

DIGITAL PAN-AFRICANISM FOR LIBERATION:
AN AFROCENTRIC ANALYSIS OF CONTEMPORARY
TRAVEL DISCOURSES BY AFRICAN AMERICANS VISITING
MODERN EGYPT

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ABSTRACT

Utilizing Afrocentric thought, this dissertation examines digital Pan-Africanism as a new theory that demonstrates the liberatory potential of digital technology including internet-based writing and businesses. Focusing on the burgeoning Black travel industry, it specifically considers contemporary travel narratives written by African Americans visiting Egypt and includes a thematic analysis of travel blog posts. It highlights the role technology plays in making international travel more accessible to African Americans and the potential that diasporic travel has in creating and strengthening inter-cultural bonds between African people throughout the diaspora. To this end, this dissertation advocates utilizing digital platforms as a tool for increased diasporic travel and Pan-African activism. It conceptualizes this new theory, discusses its implications within and outside of the travel industry, and offers a model to demonstrate its effectiveness and applicability.

DEDICATION

To my Grandmother, Mary Will Burnett,
My first student and one of my many teachers
1938-2019

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I would first like to thank the Creator, my ancestors and my parents, Kim Burnett who was entirely responsible for my formative education, and Dr. Stan Harris, who taught me to appreciate Black history and devour books. Many thanks to my brothers Joshua, Josiah, & Justin for providing me encouragement and a loving family support system. I am indebted to my professors, colleagues and classmates at Temple University who stretched and sharpened my mind. Special thanks to Ms. Tammey Abner who has been an ally since day one, Jennifer Williams who is always brilliant and helpful, Manna Duah who was with me through every step of this excruciating process and spent many long nights writing and editing with me, and my advisor Molefi Kete Asante who is always inspiring and encouraging. Asante sana to my many writing partners over the years, Garrison, Manna, Ife, Matthew, Raven, Christine, Ashley, Whitney, Candace, Theresa and many others. I am grateful for my students Hanna, DelVal, Temple and Stockton, some of whom first insisted that I begin this journey and all of whom constantly ensured that I stay on my toes and continue to learn. Thank you to all of the librarians who assisted in my research (especially Latanya Jenkins). A million thanks to my partner Rob who made numerous personal sacrifices, encouraged me consistently and supported me emotionally, domestically and financially so that I could finish this project. Lastly, thank you to my ENTIRE village –all the family, friends, peers, colleagues, and even strangers who have been supportive in many different ways throughout this journey. I hope

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCING EGYPT

*No matter where you travel,
You still be Black,
You carry all your history
On your own damn back.
Your momma raised you proper
Your daddy caused you pain
You understand Beethoven,
But you still love Trane.*

—Houston Baker Jr.,
“No Matter Where You Travel, You Still Be Black” (1979)

Travel has always been an essential facet of human activity. Since the earliest migration in and out of Africa, *Homo Sapiens* have proved to be mobile. One can surmise that humans moved for many reasons. For example, they moved for purposes of food, for mating, for security and survival, and for curiosity. It is generally accepted that all seven billion humans can trace their ancestry to the continent of Africa. We know that there have been many periods of human movement during the prehistoric period. History affords us the example of humans being forced to leave their homes as is the case with Africans during the period of Arab and European slavery. Consequently, travel has been at the core of the human experience since the beginning of time. An examination of the nature of travel in the ancient world demonstrates that from the African cradle, humans traveled as far as Australia.

When did African Americans begin to gain an appreciation for traveling to Africa? Prior to the 1960s, African Americans knew very little of the African continent or its inhabitants. In 1945 and 1954, Eslanda Goode Robeson and Era Bell Thompson

respectively both lament this fact in their travel narratives.¹ Robeson and Thompson intentionally set out to visit several countries throughout the continent of Africa in order to learn the truth about their ancestral homeland. As the movement for African independence from European-controlled African nations began to capture the world's attention while the struggle for civil rights and subsequent Black Power Movement occupied African Americans, Africans throughout the diaspora began to collectively think more seriously about their African heritage and identity more than ever before.

African Americans, feeling the need to find and reconnect with their African cultural heritage, began traveling to the continent more and more. What were their reasons for making these journeys? Were they political? Personal? A mixture of both? Is it possible that African Americans were choosing to make pilgrimages to Africa because after several centuries of watching the ties that they had to their homeland brutally and intentionally severed by those who sought to enslave them physically, mentally and spiritually, they had now thrown off those shackles and begun to seek and demand the truth which led them to uncover more information about the continent than ever before? This dissertation seeks to discover what prompts African Americans to make the journey back to Africa, especially to Egypt, and to determine how these journeys shape their psychological and ideological relationship with the continent and inform their sense of identity and Africanity. Additionally, it engages Black travel writing across spacial and temporal realities and considers the implications that travel blogs hold for transforming personal narrative into a liberating social space. Ultimately, it interrogates the recent

¹ Robeson, Eslanda Goode, *African Journey*, (London: Victor Gollancz, 1946) and Thompson, Era Bell Eslanda, *Africa: Land of My Fathers* (New York: Doubleday Robeson, 1954). Robeson's journey began in May of 1936, but her travel narrative, was not published until a decade later.

changing nature of the politics of movement and freedom among African-Americans and advances digital Pan-Africanism as a new model for diasporic travel that promotes African agency, seeks to maintain victorious consciousness, and strives towards African diasporic unity.

There is a new travel movement quickly gaining steam among the younger generations of the Black community. According to a series of studies completed by Mandala Research, Black millennial travelers in the US spent at least 48 billion USD in 2010. By 2018, that number swelled to 63 billion.² While the wider travel industry largely ignores African American travelers, several Black-owned travel companies have sprung up to address the needs of Black travelers. Evita Robinson, creator of the Nomadness Travel Tribe brand, is one of the leaders of this new Black travel movement. “Communities like Nomadness were created because I don’t wait for y’all. We answer our own call. We create our own businesses. We’ve created our own niche within this larger industry...”³ Robinson and other Black travel business owners have seized the opportunity to assert their agency and exercise self-determination by controlling narratives around Black travel, shifting modes of cultural production, and promoting interdiasporic movements with potentially restorative measures.

Since the last historic Green Book (Negro Travel Guide) was published in 1966, the growth in numbers and frequency of travel among African Americans continues to

² Mandala Research. “African American Travel Represents \$63 Billion Opportunity.” *GlobeNewswire News Room*, GlobeNewswire, 20 Dec. 2018, <https://www.globenewswire.com/news-release/2018/12/20/1670310/0/en/African-American-Travel-Represents-63-Billion-Opportunity.html>.

³ Hubbell, Diana., “How Evita Robinson Is Disrupting the Travel Industry.” *Condé Nast Traveler*, Condé Nast, 8 Mar. 2019, <https://www.cntraveler.com/story/how-evita-robinson-is-disrupting-the-travel-industry>.

increase at unprecedented rates. In 2001, the African American market was identified by the United States Travel Association (USTA) as the number one fastest growing segment in the travel industry.⁴ As the Black travel industry in the US continues to rapidly expand there is a growing need for Afrocentric scholars to broaden discussions about diasporic unity, activism, and liberation to include the powerful potential of African travel and 21st century technologies that provide greater access to that travel, particularly for African Americans. To this end, this dissertation advocates digital Pan-Africanism as a tool for utilizing digital platforms in diasporic travel and Pan-African activism. It conceptualizes this new theory, discusses its implications within and outside of the travel industry, and offers a model to demonstrate its effectiveness and applicability.

The broad objective of this study is to evaluate the liberatory potential of Black travel writing as a form of digital Pan-Africanism. I accomplish this by first laying a foundation for the study by delving into the existing literature on related subjects and providing a comprehensive historical overview of the scholars and texts that have worked to heighten awareness around the cultural and historical importance of ancient Egypt to African Americans. I endeavor to present a critical interrogation of the factors that undergird the current desire on the part of African Americans to travel to modern Egypt. I do this by first examining the motivating factors that African Americans have had to travel historically, and then hone more specifically on their reasons for traveling to the continent of Africa before finally pinpointing Egypt as the country of interest for this project because of its position as the core civilization of African antiquity. I then move to a thematic analysis of data culled from published, personal narratives of past trips to

⁴ “African American Travel Represents \$63 Billion Opportunity.”

determine what prompts these journeys and to ascertain the potential of Black travel writing as a form of digital Pan-Africanism.

