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Representing a Problem of Modern Mobility: Travel and Imagination in African American Cultural History, Arts and Letters, ca. 1900-1970

By

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M.A., Emory University, 2011

M.P.S., Cornell University, 2008

Advisors: Kevin Corrigan, PhD and Mark Sanders, PhD

An abstract of

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University

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Abstract

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By Michael Ra-shon Hall

This dissertation examines the little explored social phenomenon of travel and imagination as evidenced by the critical and creative works of African American artists. It is an interdisciplinary humanities project combining literary analysis, visual analysis and film criticism with cultural history as refracted through material artifacts and demonstrates travel as a paradigmatic complement to Diaspora and migration as frameworks for examining historical legacies of geographical dispersal and traversal. In particular, a chapter surveying the travel narratives and creative works of several African American artists and intellectuals, and charting the broader trajectory of African American mobility via slave, migration and travel narratives, precedes three chapters focused individually on Sterling Brown's poetry, Zora Neale Hurston's early travels and novels *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and the ground breaking 1930s film *The Emperor Jones* directed by Dudley Murphy and featuring Paul Robeson. A fifth chapter moves beyond individual artists to examine a collective community of travelers through Atlanta native Calvin A. Ramsey's play based on the historic *Negro Motorist Green Book*, a specialized travel guide produced from 1936-1967. Throughout the dissertation I analyze how African Americans critically represent travel as a problem of modern mobility with racial, ethnic and gendered restrictions and impasses, and argue travel is consistently represented as a problem of modern mobility in the African American imagination in large part due to the modern paradox of freedom and confinement uniquely experienced and expressed by African Americans from the period of enslavement forward with slave narratives representing some of the earliest literary iterations of this modern problematic. Together, the sites I investigate reveal the tremendous social and cultural impact of travel and imagination and reflect a dynamic cultural history of African American travel domestically and internationally. With its focus on how travel has inspired artists and artworks as how artists and works of art imagine and represent travel as a problem of mobility, this dissertation breaks new ground at the intersection of African American and American studies, travel and tourism studies, cultural history and scholarship interested in the impact of mobility on cultural memory and imagination.

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Introduction

> With the introduction of this travel guide in 1936, it has been our idea to give the Negro traveler information that will keep him from running into difficulties, embarrassments and to make his trips more enjoyable
>
> *The Negro Motorist Green Book*, 1940

> Class could soften some of the persistent inequities and painful humiliations that African Americans endured in the apartheid South before the civil rights movement, but no amount of money would enable Black people to fully escape the indignities of Jim Crow.
>
> *Johnnetta B. Cole and Beverly Guy-Sheftall*, 2002

> Much of the black experience in the new world is characterized by migration, mobility, and travel, and much attention has been paid to acts of forced migration, such as the Middle Passage and the international slave trade.
>
> *Farah J. Griffin and Cheryl J. Fish*, 1998

Though travel and tourism have increasingly been at the center of emerging academic literature in the interdisciplinary humanities since the 1990s, little work on travel and tourism has been produced by scholars in the fields of African American and African Diaspora and/or Black Atlantic studies. Further, as Garth Lean, Russell Staiff and Emma Waterton note in their very recent edited volume *Travel and Imagination* (2014), almost

no scholarly work has explicitly addressed the social phenomenon of travel and imagination though the imagination has long been associated with travel and tourism since at least the 17th century. "Representing a Problem of Modern Mobility" contributes to the dearth of scholarly literature at this intersection by examining the social and cultural phenomenon of travel and imagination in African American arts, letters and cultural history. Doing so, my study argues travel as a productive paradigmatic complement to Diaspora and migration in studies of African American and Black Atlantic mobility and contends African American artists have historically and consistently represented travel as a problem of mobility in large part due to a modern problematic of freedom and confinement paradoxically and uniquely experienced by African Americans from the period of enslavement in the 19th century through the greater part of the 20th century.

Until the 1990s with the publication of works by Paul Gilroy, Farah J. Griffin and Cheryl J. Fish, two overarching and overlapping paradigms largely dominated scholarship on African American and Black Atlantic cultural historical legacies of geographical dispersal and traversal: Diaspora and migration. Studies of the largely forced and coerced dispersal of people from the African continent in the modern era have used the paradigm of Diaspora which hinges on the experience and legacy of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, foregrounds the primacy of slave narratives, and takes the Middle Passage as its organizing metaphor (e.g. Paul Gilroy, Michael Gomez, Grey Gundaker, Jacqueline Nassy Brown and others). Studies of the self-elected and coerced dispersal of African Americans from the US South in the early 20th century employ the framework of migration which hinges on the experience and legacy of white racial violence and

political repression in the US South, foregrounds the primacy of migration narratives, and takes the Great Migration as its organizing metaphor (e.g. Emmett Scott, Francis Smith Foster, Robert Stepto, Eric Arnesen, Nicholas Lemann, Milton Sernett, Farah Jasmine Griffin, Isabel Wilkerson and others). Studies of voluntary and coerced migration and immigration particularly from the Caribbean and South America to the US have blurred the paradigmatic boundaries between Diaspora and migration (e.g. Roy Bryce-Laporte, Susan H. Buchanan, Michel S. Laguerre, M. Patricia Fernandez-Kelly and Richard Schauffler, Regine O. Jackson and others). Historically and theoretically the experience and metaphor of the Underground Railroad, signaling a cultural history and geography of safe spaces which facilitated the escape of many enslaved persons, occupies the liminal or transitional space between Diaspora and migration.

Within the context of Diaspora, scholars such as Paul Gilroy, Michael Gomez and Kwame Anthony Appiah have contributed greatly to understanding of the Enlightenment and the Trans-Atlantic Slave trade both in terms of the multiple histories of these events and how the legacies of these events persist in the present. In particular, Gilroy's *Black Atlantic* introduces a framework for examining the close geographical, historical and intellectual connections among the areas triangulated by the slave trade, connections which he reveals as both past and present. So too, Michael Gomez's *Exchanging Our Country Marks*[1] discusses the complex ways in which enslaved Africans retained cultural practices and products through a neo-cultural synthesis with practices in the US South—a process resulting in hybrid identities neither wholly African nor American—and how

[1] Michael Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*: *The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998). Gomez's charts evidence roughly from the 1520s to 1830s.

enslaved persons often chose suicide to avoid the prospects of enslavement in the Americas.

Further, I would note Gomez's important volume *Reversing Sail: A History of the African Diaspora*,[2] a text in which Gomez ably synthesizes a long tradition of writing on Diaspora from the classic to the contemporary. Melville Herskovits's *Myth of the Negro Past*[3] and Sidney Mintz's and Richard Price's *The Birth of African American Culture*[4] fit well into this body of studies as both works examine the question of African cultural retention in African American culture. The same is true of the pioneering work of art historians James Porter,[5] David C. Driskell,[6] Sharon Patton[7] and Edmund Barry Gaither.[8] Finally, for Appiah, his 1993 essay "Europe Upside Down: Fallacies of the New Afrocentrism"[9] argues that contemporary Afrocentrism is "thoroughly at home . . . in the frameworks of nineteenth century European thought," despite its claims otherwise.[10]

Complementing works by Gilroy, Gomez and Appiah are studies by Brent Hayes Edwards, Jacqueline Nassy Brown and Grey Gundaker. Hayes Edward's *The Practice of*

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[2] Gomez, *Reversing Sail: A History of the African Diaspora* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
[3] Melville J. Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past* (New York: Harper, 1941).
[4] Sidney W. Mintz and Richard Price, *The Birth of African American Culture: An Anthropological Perspective* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992).
[5] James A. Porter, *Modern Negro Art* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1992).
[6] David C. Driskell, *Two Centuries of Black American Art* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art; New York: Knopf, 1976).
[7] Sharon F. Patton, *African-American Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).
[8] Edmund Barry Gaither, "Heritage Reclaimed: An Historical Perspective on Chronology" *Black Art Ancestral Legacy: The African Impulse in African-American Art* (Dallas, Tex.: Dallas Museum of Art, 1989; New York: H.N. Abrams, 1989), 17-34.
[9] Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Europe Upside Down: Fallacies of the New Afrocentrism," Times Literary Supplement, February 12, 1993, 24-25. Rev. version "Beyond Race: Fallacies of Reactive Afrocentrism," The Skeptic 2, no. 4 (1993): 104-7.
[10] Appiah's argument has been strongly disputed by Afrocentric scholar and activisit Molefi K. Asante

Diaspora[11] challenges works by Gilroy and others with its focus on ideas, struggles and words that travel between black Francophone and Anglophone worlds, an examination of circulation and translation which necessarily moves beyond conceptions of Diaspora as a historical condition. Nassy Brown's *Dropping Anchor, Setting Sail*[12] which, relying on a historical conception of Diaspora, focuses ethnographically on a single location and culture (Black Liverpool) to demonstrate the complex formation of race as intertwined with formations of identity based on gender, sexuality, class, nation and geography. Grey Gundaker's *Signs of Diaspora/diaspora of Signs*[13] situates the vernacular practices and speech patterns of US Southern African Americans alongside more conventional writing, language and signs derived from European civilizations in a reconfiguration of literacy, its meaning and significance.

What studies of Diaspora and the Black Atlantic share in common is the experience of a people dispersed to various geographical locations, whether through forced movement (e.g. slave trade, exile, etc.) or (im)migration—self-elected or otherwise. The figures important to the study of Diaspora and the Black Atlantic are then the enslaved, the expatriate, the exile, the refugee, and the (im)migrant—the final figure one most closely shared with scholarship on migration. Finally, the organizing metaphor of movement in Diaspora is the Middle Passage, the stage in the Trans-Atlantic slave trade during which Europeans transported millions of enslaved Africans to the New World, largely the Americas and the Caribbean.

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[11] Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2003).
[12] Jacqueline N. Brown, *Dropping Anchor, Setting Sail: Geographies of Race in Black Liverpool* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).
[13] Grey Gundaker, *Signs of Diaspora/diaspora of Signs: Literacies, Creolization, and Vernacular Practice in African America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

Studies of migration, likewise, have produced a wealth of material for comprehending not only the cultural history of a person's or people's journey—typically from an ancestral homeland—in search of a new home, but also the motivations for such a movement and the subsequent negotiation or adjustment necessary upon arrival to the new or host location. In the African American context, the organizing metaphor for examining such an experience has been the Great Migration (1910-1970), a historical period during which an unprecedented number of African Americans journeyed largely to urban centers in the US North and Midwest to escape the harsh realities of a violent US South as well as in hopes of new opportunities and a fresh start. In many ways, Jacob Lawrence's enormously impactful *Migration* series (1940-41) represents one of the most dynamic and compelling visual narratives of African American migration. Notable works on African American migration include Emmett Scott's classic study *Negro Migration During the War*,[14] Eric Arnesen's *Black Protest and the Great Migration*,[15] Nicholas Lemann's *The Promised Land*,[16] Milton Sernett's *Bound for the Promised Land*,[17] Farah Jasmine Griffin's "*Who Set You Flowin'?*"[18]—a defining work in studies of African American migration—and Pulitzer Prize winning journalist Isabel Wilkerson's

[14] Emmett J. Scott, *Negro Migration During the War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1920).
[15] Eric Arnesen, *Black Protest and the Great Migration: A Brief History with Documents* (Bedford: St. Martin's Press, 2002).
[16] Nicholas Lemann, *The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How It Changed America* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1991).
[17] Milton C. Sernett, *Bound for the Promised Land: African American Religion and the Great Migration* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).
[18] Farah J. Griffin, *"Who Set You Flowin'?": The African-American Migration Narrative* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

award winning *The Warmth of Other Suns: the Epic Story of America's Great Migration*.[19]

While there are many more treatments of migration, spanning a wider historical period, my study focuses on early 20th century African American travel and imagination until roughly 1970. Migration, with its clear connections to Diaspora, holds as its primary figure the migrant or immigrant. The process of migration entails the movement of people from one area to another, usually in large groups, and is either voluntary (often within the region or country of one's birth) or involuntary in the case of enslaved persons, human trafficking or as a means to escape ethnic cleansing and other forms of cultural and political violence. Diaspora, then, often encompasses much of the aspects and experience of migration and migration, too, is a process that helps to produce Diaspora. Despite the synergy between the frameworks of migration and Diaspora, neither paradigm is without limits.

The paradigm of Diaspora is strong in relaying a history of forced or coerced movement (although there is certainly scholarship which focuses on the agency shown by the enslaved in escaping a harsh life in the Americas) and its felt impact and legacy throughout the world, and the paradigm of migration, as exemplified by the Great Migration, is strong in its ability to account for the agency exhibited by black Americans in escaping the harsh realities of the US South in favor of future possibilities signified by a freer, more liberal US North. Even recent studies of migration adhere to the master metaphor of the Great Migration as seen in the Brookings Institution's current research

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[19] Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: the Epic Story of America's Great Migration* (New York: Random House, 2010).

on the New Great Migration (1965-present). The Institution's research suggests that, in the wake of de-industrialization in urban centers in the US Northeast and Midwest, African Americans are returning to the South and increasingly viewing the South as a favorable destination to relocate. Also, Diaspora relies heavily on a notion of collectivity, while migration allows for both individual and collective iterations of cultural historical movement, though studies in this field have largely addressed collective movement. For both paradigms, a sense of relative permanence or settlement in a new locale is an underlying assumption. The paradigm of travel (including tourism) complements both these perspectives because not only is impermanence or temporality in the new, or host, locale foundational, but individuality and collectivity in terms of the experience and influence of movement and mobility (mostly physically and geographically, but also virtually and imaginary) are equally addressed in studies.

To be clear travel here refers to the geographical traversal of individuals or groups from one location to another (real or imaginary), usually a journey that is forced, coerced or self-elected and which culminates in a permanent or impermanent destination. My use of tourism refers to the modern (i.e. Enlightenment era) phenomenological emergence of leisure travel outside the confines of the industrial work model. A travel-related phenomenon, tourism's destination is never permanent relocation, but always temporary and, thereby, ephemeral residence in a host local. My use of tourism is spectral acknowledging a diversity of tourist desires as well as unique obstacles and social factors affecting some traveling subjects, but not others. Put succinctly, I understand tourism as a modern form of travel with its own various typological incarnations directly tied to the

desires of the traveling subject as well as to constructs of social stratification and cultural organization.

To be fair, a modest amount of work on travel and tourism has been undertaken by researchers working in the field of African American studies. This includes Farah J. Griffin's and Cheryl J. Fish's volume *A Stranger in the Village*, presenting two centuries of travel writing and focusing on "narratives of journeys by African Americans who wrote about their experiences as tourists, emigrants, expatriates, sailors, educators, missionaries, philanthropists, artists, and leaders of political or nationalistic movements." [20] Gilroy's *Black Atlantic*, Hayes Edwards' *The Practice of Diaspora* and studies of cultural heritage tourism by Sandra Richards[21] and Cheryl Finley[22] also comprise this body of work. Works on travel provide novel insights on black transnational cultures and phenomenological practices of mobility significant to African American and African Diaspora identity, cultural history and memory. Particularly, Richards' and Finley's work on African American cultural heritage tourism to former slave trade sites along the West African coast provides a model for examining the intersection of cultural historical memory and contemporary practices of mobility. However, work of this kind has indeed only been modest.

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[20] Farah J, Griffin and Cheryl J. Fish, *A Stranger in the Village: Two Centuries of African-American Travel Writing* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), XIII.
[21] Sandra Richards, "Who Is This Ancestor?: Performing Memory in Ghana's Slave Castle-Dungeons," in *Sage Handbook of Performance Studies*, ed. D. Soyini Madison and Judith Hamera (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2006) and "What Is To Be Remembered? Tourism to Ghana's Slave Castle-Dungeons," *Theatre Journal* 57, no. 4 (December 2005): 617-637.
[22] Cheryl Finley, "The Door of (No) Return," *Common-Place*, Vol. 1, No. 4. (July 2001). http://www.common-place.org/vol-01/no-04/finley/.

In light of the work published by Gilroy, Griffin, Fish and later Sandra Richards, Cheryl Finley and Brent Hayes Edwards, scholars working in African American and Diaspora studies have turned increasingly to travel as a distinct point of departure for examining geographical dispersal, or rather traversal, and its legacies. Though a turn to travel has characterized a subset of scholarship emerging from African American and Diaspora (and Black Atlantic) studies, Griffin and Fish's edited volume of writings *A Stranger in the Village* represents the only systematic attempt to outline something like a paradigm of travel. My work contributes to the growing body of scholarship on travel by not only taking seriously the paradigmatic and theoretical contours of travel (particularly as it complements Diaspora and migration), but also exploring the cultural historical experience and legacy of African American domestic (and modest international) travel as it has impacted the imaginations of artists and intellectuals. My study not only addresses a void in African American and African Diaspora (or Black Atlantic) studies by focusing on the little studied social and cultural phenomenon of travel and imagination but also adds to the evolving discourse on travel in interdisciplinary humanities largely. With its focus on the ways in which travel and tourism have inspired artists and artworks as well as the ways in which artists and works of art imagine and represent travel and tourism as a problem of mobility, my dissertation breaks new ground at the intersection of African American and American studies, African Diaspora and Black Atlantic studies, travel and tourism studies, cultural history and scholarship interested in the impact of modern mobility on cultural memory and imagination.

In many ways the central question at the heart of my dissertations is how does taking travel and tourism as points of departure for analyzing the cultural historical

experience of African American geographical traversal contribute to understanding not only the complex ways that African American geographical dispersal and traversal has occurred, but also the impact geographical dispersal and traversal has on individual and collective cultural memory and imagination? Using the paradox of freedom and confinement in African American cultural history and imagination to establish continuity among slave, migration and travel narratives, my study is an interdisciplinary inquiry necessarily employing hybrid methods of literary and visual analysis, film criticism, and cultural history as refracted through material artifacts, narrative and the black press. In this way it is my hope to model the kind of innovative work possible when scholars seriously take travel as the point of departure for analysis of modern mobility and its legacy in African American and Black Atlantic arts, letters and cultural history.

Before outlining the questions guiding my analysis and detailing the chapters comprising this study, it is important to briefly examine points of continuity and discontinuity among slave, migration and travel narratives. Put another way, it is important to answer the question "What does travel owe to the Middle Passage and Great Migration?" To address this question, I consider the paradox of freedom and confinement in slave and migration narratives, a problematic which finds continuity in travel narratives. Examining freedom and confinement in African American narratives is a good way of charting the points of synergy between Diaspora, migration and travel as organizing paradigms in African American cultural history, arts and letters. The following section provides a brief overview of freedom and confinement in slave and migration narratives, citing significant texts in African American arts, letters, literary and cultural criticism. A discussion of the broader cultural historical trajectory of African

American mobility through slave and migration narratives provides the foundation for a selective survey of travel narratives and creative works in Chapter 1.

Beyond Freedom and Confinement: A Brief Explanation of (Dis)Continuity Among Slave, Migration and Travel Narratives or What Travel Owes to the Middle Passage and the Great Migration:

As Orlando Patterson has demonstrated, freedom as a socially constructed value originated in pre-modern, preindustrial ancient Greece and "was generated from the experience of slavery. People came to value freedom, to construct it as a powerful shared vision of life, as a result of, and response to, slavery or its recombinant form, serfdom, in their roles as masters, slaves, and nonslaves."[23] Freedom as a concept derives a particular significance and force during and after the Enlightenment period. As a modern notion freedom finds its most concrete expressions in response not only to the condition of slavery (Olaudah Equiano aka Gustavus Vassa, Alexander Crummell, Martin Robinson Delaney, Frederick Douglas, Anna Julia Cooper and Booker T. Washington), but also in response to such experiences as religious wars and intolerance (Martin Luther, John Locke, Baruch Spinoza, etc.), and scientific discoveries about Nature and natural law (Isaac Newton). Indeed, the relationship between religion (Christianity), enslavement and freedom in the modern era is a major focus of David Brion Davis' Pulitzer Prize winning work.[24]

Furthermore, the concept of freedom continues to develop in Post-Enlightenment cultural and political movements such as the Abolitionist Movement (1820s-1870)—for

[23] Orlando Patterson, *Freedom in the Making of Western Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 1991), XIII.
[24] David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966).

which slave narratives document concepts of freedom tied to manumission and literacy—and the Civil Rights Movement. Referring to the Civil Rights Movement, I allude to the Early Civil Rights Movement of the 1920s-40s,[25] which developed in part as a consequence of the First Great Migration (1910-1930) to urban centers in the Northeast, Midwest and West—and for which migration narratives document concepts of freedom tied to escape from white racial violence in the US South and greater political power in the urban US North. Additionally, I refer to the more familiar Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s-70s,[26] perhaps differently influenced by a Second Great Migration (1940-1970). In the experiences of African Americans, the meaning of freedom shifts over time as the situation of African Americans in the US transforms and more African Americans become mobile, not simply through the cultural historical experience of migration, but also through modern travel.

Due to the long and complex historical entwinement of freedom and enslavement in Western societies, the concept of freedom in African American cultural history, narratives, arts and letters contains a paradoxical quality, namely that of a freedom intimately bound with constraint. Across slave, migration and travel narratives the notion of freedom almost already pivots on the legacy of confinement and restriction responsible for the very social construction of freedom as a value. The paradoxical intertwining of freedom and confinement in African American narratives, arts and letters (as well as literary and cultural criticism) provides conceptual space for further understanding points of (dis)continuity among slave, migration and travel narratives. Though comprehensive

[25] The Early Civil Rights Movement saw important gains in anti-lynching legislation and The Scottsboro Trials of 1931.
[26] Civil rights activism began as early as 1896 in response to *Plessy Vs. Ferguson* and arguably continues into the present in what most consider to be human rights struggles.

analysis of slave and migration narratives lies beyond my study, a project on African American travel and imagination only benefits from acknowledgment and understanding of the intellectual and historical debt which travel owes to the Middle Passage and the Great Migration. Furthermore, a cursory understanding of the similarities and distinctions among genres of narrative, while foregrounding the significance of travel narratives to this particular study, establishes a foundation for examining the impact of travel and tourism on modern African American imagination.

The concept of freedom in slave narratives (or rather narratives of the enslaved) is tied to emancipation and literacy (in addition to flight and escape) as many enslaved persons not only sought manumission from bondage, but often secretly plotted ways of becoming literate, aspects of slave desire and experience which figure heavily in the narratives produced by the enslaved. Prominent texts in this regard include such works as Frederick Douglass's 1845 autobiography *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*,[27] Booker T. Washington's 1901 autobiography *Up From Slavery*,[28] Solomon Northup's 1853 autobiography *Twelve Years a Slave*,[29] Francis Smith Foster's *Witnessing Slavery: The Development of Ante-Bellum Slave Narratives*,[30] Robert Stepto's *From Behind the Veil: A Study of Afro-American Narrative*,[31] the Deborah E. McDowell

[27] Frederick Douglass and Robert B. Stepto, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009).
[28] Booker T. Washington, *Up from Slavery* (New York: Dover Publications, 1995).
[29] Solomon Northrup, *Twelve Years a Slave: Narrative of Solomon Northup, a Citizen of New-York, Kidnapped in Washington City in 1841, and Rescued in 1853, from a Cotton Plantation Near the Red River in Louisiana*, ed. David Wilson (Auburn: Derby and Miller, 1853).
[30] Frances S. Foster, *Witnessing Slavery: The Development of Ante-Bellum Slave Narratives* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1979).
[31] Robert B. Stepto, *From Behind the Veil: A Study of Afro-American Narrative* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1979).

and Arnold Rampersad edited volume *Slavery and the Literary Imagination*,[32] Marion Starling's *The Slave Narrative: Its Place in American History*,[33] the William Andrews and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. edited volume *Slave Narratives*[34] and Norman Yetman's volume *Life Under the "Peculiar Institution": Selections from the Slave Narrative Collection [Library of Congress]*,[35] a collection of narratives taken from the tremendous archive of slave narratives amassed under the Federal Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration in the 1930s. Here, Foster's *Witnessing Slavery* is significant as a text which inaugurated, and in many ways defined, the study of slave narratives, and Stepto's *From Behind the Veil* is important both for its grounding in slave narrative and its presentation of freedom "as being a protean state of literacy to be achieved and safeguarded."[36]

The concept of freedom in migration narratives is tied to a desire to escape racial violence in the US South and to gain greater political power, particularly in the urban North, West and Midwest, as witnessed in the emergence of the early modern struggled for civil rights pioneered by such leaders as Mary Church Terrell, James Weldon Johnson, W. E. B. Du Bois, A. Phillip Randolph and Fannie Lou Hamer. Examining migration narratives it is important to note that the Great Migration north in search of new possibilities and escape from the harsh realities of the US South occurred in conjunction with the early rise of the modern struggle for civil rights. Significant texts in

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[32] Deborah E. McDowell and Arnold Rampersad, ed., *Slavery and the Literary Imagination* (Baltimore : Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989).
[33] Marion W. Starling, *The Slave Narrative: Its Place in American History* (Boston, Mass: G.K. Hall, 1981).
[34] William L. Andrews and Henry L. Gates, Jr., *Slave Narratives* (New York: Library of America, 2000).
[35] Norman R. Yetman, *Life Under the "Peculiar Institution": Selections from the Slave Narrative Collection [Library of Congress]* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970).
[36] Robert B. Stepto, *From Behind the Veil: A Study of Afro-American Narrative*, 2nd edition (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), XI.

this area include, among others, Farah Jasmine Griffin's *"Who Set You Flowin'?": The African-American Migration Narrative*, Du Bois' *Souls of Black Folk* and his essays in *The Crisis* and Nell Painter's *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas After Reconstruction*[37] in which Painter examines the migration of thousands of blacks from the US South to the homesteading lands of Kansas, Missouri in 1879.

Important intellectuals writing about migration include not only Du Bois, but notably Darlene Clark Hine. Du Bois' landmark 1899 sociological study *The Philadelphia Negro*[38] offers a portrait of the status of African Americans in the urban North in the years following Reconstruction and preceding the height of the Great Migration. Despite the tendency in US society at the time to attribute black poverty to racial inferiority, Du Bois's study ultimately served to show that, with philanthropic assistance, the residents of Philadelphia's Seventh Ward could greatly improve their lot in the world. Also important is Hine's *Hine Sight: Black Women and the Re-Construction of American History*,[39] particularly the chapter "Black Migration to the Urban Midwest: The Gender Dimension, 1915-1945," in which Hine argues that violence against women, in addition to racial violence, was a distinct and important motivation for women to escape the US South in the decades following Reconstruction and including the Great Migration. As the preceding discussion has briefly suggested, slave, migration and travel narratives differ in the ways African Americans conceptualize freedom.

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[37] Nell I. Painter, *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas After Reconstruction* (New York: Knopf, 1977).
[38] W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro* (Millwood, N.Y.: Kraus-Thomson Organization Ltd., 1973). (Originally published in 1899).
[39] Darlene Clark Hine, *Hine Sight: Black Women and the Re-Construction of American History* (Brooklyn, N.Y: Carlson Pub, 1994).

Despite points of discontinuity in the ways African Americans have imagined freedom in slave, migration and travel narratives, the paradox of freedom and confinement is consistent across all three narrative types, revealing this problematic as a staple characteristic of African American modern experience and imagination. Indeed as slave, migration and travel narratives—and the works of art they have inspired—illustrate, African American modern experiences and mobility have not only largely been framed by the problematic of freedom and confinement but particularly by efforts both existential and imagined to transcend the modern paradox. Existential attempts to move beyond the paradox of freedom and confinement resonate in the agency exhibited by African Americans in their organized, grass roots struggles for social justice with no greater evidence than the long struggle for civil rights in the US. Imagined attempts to move beyond the paradox can be gleaned from the literary and visual devices employed by African American artists as they approach transcendence through the metaphysical, psychic and universal. Because artists and intellectuals have employed their works as veritable sites of cultural history and memory, the notion of *lieu de mémoire*, or sites of memory, provides ample conceptual space to interrogate the phenomenological relationship between travel and imagination in African American arts, letters and cultural history.

Where Travel, Tourism, the Literary and the Visual Meet or African American Creative and Nonfiction Works as *Lieu de Mémoire*: Hughes, Larsen, Hurston, Lawrence and Others:

In the late 1980s, the French historian Pierre Nora coined the term *lieu de mémoire* (or sites of memory) in order to examine the complex interaction between history and memory at physical and discursive memorial sites. Employing Nora's theory to orient their groundbreaking volume *History and Memory in African-American Culture*, Geneviève Fabre and Robert G. O' Meally describe the significance of sites of memory to African American arts, letters, cultural history and identity:

> Whether deliberately or not, individual or group memory selects certain landmarks of the past—places, artworks, dates; persons, public or private, well known or obscure, real or imagined—and invests them with symbolic or political significance. Thus a *lieu de mémoire* may be historical or legendary event or figure, a book or an era, a place or an idea; it can be "simple and ambiguous, natural and artificial, at once immediately available in sensuous experience and susceptible to the most abstract elaboration." Nonetheless, it is "material, symbolic, and functional."[40]

To some extent this study frames African American arts and letters (in addition to vernacular expression) as sites of memory, or heritage sites, tangible and intangible locations where individuals and groups consign for safe keeping and longevity aspects of cultural history and memory considered sacred or significant to be passed along. As recurring tropes in the African American imagination, travel, travel figurations and travel ideals provide discursive sites for individuals and artists to communicate and critically address modern gendered, racial and ethnic paradigmatic restrictions on mobility.

