

**AFRICAN AMERICAN  
TRAVEL NARRATIVES  
FROM ABROAD**







AFRICAN  
AMERICAN  
TRAVEL  
NARRATIVES  
FROM ABROAD

Mobility and Cultural Work  
in the Age of Jim Crow



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The two photographs in chapter 5 are from pp. 165 and 180 in *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica* by Zora Neale Hurston. Copyright © 1938 by Zora Neale Hurston.

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## INTRODUCTION

In her autobiography, *Crusade for Justice*, Ida B. Wells describes her response to a minister who had unjustly accused her of immoral behavior. She demanded that he read a retraction of his remarks from the pulpit and notes that she “wanted him to know at least one southern girl, born and bred, who had tried to keep herself spotless and morally clean as [her] slave mother had taught [her].”<sup>1</sup> Accusations of unseemly conduct followed Wells throughout her life,<sup>2</sup> and to counter such attacks, she would often refer to herself in her travel essays as virtuous and womanly. In accounts of her 1893–94 antilynching tours in the United Kingdom, Wells emphasizes her respectability and femininity and links these characteristics to her experience in the segregated South, specifically to episodes in which her gender and morality were attacked by those wishing to enforce the segregation and potential lynching of her black female body. Visual images of black bodies play a significant role in Wells’s narratives and travels. An image of her own face on the cover of her antilynching pamphlets, for example, served as an assertion of subjectivity meant to counter the dehumanizing acts described within, and she often depicted the horrific physical realities of lynching to her U.K. audiences, at one meeting circulating a graphic photo of the lynching of C. J. Miller.<sup>3</sup> Wells’s deployment of positive and negative images of the black body, both her own and others’, not only certifies black moral character but also exposes the irrationality of lynch law and the horrors of segregation and racial violence in the United States.

Several decades after Wells’s antilynching tours, Zora Neale Hurston traveled to Haiti and Jamaica to study religious practices in the West Indies,

and in 1938 she published *Tell My Horse*, an account of her travel and field-work. In her narrative Hurston emphasizes her control over information about herself and her research agenda. For example, she visits the Maroons at Accompong, Jamaica, ruled by a Colonel Rowe, and though she senses that he has questions about the motives behind her visit, she does not reveal to him what they are. He offers to stage a dance for her, but she declines, not telling him that she is “too old a hand at collecting [ethnographic information] to fall for staged-dance affairs.”<sup>4</sup> In both cases she emphasizes her expertise and control over her work and identity and links her physical and professional mobility to her acquisition of cultural knowledge.

Hurston’s ethnographic methods rely on both the mobility and the stasis of the black female body. As an interesting counterpoint to her mobility as a traveler, soon after her arrival in Haiti in 1936, Hurston notes in an undated letter to Henry Moe, her mentor at the Guggenheim Foundation, that her approach is to “just squat down awhile” and wait for things to happen.<sup>5</sup> At other times Hurston asserts her subjectivity and emphasizes her mobility through the degree to which she physically participates in Haitian cultural practices. Her role as a participant observer, even as an initiate observer as she goes through a Canzo ceremony (the penultimate step toward the voodoo priesthood), provides her with an impressive degree of firsthand access to voodoo and its adherents.<sup>6</sup> She privileges her own eyewitness experience of the ceremony and its actual practice over the scholarly explanation of it. Yet despite her physical immersion in Caribbean cultural practices, she is careful to emphasize that she has not been converted to voodoo in a way that would compromise her objectivity or professional authority.

These experiences from the travel writing of Wells and Hurston highlight the diverse cultural work of the African American travel narrative in the age of Jim Crow. Wells participates in the circulation of black bodies, both literally and visually, in her travel, travel narratives, and photographs and thus speaks truth to the lies of racial violence. Hurston’s narrative negotiates the discursive space between the authority of the participant and the distanced objectivity of the professional. Both travelers undertake cultural work relating to issues of identity and mobility and call our attention to the ways in which late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century African American travel narratives reflect *and* intervene in their cultural moment.

I begin and end this book with Wells and Hurston because their travel narratives bracket a particularly tumultuous but significant period in

African American travel discourse and culture. Wells's late nineteenth century represents an important moment in the history of African American travel writing, a time when African Americans are more mobile both within the United States and abroad but also more limited by increasing racial violence, which Wells documents in her antilynching pamphlets *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases* (1892) and *A Red Record: Tabulated Statistics and Alleged Causes of Lynchings in the United States, 1892–1893–1894* (1895).<sup>7</sup> Wells's travel essays in the *Chicago Inter-Ocean* newspaper, describing her antilynching tours in the United Kingdom, call attention to both the opportunities for increased movement and the constraints that racial violence places on African American mobility.