It is impossible to enter into a serious discussion of the relationship and connections that continental Africans have historically had with the Africans who were brought to America without acknowledging how the legacy of enslavement and colonialism have impacted their knowledge of each other and shaped their interactions with each other. For hundreds of years, Europeans did everything in their power and imagination to dissolve cultural bonds between these two groups of Africans and to dissuade their mutual identification with one another.⁵ Djibril Tamsir Niane notes that, “Africans do not know much about the black world of the diaspora. On the other hand, the stereotypical views of the black African and his country put forth by colonialists and reflected in their racially biased pronouncements have tended to distort whatever knowledge the blacks of the diaspora have about Africa”.⁶ Maulana Karenga extends this argument further as he sees these actions as more than mere distortions of knowledge, but rather as a gross violation of human rights, contending that the "destruction of human possibility involved redefining African humanity to the world, poisoning past, present and future relations with others who only know us through this stereotyping and thus damaging the truly human relations among peoples.”⁷ Maulana Karenga Despite these continued and deliberate attempts by agents of white supremacy to incapacitate both

⁵ Temple, Christel, *Literary Pan-Africanism: History, Contexts, and Criticism*. Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2005, 50.

⁶ Temple, *Literary Pan-Africanism*, 106.

⁷ Quoted in Epps, Henry, Jr., *Concise Chronicle History of the African-American People Experience in America: From Slavery to the White House*, CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2012, 76.

groups and permanently sever their ties to one another and to the outside world, these bonds, however tenuous, have persisted. By 1864 the number of Black people in the United States who had been born in Africa--and therefore had a direct tie to the land--was around only one percent, however African Americans continued to seek out their ancestral homeland-- searching for clues to the heritage that had been plucked from their grasp. As African Americans began traveling back to Africa in the years that followed, they found very different answers to a question not yet fully shaped.

Where Hughes imagined an idyllic homeland, adherents of the contemporaneous Garvey movement saw the continent as the future seat of a great black empire. Others, traveling at different times and under different auspices, have cast Africa as a “Dark Continent” crying out for Christian civilization, a headquarters for global anti-colonial revolution, or a field of opportunity for entrepreneurs. Still others have denied any connection to the continent, the better to advance their claim to full citizenship in the United States. Yet whatever the individual motives and aspirations, every African American has confronted the question that Hughes’s contemporary, Countee Cullen, posed so eloquently in his 1925 poem “Heritage”: “What is Africa to me?”⁸

This question is one that will be answered in multiple ways time and time again as African Americans continue to engage the continent of Africa in an attempt to cope with sense of loss and dispossession caused by the European slave trade and seek to heal from the effects of colonization which Ama Mazama aptly describes as “not simply an enterprise of economic exploitation and political control, as it was commonly held, but also an on-going enterprise of conceptual distortion and invasion leading to widespread confusion, and ultimately, ‘mental incarceration.’”⁹

Marcus Garvey, the Jamaican political activist, writer, orator and entrepreneur,

⁸ Campbell, James T., *Middle Passages : African American Journeys to Africa, 1787-2005*. New York: Penguin Press, 2006, xxii.

⁹ Mazama, Ama., 3.

was one of the key voices influential in reshaping African American perspectives of Africa. In 1914 he founded the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) and launched what many consider to be the largest mass movement in African American history centered around the cause of “African for the Africans—that is, that the Negro peoples of the world should concentrate upon the object of building up for themselves a great nation in Africa.”¹⁰ As a strong Black nationalist, Garvey advocated for an end to white colonial rule in Africa and campaigned for the political unification of the continent through cooperation and unity between the continent of Africa and the diaspora. He extolled a shared heritage that extends back to the time before the European slave trade disrupted the socio-cultural framework of African peoples. Garvey’s “Back to Africa” movement sought reconnection with and return to, the African continent while his stirring speeches and *Negro World* publication spread his ideas to members of the UNIA and the African American community who rallied around his cause.

Historical Context for African American Travel

African Americans have a rich tradition of travel and exploration steeped in heritage and rooted in specific cultural and identity politics. Copious evidence exists to document the fact that African peoples have been traveling the world since the dawn of time--establishing vast empires and acquiring great wealth. One well-documented example of early African travel to Egypt is seen in the pilgrimage made by Mansa Musa, the incredibly wealthy 14th century ruler of the great Mali empire. Musa made Hajj in 1324 accompanied by an enormous and elaborate convoy containing tens of thousands of

¹⁰ Garvey, Marcus. “Africa for the Africans.” *Selected Writings and Speeches of Marcus Garvey*. Edited by Bob Blaisdell. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc. 2004, 69.

soldiers and attendants alongside camels and horses carrying hundreds of pounds of gold. Though his final destination was Mecca, Musa made an infamous stop in Cairo, Egypt where the amount of gold that he spent and gifted actually generated a depreciation in the metal's value that would impact the economy for years to come.

The practice of journeying specifically between the African continent and the American one occurred significantly earlier than the advent of European "discovery" and colonization of the Americas, a fact that has been noted by many scholars including Leo Wiener in his *Africa and the Discovery of America* and most notably Ivan van Sertima in his ground-breaking and compellingly-written text, *They Came Before Columbus*, which contains a highly detailed documentation of the presence and legacy of Africans in ancient America. Van Sertima compiled and presented copious evidence to support his assertion that Africans voyaged to and had significant cultural impact on the Americas as early as 800 BC including records of journeys and navigational maps; pre-Columbian African artifacts; stone heads and terra cotta figures with Negroid features; analyses of linguistic connections between African and Latin American ethnic groups; and the transportation of plants, animals & textiles between continents. Despite this (or perhaps, because of it) van Sertima was subjected to a special form of racist ideological critique and which could be labeled as agency reduction formation in which he was accused of racist chauvinism and regarded as a "deluded scholar spewing ignorant rubbish" which belonged on the "maniacal fringes of archeology."¹¹

Nearly 300 years before Lewis and Clark's famous expedition across the western portion of the United States following the Louisiana Purchase, a formerly enslaved

¹¹ Daniel, Glyn. "America B.C." *New York Times*. 13 Mar. 1977, pg. 257.

African turned military commander, Esteban Dorantes, completed the first crossing of North America in recorded history surviving shipwreck, famine, disease and the hostility of the indigenous people to become the first pioneer to explore the entirety of the American south.¹²

In 1909 Matthew Henson was celebrated as being the first person to reach the geographic North Pole. Though evidence later emerged to reveal that this assertion may have been incorrect, Henson nevertheless completed seven successful expeditions into Arctic territory over a period of 23 years, made it to the farthest North of any expedition at that time, and became a skilled craftsman--learning to build igloos, train and drive dogs in the Inuit fashion and speak the Inuit language. Together, these accounts provide extensive evidence of the fact that African peoples were embarking on voyages and exploring the North American continent alongside of and even prior to European explorers.

Perhaps the most infamous and harrowing journey completed by Africans in recent history occurred along during the European slave trade, which is known as *maafa*--the capture, confinement, and commodification, of Africans.¹³ The period that Africans spent in the cargo holds of slave ships is popularly referred to as the Middle Passage. This term, however, is problematic as it is derived from the European perspective of crossing the Atlantic as the second of the three stages in their journey along the triangular trade route. It does not represent the view that for millions of enslaved Africans crossing

¹² Goodwin, Robert. *Crossing the Continent, 1527-1540: the Story of the First African-American Explorer of the American South*. New York: Harper, 2008, 54.

¹³ I use "European slave trade" rather than the popular term "transatlantic slave trade" because the latter obscures the involvement of Europeans and instead shifts the focus to an ocean that captured not one single human being.

the Atlantic was neither the middle, nor the end of the journey. It began with an arduous overland march to reach the African coast. During this trek the captured Africans would march an average of 8 hours a day and cover about 20 miles while joined in chains at the neck or leg or both. Upon reaching the shore, they were thrown in dungeons where they would languish for weeks or months in overcrowded cells in highly unsanitary and disease-prone conditions and be regularly subjected to physical and sexual abuse before passing through what was known as “The Door of No Return” and embarking on the voyage to the Americas. The trip, which averaged 6-8 weeks but varied depending on the point of origin on the African continent, the route taken, and the point of arrival in the Caribbean or Americas, was characterized by intense physical and psychological trauma and high mortality rates as a result of the deplorable conditions and African resistance to enslavement via suicide.

Between 1680-1688 23% of the human “cargo” being transported by the Royal African Company died en route to the Americas. According to Thomas Clarkson, it is estimated that 45,000 enslaved Africans died annually, and over the span of the entire European slave trade 30% or five million perished.¹⁴ In a 1789 speech to Parliament, William Wilberforce described the transatlantic transportation of enslaved Africans as “most wretched part of the whole subject [of slavery]. So much misery condensed in so little room is more than the human imagination had ever before conceived.”¹⁵

Africans rebelled violently against their capture and enslavement at every point in the journey from the African continent to the American one. Data shows that between

¹⁴ Eltis, David, et al. “The Experience of the Middle Passage.” *Atlas of the Transatlantic Slave Trade*, Yale University Press, 2010, 171.