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[40] Geneviève Fabre and Robert G. O' Meally, ed., *History and Memory in African-American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 7.

Examining travel and imagination specifically, I elucidate a tradition of literary, visual art and film making as well as nonfiction writing bearing the cultural historical memories of African American geographical traversal which artists and intellectuals have considered paramount to portray and, thereby, bequeath to seceding generations. I analyze creative and nonfiction works in relation to culture, history, memory and mobility (travel) and illustrate the paradigmatic importance of travel as complement to migration and Diaspora. More than individual accounts of travel and travel-inflected creative expressions, this body of writings and art documents, critically refracts and memorializes a vibrant and complex cultural history of African American modern mobility for posterity.

The travel experiences, creative and nonfiction works of Langston Hughes, Nella Larsen, Zora Neale Hurston, James Weldon Johnson, W.E.B. Du Bois, Sterling A. Brown and Jean Toomer are very promising for a study of travel and imagination. Works of import include a combination of autobiographies, biographies as well as poetry and prose fiction: Hughes' *The Big Sea* and "Negro Speaks of Rivers", Hurston's *Dust Tracks on the Road*, *Tell My Horse*, *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, James Weldon Johnson's *Along This Way* and *Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man*, W.E.B. Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk* and *Dusk of Dawn*, Sterling Brown's *Southern Road*, Nella Larsen's *Passing* and *Quicksand* (as well as biographies of Larsen, *Nella Larsen, Novelist of the Harlem Renaissance: A Woman's Life Unveiled* by Thadious M. Davis and *In Search of Nella Larsen: A Biography of the Color Line* by George Hutchinson) and Jean Toomer's "Song of the Song," and *Cane* (as well as Darwin T.

Turner's *The Wayward and the Seeking* which includes Toomer's autobiographical writings). The works of several visual artists also fit squarely into my study.

Artists and visual art ripe for analysis include Aaron Douglas (particularly his signature piece "Building More Stately Mansions," 1944[41]), Augusta Savage ("Lift Every Voice and Sing," 1939), William H. Johnson ("Harbor Under the Midnight Sun," ca. 1937 and "Street Life, Harlem," 1939-40) and Jacob Lawrence, particularly those works inspired by geography or cultural historical dispersal and traversal (e.g. the *Migration* series[42], 1940-1941 and *Meat Market, Nigerian* series 1964). Romare Bearden's famous collages featuring the iconic train are also significant, particularly as the train image represents a definitively modern industrial image with a particular cultural historical function and occupation in the African American imagination. Finally, films like the 1933 screenplay *The Emperor Jones*, featuring Paul Robeson as a Pullman porter, extend sites of analysis for travel and African American imagination beyond literary and visual art to include visual culture and American popular culture broadly.

It is clear that the wealth of artists, intellectuals and creative and nonfiction works I indicate offer more material than can be adequately examined in a dissertation. As a result, I select a sample including literary artists and intellectuals Sterling Brown, Zora Neale Hurston and Calvin A. Ramsey and the path breaking 1930s film *The Emperor Jones* directed by Dudley Murphy and featuring a young Paul Robeson. I devote a chapter each to Brown's poetry, Hurston's early travels and novels *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Ramsey's play based on the historic *Negro Motorist*

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[41] "Building More Stately Mansions" also serves as the cover design for Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic.*
[42] This series was originally titled *The Migration of the Negro*.

Green Book travel guide and Murphy's *The Emperor Jones*, and precede these chapters with a broader survey of African American travel and imagination. I present a survey of travel narratives and creative works in the first chapter to demonstrate the larger potential of the kind of analysis I propose in the dissertation, and I use the fifth chapter to explore African American travel and imagination outside of the somewhat privileged cadre of artists that center this study. I do so by examining native Atlanta playwright Calvin Ramsey's *Green Book: A Play in Two Acts* (2006) in relation to the specialized *Green Book* travel guide which inspired the drama's creation.

The creative works I choose provide a more reliable, and perhaps even organic, reflection of African American cultural history, memory and imagination precisely because these works are so heavily indebted to artistic commitments to African American vernacular expression and historical and ethnographic research. Moreover for the figures in my study, travel and tourism offer fresh lenses through which to examine the lasting impact of modern African American experiences of geographical traversal on the imagination. As such, I interrogate artists' works as *lieu de mémoire*, or sites of memory, which represent dimensions of the African American cultural history of travel, most notably paradigmatic restrictions on modern mobility. Taken together, the creative works I analyze not only refract a cultural history of travel, but also comprise a corpus that has implications for the development of modernism.

The Research Problem: Being African American, Modern and Physically Mobile

Three questions guide my study.

1. How are travel and touristic experiences reflected in the creative works of African American literary and visual artists? I argue that travel and tourism has a significant impact on the African American imagination and that this impact can be seen in various forms of sites, two of which are literary and visual art. To pursue this question I assess the works of selected artists and works of art and employ literary, visual and cultural historical analysis to make the concrete connections between experience and the creation of the work of art.

2. How did race and ethnicity, and indeed the spatial logic of white supremacy in the US South, effect the travel and touristic experiences of African Americans domestically? I further assert that the historical experience of Jim Crow, that is legally sanctioned segregation in public accommodations, operated to prevent African Americans from enjoying the pleasure, right and privilege of modern travel. This question is important because it not only allows me to examine the significance of race and ethnicity to the experience of travel and tourism, but it also permits me to differentiate somewhat between the experience of international vs. domestic travel in my assessment of the impact of travel and tourism. Here autobiographical and biographical travel narratives, travel guide books and the black press are indispensible.

3. Did gender play a significant role in the ways in which African American bodies were disproportionately mobile? The early 20th century was a time during which many, if not most, women were tied to domestic spheres, if not industrial workshops like garment factories. Interrogating autobiographical and biographical travel narratives, I elucidate a gendered paradigm of mobility in which men were far more mobile than

women. Further, I analyze art works in light of a gendered paradigm of mobility to assess the impact of a gendered mobility on the African American imaginary.

Structure:

I. Introduction:

The chapters which comprise this study are connected by a concern with the social and cultural phenomenon of travel and imagination to explicate the ways in which travel and tourism have fueled African American creative and intellectual imagination, particularly during the 20th century. To this end Chapter 1 offers a selected survey of travel narratives and creative works, focusing on recurrent themes and issues and how the paradox of freedom and confinement finds continuity in travel narratives. Also, I employ Nora's notion of *lieu de mémoire* to frame the kind of literary and visual site analysis I pursue in my study. The following two chapters on Brown and Hurston intersect travel and imagination with literary criticism. Chapter four on *The Emperor Jones* intersects travel and imagination with film criticism, specifically with a focus on black masculinity, gendered mobility and Diaspora. The final chapter on Ramsey's *The Green Book* returns to an engagement of travel and imagination with literary criticism as I explore the cultural historical experience of domestic travel in the US South for a broader community of African American travelers. Questions of race, ethnicity, gender and (to a lesser extent) class permeate the chapters comprising this study in various degrees and dimensions. Though the question of modern travel and its impact on the imagination organizes the broader project, I frame each chapter to stand alone as distinct analytical engagements. Doing so encourages me to allow individual travel experiences and creative works to

inform the conversation I orchestrate as well as the multiple disciplines and fields of study which inform my discussions.

II. Chapter 1: Mobility, Restriction and the Meaning of Freedom: A Selected Survey of African American Travel Narratives and Creative Works:

In chapter one, I offer a survey of travel narratives, particularly focusing on the turn of the twentieth century to 1960s, a period which saw the early development of modern travel by African Americans. I present a condensed survey of travel narratives and creative works, employing the paradox of freedom and confinement to establish continuity among slave, migration and travel narratives. As I demonstrate, African American travel narratives not only reveal paradigmatic impasses characteristic of Afro-modern mobility, but narratives also illustrate the resilience and ingenuity exhibited by Afro-modern travelers in responding to restrictions to travelers' physical and geographical mobility. Sources used in my analysis include literary, critical, historical, (auto)biographical, periodical and sociological texts as well as key legislation. Like slave and migration narratives, travel narratives are tied to the concept of freedom, particularly as African Americans conceptualize freedom in terms of a desire to capitalize on the promises of US citizenship and democracy through the increasing early to mid 20th century process and practice of touring the country of one's birth. In addition, African American travel narratives reveal a modest desire for travel beyond US borders for the purposes of education, cultural heritage, cosmopolitanism and building international political relationships. The first chapter of this study continues where the subsection "Beyond Freedom and Confinement: A Brief Explanation of (Dis)Continuity Among

Slave, Migration and Travel Narratives or What Travel Owes to the Middle Passage and the Great Migration" ends.

III. Chapter 2: The Prominence of the Railroad in the African American Imagination: Mobile Men, Gendered Mobility and the Poetry of Sterling A. Brown:

The second chapter of this study examines the ways in which the locomotive, mobile men (like Pullman porters) and gendered mobility figure into the poetry of literary Sterling A. Brown. By gendered mobility, I refer to a gendered paradigm of mobility dominate in the early to mid 20th century US in which men are not only far more mobile than women, but the very mobility of men is predicated on the domesticity of women. Brown's poetry dynamically and critically refracts this moment in African American cultural history particularly because much of Brown's literary art is influenced by African American vernacular culture. Poems I treat include "Long Gone" and "Sister Lou" from Brown's first and most successful volume of poetry *Southern Road* (1933) and "The Law for George" from Brown's rejected second volume of poetry *No Hiding Place* (not published until 1980). Exploring the figure of the Pullman porter in Brown's poetry, specifically, and African American cultural history, arts and letters, more generally, I consider the narratives of porters as gleaned through the cultural history of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and Maids (BSCP). As I argue, Brown's poetry collectively mirrors the gendered (racial and ethnic) paradigm of mobility characteristic of modern American travel, and though Brown attempts to transcend paradoxical limitations via the metaphysical, the attempt is not wholly satisfactory. The gendered

paradigm of mobility reflected in Brown's poetry finds stark resonance in Hurston's early novels *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, a subject I examine in the following chapter.

IV. Chapter 3: Variations on a Paradoxical Theme: Gendered Mobility, Modern Travel and Imagination in Hurston's Early Travels and Creative Works:

In chapter 3 I examine gendered mobility, modern travel and imagination in Hurston's early travels and creative works. Complementing Brown's poetry, Hurston's early novels imaginatively refract the early cultural history of Afro-modern travel due to the semi-autobiographical quality of Hurston's literary art. Exploring gender, mobility, modern travel and imagination, I treat Hurston's early novels *Jonah's Gourd Vine* (1934) and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), both of which are influenced by Hurston's early ethnographic travels collecting folklore in the US South (1928-1932) and both of which present modern travel as a problem of mobility with gendered, racial and ethnic paradigmatic restrictions and impasses.

In *Jonah's Gourd Vine* Hurston presents a vision of mobility in which men are more mobile than women and in which the train image (as a metaphor for the paradox of freedom and confinement in the African American experience) is tied to men's mobility, and by extension masculinity. In *Their Eyes*, she makes an artistic intervention depicting the journey of a female protagonist Janie who struggles against paradigmatic restrictions to assert her right to freedom of mobility. As I argue, Hurston employs a strategy of theme and variation, a self contained iteration of the African American call and response tradition, to both state the problem and then intervene presenting a new vision of mobility

in which gendered barriers are corporeally and psychically challenged, even to some extent surmounted. Moreover, Hurston's early novels taken together represent a critical, semi-autobiographical response to the gendered (racial and ethnic) paradigm of mobility she observed in her life and travels. Demonstrating the significant impact of travel on Hurston's creative works, I incorporate multiple genres including autobiography, biography, literary works and critical essay. Gender, race, ethnicity and mobility are consistent threads through the chapters comprising the dissertation, and chapter 4 continues that thread with an exploration of black masculinity, mobility and Diaspora in a significant American film text *The Emperor Jones*.

V. Chapter 4: Scenes of Black Masculinity and Wanderlust: Travel, Gendered Mobility and Film Diaspora in *Emperor Jones*:

Chapter 4, perhaps, represents the most interesting engagement with travel and imagination as I move beyond an African American centered analysis to examine a film text that situates a culturally specific African American narrative within the broader contours of African Diaspora. *The Emperor Jones* is a 1933 film adaptation of the 1920 Eugene O'Neill play of the same title, directed by Dudley Murphy, featuring Paul Robeson, Ruby Elzy, Dudley Digges, Frank H. Wilson, and Fredi Washington. Very loosely based on the O'Neill drama, the film follows Brutus Jones (Robeson) a newly hired Pullman porter from a rural town who leaves his wife Dolly (Elzy) to travel for work, quickly succumbs to vices of the big city and accidently stabs and kills friend-turned-rival Jeff (Wilson), landing him a stint on a southern chain gang. To avoid further trouble in the US, Brutus escapes the chain gang to return home to his wife, only to take a

job stoking coal on a steamer headed to the Caribbean where he jumps ship to a remote island whose crude leader he deposes and replaces with the partnership of a colonial white merchant Smithers.

In this chapter I employ cultural historical criticism, visual analysis and film criticism to examine the various diasporic scenes the film's protagonist navigates in his dramatic travels and development as a man. I argue the film can be seen as an African American male coming-of-age tale in which aspects of African American culture and history, such as gendered paradigmatic restrictions on mobility, African cultural continuities in the African American (or black) church and continuities in antebellum, plantation-style servitude a la post bellum chain gangs are situated within a broader diasporic framework including the African continent, the Caribbean and the Americas. The result is a filmic coming-of-age tale in which ideals of escape, refashioning and becoming converge uneasily with those of roots, belonging and homecoming on screen. The final (and conclusive) chapter of the dissertation extends beyond more familiar figures in the cultural history of African American travel and imagination to include a more recent work of drama inspired by a historic guidebook which addressed the needs of a larger corpus of Afro-modern travelers, most notably those traveling within the often perilous US South.

VI. Chapter 5: Dramatizing the African American Experience of Travel in the Jim Crow South: *The Green Book: A Play in Two Acts*:

From 1936-1967 the *Negro Motorist Green Book*, the brain child of New York-based African American businessman Victor H. Green and commonly referred to as the

Green Book, served as a guide for black American travelers to both lessen embarrassing situations in travel as well as protect travelers from physical harm in a Jim Crow US South. The travel guide assisted African American travelers during a period in US history when Howard Johnson restaurants and motor lodges was the only national chain where black persons could eat and sleep and Esso gas stations (now Exxon Mobil Co.) provided the only stations where African Americans could both refuel and use restrooms. In Chapter 5 I examine a recent literary work by Atlanta native Calvin A. Ramsey inspired by archival research on the *Green Book* and Jim Crow era travel: *The Green Book: A Play in Two Acts* (2006) which debuted and had a very successful run as a stage play at Theatrical Outfit in Atlanta, GA in September 2011. Ramsey's two-act play, featured in the arts section of the *New York Times* (August 23, 2010), reflects on this moment in US history when the *Green Book* served as a safeguard for New Negro travelers. Grounded in archival research and presenting the narratives of a traveling *Green Book* salesman, a weary Jewish traveler, and a soldier and his wife who converge on a tourist home in Jefferson City, Missouri, Ramsey's play offers a fictional window into a little known, but important chapter in US cultural history. I examine Ramsey's work along with a short treatment of Andrea Lee's short musical *The Golden Chariot* (2002), an abbreviated literary epic depicting African American leisure travel by automobile which also reflects on travel under Jim Crow, providing a comedic complement to Ramsey's play. Together, works by Ramsey and Lee chronicle important dimensions of African American modern travel from the early 1900s through the 1960s.

Developing the study until now, I have focused the art and figures of my analysis on more familiar (though not necessarily widely known) artists and works—Brown's

poetry, Hurston's novels and Murphy's *The Emperor Jones* with discussion of Hughes, Du Bois, Johnson and Bearden in the survey chapter—because, generally speaking, these were the only African Americans who traveled extensively, domestically and internationally, and also related travel experiences in innovative and critical ways during the early 20th century. Also, my project is particularly interested in how travel experiences have informed the African American creative and cultural historical imagination. Making such a necessary move, I have been personally vexed with African American travel and creative work outside of this privileged group and, subsequently, I have wondered how I might include voices and narratives beyond the perspectives of prominent African Americans of the period.[43] Examining Ramsey's play in relation to the travel guide which inspired its creation allows me to do so, providing a means of exploring the cultural historical experience of travel for the typical (if such a thing can be said to have existed) African American traveler in the US South. What was it like to be an African American traveler in a Jim Crow South where a quite explicit racist spatial logic, a malignant geography of race, was working to prevent pleasure in touring the country of one's birth? How did black American travelers negotiate this space in order to (re)claim a position for themselves as distinctly modern people through modern travel, or tourism? In addition to addressing these questions and broadening the reach of my analysis, this chapter also adds another literary form, drama, to Brown's poetry and

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[43] It must be admitted here, however, that physical mobility through travel and tourism most times required a kind of social mobility in terms of the economic capital needed in order to pay for transportation, accommodation and so forth. Also, due to the potential violence of a Jim Crow South, many African Americans would have preferred a personal automobile to public transportation, again, a privilege which required economic means, something not typical of black American families in the early 20th century. Still, many African Americans (particularly men) used employment as porters, stevedores, ship crew, soldiers and the like as a means to travel.

Hurston's novels. Serving as the conclusive chapter to my dissertation, I end with a final world in lieu of a traditional conclusion.

VII. A Final Word In Lieu of a Formal Conclusion

Rather than a conventional conclusion, I end this study with a final word. Having spent many pages examining representative aspects of the social and cultural phenomenon of travel and imagination in African American arts, letters and cultural history, it is not my intention to labor my readers with a formal restatement of the major arguments central to my thesis. Instead, I opt for a brief and more personal reflection on the topic of my analysis and offer conclusive remarks as appropriate.

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Chapter 1

Mobility, Restriction and the Meaning of Freedom: A Selected Survey of African American Travel Narratives and Creative Works

Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness, and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts. Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one's lifetime.

Mark Twain, Innocents Abroad, 1869

When the white conductor in a train has told me occasionally that I was in the wrong car, the underlying assumption has also been the same, that the separation was made in order to save white people from having to tolerate Negro company. Contrary to the laws—which are all written on the fiction of equality—he has, with a shrug of his shoulders, always left me where I was after I told him I had gone there purposely to have a look at the Negroes. A Negro who would disclose a similar desire to observe whites would, of course, be dealt with in quite another way.

Gunnar Myrdal, An American Dilemma, 1944

Since I travel about the country a great deal, people are always asking me if I notice any improvement in race relations, if things are better or worse. To tell the truth, I really do not know if they have improved or not. Race relations look like a see-saw to me—up on one end and down on the other, up here and down there, up and down. If one community reports better race relations than before the war, another reports worse.

Langston Hughes, "The See-Saw of Race," Chicago Defender, April 20, 1946

Introduction:

Travel narratives, like slave and migration narratives, are tied to the concept of freedom, particularly African American desire to capitalize on the promises of US citizenship and democracy through modern travel. African Americans conceptualize freedom in travel narratives as the unfettered ability to participate in the increasing early to mid 20th century process and practice of touring the country of one's birth in addition to a modest desire for travel beyond US borders. African Americans traveled abroad for many reasons, most notably for the purposes of education, work, cultural heritage, cosmopolitanism and building international and transnational political relationships. Though conceptions of freedom tend to change across slave, migration and travel narratives, the paradox of freedom and confinement remains consistent across all three narrative types. In this chapter, I examine travel narratives in greater detail, offering a selective survey of narratives, particularly focusing on the turn of the twentieth century to the1960s, a period which sees the early development of tourism as modern travel by African Americans. The first chapter of this study continues where the subsection "Beyond Freedom and Confinement: A Brief Explanation of (Dis)continuity Among Slave Narratives, Migration Narratives and Travel Narratives" in the introduction ends.

Not surprisingly, African Americans in the early 20th century conceptualize freedom in travel narratives as liberty from constraints to mobility, access to better jobs and a civil right to safe and hospitable public accommodations, particularly as many African Americans sought inclusion in the growing stream of Americans engaging in

tourism as a form of modern travel. In striving for the right to mobility and hospitality through travel, African Americans also challenged a logic and practice of white supremacy, a logic and practice which would otherwise bar African American travelers from experiencing many of the comforts and securities enjoyed by their white (or European) American counterparts. Because struggles for the civil (and indeed human) right to safe, secure and unconstrained mobility characterize the cultural history of African American modern travel, race (in addition to ethnicity, gender and class) as a socially constructed barrier or impediment to modern travel emerges as a unifying theme of this dissertation.

In addition to travel narratives, which can largely be found in autobiographies, biographies and literary works, I consult historical and sociological texts as well as key legislation and the black press. In the area of periodicals, I focus particularly on such historic publications as the *Baltimore Afro-American*, *Pittsburgh Courier*, *Los Angeles Sentinel*, *Plain Dealer*, *Philadelphia Tribune*, *Atlanta Daily World*, *New York Amsterdam News* and *Chicago Defender*. I maintain a selective use of the black press in this chapter, using the press to highlight and supplement sociological study and (auto)biographical narratives. The black press similarly figures in the final chapter on the *Negro Motorist Green Book*, providing historical context for my analysis of Ramsey's play. In the case of (auto)biographical writings, in particular, societal and cultural factors which left African Americans vulnerable to insult and attack in their struggles for greater mobility emerge quite concretely. Simultaneously, factors which forced African Americans to negotiate travel also surface in autobiographical and biographical narratives.

Noting the paradoxical duality of freedom and confinement in travel narratives, I examine recurring challenges and creative strategies which surface as a defining feature of African American cultural history. Extending beyond a confirmation of challenges African Americans experienced in travel and transportation, autobiographical and biographical narratives document African American ingenuity in responding to difficulties. I begin this survey somewhat anecdotally with a tale from one of James Weldon Johnson's earliest travel experiences. Using Johnson's experiences as a springboard, I explore some recurring features in the narratives of such figures as W.E.B. Du Bois, Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston during the early 20th century. Also, I include some discussion of a significant, yet controversial sociological study *An American Dilemma* conducted under the direction of Swedish economist Gunnar Myrdal and with the assistance of several African American researchers and intellectuals.

Research for this ambitious study of "the Negro problem" began in 1938, a year before the outbreak of WWII, and ended with the publication of *An American Dilemma* in 1944, a year before the close of WWII. The collaborative study paints a vivid picture of the situation of African Americans in the areas of travel, mobility and transportation during the early to mid-twentieth century. The primacy of travel, transportation and mobility is not surprising as the 1940s extend the 1930s American thrust for tourism, particularly as the 1930's witnessed the US government's attempts to counter the negative economic impact of the Great Depression through the development of American tourism. Even further, as Arnold Rose notes in his 1962 Postscript to *An American Dilemma*, one of the major forces responsible for the rapid change in race relations post

1940 was "the high level of mobility among the American people."[44] Observations by Myrdal et. al. in *An American Dilemma*, supplement my selective, critical cultural historical survey of African American travel narratives.

Finally, experiences of discrimination in travel certainly impacted African American intellectual and creative development, particularly affecting African American artistic and political sensibilities as well as how African Americans identified themselves in complex relations with places and people they encountered. As such, I examine the influence of travel and tourism on the intellectual, political and creative development of many of these figures, making connections between experiences of travel and artistic production. I also consider the impact travel has on identity, particularly related to dimensions of race, ethnicity, gender and class. Overlapping discussions unfold almost organically as I explore the travel experiences and subsequent creative and political work of individual figures. Because *An American Dilemma* provides a sociological context in which to understand the situation of modern African American travel, observations about travel, transportation and mobility in the study help to frame African American (auto)biographical travel narratives.

***An American Dilemma*: The "Negro Problem" in Travel, Transportation and Mobility in the Early to Mid Twentieth Century:**

Much of *An American Dilemma* focuses on mobility and transportation. Chapter 9 of the study on Economic Inequality indicates the emergence of a concrete American standard of living: "A new kind of 'inalienable rights'—economic and social—is gradually taking

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[44] Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), XXVIII.

shape within the great political canon of America and is acquiring the respectability of common adherence even if not of immediate realization."[45] Here the study reveals a broader US understanding of the relationship between freedom, democratic citizenship and modern mobility. Quoting from the National Resources Planning Board under President Roosevelt, the study lists 9 individual rights which the Planning Board felt reflected modern understandings of freedom. Ninth among these rights is the "right to rest, recreation, and adventure; the opportunity to enjoy life and take part in an advancing civilization."[46] As I argue in this study, much of the right to rest, recreation and adventure hinged on mobility, transportation and hospitality in particular the freedom to exercise one's civil (and indeed human) right to the "pursuit of happiness" as promised under the tenets of US democracy and citizenship.

Addressing social mobility, *An American Dilemma* describes possibilities available to US citizens in a culturally heterogeneous nation with economic (or class-based) stratification and ample geographical space:

> Social mobility permitted a relative uniformity of social forms and modes of thinking to exist side by side with a great diversity of economic levels of living. Cultural heterogeneity within the nation and huge geographical space also permitted a measure of anonymity and ignorance of distress. On account of the rapid tempo of economic progress and the rapidly growing market, economic adversities never did appear so final and hopeless.[47]

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[45] Myrdal, *An American Dilemma*, 209.
[46] Ibid., 210.
[47] Ibid., 210-211.

Though the final part of this statement is certainly up for debate, the study presents a reasonable picture of the opportunities available to US citizens. As the study demonstrates, racism in the form of racial violence, intimidation and legal sanctions operated to crystallize barriers preventing African Americans from taking advantage of the otherwise permeable structure of US society. *An American Dilemma* explains how Jim Crow mandates as well as threats and instances of physical violence and terror discouraged African Americans from capitalizing on US democracy's promises of freedom and equality. As a result of the study's report, the US class-based system appears more as a hybrid class and caste system[48] in which a more or less rigid social structure prevented African Americans from having access to certain privileges, particularly in public accommodations, based on skin color. Furthermore, such a system would seem more or less to facilitate economic subordination and geographical and spatial apartheid.

Also, in a subsection Crossing the Caste Line, *An American Dilemma* examines the social phenomenon of passing as a subversive means of obtaining upward mobility, socially and economically, and surmounting socially constructed (but physically maintained) racial barriers:

> For all practical purposes "passing" means that a Negro becomes a white man, that is, moves from the lower to the higher caste. In the American caste order, this can be accomplished only by the deception of the white people with whom the passer comes to associate and by a conspiracy of silence on the part of other Negroes who might know about it . . . Much passing is partial and sporadic, as

[48] Ibid., 667-688.

> when Negroes (in Washington, for example) pass for whites to attend theaters, lectures, concerts and receptions.[49]

Not only does the study explore passing as a subversive method of achieving social and physical mobility, but it also notes the practice as generally temporary and spontaneous, a quality which reveals passing as more a temporary, opportunistic and, perhaps even, voyeuristic activity. In this way, passing emerges as a social phenomenon and practice with some close similarities to tourism. Indeed, passing in relation to modern mobility is a characteristic feature of early creative works by African Americans. Two wonderful examples are James Weldon Johnson's *Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man* and Nella Larsen's novels *Quicksand* and *Passing*. Though I do not have the space to offer chapter length treatments of these creative works in my study of the social and cultural phenomena of travel and African American imagination, I would certainly be remiss if I did not at least earmark these avenues as organic extensions of the kind of analysis I pursue.

Discussing patterns of Social Segregation and Discrimination in the US, *An American Dilemma* offers a detailed picture of the impact of US law and custom on the ability of African Americans to gain access to comfortable and secure accommodations and services in travel:

> A good part of the segregation and discrimination that does occur in such facilities as railroad trains, railroad waiting rooms and ticket offices, streetcars, buses and taxicabs occurs because the law requires it. The law compels

[49] Ibid., 683-685.

> transportation companies to bear the extra costs of maintaining two sets of facilities. This becomes the more expensive as many Negroes avoid Jim Crow facilities by using their own cars or walking. On the other hand, it is notorious that companies—with few exceptions—save money by giving Negroes inferior service for equal charge.[50]

After first noting the somewhat impractical practice of discrimination against African Americans in public transportation, *An American Dilemma* assesses the significance of US law to the maintenance of Jim Crow social practice:

> While white opinion would no doubt force these companies to maintain segregated facilities, there would be many exceptions and a slow trend toward a breakdown of segregation if there were no laws to keep the pattern rigid. This inference may be drawn from observation of segregation practices in privately run stores where there are no laws to prohibit or to segregate Negro customers . . . It is a common observation that the Jim Crow car is resented more bitterly among Negroes than most other forms of segregation. In the North there is practically no segregation in public carriers.[51]

As US history illustrates, it was the 1896 decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* which legally sanctioned Jim Crow practices which functioned to disadvantage African Americans, particularly in the areas of public education and transportation, through a Supreme Court-supported doctrine that "separate but equal" facilities and services were both permissible and fair under US law. However, as *An American Dilemma* posits, US society and

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[50] Ibid., 634-635.
[51] Ibid., 635

culture would undergo a slow, but eventual transformation ending discrimination in public accommodations if not for the legal measures supporting discriminatory practices. Making this assertion, the study notes the looming specter of the Jim Crow car in the African American and American imagination, as the Jim Crow car served as an intense microcosm of discriminatory segregation across the broader US landscape. Supplementing the Jim Crow car as a primary space for discrimination, the study adds that "[o]f all the institutions run by the government, public bathing beaches, pools and bath houses have the most complete segregation."[52]

An American Dilemma centers on the major obstacle to African Americans receiving fair treatment in transportation in its chapter on Social Segregation and Discrimination where the study presents the judicial system as a significant site for negotiating civil rights:

> The inability of Negroes to get justice in the courts extends the powers of the police in the use of physical force. Beating and other forms of physical violence may be perpetrated by almost any white man without much fear of legal reprisal . . . As long as the Supreme Court upholds the principle established in its decision in 1883 to declare the federal civil rights legislation void, the Jim Crow laws are to be considered constitutional.[53]

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[52] Ibid., 634.
[53] Myrdal, *An American Dilemma*, 628-629.

