

how spatial movements are connected to freedom, liberation, justice, and citizenship, as is the case with the journeys of the enslaved to pursue their freedom, the nineteenth-century transit justice struggles, and the significance of mobility during the Civil Rights Movement. At the same time, the travels of Black people are also associated with oppression, dehumanization, and immobilization. By considering various forms of travel and the meanings attached to them, it is possible to define travel in broader terms to include experiences of travel that have often gone unnoticed. In line with Cresswell's assertion that "[w]e cannot understand new mobilities [...] without understanding old mobilities" ("Towards" 29), I maintain that it is indispensable to consider the above-presented implications of travel when analyzing contemporary narratives of travel. To be certain, the journeys of Black travelers that are analyzed in this study reflect a particular privilege, financially, if nothing else; however, their mobility should not be simply understood as a given. In the context of the cultural history of Black im/mobility, their physical mobility underscores the significance of travel for people of color, which is certainly not lost on these travelers. The associations of travel with limitation and confinement on one side, and freedom, self-determination, resistance, and citizenship on the other, are crucial for understanding the underlying connotations of journeys and movements that inform Black travel and its representation in literary production.

## 2. Diasporic Return and the Significance of Africa in the Black Imagination

To the heirs of those uprooted people, Africa quickly became a distant, intangible entity, yet for many it also remained a pivotal constituent in their search for identity, a quest for cultural roots.

—*Daria Tunca and Bénédicte Ledent, "The Power of a Singular Story: Narrating Africa and Its Diasporas"*

What is Africa to me?

—*Countee Cullen, "Heritage"*

Throughout American history, the continued denial of citizens' rights and privileges and the devaluation of Black lives have led African Americans to gravitate toward Africa in a variety of ways. For instance, they have traveled

to the continent to settle either temporarily or permanently in the homeland of their ancestors and they have turned to the continent for the purpose of empowerment, cultural identification, and inspiration. The journeys to Africa and the resulting literary and cultural engagement reflect the desire of Black people in the diaspora to make sense of their personal as well as their collective and historical relationships with the continent. In the following, I examine the performed and imagined returns to Africa and delineate the different significations of Africa in the Black diasporic imagination. An understanding of Africa's centrality for the self-conception of the diaspora and the meanings attached to it is essential for the analysis of contemporary narratives of travel to Africa. As I demonstrate in Chapter IV, all of the travel narratives analyzed in this study are concerned with the question eloquently expressed by Cullen: What is Africa to me? Evidently, responses to this question vary depending on the particular cultural and historical context.

From the moment that Africans were violently uprooted from their native lands and transported to the Americas, they desired to return to Africa. The Middle Passage was for almost all Africans a one-way journey that forever separated them from their homeland. People of African descent had to create ties to the foreign and hostile land where they lived and slaved. However, they maintained a connection to Africa and expressed their persistent links to their native countries by preserving the memories of the place and by sustaining cultural and religious practices and customs, passing them from one generation to the next. The idea of Africa as the land of origin remained vital to many, as did the wish to return: "The notion of a return to the point of origin," as Gilroy points out, "predate[s] any formal organisation around this goal" and in the imagination of the enslaved, they would return to Africa eventually, even if it was only in the afterlife (*Black Atlantic* 208). In historical accounts of the slave trade and the Middle Passage, stories appear frequently of enslaved Africans jumping overboard to their deaths to free themselves and let their souls return home to Africa (see, for example, Rediker, *Slave Ship*; Snyder 2015). Similarly, tales of enslaved Africans who ascend into flight to escape from slavery and return to an African homeland permeate the African American folklore tradition. The flying African embodies mobility and resistance to slavery and oppression. Referring to this tradition of flight, Commander writes, "Literal and figurative flights closer to Africa are indicative of the ceaseless reconfigurations of resistance to elide racism and its attendant systems of domination" (5). She further points out that "Black Americans have been perpetual travelers enraptured by the promises of flight since the Middle