¹⁵ Eltis, David, “The Experience of the Middle Passage.” 168.

1566-1865 African-led insurrections occurred on over 483 voyages. Most rebellion occurred while the slaves were being obtained on the African coast (62%) or during the transatlantic crossing (22.5%), some (12.8%) happened within a week of the slaves being purchased, while very few (2%) took place upon arrival in the Americas before disembarkation.¹⁶ Interestingly, Africans from Upper Guinea (Senegambia, Sierra Leone, & the Windward Coast) were by far the most likely to revolt more so than Africans from any other regions. While this group only comprised 12% of the total captured, they were responsible for 40% of the rebellions that occurred. The struggle and resistance that transpired during these voyages would quickly become characteristic of the African experience in the Americas.

In the same indomitable spirit they displayed on the journey to America, Africans continued to resist the moment they arrived in America in chains and ships. This next phase of struggle began a new journey that would be much more surreptitious than the previous one. After being auctioned off to the highest bidder, newly enslaved Africans went through a seasoning process meant to make them docile and malleable, but almost immediately they began to endeavor to find means of undermining those who sought to enslave them. Resistance against enslavement took place in many ways, shapes, and forms including sabotage through breaking/misplacing tools, acts of insubordination such as feigning illness or refusing to perform tasks, and also included outright rebellion. These rebellions included harming the slaveholder (assault), injuring or killing oneself (suicide) or one's child (infanticide), or simply absconding to freedom.

¹⁶ Eltis, David, "The Experience of the Middle Passage." 190.

Thousands of enslaved Africans escaped to the North utilizing the Underground Railroad, a systematic network of safe houses and secret escape routes with the aid of free Blacks, allies and abolitionists. African Americans undertaking this journey understood all too well the dangers and perils that the voyage would entail as fleeing North was punishable by painful branding, severe whipping, mutilation, and even death, yet still chose to make the hazardous mission, preferring to risk the inevitable dangers they would face from man and nature rather than to remain enslaved. Travel along the Underground Railroad could be terrifying at times as many unconventional methods were used to ensure that those who had been enslaved could reach freedom. People were hidden in barns or false walls in houses, concealed in wagons beneath hay or manure, dressed in disguise, placed into coffins and even sealed into boxes or crates and mailed via the postal service to reach the North.

The Fugitive Slave Act, which allowed those who reached the North to be captured and brought back to slavery, was passed in 1793. Africans changed their tactics in response--rather than simply heading to Northern US cities like Philadelphia or New York, where this new law allowed them to be re-enslaved, many Africans now fled the country and went to Canada to avoid recapture. Estimates show that over 100,000 people were safely ferried from slavery to freedom between 1810 and 1850. Travel now became an important for African Americans as a means of achieving freedom, and writings about these journeys (which were published in newspapers, abolition pamphlets and books) became important to the abolitionist cause as a means of vividly describing the evils of slavery, and urging citizens to campaign to eradicate the horrendous institution altogether.

When slavery in the United States was finally abolished after the Civil War, many of the newly liberated Blacks who remained in the South with no means of supporting themselves or their families entered into sharecropping agreements with their former slaveholders--living and working the land where they were once enslaved, but falling further and further into debt each year. As conditions worsened in the South and the Industrial Revolution began in the North, African Americans began another important phase of travel as they began rapidly migrating northward. Between 1916 and 1970 around 6 million Blacks left the racial and economic oppression of the South for the chance of gainful employment and upward mobility in the North. As racial tensions in the South climaxed and African Americans were subjected to segregation, chain gangs, and widespread lynching, they began to seek other opportunities. Vacancies in factories as a result of World War 1, and employer incentives such as free transportation and low cost housing drew them toward urban cities such as New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Detroit, St. Louis, Cleveland & Baltimore where they made substantial gains in industrial employment despite facing resentment from the urban white working class which contained large numbers of European immigrants.

As Blacks began to gain wealth and attain social mobility in increasing numbers they encountered a new challenge in regard to travel: they now had the income and means to travel recreationally (a luxury that previously had been largely enjoyed by only whites), but still faced racism and discrimination especially in the Jim Crow South that restricted their travel. The mass production of automobiles gave African Americans the freedom to navigate, and with that an opportunity to escape segregated public transportation, but mobility was difficult and dangerous due to long standing racial

tensions. Black motorists faced profiling by police and white civilians who didn't like seeing Blacks engaged in "uppity" activities such as driving, a lack of access to travel essential facilities such as restrooms, restaurants and hotels, and a need to avoid certain areas at night as their presence in a "Sundown Town" could result in them being beaten or even killed. Black motorists would often pack food, carry extra cans of gasoline and bring portable toilets or buckets, or else plan to hold their bladders for long periods of time for safety reasons. A 1947 editorial in the NAACP's *The Crisis*, remarked on the difficulties faced by African American travelers, "Would a Negro like to pursue a little happiness at a theater, a beach, pool, hotel, restaurant, on a train, plane, or ship, a golf course, summer or winter resort? Would he like to stop overnight at a tourist camp while he motors about his native land 'Seeing America First'? Well, just let him try!"¹⁷

To address this pressing issue, Victor Hugo Green, a New York mailman, created and published *The Negro Motorist Green Book* in 1936. The Green Book, as it was commonly called, was an annual guidebook published 1936-1966 which provided African Americans with information on local businesses and private homes that would offer them food and shelter while traveling throughout the United States. This book was essential to driving safely as it allowed drivers to have access to information about safe havens in unfamiliar areas--allowing them to strategically map out rest stops along their journey, find food and secure lodging. The text also included warnings of which areas should be strictly avoided, short stories about travel experience, notations of scenic wonders, and advertisements. Green stated that his aim was "to give the Negro traveler

¹⁷ Quoted in Bascom, Lionel C., *Harlem: the crucible of modern African American culture*. Santa Barbara, California: Praeger, 2017, 165.

information that will keep him from running into difficulties, embarrassments and to make his trip more enjoyable." To do this, he gathered research for four years before starting the publication and solicited help from these readers to continually update the book each year. Green hoped that his work would one day be rendered obsolete by equality--as evidenced by his statement in the preface of the first edition, "there will be a day sometime in the near future when this guide will not have to be published. That is when we as a race will have equal opportunities and privileges in the United States. It will be a great day for us to suspend this publication for then we can go as we please, and without embarrassment."¹⁸ This hope was realized in 1966 when publication was discontinued due to the book no longer being necessary following the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

While African Americans are still less likely to travel than their white counterparts due to structural racism, the numbers of those who travel recreationally have increased rapidly in recent years as a result of increasing incomes, access to travel, and a rising interest in cultural heritage tourism following the widespread availability of DNA testing. After generations of feeling cut off from their homeland and being unable to identify which African culture they belonged to, people of African descent are now beginning to find answers. Utilizing companies such as African Ancestry, Ancestry.com, and 23 & Me, African Americans are now able to use a sample of their DNA to trace where their ancestors most likely originated from. Many of those who have done so then decide to take trips back to the region or country that is most represented in their DNA.

¹⁸ Seiler, Cotten. "The Significance of Race to Transport History." *The Journal of Transport History* 28.2 (2007): 94

Additionally, Black owned travel companies catering to urban travelers have made access to travel—especially international travel—much more accessible to the Black community. Companies such as Nomadness Travel Tribe, Travel Noire, Black Travel Movement, and Green Book Travel are creating online communities where Black travelers can access resources, tools, tips and tricks to travel safely and affordably or join a group trip; while companies like Airfordable allow consumers to purchase airfare on layaway, and Innclusive has created a black-owned alternative to popular but problematic homes-sharing sites such as AirBnb.

Over the last few centuries African Americans have had a very complex relationship with travel that has largely been characterized by mobility as a necessity for freedom or safety. As we move into an era in which we are able to travel for leisure, we have cause to examine how our culture, heritage, mindsets and ideologies inform the destinations to which we desire to travel. This dissertation engages the changing nature of travel among African Americans, examines the reasons why we choose to return to our ancestral homeland, and theorizes new ways for us to utilize internet technologies to facilitate access to affordable diasporic travel.