Here the study refers to the Civil Rights Cases of 1883 in which the Supreme Court declared unconstitutional the Civil Rights Act of 1875,[54] an earlier measure providing legal protection of the rights of all citizens to public accommodations. The 1883 Supreme Court decision prefigured and, in many ways, anticipated the *Plessy vs. Ferguson* ruling of 1896 in which Supreme Court justices handed down a decision requiring racial segregation in private businesses, especially railroads, despite use of privately-owned transportation services by the broader American public of all skin colors. Essentially the Supreme Court ruled that "separate, but equal" public accommodations were legal, ushering in an era of Supreme Court protected discrimination against African Americans, most prominently in the US South. Despite noted pessimism towards the judicial fight for civil rights waged by such organizations as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), *An American Dilemma* remains optimistic about the future of legal battles as it observes that federal court decisions "are increasingly exposing the Southern statutes backing the system of institutional segregation as unconstitutional."[55]

As my discussion of *An American Dilemma* reveals, key legislation to the cultural history of African American travel includes *Plessy v. Ferguson*, *Brown v. Board of Education* and The Civil Rights Act of 1964. Of course it was *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896 which legally sanctioned an already instituted set of Jim Crow practices, particularly in the areas of public education and accommodation, through a Supreme

[54] The Civil Rights Act of 1875 provided that "all persons within the jurisdiction of the United States shall be entitled to the full and equal enjoyment of the accommodations, advantages, facilities, and privileges of inns, public conveyances on land or water, theaters, and other places of public amusement; subject only to the conditions and limitations established by law, and applicable alike to citizens of every race and color, regardless of any previous condition of servitude." See Civil Rights Cases, 109 U.S. 3 (1883).
[55] Ibid., 629.

Court-supported doctrine that "separate but equal" facilities and services were both permissible and fair under US supreme law. The 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling reversed the Supreme Court's stance on "separate but equal," finding that segregated public schools were indeed both unfair and illegal, a decision which offered the possibility of legal sanction against discriminatory practices negatively impacting African Americans-including discrimination in travel and transportation. Finally, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 under President Lyndon Johnson enlarged US legal protections against racial discrimination (and women's rights) to include such areas as voter registration (Title I), public facilities in general (Title III) as well as discrimination in hotels, motels, restaurants, theaters, and all other public accommodations engaged in interstate commerce (Title II). Not only does *An American Dilemma* foreground significant obstacles to African Americans receiving fair treatment in travel and transportation, but it also documents authorities accepting the task of Jim Crow maintenance.

Importantly, railroad conductors, in addition to police officers, took responsibility for the enforcement of Jim Crow segregation. Citing Arthur Raper's unpublished manuscript "Race and Class Pressures," *An American Dilemma* explains that not only did conductors, for all intents and purposes, operate with the same powers as police, but conductors often carried firearms with which to threaten and intimidate Negro passengers who violated the Jim Crow mandate.[56] Railroad conductors were not the only citizens to appropriate power for the enforcement of Jim Crow law and practice, but as documented in *An American Dilemma* and the black press, white private citizens, often in vigilante-

[56] Ibid., 1340.

style organization, terrorized and assaulted Negro passengers who dared to challenge Jim Crow.

An American Dilemma foregrounds the function of the black press in publicizing incidents of racial discrimination in public transportation in its discussion of the often illegitimate powers exercised by The Police and Other Contacts:

> Practically all Southern Negroes interviewed by the present writer on this question have complained about the arbitrary and high-handed manner in which the Jim Crow regulations in transportation are often handled. Incidents of illegal treatment are frequently reported in the Negro press.[57]

Even the poet Langston Hughes reported about such discrimination experienced by African Americans in his many articles published in the *Chicago Defender*. In one such article written in 1948, Hughes reflects on Jim Crow discrimination experienced not only by African Americans, but by Native Americans as well:

> A few weeks ago I read about an Indian girl who started East to college, got Jim Crowed on a bus in Texas, so she turned around and went back to her reservation. One seldom hears of any Negroes turning around and going back home on account of Jim Crow. Is it that Negroes have more gumption—or less pride? Is it

[57] Ibid., 537.

> that we take the back seat to get where we are going in spite of all—or that we just take the back seat?[58]

Hughes offers no concrete answer to his query, yet his sentiment is clear all the same. As I illustrate in the final chapter on the *Green Book*, incidents which Hughes reported in the *Chicago Defender* often proved far more physically violent when experienced by Negro bodies in the US South.

Observations about the situation of travel, mobility and transportation for African Americans in *An American Dilemma* have implications (sociological, political and otherwise) for black travel in the South. Namely, these observations illustrate the role of race in determining not only US cultural and societal attitudes about the level of comfort and security appropriate for African Americans in transport, but also a southern US landscape and policy seeking to proscribe—if not completely restrict—African American movement. Still, the possibilities for African Americans were not entirely bleak, as the US judicial system offered a battle ground on which to wage a struggle for the civil right to freedom of mobility domestically. To be sure, the challenges to African American travel presented in *An American Dilemma* are confirmed not only in the black press, but also in African American autobiographical and biographical narratives.

Recurring Challenges, Creative Strategies: Unpacking African American Experiences of Travel in a Jim Crow US South and Beyond:

[58] Langston Hughes, "U.S. Likes Nazis and Franco Better Than Its Own Negroes," in *Langston Hughes and the Chicago Defender: Essays on Race, Politics, and Culture, 1942-62,* ed. Langston Hughes and Christopher C. De Santis (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 35.

In his autobiography *Along This Way* James Weldon Johnson reveals many critical moments in his development as an intellectual, artist and activist. One striking example is his early experience of discrimination in travel as an African American teenager in 1887. Johnson, along with a Spanish-speaking companion Ricardo Rodriguez, is traveling as a first-class passenger at the age of sixteen on his way from Jacksonville, Florida, to Atlanta, Georgia, to enroll at the Atlanta Preparatory School:

> A number of colored people had got on the train but we were the only ones in the first-class car. Before we could open our lunch, the conductor came round. I gave him the tickets, and he looked at them and looked at us. Then he said to me gruffly, "You had better get out of this car and into the one ahead." "But," I answered, "we have first-class tickets, and this is the first-class car, isn't it?" . . . Ricardo knew there was something wrong but didn't fully understand the conversation or the situation, and asked me, "¿Que dice?"… I explained to him what the conductor was trying to make us do; we decided to stay where we were.[59]

Fortunately for Johnson and his travel companion, a facility with the Spanish language made a direct confrontation with the conductor unnecessary:

> But we did not have to enforce the decision. As soon as the conductor heard us speaking a foreign language, his attitude changed; he punched our tickets and gave them back, and treated us just as he did the other passengers in the car . . . This was my first impact against race prejudice as a concrete fact. Fifteen years

[59] James Weldon Johnson, *Along This Way*, 1st Da Capo Press ed. (New York: Da Capo Press, 2000), 64-65. (Originally published New York: Viking Press, 1933)

> later, an incident similar to the experience with this conductor drove home to me the conclusion that in such situations any kind of Negro will do; provided he is not one who is an American citizen.[60]

Two significant characteristics of this exchange are salient and recurrent in the cultural history of African American travel: 1) The several factors that made Johnson and other African Americans vulnerable to discrimination in travel (e.g. race/ethnicity as perceived through visual markers of skin color, class and gender); 2) Language (in addition to skin color and automobile[61] ownership) as a "passport" of sorts, allowing some African Americans to avoid many of the prejudices attendant in travel during the Jim Crow era of US history. Other narratives from Johnson's autobiographical writings reveal the impact of travel on his political outlook and activism.

Born June 17, 1871 in Jacksonville, Florida, James Weldon Johnson's chief joy as a child was treating the walk to his grandmother's house as an adventure in its own right. As many children with vivid imaginations do, James Weldon and his younger brother Rosamond accepted any opportunity to recreate the landscape to support their desire for a genuine epic experience, particularly when a venture involved bare feet on hot sandy roads and a stop at Arpen's store, where candy could be purchased for the brave and deserving adventurer:

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[60] Ibid., 65.

[61] Automobile ownership and "automobility"—as Cotton Seiler discusses in *Republic of Drivers: A Cultural History of Automobility in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008)—serve not only as signs of class status for African Americans in the early 20th century, but also as physical means of avoiding discrimination in travel. Automobiles, however, only lessened experiences of prejudice in travel as gas stations in the early to mid twentieth century US South often did not welcome its African American patrons.

> And so sometimes the expedition to our grandmother's house gave us, in proportion, all the thrills that a traveler gets in exploring the world's perilous places. Our method was to run from one patch of grass to another, waiting at each until our feet cooled off before daring to set out for the next. But even these islands of refuge were not free from hazard; the grass was filled with sand-spurs that pierced the feet like hot needles. Under these conditions that journey was one that called for agility, endurance, and courage. But the goal was always worth the dangers run; there were sure to be small cakes and jumbles and benne candy, and at times a cool glass of limeade.[62]

In later years, these incidents of imagined epic adventure, simulating experiences of danger in travel while serving as a guardian to his younger brother Rosamond, would seem more than child's play.

Indeed, if one considers Johnson's bold and courageous leadership, building membership and chapters of the NAACP as national organizer between 1916 and 1920, particularly in a dangerous US South, his imagined adventures appear more as practice and preparation for a life of trials and tribulations, but eventual triumphs. In this way, Johnson's own life experiences read, at times, like an epic journey with Johnson the hero in a tale of racial progress and uplift in the face of numerous obstacles and seeming impasses. One such triumph, as Sondra K. Wilson notes, is Johnson's election to Secretary of the NAACP, an organization which in prior years had been persistent in maintaining its all white leadership:

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[62] Johnson, *Along This Way*, 23-24.

> By 1920, he had spent four years building branches across the North and in the difficult South. He had strategically used his position as field secretary in those years to quietly gather the forces in the field. For the first time, ninety-five percent of the association's funding came from black memberships. Not only had Johnson been adroit at building a strong base in the black community, but the significant administrative work was now being planned and executed by him and Walter White. Johnson and White represented the NAACP in the nation's capital, lobbying congressmen, senators, and cabinet members. In other words, they bore the chief public responsibility for the work of the NAACP, thereby proving themselves effective leaders in the eyes of their race.[63]

Having utilized his travels in the US North and South to strategically build a base of support in black communities, Johnson positioned himself carefully to assume a formal leadership role in the organization. In fact, nearing the election season for NAACP national officers, branch director Robert Bagnall "[f]ound every branch I visited clamoring for the ratification of Johnson as secretary." With such a strong base of support and "no one else contending, the board named Johnson executive secretary in the fall of 1920."[64]

The situation which Johnson challenged in the early 1900s is one in which African Americans not only experienced discrimination in public accommodations including travel—in response to which Johnson quickly transformed into a skilled civil rights activist—but also a context in which black bodies were vulnerable to fatality as

[63] Ibid., XVII.
[64] Ibid.

illustrated by the brutal practice of lynching. From these brief episodes drawn from Johnson's autobiography, one comes to understand race, as perceived through skin color, as a physical marker signifying African Americans as acceptable targets for prejudice both within the context of travel and outside it. Furthermore, Johnson's experiences illustrate travel as an opportunity for developing a base for later civil rights activism and leadership, as Johnson himself came to understand the complexities (and even contradictions) of the "race problem" in the US.

Similar to Johnson, W.E.B. Du Bois' travel experiences had a substantial impact on his development as a scholar and activist. A critical examination of Du Bois' travel experiences demonstrates not only the significance of travel to Du Bois' intellectual and political development, particularly as he embarked on a journey akin to (yet markedly disparate from) the Grand Tour popular among late 17th to mid 19th century young British aristocrats, but also the centrality of travel to assertions of modern subjectivity. Concerning modern subjectivity, the travel experiences of Du Bois and others reveal the denial or hindrance of African American travel and tourism as a very denial of the status of African Americans as modern people.

Du Bois' writings about his experiences abroad contain, perhaps, the most compelling evidence of the importance of travel to Du Bois' intellectual and political development, especially as it relates to his lifelong struggle against the race problem in the US:

> The most important work of the decade, as I now look back upon it, was my travel. Before 1918, I had made three trips to Europe; but now between 1918 and

> 1928 I made four more trips of extraordinary meaning: to France directly after the close of the war and during the Congress of Versailles; to England, Belgium, France and Geneva in the earliest days of the League of Nations; to Spain, Portugal and Africa in 1923 and 1924; and to Germany, Russia, and Constantinople in 1927.[65]

It is interesting initially to note the similarities between the Grand Tour of 18th century young aristocrats, and the "Grand Tour" of Du Bois. The Grand Tour, a traveling experience in the creation of a gentleman that included, France, Germany, Switzerland and Italy was a common practice of 18th century nobility in which "[y]oung aristocratic men and women toured the principal capitals of Western Europe to cultivate knowledge, character, and contacts (Black and Stroud 1992)."[66] Du Bois' tour, far more extensive in sites visited, still maintains an element of cosmopolitan educational experience as well as the benefit of developing character and gaining important contacts:

> I could scarcely have encompassed a more vital part of the modern world picture than in those stirring journeys. They gave me a depth of knowledge and a breadth of view which was of incalculable value for realizing and judging modern conditions and, above all, the problem of race in America and in the world.[67]

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[65] W.E.B. Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay Toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2008), 267. (Originally published in 1968 by Schocken Books).
[66] Chris Rojek, "Mass Tourism or the Re-Enchantment of the World? Issues and Contradictions in the Study of Travel," in *New Forms of Consumption: Consumers, Culture and Modification*, ed. Mark Gottdiener (Lanham, MD : Rowman & Littlefield Publishers , 2000), 51.
[67] Ibid.

Complementing his interest in Marxism, Du Bois' early tour helped him to develop a transnational perspective on the problem of the subjugation and oppression of people of color globally (not just in the US). In contrast to the 18th century aristocratic travel experience, a venture significant in affirming a position of nobility and privilege through the development of a cosmopolitan worldliness, Du Bois' tour troubled his concept of (and relationship to) nationality and nationhood.

The very racial character of Du Bois' experiences as a modern traveling subject, a tourist—Du Bois even refers to himself as a modern "American Negro traveler"—certainly contributed to his complex relationship with the nation as political construct.[68] The impact of travel on Du Bois' intellectual development and his political outlook ultimately found its fullest expression in Du Bois' transnational, Pan-Africanist positions on national and international politics and his intense and penetrating philosophical reflections on the intertwining of race and class in a larger problem of the global subjugation of people of color in the modern world by imperial and colonial countries. While travel experiences broadened Du Bois' understanding of the position of people of color in an increasingly modernizing and industrializing world, Du Bois also discovered acceptance by white (European) persons he encountered, in contrast to the stark character of racism that defined his encounters with white persons in the US.

To a degree, the segregation characterizing public spaces in the US influenced Du Bois to assert "on the street, in travel, in pubic assembly and the like, where I came in contact with white people, I spoke to them only when it was necessary, and then briefly.

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[68]Ibid, 123

For the most part, I did not speak at all, unless they addressed me.[69] However, during his first travels abroad in Europe, Du Bois experienced two incidents which at once give him hope for the equal acceptance of people of color in the broader world, but also offered him a painful reminder of American racism in the US. Although attempting to avoid a Dutch family while traveling on the Rhine, Du Bois was approached by the fellow travelers who introduced themselves, and, as a result, Du Bois "ended by having a delightful trip and by feeling more at home with cultured white folk than I had before in my life."[70] This feeling of hope, however, was quickly interrupted when "an American husband and wife from the West came, and, were so alarmed about my social relations with German girls that they solemnly warned the Marbach family against racial intermarriage."[71] Du Bois' experiences of acceptance and comfort abroad circa 1918-1928, in contrast to discrimination in the US, continued to echo decades later in the 1960s black press.

In contrast to the difficulties encountered by many African Americans traveling domestically in the US South during its Jim Crow era (ca. 1896-1965), a 1961 article "Courier, ITAS Sponsor 'Friendship Tour' to Mexico" in the *Pittsburgh Courier* promises the *Courier*'s largely African American readership amiable and hospitable accommodations and guided tours abroad in countries on three continents and in the Caribbean:

> The *Pittsburgh Courier* (*sic.*) and the Inter-American Travel Agents Society have completed arrangements for the first in a series of tours planned specifically to

[69] Ibid., 259.
[70] Ibid., 45-46.
[71] Ibid.

> give the American Negro tourist an opportunity to meet and talk with top government officials and be given officially guided tours. Through these "Friendship Tours" Negroes, and any interested members of any other race, will be exposed to the type of "communication" not offered to the general tourism. Subsequent economical tours to Asia, Africa, South America, the Caribbean and Bermuda are being planned in this series of goodwill tours."[72]

The *Pittsburgh Courier* continued advertising economic tours abroad to its readership in 1962. The article "Courier Summer Economy Tours Make 'Travel Dreams' Come True" published in the *Courier* reflects a relatively friendly climate abroad[73] for African American tourists and documents, like its 1961 predecessor, the development of a professional service industry in response to a growing consumer base of African American international tourists.

> Guidance is the best part of an organized tour. Have no fear that you will sacrifice any of your independence, on the contrary, you will find that you will be relieved of all the bothersome details which would reduce your free time. Guided tours insure your seeing the most interesting things in the shortest time, you are free from worry about best hotel accommodations, good food and comfortable transportation. Language barriers and currency exchange become no problem

[72] "Courier, ITAS Sponsor 'Friendship Tour' to Mexico: Mexican Gov't Giving VIP Welcome to Those on Tour," *Pittsburgh Courier*, Oct. 28, 1961, sec. A23, col. 1.

[73] There are some exceptions to complicate an easy conception of travel destinations abroad as welcoming to its African American visitors. For example, an article published in 1960 by Fred Avendorph, travel editor for the *Chicago Defender*, describes some ill sentiment expressed by locals of color in Bermuda about servicing African American tourists. Fred W. Avendorph, "Let's Take a Trip Travel Talk: Colored Resorts Seek Negroes" *The Chicago Defender*, Oct. 8, 1960, p. 21.

> when you have a guided tour courier to depend upon. Tour couriers must past rigid training in language, history, currency and human relationships.[74]

Such an opportunity would certainly have been attractive to any African American with the economic prosperity to afford such a luxury as international travel. Also, the article boasted, "The day has past when only the wealthy American traveler appeared on the London or Paris scene. . . now the butcher, the baker and the candlestick maker are the ones making tourism a leading industry." As Du Bois' autobiographical narrative asserts and the black press confirms, much of African American travel abroad during the 20th century was motivated by a desire to experience a kind of freedom—freedom of mobility—hardly afforded African Americans in the US.

Du Bois' time in Europe, in conjunction with his leftist politics, contributed to his understanding "the real crux of the problems of my time; and that is the widespread effort of white Europe to use the labor and material of the colored world for its own wealth and power."[75] Another way to understand Du Bois' assertion is to suggest that what he came to understand was that the problem of the 20th century was not simply a problem of the color line, but rather a very complex problem of the interwoven and dual problem of color and class line(s), or what the contributors to *An American Dilemma* refer to as a problem of class and caste operating simultaneously. In developing a transnational perspective, which led to his formulation of Pan Africanism, Du Bois also realized the dominant role of European countries in the systematic exploitation of people in Africa,

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[74] "Courier Summer Economy Tours Make 'Travel Dreams' Come True," *Pittsburgh Courier*, May 19, 1962, p. 25, col. 6.
[75] Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn*, 261.

Asia and South America for the purposes of gaining capital wealth through the raw resources abundant on these continents.

Finally, as an Afro-modern traveler, Du Bois struggled, as many African Americans of the early 20th century did, against US Jim Crow policies and practices of segregation in public spaces and travel, policies which denied, or at least hindered, African Americans from expressing themselves as fully modern people. In fact, one of the tenets of the ca. 1905 Niagara Movement, in which Du Bois was a central figure, was a commitment to end "discrimination in public accommodation," on the grounds that, "[s]eparation in railway and street cars, based simply on race and color is un-American, undemocratic, and silly."[76] Recurrent challenges in Afro-modern travel are not only aspects of the life and works of older (and in some ways more conservative) figures like Johnson and Du Bois, but likewise of the younger generation of intellectuals and artists that included figures like Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston.

Hurston and Hughes serve as dynamic complements to Johnson and Du Bois for several reasons. First, Hughes and Hurston both traveled extensively at a time when many African Americans could not—or indeed would not—travel, due to lack of economic means (or social mobility), gender mores and potential danger. Even more, both Hurston and Hughes were enormously prolific in terms of artistic and intellectual production. Narratives that emerge from Hughes' autobiographical writing and biographical writing about Hurston paint a picture of the encounter between black and white US citizens during the Jim Crow era of US travel and tourism in Harlem around the time of the artistic and intellectual Renaissance often associated with 1920s Harlem.

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[76] Ibid. 90-91.

These narratives complement those of Johnson and Du Bois well not only because they extend discussion of recurrent tropes in the cultural history of African American travel, but they do so for a younger generation who witnessed aspects of the tourist encounter in urban spaces (and usually part of night life revelries) that older persons like Johnson and Du Bois probably would have avoided. To frame my brief look at narratives that surface from Hughes and Hurston I employ voyeurism, a practice (much like passing) that lends itself to conceptualization as a typology of tourist practice.

Voyeurism as a Typology of Tourism: A Brief Glance at Some Narratives from Hughes and Hurston:

Voyeurism as a typology of tourism surfaces in Hughes' autobiographical writing during his years in Harlem as part of the Renaissance:

> White people began to come to Harlem in droves. For several years they packed the expensive Cotton Club on Lenox Avenue. But I was never there, because the Cotton Club was a Jim Crow club for gangsters and monied whites…Harlem Negroes did not like the Cotton Club and never appreciated its Jim Crow policy in the very heart of their dark community…where now the strangers [whites] were given the best ringside tables to sit and stare at the Negro customers-like amusing animals in a zoo.[77]

What Hughes decries here is the popular 1920s practice of "slumming," during which white patrons would venture into Harlem at night for the amusement of viewing a culture they saw as at once amusing and inferior, only to return to their privileged neighborhoods

[77] Langston Hughes, *The Big Sea: An Autobiography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1963), 224-225.

none the more knowledgeable about the needs, desires or concerns of Harlem's black residents. Hughes describes this practice against the backdrop of Jim Crow policies at work in the North which certainly challenges common beliefs that Jim Crow was a practice applied only in the US South.

As Hughes continues to describe the relationship between white patron-tourists and black residents-toured, the question of authenticity in relation to tourism comes to the fore. In particular, he discusses how black resident artists and entertainers began to tailor their performances to the desires of white patron-tourists:

> The lindy-hoppers at the Savoy even began to practice acrobatic routines, and to do absurd things for the entertainment of the whites, that probably never would have entered their heads to attempt merely for their own effortless amusement. Some of the lindy-hoppers had cards printed with their names on them and became dance professors teaching the tourists.[78]

To be certain any notion of authenticity when it comes to the question of cultural performances is a false one, particularly because authenticity, as it rests on a premise of pure origins, would assume the immutability of culture. As cultures do change over time, so do the cultural products which emerge from those cultures. However, in terms of an organic process by which a cultural product is created by people of a culture which reflects even those changing elements and processes of that culture, one can at least distinguish between genuine cultural creations that emerge internally from a culture's

[78] Ibid., 226.

own dynamics and those which come into being as a process of negotiation between people of different cultural backgrounds, particularly along an axis of economic power.

The decision by black cultural actors of Harlem to alter their creations and performances for a tourist trade, reflects, not a genuine cultural product in this way, but rather a cultural synthesis that is the product of a negotiation between white voyeuristic desire on one hand, and black aspirations and economic need on the other. I make no pretense of privileging one set of cultural products over the other, but think it prudent to be aware of the complex processes and even negotiations through which cultural products are created as well as those qualities which distinguish one from the other. Even more so, I think it significant to note cultural performances of this sort which emerge as a process of negotiation because they throw into further relief the impact power, and indeed privilege, has on cultural formations as it is reflected through class, racial, ethnic and even gender dynamics.

Voyeurism via "slumming" as a typology of tourism appears not only in the autobiographical writings of Hughes, but also in Valerie Boyd's biography of Hurston's life and writings:

> For some white sophisticates—seeking distance from their usual circles, either for a dash of discretion or for more "exotic" playmates—Harlem became an uptown playground. Among those who frequented Harlem in the 1920's were William Faulkner, George Gershwin, Charlie Chaplin, Jimmy Durante, Tallulah Bankhead, Muriel Draper, Theodore Dreiser, and Alexander Woollcott. Most of

> them were "mere sightseers," as Langston Hughes recalled, "faddists temporarily in love with Negro life."[79]

Boyd even describes the seminal role played by Carl Van Vechten, a big patron of African American artists and institutions and frequent staple in Harlem, who "was often in Harlem, where he routinely served as a tour guide for prominent whites slumming uptown."[80] Many African Americans in the early 20th century responded negatively to the influx of white "slummers" encouraged by Van Vechten's willingness to serve as tour guide, and one notes a measure of such disdain from Claude McKay who asserted from Europe, "Harlem is an all-white picnic ground and with no apparent gain to the blacks." Other African Americans, like Rudolph Fisher saw white interest in Harlem as a positive sign that white Americans were finally "tuned in on our wave-length."[81]

Supplementing narratives emerging from the lives and works of Du Bois and Johnson, narratives from Hughes and Hurston around the period of the Harlem Renaissance further illustrate recurrent challenges to Afro-modern travel. In particular, they show the complex interplay of race and ethnicity on the singular geographical site of Harlem, demonstrating the ways in which specific touristic encounters reflected broader challenges to modern African American mobility. Taken together, the multiple genres of writing I have discussed in this chapter illustrate dimensions of the African American cultural history of modern travel that resurface throughout this dissertation. Before concluding this chapter, and as segue to the first chapter length examination of travel and imagination via the poetry of Sterling Brown, I briefly consider the train and railroad as

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[79] Valerie Boyd, *Wrapped in Rainbows: The Life of Zora Neale Hurston* (New York: Scribner, 2003), 124.
[80] Ibid., 125.
[81] Ibid., 125-126.

central figures in the African American cultural historical imagination, particularly in the graphic collage art of Romare Bearden.

Prevalent figures in African American literary and visual art (in addition to music and film), the train and railroad not only figure substantially in formal literature, but also feature in African American graphic art, most notably the collage art of Romare Bearden. Two worthy examples of Bearden's collage art include "The Train" (1974-5), which references the cultural historical experience of the Underground Railroad, and "Spring Fever" from the *Profile/Part I: The Twenties* series (1978), which serves as the cover art for the volume *The Collected Poems of Sterling A. Brown*. Though some scholars and art critics have assessed Bearden's collage art in relation to the issue of segregation, the blues, jazz and the cultural historical experience of migration, taking travel and mobility as points of departure for analysis—without negating other frames of analysis—bears striking results. Before concluding this chapter, I reflect on the image of the train in Bearden's art. Bearden's use of the train continues in a trajectory of African American visual and graphic art that includes Walter Ellison's "Train Station" (1935), William H. Johnson's "War Voyage" (ca. 1942), Jacob Lawrence's *Migration* series (1940-1) and "Going Home" (ca. 1946) and the recent mixed media pieces of Radcliff Bailey.

Memory and Embodiment, Freedom and Confinement: Reflections on "The Train" in Bearden's Graphic Art:

African American artists have employed the railroad and train in literature, visual art and music, more broadly, as signifiers of freedom, conceptions complicated by historical experiences of confinement such as enslavement, Jim Crow segregation and racial

discrimination and gendered restrictions on women's mobility. Much of Bearden's art demonstrates this aspect of African American visual art practice through Bearden's employment of the train as a complex and mysterious trope embodying the paradox of freedom and confinement as a characteristic dimension of African American cultural historical memory. Bearden's concern with the train stems from his own memories of his childhood, spending significant time in Charlotte, North Carolina and cherishing, like many, the opportunity to watch trains go by at the Southern Railroad station on West Trade Street.[82]

Signifying freedom and modern mobility, as well as serving as a modern vessel of transport to places in the far off North or other unknown parts of the US and South America, the Southern Railroad and train in the 1920s South would have really been an impressive sight to behold. Indeed, Myron Schwartzman notes the tremendous impact Bearden's memory of trains had on his artistic output decades later:

> Many years later, it would be just such trains, carrying people to magic, mysterious places, that Romare would remember in collage after collage with titles such as *Watching the Good Trains Go By* (1964), *Sunset Limited* (1978), *Southern Limited* (1976), *Evening Train to Memphis* (1976), and *The Afternoon Northbound* (1978).[83]

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[82] Myron Schwartzman, *Romare Bearden: His Life and Art* (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1990), 20.
[83] Ibid., 21.