Zora Neale Hurston's *Tell My Horse* was published near the end of the Harlem Renaissance, a period of artistic revitalization during which the increased visibility and mobility of African American writers and travelers, emphasized in Wells's travel essays, become even more pronounced.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, W. E. B. Du Bois, in an open letter to President Warren G. Harding in the March 1921 *Crisis*, underscores this increased mobility with the following appeal: "WE WANT THE RIGHT TO VOTE. WE WANT TO TRAVEL WITHOUT INSULT. WE WANT LYNCHING AND MOB-LAW QUELLED FOREVER. WE WANT FREEDOM FOR OUR BROTHERS IN HAITI."<sup>9</sup> That Du Bois would include the ability to travel without insult in a list including the right to vote and a plea to end lynching and colonial domination points to the connections that black travel writers during this period were making between increased mobility and efforts to expand civil rights and end racial violence. Hurston's Caribbean travel narrative covers similar ideological ground and parallels Wells's essays in its exploration of the relationship between cultural authority and the black female traveler's mobile body. In many travel narratives this relationship challenges the male gaze (what Mary Louise Pratt calls the "imperial eye"),<sup>10</sup> which immobilizes the body of the other while obscuring the white male body housing the objectifying gaze. Framing my book with these two women writers highlights the significant contributions of women to the tradition of African American travel writing and foregrounds the important role that these African American-authored texts themselves play in shaping our understanding of the genre.<sup>11</sup>

The authors under consideration here travel abroad during the beginning and into the height of the Jim Crow era and in the context of the violence and social constraints attending segregationist policy. Wells's antilynching

work occurred just before the legalizing of segregation through *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896, a decision that emphasized the necessity of her efforts. Hurston's anthropological work in the Caribbean occurred just prior to *Gaines v. Canada* (1938), in which the NAACP's Charles Hamilton Houston convinced the Supreme Court that Missouri (and by extension all states) must either build separate law schools for blacks, equal to those of whites, or integrate graduate schools. *Gaines v. Canada* instigated the rupturing of school segregation laws that would culminate in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954. The changing landscape of U.S. civil rights policy during this period created a volatile and complicated context for travel within the United States and influenced writers' reflections on the differing racial climate in other locations outside the country to which they traveled.

While I examine African American travel writing from abroad that is engaged with the material realities of the Jim Crow era, I also stress the particular discursive forms of such texts and the range of cultural work that these travelers undertake, in contrast to the leisure travel agendas of others during this time. As cultural representations, these narratives exhibit what Stephen Greenblatt calls "resonance," the power of objects "to reach out beyond . . . formal boundaries to a larger world, to evoke in the viewer the complex, dynamic cultural forces from which [they have] emerged."<sup>12</sup> In addition to approaching the travel narratives themselves as discursive objects, we might also consider the resonance of the specific physical and discursive objects with which these writers deal in their texts, such as the visual images and photographs that Wells manipulates or the cultural artifacts and practices that Hurston interprets.

Greenblatt's ideas about resonance and cultural boundaries inform my analysis of both the literal and metaphorical movement represented in the African American travel narrative. In terms of their cultural intervention or cultural work, these narratives negotiate cultural boundaries even as they actively establish such boundaries. Greenblatt notes that "if culture functions as a structure of limits, it also functions as the regulator and guarantor of movement. Indeed the limits are virtually meaningless without movement; it is only through improvisation, experiment, and exchange that cultural boundaries can be established." The ratio between mobility and constraint will vary in different cultures, but both are necessary to some degree for cultural survival. Greenblatt further argues that works of art "do not merely passively reflect the prevailing ratio of mobility and constraint;

they help to shape, articulate, and reproduce it through their own improvisatory intelligence” and “variations upon received themes.”<sup>13</sup> Heather Russell makes a related claim about African Atlantic narratives, which articulate the “material truths” of their specific contexts “while simultaneously destabilizing Grand Narrative determinism.”<sup>14</sup> I argue that the African American travel narrative deals with issues of identity in relation to mobility, cultural displacement, and the “reshaped sense of self,”<sup>15</sup> which we might expect to find in most travel narratives, while also offering significant variations on these common themes. The effort that these narratives exert in pushing against the boundaries governing human mobility and constraint constitutes the cultural work of African American travel narratives from abroad during the Jim Crow era.

I am interested in the types of movements that the African American travel narrative sustains and the cultural limits with which it contends. Despite the fact that Hurston draws attention to the dialectic between movement and stasis during her Caribbean travels, the African American travel narrative typically emphasizes mobility over stasis. The cultural work that the genre undertakes in order to understand and represent African American mobility generates specific discursive spaces for the construction of identity. Wells’s and Hurston’s travel texts perform similar cultural work in some respects, but their differences remind us that not all African American travelers share the same ideological agendas or enact the same cultural interventions. Indeed, there is a significant heterogeneity generally found in travel literature that can also be found in African American travel literature during this time.<sup>16</sup> The differences between Wells’s and Booker T. Washington’s travel narratives illustrate this point. Wells’s essays document the historical legacy of slavery by way of the lasting material realities of segregation and violence in the United States, while Washington’s European travel narrative *The Man Farthest Down* (1912) elides historical realities and concentrates on the notion of class uplift in Europe, especially as it coincides with his agenda of racial uplift at Tuskegee Institute.<sup>17</sup> Wells’s travel narratives are published in the form of newspaper essays and as dispatches from a correspondent abroad, while Washington publishes a book of his European travels in collaboration with his white travel companion, the sociologist Robert E. Park. Both Wells and Washington participate in cultural work and explore issues of mobility and identity in African American travel, but they imagine different sets of constraints that define

the boundaries of the genre and arrive at different conclusions about the meaning and purposes of African American mobility in the Jim Crow era.