Statement of Problem

Molefi Kete Asante notes the assault on African cultural interests that has been waged by Eurocentric academics for centuries for the purpose of establishing and maintaining a racial hierarchy. He argues that, “we have been the pawns in the game to conquer not just the world, but information about the world, including the African world” (Asante 37). This is certainly evident in the field of travel literature where information about the world is freely exchanged but usually in a manner that is consistent with

Western standards and cultural assumptions while employing Eurocentric ideology. This is especially important in reference to information about the continent of Africa as we as Africans have become “marginalized in our own story” and our progenies increasingly seek to distance themselves from identifying with African culture as a result of both the subtle and overt negative and harmful propaganda that they unknowingly ingest (Asante 37)¹⁹. There has been a long tradition of dislocated African Americans disavowing Africa--seeing the continent as the source of so many negative beliefs about black people, and therefore, for many years, Blacks did not see Africa as a choice travel destination. The intentional attempts made by whites to sabotage the relationship between Africa and the rest of the world (including African Americans) resulted in false beliefs that Africa was a disease-ridden and poverty-stricken land and that its people were little more than illiterate savages. The stereotypes presented by this false narrative serve to undermine ideas of African unity and cooperation in a systemic use of counter-information which constitutes what Michael Tillotson describes as an agency reduction formation and serves to maintain the power structure of white supremacy. This project seeks to address this issue by viewing travel to Africa (and the African experience) through the lens and perspective of African people for the purpose of recapturing the narrative of Africa, cultivating a renewed sense of identification with African culture and values, and fostering physical, cultural, and ideological connections between Africans in the diaspora and those on the continent. In effect, this study will attempt to weave time and space dimensions to the problem of travel in the context of cultural realities.

¹⁹ Asante, Molefi, 37.

Significance

While the chronology of the historic tradition of African American travel has been outlined and the impetus of these movements expounded upon, there yet remains an obligation to explore those factors that have prompted contemporary travelers to embark upon journeys to their ancestral homeland. Bianca Williams' recent study of African American emotional transnationalism is useful in determining these factors. While Williams' study examines a very specific segment of diasporic travel (namely, Black women traveling to Jamaica) it nevertheless draws conclusions that hold larger implications which are also applicable to African Americans traveling to other diasporic locations including those on the continent.²⁰

The significance of travel from America to the African diaspora and the myriad functions that these diasporic journeys serve for African Americans can be categorized in terms of emotional, financial, psychological, social, political, and cultural factors.

- Search for a “Black paradise”
- Safe space (physically/geographically and metaphorically)
- Search for homeland
- Emotional transnationalism
- Dealing with/escaping from American racism/sexism
- Self-care
- Source of joy & pleasure
- Practice of Ujamaa by stimulating African economies

²⁰ Williams, Bianca C. *The Pursuit of Happiness: Black Women, Diasporic Dreams, and the Politics of Emotional Transnationalism*. Duke University Press: Durham, 2018.

- Easing the burdens of responsibility
- Transnational coping mechanism
- Search for diasporic kin and kinship
- Participation in romance tourism
- Political process which explores and explains relationships & intersections between race/gender and privilege/power
- Means of acquiring affective knowledge
- Means of achieving visibility
- Way to test the fluidity and flexibility of transnationally shared ideas of Blackness
- Method of exposing power differentials in the African diaspora
- Critique of class/national privilege held by Americans
- Chance to experience increased class status & privilege
- Challenging and affirming ideas of imagined diasporic community
- Escaping minority/ Experiencing the majority
- Seeking familiar & foreign understandings of identity & Blackness
- False sense of superiority which reflects oppression & self-hate
- Cultural heritage tourism
- Re-initiating family ties as a basis for African world unity (Temple 44)

Rationale/Purpose

While travel writing has been practiced for centuries. One of the first travelers to visit Egypt and write about it was the ancient Greek historian, Herodotus, during the fifth century B.C.E. Travel writing remains a relatively new field of study within the academy. The systematic study of travel literature emerged as a field of scholarly inquiry with its

own conferences, organizations, journals, monographs, anthologies, and encyclopedias in the mid-1990's. In contrast, African American travel writing has only begun to burgeon since the mid-1940's and still remains prodigiously unexplored both within and without the academy. This work seeks to address this deficit in the scholarship by offering a critical examination of this particular aspect of the black experience that has been largely ignored.

The fairly new genre of black travel writing is difficult to define but Victoria Arana offers two constancies that characterize this sect of literature: "first, a first-person, non-fictional relation of the experience and significance of travel; and, second, a racially-specific gaze."²¹ This genre is one that is full of possibility as it interrogates and elucidates lived experiences of black people at a critical moment in time when travel is becoming more accessible to African Americans than ever before. This new accessibility to attaining travel experience is poised to have a critical impact on the ways in which Africans in the diaspora examine and define their own identities and build and maintain diasporic connections with other Africans. Additionally, it facilitates an intimate introduction and entryway to the continent of Africa for those from the writer's point of origin who may not yet have the means or motivation to travel themselves-- it fosters new interest and encourages those individuals to begin their own explorations whether physical or intellectual. Arana argues that the academy has been slow to recognize full potential of black travel writing and the "cultural efficacy of [it's] primary purpose: to

²¹ Arana, Victoria., "Black Travel Writing: The Invisible Genre." *African Diaspora Tourism*, 8 June 2011, www.africandiasporatourism.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=573:black-travel-writing-the-invisible-genre&catid=107:editorial&Itemid=131.

describe promising destinations (for escape or relocation), to describe the peoples and customs existing elsewhere and do so in a way that could transform the reader's sense of possibility, both individual and collective, and offer new lives to blacks who remained at the travelers point of origin.²² The purpose of this dissertation is to critically interrogate the travel activity of African Americans in the context of Afrocentric consciousness especially as related to ancient Kemet. This work aims to demonstrate and explicate the significance of black travel writing to the goals of Afrocentricity and its relevance to the pursuit of victorious consciousness.

Methodology

I located the twelve travel blogs used in this study in three steps. First, I conducted a broad survey using a keyword search through popular search engines. I used a variety of search phrases including terms such as “travel blog Egypt,” “African American travel blog Egypt” “Black travel blog Egypt” Second, I launched a social media search on the three digital platforms that are currently most often utilized by Black millennial travelers: Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. I scanned Facebook groups such as Black Travel Bloggers Chronicles and Instagram and Twitter hashtags related to Black identity and travel blogging, the most popular of which was #blacktravelblogger with 13,000 posts as of August 2019. Third, I combed through lists of top travel blogs compiled by leading travel websites and publications paying particular attention to lists curated by Black-owned websites and publications.

I narrowed my data set by utilizing the following criteria:

²² Arana, “Black Travel Writing.”

- The blog author presented or identified themselves as African American or Black
- The blog post was no more than five years old
- The blog was identified as being primarily centered around travel and contained at least three other travel-related posts

The bloggers depicted in my study represent a diverse set of backgrounds and experiences. They include two men and ten women from seven cities in nine states—all of whom self-identify as African American. Their educational experience skews on the high side as nine out of twelve of them indicate completing some college. They represent a variety of industries mostly within professional fields. Four out of twelve are married and six have at least one child.

The overrepresentation of women in my sample accurately represents the existing gender imbalance in the modern Black travel movement which has been frequently noted by members of the community. Numerous posts in popular online groups such as Nomadness and Black Travel Movement address the issue. An Instagram post shared by @blacktravelclub on August 15, 2019 depicts a photo of five African Americans in a pool. They appear to be 25-35 years old and present as four women and one man. The caption reads, “Let’s talk about it @voteformeek ‘Fellas get your passport. Sistas are out traveling us by leaps and bounds. Every trip I go on I’m outnumbered at least 5 to 1. I’ve always wondered how women, no matter what their income, find their way to vacation, yet men stay stuck at home...”²³ The comments of both the @voteformeek’s original

²³ The Black Travel Club. Five African Americans in Swimming Pool. *Instagram*. Photo by DJ

post and the post shared via @blacktravelclub largely affirm the sentiment in the caption with users sharing various positive emojis (thumbs up, fire, heart and 100 emojis) or offering explanations. In the 56 comments between both posts only one user disagreed suggesting that the proffered a generalization and offering another perspective. “This is a broad over generalization. Women primarily travel in groups where men will travel solo or with one more person. We’re out there, but we’re not traveling the same way as you. We take less pictures for social media so it makes it seem (sic) like we don’t travel at all in comparison.”²⁴

A 2019 news article published by ABC notes that “[t]he black travel community consist of mostly millennials and women...”²⁵ The gender imbalance in Black travel is visible in other ways as well. Audacity Fest, the only travel festival that caters primarily to travelers of color held its 2nd annual meeting in Memphis, Tennessee during fall of 2019. The festival includes panels, one-on-one fireside chats, international music & DJs, celebrity appearances, food, vendors, and community love.²⁶ The speakers list is comprised of some of the most notable names in the Black travel movement, including bloggers, journalists, social media influencers, travel show hosts, and tourism professionals speaking on a range of topics from travel writing to sustainable travel to mental health and volunteering abroad. Of the 59 total speakers who presented 47 of

Meek @voteformeek, 15 Aug. 2019, <https://www.instagram.com/p/B1MGDIB11qH/?igshid=47dpd5k0y9nh>

²⁴ The Black Travel Club. Five African Americans in Swimming Pool.