A dynamic and complex example is "The Train" in which the graphic artist references the cultural historical experience of the Underground Railroad to present his perspective on the paradox of freedom and confinement.

[Image not included to comply with US Copyright Law][84]

Figure 1: *The Train*, Romare Bearden, collage on paper, 1974-5. Estate of William H. Van Every, Jr., Charlotte, N.C.

In "The Train," Bearden employs his signature collage technique to present several African Americans around a kitchen table in what appears to be a rural southern make-shift tenement. Among the faces assembled around the table is Harriet Tubman, American Civil War hero and organizer of the Underground Railroad which guided many enslaved persons out of the US South to the "free" North through a network of secret routes and safe houses, or what I like to consider as "a geography of safe spaces." The inclusion of Tubman as a reference to the Underground Railroad, in addition to the inclusion of the train image, demonstrates Bearden's understanding of the significance of the train and railroad in the African American imagination beyond the physical structure and likeness of the modern industrial vessel.

In the upper left quadrant of the composition, Bearden includes the image of the train passing by just outside the rural dwelling, indicating the proximity of rural, southern African American families to the railroad or train tracks. Also, I would suggest Bearden's inclusion of Tubman along with the train image is an explicit reference to the

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[84] For an image of the work see "The Train" at the website of the Museum of Modern Art: http://www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object_id=65232

expansive, conceptual articulation of freedom and confinement in the African American imagination as not only a problem of modern mobility, but a cultural historical problem of mobility with connections to the antebellum experience of enslavement. The result is a productive asymmetry which presents the train as a vessel of cultural memory whose very mobility mirrors the aspirations of African Americans. The ironic complexity of Bearden's assemblage surfaces when one considers Jim Crow laws and practices not only geographically segregated African American residences from those of their white counterparts but also restricted African American mobility via train from the 1870s through the 1960s. Though Bearden employs the train as a culturally specific container of African American cultural memory, like many African American artists his use of this culturally specific image is done in an effort to transcend the paradox of freedom and confinement by accessing the universal meanings of the train beyond its specificity in African American cultural history and memory.

Noting the influence of Bearden's collage art on the dramatic work of playwright August Wilson, Tracy Van Dorpe observes how Bearden uses "collage to express the disjunction of the African-American experience, adopting his cultural specificity to express the commonality of culture."[85] Bearden's use of the train as a culturally specific container of African American memory also accesses the train's more universal meaning as an image of modern industry (and modernism more broadly) providing an expanding floor to situate the specificities of African American cultural history in the broader historical trajectory of modern experience. Amidst the disjuncture and asymmetry which characterize the broader landscape of such graphic pieces as "The Train" and "Spring

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[85] Tracy L. Van Dorpe, "From Chaos to Collage: The Influence of Romare Bearden's Art on August Wilson" (February 16, 1998), accessed Mar. 21, 2009, www.augustwilson.net.

Fever," Bearden employs the train as a paradoxical signifier of (imagined) freedom and (experienced) confinement as the artist ultimately approaches transcendence through the universal relevance of the modern paradox despite the specific cultural referent (the train) he uses to gesture towards the duality of freedom and confinement. Having situated my dissertation as an interdisciplinary study of travel and imagination, a study refracting dimensions of African American cultural histories of travel, I conclude this chapter with some reflections on travel ideals and travel figurations.

Conclusion: Some Reflections on Travel Ideals and Travel Figurations:

Drawing from a variety of sources—most notably sociological study, the black press and travel narratives gleaned from a selection of African American autobiographies and biographies—I have tried to offer a window into both the cultural historical experiences of African American travelers in the 20th century as well as an understanding of the significance of travel and tourism to African Americans. Exploring the meaning of freedom in travel narratives, I have tried to show that freedom for African Americans in the 20th century hinges, not only on political empowerment and escape from white racial violence as documented in migration narratives, but also on greater mobility as well as hospitality and security in travels abroad and at home (i.e. domestically within US borders). Finally, in an effort to extend the significance of African American cultural histories of travel in the US beyond historical documentation, I have explored some works of literary and visual art created in response to both experiences of travel and iconic images of transportation in African American arts, letters and cultural memory (i.e. the Jim Crow car, train, railroad and Pullman porter). Doing so has allowed me to

highlight the importance of African American cultural histories of travel in their own right as well as detail the impact of travel and tourism on the imagination, the central focus of my study. In the next chapter I continue my discussion of the significance of the train and railroad in the African American imaginary. I do so through literary and cultural historical analysis of the poetry of literary critic and poet Sterling Brown for whom mobile railroad men like porter served as artistic inspiration.

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Chapter 2

The Prominence of the Railroad in the African American Imagination: Mobile Men, Gendered Mobility and the Poetry of Sterling A. Brown[86]

Introduction

The railroad, train and Pullman porter are prevalent figures in African American literature, film and music. Examples are numerous: the collage art of Romare Bearden in the graphic arts and the 1933 Hollywood film *Emperor Jones* starring Paul Robeson as a porter, the autobiographical writings of Zora Neale Hurston both anthropologist and literary artist, and poet and columnist Langston Hughes. In this chapter on travel and imagination I examine how railroad imagery, mobile men and gendered mobility figure in the poetry of scholar and literary artist and critic Sterling A. Brown (1901–1989) as a reflection of African Americans' cultural historical experiences of racial and gendered paradigmatic restrictions on modern mobility. By gendered mobility, I refer to a modern paradigm – dominant in the United States (US) at least from the close of the Civil War in 1865 until the Second World War (WWII) – in which men were not only far more mobile than women, but the very mobility of men was predicated on the domesticity of women. Brown's poetry dynamically and critically refracts this moment in African American cultural history, particularly because mobile men and African American vernacular culture influenced much of Brown's literary art.

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[86] Reprinted with revision from "The Prominence of the Railroad in the African American Imagination: Mobile Men, Gendered Mobility and the Poetry of Sterling A. Brown" in *Travel and Imagination* ed. Garth Lean, Russell Staiff and Emma Waterton (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), pp. 89–102. Copyright © 2014.

The poems I treat include “Long Gone” and “Sister Lou” from Brown’s first and most successful volume of poetry *Southern Road* (1932) and “The Law for George” from Brown’s rejected second volume of poetry *No Hiding Place* (1980) written in the years following the publication of *Southern Road*, but not published until 1980.[87] Exploring images of mobile railroad men in Brown’s poetry, specifically, and African American cultural history, arts and letters more broadly, I consider the experiences of porters as gleaned through the cultural history of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and Maids (BSCP). The BSCP, founded in 1925 by A. Phillip Randolph, was the first successful black labor union in US history.[88]

I begin with a brief overview of the railroad, train and porter in African American cultural history, arts and letters. Then I explain the significance of the porter as a heroic figure in African American cultural history and imagination, noting the historical shadow masking women’s experience of the railroad. Finally, I foreground the importance of the railroad and mobile men like the porter in the poetry of Brown and analyze the cultural history refracted in Brown’s literary art, specifically addressing the racial and gendered paradigmatic restrictions on mobility reproduced in his vernacular-inflected musings. I conclude this chapter with a reflection on the continued influence of the train and railroad in African American artistic expression up until the present.

The Railroad in the African American Imagination: Literature, Visual Art and Music

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[87] For these poems, see Sterling A. Brown, *The Collected Poems of Sterling A. Brown* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980).

[88] Beth Tompkins Bates, *Pullman Porters and the Rise of Protest Politics in Black America, 1925–1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

Railroad imagery is prevalent in African American literature, visual art, film and music. The train features prominently in literary works by Faith Ringgold, Nikki Giovanni, James Baldwin, Richard Wright, Toni Morrison, Claude McKay, Ralph Ellison, Zora Neale Hurston, August Wilson and others, "in which the train, train history, and legendary train figures such as Harriet Tubman or John Henry serve as literary symbols."[89] Similarly, Hurston's autobiography *Dust Tracks on a Road* includes a blues-inspired folk song about the southern railroad which she encountered during her ethnographic travels in the US South,[90] and Hughes' autobiography *The Big Sea* includes a blues–inspired poem about the railroad, a poem the poet wrote while in Washington, DC circa 1924–1925.[91]

Further, the train and railroad feature heavily in African American visual art with such examples as the collage art of Romare Bearden, most notably "The Train" (1975) which references the cultural historical experience of the Underground Railroad. The Underground Railroad was a network of secret routes and safe houses most associated with American Civil War hero Harriet Tubman which guided many 19th century enslaved persons out of the US South to the "free" US North. A more recent example is the contemporary mixed media pieces of Radcliff Bailey with such examples as "Self-portrait" (2005) and "Untitled" (2011) from Bailey's 2011 solo exhibition *Memory as Medicine*. In both "Self-portrait" and "Untitled" Bailey uses railroad tracks to signify the

[89] Darcy Ann Zabel, "Two Trains Running": The Train as Symbol in Twentieth–Century African American Literature," PhD diss. (University of Connecticut, 2001), 4.
[90] Zora Neale Hurston, *Dust Tracks on a Road* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1996), 149-50. Originally published in 1942.
[91] Langston Hughes, *The Big Sea: An Autobiography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1963), 209.

railroad and train as symbols of freedom and continuity in African American cultural history and imagination.

Finally, railroad imagery is a definitive characteristic of early modern African American music with the train symbolizing "escape, freedom, hope, loneliness, the tension between traditional and modern life, severed relationships, and wanderlust."[92] As Theodore Kornweibel notes, "Railroads generated new forms of culture, like track-lining and train-calling chants, while reshaping others, including work and protest songs and the blues" along with big band swing, jazz, rock 'n' roll and the spirituals.[93] Examples are numerous from spirituals inaugurated by enslaved persons like "Low [Swing] Down the Chariot and Let me Ride" and "The Gospel Train," to later transformations in the blues tradition like "Freight Train Blues" recorded by Trixie Smith in the 1920s and Walter "Buddy Boy" Hawkin's "Woking on the Railroad."[94]

African American artists have employed the railroad and train in literature, visual art and music more broadly as signifiers of freedom. Indeed as vessels of modern mobility and embodiments of freedom for many African Americans living in the period 1915–1970 and desiring to escape a US South characterized by white racial intimidation and violence, trains and railroads served as the very antithesis to the ownership, confinement to land and shackles to place that defined the experience of enslavement in the antebellum US South. These conceptions of freedom, however, are complicated by historical experiences of confinement including enslavement, Jim Crow segregation and

[92] Theodore Kornweibel, Jr., *Railroads in the African American Experience: A Photographic Journey* (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 271.
[93] Ibid., 271-72.
[94] Ibid., 272-86.

racial discrimination and gendered restrictions on women's mobility. The struggle by porters for better conditions in their employment represents a striking example of the paradox of freedom and confinement in the experiences of African Americans. Further, the porter as a historical figure provides a bridge between the hospitality of antebellum southern plantation life and the service work to which African Americans were confined long after emancipation.[95] Because historical experiences of mobile railroad men, coupled with railroad imagery and vernacular expression, provide inspiration for many of Brown's poems, an understanding of porters' experiences and porters' significance in the African American (and broader American) imagination is useful to an examination of Brown's work.

The Pullman Porter in US Cultural History: The Porter in the American Imagination and a History of Struggle against Paradigmatic Restrictions on African American Mobility

George Pullman founded the Pullman Palace Car Company (PPCC) in the 1860s, employing former enslaved African American men[96] beginning in the 1870s and perpetuating "the link between African Americans and slaves"[97] as a selling point. By the 1920s, the PPCC was "the largest employer of black labor in the country."[98] Due to the PPCC's advertising and bit part roles for African American men in Hollywood films of the 1920s and 1930s, the porter became a staple of the mainstream American

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[95] David D. Perata, *Those Pullman Blues: An Oral History of the African American Railroad Attendant* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996), XIX.
[96] Jack Santino, *Miles of Smiles, Years of Struggle: Stories of Black Pullman Porters* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 6.
[97] Bates, *Pullman Porters*, 2001, 5.
[98] Santino, *Miles of Smiles*, 1989, 8.

imagination from the late 1860s to 1940s. Through advertising and film, the porter became identified as a relatively jovial African American man readily available for service and always with a smile.[99] Indeed, the porter became the living symbol most associated with the PPCC and, as Jack Santino indicates, "[t]o whites the porter represented service and luxury; to blacks, he represented status and mobility, both physical and social."[100]

The solidarity demonstrated by porters can be attributed in part to the cultural homogeneity of the group as a class of workers, a homogeneity centered on a shared mobility and mobility-based identity. Though sharing a mobility-based identity around which they organized to gain and protect civil rights, porters were confined to servitude within the space of the Pullman car (a restricted mobility at least) as a condition of their mobility as modern travelers-workers.

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[99] Ibid., 1.
[100] Ibid., 8.

Figure 2: Interior view of Pullman car with porters waiting to serve passengers, 1920 or before, Robert Langmuir African American Photograph Collection, MARBL, Emory University

In many ways, the conditions under which porters, and other African Americans, were mobile reveals the status of modern African American travelers often as a dual, conflicting and paradoxical position of mobility and restriction, freedom and confinement. Though African American men in particular enjoyed the physical and economic mobility afforded by railroad company service jobs, struggles against the Jim Crow segregation practices of many railroad companies reminded African American men

and women of societal restrictions they endured many decades removed from enslavement. Sometimes reminders of the limits imposed on African American mobility precipitated violent conflict. In one notable instance in 1884, a train conductor and two other white men forcefully removed journalist, sociologist, suffragist and newspaper editor Ida B. Wells from the ladies' coach after Wells, not only refused the conductor's order to enter the smoking car but also, "sunk her teeth into the back of his hand" when the conductor first attempted to eject her from the ladies' car.[101] The unique predicament of modern African American travelers, a veritable "confinement in freedom," is one against which porters organized in order to move beyond a mobility attendant with restriction, a freedom saddled with discriminatory limits.

On August 25, 1937, after several years of organizing, protest and negotiation, the PPCC finally acquiesced to the demands of the Brotherhood, signing a contract including a substantial "reduction in the work month from 400 to 240 hours and an annual wage package that increased porters' salaries by a total of $1.25 million."[102] With the contract's signing, the Brotherhood became the first black labor union to sign a labor agreement with a major American corporation.[103] Due to porters' success in early campaigns against segregated spaces and for civil rights, they garnered a heroic position in the minds of many African Americans. As such, porters provided inspiration for creative works by artists like Brown for whom mobile men and train travel offered a means through which to creatively explore paradigmatic restrictions on modern mobility.

[101] Kornweibel, *Railroads*, 2010, 240
[102] Bates, *Pullman Porters*, 2001, 126.
[103] Ibid., 126-27

Men and Trains in the Literary Imagination: Race, Gender and Paradigmatic Restrictions on Afro-modern Mobility in Brown's Poetry

Literature, film, music, visual art and scholarship have contributed much to understanding African American men's experience of US railroads, as well as attending to men's visibility in the many representations of railroads. However, little attention has been given to African American women who are largely absent from cultural histories and representations of the railroad experience, except as implied bodies in the broader cultural history signified by the prevalence of the train and railroad in visual art and media. Brown's poetry provides a literary lens through which to examine the role of gender and mobility to the absence of women in the cultural history of the American railroad. Moreover, because mobile men and vernacular expression inspired Brown's poetry, with verses often rendered in the folk idiom, his literary art reflects aspects of the paradigmatic restrictions on mobility which characterized the cultural history of African American travel between 1865 and the 1940s.

Travel and mobility are central to Brown's poetry, particularly his first collection *Southern Road* (1932). As the title to the volume suggests the metaphor of the road encompasses the entirety of Brown's first collection of poems as Brown employs the universally accessible (and thereby democratically oriented) trope of the road in a broader strategy to address a diversity of modern black voices living and traveling in the US South despite restrictions to physical and geographical mobility. Mark Sanders signals the centrality of travel to Brown's Afro-modernist project when he notes, "his is a poetry of motion, vocality, and subjectivity, conceiving agents and actors impinging themselves

upon the cultural and psychic landscape."[104] Brown not only replicates a gendered paradigm of mobility in this volume, but he also meditates on the significance of the railroad to the modern experience, particularly of African American men who frequently worked as porters on trains or as stevedores, shipmates, redcaps and chauffeurs. It is in part a result of the job opportunities afforded men in transportation service that a gendered paradigm of mobility becomes so pervasive. Such jobs were not initially available to African American women, many of whom worked as domestics in their own homes and in the homes of white families, in addition to work as nurses, teachers and in the garment industry.

Poems of particular interest in *Southern Road* include "Long Gone," in which the speaker describes his love of mobility and of the train, and "Sister Lou," in which Brown offers a transcendent portrayal of a woman's mobility by train. The themes of travel and mobility prominent in *Southern Road* continue in *No Hiding Place* (1980). In this volume, Brown offers a precarious image of black men's mobility (mobile women are all but absent from Brown's oeuvre) in "The Law for George." Taken together, these poems not only offer diverse perspectives on conditions of modern mobility, but specifically refract paradigmatic restrictions on women's (as well as men's) mobility.

The railroad and train are recurrent in Brown's poetry. In both "Long Gone" and "Sister Lou" the image of the train is quite overt as Brown depicts it. "Long Gone," though not explicitly about a porter, presents the voice of a mobile, self-proclaimed

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[104] Mark A. Sanders, "Preface" to *Afro-modernist Aesthetics & the Poetry of Sterling A. Brown* (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1999), XI.

“railroad man” addressing his stationary lover and explaining to her the reasons why he must at times privilege his mobility over her companionship:

I laks yo’ kin’ of lovin’,

Ain’t never caught you wrong,

But it jes’ ain’ nachal

Fo’ to stay here long

It jes’ ain’ nachal

Fo’ a railroad man,

With a itch fo’ travelin’

He cain’t understan’ . . .

I looks at de rails,

An’ I looks at de ties,

An’ I hears an ole freight

Puffin' up de rise,[105]

In "Long Gone" the male speaker of the poem expresses to his lover an anxious desire to travel and not remain static. He associates the impulse for mobility with the railroad and train and naturalizes his desire for travel, "asserting the foreignness of stasis and domesticity [to him]"[106] almost as a masculine claim to mobility. Here, as in the early literary works of Hurston, most notably the novel *Jonah's Gourd Vine* (1934), gendered paradigmatic restrictions surface to complicate the train image as an image of freedom and continuity in the African American imagination. The train appears here, much as it does in *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, as an image intimately tied to men's mobility and modern self fashioning. The speaker acknowledges that his naturalization is without a rational foundation; yet, he consigns his lover to stasis as the anchor and embodiment of home:

An' I knows de time's a-nearin'

When I got to ride,

Though it's homelike and happy

At yo' side.

You is done all you could do

[105] Sterling A. Brown, *The Collected Poems of Sterling A. Brown* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980), 22.
[106] Sanders, *Afro-modernist Aesthetics*, 1999, 49.

To make me stay;

'Tain't no fault of yours I'se leavin—

I'se jes dataway.

I is got to see some people

I ain't never seen,

Gotta highball thu some country

Whah I never been.[107]

Depicting his relationship to mobility as an undeniable, natural impulse superseding reason or compromise, the speaker explains his need to answer the call to travel without fail and leaves little room for negotiation or discussion with his lover. In many ways the speaker's attitude and pose toward his lover suggests she simply accept the terms he has outlined. There is no alternative. The train is calling, and he must ride. The poem concludes with a return to a naturalized, masculine claim to mobility, reiterating the theme established in the beginning stanzas of the poem:

I don't know which way I'm travelin'—

Far or near,

[107] Brown, *The Collected Poems*, 1980, 22.

All I knows fo' certain is

I cain't stay here.

Ain't no call at all, sweet woman,

Fo' to carry on—

Jes' my name and jes' my habit

To be Long Gone . . .[108]

Offering no information about his travel destinations or length of time away, the speaker reiterates a naturalized claim to mobility divorced from any consideration of his lovers desires, perhaps even for her own experiences of mobility. Indeed, he concludes his address by noting it is simply his "habit/ To be Long Gone."

[108] Brown, *The Collected Poems*, 1980, 23.

Figure 3: Pullman porter standing on rear platform of train car preparing for departure, August 1896, Robert Langmuir African American Photograph Collection, MARBL, Emory University

In "The Law for George," a poem explicitly referencing the name white passengers often called porters, Brown employs a third person limited perspective to address a spectrum of African American male service workers. At its heart, "The Law for George" is a warning to African American male service workers, especially those working in transportation service, about the dangers of socializing with white women outside of uniforms designating professional servitude. The third person speaker of the poem addresses five types of service workers, a porter, cook, redcap, houseman and chauffer, offering similar advice to all. Three of the five service workers are transportation workers, a feature which not only reflects the service work African

Americans performed to allow modern travelers the luxury of service in transportation, but also reveals how African Americans were often limited to positions of service in their own early modern experiences of mobility, transportation and travel. As such, Brown's poem captures quite concretely important dimensions of early African American modern travel and transportation. In particular the poem reflects the restrictions, limits and confinement paradoxically endured by African Americans despite the function vessels of transportation like the train performed as signs of freedom and continuity for African Americans. Put another way, travel insinuates itself in Brown's poems underscoring travel as a problem of mobility in African American travel and imagination. The speaker advises the porter first:

> Take her tray
>
> Into her Pullman compartment
>
> She may be in morning all–shabby
>
> Take her gin and gingerale
>
> She may be in cool of the evening lingerie
>
> That's all right
>
> You got your white coat on, ain't you?
>
> Okeh.[109]

[109] Brown, *The Collected Poems*, 1980, 172.

In his working environment and white uniform, the porter often occupied otherwise precarious positions, such as waiting on white women who thought nothing of undressing in front him.[110] A white woman would hardly have felt comfortable undressing in front of a white hotel bellboy[111] and surely would not have felt as nonchalant in her interactions with the same porter in civilian life. Still, because the PPCC was concerned over the dubious law suits it received from passengers claiming to have been sexually harassed by porters it often hired female spotters whose job it was to attempt to seduce porters.[112] Centering on figures of mobile men like the porter, Brown's poem reflects this aspect of US cultural history and reveals practices of social decorum and professional dress which provided the necessary distance (and thereby security) for African American men who worked in close proximity to white women.

After noting the revealing dress in which the porter might find his white female passenger as he provides professional service, the speaker assures the porter that he is secure from accusation as long as he dons his white uniform. Brown uses the white coat as a subversive literary device signifying the kind of veil behind which porters performed service in order to safeguard the integrity of their employment against accusation. Even more, the white coat references the limits placed on social interactions between black men and white women in broader US society as well as in the paradoxical microcosm represented by the train car. The speaker spends the second half of his address to the porter focusing on the dangers of social interaction without donning the protective white garb and outside the space of the Pullman car:

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[110] Perata, *Those Pullman Blues,* 1996, XIX.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Ibid., 78.

> But don’t ever ride
>
> With her in a Pullman
>
> Without that white coat on
>
> Don’t even buy
>
> No ticket for a Pullman
>
> She might just be thinking ’bout riding
>
> You fool you
>
> You want to make the lady paint?[113]

Crossing barriers in social engagements was a serious offense for porters as evidenced in the accounts of service workers like James T. Steele (Pullman Buffet and Lounge Car Attendant, 1936–1960):

> You had to be so careful when you catch a lot of single white women, because a lot of ’em are put on there to try to trap you, see? And you got to have damn good willpower not to get yourself messed up, ’cause [Pullman] would pay you $77.50 a month, and they pay $2,000 to get something on you. See? A lot of porters was caught, and you had to be careful.[114]

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[113] Brown, *The Collected Poems*, 1980, 172.
[114] Perata, *Those Pullman Blues,* 1996, 78.

The speaker's insistence on keeping the white coat on and maintaining professional interaction with white women, then, reflects not simply a literary device in Brown's poem, but also the actual circumstances of African American men's employment particularly in transportation service jobs requiring interaction across racial lines. To be without the white coat, without a signifier of servitude, left one vulnerable to accusations of sexual harassment or worse. Indeed, even to be with the white coat did not entirely insulate African American men from conjecture and suspicion in their professional work, conjecture and suspicion predicated on stereotypes of black male sexual aggression and prowess circulating in the white American imagination. In addition to "Long Gone" and "The Law for George," mobile men offer inspiration for other poems by Brown including "Odyssey of Big Boy" from *Southern Road*, a poem modeled on the experiences of itinerant performer Calvin "Big Boy" Davis[115], and *The Last Ride of Wild Bill* (1975). Mobile women, however, do not occupy such a prominent place in Brown's constellation.

In one of Brown's few (if not only) representations of mobile women "Sister Lou," he depicts a woman's relationship to the train and mobility via a transcendent (as opposed to corporeal) context. Brown's introduction of Sister Lou's mobility (or perhaps lack thereof) stands in marked contradistinction to his rendering of a railroad man's mobility in "Long Gone." While the train appears as a corporeal image in "Long Gone," tied to men's mobility in the physical world, the train functions as a metaphysical image in "Sister Lou," divorcing the physicality or corporeality of the train image from women's mobility:

[115] Sanders, *Afro-modernist Aesthetics*, 1999, 42.

Honey

When de man

Calls out de las' train

You're gonna ride,

Tell him howdy.

Gather up yo' basket

An' yo' knittin' an' yo' things,

An' go on up an' visit

Wid friend' Jesus fo' a spell.

Show Marfa

How to make yo' greengrape jellies,

An' give po' Lazarus

A passel of them Golden Biscuits.[116]

In contrast to Brown's presentation of a mobile man on the train, his depiction of a mobile woman comes not only post mortem, but attendant with all the accoutrements of domesticity (e.g. basket, knitting items, jellies and biscuits). As the speaker of the poem instructs, Sister Lou is to teach another woman "Marfa" (Martha) how to make jellies in heaven. Furthermore, the speaker of the poem is not Sister Lou (first person), but a third-person limited speaker addressing Sister Lou. Unlike "Long Gone" in which the mobile male speaker provides the dominate point-of-view for the poem's narrative, Sister Lou's perspective (her voice) is completely absent. The juxtaposition in representations of mobile male and female subjects should not be understated. Consciously or not, Brown's juxtaposition foregrounds the paradigm of mobility restricting women's travel. The poem even attempts to present a vision of Sister Lou transcending paradigmatic restrictions on mobility via death and the afterlife; though ultimately, the attempt is unsatisfactory.

Considering the train's employment in the African American imagination as a metaphor for the paradox of freedom and confinement in the African American experience, Brown's decision to have Sister Lou's post mortem train ride end in a transcendent realm (heaven) gestures to a tradition of African Americans striving to move beyond the paradox of freedom and confinement, struggles waged in the realm of the real and the realm of the imaginary. Still, Brown's description of Sister Lou's arrival in heaven relays a sense of confinement even in transcendence. In fact, the speaker's

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[116] Brown, *The Collected Poems*, 1980, 54.

instructions to Sister Lou in the stanzas preceding the conclusion of the poem suggest a different kind of confinement through eternal rest and stasis:

> Then sit down
>
> An' pass de time of day while.
>
> Give a good talkin' to
>
> To yo' favorite 'postle Peter,
>
> An' rub the po' head
>
> Of mixed-up Judas,
>
> An' joke awhile wid Jonah.
>
> Then, when you gits de chance,
>
> Always remeberin' yo' raisin',
>
> Let 'em know youse tired
>
> Jest a mite tired.

Jesus will find yo' bed fo' you

Won't no servant evah bother wid yo' room.

Jesus will lead you

To a room wid windows

Openin' on cherry trees an' plum trees

Bloomin' everlastin'.

An' dat will be yours

Fo' keeps.[117]

In contrast to the sense of unbounded possibility Brown relates in "Long Gone," "Sister Lou" concludes with the sense of a final destination, a place where there is no need to seek adventures far beyond the picturesque view from the window of one's heavenly quarters. Though the juxtaposition in Brown's representations seems to suggest transcendence in the afterlife as one of the few contexts in which women's mobility by train is possible, his attempt to imagine a context for women's mobility is troubled by its own iteration of confinement and stasis. Here, as in "Long Gone," the train as a sign of freedom is complicated by the reminder of paradigmatic (and indeed corporeal) restrictions on women's mobility. Though Brown presents the image of a woman's

[117] Brown, *The Collected Poems*, 1980, 55.

mobility by train in "Sister Lou" he does so while placing corporeal limits to her travel by train. Rather than leaving the reader with a sense of contentment as Sister Lou embarks on a new adventure in eternal (unbounded) paradise, the poem's final depiction is of a tired old woman who has made her last journey and now rests eternally in perpetual stasis.

Conclusion

The railroad, train and porter hold a prominent place in the African American (and indeed American) imagination. The prevalence of these figures can be seen in literature, music, film and visual art and culture. In this chapter, I have explored travel and imagination in the poetry of Sterling Brown. Railroad imagery and mobile men like the porter figure centrally in Brown's often vernacular-inflected poetry, compositions which, not only represent the paradox of freedom and confinement in the historical experiences of mobile African American male service workers but also, mirror paradigmatic restrictions on women's mobility pervasive from 1865 until the 1940s. For Brown, poetry served as a medium through which the poet imparted his understanding, not only of the diversity of black life in the US South, but also of the railroad's significance to the African American modern experience. As such, his poems hold a dual importance as both literary abstraction and art, and historical documentation of lived experiences and folk idiomatic expression.