African American travel writing emerges from a rich but troubled narrative of black movement that continues to influence the genre in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The forced travel of the slave trade<sup>18</sup> and the displacement of African Americans within the United States during northern migration following Reconstruction forge close connections between mobility and African American identity. As Farah Jasmine Griffin argues, both the slave and the migration narrative are associated with images of violence, but the migration narrative specifically invokes the issue of lynching, especially important in the travel writing of Wells, Washington, and Jessie Redmon Fauset. Griffin observes that figures of “hanging bodies, burned and mutilated, women, raped and tormented . . . populate the migration narrative. The texts are filled to the brim with the portrayal of an institutionalized terrorism that daily inflicts itself on the lives of black characters. Lynching becomes a metaphor for all such acts of violence on Southern blacks.”<sup>19</sup> Violence, rather than economic or political factors, is the major catalyst for migration in literary texts from the period, according to Griffin, a notion borne out by a March 1920 *Crisis* cartoon that Griffin reproduces in her study of the subject, “*Who Set You Flowin’?*” *The African-American Migration Narrative* (1995). The cartoon, bearing the caption “The Reason,” depicts an African American man, suitcase packed and heading north, looking back over his shoulder at a lynched black body hanging from a tree and a white southerner gesturing toward it. As Griffin demonstrates, the cartoon emphasizes the close connections between lynching and northern migration in the cultural imagination of early twentieth-century African American writers.

Such spectacles of racial violence certainly motivate Wells to travel north and abroad, but the influences of migration in Washington’s and Hurston’s work might also be viewed in terms of a southern rather than a northern trajectory. As I discuss in chapter 2, a major impetus for Washington’s working trip to Europe was to solidify his arguments about African Americans’ vocational opportunities in the South. In the case of Hurston, Hazel Carby notes that her immersion in and celebration of black southern life serves as a nostalgic counternarrative to black northern migration and urbanization. Carby argues that Hurston refused to “take seriously” the ways in which northern migration was transforming African American culture

and responded to these dramatic transformations by representing African American culture “as primarily rural and oral.” Furthermore, Carby claims that the southernness of Hurston’s black characters “is not defined through a difference to northernness as much as it is related to cultural practices and beliefs of the Caribbean.”<sup>20</sup> In contrast, Eve E. Dunbar contends that Hurston’s “black rural modernity” in *Mules and Men* (1935) and *Tell My Horse* carves out a discursive space in which she can combat racism in the United States, though she has to emphasize the primitive nature of non-U.S. blacks in order to do so.<sup>21</sup> Certainly a southerly orientation informs and complicates the meaning of travel and the representation of mobile black bodies in the travel writing of both Hurston and Washington.

My examination of the meaning of black bodies in transit during the age of Jim Crow is also informed by Sidonie Smith’s point that “the mode of moving a body through space affects the traveler who moves through space as that body” as well as “the meaning that the traveler sends back home in narration.”<sup>22</sup> Differing modes of travel organize black bodies and experience in specific ways, thus influencing the cultural work of these narratives and the discursive space they provide for the exploration of identity. Griffin and Cheryl J. Fish lament the lack of critical attention to such issues in black travel writing when, in their introduction to *A Stranger in the Village: Two Centuries of African-American Travel Writing* (1998), they note that scholars’ failure to “account for the significance of mobility” and its relationship to identity in African American travel narratives results from a tendency to read such narratives as autobiography rather than in relation to the unique qualities of travel writing.<sup>23</sup> Important studies of the African diaspora and black Atlantic do not specifically focus on the ways in which the African American travel text influences writers’ depictions of the relationship between mobility and identity. Paul Gilroy’s volume *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993),<sup>24</sup> for example, examines the cultural hybrid of the black Atlantic as an effect of mobility, but he focuses on this cultural hybrid as a source of and catalyst for modernity and not in relation to the genre traits of the black travel narrative. In this book I address this gap in scholarship by examining the ways in which the genre of the African American travel narrative takes up issues of mobility and identity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and how these travelers and their texts perform cultural work by challenging dominant ideologies about African American experience, expression, and identity in this period of rapid change and racial violence.

African American travel writing presents a particularly under-studied aspect of the genre's history. Travel writing has gained recognition over the past few decades as an important field of study, but as Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs contend, the "complex history" of this "broad and ever-shifting genre . . . has yet to be properly studied."<sup>25</sup> Both Mary Baine Campbell and Alasdair Pettinger note that critical approaches to travel writing must and do change as scholars consider previously under-examined travel texts,<sup>26</sup> a point that Griffin and Fish anticipate when they suggest that the relationship between mobility and identity for African American travelers becomes more clear as African American travel writing receives greater attention.