²⁵ Carega, Christina. “Purely disgusting’: How luxury yacht vacation for black travelers allegedly went adrift.” abcNEWS. 16 Sep 2019. Accessed <https://abcnews.go.com/US/purely-disgusting-luxury-yacht-vacation-black-travelers-allegedly/story?id=65439075>

²⁶ Audacity Fest. ”Audacity” 2018. <http://audacityfest.com/>

them were women and 12 were men. These numbers accurately represent the proliferation of women in the black travel movement and the black travel blogosphere.

Theoretical Framework

What is the theoretical grounding of the Afrocentric theory as a paradigm for inquiry into the historical tradition of African American travel? Afrocentricity is centered, grounded, and rooted in the primacy of the African experience for African people and predicated on the assumption that any valid historical analysis of African peoples must be oriented in a central focus on Africa. According to Molefi Kete Asante, “Afrocentricity is therefore a consciousness, quality of thought, mode of analysis, and an actionable perspective where Africans seek, from agency, to assert subject place within the context of African history.”²⁷ Afrocentricity continually places Africa at the core of any scholarly discourse related to African history. As such, ancient Egypt (more correctly referred to as Kemet) becomes a classical reference point for the study of Africa as it is the first human civilization to achieve greatness and the intellectual foundation upon which Afrocentricity is built as the core civilization of African antiquity. This sentiment is articulately expressed by Tsheloane Keto who asserts that “an Africa centered perspective of history cannot be sustained without its connection to the African culture of Ancient Egypt” (23).²⁸

Situating ancient Egypt as a classical reference point for African history is a result of intellectual groundwork completed by Cheikh Anta Diop, the Senegalese historian,

²⁷ Asante, Molefi K. *An Afrocentric Manifesto: Toward an African Renaissance*. Cambridge: Polity, 2007, 16

²⁸ Tsheloane, Keto C., *Vision and Time: Historical Perspective of an African-Centered Paradigm*, Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2001, 53 – 55, 23.

physicist, sociologist, linguist and Egyptologist who is widely regarded as one of the key founding figures of Afrocentric scholarship. It was Diop who successfully led the charge in reclaiming ancient Egypt for Africa through his publication of *The African Origin of Civilizations* which presents facts and evidence to prove that the ancient Egyptians were, in fact, Negroes and that ancient Egypt was a Negro civilization. Based on this, Diop advocates for a historiography based in Kemet. He asserts that:

The history of Black Africa will remain suspended in air and cannot be written correctly until African historians dare to connect it with the history of Egypt...it will be impossible to build African humanities, a body of African human sciences, so long as that relationship does not appear legitimate.”²⁹

Although many Eurocentric, Western scholars have tried to challenge Diop’s work, Afrocentric scholars recognize the genius of Diop’s scholarship and its central importance to the ultimate goal of asserting African agency and achieving victorious consciousness. Asante credits Cheikh Anta Diop as being one of the first historians to articulate and advance a “decidedly Afrocentric point of view.”³⁰ This assertion undergirds the importance and centrality of Afrocentricity to this project and any project that seeks to explore the history and lived experiences of African people--it must be done with the preceding assumption that African people must write their own stories and be centered in these stories as subjects and not objects of human experiences.

Afrocentric Orientations to Travel Discourses

Afrocentricity is a consciousness and analytical process that privileges the African experience and centers Africans as subjects and agents rather than objects or spectators.

²⁹ Diop, Cheikh A, *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality*. New York: L. Hill, 1974, xiv.

³⁰ Asante, *Cheikh Anta Diop*, 81.

As African agency and the centering of the African experience is of utmost importance to the success of the project, the theory of Afrocentricity is utilized to ensure these narratives of African experience are studied from an African perspective and not a European one.³¹ As such, the project works to adhere to Modupe's Three Pyramidal Elements of Afrocentricity: Grounding (knowledge of the history and experience of the African world), Orientation (an interest in the needs and concerns of African peoples) and Perspective (viewing the world in a way that seeks for opportunities and strategies to empower and liberate African peoples).³² This project employs the use of multiple methodologies including Pan Africanism and literary Pan Africanism as components of the Afrocentric Paradigm. Additionally, this dissertation pre-supposes the following basic assumptions of Afrocentricity from Kershaw, Nobles, and Mazama.³³ These are that

- The experiences of people of African descent as worthy of study (Kershaw)
- African people have unique and distinctive cultural and historical experiences (Kershaw)
- The best way to understand African people is first and foremost from their own perspective

³¹ Asante, Molefi., *Afrocentric Idea* 8.

³² Modupe, D. S., "The Afrocentric philosophical perspective: A narrative outline." In Ama Mazama (Ed.), *The Afrocentric paradigm* (pp. 55-72). Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2002.

³³ Mazama, Ama (Ed.), *The Afrocentric paradigm* (pp. 55-72). Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2002.

- A people's worldview determines what constitutes a problem for them, and how they approach solving problems (Mazama)
- The fundamental substance of all reality is spirit, and not everything that is important is measurable (Mazama, Nobles)
- The ultimate aim of all research in Africana Studies must be to empower and liberate people of African descent (Mazama, Kershaw)
- African peoples' experiences can be used to help gain a greater understanding of the human experience (Kershaw)

W.E.B. Du Bois and George Padmore are generally recognized as the ideological forefathers of the Pan African movement, but there is much variation in how contemporary scholars define the movement. Esedebe's study of Pan Africanism critiques the lack of rigorous academic inquiry into the study of pan-Africanism and the confusingly conflicting interpretations of its goals and dynamics but argues its importance as both a political and cultural phenomenon which seeks to unite Africans around the diaspora and instill a sense of pride in common cultural values.³⁴ Ofuatye-Kodjoe focuses on the political aspect of the term which he conceptualizes as a body of ideas which inspired a movement comprised of various political organizations all of which espoused the common elements of "the acceptance of a oneness of all African people an a commitment to the betterment of all people of African descent."³⁵ Walters

³⁴ Esedebe, Olisanwuche P. *Pan-Africanism: The Idea and Movement, 1776-1991*. Washington D.C.: Howard University Press, 1992.

³⁵ Ofuatye-Kodjoe, W. B. *Pan-Africanism: New direction in strategy*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1986. 388.

aligns his definition of pan Africanism with Ofoatey-Kodjoe's but contends that a more comprehensive definition might be obtained by delineating the core values (operationalizing the words contained in the very term) and transitory values (those which separate pan Africanism into distinct categories and those that vary based on the challenges of each epoch) of the term itself.³⁶

V.B. Thompson views Pan Africanism as a struggle in which Africans have been involved since their earliest encounters with Europeans.³⁷ Ato Kifle Wodajo shared Thompson's view, and states, "in Africa itself the seeds of Pan-Africanism were implanted the moment the first alien colonizer set foot on her soil"³⁸ A similar sentiment is held by John Henrik Clarke who declares,

for a period of more than a hundred years, African warrior nationalists, mostly kings...out-manuevered and out-generaled some of the best military minds of Europe. They planted the seeds of African independence for another generation to harvest. Their Pan-Africanism was more military than intellectual, but it was Pan-Africanism.³⁹

Geiss, on the other hand, contends that the movement was formally initiated in 1958 with the first two conferences being held on African soil but that its roots were planted earlier specifically with the first pan-African conference held in London in 1900 and broadly with the developments that occurred in the slave triangle in 1787. He broadly

³⁶ Walters, Ronald W. *Pan Africanism in the African Diaspora: An Analysis of Modern Afrocentric Political Movements*. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1997.

³⁷ Thompson, Vincent Bakpetu. *Africa and Unity: The Evolution of Pan-Africanism*. New York: Humanities Press, 1969.

³⁸ Quoted in Esedebe, P. *Pan-Africanism: The Idea and Movement*, 168.