Travel in the African American imagination has been complicated by historical experiences of confinement and restriction. The complexity of travel in the African American, and indeed broader American, imagination is nowhere more punctuated than

in the literary, visual and musical works by African Americans which employ the paradoxical image of the train and railroad to signal both freedom and limitation. As I have shown in this chapter, despite the function of the train and railroad as signifiers of freedom and historical continuity, racial and gendered paradigmatic restrictions on mobility demanded African Americans reconcile the freedom train with its restrictive counterpart the Jim Crow train. The result has been a vibrant tradition of artistic expression centered on the train image and its paradoxical significations.

From the 1940s to the present, the train and railroad have continued to be compelling (if ambivalent) influences in the African American imaginary. This much is clear from such artistic works as Ann Petry's best-selling novel *The Street* (1946) featuring a struggling, mobile female protagonist Lutie, Robert Hayden's poem "Runagate Runagate" (1985), a 1962 historical poem portraying the Underground Railroad, Albert Murray's novel *Train Whistle Guitar* (1974), Romare Bearden's collages like "The Train" (1975)[118] also referencing the cultural historical experience of the Underground Railroad, August Wilson's play *Two Trains Running* (produced 1990), and Colson Whitehead's novel *John Henry Days* (2001), to the very recent work of visual and mixed media artist Radcliff Bailey exhibited in 2011. Two important shifts in the employment of train and railroad imagery can be seen in the works of Petry and Bailey with Petry offering one of the earliest ante mortem literary depictions of a female protagonist's mobility by train and Bailey shifting the use of train and railroad imagery in visual art to the use of railroad tracks (as opposed to the locomotive) as signifiers of historical continuity. Still, the use of folk heroes like John Henry as literary symbols

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[118]See Myron Schwartzman, *Romare Bearden: His Life and Art* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1990).

continues in the very recent work of writers like Whitehead. Despite paradoxical significations owing to historical experiences of paradigmatic restrictions on mobility, the train and railroad continue to provide metaphorical and symbolic significance as vessels of history, memory, continuity and freedom in the African American imagination.

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Chapter 3

Variations on a Paradoxical Theme: Gendered, Ethnic and Racial Paradigms of Mobility in Hurston's Early Travels and Writings

Introduction

In this chapter I examine gendered, ethnic and racial paradigms of mobility as defining characteristics of the early travels and writings of anthropologist and literary artist Zora Neale Hurston. Hurston's early novels in particular provide a wonderful complement to Brown's poetry for a number of reasons. First, like Brown's poetry, Hurston's novels are influenced by black vernacular culture and expression, more specifically by Hurston's research studying and collecting folk culture in black communities of the US South and Florida. Further, Hurston's novels critically refract (and respond to) paradigms of modern travel she observed in her life and travels. Her works display semi-autobiographical qualities with characters and folk elements bearing striking semblance to people and customs Hurston observed in her life and travels. Exploring gendered mobility, modern travel and imagination, I treat Hurston's early novels *Jonah's Gourd Vine* (1934) and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), both of which are influenced by Hurston's early ethnographic travels collecting folklore in the US South (1928-1932) and both of which present modern travel as a problem of mobility with gendered, ethnic and racial paradigmatic restrictions and impasses.

In *Jonah's Gourd Vine* Hurston presents a vision of mobility in which men are mobile, women are stationary, and the train image is tied to men's mobility and by

extension to masculinity. In *Their Eyes*, she makes an artistic intervention depicting the journey of a female protagonist Janie who struggles against paradigmatic restrictions to assert her right to freedom of mobility. Essentially, Hurston employs a strategy of theme and variation, a self contained iteration of the African American call and response tradition, to both state the problem and then intervene presenting a new vision of mobility in which gendered barriers are physically challenged and at least psychically surmounted. In contrast to Brown who attempts to transcend the modern problematic of freedom and confinement via the metaphysical, Hurston with *Their Eyes* presents the complex narrative of a struggling mobile female protagonist Janie and tries to move beyond the modern paradox through Janie's corporeal efforts and, ultimately, the protagonist's navigation of her own interior geography (a characteristic of *Their Eyes* which carries semi-autobiographical connections to details of Hurston's autobiographical musings in *Dust Tracks on a Road*). Taken together, Hurston's early novels represent a critical, semi-autobiographical response to the gendered (as well as ethnic and racial) paradigm of mobility she observed in her life and travels.

Before turning to an analysis of Hurston's novels, I first reflect on Hurston's broader observations about gender, ethnicity, race and mobility as a result of her extensive ethnographic travels collecting folk culture in the US South and abroad. Hurston's observations are contained in her autobiographical work *Dust Tracks on a Road* and in biographical works on Hurston by scholars Robert Hemenway and Valerie Boyd. These works mirror gendered, ethnic and racial paradigmatic restrictions on African American mobility as well as Hurston's fervent passion for ethnographical travel and collecting folk culture despite obstacles she faced in her journeys in the US and

abroad. Even more, these works reveal an intimate connection between Hurston's travels and her literary imagination. As such, Hurston's broader perspective on gender, ethnicity, race and mobility sets the stage for a cultural critical reading of *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

Ripe with Insights: Gender, Ethnicity, Race and Mobility in Hurston's Ethnographic Travels and Creative and Intellectual Pursuits

One of the first impulses revealed in Hurston's autobiography is her knowledge early on, as a toddler, of a yearning for travel:

> The strangest thing…was that once I found the use of my feet, they took to wandering. I always wanted to go. I would wander off in the woods all alone, following some inside urge to go places. This alarmed my mother a great deal. She used to say that she believed a woman who was an enemy of hers had sprinkled "travel dust" around the doorstep the day I was born.[119]

One of Hurston's biographers, Valerie Boyd, also notes this early desire for mobility as Boyd discusses Hurston's attempt around the age of nine to undertake a "journey to the edge of the world" because she "needed to know, for instance, what the end of the world was like."[120] What is even more striking when one considers Hurston's exploration of gender and mobility in her early novels is Hurston's acknowledgement that she inherited her desire to travel from her father with whom she argued seemingly to no end. Hurston continues:

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[119] Zora Neale Hurston, *Dust Tracks on a Road*, 1st HarperPerennial ed. (New York, NY: HarperPerennial, 1996), 22. Originally published in 1942.

[120] Valerie Boyd, *Wrapped in Rainbows: The Life of Zora Neale Hurston* (New York: Scribner, 2003), 13.

> That was the only explanation she [her mother] could find. I don't know why it never occurred to her to connect my tendency [to wander] with my father, who didn't have a thing on his mind but this town and the next one. That should have given her a sort of hint. Some children are just bound to take after their fathers in spite of women's prayers.[121]

From her early autobiographical writings, two readings emerge to explain both Hurston's extensive travel as well as her literary focus on travel and travel figuration, particularly as it relates to gender and mobility. The first might be to suggest, as Hurston seems to do, that this urge is one inherited from her father. An alternative explanation surfaces, however, when one considers Hurston's contentious relationship with her father as a man. Many scholars of Hurston's literary works argue that traces of Hurston's father John Hurston slip into her novels through characters like John Buddy Pearson in *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and Joe Clarke in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Furthermore, as Maya Angelou suggests in the foreword to the 1996 First HarperPerennial edition of *Dust Tracks*, Hurston "seemed to have pitied but only glancingly (*sic*) loved" her mother who died when Hurston was very young.[122]

Hurston's apparent sympathy for her mother may have arisen from Hurston's observance of her mother's domesticity while her father traveled often. With this is mind, it is not difficult to understand Hurston's focus on gender and mobility in these novels as a reflection of her own critical "working through" of a problem she noted early on, namely the greater mobility enjoyed by black men at the cost of black women's

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[121] Hurston, *Dust Tracks*, 1996, 22.
[122] Maya Angelou, "Foreword" to Hurston, *Dust Tracks on a Road*, IX.

domesticity. Completely opposed to such gendered stratifications and gender privileges, Hurston as a modern woman challenged disproportionate mobility of modern travelers through both her adventurous traveling and critical fiction.[123]

Hurston not only noted a problem of gendered mobility, but she also realized a simultaneous problem of race and mobility which she indicates in her memories of seeing passersby from the gate of her childhood home:

> I used to take a seat on top of the gate post and watch the world go by. One way to Orlando ran past my house, so the carriages and cars would pass before me. The movement made me glad to see it. Often the white travelers would hail me, but more often I hailed them, and asked, "Don't you want me to go a piece of the way with you?" They always did.[124]

As a young person Hurston expresses envy of modern white travelers who seem able to move around the world and access the open road with the security offered by white privilege. Though Hurston may not have wished to be white herself, she certainly desired the status and privilege to be physically mobile which white skin color promised.

It is upon her mother's death that Hurston suggests she began to feel the urge to travel more strongly. She says, "That hour began my wanderings. Not so much in geography, but in time. Then not so much in time as in spirit."[125] What Hurston indicates here is a kind of early spiritual yearning for mobility which she did not fully

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[123] This analysis can be pushed further to even understand the less factual elements of Hurston's own autobiography, not surprisingly titled *Dust Tracks on a Road*, as a reflection of her own attempts at "working through" a problem of gendered mobility as a modern African American woman and intellectual.
[124] Hurston, *Dust Tracks*, 1996, 33-34.
[125] Ibid., 67.

realize until much later in her life. Hurston's sense of a spiritual yearning for travel finds expression within her own interior geography as a young Hurston is shuffled from place to place, very much an orphan after her mother's death:

> I had always thought I would be in some lone, arctic wasteland with no one under the sound of my voice. I found the cold, the desolate solitude, and earless silences, but I discovered that all that geography was within me. It only needed time to reveal it.[126]

Hurston's articulation of an interior geography, a space which she must learn to navigate, intimates a kind of tourism that is psychological, virtual or ethereal rather than physical and tangible. Hurston's realization of her inner self and inner world is one which her female protagonist Janie likewise expresses in *Their Eyes*.

Within herself, Hurston began to explore a landscape that was initially barren and unpopulated. The isolation of Hurston's interior early on is striking considering the care, detail and creativity with which she (re)imagined geographies and landscapes in her literary art, spaces she filled with compelling and complex characters, many of whom resemble people Hurston had actually known. However, it is not long after Hurston expresses a feeling of loneliness and isolation that her oldest brother Bob sends for her. He requests that Hurston come to live with him and his family so she can attend college as he had done:

> I shall never forget the exaltation of my hurried packing. When I got on the train, I said goodbye—not to anybody in particular, but to the town, to loneliness, to

[126] Ibid., 85.

> defeat and frustration, to shabby living, to sterile houses and numbed pangs, to the kind of people I had no wish to know; to an era. I waved goodbye and sank back into the cushions of the seat.[127]

Despite the enthusiasm with which she accepted her brother's invitation, Hurston soon discovered that her brother did not intend to enroll her in school immediately and that she must help with the raising of the three children in the home. Further frustrated, Hurston eventually packed her things and accepted a job as a maid for a young white singer, allowing Hurston to travel with the singer as the singer toured for different shows.[128]

Gender (in addition to race and ethnicity) impacted Hurston's livelihood and opportunities both in Hurston's experience of stasis as a domestic helper in her brother's home and in her mobility as a professional domestic worker for a young white singer. Because she was a woman, Hurston's brother perceived no insult assigning the young Hurston child rearing duties while living in his home. Further, though Hurston exhibited agency in her decision to find employment as a maid in order to leave her brother's home, her mobility was predicated on her service as a domestic worker. In the early twentieth century before World War II and organized protests presented new job opportunities to African American women, domestic work represented one of the few opportunities available to African American women, including women desiring physical mobility as maids for traveling professionals. After the female singer got married, no longer requiring Hurston as a maid, Hurston focused her travels on education and intellectual development.

[127] Ibid., 99.
[128] Ibid., 103-119.

In 1917 she traveled to Baltimore, Maryland to finish high school at Morgan Academy.[129] Shortly after graduating high school, Hurston moved to Washington, DC to attend the prestigious Howard University.[130] Following a year and a half at Howard, only one semester shy of completion and after Hurston had published two pieces "Drenched in Light" and "Spunk" in Charles S. Johnson's newly founded *Opportunity Magazine*, Hurston left Howard for New York in January 1925 to attend Barnard College. After winning a prize at the first *Opportunity* Awards Dinner (May 1, 1925) for her short story "Sweat," Fannie Hurst offered Hurston a job as her secretary and Annie Nathan Meyer offered to get Hurston a scholarship at Barnard. Hurston entered Barnard in the Fall of 1925, graduating in 1928.[131] Upon graduating Barnard in 1928, Hurston began her travels south to collect Negro folklore with a fellowship which Franz Boas secured for her.[132] Hurston's travels were largely to the region of her birth in Florida as well as to New Orleans, Louisiana to study voo doo, or hoo doo. While collecting folklore in the US South in the 1920s and 30s, Hurston traveled by car, a rare privilege for Afro-modern travelers of the period. As such, Hurston was able to avoid much of the insult of the Jim Crow car, a characteristic feature of railroad transportation.

During Hurston's early ethnographic travels to Polk County, Florida, she discovered the relationship between civilization and travel as she watched the labor of black men working to build railroads and listened intently to their work songs:

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[129] Ibid., 124.
[130] Ibid., 129.
[131] Ibid., 138-139.
[132] Ibid., 141.

> Polk County. Black men from tree to tree among the lordly pines, a swift, slanting stroke to bleed the trees for gum. Paint, explosives, marine stores, flavors, perfumes, tone for a violin bow, and many other things which the black men who bleed the trees never heard about.
>
> Polk County. The clang of nine-pound hammers on railroad steel. The world must ride.
>
> Hah! A rhythmic swing of the body, hammer falls, and another spike driven to the head in the tie . . .
>
> The singing-liner cuts short his chant. The straw-boss relaxes with a gesture of his hand. Another rail spiked down. Another offering to the soul of civilization whose other name is travel.[133]

The imagery, which Hurston so lyrically relates, of black men laboring away to build the railroad infrastructure for the transportation of US goods and patrons has strong connections to what can be described as a 20th century incarnation of Manifest Destiny, a justification of geographical expansion largely by white Americans at the expense and sacrifice of people of color both through manual labor and bloodshed. Hurston's narration of "slanting stroke[s] to bleed the trees for gum" in conjunction with the use of "explosives" as a sacrifice in the service of "the soul of civilization whose other name is travel," conjures images of vulnerable, yet heroic black bodies engaging in the dangerous work of laying rails because "[t]he world must ride." Even more, it is not hard to make the connection between Sterling Brown's alignment of train and railroad imagery with

[133] Ibid., 147-148.

men and masculinity in his poetry—for example “Long Gone” in which the speaker insists “he must ride”—and Hurston’s similar alignment in prose. Her autobiographical musings based on ethnographic work, then, not only serve as important documentation and archive of African American vernacular expression in the US South, but also as historical record of the hardships African Americans suffered while helping to build the infrastructure allowing for the successful geographical expansion and industrial development of the US in the 20th century.

The picture which Hurston paints of railroad workers also bears a striking resemblance to poet Langston Hughes’ description (circa 1923) of African laborers of the Kru tribe engaging in the dangerous work of gathering mahogany logs, floating the logs out to sea and loading the logs onto ships such as the *S. S. West Hesseltine* on which Hughes worked:

> A dozen black Kru boys would dive into the water, swimming under and about the log until the chains were tight around the great bobbing hulk of wood. If a boy was caught between the floating black logs, or between a log and the ship, death would often result. Or if the sharks came, death would come, too. Watching them, I had somewhat the same feeling I had had in Mexico, watching Sanchez Mejias turning his red cape so gracefully before a bull’s horns. It was beautiful and dangerous work, those black boys swimming there in the tossing waves among the iron chains and the great rolling logs, that would perhaps

> someday be somebody's grand piano or chest of drawers made of wood and life, energy and death out of Africa.[134]

Like Hurston, Hughes finds nobility (and beauty) in watching the dangerous and often fatal work of young Kru laborers "swimming there in the tossing waves among the iron chains and the great rolling logs." Hughes also underscores the significance of Kru sacrifice when he notes that the "life, energy and death out of Africa" would "perhaps someday be somebody's grand piano or chest of drawers made of wood." The significance of African American sacrifice in building railroads, similarly, manifests in the folklore which Hurston collects in Florida.

In an ironic twist, the folk expressions which Hurston collects in Polk County also reveal how African Americans, and indeed the poor more generally, were not necessarily the intended beneficiaries of the railways whose tracks they laid. That is to say, it is ironic that, though African American men and women comprised a large part of the labor force for building railroads and servicing railway passengers, because a railway passenger required money for fare and Jim Crow laws made travel uncomfortable and often dangerous, many African Americans found it difficult to enjoy the modern modes of transport which they helped to build. Despite the impasse which fare presented to the would-be African American traveler, a blues-inspired song which Hurston encountered in Polk County reveals a subversive strategy and commonsensical ethos with which black Americans in the area maneuvered to surmount an economic impasse:

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[134] Langston Hughes, *The Big Sea: An Autobiography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1963), 112.

Yeah, I'm going. Who care anything about no train fare? The railroad track is there, ain't it? I can count tires just like I been doing. I can ride de blind, can't I?

Got on de train didn't have no fare

But I rode some

Yes I rode some

Got on de train didn't have no fare

Conductor ast me what I'm doing there

But I rode some

Yes I rode some.

Well, he grabbed me by de collar and he led me to de door

But I rode some

Yes I rode some.

Well, he grabbed me by de collar and he led me to de door

He rapped me over de head with a forty-four

But I rode some

Yes I rode some.[135]

This song reveals a sense of pride and ingenuity from the perspective of the speaker who, despite the fare required of railway passengers, decides to board the train and ride for a while. This choice, as the Polk County folk song conveys, is not without consequences as the speaker finds himself first accosted and then physically assaulted by the conductor of the train whose job it is to ensure the security of the passenger car for paying patrons only. The conductor demonstrates no sense of a history of African Americans laboring to build railroads often with little or no compensation. Seen in this light, the decision of the speaker to board the train *gratis* almost appears justified. Even though the speaker experiences bodily harm, he expresses a sentiment that it is all worthwhile because "I rode some/ Yes I rode some." Hurston's writings not only illustrate her reactions to difficulties encountered by African Americans while traveling within US borders, they also reflect Hurston's personal aversion to opportunities to travel and study in Europe, a practice in which many African American artists engaged at the time.

Hurston's response upon learning of Countee Cullen and Eric Walrond's travels to study in Europe reveals her distaste for European travel, particularly the practice of African American literary and visual artists traveling to Europe in order to develop their artistic craft. Robert Hemenway notes Hurston's response, suggesting her reaction reveals her "sense of the cultural roots of black literature":

[135] Hurston, *Dust Tracks on a Road*, 1996, 149-150.

> What, I ask with my feet turned out, are Countee and Eric going abroad to study?...A Negro goes to white land to learn his trade! Ha! That was inevitable for Countee. It will fit him nicely too. Nice, safe, middle class.[136]

Extending (and somewhat amending) Hemenway's argument, I would suggest Hurston's response reveals her conviction that the cultural fount of African American artistic expression lies in African American vernacular culture not only in the US South, but also in African-descended cultures and communities the world over. Hurston's travels—to Harlem, the US South (particularly Florida and Louisiana), Jamaica (in 1936 with a Guggenheim fellowship to study obeah, the religious practices of sorcery or folk magic in the West Indies), Haiti (in 1937 with an extension on her Guggenheim fellowship) and Honduras in 1947—all of which influenced her writings, also seem to confirm this thesis. In this way, Hurston serves as a counterpoint to her contemporaries (Hughes, Cullen, Aaron Douglas and others) as her experiences of Afro-modern travel were located, largely, within an African-centered (Afro-centric) geography.

Hurston's travels were not without danger. During an incident at a party in Polk County, Hurston came near to losing her life to a woman Lucy who was envious of Hurston's conversation with Lucy's ex-man Slim. To Hurston's credit, she had the foresight to befriend a tough woman Big Sweet who immediately came to Hurston's defense, standing off with Lucy in what became a full out brawl with weapons in hand. This incident not only served to caution Hurston, making her more self-reflexive in terms

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[136] Robert E. Hemenway, *Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 51. Here, Hemenway draws from a letter written to Langston Hughes from Zora Neale Hurston on April 12, 1928 which is located in the James Weldon Johnson Collection of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University.

of her engagement with locals from whom she collected folk lore, but it also provided the impetus for Hurston's transition to her next site New Orleans:

> One or two razors had already been bent back and thrown across the room, but our fight was the main attraction. Big Sweet yelled to me to run. I really ran, too. I ran out of that place, ran to my room, threw my things in the car and left the place. When the sun came up I was a hundred miles up the road, headed for New Orleans.[137]

It was in New Orleans that Hurston "delved into Hoodoo, or sympathetic magic. I studied with the Frizzly Rooster, and all of the other noted 'doctors":

> I learned the routines for making and breaking marriages; driving off and punishing enemies; influencing the minds of judges and juries in favor of clients; killing by remote control and other things. In order to work with these "two-headed" doctors, I had to go through an initiation with each. The routine varied with each doctor.[138]

One such initiation which Hurston describes "was not only elaborate, it was impressive":

> I lay naked for three days and nights on a couch, with my navel to a rattlesnake skin which had been dressed and dedicated to the ceremony. I ate no food in all that time. Only a pitcher of water was on a little table at the head of the couch so that my soul would not wander off in search of water and be attacked by evil influences and not return to me . . . In this particular ceremony, my finger was cut

[137] Ibid., 156.
[138] Ibid.

> and I became blood brother to the rattlesnake . . . The symbol of lightning was painted on my back. This was to be mine forever.[139]

In another ceremony, Hurston "had to sit at the crossroads at midnight in complete darkness and meet the Devil, and make a compact."[140] Valerie Boyd describes in detail the intensive process through which Hurston conducted her ethnographic research in New Orleans:

> Some of her initiation ceremonies require intimate (though apparently not sexual) encounters with her teachers, several of whom were men. In one case, for example, Hurston had to allow her initiator, a middle-aged man, to come to her Belville Court home to give her a ritual bath in water embellished with various items she'd been instructed to collect, including parsley, a handful of salt, and three tablespoons of sugar . . . The mysterious ritual apparently paid off. By September, Hurston boasted: "I know 18 tasks, including how to crown the spirit of death, and kill."[141]

The details which both Hurston and Boyd supply are significant as they confirm the extent to which Hurston labored while conducting her ethnographic research in the South. As Boyd indicates, "To endure such rites, Hurston's interest in hoodoo had to be more than skin-deep and her belief in its power had to be genuine" because surely "the conjure

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[139] Ibid., 156-157.
[140] Ibid., 157.
[141] Boyd, *Wrapped in Rainbows*, 2003, 178.

masters who accepted her as an apprentice possessed the innate intelligence to recognize a faker."[142]

Though, I have yet to confirm the accuracy of the following excerpt from Hurston's autobiography, it was during Hurston's early trips to collect folklore in the US South that Hurston suggests she decided, almost on a whim, to visit Nassau in the Bahamas for the same purpose:

> This visit to Nassau was to have far-reaching effects. I stayed on, ran to every Jumping Dance that I heard of, learned to "jump," collected more than a hundred tunes and resolved to make them known to the world. On my return to New York in 1932, after trying vainly to interest others, I introduced Bahaman songs and dances to a New York audience at the John Golden Theater, and both the songs and the dances took on . . . Since then there has been a sharp trend toward genuine Negro material.[143]

Taking for granted the validity of Hurston's narrative, it is significant to note that an international location like Nassau is on the itinerary of Hurston's early ethnographic travels. Such insight is important, because none of the folk material included in Hurston's groundbreaking publication *Mules and Men* shows evidence of this early raw material. One is left to wonder, if Hurston's mission was to exhibit folk cultural gems of the African Diaspora to the world, why she would pass on the opportunity to showcase her collection of material from travels to the Bahamas in such a work as *Mules and Men*.

However, the New York audience to which Hurston refers is an audience for a theatrical revue called *The Great Day*, first performed in January 1932 at the John

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[142]Ibid., 179.
[143] Hurston, *Dust Tracks*, 1996, 158.

Golden Theatre, and the "religious scene from my concert" alludes to *From Sun to Sun*, a January 1933 adaptation of *The Great Day* staged at Rollins College. It may very well be the case, then, that Hurston simply chose these alternative venues to exhibit this unique Bahaman folk material. If my hunch is correct, these works surely beg further exploration and analysis. More immediately demanding of further analysis are Hurston's early novels *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Taken together, Hurston's early novels represent a critical, semi-autobiographical response to the gendered paradigm of mobility she observed in her life and travels.

(Re)Petition or (Re)Capitulation With a Difference: Gendered Mobility in Hurston's Novels *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

A gendered paradigm of mobility is perhaps best expressed and treated in the early novels of Zora Neale Hurston, particularly the novels *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. In the first of the two novels, Hurston presents a vision of mobility in which men are more mobile than women as she presents the narrative of a male protagonist John "Buddy" Pearson, an archetypal mobile folk character who rises from humble southern roots to be the pastor of a church through a life of hard work, humanizing mistakes and loving a number of women. In the second, she makes an artistic intervention depicting the journey of a female protagonist Janie who challenges the paradigm and asserts her right to exercise freedom of mobility. Both novels fall squarely in the tradition and genre of the *Bildungsroman*, or coming-of-age story. Essentially, Hurston employs a strategy of theme and variation, a self contained iteration

of the African American call and response tradition, to state the problem and then intervene presenting a new vision of mobility in which gendered barriers are surmounted.

In Hurston's first novel *Jonah's Gourd Vine* she presents the modern paradigm of mobility as a gendered paradigm in which African American men are permitted far greater mobility, through travel and migration, than African American women. One of the starkest illustrations of this gendered paradigm arises just after protagonist John escapes legal persecution, under similar circumstances as Brutus the protagonist of *The Emperor Jones*. Local authorities arrest John for beating his wife Lucy's brother Bud after Bud forcibly takes the couples' wedding bed to settle a debt owed. John boards a train headed to Sanford, Florida, after meeting a fellow male traveler who offers to introduce John to "uh fine lookin' portly 'oman." After John declines, stating he is already married to a woman who he intends to send for after he has settled into his new locale, his fellow traveler responds, "Aw shucks man, you ain't lake me. Ah don't take no women no place. Ah lets every town furnish its own."[144] Hurston paints an intimate picture of the train's connection to John who is so soothed and intrigued by his first ride by train that he "forgot the misery of his parting from Lucy in the aura of it all. That is, he only remembered his misery in short snatches, while the glory lay all over him for hours at a time."[145] No other woman can challenge John's love for Lucy despite John's several extra marital affairs; however, the train provides a substantial rival for John's affection.

[144] Hurston, *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, First Harper Perennial Modern Classics Edition (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2008), 103-104. (Originally published in 1934).
[145] Ibid., 104.

Constructing dialogue for this exchange between the character John and his fellow traveler, Hurston draws from folklore she collected in Polk County. In fact, she draws from the prelude to the aforementioned blues inspired song which begins, "Take you where I'm going, woman? Hell no! Let every town furnish its own."[146] Even more, Hurston, much like Brown with his poetry, aligns corporeal imagery of the train in *Jonah's Gourd Vine* with men and masculinity. Several scenes from *Jonah's Gourd Vine* provide sufficient textual evidence to that effect.

Early in the novel when John first sees a train as a young man, Hurston describes the experience as one where the train audibly speaks to John. John inquires about the steel beast on rails to an unnamed man he meets during John's first visit to a train station, searching for work:

> "You laks dat ole train Ah see," the Negro said to John, watching him as he all but fell down into the railroad cut, trying to keep sight of the tail of the train.
>
> "Yeah, man, Ah lakted dat. It say something but Ah ain't heered it 'nough tuh tell whut it say yit. You know whut it say?"
>
> "It don't say nothin'. It jes' make uh powerful racket, dass all."
>
> "Naw, it say some words too. Ahm comin' heah plenty mo' times and den Ah tell yuh whut it say."[147]

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[146] Hurston, *Dust Tracks*, 1996, 149.
[147] Hurston, *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, 2008, 16.

From the first instance the train appears in the novel Hurston intimately associates the image with masculinity, most intimately wedded to the desires, prowess and fate of her male protagonist John. Indeed this early moment in the novel foreshadows (as does a later sermon by John employing train imagery) John's final moments, his ultimate fate and peril, destined alongside the modern industrial image. In another scene, not long after young John has made a life for himself across the creek from his childhood home working on Alf Pearson's farm, Hurston's coming-of-age protagonist contemplates flight by train to avoid returning back across the creek to work on the Shelby farm due to actions of his hot-headed stepfather Ned.

Similar to the male speaker in Brown's "Long Gone," Hurston naturalizes John's masculine claim to mobility through the protagonist's ability to hear the voice of the train in his moment of distress. John's mother Amy has come to retrieve him; yet, all he can think of is his budding love for the young Lucy and "the song book that Lucy's terrifying brother had given him . . . [with] a crude drawing of a railroad on it."[148] He immediately runs to the Notasulga train station hoping never to leave the small town "where the train came puffing into the depot twice a day."[149]:

> He sat down upon the embankment and waited. Soon in the distance he heard the whistle, "Wahoom! Wahup, wahup!" . . . The drivers turning over chanting "Opelika-black-and-dirty! Opelika-black-and-dirty." Then as she pulled into the station, the powerful whisper of steam. Starting off again, "Wolf coming! Wolf coming! Wolf coming! Opelika-black-and-dirty, Opelika-black-and-dirty!