Passage. Flight is transcendence over one's reality—an escape predicated on imagination and the incessant longing to be free" (7). For centuries, then, the idea of return has persisted in the cultural imagination of people of African descent long after slavery ended.<sup>17</sup>

Religious beliefs also played a crucial role in strengthening the idea of return. While scholars have pointed out that religious indoctrination and conversion were used as a means of social control over enslaved Africans (as they were taught submissiveness, piousness, and acceptance of their condition), they also emphasize that enslaved people embraced the Christian tradition because it provided narratives of emancipation and freedom as well as access to symbolic resources, which they could interpret according to their purposes (Paul 168). In particular, the biblical narrative of the emancipation of the Israelites from Egyptian slavery by God emerged as an important symbol and a metaphor for their own enslavement. Enslaved people of Christian faith discovered within the Exodus story a narrative that allowed them to interpret and make sense of their condition. Albert J. Raboteau, a renowned scholar of American religious history, explains that Black Christians appropriated the Exodus narrative and "articulated their own sense of peoplehood. Exodus symbolized their common history and common destiny" (13). The narrative also nurtured enslaved people's internal resistance because it contradicted White Christians' racist claims that Black people were inferior to them and therefore destined to slavery. Sustaining their belief in a future where they would eventually be freed, the Exodus narrative provided a refuge. This belief also entailed the idea of a Promised Land, or Canaan, which "referred not only to the condition of freedom but also to the territory of freedom—the North or Canada" (14). In the Black imagination Africa, too, emerged as the Promised Land to which African-descended people were meant to return. The idea of a return formed the foundations of the Black Zionist tradition. The Exodus narrative found its way into spirituals sung by the enslaved, in abolitionist writings of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and in speeches held

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17 For an account of the stories of flying Africans in the folklore of enslaved people, see Jason R. Young's 2017 article "All God's Children Had Wings: The Flying African in History, Literature, and Lore."

during the Civil Rights Movement of the twentieth century and served as a blueprint for the Rastafari belief that developed in the 1930s in Jamaica.<sup>18</sup>

The first organized efforts to return to Africa began in the eighteenth century. From then onward, formerly enslaved and free Black people from North America as well as from other Western societies began to repatriate to Africa, inciting the long tradition of traveling and emigrating to the continent that has come to be known as Back-to-Africa movements. Many others followed their routes to Africa, including Black missionaries, emigrationists (that is, proponents of emigration), intellectuals, scholars, political figures, and tourists. The repatriation of Black people began after the American Revolutionary War. Several thousand enslaved Black people joined the fight on the side of the British, enticed by the promise that they were to earn their freedom. After Britain's defeat, some of the Black Loyalists settled in Nova Scotia or were brought to London by British forces. In both locales, however, they faced hardships and frustration, such as severe climate, food shortages, and labor exploitation in Canada, and discrimination and poverty in England. Seeking alleviation from the precarious living conditions of London's so-called 'Black Poor,' the charitable organization Committee for the Relief of the Black Poor supported the founding of a British colony on the west coast of Africa. This first effort at repatriation was a historic event: In 1787, a ship set sail for Sierra Leone carrying several hundred members of the Black community from London who established a rudimentary coastal settlement upon arrival. A few years later, in 1792, some 1,200 Black Loyalists from Nova Scotia followed and built a second colony. In both colonies, however, the settlers faced conflicts with local Africans and were plagued by disease as they were ill-equipped for life in such an environment.

The repatriation of Black people from America to Sierra Leone was also supported by the American Colonization Society (ACS) founded in 1816. Established and dominated by White people, their motives to sponsor and encourage Black emigration initiatives were highly controversial. Some thought of their work as a humanitarian effort aimed at relieving Black people from slavery; others subscribed to the belief that White and free Black people could not coexist and thought it best to remove the Black population from the United

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18 On the Exodus narrative as a key cultural metanarrative of Afro-Atlantic communities, see Rhonda R. Thomas's *Claiming Exodus: A Cultural History of Afro-Atlantic Identity, 1774-1903* (2013).