³⁹ Quoted in Esedebe, P. *Pan-Africanism: The Idea and Movement*, 5.

defines Pan Africanism as a meta-form of African nationalism envisioned on a continental level and supported by those of African descent in America.⁴⁰

In addition to traditional Pan Africanism, this project also utilizes the corresponding literary methodology as befits a dissertation which focuses on narratives and literature. Christel Temple, author of *Literary Pan-Africanism* describes the text's eponymous theory as, "A vibrant critical parameter that encourages readers and scholars to explore the mutual heritage, the points of divergence, and the points of convergence between Africans and African Americans...refers to the historical, social, spiritual, and political functions of Pan-Africanism within literature, yet it emphasizes a most traditional parameter of creative production—its *functionality*."⁴¹ She proceeds to explain that works reflecting the paradigm of Literary Pan-Africanism

- Seek to regenerate relationships, understanding, and future interactions between continental Africans and diasporic Africans dispersed through the Europeans slave trade
- Facilitate mutual understanding and nurture the relationship between Africans and African Americans
- Parallel Pan-African ideology in philosophy or ideas
- Utilize "similar terminology expressive of return"
- Contain non-stereotyped depictions of African American characters
- Are written from a Pan-African, Afrocentric, and/or African-centered perspective
- Are written by an author that has spent time among African American communities in the United States.

All of the texts I examine fit these parameters (or the reverse thereof). Temple's analysis focuses on continental Africans writing about diasporic Africans. I plan to use this framework in reverse to show how Literary Pan-Africanism can be applied to diasporic or American African writers whose texts deal with continental Africa and

⁴⁰ Imanuel Geiss. "Pan-Africanism." *Journal of Contemporary History* 4.1 (1969): 190.

⁴¹ Temple *Literary Pan-Africanism* 181.

Africans. This is especially necessary because of the abundance of negative stereotypes about Africans that are inculcated into the minds of American African communities through the use of media and propaganda which upholds the myth of white supremacy through the use of menticide.⁴²

The Attraction to Ancient Egypt

For centuries, Egypt has been a destination for world travelers. Herodotus was one of the first to record his travels to Egypt (he includes descriptions of geography and people and narrates a few stories about the pharaohs) enticing others to follow. Afrocentric methodology centers anteriority as it properly positions scholars to accurately study modern phenomena and adequately prepare for future developments. Asa Hilliard declares that “[o]ur concern with the connection to our African past is really future oriented. It is not merely for sentimental or aesthetic reasons that we return. While it is true that no one can or should live in the past, it is equally true that all futures are created out of some past.”⁴³ For this reason, my dissertation which focuses on digital Pan-Africanism as a very modern and contemporary idea and demonstrates how this new theory will better inform a victorious African future, must be grounded in and informed by the classical African past. To this end, I devote the foundational chapter to exploring the scholars who successfully reclaimed and accurately centered Kemet in the African tradition then challenged and encouraged other African intellectuals to travel to Egypt, learn *Mdw Ntr*, and master the deep cultural and philosophical elements of Kemet in

⁴² Tillotson, Michael T. *Invisible Jim Crow: Contemporary Ideological Threats to the Internal Security of African Americans*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2011, 13.

⁴³ Hilliard, Asa. “Pedagogy in Ancient Kemet.” Ama Mazama, ed. *The Afrocentric Paradigm*. Trenton: Africa World Press, 2002, 265.

order to properly assert the primacy of the African experience for African people. Cheikh Anta Diop is widely regarded as one of the greatest scholars of the African world in the 20th century. The attraction that so many African Americans have to both ancient and modern Egypt is due in large part to his scholarship which identified ancient Egypt as a “Negro civilization” and thus firmly positioned Kemet as a classical reference point for the study of Africa. Diop’s willingness to challenge Eurocentric thought and interrogate and refute the ideas of the Western academy through rigorous research opened the doors for scores of other African scholars to engage Egypt as never before. Overall, Cheikh Anta Diop’s work in historiography, linguistics, economics, and political thought, has formed the foundations of a certain magnetism between Egypt and the African diaspora that exists to this day. This study will explore how his scholarship and the implications thereof were fundamental in creating and sustaining a major attraction to Kemet.

Literature Review

Travel blogs are relatively new to academic inquiry, even more so when one considers the discipline of Africology in particular. Molefi Kete Asante has articulated that the distinction between Africology and African American or Black Studies lies in the perspective and orientation of the study rather than the content being studied. In *African Pyramids of Knowledge*, Asante challenges the historian’s reliance on written sources over alternative methods of collecting data for writing African histories. As a means of demonstrating the usefulness of an Afrocentric approach, Asante formulates an argument for using linguistic and cultural origins of *Kemet* as an example. This work locates the study of Africology in four lines of inquiry: cosmological (concerned with the place of culture in ‘myths, legends, literature and *oratures*’); epistemological; axiological; and

aesthetic (concerned with the seven senses that make art a ‘representational form of human behavior’).⁴⁴ My study builds off of Asante’s work in that it challenges conventional modes of travel writing and advocates for the use of alternative forms of literature that hold the potential to provide new meanings for an African future.

My theoretical framework is constructed with the help of many Afrocentric scholars, chiefly Asante’s *Afrocentric Manifesto* and Ama Mazama’s *Afrocentric Paradigm*, both which examine the metaphysical foundations of Afrocentricity and the sociological dimension of the Afrocentric paradigm. Additionally the writings of Modupe, Hudson-Weems, Dove and Karenga shape my ideas of Afrocentric philosophy, Africana womanism and victorious consciousness.⁴⁵

This dissertation draws heavily from diaspora studies as a socio-political framework in which to position the cultural character of African people across national and geopolitical spaces. Okpewho, Davis & Mazrui’s text, *The African Diaspora: African Origins and New World Identities* features debates about the relationship of the African Diaspora to the physical, cultural, and intellectual environment of western society.⁴⁶ With interdisciplinary papers, the authors explore whether the African origin of the Black diaspora is central to Black identity or not, challenging and extending ideas of diaspora and Black identity found in Paul Gilroy’s *Black Atlantic*.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Asante, Molefi K. *African Pyramids of Knowledge: Kemet, Afrocentricity and Africology*. 2015, 12-14

⁴⁵ Mazama, Ama. *The Afrocentric Paradigm*. Trenton: Africa World Press, 2003.

⁴⁶ Okpewho, Isidore, Carole Boyce Davies, and Ali A. Mazrui. Eds. *The African Diaspora: African Origins and New World Identities*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999.

⁴⁷ Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Boston, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993.

The historical context of the relationship between African Americans and Africa is established in Hill and Kilson's *Apropos of Africa* which is useful for its contextualization of the Black American intelligentsia's early awareness of and engagement with the African diaspora from about 1800.⁴⁸ Building on their work is Nemata Amelia Ibitayo Blyden's new book, *African Americans and Africa*, which explores African Americans' relationship with Africa, from the era of enslavement in the early Americas to the present and maps the overlapping diasporas of slavery, immigration, region and ethnicity that created the diversity of African American identities. Blyden's analysis provides a useful lens with which to examine modern of constructions of transnational Black identit(ies).⁴⁹

My second chapter seeks to initiate an intellectual record similar to Robert Hill's *Pan-African Biography* which profiles political and cultural leaders in the Pan-African movement throughout the diaspora. There is currently no work that provides comprehensive biographies of African Egyptologists (more appropriately referred to as Kemetologists) who successfully reclaimed Kemet's Africanity. While my biographical analysis is certainly not comprehensive, I hope to provide a starting point for the later expansion of this important intellectual history.⁵⁰

In *Black Passports* Stephanie Evans argues that the travel autobiographies of

⁴⁸ Cromwell Hill, Adelaide and Kilson, Martin Eds. *Apropos of Africa: Sentimerits of Negro American Leaders on Africa*. New York: Humanities Press, Inc., 1969.

⁴⁹ Ibitayo, Nemata Amelia Blyden. *African Americans and Africa: A New History*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019.

⁵⁰ Hill, Robert. *Pan-African biography*. University of California, Los Angeles. African Studies Center.; African Studies Association, 1987.

African Americans are a critical way for teachers and guardians to reach at-risk Black youth. Through an exploration of 200 African American memoirs including Maya Angelou, James Baldwin, Angela Davis, and many others, she pairs mentorship with curriculum development to empower Black youth to explore and achieve their destinies.⁵¹ This work was incredibly helpful in allowing me to locate the African American narratives of Egyptian travel I discuss in chapter 3 and illustrates the importance of the transnational writing process in reframing personal perceptions of self and the world.