[148] Hurston, *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, 2008, 41.
[149] Ibid.

> Auh—wah-hoooon"—into the great away that gave John's feet such a yearning for distance.[150]

John not only hears the train speak, but the train warns him of pending ills awaiting him upon return across the creek. Hurston employs the train and train phonetics to both mirror the yearnings of her male protagonist as well as to foreshadow his fate as the novel develops. Hearing the train's voice conjures a desire for flight in John much as hearing the train in "Long Gone" conjures a desire for physical mobility in the speaker of Brown's poem. John, like the speaker, yearns to be long gone. Free to travel and create a place for himself in the world away from Opelika where his mother Amy raised him. John even inspires his younger Brothers Zack and Zeke who begin to imagine "over de Creek" and "man when us get on dat ole train."[151] As Hurston's archetype of masculinity, John is integral to the train's progression as much as the train is integral to John's destiny.

The train not only provides John's means of escape after his fight with Lucy's brother, but John (alongside other male characters) provides the labor and raw man power to lay the train's tracks. Working for some time building the railroad before his escape and later tenure as a preacher, young John, like the folk hero John Henry, displays superior skill at the task and superior strength, "stand[ing] like a cross, immobile for several seconds with an axe muscled out in each hand."[152] Even after his escape to Sanford, Florida John returns to railroad work solidifying his fate as intimately bound with that of the locomotive. He is Hurston's veritable John Henry "swinging a nine-

[150] Ibid.
[151] Ibid., 44.
[152] Ibid., 61.

pound hammer and grunting over a lining bar."[153] Not only are the mobile characters Hurston depicts in this novel predominately male, but, as the fellow traveler John meets escaping persecution early in the novel suggests, the few mobile female characters in *Jonah's Gourd Vine* are almost entirely reliant on the male characters in the novel to grant (or conversely deny) them the privilege of mobility.

After John refuses Mehaley's advances, she reluctantly marries Pomp and petitions her new husband to move off Alf Pearson's land.[154] John's mother Amy travels to the Pearson farm to retrieve John to work hard labor on the Shelby farm, declining better work conditions on the Pearson farm, because John's step-father "Ned, he too hard-headed tuh do dat. Ah done tried and tried but his back don't bend."[155] When John relocates to Sanford and then the all-black town of Eatonville, he must first send for Lucy before she can join him in Florida. In the interim, John's adventures, including extra marital affairs, delay his doing so.[156] Oscar, the late husband of John's third wife Sally, would not even take her the short distance to catch fish at Plant City, Florida's local pond despite her desire to do so.[157] Hurston continues illustrating this gendered character of mobility during John's tenure as a great preacher and through the final scenes of the novel, just before the narrative reaches its final climactic moment. Hurston foreshadows the novel's final climax with a sermon in which John employs train imagery to reflect on his life and deeds.

[153] Ibid., 105.
[154] Ibid., 81-84.
[155] Ibid., 40.
[156] Ibid., 107-108.
[157] Ibid., 190.

Following Lucy's death, John's hazardous marriage with (and divorce from) the venomous Hattie which nearly costs John his church followers and towards the end of the novel, train imagery resurfaces to both forewarn John of the ultimate cost of his misadventures as well as provide John a final cathartic opportunity to heed the train's call. John has survived the back stabbing efforts of Hattie and many of his church followers as well as acknowledged his own human flaws and sins, and he preaches a sermon to that effect, employing train imagery and a poetic strategy akin to the metaphysical conceits used by 17th century English lyric poets to tell a story of human sin and spiritual redemption:

> I heard de whistle of de damnation train
>
> Dat pulled out from Garden of Eden loaded wid cargo goin'
>
> to hell
>
> Ran at break-neck speed all de way thru de law
>
> All de way thru de prophetic age
>
> All de way thru de reign of kings and judges—
>
> Plowed her way thru de Jurdan
>
> And on her way to Calvary, when she blew for de switch
>
> Jesus stood out on her track like a rough-backed mountain

And she threw her cow-catcher in His side and His blood

ditched de train . . .

That's where I got off de damnation train[158]

Hurston's protagonist preaches a sermon to Zion Hope's members that closely mirrors his own life of misdeeds and his feminization of the "damnation train" calls to mind the many women after whom John has lusted, like Hattie who (along with John's own foolish choices) nearly led to John's demise. Despite his many mistakes, John suggests a pathway for his own spiritual redemption through his reference to Christ's sacrifice which "ditched the [damnation] train." Though John has all but used his own life as pretext for a sermonic and cathartic confessional universally applicable to all of his church members, he yet foresees "dat Judgment Convention/ When de two trains of Time shall meet on de trestle/ And wreck de burning axles of de unformed ether."[159] Simply put, John still foresees the day where he will have to answer for his misdeeds. Having predominately aligned the train and railroad imagery with mobile men and masculinity, as well as naturalized the link between her male protagonist and corporeal imagery of the train, Hurston fulfills the promise of her foreshadowing in the final pages of the novel.

Hurston spends the final pages of *Jonah's Gourd Vine* redressing her protagonist's fall from grace and staging what arguably is the greatest (and final) climax of the novel. Falling on hard times after his last sermon at Zion Hope, John moves from Sanford to Plant City looking for carpentry work and a new start. Even better, he finds

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[158] Ibid., 180-181.
[159] Ibid., 181.

the kind-hearted and widowed Sally Lovelace, a well-to-do widow who inspires John to begin preaching again at Pilgrim Rest Baptist Church and to marry. For a time, John seems to have fully redeemed himself. He is faithful to Sally, and for his virtue she rewards him with a brand new Cadillac and an order to go visit his friend Hambo back in Sanford where he can show naysayers how well he is now doing. Sally declines traveling with him to visit Hambo to allow John to "git uh rest from me," and the very young Ora Patton petitions the much older John for a ride in his Cadillac during his visit to Sanford.[160] Despite his vow to remain true and a successful refusal of young Ora's initial advances, John eventually falls again and with his final fall Hurston divorces her human, but folk heroic protagonist from his intimate competence of the train's call. The "damnation train" returns, but this time John is not able to hear it.

Hurston's staging of the novel's final climax, its final moment of justice, is swift and tense. On John's final night in Sanford, he foolishly agrees to drive Ora a good distance to Oviedo where he breaks his vow and engages in extra martial activity with her. He is so rocked with guilt that he leaves without saying goodbye to Hambo the next morning:

> The ground-mist lifted on a Florida sunrise as John fled homeward. The car droned, "ho-o-ome" and tortured the man. False pretender! Outside show to the world! Soon he would be in the shelter of Sally's presence. Faith and no questions asked. He had prayed for Lucy's return and God had answered with Sally. He drove on but half-seeing the railroad from looking inward. The engine

[160]Hurston, *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, 2008, 194-196.

> struck the car squarely and hurled it about like a toy. John was thrown out and lay perfectly still. Only his foot twitched a little.[161]

After a life of mishaps, greatness and a tragic fall, John again discovers the opportunity for a satisfying life. However, he breaks his vow to remain true and deserving of the newfound happiness he realizes with Sally and, subsequently, pays the ultimate price. Throughout Hurston's narrative, John has had the gift of hearing the trains call, and at times warning. With his final fall (and in Hurston's cosmology, perhaps because of John's return to misdeeds), however, Hurston severs the intimate bond between her male protagonist and the corporeal train. John can no longer hear the train's call, nor see the immediate threat it presents. The tragic end Hurston foreshadows throughout the novel finally comes.

In *Jonah's Gourd Vine* Hurston presents the tragic, but universally accessible narrative of a mobile male protagonist whose mobility she foregrounds via her protagonist's intimate relationship with the modern industrial train and whose mobility she illustrates in marked distinction to the stasis and immobility of female characters in the novel. Including semi-autobiographical elements that gesture to people and aspects of folk culture Hurston experienced in her life and ethnographic travels, the novel not only serves as literary abstraction, but as cultural historical document, refracting paradigmatic dimensions of African American cultural history of mobility. Most notably Hurston's first novel mirrors gendered, racial and ethnic restrictions in travel (as well as migration).

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[161] Ibid., 200.

In this way, *Jonah's Gourd Vine* serves as the initial statement of the problem, the petition or capitulation. In Hurston's subsequent novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, she makes the move to critically address a gendered paradigm of mobility presenting a traveling and mobile black female subject, Janie, who demonstrates agency and modern subjectivity, not only through her exploration and expression of female sexuality, but also through the very practice of modern travel as mobility. In this way, Hurston's later novel serves as the repetition or recapitulation of the paradigm, except this time with a difference. Hurston employs this difference in (re)presentation in the service of a kind of critique of the gendered paradigm of modern African American, and indeed American, mobility. She critiques the paradigm by countering it, inserting a mobile black female subject into the modern paradigms of mobility represented by travel and migration.

In the first of two early novels, *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, Hurston presents mobility in the early 20th century as gendered. In particular, she presents female characters who either are not mobile or who are dependent on male characters in order to be mobile. In contrast, Hurston focuses her second novel on a mobile female protagonist in response to her depiction of mobility and travel as a male privilege in her first novel, as a kind of critical-creative reaction to the gendered paradigm of mobility which largely framed the early 20th century American experience of modernity. The latter novel, then, can be read as a critique of a gendered paradigm of mobility through the representation of a mobile female subject.

In *Their Eyes Were Watching God* Hurston presents the timeless narrative of a female protagonist Janie who comes of age in the midst of an arranged marriage, flees,

and then struggles throughout her life against forced domesticity and stasis. Instead, Hurston's protagonist desires a life of love and adventure, including the freedom of physical mobility needed to achieve her desired happiness. Unlike the female characters of *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, Janie struggles somewhat successfully to assert her right to be physically mobile and aspires to a life not entirely saddled by a smothering stasis and domesticity.

One might raise the objection that, even though Hurston depicts a mobile female protagonist, the protagonist Janie must still appeal to a male authority of sorts to enact her mobility. A counter argument in this regard might suggest the following: though Janie escapes her first, unhappy, marriage to Logan, she does so only through the mediation or impetus of a male character Jody (or Joe). It might note that, though "spring time" (or a strong desire for flight and freedom) comes to Janie in the barnyard as she is peeling potatoes and contemplating her unhappy marital situation, this desire is not enough to make Janie act. She does not actually fly, so to speak, until Jody presents an opportunity. Though such an argument is convincing at first glance, a careful reading of the text reveals that Janie's determination to leave Logan, in fact, is not fully predicated on a future with Jody. Janie's decision to leave Logan occurs at the conclusion of the fourth chapter.

As Janie is just about to rush out of her home (and marriage) with Logan to meet Jody, she has a critical self-reflexive moment in which she solidifies for herself (and for the reader) her motivation for leaving Logan:

> A feeling of sudden newness and change came over her. Janie hurried out of the front gate and turned south. Even if Joe was not there waiting for her, the change was bound to do her good.[162]

Janie's decision to fly (so to speak), to be mobile, is not predicated on a secure future with Jody. On the contrary, her transformation into a mobile subject is self-motivated with Jody serving as an added motivating factor. Janie's early flight is a gesture to her later and eventual self-actualization, a self-actualization which indeed occurs without Jody and, in fact, despite Jody. Though Janie's decision to leave Logan is largely self motivated, one might also object that she still later accepts a stasis (or immobility) imposed on her by Jody. Here, the duality of freedom and confinement provides a ready paradigm to explain the interplay between motion and stasis (mobility and immobility) in *Their Eyes*. Though Hurston presents a mobile female protagonist in *Their Eyes*, Janie's mobility is not without impasse or obstacle. Indeed, Jody represents one of the most difficult obstacles for Janie to surmount.

In *Their Eyes*, Hurston does not simply eradicate the gendered paradigm of mobility characteristic of *Jonah's Gourd Vine*. Rather, a gendered paradigm of mobility surfaces as a constant challenge for Janie. Hurston's desire for a mobile female subject free from gendered constraint does not prevent the literary artist from restating the paradigmatic impasse she notes in *Jonah's Gourd Vine*. On the contrary, a gendered paradigm of mobility, most strikingly embodied by the character Jody, provides the

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[162] Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, First Perennial Classics edition (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1990), 33-34.

context for the development of a heroic, mobile female protagonist who brazenly grapples with a characteristic modern problematic.

Initially embodying mobility and opportunity for Janie, Jody's meaning quickly changes after he and Janie move to the all-black town of Eatonville, marry and Jody attempts to relegate Janie to a position of stasis and domesticity. Not only does Jody impose a physical stasis on Janie, but he also attempts to relegate Janie's psychic navigation of her own interior geography through verbal and physical abuse. Jody's attempts to restrict Janie, however, only heighten Janie's awareness of her own interior landscape. In fact, Janie's awareness of her interior self begins to crystallize after Jody slaps her as punishment for cooking a meal he deems less than acceptable:

> Janie stood there where he left her for unmeasured time and thought. She stood there until something fell off the shelf inside her. Then she went inside there to see what it was. It her image of Jody tumbled down and shattered. But looking at it she saw that it never was the flesh and blood figure of her dreams. Just something she had grabbed up to drape her dreams over. In a way she turned her back upon the image where it lay and looked further. She had no more blossomy openings dusting pollen over her man, neither any glistening young fruit where the petals used to be. She found that she had a host of thoughts she had never expressed to him, and numerous emotions she had never let Jody know about. Things packed up and put away in parts of her heart where he could never find

> them. She was saving up feelings for some man she had never seen. She had an inside and an outside now and suddenly she knew how not to mix them.[163]

The day Jody disrupts the harmony of Janie's interior geography represents a major turning point in the novel. For the first time in the novel, Janie must navigate the psychic and emotional space inside of her in order to repair the disruption Jody's violence has caused. Navigating her own interior terrain, Janie discovers a longing hidden deep within her for something or someone beyond Jody, beyond artificial boundaries and forced restriction. From that point forward Janie becomes increasingly aware of the restriction and confinement Jody embodies to her.

The novel reaches a climax during the verbal contest Hurston stages between Janie and Jody in the store, when Janie cuts a plug of tobacco for a customer too generous for Jody's liking, and Jody launches a verbal assault against Janie's body. Responding in kind, Janie deconstructs the image of a "big man" Jody has created among Eatonville's residents and unveils her discontent with the metaphorical weight and restriction which Jody has come to represent. Immediately following the verbal contest, when Jody retreats to a downstairs room in the couple's home, Janie reflects on Jody's changing physicality:

> [S]he noticed how baggy Joe was getting all over. Like bags hanging from an ironing board. A little sack hung from the corners of his eyes and rested on his cheek-bones; a loose-filled bag of feathers hung from his ears and rested on his neck beneath his chin. A sack of flabby something hung from his loins and rested

[163] Ibid., 72.

> on his thighs when he sat down. But even these things were running down like candle grease as time moved on.[164]

The imagery which Hurston uses to present Jody's physical alterations establishes a corporeal analog to Jody's embodiment of constraint and impediment for Janie. Janie explicitly confronts the impediment Jody represents, even to her ability to navigate her own interior geography, as Jody lays on his death bed not long after their public verbal foray:

> Listen, Jody, you ain't de Jody ah run off down de road wid. You'se whut's left after he died. Ah run off tuh keep house wid you in uh wonderful way. But you wasn't satisfied wid me de way Ah was. Naw! Mah own mind had tuh be squeezed and crowded out tuh make room for yours in me.[165]

This seminal moment before Jody's death alludes to a previous moment in the text when Jody's physical abuse interrupts Janie's navigation of her own interior topography. Janie's confrontation with Jody, referencing his violent rupture of her interior serenity, sets the stage for her pivotal emancipation from strictures to both her physical mobility and her psychic (interior) confinement. Indeed, Janie ritualistically reestablishes the protection of her interior landscape and navigation when she attends Jody's funeral:

> Janie starched and ironed her face and came set in the funeral behind her veil. It was like a wall of stone and steel. The funeral was going on outside. All things concerning death and burial were said and done. Finish. End. Nevermore.

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[164] Ibid., 81.
[165] Ibid., 86.

> Darkness. Deep hole. Dissolution. Eternity. Weeping and wailing outside. Inside the expensive folds were resurrection and life. She did not reach outside for anything, nor did things of death reach inside to disturb her calm. She sent her face to Joe's funeral, and herself went rollicking with the springtime across the world.[166]

Attending Jody's funeral, Janie dons the veil as an individual tool of self-protection and disguise, employing the veil as a defense against any further intrusions against her interior tranquility. Not only does Janie reclaim the serenity of her interior landscape, but she also experiences a cathartic, interior wanderlust that prefigures her gratifying (but ultimately tragic) adventures with Tea Cake. Though Hurston's protagonist finally experiences joy physically traveling and working in the Florida Everglades alongside Tea Cake, Hurston makes the final moment of (or at least attempt at) transcendence—beyond the modern paradox of freedom and confinement—a spiritual and psychic transition.

Following Tea Cake's funeral—Janie shoots Tea Cake in self defense due to a tragic, rabid assault Tea Cake makes on her after being bitten by a diseased canine—Hurston's protagonist returns to her home in Eatonville and then to her interior geography for solace. She returns from the Florida Everglades to the porch of her home in Eatonville where she narrates the entirety of the story to her friend Pheoby. Janie concludes her narrative to Pheoby noting "Ah'm back home agin and Ah'm satisfied tuh be heah. Ah done been tuh de horizon and back and now Ah kin set heah in mah house and live by comparisons."[167] Her narrative is so powerful that it inspires Pheoby's own

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[166] Ibid., 88.
[167] Ibid., 191.

desire for mobility who confesses, “Ah ain’t satisfied wid mahself no mo’. Ah means tuh make Sam [her husband] take me fishin’ wid him after this.”[168] The novel closes on Janie reflecting on her adventures with Tea Cake, “[c]ombing road-dust out of her hair”[169] and finally feeling inner peace:

> She pulled in her horizon like a great fish-net. Pulled it from around the waist of the world and draped it over her shoulder. So much of life in its meshes! She called in her soul to come and see.[170]

Hurston closes the novel with the image of Janie returning to her interior geography; however, this time she is not doing so as a protective gesture. Like the young Hurston, Janie populates her interior geography with the great bounty she worked so hard to deserve and calls in her soul to enjoy the blissful landscape of her remodeled and serene psychic and spiritual interior.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have examined Hurston’s early writings, creative and intellectual, in relation to her ethnographic travels in the US South and Florida. More specifically, I have analyzed her early novels *Jonah’s Gourd Vine* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* in relation to modern paradigms of mobility Hurston observed in her life and travels, gendered, ethnic and racial paradigms of mobility which surface in Hurston’s autobiographical work *Dust Tracks on a Road* and in biographical treatments of Hurston by Robert Hemenway and Valerie Boyd. Hurston’s travel experiences not only helped

[168] Ibid., 192.
[169] Ibid.
[170] Ibid., 193.

her to understand a gendered paradigm of mobility framing the lives and opportunities of many Americans in the early 20th century, but, even more, Hurston's understanding of a gendered paradigm of mobility manifests concretely in her early novels. Taken together, Hurston's early novels provide a creative and critical perspective on paradigmatic restrictions on mobility she encountered and observed in her life and travels.

Hurston, in contrast to Brown, does not turn exclusively to the metaphysical as a means of addressing a gendered paradigm of mobility. Instead she wrestles with the corporeal nature of the problematic through the journey of her female protagonist and tries to navigate and hone the psychic potential of the inner self (i.e. interior geography) as a final means of achieving her vision of freedom beyond a modern paradox. Closely following the publication of *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, and similarly influenced by elements of characters and cultural practices and expressions Hurston observed, *Their Eyes* is characterized by a physical, psychic and spiritual struggle for mobility and concludes with a psychic and spiritual vision of transcendence wherein Janie finds a semblance of freedom by drawing all of the physical world she holds dear into her interior geography, populating her inner world in a way that satisfies her longing for freedom and serenity. Much like the young Hurston had once populated and navigated her own interior geography, Janie draws elements of the physical world into her inner self and creates a place (a navigable landscape) where she could be free.

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Chapter 4

Scenes of Black Masculinity and Wanderlust: Gendered Mobility and Film Diaspora in *Emperor Jones*

Robeson's greatest contribution to black film history—and the aspect of his work that most disturbed American white moviegoers—was his proud, defiant portrait of the black man. In his best known film, *The Emperor Jones* (1933), Robeson portrays O'Neill's black man who refuses to kowtow to anyone—Brutus Jones, an arrogant, strong-willed braggart, who rises from Pullman porter to autocrat.

Donald Bogle, Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, & Bucks, 2009

The climax of Jones's death becomes a black social variant of the inevitability of Greek tragedy given new meaning through an artful use of environmentalism . . . When Jones dies in a revolt, he is not a Pullman toady or a high-roller under the stairwell; he is a black king dying in pain and rage at his demeaning fall.

Thomas Cripps, *Slow Fade to Black*, 1993

Introduction

The Emperor Jones is a 1933 film adaptation of the 1920 Eugene O'Neill play of the same title, directed by Dudley Murphy, featuring Paul Robeson, Ruby Elzy, Dudley Digges, Frank H. Wilson, and Fredi Washington. Very loosely based on the O'Neill drama, the film follows Brutus Jones (Robeson) a newly hired Pullman Porter from a rural town who leaves his wife Dolly (Elzy) to travel for work. Brutus quickly succumbs

to vices of the big city, accidently stabs and kills friend-turned-rival Jeff (Wilson), landing him a stint on a southern chain gang, and finally escapes the chain gang to return home to his wife. To avoid persecution in the US, Brutus takes a job stoking coal on a steamer headed to the Caribbean where he jumps ship to a remote island whose crude leader he deposes and replaces with the partnership of colonial white merchant Smithers. In this chapter on travel ideals in film, I employ cultural historical criticism and visual analysis to examine the various diasporic scenes the film's protagonist navigates in his dramatic travels and development as a man.

I argue the film can be seen as an African American (or black) male coming-of-age tale in which aspects of African American culture and history are situated within a broader diasporic framework, including the African continent, the Caribbean and the Americas. These elements include African cultural continuities in the African American (or black) church, continuities in antebellum, plantation-style servitude a la post bellum chain gangs, and gendered, racial, and ethnic paradigmatic restrictions on mobility. The result is a filmic coming-of-age tale in which ideals of escape, refashioning and becoming converge uneasily with those of roots, belonging and homecoming. Against the film's diasporic framework and background—which gesture to the transnational racial solidarity that grounds Diaspora as heritage—Brutus's individual agency (in particular his individual greed) unsettles many of the dimensions of Diaspora, namely transnational racial solidarity, that are most settling. Ultimately, Robeson's portrayal of a self-confident (indeed arrogant) black man situates black masculinity against both white male authority and black womanhood in a tale of wanderlust in which physical and geographical mobility (by train, steamer or otherwise) not only delineates the contours of

Diaspora, but also provides the impetus and opportunity to temporarily estrange oneself from fixed notions of roots, community, and home through processes of flight, reinvention and traversal (as opposed to traditionally accepted conceptions of Diaspora as the result primarily of geographical dispersal).

My reading of the film hinges on its portrayal of black masculinity and individual agency as displayed by the film's protagonist Brutus. Not only is the protagonist's masculinity predicated on his relationship to white male authority and black womanhood, but his very mobility is undergirded by masculine, industrial imagery, most notably moving train and steamer images. Powerful, modern industrial vessels of transport and territorial dominance, train and ship imagery not only provide a sense of immense geographical traversal in the film—the train often providing segue between one scene and the next—but physically embody the forceful, confident and wandering spirit of the film's main character. More than scenes of geographical traversal which represent black masculinity through Brutus's wanderlust, ultimately mapping the counters of Diaspora through physical mobility, *The Emperor Jones* foregrounds gendered, racial and ethnic paradigmatic restrictions on mobility as a mainstay of African American cultural history in the early twentieth century.

In the film's opening scene director Dudley Murphy features West African tribal dancing and drumming fading into a scene of singing and dancing inside a black church in rural Georgia, a filmic strategy intended to make overt connections between West African cultural, spiritual and ritual practices and the faith-based cultural and ritual practices developed in southern black churches. Brutus's departure to pursue a new

career as a Pullman Porter, a respected occupation in many black communities and means of upwardly mobility for many African Americans in the early 20th century, is not complete without a communal farewell at his home church in rural Georgia. The scene depicts Brutus wearing his porter uniform as the pastor of the church wishes him well followed by a somber song and farewell by the church community. In many ways, the hopes, desires and pride of the community travel with Brutus as many of the residents of Brutus's home town are not in a position to travel and be physically mobile in their work or leisure. The places to which Brutus travels after he leaves his roots in rural Georgia—including major cities across the continental US, a southern chain gang, and a remote island in the Caribbean—geographically establish the film's construction of Diaspora. The film situates the continent of Africa in its diasporic frame through the inclusion of opening scenes tying the southern rural black church to ritualistic and spiritual practices observed on the continent.

In addition to "J. Rosamond Johnson's score [which] divided the picture into four movements and motifs: African, to Gullah, to Harlem jazz, to Voodoo, a sure-handed attempt to symbolize a long race-memory,"[171] the film situates the continent of Africa in its diasporic frame through opening scenes in which director Dudley Murphy features a scene of West African tribal dancing and drumming fading into a scene of near ecstatic singing and dancing inside a black church in rural Georgia. The coupling of these two scenes represents a filmic strategy intended to make overt connections between West African cultural, spiritual and ritual practices and the faith-based cultural and ritual practices developed in Southern black churches. Moreover, these scenes foreshadow

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[171] Thomas Cripps, *Slow Fade to Black: The Negro in American Film, 1900-1942* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 216.

early on the film's complex situation of an African American narrative within a larger African Diaspora framework. Though the film's exposition provides a sense of black racial community with explicit connections to a broader community signified by Diaspora as cultural inheritance and heritage, the film's primary focus on Brutus's individual journey unsettles the very sense of transnational solidarity established at the film's beginning. Even more, Brutus's brand of black masculinity—while inspiring admiration from black audiences unaccustomed to an assertive black male lead—relegates black womanhood to a position of stasis and dispensability.

Black masculinity in the film is represented in contrast to white male authority, in relation to a geographically specific dichotomy of black womanhood, within a gendered paradigm of mobility, and alongside the train as a masculine image. In 1933 when the film was released, white audiences would not have been very accustomed to a black male lead who defies and subverts white male authority really at every turn. In an early scene in the film, Brutus maneuvers his position as a Pullman porter in the President's car of a train to exploit his white male employer for financial gain. Brutus overhears sensitive information regarding a railroad company merger and uses the information to manipulate his employer into including Brutus as an investor with stock interest. In the 1930s, the dominate image of porters circulating in the minds of white Americans was of a jovial porter inherently predisposed to servitude. This image had been the result not only of an earlier history of black enslavement and labor, but also of the Pullman Palace Car Company's (PPCC) decision in the 1870s (only a few years after the 1865 Emancipation Proclamation) to hire black men as porters and capitalize on a ready-made image of black

servitude that characterized antebellum life particularly in the US South.[172] The PPCC by the 1920s was “the largest employer of black labor in the country.”[173] To see Robeson portray a confident, smart and assertive porter on the big screen would have been anything but commonplace for the time.

Indeed, Robeson’s Brutus would have alarmed white audiences with the threat of a black masculinity no longer entrapped and subdued by the position of subservience designated by the porter position and uniformed white coat. Black audiences, however, would have been proud of Robeson’s portrayal of an assertive and confident black man. As leading film studies scholar Donald Bogle notes, “[D]espite the fact that in the jungle sequences Robeson, with his chest bare and a terrified expression on his face, was often a black brute figure, black audiences still saw a black male completely unlike the servile characters of most American movies.”[174] Even more than racial pride in seeing a confident black male lead in an American film, black communities (in contrast to their white counterparts) held an entirely opposite conception of porters. Porters in many African American communities were regarded with dignity and respect, not only because of their contributions to building the black middle class in many cities, but also due to the successful early labor struggles of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters the first black labor union to win a settlement with a major American corporation—the PPCC.[175]

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[172] Beth T. Bates, *Pullman Porters and the Rise of Protest Politics in Black America, 1925–1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 5; Michael R. Hall, “The Prominence of the Railroad in the African American Imagination: Mobile Men, Gendered Mobility and the Poetry of Sterling A. Brown,” in *Travel and Imagination*, ed. Garth Lean, Russell Staiff, and EmmaWaterton (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Co., 2014), 91.
[173] Jack Santino, *Miles of Smiles, Years of Struggle: Stories of Black Pullman Porters* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 8.
[174] Donald Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattos, Mammies & Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films,* Fourth Edition (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2006), 98.
[175] Bates, *Pullman Porters*, 2001, 126-27.

Despite Robeson's portrayal of an assertive and cunning Brutus who defies white male authority and navigates complex and often perilous geography at will, his brand of black masculinity leaves little room for an equally assertive black womanhood.

Discussing Brutus's defiance of white male authority, particularly during the scene in the President's car of a train, Bogle too easily interprets Brutus's assertiveness as one which is beneficial to the black women characters in the film. His interpretation, however, ignores the film's broader and consistent assertion of black male masculinity at the expense of black womanhood and black women.