Postcolonial scholarship has helped us better understand the power dynamics at play in travel texts between mobility and identity. Paul Smethurst contends that European mobility allowed and informed imperial exploration and discourse through the production of a binary privileging the "West's mobility, science and (modern) *progress*" over "the historical and geographical *stasis* of 'the Rest'" of the world. Imperial discourse relies on this system of binaries to suppress the inherent instability and disorder that accompany mobility, giving rise to an imperial form that attempts to order and control "disorderly mobility." Such orderliness is maintained by way of a narrative voice, structure, and other formal elements (such as motifs or images) that impose narrative patterns replicating the "authority of imperial order."<sup>27</sup> A particularly cogent example of this process can be found in the ways that the travel book industry colluded with mapmaking, economic priorities, ethnographic practices, and settlement patterns to effectively colonize the African Congo.<sup>28</sup> Smethurst also notes that the relationship between imperial ideology and the orderly form of imperialist travel writing can break down in various ways: "The main threat to textual orderliness comes from the essential link between travel writing and *mobility*. . . . But if mobility is enabling for the imperialist traveler, it is also potentially threatening and disorderly" because "travel produces the overlapping of conflicting spaces and temporalities of heterotopias, which are the problematised sites where order and form no longer confer meaning on words and things."<sup>29</sup>

Although African American travel texts during the Jim Crow era are not always engaged in deconstructing the imperial forms imposed by the British Empire specifically, these narratives resist hegemonic forces and discourses that threaten to overwhelm or discount black mobilities. Black

travel texts participate in the sort of heterotopic exigencies that problematize orderliness. The dichotomy between order and disorder in the travel narrative coincides with what John Zilcosky posits as the “central generic attribute” of travel writing—that is, the inherent tension between truth and fiction, the “built-in anxiety” about the precariousness of its truth claims that distinguishes it from other autobiographical genres.<sup>30</sup> As we consider the tensions in African American travel writing between truth and fiction, between order and disorder, and between the actual movement of black bodies across time and space (in direct challenge to the literal and literary forms of containment forced upon black bodies by dominant cultures) and the literary creation of black selves in the pages of travel accounts, we uncover important characteristics of the African American travel writing produced during this period.

The genre of the travel narrative has always been difficult to define or codify, and some critics, such as Jan Borm, question whether travel writing is a genre at all, viewing the travel book as a hybrid text or “generic *in-between*er” that complicates attempts to categorize it.<sup>31</sup> Some definitions of travel writing as a genre are so open-ended that almost any text, fictional or factual, dealing with travel, even in a tangential fashion, could be counted as such. Often critics avoid specific definitions altogether by arguing that, like the narratives of mobility it encompasses, the genre itself is fluid and in flux. Alfred Bendixen and Judith Hamera identify two general emphases in travel literature: a focus on the self as “part of an autobiographical project . . . to explain oneself . . . to the reading public” and a “focus on the external details of nature and society in a specific location.” Although the first type obviously bleeds into life writing (the title of books such as Sidonie Smith’s *Moving Lives* [2001] suggests the overlap between travel writing and autobiography) and the second shares affinities with other forms of discourse such as historical writing, journalism, scientific observation, and sociology, Bendixen and Hamera maintain that travel writing “emerges in unique ways in response to the historical, political, and aesthetic particulars of a given context.”<sup>32</sup>

In the past few decades, the establishment of book series, academic journals, scholarly societies, conferences, and a body of critical and theoretical approaches specific to travel writing studies underscores the unique response of travel writing to human mobility. The enduring amorphous nature of travel writing, however, is perhaps anticipated in its critical history. Philip

Gould observes that travel writing in eighteenth-century British America “was not really an identifiable literary genre. Rather, the discourses of travel permeated all sorts of genres and writings that included a wide array of audiences and intentions.” This generic openness is illustrated by one of the earliest forms of travel literature, “the promotional writing meant to attract emigrants and funding for British colonies,” which was, as Wayne Franklin writes, “less concerned with the details of an actual endured journey than with the general design of America as a scene for potential ones.”<sup>33</sup>

The idea of the United States as a *tabula rasa* designed for potential adventures and onto which the traveler might project his or her desires for a better life does not account for the experience of enslaved Africans, however, as they are brought to the new world. Indeed, African American oral narratives, such as the story of the flying Africans or Ibo Landing, for example, complicate the notion of the promotional tract as the *ur-text* of American travel writing. The stories shared among African American slaves of field workers who, at the shout of an overseer, rise into the air and fly back to Africa, or of shackled slaves who, upon disembarking from slave ships at the Georgia coastal island port of Ibo Landing, walk back across the water to Africa, depend on the idea of travel back to an African homeland and away from the hostile space of the United States.<sup>34</sup> These stories inform African American mobility and call attention to a sense of identity and mobility that contradicts the narratives of American economics and exceptionalism on which the early promotional tracts depended.