States. Southern enslavers who were members of the ACS backed the endeavor because they saw the growing population of freeborn and recently emancipated Black people as a threat to the institution of slavery. Black Americans predominantly denounced ACS-sponsored emigration; they viewed it as a deportation scheme meant to remove free Black people from the country where they had been born (Blyden 103). However, the ACS played an important role in the repatriation efforts of Black Americans as the organization acquired land and over the course of the nineteenth century brought a few thousand migrants to West Africa. In 1819, the organization founded another colony south of Sierra Leone: the Republic of Liberia, which became an independent nation in 1847. The mid-nineteenth century witnessed a significant increase in Liberia's settler population. Regardless of the many hardships they faced, from the arduous ship voyage that cost the lives of many prospective settlers to the difficulties that emigrants encountered when landing on African shores, Black Americans continued to leave the United States, having lost faith in a country that did not accept them as equals. Their journeys testified to the intense longing for freedom and a better life.

In the nineteenth century, Black "emigrationists looked upon Africa as the new promised land, a land of milk and honey where its offspring in the diaspora could return and thrive" (Kelley 21). Among the most influential figures calling for Black repatriation to Africa were the merchant and shipowner Paul Cuffe, who brought 38 Black settlers to Sierra Leone in 1816; Daniel Coker, who immigrated to Sierra Leone and became the first Methodist missionary; the physician Martin Delany, who led an exploration party to West Africa in the 1860s; and Bishop Henry McNeal Turner, who founded the International Migration Society and organized two voyages to Africa in the late nineteenth century which brought Black emigrants to Liberia.<sup>19</sup> These emigrationists carried American political, legal, social, and cultural conventions with them as they prepared to settle in Africa. Supporters of emigration and the settlers who were steeped in American belief and value systems viewed it as their responsibility to 'enlighten' native Africans. The return of Black Americans to Africa was seen "as a kind of civilizing mission, bringing Christianity to the heathens and technology and knowledge to the backward natives," an endeavor to redeem Africa—not from European colonialism but from the decline of its civilization, thus signaling a "radically different cultural approach to 'return'"

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19 For a detailed study on Black emigrationists and colonizers, see Campbell (2006) and Blyden (2019).

(Kelley 21). Gaines, who connects the imperialist civilizing mission with the ideology of racial uplift, explains that those who supported and participated in this mission believed that they could demonstrate their fitness for US citizenship and counter racial stereotypes by presenting themselves as “agents of civilization” (“Black Americans” 437). This attitude says much about how Black emigrationists of this time thought about Africa. As a result, the consequences of Black emigration and colonization were often disastrous for the local population because the newly arrived settlers did not view Africans as equals and frequently exploited and dispossessed them (Dodson and Diouf 77). Needless to say, there is an inherent irony in the way that people fled from discrimination and exploitation in the United States only to arrive in Africa and establish themselves as the superior population, devaluing the culture of the local inhabitants.

Unsurprisingly, controversial stances on the debates about emigration existed within Black American communities. The idea to return to their ancestral African homeland resonated with those who felt that they would never be fully integrated into American society and that their struggle for equality was a delusion. True freedom, they argued, was to be sought outside the national boundaries of the United States. In their imagination, Africa transformed into a utopian, paradisiacal homeland where Black people could prosper free from oppression and exploitation. Moreover, their return to the continent presented an antidote to the dispossession they experienced in the United States. For them, Africa was both a past and future home. By contrast, opponents of Black emigration, such as Frederick Douglass, did not think of Africa as a potential homeland and rejected the colonization movements. To them, Africa was irrelevant and repatriation efforts were seen as a distraction from the necessary struggle for equality in the United States (Campbell 67). Reasoning that they were first and foremost Americans, they argued that Black people belonged in the United States and were determined to fight for their rights and claim the country in whose building and development they had played a quintessential role. They displayed fierce opposition to emigration and denounced the movement, trusting that they would gain freedom and equality in the United States at last. The different sentiments and attitudes demonstrate that throughout history, Black people were divided on the topic of repatriation. Furthermore, the controversies over this issue also reveal the heterogeneity of Black people’s experiences in the United States.