My work seeks to reconceptualize many of the Eurocentric assumptions of the travel industry and assert the agency of African and female travel writers within a tradition that has historically been white and male. Bendixen and Hamera's *Cambridge Companion to American Travel Writing* examines the political impact of diverse, canonical travel writings and argues that these narratives have shaped American identity from the pre-revolutionary war era. I extend their analysis to African American travel memoirs which shape a collective African American identity, especially as it relates to our relationship with Africa.⁵² Hulme and Youngs' study of trends in travel writing rejects oversimplified binary paradigms, but still focuses heavily on Western travel autobiographies. They include some more nuanced approaches which provide compelling discourse around women's perspectives of others as constructed (rather than reflected) in their writing.⁵³

⁵¹ Evans, Stephanie Y. *Black Passports: Travel Memoirs As a Tool for Youth Empowerment*. New York: State University of New York Press, 2014.

⁵² Bendixen, Alfred and Hamera, Judith. *The Cambridge Companion to American Travel Writing*. London: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

⁵³ Hulme, Peter, and Youngs Tim, Eds., *Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*. London:

James Campbell's *Middle Passages* provides a comprehensive survey of African American encounters with Africa spanning over two centuries.⁵⁴ As one of the more thorough texts on Black travel to Africa in terms of scope it provides important context for African American ties to Africa and political struggles with the United States. Gary Totten's *African American Travel Narratives From Abroad* looks specifically at writings of Black travelers that engage the material realities of the Jim Crow era. While less expansive than Campbell's monograph, it brings into sharp focus the cultural work that was performed by these travelers in contrast to the leisure travel prerogatives of white travelers during this time.⁵⁵

In *Afro-Atlantic Flight* Michelle Commander examines Black American cultural works that engage with slavery, spirituality, and Africa. She argues that through cultural tourism and migration to places including Ghana; Bahia, Brazil; various sites of slavery in the US South, these actors produce narratives on "Africa" and contests existing narratives. Finally, she focuses on the revolutionary possibilities inherent in psychic speculative returns and to argue for the development of a Pan-Africanist stance that addresses the contemporary echoes of slavery that exist across the Afro-Atlantic. I draw from her work in the imaginary and speculative to inform my own revolutionary possibilities in physical return.⁵⁶

Bianca Williams' *The Pursuit of Happiness* traces older African American

Cambridge University Press, 2002.

⁵⁴ Campbell, *Middle Passages*.

⁵⁵ Totten, Gary. *African American Travel Narratives from Abroad: Mobility and Cultural Work in the Age of Jim Crow*. Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2015.

⁵⁶ Commander, Michelle. *Afro-Atlantic Flight: Speculative Returns and the Black Fantastic*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2017.

women's travel to Jamaica as part of the Girlfriend Tours International (GFT) to escape the oppression they experience in the US, which lies at the intersection of American sexism, racism, and ageism. Williams work complicates classic constructions of African American travelers by highlighting how their affective relationships abroad reveal nationalized and gendered power differentials within the African diaspora.⁵⁷

In *Mapping Diaspora* Patricia de Santana Pinho – studies African American roots tourism to Brazil from the 1970s to find and explore Black identity and heritage. Utilizing ethnographic research she also examines the political and economic factors that shape the Brazilian tour industry designed to cater to Black tourism. Of particular interest to me is her analysis of the gendered dimensions of travel as the majority of the roots-seekers she studies are Black women. Her focus on the construction and transformation of diasporic identities through tourism provides theoretical context for the possibility of Black global unity through travel and digital Pan-Africanism.⁵⁸

Implications for the Future

In closing, this dissertation will explore the implications that digital Pan-Africanism holds for the future. It will specifically interrogate how the intersections of digital technology and diasporic travel can advance victorious consciousness and lead to liberation. Additionally, it investigates continued travel as a means for diasporic Africans to remain connected to the continent of Africa and highlights online travel communities which serve to

- facilitate vicarious travel

⁵⁷ Williams, *The Pursuit of Happiness*.

⁵⁸ De Santana Pinho, Patricia. *Mapping Diaspora: African American Roots Tourism in Brazil*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2018.

- create safe space
- create & fortify diasporic bonds/connections
- establish online & real-life relationships, friendships & romance
- generate virtual intimacies
- build diasporic communities
- construct virtual transnational identities

Chapter Summaries

Chapter 1 launches an introduction to the study which provides historical context for the topic then introduces and expounds upon the statement of problem, significance of the study, and theoretical grounding of the work. I interrogate previous scholarship relating to Pan-Africanism and more specifically, Literary Pan-Africanism. I analyze works showing the importance of the African Egyptologists who fought to reclaim Kemet for the African world. Additionally, I explore the limited corpus of texts centered on Black Travel--focusing specifically on travel to the continent of Africa and the country of Egypt (Kemet). Finally, I examine works centered around diasporic identity and Black nationalism, internationalism, and transnationalism.

Chapter 2 focuses on the importance of Kemetologists including Cheikh Anta Diop and his intellectual descendants whose research and writings established the African origin of ancient Kemet and cemented its position as the source and center of African and human civilization. It highlights the importance of Diop's work in using archeological, anthropological and linguistic evidence to prove the Africanity of Kemet then move on to delineate other Kemetologists such as Theophile Obenga, Jacob Carruthers, Asa Hilliard, John Henrik Clarke, Yosef Ben Jochannan and others who worked to build on the foundation he laid by establishing an African based context for the systematic study of African history and began creating and promoting trips to lead Africans on tours

throughout Egypt. Additionally, it discusses the importance of institutions such as the Ancient Egyptian Studies Conference and the Association for the Study of Classical African Civilizations (ASCAC) in continuing to build on this legacy by heightening awareness of the importance of Kemet to African peoples and cultures. This chapter lays the foundation for my discussion of travel blogs by situating the intellectual and historical context of Kemet. The importance of the legacy of these African scholars centers around the ways in which they work to create and conceptualize the Blackness of ancient Egypt which provides a powerful impetus for the themes of Blackness and identity found in both 20th century travel narratives and 21st century travel blogs.

In Chapter 4 I examine other influencing factors on modern African American travel to Egypt, especially visits made by high-profile and influential African Americans during the 20th century and the travel narratives they wrote following these trips. In this section, I consider travel narratives written by a host of Black authors including poets and writers such as Maya Angelou, Claude McKay, and Era Bell Thompson; entertainers such as Chuck D, Katherine Dunham, Dizzie Gillespie, Ray Charles, Duke Ellington, and Ossie Davis ; activists such as Malcolm X, Martin Luther King and Benjamin Mays; and scholars such as Eslanda Goode Robeson, David Du Bois, and Cornel West. These narratives of Black travel to Egypt demonstrate the public shift in African Americans' changing perceptions of Egypt and highlight the importance of intraracial transnational encounters and community connectedness that eventually emerge as themes in the travel blogs of the next generation of Black writers.

In Chapter 5 I review firsthand accounts of twelve modern African American travel bloggers who visit Egypt. This section contains a thematic analysis which

explicates the experiences of these travelers by examining their expectations and motivations prior to the trip, summarizing the experiences that they had, and observing post-trip reflections while highlighting themes, intersections, commonalities, and diversions between their experiences.

Chapter 6 concludes this work by stating the findings of the study and what their implications are for the future of Africology and for the Black community. It defines my ideas of digital Pan-Africanism and initiates a discussion centered around the of utilizing 21st century technology and web-based, Black-owned businesses as tools of liberation in the stride towards global African unity.

This study of African American travel to Africa and specifically to Egypt aims to illuminate the possibilities that these diasporic journeys have for addressing other related historical, social and contemporary issues. In keeping with the foundational tenets of the Afrocentric paradigm which hold that, “knowledge can never be produced for the sake of it, but always for the sake of our liberation, a paradigm must activate our consciousness to be of any use to us,” this study is devoted to a production of knowledge that will facilitate the victorious consciousness which is necessary for African agency. To this end I have purposely set out to write a dissertation that will radically engage Diopian thought in the context of Afrocentric methodology to formulate new approaches to diasporic unity through black travel writing.