> In one particularly interesting scene on a railroad car, Robeson goes through the stock "yes sirs" and "no sirs" to his white employers, but is so full of energy and self-mockery that his behavior is not self-demeaning. Later when he attempts to blackmail his employer (and afterward when he mocks the employer for the benefit of his black woman), he is a black man consciously asserting himself, consciously cutting The Man down to size.[176]

As much as I agree with Bogle's reading of the subversive gestures and double-talk employed by Brutus to best his white male employers, it is definitely a stretch to interpret Brutus's tactics as beneficial to "his black woman." Firstly, Brutus does not have a black woman, he has black women. Not only does Brutus pursue several women despite his marriage to Dolly, but his very mobility reveals the gendered nature of mobility in the early twentieth century when black men were not only far more mobile than black women, but the very mobility of black men was in large part predicated on the

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[176] Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattos, Mammies & Bucks*, 2006, 98.

domesticity of women.[177] Wanderlust surfaces as the overriding drive that both fuels the protagonist's travel and undergirds his easy neglect of women.

Wanderlust, that is a strong, almost undeniable desire to travel, consumes the film's protagonist Brutus and provides the overriding motivation and impulse for Brutus' filmic journey. The film presents wanderlust almost as a naturalized, masculine claim to mobility. Not only are there no mobile female characters in the film, but the film frames the very mobility of men in contrast to the stasis and dispensability of women. The first instance the audience becomes aware of a gendered dichotomy in the mobility of the film's characters is early on in a scene where Brutus' wife Dolly expresses worry that the fast girls of New York City will inspire Brutus to turn away from her. Though Brutus reassures Dolly that no other girl is pretty enough to turn him from her, he quickly begins an affair with Undine the love interest of his new friend and fellow porter Jeff. With the dialogue between Brutus and Dolly and the affairs Brutus has after leaving his roots, home and wife in rural Georgia, the film establishes a geographically specific dichotomy of black womanhood whereby rural Southern black women are chaste and loyal and "big city" Northern women are fast and treacherous.

Brutus's exploitation of his mobility and of women continues when he later dismisses Undine at a whim for laughing at his bigheadedness. In a scene following Brutus's bold manipulation of his white employers in a railroad car, Brutus boasts to Undine of the investment deal he made with his employer, constructing himself as a big man to be. After Undine offends Brutus, laughing at his show of bigness, he breaks his ties to her stating, "Any woman's baggage will get heavier and heavier the longer you

[177] Hall, "The Prominence of the Railroad," 2014, 89.

totes 'em, you got to change 'em to keep travelin' light." He tosses her forty dollars to conclude their affair. Shortly thereafter in a night club scene, Brutus's first mistress Undine publicly fights with a new mistress he has acquired. Brutus exits the club, leaving both women fighting and quipping to a female club attendant, "I'se travelin' light." Brutus's quips are reminiscent of the blues lyric documented by literary artist and cultural anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston (discussed in chapter 3) during her ethnographic travels in the US South and Florida and fictionalized in her early novel *Jonah's Gourd Vine*,[178] a literary work in which Hurston aligns men's mobility (and masculinity) with the train.

Conducting ethnographic research in Polk County, Florida circa 1928, Hurston documented much of the folk life she encountered. In particular, she documented a blues-inspired folk tune (voiced from a male perspective) the prelude of which begins, "Take you where I'm going, woman? Hell no! Let every town furnish its own."[179] Revealing a masculine, almost naturalized claim to mobility through travel on the part of the male speaker of the folk tune, the song Hurston collected, much like Brutus's statements to black women characters in *The Emperor Jones* refracts the gendered restrictions on black women's mobility that formulate a characteristic feature of early modern African American travel. More than fictionalized and filmic works which imagine African American mobility without historical context, Hurston's *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and, more importantly, the film text *The Emperor Jones* represent modern travel as a problem of mobility, refracting actual gendered and racial dimensions of African

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[178] Zora Neale Hurston, *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, First Harper Perennial Modern Classics Edition (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2008), 103-104. (Originally published in 1934).
[179] Zora Neale Hurston, *Dust Tracks on a Road*, 1st HarperPerennial ed. (New York, NY: HarperPerennial, 1996), 149. (Originally published in 1942)

American cultural historical experiences of travel. In addition to Brutus's wanderlust coupled with a gendered mobility which situates the protagonist's black masculinity against both white male authority and black womanhood, the film employs train and ship imagery as well as Brutus's geographical traversal to delineate its own sense of a film Diaspora. The film's construction of Diaspora, however, presents a transnational geography haunted by the vagrancies of individual choice.

After leaving rural Georgia, Brutus spends time traveling the US South and Northeast by train as a Pullman Porter. After accidently killing his friend Jeff following a scuffle over Brutus's affair with Undine, Jeff's former girlfriend, and a craps game gone wrong, Brutus makes a brief detour and stop on a southern chain gang. Serving time on the chain gang, Brutus (Robeson) sings a folk song inspired by the (southern) African American folk hero John Henry. Robeson's singing and song choice at this precarious moment in the film's narrative establishes a cultural historical link between Brutus and his plight and that of the folk hero Henry. It also situates Brutus firmly and firstly in an African American tradition of mobility before inserting him into a broader geographical, racial and cultural trajectory of mobility through Diaspora.

John Henry (the figure the film references) is a folk hero who worked as a steel-driver, hammering still drills into rock to make holes for explosives used to blast away rock. As a folk hero, Henry is credited with outperforming modern machinery, specifically a steel powered hammer, at the task. Performing the folk ballad, Brutus appears heroic in his plight and only momentarily humbled in his masculinity. The film uses references to John Henry through song to situate Brutus as the film's folk hero, its

universally accessible archetype of black masculinity. Even more, the film's referencing of John Henry in tandem with its use of the moving train image frames the first half of the film's narrative within the context of modern African American mobility and travel via the railroad.

Preceding Brutus's escape to a remote Caribbean island, the film employs the moving train image (or locomotive) to transition from one scene to the next. The use of the train as a transition not only helps to move the film along and provide the viewer with a sense of vast geographical traversal and time passage, but also foregrounds the prominence of the locomotive in the African American cultural historical imagination and the importance of railroad employment to the early modern development of African American communities and families. To make the geographical transition from the US to the Caribbean, the film utilizes the image of a moving steamer, signifying the great distance traversed by the film's protagonist as well as the significant temporal lapse between the protagonist's escape from US shores and his arrival on Caribbean coasts. The film physically and geographically pushes its diasporic reach beyond the continental US when Brutus spots a remote Caribbean island from the steamer, jumps ship and swims ashore to be met by the islands' black residents. Brutus's arrival to the shores of the Caribbean island serves as the filmic hinge for a reversal of fortunes for the film's protagonist.

During the first half of the film Brutus is employed as a Pullman porter, a position in which he is reminded of his black servitude to largely white American railroad patrons. It is his job as a porter to provide service and comfort largely to a white patronage. Even

further, Brutus's stint on the chain gang makes his position relative to his white male counterparts even more clear as the chain gang is almost entirely composed of black men, while the authorities in charge of the gang are all white men. However, when Brutus jumps ship and swims ashore a small Caribbean isle his fortunes are reversed and the corridors of power far more open to his ascension.

Black locals take Brutus into custody when he first comes ashore, and the island's ruler—referred to only as the General—orders Brutus to be jailed until he can be deported. The white colonial merchant Smithers pays a small sum to the General to have Brutus released and claims Brutus as his own. Despite Smither's assistance, Brutus makes it clear to Smithers that he no longer takes orders from white men. He says, "Look a here white man, I comes and I goes and that's my business." Smithers responds, "So, that's the kind of a nigger you are, aye? Not afraid to stand up to your betters and tell 'em what's what's?" Having come to understand the kind of man Brutus is, Smithers agrees to provide all the food, rum and entertainment Brutus desires as long as Brutus does not seek monetary compensation and as long as Brutus works for the merchant remembering that publicly he "belongs to Mr. Smithers."

It does not take long, however, for Brutus to lobby his position as Smither's representative and enact a plan to depose the island's corrupt ruler, the General, only to replace the corrupt ruler with another, Brutus. After assuming rule over the island, Brutus opens new negotiations with Smithers, warning the white merchant, "Don't make the mistake of thinking you're dealing with an ignorant bush nigga." Brutus completes a reversal of power by ordering Smithers to hand him a cigarette and light it. He no longer

belongs to Smithers, Smithers belongs to him. He tells Smithers, “You have just had an audience with the Emperor Jones.” Brutus intends to exploit his position as ruler to amass a great fortune over a few years and then skip town before his game is discovered. As he brags to Smithers, he has secretly been amassing a fortune and, “It’s banked in a foreign land where there ain’t no chain gangs and no Jim Crow, and nobody can’t get it accept me.” Following a complete reversal of power, Brutus’s heroic guise changes for a more sinister façade and he assumes a colonial rule that distances him from his black counterparts on the Caribbean isle.

Having spent his life navigating a US society in which black men’s labor is largely circumscribed by white businessmen and politicians, and in which white men predominately occupy positions of power, Brutus welcomes the opportunity to partner with a white merchant Smithers on the island to depose the islands’ corrupt leader. Through a brief sequence of events Brutus enters a geographical space in which the corridors of power do not lie squarely in the hands of white male leaders. For the first time in life, his visions of becoming a big black man have been realized on this remote, predominately black island. In some ways, the film’s juxtaposition of the US and Caribbean establish the US as geographically white and the Caribbean as geographically black, in terms of the opportunity to control resources, political position and influence and the means of industrial and agricultural production. Though the film positions the Caribbean island as a geographically black space, assumedly amenable to black racial solidarity through Diaspora, it is Brutus’s conniving and exploitation of the islanders and their resources that troubles any easy sense of racial solidarity and community in the film. Indeed, Brutus eventually loses his stronghold on the islanders and a revolt ensues

following Brutus's brutal decision to use corporal punishment as a response to the islanders' refusal to continue abiding Brutus's harsh rule.

Brutus accepts all the trappings of an imperial authority and has no tolerance for dissent, especially to an attack on his tax collector by local black men tired of being taxed to the point of poverty. The black Diaspora established by the film is not one in which people of African descent exhibit solidarity in a struggle against injustices of colonial and imperial European rule, but one in which an essentialized and assumed universal blackness is troubled by individual choice and, in particular, individual greed. Any injustice Brutus may have endured as an African American man subject to the vagaries of Jim Crow and chain gangs in the US are lost on him as an imperial ruler who thinks nothing of exploiting his black counterparts in the Caribbean for economic and political gain. Brutus is brutal and unforgiving, not only sentencing dissenters to corporal punishment, but ordering an entire village to be burned to the ground based solely on the dissent of a few men. It is after ordering the village to be burned that locals stop attending the Emperor's court. Reading the signs of a situation turning bad, Brutus decides he has overplayed his hand and plans to leave with the modest treasure he has secreted away.

After relinquishing his throne to escape into the bush with a revolver in hand, Brutus is tormented by the sound of war drums sounding throughout the island and haunted by his past misdeeds. He sees the ghosts of Jeff and the ghosts of the white officer he killed escaping the southern chain gang. He can even see the specter of chain gang members alongside of which he views himself hammering rocks. The specters

Brutus sees not only serve as a haunting reminder of his misdeeds, but as a film technique remind the viewer of the various locales Brutus has traversed in his diasporic film journey. Finally Brutus sees a transparency of the rural southern church from which he emerged and the specter of an African ritual performer who leads Brutus to water's edge where the specter of an alligator taunts the protagonist. The film uses transparent imagery to rehearse the diasporic journey of misdeeds on which Brutus has embarked since he left—and divorced himself from—his rural southern roots. In short the film revisits the scenic Diaspora established by the film's greater narratological arc. Driven mad Brutus stumbles upon Smithers and the group of local men Smithers has assembled to hunt him down. They shoot Brutus and he collapses to his death atop a circular table of rock in the midst of the dark bush.

Conclusion

A 1933 film loosely based on Eugene O'Neil's 1920 play and chronicling the journey of a Pullman porter turned wandering traveler and Afro-modern tragic hero, *The Emperor Jones* represents a significant film text in African American cultural history, arts and letters, specifically, and American film and cultural history more broadly. The film's value lies not only in its historically novel portrayal of an assertive black male protagonist, but even more in its refraction of the gendered, racial and ethnic dimensions of modern travel in American cultural history. Following the protagonist as he traverses complex geography, characterized particularly by racial and gendered limitations on modern mobility, the film situates an African American tale of masculinity and wanderlust within a broader frame of Diaspora in order to reveal the ways individual

agency and greed hinder racial community formation and solidarity across national borders.

While African cultural retention, rural southern roots and communal belonging frame the exposition of this decidedly African American and African Diaspora film narrative, the protagonist's need for escape, reinvention and becoming destabilize any easy conception of Diaspora as the essential, almost organic expression of black racial solidarity despite geographical and cultural differences. Brutus is hungry, opportunistic and anything but altruistic or just in his dealings with his counterparts residing in the US and on a remote Caribbean isle. A racy film that uncomfortably situates African American manhood and masculinity in the broader context of modern industrial mobility and supposed African Diaspora community and solidarity, *The Emperor Jones* not only challenged white audiences in the 1930s to confront a self-assured, subversive and intelligent Pullman porter as protagonist (as opposed to stereotypical conceptions of black servitude circulating in the white American imagination as a result of ads framing porters as jovial, readily available attendants), but simultaneously complicated Brutus's relationship to racial solidarity across borders, through his scheme to exploit islanders' superstitions for economic and political gain. The result is a complex film narrative that encourages audiences to consider not only the complexities of modern mobility through travel, but to also complicate their understanding of black masculinity and transnational racial solidarity through the protagonist's tragic journey through a Diaspora plagued by individual greed, which threatens any sense of transnational community and racial solidarity.

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Chapter 5

Dramatizing the African American Experience of Travel in the Jim Crow South: *The Negro Motorist Green Book* in the African American Literary Imagination[180]

> With the introduction of this travel guide in 1936, it has been our idea to give the Negro traveler information that will keep him from running into difficulties, embarrassments and to make his trips more enjoyable
>
> *The Negro Motorist Green Book* (1940)

> That this change to complete Jim Crow happens at Washington is highly significant of the state of American democracy in relation to colored peoples today. Washington is the capital of our nation and one of the great centers of the Allied war effort toward the achievement of the Four Freedoms. To a southbound Negro citizen told at Washington to change into a segregated coach the Four Freedoms have a hollow sound, like distant lies not meant to be the truth.
>
> "My America" (1944), Langston Hughes

> Not until years had passed, and other, far, more sophisticated vacations had been taken—jaunts to Europe and Africa and Asia, paid for by credit cards and boosting us to a palmy level of worldliness we'd never dreamed of. Not until we Harmon children had gone our separate ways, and looked back suddenly to realize

[180] Reprinted with revision from "Dramatizing the African American Experience of Travel in the Jim Crow South: The Negro Motorist Green Book in the African American Literary Imagination," *South Carolina Review*, Vol. 46, No. 2 (Spring 2014), 80-94. Copyright © 2014.

> that this was the trip by which we would always judge all others. A journey that defined the ambiguous shape of our citizenship, when we moved across our country feeling as apprehensive as foreigners and at the same time knowing that every grain of dust was ours.
>
> *The Golden Chariot* (2002), Andrea Lee

Introduction

From 1936 to 1964 the *Negro Motorist Green Book*, the brain child of New York-based African American businessman and former postal worker Victor H. Green, served as a guide for African American travelers to both lessen embarrassing situations in travel as well as to protect them from physical harm in the Jim Crow South and beyond. This travel guide, commonly referred to as the *Green Book,* assisted African American travelers during a period in US history when Howard Johnson, which operated restaurants and motor lodges, was the only national chain where black persons could eat and sleep, and Esso gas stations (now Exxon Mobil Co.) provided the only stations where African Americans could both refuel their cars and use public restrooms.

Contemporary playwrights have examined this moment in US history when the *Green Book* served as a safeguard for African American travelers. In the critically acclaimed *The Green Book: A Play in Two Acts* (2006), Atlanta native Calvin A. Ramsey presents the narratives of a *Green Book* salesman, a Jewish Holocaust survivor, and a soldier and his wife who converge on a "tourist home" in Jefferson City, Missouri, where they consider the value of this guidebook. His play offers a fictional window into a little

known but important chapter in our shared American history. Andrea Lee's short musical *The Golden Chariot* (2002), an abbreviated literary epic depicting African American leisure travel by automobile, also reflects on travel under Jim Crow, providing a comedic complement to Ramsey's play.

Together, these works by Ramsey and Lee chronicle two important dimensions of African American modern travel from the early 1900s through the 1960s. First, they illustrate the unique vulnerability of African American travelers during an era of Jim Crow segregation and discrimination and the resilience of African American travelers in finding ways to surmount impasses to physical and geographical mobility. Secondly, they foreground the role of the automobile not only as a signifier of class status but also as a limited means of avoiding the harsher aspects of Jim Crow era travel, as black travelers could hardly avoid stopping at gas stations, rest stops, and other accommodations, many of which did not welcome African American patrons. Though grounded in specificities of African American cultural history, Ramsey's drama and Lee's comedy employ cultural specificity to affirm universal lessons about communal responsibility, individual agency and integrity, and ethics. More than literary abstractions, these works should be understood as creative expressions refracting not only aspects of the cultural history of racial restrictions on African American physical and geographical mobility, but also the ingenuity and fortitude demonstrated by modern African American travelers faced with legal impediments to their leisure mobility.

Dramatizing the African American Experience of Travel in the Jim Crow South:

The Green Book, A Play in Two Acts

The Green Book: A Play in Two Acts uses character dialog to provide historical context on the situation of African American modern travel. The play opens with a brief telephone conversation between Dwight Green, a married, Harlem-based African American businessman in his forties whose company publishes the Negro travel guide, and Langston Hughes. Green is arranging papers in his Harlem office when he receives a phone call from Hughes:

> Your friends there [in D.C.] are afraid to have you stay in their homes . . .? Because of the communist charges against you? That's a damn shame. Yes, Langston, I have an address for you. Let me grab a Green Book. Call this number. It's the Brown Family . . . Butterfield-60027.[181]

From the beginning, Ramsey highlights the utility of the travel guide as a practical means of securing accommodations for black travelers in the United States, even African American travelers of some status whom one might imagine were not subjected to such difficulties in their travels. That is to say that in the conversation between Green and the poet Hughes, the reader notes that not even middle-class educated African Americans were immune to the regular insult of Jim Crow. Even more, the conversation presents the irony that the state calls Hughes to appear in the capitol and defend himself as a loyal citizen even as the state's sanction on Jim Crow and its anti-communist crusade make it difficult for Hughes to physically travel and find accommodations in the capitol. Indeed it's the communist charges that ultimately leave Hughes without a place to stay because, as an African American, his only recourse is to rely on friends' homes for temporary residence in D.C. Ramsey's fictional representation of a phone conversation between

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[181] Calvin A. Ramsey, *The Green Book*: *A Play in Two Acts* (Atlanta: Calvin A. Ramsey, 2006), 5.

Green and Hughes reflects not only Hughes' actual trip to Washington, D.C., in March of 1953 to answer charges of communist affiliation before the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations chaired by Senator Joseph McCarthy, but also the poet's and columnist's regular criticism of Jim Crow discrimination in the United States.

In a 1946 article, "Better Jobs for Women," published in the *Chicago Defender*, Hughes assailed the US government and southern transportation system for abiding discrimination domestically while US armed forces helped to combat injustices perpetuated by Nazis abroad. He contends that

> The wasteful, uncivilized, inconvenient and stupid Jim Crow travel system of the South still prevails. The Jim Crow car is a disgrace to America, and is an open and unashamed symbol of all the other Nazi-like inequalities to which Negroes are subjected.[182]

During an era when early struggles for civil rights had benefited from the leadership of such figures as James Weldon Johnson, W.E.B. Du Bois, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Mary Church Terrell, Mary McLeod Bethune, Paul Robeson, A. Phillip Randolph, Walter White and others, Hughes's focus on the Jim Crow car brings into sharp relief the hypocrisy of a nation that would enlist all of its sons and daughters in a fight abroad for freedom and democracy as it denied those same rights and privileges to its darker-skinned citizens at home. Describing Jim Crow discrimination and racial inequality in the US, Hughes insinuates that the US refuses to both acknowledge and eliminate Nazis at home.

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[182]Langston Hughes, "Better Jobs for Women," in *Langston Hughes and the Chicago Defender: Essays on Race, Politics, and Culture, 1942–62*, ed. Christopher C. De Santis (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1995), 32.

After speaking with Hughes, Green asserts that it is "a crime, and a sin before God. Langston Hughes, the people's poet, can't find a place to stay in our nation's capital."[183] With this rhetorical gesture, Ramsey brings the issue of segregation and discrimination in public accommodations and travel to the literal and metaphorical door step of the nation.

Following the exchange between Green and Hughes, Ramsey includes a more extensive conversation between Green and one of his employees Douglas Walker to further establish a context for the plays plot. Walker, whose name merges the surnames of historic African American leaders Frederick Douglas and David Walker, has just returned from a successful tour in the South gathering information about businesses to include in the *Green Book*. This dialogue foregrounds the risks involved in travel for African Americans, common misperceptions about the South, and the value of travel to the acquisition of knowledge. After boasting of his success in the South, Walker admits it was Green's example that inspired him, despite reservations, to accept the assignment of traveling and gathering information in the South:

> You mentioned that you never planned to work with The Green Book after college, but that things changed after you started reading the mail from people who bought The Green Book and how it had saved their families from harm on the open road. I think that . . . made me realize this was more than a job.[184]

A question which Walker's admission both raises and partially answers here is what was at stake for the Negro traveler in the South, and related to that question, what was the value of the travel guide? Hughes's 1944 essay "My America" offers a more visceral

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[183] Ramsey, *The Green Book*, 2006, 5.
[184] Ramsey, *The Green Book*, 2006, 9.

answer to these queries, making it clear that for African American travelers like Morehouse College professor Hugh Gloster living under Jim Crow was not merely an embarrassment for both the rider and nation: often, the lives of African American citizens were at stake.

While riding as an interstate passenger, Professor Gloster was "ejected from a train . . . beaten, arrested, and fined because, being in an overcrowded Jim Crow coach, he asked for a seat in an adjacent car which contained only two white passengers."[185] Professor Gloster's forceful removal from the train was illegal, as Hughes notes, because "Jim Crow laws do not apply to inter-state travelers, but the FBI has not yet gotten around to enforcing that Supreme Court ruling."[186] Hughes goes on to show that attacks like the one on Gloster were not isolated incidents, but reflective of a system of racial violence intended to control, or circumscribe, the mobility of black bodies, even when the law sided with those being Jim Crowed. In addition to Professor Gloster's attack, Hughes reports that a probation officer of color, Fred Wright, in route to from San Francisco to Oklahoma was "beaten and forced into the Texas Jim Crow coach on a transcontinental train by order of the conductor in defiance of federal law." Furthermore, an elderly clergyman, Dr. Jackson, while traveling south from Hartford, Connecticut, to the National Baptist Convention was "set upon by white passengers for merely passing through a white coach on the way to his own seat."[187] Not only were black citizens regularly prone to vigilante assault while traveling on public transportation, particularly

[185] Langston Hughes, "My America," in *What the Negro Wants,* ed. Rayford W. Logan (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1944), 303.
[186] Ibid.
[187] Ibid.

in the South, but at least in once instance a fatality occurred as a result of racial discrimination.

Pushing the issue of racial violence beyond the civilian population in the United States, Hughes emphasizes that similar attacks were perpetuated against uniformed black soldiers on public carriers with one such attack resulting in "the soldier dragged from a bus and killed by civilian police."[188] These narratives of Jim Crow racial violence in travel are precisely the kinds of incidents that prompted Victor Green to publish a guidebook for Negro travelers. Rather than sit idly by as increasing numbers of African American travelers suffered discrimination, embarrassment, physical harm, and even death at the hands of white citizens, Green—like Harriet Tubman, William Still, Charles Sumner, and other abolitionists who served as conductors for the Underground Railroad—offered a means of protection by acting as a guide to a network of hotels, motels, rest stops, boarding houses, other accommodations, dining establishments, and leisure pursuits.

While Tubman and other abolitionists served as literal guides for escaped enslaved persons seeking refuge and a pathway to freedom in locales beyond the antebellum slave-holding South, Green created a guide to disseminate to African American travelers seeking protection while navigating a largely hostile post-bellum America. Black travelers used this tool—a guide to a veritable geography of safe spaces—to reduce racist incidents while traveling in the South, across the country, and even internationally. In this way, post-bellum and early twentieth-century African American travelers negotiating a precarious national landscape appear to be the

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[188] Hughes, "My America," 1944, 303.

contemporary analogs of enslaved persons requiring a guide to escape the harsh realities of the South. In the case of both the enslaved person and the modern traveler, the South represents an unsafe geographical space plagued by the vagaries of white racial violence. Even more, for both the South is a place in which white persons use violence and intimidation to restrict and delimit the physical mobility of black persons. Put another way, for African Americans and their enslaved predecessors the South geographically and culturally represents landscape and terrain hostile to anything akin to democratic freedom. In addition to historical context, Ramsey utilizes the conversation between Green and Walker to make concrete connections between the *Green Book* travel guide and the cultural historical experience of the Underground Railroad.

A major issue that surfaces in the exchange between Green and Walker is the difficulty of both traveling on the open road (at least not with the sense of freedom and democratic possibility captured in the "Song of the Open Road" by American poet Walt Whitman) and also finding food and safe and decent accommodations, such as restaurants and lodges. Specifically underscoring Hughes's reports of the deplorable and hypocritical treatment of black soldiers, Green reminds Walker of the situation for African American soldiers returning home from World War II. He states, "They have been home for almost five years now. They want all that America has to offer. They are sleeping in their cars, eating out of brown paper bags, and they are on the road. There are just not enough rooms for the thousands of our people traveling."[189] Green indicates a vast shortage of accommodations for a growing cadre of Afro-modern travelers and not only prompts Walker to reflect on a broader, informal network of boarding houses and

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[189] Ramsey, *The Green Book*, 2006, 13.

guestrooms organized by African Americans as a response to that shortage, but also prompts Green to reflect on historical similarities between the *Green Book* and the Underground Railroad.

Communal responsibility and hospitality as mainstays of early modern African American cultural history lie at the heart of the exchange between Green and Walker. Following Green's notation of the shortage of hospitable places available to the African American traveler, Walker expresses his own observation of this lack and his sense of an African American and black communal commitment to provide hospitality to known visitors and strangers alike. He explains, "In every Negro home I've been, I see a folding sleeping cot for that known and unknown traveler who is headed their way."[190] Walker's observation extends our understanding of African American hospitality and ingenuity beyond those places listed in the *Green Book* to include the many homes not documented in the travel guide which remained prepared to receive the inevitable weary traveler unable (and unwelcome) to reside at white-owned hotels and motels. Walker's comment inspires Green to make a historical link adding, "The Underground Railroad was called Egyptland and in some ways, this is a modern day version of that,"[191] a literary expression of the character's understanding of the connection between the cultural historical experiences of enslaved persons escaping through the Underground Railroad and modern travelers using the *Green Book* and its network of accommodations to safeguard Negro travelers desiring to see the country of their birth and sometimes venture abroad.

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[190] Ramsey, *The Green Book*, 2006, 13.
[191] Ibid., 14.

Dialog in the play not only establishes historical context for the situation of African American travel and a connection between the *Green Book* and the Underground Railroad, but also dispels popular misconceptions about the American South, affirming the importance of travel to knowledge. After Walker shares his reflection on the *Green Book*, indicating the significance and centrality of the travel guide to modern African American travelers, he admits his misconceptions of the South. Preceding his travels in the South, Walker believed southerners used corn cobs instead of toilet paper and "was expecting to see Negroes hanging from trees."[192] Walker's statements reflect a view of the US South commonly held by Northern Americans in the early to mid-twentieth century (and often still today), whereby the South represents a backwards geographic space in which the horrors of racial violence and primitive pre-modern conditions are amplified in the Northern imagination, both black and white. This misconception is one which the experience of touring the South helps to correct for Walker as he admits his previously held views of the south "were wrong." Walker's admissions not only foreground the value of travel to combating ignorance, also reminiscent of Mark Twain's famous assertion that "travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness,"[193] but his admitted fears about violence in the South reflect the concerns which lie at the foundation of the many incidents of racial assault Hughes reported in the *Chicago Defender*.

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[192] Ramsey, *The Green Book*, 2006, 9-11

[193] Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad, Or, the New Pilgrims' Progress: Being Some Account of the Steamship Quaker City's Pleasure Excursion to Europe and the Holy Land with Descriptions of Countries, Nations, Incidents, and Adventures as They Appeared to the Author* (Hartford, Connecticut: American Publishing Co., 1869).