Back-to-Africa movements often coincided with times of despair in the United States. Black Americans’ fears of never being able to fully participate in

American society and culture were reflected in the rising interest in repatriation initiatives. Although the number of these initiatives declined in the post-emancipation period, when the abolition of slavery engendered a new sense of optimism in a brighter future in America, several historical moments saw an upsurge in emigrationist sentiments. Especially during times when it seemed that hopes for integration and equality would never be realized, repatriation initiatives flourished. One such period was the last decade of the nineteenth century: In the 1890s, the interest in emigration peaked, particularly among Black people in the South because this period was marked by the rise of racial violence and pervasive discrimination (Blyden 126-27). With unprecedented rates of lynchings of Black people, this period is referred to by historians as the nadir of race relations (Logan 23). In the face of rising violence and the institutionalized segregation, which profoundly curbed many of the rights Black people had gained during Reconstruction, the hopes for integration and citizenship rights vanished, causing African Americans to reassess their place in society and rethink their prospects in the country (Blyden 127). As Africa was perceived by many as a safe haven from discrimination, they sought out ways to emigrate to the continent. In terms of actual numbers of people leaving the United States during this time, the movement was relatively small compared with pre-Civil War emigration.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, as Campbell stresses, “numbers alone do not reveal the movement’s full significance”—rather, the meaning of the movement is to be found in the way it prompted “a searching debate among African Americans, posing fundamental questions about black identity, history, and destiny” (103). That is to say, the importance of Black colonization and emigration is not so much found in the number of people making the journey across the ocean but in the ways that Black Americans engaged with issues concerning their self-conception both in relation to the United States and Africa as well as their current and future place in US society. Black Americans’ relationship to Africa, therefore, reveals much about the domestic issues and concerns that were relevant for them at the time.

In the early twentieth century, the Back-to-Africa movement was reinvigorated by Jamaican-born Marcus Garvey. A radical pan-Africanist who emigrated to the United States, Garvey founded the nationalist United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), which promoted racial pride and advocated for Black Americans’ return to Africa. Garvey’s UNIA excited unprecedented

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20 Campbell notes that only an estimated 2,500 Black Americans settled in Africa in the four decades following the Civil War (103).

popularity for the return idea and attracted supporters from North and South America, the Caribbean, Africa, and Great Britain. Calling for African independence and for people in the diaspora to return to their ancestors' homeland, Garvey envisioned a Black-owned shipping line, the Black Star fleet, sailing to conduct trade and bring Black Americans to Africa. In the end, however, Garvey's mission failed: The shipping line went bankrupt and he was accused of fraud and sentenced to prison before being deported from the United States in 1927. Although his vision was never realized, and, ironically, he himself never set foot on African soil, his influence remained strong.

In spite of many unsuccessful efforts to return to Africa, the desire to leave the United States has endured throughout history.<sup>21</sup> The search for an alternative homeland in Africa and beyond testifies to African Americans' estrangement from and disappointment with the United States. Proposals for repatriation to another place express the wish for a new beginning and are a manifestation of the Black diaspora's "freedom dreams"—that is, "the dream of a new world" envisioned by political activists, intellectuals, and artists which has fueled social movements and political engagement (Kelley 3, 126). Africa was and remains a fertile ground to plant and nourish the dreams of African-descended people—as a home, a place to reconnect with cultural roots, and as a space that can offer the reconciliation of emotional and psychological divisions caused by history.