Because of the specific cultural and identity politics informing black travel, the African American travel account often undertakes cultural work more aggressively and with more urgency than narratives by white travelers. This cultural work manifests itself in various ways during the Jim Crow era. As Wells’s and Hurston’s travel narratives demonstrate, African American travelers often place particular emphasis in their travel writing on the relationship between mobility and corporeality, which Virginia Whatley Smith connects to the slave narrative’s account of “shocked bodies and fractured psyches.”<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, African American travelers address sociological context in ways that often aggressively rework the leisure-class tourist narrative, as Wells, Washington, and Fauset demonstrate. In terms of national identity, Bendixen and Hamera insist that for all American travelers, “American self-assertion is more vigorous on foreign soil.” While this is true for some of the travelers I examine, the notion of

individual or national self-assertion itself is often challenged by the African American travelers discussed here. Bendixen and Hamera seem to elide race and even gender when they suggest that “the traveler’s persona stands in for Americanness” when Americans are abroad and then list some of the personae that Americans adopt: the expat, the tourist, the good-natured American gentleman, the sailor who “goes native,” and the adventurer.<sup>36</sup> These are positions that assume a certain amount of white male privilege, and the African American travelers whom I discuss often adopt an ironic or critical attitude toward or actively work to distance themselves from such identities.

African American travelers also express reasons for traveling that may differ from those of white travelers. For example, cultural critique and observation often trump leisure as a motivation for African American travel. Bendixen and Hamera note that whereas a “privileged Euro-American traveler might construct travel to Europe or the Middle East in terms of various ‘origin myths,’ as return visits to lands that are part of one’s historical or cultural ancestry, African American travelers pointedly problematize these myths by naming complicity with slavery and white amnesic nostalgia as their core, if unacknowledged, components.”<sup>37</sup> Thus Wells explicitly rejects the tourist sites and institutions of London (the British Museum, the Royal Academy, or Westminster Abbey, for example) that might be complicit with cultural or racial oppression and characterizes herself as too busily engaged in her antiracism work to act the part of tourist or pilgrim.<sup>38</sup> She deemphasizes these roles in order to promote the important antilynching message of her lecture tour and establish herself as a credible eyewitness to racial violence. Wells claims cultural and narrative authority by downplaying the conventional focus on the traveler’s gaze in the genre of the travel narrative and drawing attention to her mobile black body.

Hurston even more explicitly comments on the charged racial atmosphere in Jamaica, which invokes some of the physical realities of Reconstruction-era American racism, such as segregation and lynching. She notes that the privileging of whiteness in Jamaica is “a curious spectacle to the eyes of an American Negro” and says she feels as if she has “stepped back to the days of slavery or the generation immediately after surrender” in the United States.<sup>39</sup> Hurston’s discussion of racial prejudice and black female oppression underscores how the violence against the black female population in Jamaica parallels racial wrongs in the United States. African American

travelers' critical views of their own or others' mobility in the context of segregation emphasize the unique and disruptive nature of black movement, particularly as it relates to issues of self and cultural identity and authority in travel texts written during the age of Jim Crow.

In addition to works by Wells and Hurston, I examine other texts from this period that grapple with African American mobility, identity, and cultural authority, including Washington's *The Man Farthest Down* (1912), Matthew Henson's *A Negro Explorer at the North Pole* (1912), and Fauset's 1921 and 1925–26 travel essays published in *Crisis* magazine. I explore African American travel writing that has not yet been studied extensively (Henson and Fauset) or that has been studied as a sociological or anthropological treatise but not as travel writing (Wells, Washington, and Hurston). In chapter 1 I analyze Wells's body as physical proof of the potentially empowering aspects of mobility and show how Wells herself serves as an example of the ways in which the African American community might resist historical narratives of inequality and achieve cultural power. In chapter 2 I contrast Washington's approach with that of Wells. The close ties in Washington's travel account between the traveler's physical mobility and the race's upward social mobility leads to an elision of racial history and a representation of mobility and constraint that is very different from Wells's bold critique of segregation. Washington's travels and narrative reveal the power of racial ideologies and the ways in which they complicate the traveler's identity and agenda. Similar to Wells, Washington attempts in his narrative to reimagine African American mobility and the genre of the African American travel text in liberating ways (most obviously by pitting his text against the conventional slave narrative), but his problematic position on issues such as lynching and the black business class, as well as his desire to validate his views of work and progress embodied by Tuskegee Institute, cause him to sustain Old South ideals in his travel text.

Similar tendencies appear in Washington's brief introduction to *A Negro Explorer at the North Pole* (1912), an account of Matthew Henson's 1909 North Pole expedition with Robert Peary. Washington downplays Henson's role in the discovery of the pole and notes his "useful[ness]," "fidelity," and "devotion" to Peary.<sup>40</sup> Peary also supplies a foreword to the narrative, characterizing Henson as a credit to his race. In my examination of Henson's travel narrative in chapter 3, I observe how this framing of an African American text recalls the rhetoric and design of slave narrative prefaces,

usually written by white men to legitimize the text. In his text, however, Henson resists the confining cultural, structural, and linguistic forces of the slave narrative form and incorporates genre traits of the European exploration narrative. The tension in the text between the genres of the exploration and slave narrative challenge Eurocentric notions about both the subjects and the work of exploration and discovery; such a challenge represents an important aspect of the cultural work that the African American travel text performs during the Jim Crow period. Henson's text pushes against the constraints of these narrative traditions, and he claims authority as a traveler as he explores what happens when a black body occupies the position generally reserved for the white explorer.