Finally, Ramsey uses the conversation between Green and Walker to address the limitations of automobile ownership for those middle-class African Americans for whom automobile ownership provided a means of avoiding the routine racial discrimination which characterized public transportation, particularly via bus and train, during Jim Crow. In addition to noting difficulties African American travelers' experienced securing safe and hospitable accommodations, Walker makes a report to Green regarding gas stations in the South in which he expresses concern about the availability (or not) of full service gas stations for African Americans:

> Well, there's good news and bad news. The Esso service stations will sell us gas, and we can use the restrooms there. But the Esso stations aren't in some of the smaller towns. Our people can buy gas at other stations, but are still not allowed to use the restrooms. This is not acceptable to me.[194]

Though Walker is clearly worried that gas stations in smaller towns do not permit African Americans to use their restrooms, an issue sure to inconvenience any traveler in need of relief after several hours on the road, he is optimistic that a national chain of gas stations does provide full service without discrimination to all travelers requiring relief. Walker's somewhat cynically optimistic report aptly captures the limitations of automobile ownership despite the opportunity automobiles presented African American families wishing to avoid Jim Crow in public transportation. Not only was automobile ownership an atypical luxury possession in black households, but, as Walker's report illustrates, not even automobile ownership could completely shield African Americans from discrimination in their travels. Gas stations at times served as reminders of the long reach

[194] Ramsey, *The Green Book*, 2006, 14.

of Jim Crow particularly in the rural US South, and, as Green's response to Walker's report shows, they also provided opportunities to negotiate consumer power in the interest of civil rights gains.

Walker's report on the situation of gas stations hints at a historical relationship between Victor H. Green & Co., Publishers and Esso Standard Oil Co. and imagines the role consumer power and political lobbying played in achieving civil rights gains on Capitol Hill. As Green notes at the conclusion of Walker's report, "[t]here's a Civil Rights bill[195] in Congress that's being shepherded through by Senator Hubert Humphrey of Minnesota, and Clarence Mitchell of Baltimore" and "Esso[196] has thrown their lobbyist behind this bill"[197] As the pages of the *Negro Motorist Green Book* confirm, Esso gas stations (and a number of other white-owned businesses) responded to the growing power of the Negro dollar by fully servicing the needs of travelers without discrimination. Even more, Esso stations served as a venue through which the travel guide was sold and further disseminated to travelers who required its guidance.

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[195] Enacted by the 88th United States Congress on July 2, 1964, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 aimed to protect voter rights from racial, ethnic and other forms of discrimination via the unequal application of voter requirements. Even more, the landmark legislation empowered US district courts to intervene in cases of discrimination in public education and public accommodations (i.e. public facilities and institutions), including public transportation, among other safeguards. President John F. Kennedy in his June 11, 1963 civil rights speech made an explicit call for such legislation, and the bill gained traction with the sponsorship and support of such figures as Representative Emmanuel Celler, NAACP lobbyist Clarence M. Mitchell, Jr., and Senators Hubert Humphrey, Everett Dirksen, Mike Mansfield. Following President Kennedy's assassination, the bill was championed and eventually signed into law by Kennedy's successor President Lyndon B. Johnson.

[196] The decision by Esso gas stations to cater to an African American clientele during segregated America resulted in part from the decision by Victor Green Publishing Co. to sell travel guides to friendly white-owned businesses in addition to black-owned businesses. As Celia McGee notes in a *New York Times* article reflecting on the function of the *Green Book* during Jim Crow, Green insisted on marketing and selling "not just to black-owned businesses but to the white marketplace, implying that it made good economic sense to take advantage of the growing affluence and mobility of African Americans." As a result of Green's visionary distribution of the *Green Book*, "Esso stations, unusual in franchising to African Americans, were a popular place to pick one up" (2010).

[197] Ramsey, *The Green Book*, 2006, 14-15.

Transformations in rights afforded African American travelers as a result of lobbying the black dollar is not only imagined in Ramsey's play but also observed in the 1949 edition of the historic travel guide. In an article "The *Green Book* Helps Solve Your Travel Problems" written by Wendell P. Alston, Special Representative for Esso Standard Oil Co., Alston describes the unique problems faced by African American travelers but remains optimistic. Improvements in the opportunities available to traveling businessmen as a result of lobbying the black dollar bolster Alston's confidence in using purchasing power to effect meaningful change. His optimism anticipates the gains of boycotts organized by black consumers like the 1955-1956 Montgomery Bus Boycott[198] or the Southern Christian Leadership Conference's boycott of Winn Dixie stores much later in 1986[199]:

> More business men, representing increasing Negro enterprises, are traveling from city to city, and more white corporations cognizant of the mounting purchasing power of the Negro consumer, have Negro representatives in the field, a number of whom, like ourselves, spend half the year traveling.[200]

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[198] Following the arrest of Rosa Parks who refused to surrender her seat to a white passenger, the 1955-1956 Montgomery Bus Boycott was a social and political protest campaign organized in response to the negative effects of segregation in the US, specifically racial discrimination in public transportation in Montgomery, Alabama.

[199] SCLC's commitment to global human rights found its strongest expression in the civil rights organization's fight against apartheid in South Africa. In 1985, SCLC launched a successful boycott of Winn Dixie grocery stores for selling products grown or manufactured in South Africa. Its President Joseph E. Lowery described the chain's business in South Africa as an example of endemic racism in the company and an affront to its African American customer base. For four months, beginning in September, picketers protested outside stores in Georgia, Florida, Alabama and North Carolina. Corporate leadership eventually agreed to cease all business with South Africa and pull any existing product from the shelves.

[200] Wendell P. Alston, "The *Green Book* Helps Solve Your Travel Problems," in *The Negro Motorist Green Book,* ed. Victor H. Green (New York: Victor H. Green and Co., 1949), 3. From the Collections of the Henry Ford, Benson Ford Research Center, Dearborn, Michigan. University of Michigan at Dearborn. Accessed November 7, 2009: www.collections.thehenryford.org

Ramsey's fictional rendering of a conversation between characters Green and Walker is more than dramatization, but a representation of the actual relationship between white-owned businesses like Esso Standard Oil and Victor H. Green & Co., Publishers. Reflecting not only on racial and ethnic paradigmatic restrictions characteristic of early modern African American travel but also on the resourcefulness and inventiveness of individuals and communities to discriminatory impasses, the exposition to Ramsey's dramatic play provides a broad, but detailed cultural historical context for a series of events which unfold in the second half of the play. Walker's discussion of hospitality denied to African American travelers at gas stations in particular foreshadows dramatic events that occur in Act II. Act I, Scene 1 closes on Harlem to shift in the next scene to Jefferson City, Missouri where another agent Keith Chenault is on assignment.

It is in Act I, Scene 2 that dramatist Calvin Ramsey sets the final stage for a complex set of interactions and circumstances which bring into relief the significance of the *Green Book* as a cultural historical artifact. This complex set of interactions includes: 1) The encounter between Keith and a Jewish fellow traveler Victor Lansky, an interaction which relies to some extent on connections between African American and Jewish cultural heritages (particularly shared traumatic cultural memories of racial and ethnic injustices); 2) The negotiations between Keith and Colonel Jones, a racist white businessman, which raise a moral issue about the limits of profit seeking at the expense of personal integrity and racial pride; and 3) The violent attack on Captain Smith as he seeks service at a gas station in Tennessee, which highlights the kinds of violence and embarrassment which the *Green Book* sought to prevent.

Ramsey foreshadows dramatic events leading to the play's climax largely through character development, particularly by unveiling characters' ethical stances, interior thoughts and feelings. Scene 2 opens in the home of Dan and Barbara Davis, a 40-something African American couple who own a boarding house at which the couple Captain George and Jackie Smith, both 30 years of age, and Keith Chenault, in his early 20s, are residing. The Smiths are preparing to leave the Davis's home to travel to Tennessee. In this scene we learn several things which are crucial to understanding the events which unfold in the second act: 1) Captain Smith is uneasy about traveling with his wife to his new post in Fort Benning, Georgia; 2) Barbara's sister Shirley is sending a new guest, Victor Lansky, to stay at the Davis's home; Victor, a white man, requires accommodations, because he refused to reside at the Governor's Hotel due to its "No Negroes Allowed" policy.[201] Dan and Barbara's teenage daughter Neena is distrustful of Keith because "he says things that sound like he doesn't like or respect Negro people" and Neena "saw his car at Colonel Jones's…the most racist and powerful man in this state."[202] Dan considers Neena's warning and ponders why Keith would pay a visit to a man of such ill will:

> The Colonel owns a string of hotels and gas stations all over the Midwest. Mr. "States' Rights" sees himself as a true patriot and Negroes as non-humans. There is not a single Negro in this town that respects that man.[203]

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[201] Ramsey, *The Green Book*, 2006, 42.
[202] Ibid., 50.
[203] Ibid., 51.

The family decides not to confront Keith about this issue, but, instead, to wait and see if Keith volunteers information regarding his visit to Colonel Jones.

In the final act of the play, Ramsey uses a sensitive conversation between Keith and Victor to relate his own artistic statement about racial and ethnic pride, communal responsibility, individual integrity and something like a universal ethic. During this first, of several, complex interactions, two distinct and critical perspectives emerge between Keith and Victor who, based on his ethical convictions, refused accommodations at a hotel bearing a "Whites Only" sign. When Victor explains to Keith why he chose to stay at a black-owned establishment rather than remain at the Governor's Hotel, Keith replies, "Look mister. By your staying here you are taking a room away from a Negro. You're not doing us any favors by staying here."[204] Despite the moral fortitude demonstrated by Victor in challenging a racist practice, on a pragmatic level, Keith indicates that Victor's physical presence in one of few black establishments means less space for black travelers whose safety in travel depends on the availability of such tourist homes. Still, Keith is surprised to learn that Victor has attended a lecture by W.E.B. Du Bois at Morgan State College as well as read about Du Bois in Negro newspapers, an interest which Keith does not share because he has little interest in being a "race man."[205]

Ramsey stages the confrontation between Keith and Victor to challenge our understanding of racial pride, communal responsibility, and personal integrity beyond a strict racial binary of black versus white. That is to say, what we learn about Keith and Victor illustrates not only how well meaning white persons may inadvertently cause

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[204] Ramsey, *The Green Book*, 2006, 77.
[205] Ibid., 73-76.

further complications in their quest to be morally upright, but also how self interested black persons in their racial exclusiveness can make poignant, albeit defensive, observations about limited resources which should be safeguarded due to the very shortage of their availability. Conversely, and with no less force, we also learn from the interaction between Keith and Victor how seemingly unaware white persons can inspire the most astute lessons about racial pride and communal responsibility—through their very commitments to interracial cooperation and solidarity—and how seemingly racially conscious and concerned black persons can allow individual greed and ambition to narrow their aims in ways that prove beneficial to the few but unintentionally detrimental to the many.

Inverting the critical potential of racial binary, Ramsey complicates his artistic vision further by having Victor also offer an assessment of Keith's actions and the ethical consequences of those actions. Though Keith judges Victor to be unaware in his moral fortitude, he is intrigued to learn that Victor owns a copy of the *Green Book*, which Victor explains by noting that there was a time when displaced survivors of concentration camps in Germany "could have used a Green Book of their own."[206] Here, the critical perspective cuts the other way as Victor all but levels an indictment against Keith for exhibiting a lack of racial pride and commitment in his work and politics. Victor, whose dear friend is William Scott, a black photographer who once saved Victor's life from the horrors of a concentration camp in Germany during World War II, is shocked to learn that Keith has been making deals with a racist (and ex- military) businessman Colonel Jones.

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[206] Ramsey, *The Green Book*, 2006, 87.

In an attempt to convince Keith to reconsider his decision to negotiate with a racist businessman, Victor shares his experience of ethnic violence as a camp prisoner.

Ramsey's use of Victor as an authorial voice benefits from connections between Jewish and African American cultural heritages, and the ethics of racial and communal rights struggles fortifies the play's moral claims. After narrating a tale of his experience as a prisoner in a concentration camp, Victor queries Keith about the actions that Keith has taken to ensure that civil rights and liberties are protected and extended to African Americans. Keith replies that he is doing nothing because, "We have people that work on those kinds of things . . . we call them race men." Keith is insistent that he is not a race man but "a business man. That's my contribution. I am making something out of myself."[207] Dissatisfied with Keith's clear intention to reap the benefits of organized black struggle without enduring any of the hardships, Victor tells Keith that Keith reminds him of someone in the concentration camps: "We called him the collaborator . . . We meant it as someone who was a traitor to his people and himself . . . .You are very clever, just coasting along letting others do your share. All you want are the benefits."[208] Offering a scathing rejoinder to Keith's assessment of Victor as unaware and somehow unintentionally inconsiderate of racial politics and needs, Victor's assessment troubles Keith's own sense of himself as a man whose actions, ambitions and investments contribute to broader racial and communal uplift.

Pushing the critical edge of inverted racial binary to its extreme, Ramsey reveals Keith to be not only morally corrupt, but also hypocritical and lacking in personal

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[207] Ramsey, *The Green Book*, 2006, 98-99.
[208] Ibid., 106-107.

integrity. At this tense moment in the conversation Keith pulls out the contract he signed with Colonel Jones and says, "You see this? I've been negotiating for two days, all day yesterday and today . . . cutting a deal with the most powerful man in the state."[209] Keith later reveals he has signed a deal with Colonel Jones, who owns a string of gas stations and hotels, that African Americans can buy gasoline, purchase snacks, and use clean restrooms, but at double the purchase price of white customers. Noting that Keith has just contradicted an earlier statement in support of segregation to protect Negro business, Victor deciphers that Keith must be receiving a hefty commission for this deal and questions conclusively, "So you made a deal with the devil?" Keith agrees.[210] Here, Ramsey fully turns the racial binary black versus white on its head, revealing Keith to be wholly self serving and almost completely devoid of an active moral compass. Though Keith has spent a good deal of time insinuating Victor's naivety is as harmful as it is well-intentioned, Keith has proven to be a greater threat to gaining and securing civil rights for African Americans than his assumedly unaware white counterpart.

Victor's interrogation of Keith reveals Keith to be self-serving and uninterested in furthering anything like civil rights. Instead, Keith has chosen essentially to "sell out" African Americans in order to solidify continued economic gains for himself. The point that Ramsey is making through Victor's critique of Keith is a simple, but potent message: there are well-intentioned white people and ill-intentioned black people and any struggle for social justice must be aware of this reality in order to further its mission and fully realize its goals. Also, Victor's narrative about his experience as a prisoner and being saved by a regiment of African American soldiers frames African American soldiers as

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[209] Ramsey, *The Green Book*, 2006, 109.
[210] Ibid.

heroes in a tale about horrors of the Holocaust. The heated dialogue between Victor and Keith, however, is interrupted by the final dramatic turn in this scene: the abrupt return of Captain Smith and his wife.

To fully exploit the substantial tension created by the verbal exchange between Keith and Victor, Ramsey has the most violent episode of the play occur in the midst of an already established conflict. The drama reaches its climax when Captain George Smith and his wife Jackie Smith return suddenly after a violent encounter during their travels to Fort Benning. Jackie enters with a semi-conscious George and the first clue that racial violence has occurred is that Jackie screams as Victor approaches to offer assistance. "I don't want any white man to touch us," she exclaims. Victor judiciously steps back and Keith retrieves a *Green Book* and calls the number of Dr. Johnston, a black physician listed in the area.[211] In an ironic, but not completely unexpected, twist we learn that George was attacked at a gas station owned by none other than Colonel Jones. A dispute ensued after Jackie returned from using the restroom to find George arguing with the station manager who claimed George owed him more money. The station manager made this claim as a result of the negotiations which Keith completed with Colonel Jones, a contract requiring double pay for black customers. Three white men, including the station manager, physically assaulted George, and Jackie, after rescuing George with a tire jack she finds in the car trunk, decided to return George to the Davis's home rather than continue to Fort Benning.[212]

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[211] Ramsey, *The Green Book*, 2006, 116-117.
[212] Ibid., 118-121.

It is at this dramatic peak that Ramsey offers his unique perspective on the experiences of black travel in the Jim Crow South and the level of unity, commitment, and moral fortitude required to combat the many injustices of this dark period in US history. Ramsey's perspective emerges through two moments in the dénouement, or winding down, of the play. The first is a conversation between Barbara and Jackie in which Jackie reveals her fears and insecurities about being a frequently mobile soldier's wife, a fear which she has not shared with her husband. Barbara's response reveals Ramsey's assessment of the significance of the *Green Book* as a cultural historical artifact and guide in the American experience:

> If there was a Green Book that dealt with all aspects of living, not just travel, I would give it to Neena to spare her from pain and heartache. There is no such book. We have to live life and travel through it on our own and share the things we learn with others to make their journey a little easier.[213]

Not only do Barbara's comments comfort Jackie as she goes upstairs to see George who is now awake and fully aware, but her comments also underscore the value of guidebooks of many sorts in helping us to navigate many aspects of our lives and experiences. She makes these comments, ultimately, to show gratitude for Green's foresight and leadership in creating the *Green Book* during a time when it was most needed. At the same time, however, Jackie's statements are also a lament since the *Green Book* in this instance did not prevent racial violence. Even more, her assertion, "There is no such book," followed by an admission that African Americans must share life lessons with each other reinforces

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[213] Ramsey, *The Green Book*, 2006, 125.

the limitations of any guidebook to be a perfect resource and privileges shared experience as a more reliable guide for road and life travelers.

The second, and final, moment which defines Ramsey's artistic vision in creating this work is the interaction between Barbara and Keith. Ramsey concludes his dramatic work with a final encounter between Barbara and Keith in which Barbara emerges as the voice of the playwright, relating Ramsey's parting critical statement. After Jackie ascends the stairs to join George, Keith comments almost dismissively that "he's going to be alright. I've seen plenty of cats in Harlem beaten up worse than that, and they shake it off, and in a few days are back on their feet."[214] Barbara's reply is exacting and commanding:

> This was no street brawl. They could have been killed. I have a feeling you know something about this double pay for gasoline situation. I have never asked anyone to leave my home, especially this time of night. But I will. I will not allow evil to enter into my home. You have a lot of opportunity to do a lot of good with The Green book, but you also have the capacity to do a lot of harm. Whatever you have done, I want you to undo it before you leave this town. Whatever happened today with Jackie and George will be repeated over and over again until this mess is straightened out. Do you hear me?[215]

Barbara's authoritarian tone in her comments and commands to Keith make clear that it is not enough to have a material guide to ensure the safety of black travelers, but it is also necessary to have committed people of good will in order for that guide to realize its full

[214] Ramsey, *The Green Book*, 2006, 127.
[215] Ibid., 128.

purpose. After Keith agrees to dismantle the contract with Colonel Jones with a simple, "Yes ma'am," Barbara hands him an autographed copy of Du Bois's *Souls of Black Folk* which she got for him at a lecture by Du Bois earlier that night. Dr. Johnston enters the home and Barbara leads him upstairs. Victor retires for the night, and the play closes with Keith standing alone with the autographed book. He slams the book into a wastebasket, walks away, stops, returns to retrieve the book and exits the stage.[216] Keith's unsettling and unresolved departure leaves the reader to speculate about the possibilities of his redemption.

Conclusion and a Coda: Some Reflections on *The Green Book* and Andrea Lee's *The Golden Chariot*

Ramsey's dramatic play *The Green Book: A Play in Two Acts* revisits a moment in the history of African American travel when black travelers required a tool with which to navigate a hostile and often inhospitable nation, particularly the Jim Crow South. Ramsey's play, more than literary abstraction, documents paradigmatic racial and ethnic impasses to African American mobility in a drama which, ultimately, employs the specificities of African American and US history to relate a more universal artistic and critical statement about communal responsibility, individual agency and integrity, and ethics. Providing a window into a little known and darker aspect of US history, Ramsey's play challenges us to consider how we might productively engage the past in ways that foreground the more universal potential of African American creativity without sacrificing those qualities of African American imagination which define it as such. In lieu of a conventional conclusion, I offer here an abbreviated treatment of Andrea Lee's

[216] Ibid., 128-129.

the *Golden Chariot*. Foregrounding African American leisure travel by automobile, Lee's literary work complements Ramsey's two-act play, exploring the cultural history of African American travel beyond public transportation and extending our understanding of the role of guidebooks in the African American cultural history of travel beyond a racially and culturally specific material artifact.

The Golden Chariot is a one act "musical comedy, or traveling minstrel show," published by Andrea Lee in the Spring 2002 issue of *Zoetrope: All-*Story, the literary quarterly founded by Francis Ford Coppola in 1997. Lee's dramatic, musical comedy is set in August of 1962 and stars "a middle-class American Negro family and their brand-new 1962 metallicized Rambler Classic. All of them headed on an epic summer-vacation trip across America, from Philadelphia to the Seattle World's Fair."[217] Like Ramsey's two-act play, published a few years later, Lee's musical focuses on a critical period in US history when narratives of African American domestic travel reflected a broad struggle for freedom of mobility as a civil right. In fact, Scene I of Lee's dramatic comedy begins with a central character—Dr. Earl B. Harmon—contemplating another guidebook African American travelers utilized to avoid humiliation, discrimination and racial violence in their travels across the US: the guidebooks of the American Automobile Association (AAA).

The exposition of Lee's musical comedy, much like that of Ramsey's drama, foregrounds paradigmatic racial and ethnic restrictions on African American mobility and the resilience demonstrated by travelers who utilized guidebooks as a means of avoiding the harsher aspects of modern travel in the Jim Crow South. As the family begins their

[217] Andrea Lee, "The Golden Chariot," *Zoetrope: All-Story* 6(1): 2002, 46–50.

trip driving away from Philadelphia on the Pennsylvania Turnpike Dr. Harmon (husband to Grace Harmon and father of two sons Walker and Richie and daughter Maud) expresses gratitude for the AAA guidebooks with which the family travels safely:

> Oh, it's the AAA that gives us the bedrock of security, the courage to take this leap. American Automobile Association. The name inspires confidence. All of those A's, like the NAACP. The opposite of the KKK. The AAA guidebook tells us that it includes only hotels, motels, inns, TraveLodges, campsites, and guesthouses where, and I quote, no discrimination is made according to race, color, or creed. And there you are, there's the whole country open to us, like one big guesthouse. They can't slam the door in your face if they're in the guidebook.[218]

Positioning the AAA as an acronymic and organizational safeguard in direct opposition to the vulnerabilities and perils signified by the white racist and vigilante KKK (Klu Klux Klan), Dr. Harmon attributes the confidence his family (and other African American families) enjoy in their travels to the AAA guidebook which, like the *Green Book*, served as a navigational tool for African Americans traversing a racialized and precarious American landscape.

Events that unfold in Lee's musical comedy not only illustrate her interest, like Ramsey, in playing with racial binary to impart an artistic vision, but also situate communal responsibility as a significant concern for African Americans. The family's journey is not without incident as younger son Richie in Scene III complains that the

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[218] Lee, "The Golden Chariot," 2002, 48.

family's old Kodak makes them seem "not even modern"—in comparison to their friends—and all the girls in photo magazines "are white, the way all the girls in *Playboy* are, the way everybody is, everywhere in the movies, on TV, in everything we watch or read."[219] Richie's dismay at the lack of black visibility (and subsequent white hyper visibility) in media extends our conception of the negative effects of segregation to include the negative effects of segregated media on individual (and even communal) self-esteem and psyches. Having little (to no) access to images of blackness in popular media, in addition to owning an outdated means of capturing such images, disheartens the younger brother to the point of feeling pre-modern or primitive in relation to his white counterparts. For older brother Walker, individual integrity falls under question when he is not able to fulfill what he sees as his communal responsibility as an African American student in the midst of student protests for rights.

Walker's communal ethics resound with the communal ethos expressed by characters central to the artistic vision of Ramsey's play. Occurring in Scene V, much after Richie's moment of dismay at feeling invisible in US society and media, Walker's displeasure with the family trip ultimately reflects an investment in collective action to achieve social justice as opposed to individual, and self serving, pursuits. The oldest son renounces the road trip as a mistake, complaining, "The fight for civil rights is in the South, so we go west on a sightseeing expedition."[220] Walker expresses frustration that white students are traveling south to partake in SNCC-led student protests, while he returned home from college to work a summer job and vacation with his family. In contrast to the character Keith in Ramsey's play, Walker will not be content to simply

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[219] Lee, "The Golden Chariot," 2002, 49.
[220] Lee, "The Golden Chariot," 2002, 49.

better himself without contributing something to broader contemporary efforts to better the lives of others as well. Walker's frustration at not participating in the student-led fight for civil rights in the South is only exacerbated by his realization that even white students were journeying south to protest in solidarity with their black fellow students and activists. Similar to Ramsey's play, Lee's comedy plays with the black-white racial binary to highlight issues of communal responsibility, individual agency and integrity, and racial and ethnic pride.

Also like Ramsey, Lee frames her depiction of a middle-class African American family's vacation by car in the context of Jim Crow racial discrimination and features a historic travel guide African Americans employed to safeguard their bodies and leisure enjoyment from the vagaries of racial discrimination and assault which defined African American leisure travel in the US at least from 1865 through the 1960s. Unlike Ramsey's play, however, the problems that surface in Lee's piece have less to do with the backdrop of Jim Crow discrimination in travel, hospitality, and accommodations and more to do with internal dynamics of the Harmon family refracted against broader national concerns like the modern struggle for civil rights and the lack of black visibility in US society and popular media. That is not to suggest the family does not experience moments of vulnerability in their travels. Indeed, moments of unease arise when the family stops at motels or national landmarks where, according to Walker, his father appears afraid "he's going to hear that word 'nigger' that would sweep us right off the map of the U.S.A. Sweep his precious family right off to Oz, like a black tornado."[221] Though physical harm does not surface as an immediate concern for the family in Lee's comedy, the threat

[221] Lee, "The Golden Chariot," 2002, 49.

of white racial verbal assault lurks consistently in the background for the elder Harmon. Despite these moments, the family's trip proceeds relatively unimpeded by excesses of racial discrimination and conflict, resulting in a depiction of white racial violence not so much as an immediate physical threat as a recurrent psychological and traumatic memory of past injustices. That is to say that, unlike Ramsey's play, the threat of white racial violence in Lee's musical comedy appears more as a stain on the individual and collective cultural memory of African Americans than an immediate possibility.

Complementing Ramsey's work of drama, Lee's short dramatic piece presents a perspective on African American domestic travel and tourism via automobile, a luxury for many African American families during the 1960s and earlier. Together, both plays represent works of African American literary imagination which utilize material artifacts and historical research that not only ground the imagination in the specificities of African American cultural historical experiences of modern travel, but even more, ably employ those cultural specificities to accomplish more universal critical and artistic statements. In this way, they represent not only abstraction and art, but lived experience and lesson.

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A Final Word In Lieu of a Formal Conclusion

Though a substantial amount of critical attention has been given to mobility broadly in scholarly literature on African American history and culture, little theoretical focus has been given to travel and tourism specifically. Even more, though a number of more recent works have given critical focus to travel and tourism as a topic, little work has addressed travel and tourism to the extent to which migration and Diaspora have been discussed (in particular I refer to theorization that addresses the paradigmatic counters of travel and tourism). Finally, not only has little work focused on the social and cultural phenomenon of travel and imagination broadly, but almost no work has addressed the phenomenon as it relates to African American cultural history and imagination. This dissertation serves as a humble foray into this much needed area of analysis and writing, examining both more studied artists like Brown and Hurston as well as less studied works of art like the *Emperor Jones* and the *Green Book*.

Presenting this work in many ways as an invitation to further work on travel and imagination in African American and African Diaspora and/or Black Atlantic culture and history, I am mindful that work of this sort requires not only courageous inquiry, but novel and mixed methods of analysis. As the editors of *Travel and Imagination* rightfully note in their conclusion to the volume, further explorations of travel and imagination will necessitate "methodological experimentation to develop new ways of capturing both the imagination of individuals and social and cultural imaginaries." My own work with its hybrid methods and complex framework of analysis (what I like to call a "mobilities studies paradigm") exemplifies the kinds of mixed methods required to simultaneously

capture aspects of African American culture and history while also attending to arts and letters as critical manifestations of the imaginary.

From (auto)biographical travel narratives, sociological study and press articles to film, visual and literary art I have used creative and nonfiction works to demonstrate the enormous impact of travel and tourism on the African American imaginary. Examining the little explored social and cultural phenomenon of travel and imagination in African American arts, letters and cultural history, I have argued that African American intellectuals and artists consistently represent travel as a problem of modern mobility precisely due to the modern paradox of freedom and confinement characteristic of African American experiences in the US. Employing the modern paradox of freedom and confinement to theoretically frame my discussion of the racial, ethnic and gendered paradigmatic restrictions on mobility which paradoxically define the African American imaginary—especially as it relates to conceptions of freedom consistent across slave, migration and travel narratives—I have argued African American creative efforts to transcend a restrictive freedom have often done so via recourse to the metaphysical, universal and psychical.

Those efforts, much like their existential analogs evidenced by the long struggle for civil (and human) rights in the US, have yielded mixed results. Still, grappling with dimensions of the modern paradox of mobility has resulted in a vibrant corpus of nonfiction and creative works which continue to offer compelling and instructive lessons about our shared US cultural history and beyond. Even more, as I illustrate with my examination of the train and railroad, travel figurations continue to serve as inspiration

for artists and works of art, albeit complex and ambiguous inspiration. Offering a poignant example of the ways travel has inspired creative and nonfiction works by African American intellectuals and artists as well as the ways artists, intellectuals and creative works imagine and represent travel in the US and beyond as a problem of modern mobility, my hope is that this dissertation inspires further exploration into the intimate relationship between modern travel, cultural history and memory, geography and the African American imagination.