Yet, although Africa has been central in Black American thought, very few people actually traveled or emigrated to the continent. Most African Americans engaged with Africa imaginatively, creatively, intellectually, or politically. Whereas the first generation of Africans who arrived in chains in the Americas had tangible connections to and concrete memories of the places they were forced to leave behind, subsequent generations were farther removed from their land of origin and their cultural heritage. Consequently, the perception of Africa underwent significant transformations. For Black people, their ties to the continent were often a source of shame because of the internalized

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21 In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Africa was the most important destination for African American expatriates and intellectuals in search of an alternative homeland. But other potential sites of relocation were also considered, including Haiti, the Caribbean, and Canada (see, for example, Dodson and Diouf 69-74). In the twentieth century, Paris, France, became an important meeting point—and sometimes even a new home—for Black intellectuals, artists, expatriates, and refugees (see, for example, Fabre 1993).

derogatory images of backwardness and primitivism that pervaded American thought. But Africa was also a place of desire, a site of Black diasporic beginnings and cultural origins, a sanctuary from racism, and an ancestral home that could provide a future for Black people from around the globe. Moreover, the projection of Africa as a mother who awaits her long-lost children from the diaspora expresses the longing to recall and reclaim the continent. In this regard, the feelings and attitudes ranged from revulsion and rejection to pride and appreciation. Visions of the continent changed over time, depending on the particular historical context, but Africa has always been and remains an “abiding presence in black political, intellectual, and imaginative life” (Campbell xxiii).

Cultural and literary productions served as a canvas for people of African descent to contemplate the meaning of Africa and think about themselves in relation to America and Africa as well as the world in the early twentieth century. The 1920s saw a cultural and aesthetic return to an African heritage: During the Harlem Renaissance, African American arts flourished and were widely celebrated. Africa seized the imagination of creative artists who sought to reestablish cultural connections to the continent. Turning to Africa as a source of inspiration and pride, they countered the popular perception that African Americans had lost their ties to African cultures because of slavery and the rupture it created. In the cultural imagination of the diaspora, Africa was constructed as a space imbued with different and conflicting meanings. Africa’s image during the Harlem Renaissance was characterized by mythical and romantic notions, which were products of the imagination rather than stemming from actual experiences. Literary responses to Africa were often ambivalent as they conjured a space that is simultaneously familiar and strange, primitive and uncivilized, a source of cultural origin and an unknown territory, a place of escape from racism in the United States, a home, and a site of cultural renewal (T. Harris 25-26). These images often relied on and were shaped by prefigured ideas of the continent, both positive and negative. Cullen’s poem “Heritage,” which was written during this time, demonstrates the ambivalent image of Africa in the literary and cultural imagination. Here, Africa takes shape as a space with fluid and shifting meanings.

Africa fulfills important functions in the processes of collective identity formation. It is a persistent but ever-evolving signifier in conceptions of Black identity. African Americans’ relationship with Africa has always been central in understanding and identifying themselves—but this has never been an easy task. Campbell confirms the significance of Africa in the Black imagination

when he contends that “African Americans continued to look to Africa, seeking in its dim outlines a clue to the meaning of their own bitter, bewildering history” (xxiii). The personal stances toward Africa of Black individuals are also reflected by the changing denominations at different points in time: Labels such as ‘Afro American,’ ‘Black,’ ‘Black American,’ and ‘African American’ reveal different identity politics and different ways to define and formulate individual and collective identities in relation to Africa.<sup>22</sup> Some felt a close connection to Africa; they saw the continent as their homeland and imagined Africans as brothers and sisters. Referring to themselves as *African Americans*, they stressed their cultural African heritage. Others, however, distanced themselves from it, arguing that centuries of separation from Africa had turned them into (Black) Americans. The disconnection and alienation they felt toward Africa were often also a result of the prevailing negative perceptions and representations of the continent. African-descended people have imagined and continue to see themselves as part of a diasporic community that has its roots in Africa. The idea of transnational connections between Black people based on shared African origins is central to strategies of identification as well as resistance against nationalist and racist historiography. However, such “essentialist, romantic ideas about black cultural unity” are also heavily criticized (Kelley 16). What transpires is that people of the Black diaspora engage with Africa in different ways and attach different significations to the continent (surely, African migrants of recent decades who have direct ties to specific places and peoples in Africa engage with the continent differently than do African Americans whose engagement with the continent is most often purely imaginative). Importantly, African Americans’ relationship with Africa has continuously been changing and complex attitudes toward the continent exist, ranging from contempt and disregard to solidarity and pride (J. H. Meriwether 11).