In chapter 4 I examine Jessie Redmon Fauset's less explicit claims to the African American traveler's authority in her *Crisis* travel essays from 1921 and 1925–26, in which she sets the everyday realities of her life abroad against scenes of poverty and oppression. Writing of France, for example, she eloquently describes the lack of heating in her *pension* and the lengths to which landlords will go to avoid providing it. Such commentary contrasts dramatically with the conditions of the poor on which she reflects in her essays "Dark Algiers the White" and "This Way to the Flea Market." Fauset's observation in "Yarrow Revisited" that in France she can take her meals in whatever tearoom "*takes [her] fancy*,"<sup>41</sup> alluding to the lack of such freedom in Jim Crow America and emphasizing her increased mobility in Europe, provides a stark contrast with her discussion of class oppression (a topic also appearing in the travel texts of both Washington and Wells) and reveals how the mundane experiences of travel abroad and their formal depiction in African American travel writing from this period highlight issues of cultural power, identity, and mobility.

Fauset was often regarded as part of the Harlem Renaissance's "Rear Guard," the conventional, "imitative" writers who avoided innovative form and content in order to court white critical approval, and her work has been criticized as "sentimental" and "dull."<sup>42</sup> Yet readers' undue concerns about the perceived middle-class sensibilities of Fauset's *Crisis* essays, including her travel pieces, eclipse the more radical impulses of this writing. Indeed, we might consider the combination of conservatism and activism in Fauset's essays a reflection of the "discourse of respectability" that Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham identifies in the Black Baptist Church Women's Movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Higginbotham notes

that Baptist women during this period “emphasized manners and morals while simultaneously asserting traditional forms of protest, such as petitions, boycotts, and verbal appeals to justice.”<sup>43</sup> Given the challenge posed by the movement to representations of black women as either mammies or Jezebels, we could also view Wells’s emphasis on respectability and her efforts to resist negative characterizations of the black female body within this same context. And although Fauset’s essays may at first blush seem disengaged from important racial issues, a more careful reading reveals that this is not the case; indeed, the fact that we find her essays published alongside reports of lynchings in *The Crisis* (for example, her article “Sunday Afternoon” appears just before the NAACP’s report on U.S. lynchings from 1885 to 1922 in the February 1922 issue) underscores parallels between the contexts of racial violence informing Fauset’s and Wells’s travel writing.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, the tension between conservative and radical impulses in Fauset’s work, what we might view as a passive versus an active stance toward cultural issues, invokes the tension between order and disorder that Smethurst describes, as well as the dialectic between stasis and mobility that Greenblatt identifies as a feature of the cultural work that texts perform and which Hurston explicitly notes of her travels in the Caribbean.

In addition to exploring this dialectic in her travels, Hurston, similarly to Henson, claims cultural and narrative authority by occupying a position often designated as the province of white men. Hurston’s use of the participant observer persona raises the question of what it means when an African American woman fills this role often occupied by a white male researcher. Scholars have characterized Hurston’s unique approach as “improvising ethnography” or a function of her “erratic temperament.”<sup>45</sup> In chapter 5 I consider her innovative style as a function of her physical mobility and examine her text in relation to the genre traits of the travel text. Through the liberated mobility and cultural work of her Caribbean travels, Hurston reimagines slavery’s Middle Passages as routes that mobilize and authorize black female bodies to participate in the preservation of stories and culture and the literal and metaphorical transmission of bodies of knowledge across oceans.

Through an examination of the relationship between mobility and identity in African American travel texts during a period of cultural change, this book provides insights into the way late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century African American travel narratives challenge dominant ideologies

about African American experience and history. The differing stances taken in these texts toward issues of mobility and identity also reveal the variability of the African American travel text. Indeed, I have chosen the writers and texts under consideration because of this variability, but also because through such variation they demonstrate shared patterns and themes. As I demonstrate, African American travel writers during the Jim Crow era perform cultural work in several ways: literally, through their cultural interventions abroad; aesthetically, through their negotiation of the tensions that characterize travel writing as a genre; and rhetorically, through their arguments about the complex relationship between mobility and identity in African American travel.