In the mid-twentieth century, as Black nationalist sentiments rose, African American engagement with Africa was particularly palpable: The African independence and decolonization movements were symbolically linked with the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, representing a

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22 For a detailed overview of the changing denominations and the identity politics behind these labels, see the introductory chapter (tellingly titled “I’m not African. I’m American”) of Blyden’s *African Americans and Africa*. See Manthia Diawara’s *In Search of Africa* (1998) for a discussion of the ramifications of American, African, and African American identity constructions.

common political struggle against oppression that strengthened the imagined ties between Black Americans and Africans. During this time, African Americans became outspoken proponents of African liberation and sought to lend political support. In contrast to previous periods, “African Americans embraced contemporary, as opposed to historic, Africa” (J. H. Meriwether 1) and openly identified with the continent. This renewed sense of identification and the cultural celebration of Africa was expressed in African Americans’ embrace of African fashion, food, cultural and religious practices, political outlooks, and the adoption of African names. It was also reflected in travels to the continent: From the late 1950s until the 1970s, a number of Black people sought to resettle in Africa temporarily or establish long-term residence. In contrast to the organized repatriation efforts, during this time people mostly traveled to Africa as individuals or in small groups. Among the most common destinations was Ghana, the former Gold Coast.

In 1957, under the leadership of President Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana was the first sub-Saharan African country to gain independence, carrying not only the dreams and aspirations of the African continent but also those of Black Americans who came to identify strongly with their African heritage. This promising vision of Africa in the diasporic imagination reached a peak in the 1960s and gave rise to a new wave of travelers. President Nkrumah—a prominent advocate of Pan-Africanism who sought to unify African-descended people—was mindful of the freedom struggle that was being fought on the other side of the Atlantic and invited Black Americans to relocate to Ghana and participate in the building of the new nation. The West African country, therefore, became the chosen home for many professionals, political leaders, activists, intellectuals, and writers, including W. E. B. Du Bois, Malcolm X, and Maya Angelou.<sup>23</sup> Their discontent with the situation in the United States as well as their search for identity and community motivated their journeys to Africa. Africa’s growing allure as a continent shaking off the shackles of colonialism presented a contrast for these individuals to the conditions at home, the unfulfilled aspirations and disappointed hopes for justice, and the persistent forms of discrimination and unequal opportunities in a structurally racist environment (Coles 125-26). However, many of the ‘returnees’ experienced a profound sense of alienation, isolation, and disillusionment with their new homeland (see ch. III, sec. 3.3). Black repatriates’ inability to integrate into

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23 Gaines’s *American Africans in Ghana: Black Expatriates and the Civil Rights Era* (2006) offers a detailed study of Black Americans in Ghana in the mid-twentieth century.

their adopted societies and, importantly, the fall of Nkrumah in 1966, led many to return to the United States.

In the post-civil-rights era, the publication of Alex Haley's 1976 award-winning novel *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* and its television adaptation, one of the most-watched television programs of all times, incited a resurgence of interest in African Americans' relation to Africa. Combining fictional writing, family stories, and autobiography, *Roots* covers two hundred years of Black diasporic history and tells the story of Haley's family; beginning with his great-great-great-great-grandfather Kunta Kinte, who was kidnapped by slave traders from his native village of Juffure in the West African country Gambia and forcibly brought to America. Haley accomplished what many in the diaspora longed for: to retrace the routes of their ancestors back to Africa. By creatively retracing his ancestry across generations back to Africa, Haley not only rewrote his own family history but symbolically filled the void caused by the historical ruptures of the slave trade and slavery, thus providing the Black diaspora in America with a concrete history. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. explains that the best-selling novel "provided flesh and bone to the elusive ancestors that black people [...] conjured in the absence of proof denied by slavery" ("Foreword" xiv). Moreover, Haley's "*Roots* gave a name and shape to the longing for a verifiable identification of personal and cultural beginnings" (Hirsch and Miller 1); for this reason, the book had a tremendous effect on the discourses of cultural origins in the United States. Black American perceptions of African ancestry shifted from the atrocities of slavery and the feelings of shame connected to it to an accentuation of pride in their African cultural roots. As scholars have stressed, Haley's epic narrative of his family's history "was largely responsible for creating a new consciousness in mainstream America of the slave past from the perspective of the enslaved" (Dubey and Goldberg 598). By drawing on the quintessential American narrative of progress, success, and the fulfillment of the American Dream, *Roots* proved tremendously appealing to Black and White audiences alike. As Madhu Dubey and Elizabeth S. Goldberg point out,

*Roots* gratified the demands of both black cultural nationalism and American patriotism: Haley's journey of genealogical recovery fed black pride by affirming African origins for contemporary black identity, while the 'up from slavery' narrative culminating in the spectacular individual success of Alex Haley, a descendant of slaves, attested to the fulfilled promise of the American Dream. (598-99)

The book and its adaptation aroused a nationwide interest in genealogical research, inspiring people to learn about their past and family history.<sup>24</sup> *Roots* represents a literary manifestation of the phenomenon of roots trips and shaped Black diasporic travelers' expectations of Africa. Undoubtedly, it popularized the roots journey and led to the expansion of diaspora tourism to Africa. The invocation of *Roots* in medial and literary narratives and its frequent appearance as an intertext in contemporary accounts of Black travel testify to its cultural significance—its powerful and persistent transnational influence.<sup>25</sup>

Clearly, Back-to-Africa movements have subsided in the twentieth century. As Blyden notes, "Although African Americans have sought a homeland in Africa, and some have settled on the continent, either temporarily or permanently, it continues to exist largely in the imagination of black Americans" (204). However, the idea of return and desire to reconnect with the ancestral continent prevails until today and is reflected in the roots trips to Africa as well as the flourishing of DNA testing to reveal ancestral connections. Since the late twentieth century, Africa has been a preferred destination for Black diasporic tourists, who are drawn to historical markers of the slave trade, many of which are located on the African west coast. The former slave forts and dungeons, such as the Elmina and Cape Coast castles, with their 'Door of No Return' through which African captives were forced, mark the point of embarkation on the dreadful journey across the Atlantic and into slavery. These sites figure as the symbolic points of connection between the continent and the diaspora. Visits to Africa thus elicit explorations into the history of slavery and reflections on the condition of the Black diaspora. This persistent engagement with Africa, be it in the form of actual travels to the continent or symbolic journeys of the imagination, elucidates the importance of Africa for the Black diaspora. Africa serves as a source for identification (personal, collective, and political) and cultural heritage and as inspiration for artistic, cultural, and literary productions. Return, both literal and figurative, is al-

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24 For an account of how Haley's *Roots* inspired a boom in multicultural and self-revelatory genealogy, see Jackie Hogan's *Roots Quest: Inside America's Genealogy Boom*, especially 28-31.

25 The essay collection *Reconsidering Roots: Race, Politics, and Memory* (2017), edited by Erica L. Ball and Kellie Carter Jackson, offers an assessment of the impact of the *Roots* phenomenon, in particular its influence on the discourse on slavery, race, and civil rights.

ways concerned with questions of identity, origin, and the past and future of the Black diaspora.