## NOTES

### INTRODUCTION

1. Ida B. Wells, *Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells*, ed. Alfreda M. Duster (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 44.
2. Patricia A. Schechter, "Unsettled Business: Ida B. Wells against Lynching, or, How Antilynching Got Its Gender," in *Under Sentence of Death: Lynching in the South*, ed. W. Fitzhugh Brundage (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 305.
3. Wells, *Crusade for Justice*, 178.
4. Zora Neale Hurston, *Tell My Horse* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1938), 35.
5. *Zora Neale Hurston: A Life in Letters*, ed. Carla Kaplan (New York: Doubleday, 2002), 376.
6. Hurston uses the term "voodoo" to refer to the Vodun religion in *Tell My Horse*, and I use this same term in my discussion of her text.
7. Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Southern Horrors* (1892) and *A Red Record* (1895), in *On Lynchings: Ida B. Wells-Barnett*, ed. Patricia Hill Collins (Amherst, N.Y.: Humanity Books, 2002), 25–54, 55–151.
8. A number of African American writers traveled to Europe during this time. William A. Shack also notes the many black musicians who traveled to the Montmartre district of Paris to perform in the early twentieth century (*Harlem in Montmartre: A Paris Jazz Story between the Great Wars* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001]).
9. W. E. B. Du Bois, "Opinion of W. E. B. Du Bois," *The Crisis*, March 1921, 197.
10. Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Enculturation*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2008).
11. For a discussion of similar issues in relation to women writers and Harlem Renaissance periodization, see Venetria K. Patton and Maureen Honey, introduction to *Double-Take: A Revisionist Harlem Renaissance Anthology*, ed. Venetria K. Patton and Maureen Honey (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001), xix–xxxix. Barbara McCaskill and Caroline Gebhard note that conventional approaches to the time span

from the end of Reconstruction to the end of World War I view the period as the “nadir” of African American thought and culture. Though these decades were filled with “increased violence and de facto racial segregation,” McCaskill and Gebhard also note that their reappraisal of this “post-bellum, Pre-Harlem” period reveals how it was “a crucial stage in African American cultural and literary history and a period of high aesthetic experimentation and political dynamism,” without which the Harlem Renaissance would not have been possible (introduction to *Post-Bellum, Pre-Harlem: African American Literature and Culture, 1877–1919*, ed. Barbara McCaskill and Caroline Gebhard [New York: New York University Press, 2006], 1, 2, 4). As my own book demonstrates, important work was also being done by African American writers during this time in the genre of the travel narrative.

12. Stephen Greenblatt, “Resonance and Wonder,” *Bulletin of the Academy of Arts and Sciences* 43, no. 4 (1990): 19.
13. Stephen Greenblatt, “Culture,” in *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, 2nd ed., ed. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 228, 229.
14. Heather Russell, *Legba’s Crossing: Narratology in the African Atlantic* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009), 3.
15. Frances Bartkowski, *Travelers, Immigrants, Inmates: Essays in Estrangement* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 101.
16. Critics noting the genre’s heterogeneity include Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs (introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, ed. Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs [New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002], 10–11); Dennis Porter (*Haunted Journeys: Desire and Transgression in European Travel Writing* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991], 19); and John Zilcosky (“Writing Travel,” in *Writing Travel: The Poetics and Politics of the Modern Journey*, ed. John Zilcosky [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008], 7–8).
17. Booker T. Washington, *The Man Farthest Down: A Record of Observation and Study in Europe* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1912).
18. The particular effects of the slave trade and its aftermath on American identity have been examined at length by critics such as James Olney (“‘I Was Born’: Slave Narratives, Their Status as Autobiography and as Literature,” *Callaloo* 20 [Winter 1984]: 46–73); Valerie Smith (*Self-Discovery and Authority in Afro-American Narrative* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987]); William L. Andrews (introduction to *African American Autobiography: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. William L. Andrews [Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1993], 1–25); and Farah Jasmine Griffin (“Who Set You Flowin’?” *The African-American Migration Narrative* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1995]).
19. Griffin, “Who Set You Flowin’?” 3, 16.
20. Hazel Carby, “The Politics of Fiction, Anthropology, and the Folk: Zora Neale Hurston,” in *History and Memory in African-American Culture*, ed. Geneviève Fabre and Robert O’Meally (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 31, 40.
21. Eve E. Dunbar, *Black Regions of the Imagination: African American Writers between the Nation and the World* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013), 21, 30–31.
22. Sidonie Smith, *Moving Lives: Twentieth-Century Women’s Travel Writing* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), xii.
23. Farah J. Griffin and Cheryl J. Fish, introduction to *A Stranger in the Village: Two Centu-*

- ries of *African-American Travel Writing*, ed. Farah J. Griffin and Cheryl J. Fish (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), xiv.
24. Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993). Recent studies have expanded the scope of Gilroy's paradigm to include Indian, Mediterranean, or intra-African diasporas (for example, Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, "Rewriting the African Diaspora: Beyond the Black Atlantic," *African Affairs* 104, no. 414 [2005]: 35–68). Scholarship that extends Gilroy's examination of the black Atlantic as an influence on the genealogies of modernity and globalism includes Maria Diedrich, Henry Louis Gates Jr., and Carl Pedersen, eds., *Black Imagination and the Middle Passage* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); James Walvin, *Making the Black Atlantic: Britain and the African Diaspora* (London: Cassell, 2000); and Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker's early history *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000). Brent Hayes Edwards, in *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), emphasizes the global dimensions of black travel in the early twentieth century in relation to the multiple translation practices during the period. In *At Home in Diaspora: Black International Writing* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), Wendy W. Walters complicates the conventional opposition between home and mobility in the work of black international writers during this period, and Dunbar explores links between African American writers' international experiences and their construction of black experience in the United States in *Black Regions of the Imagination* (2013). Russell in *Legba's Crossing* (2009) conducts a narratological analysis of black texts that disrupt prescriptive Euro-American literary conventions, though she does not focus on the genre of the travel narrative, and Keith Cartwright emphasizes the "modes of Afro-creole agency" that shaped the modernity of the Caribbean and Deep South in *Sacral Grooves, Limbo Gateways: Travels in Deep Southern Time, Circum-Caribbean Space, Afro-Creole Authority* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2013), 5.
  25. Hulme and Youngs, introduction, 10.
  26. Mary Baine Campbell, "Travel Writing and Its Theory," in Hulme and Youngs, *Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, 262; Alasdair Pettinger, introduction to *Always Elsewhere: Travels of the Black Atlantic*, ed. Alasdair Pettinger (London: Cassell, 1998), xii.
  27. Paul Smethurst, introduction to *Travel Writing, Form, and Empire: The Poetics and Politics of Mobility*, ed. Julia Kuehn and Paul Smethurst (New York: Routledge, 2009), 1, 2, 7.
  28. Zilcosky, "Writing Travel," 5.
  29. Smethurst, introduction, 7.
  30. Zilcosky, "Writing Travel," 8, 9.
  31. Jan Borm, "Defining Travel: On the Travel Book, Travel Writing and Terminology," in *Perspectives on Travel Writing*, ed. Glen Hooper and Tim Youngs (London: Ashgate, 2004), 13; Jan Borm, "In-Betweeners? On the Travel Book and Ethnographies," *Studies In Travel Writing* 4, no. 1 (2000): 78.
  32. Alfred Bendixen and Judith Hamera, introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to American Travel Writing*, ed. Alfred Bendixen and Judith Hamera (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 2, 3.
  33. Philip Gould, "Beginnings: The Origins of American Travel Writing," *ibid.*, 13; Wayne

- Franklin, *Discoverers, Explorers, Settlers: The Diligent Writers of Early America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 21.
34. Variations of these stories are recorded in Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps's edited collection *The Book of Negro Folklore* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1958) and in the Georgia Writers' Project's *Drums and Shadows: Survival Studies Among the Georgia Coastal Negroes* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1940).
  35. Virginia Whatley Smith, "African American Travel Literature," in Bendixen and Hamera, *Cambridge Companion to American Travel Writing*, 198.
  36. Bendixen and Hamera, introduction, 5, 6.
  37. *Ibid.*, 6–7.
  38. Wells, *Crusade for Justice*, 174.
  39. Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, 17, 18.
  40. Booker T. Washington, introduction to *A Negro Explorer at the North Pole* (1912), by Matthew Henson (Montpelier, Vt.: Invisible Cities Press, 2001), xxxiii.
  41. Jessie Redmon Fauset, "Dark Algiers the White: Part I," *The Crisis*, April 1925, 255–58; "Dark Algiers the White: Part II," *The Crisis*, May 1925, 16–20; "This Way to the Flea Market," *The Crisis*, February 1925, 161–63; and "Yarrow Revisited," *The Crisis*, January 1925, 109.
  42. Deborah McDowell, "Introduction: Regulating Midwives," in *Plum Bun: A Novel without a Moral* (1929), by Jessie Redmon Fauset (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990), xii; Sterling Brown, *Negro Poetry and Drama* and *The Negro in American Fiction* (1937; New York: Atheneum, 1968), 142; Robert Bone, *The Negro Novel in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), 101.
  43. Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880–1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 187.
  44. Jessie Redmon Fauset, "Sunday Afternoon," *The Crisis*, February 1922, 162–64. I am indebted to Amy Rupiper Taggart, who noted this juxtaposition in Fauset's work and examined her participation in the rhetoric of respectability in a presentation at the 2011 Feminisms and Rhetorics conference, "The Axis of Agency and Social Control: Jessie Fauset's Rhetorical Space and Rhetoric of Respectability." Rupiper Taggart, however, does not examine this phenomenon in Fauset's travel essays.
  45. Ronald E. Martin, *The Languages of Difference: American Writers and Anthropologists Reconfigure the Primitive, 1878–1940* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005), 234–63; Robert E. Hemenway, *Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 213.

## 1. EMBODYING SEGREGATION

1. Ida B. Wells, *Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells*, ed. Alfreda M. Duster (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 113.
2. Alsadair Pettinger, "At Sea—Coloured Passenger," in *Sea Changes: Historicizing the Ocean*, ed. Bernhard Klein and Gesa Mackenthun (New York: Routledge, 2004), 153–54.
3. Wells, *Crusade for Justice*, 4.
4. Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavas Vassa, the African. Written by Himself* (1789; New York: W. Durrell, 1791); Mary Seacole, *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands* (London: James Blackwood, 1857);