CHAPTER 2
CLAIMING EGYPT:
AFRICAN EGYPTOLOGISTS AND THE FIGHT FOR KEMET

I made the decision to center travel to Egypt as the focus of my study because of the primacy of Kemetic heritage and the importance of classical African civilizations. Many other works which examine African American culturally motivated travel focus primarily on Brazil, Ghana or other West African countries that participate heavily in the roots tourism industry.⁵⁹ While these countries are indeed frequently visited by African American tourists, there is a noticeable lack of scholarship regarding African American travel to Egypt as the center of African civilization. Countries such as Ghana, Senegal, and the Gambia are popular tourist sites because of their history as sites of enslavement. African American tourists, eager to find their roots, often travel to these countries to learn more about the trans-Atlantic slave trade and pay homage to their ancestors that passed through the door of no return to cross the Middle Passage. The attraction of these sites and countries to a people who feel separated from their culture and divorced from their heritage is certainly understandable, but one must realize that our history and heritage go back much further than the periods and places in which our ancestors were forced into bondage. To get a true sense of oneself and to engage in the discovery and reconstruction of both individual and group identity, one must acknowledge and seek not only the sites

⁵⁹ See de Santana Pinho, *Mapping Diaspora*, for a history of the roots tourism movement and an ethnographic explication of African American roots tourism in Brazil.

of our greatest tragedy or *maafa*,⁶⁰ but also the sites of our greatest triumph as the progenitors of civilization.

This chapter lays the foundation for this study by chronicling various scholars who established what Diop refers to as the “Negro origin” of Egypt then continued to produce scholarship to support this audacious narrative while simultaneously challenging Western hegemony and championing the underpinnings of Afrocentric thought and scholarship. This foundation is essential to the Afrocentric framework of this study. Asante asserts that “...the Africologist must begin analysis from the primacy of the classical African civilizations...No accurate understanding of African phenomena can occur without a reference to African culture.”⁶¹ In this section I highlight the work of Cheikh Anta Diop and Theophile Obenga for their groundbreaking work in establishing Kemetic civilization as the foundation of African culture; Molefi Kete Asante and Yosef Ben-Jochanon for continuing to explicate the African origin of ancient Egypt in theory and in practice; Jacob Carruthers and Asa Hilliard for their studies and application of Kemetic epistemology and pedagogy as a path to African liberation. In examining the ideas and movements, erudition and insight of these great African intellectuals, Egypt’s significance comes into sharp focus. For years, the Africanity of ancient Egypt was ignored and shrouded in misinformation and dishonesty. In addition to returning the focus and interest of the global black world to Kemet through their intellectual efforts,

⁶⁰ Marimba Ani introduced this Swahili term to the African-centered lexicon in her groundbreaking 1994 publication, *Yurugu : an African-Centered Critique of European Cultural Thought and Behavior*. The term literally means “terrible occurrence” or “great disaster.” It describes the forcible interruption of African civilization. Its usage was popularized by Afrocentric intellectuals such as Maulana Karenga who prefer to use indigenous African terminology, and also because of the intent it conveys.

⁶¹ Asante, *African Pyramids of Knowledge*, 18

many of the individuals presented here also planned group trips to physically bring Africans from around the diaspora (but especially from the US) to modern Egypt so that they could set foot on the lush lands of their ancestors for themselves, and witness the glories of the pyramids, temples, art, and culture while learning about its significant influence on world civilizations.

Cheikh Anta Diop

Cheikh Anta Diop is widely regarded as one of the greatest scholars of the African world in the 20th century. The attraction that so many African Americans have to both ancient and modern Egypt is due in large part to his scholarship which correctly identified ancient Egypt as a “Negro civilization” and thus firmly positioned Kemet as a classical reference point for the study of Africa. Afrocentric scholarship has positioned Diop’s historiography as one of the four major foundational blocks of Afrocentricity along with the Negritude movement, Garvey’s philosophy, and Kawaiida.⁶² Diop’s willingness to challenge Eurocentric thought and interrogate and refute the ideas of the Western academy through rigorous research laid the foundation for scores of other African scholars to engage Egypt as never before. Overall, Chekh Anta Diop’s work in historiography, linguistics, economics, and political thought, has formed the basis of a certain magnetism between Egypt and the African diaspora that exists to this day. This study will explore how his scholarship and the implications thereof were fundamental in creating and sustaining a major attraction to ancient Kemet which naturally led to the desire to visit the remnants of that great civilization in modern Egypt.

Cheikh Anta Diop was born in the village of Keitou in the West African country

⁶² Mazama *Afrocentric Paradigm*, 10

of Senegal in 1923. That he had an exceptional mind was evident from an early age as he began to excel academically during his childhood. He was known as an extraordinary student who was equipped with a logical mind and a propensity to debate. His scholastic aptitude is largely attributed to his mother, who inculcated him with a devotion to learning and a hunger for knowledge. He received both a classic French education and a traditional Islamic one. He studied philosophy and mathematics at the University of Dakar, graduating in 1945. The following year he seized the opportunity to further his education at the Sorbonne where he studied a wide range of disciplines both in the sciences and humanities and continued to excel academically.

Diop studied advanced physics under Frederic Joliot-Curie, the son-in-law of Marie Curie. He captured the attention of prominent African intellectuals at the First Congress of Black Writers and Artists in Paris in 1956 and the Second Congress in Rome in 1959 by presenting well-received papers on the cultural contributions of Africa and its cultural unity. He published “When Can One Speak of an African Renaissance” and “The Linguistic Study of Wolof: The Origin of the Wolof Language and Race.”⁶³ The latter was published in *Présence Africaine*, then considered the leading publication of Francophone African intellectuals. These articles demonstrated both his intellectual prowess and his dedication to championing the African world. Additionally, Diop translated a segment of Einstein’s theory of relativity into Wolof, his native language. This act illustrated his own superb linguistic ability for complex scientific discourse in

⁶³ Diop, Cheikh Anta (1948), When Can We Speak of an African Renaissance? In: Diop, Cheikh Anta, *Towards an African Renaissance — Essays in Culture and Development 1946-1960* (Translated by Prof. Egbuna P. Modum), London: Karnak House, 1996. [First published in French in: *Le Muscle Vivant*. Special Issue Nos. 36-37. Nov. 1948, pp. 57-651.

Wolof and also demonstrated the advanced capacity of indigenous African languages to the hegemonic academy which viewed these tongues as simple and dismissed them as substandard to European languages.⁶⁴

Diop's doctoral dissertation, entitled "Black Nations and Culture: From Black Egyptian Antiquity to the Cultural Problems of Africa Today," was initially rejected by the faculty panel of the Sorbonne. Its thesis, which argued that the ancient Egyptian civilizations were Black and demonstrated the cultural unity of Africa, was deemed radical and unfounded by the university. Diop's work established the linguistic link between Egypt and Africa, placed ancient Egyptian civilization as the basis and sole source of all African humanities, and illustrated the need for contemporary African studies to draw from paradigms of ancient Egypt. In 1954 his dissertation was published in *Présence Africaine* under the same title and won wide acclaim for both its incendiary critique of Western scholarship and the impressive mountain of historical, anthropological, cultural, linguistic and archeological evidence that supported it. Despite a concentrated effort to dismiss his arguments and an intense, combative struggle which included several additional attempts, Diop brought an entourage of sociologists, anthropologists, and historians to his defense session in 1960 and was finally able to successfully defend his dissertation and obtain his PhD.

After earning his degree, Diop returned to Senegal where he worked at the Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noire (IFAN), the French Institute of Black Africa (later renamed the Fundamental Institute of Black Africa. At IFAN, Diop then built and directed

⁶⁴ Akyeampong, Emmanuel Kwaku, Gates, Henry Louis, and Niven, Steven J. *Dictionary of African Biography, Volumes 1-6*. London: Oxford University Press, 2012. 215.

Africa's first carbon-14 dating laboratory which allowed him to compile archeological and geological data to support his original thesis. He analyzed blood types and bone measurements in order to demonstrate that microscopic analyses of skin samples taken from mummies contained melanin levels in both the dermis and epidermis that are found only in Negro populations. This work was published in two works entitled *Le Laboratoire de Radiocarbone de l'IFAN* (The Radiocarbon Laboratory at IFAN) and *Physique Nucléaire et Chronologie Absolue* (Nuclear Physics and Correct Dating).⁶⁵ Despite the fact that Diop was barred from teaching for most of his career, never earned a major honor or prize, and was never recognized by the Western academy, he is recognized as one of the greatest intellectuals that Africa has ever produced because he engaged in comprehensive reading and interrogation, mastered critical analysis

Perhaps one of his fiercest confrontations with European scholarship came when he and his protégé, Theophile Obenga, presented at the 1974 United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) conference on the "Peopling of Ancient Africa and the Deciphering of the Meroitic Script" in Cairo.⁶⁶ Diop and Obenga, facing more than seventy of the most well-known Egyptologists in the Western academy, reiterated Diop's argument for the blackness of the ancient Egyptians, discussed the work that had been done to decipher the Meroitic script of ancient Nubia, one of Africa's oldest scripts, and demonstrated similarities in grammatical structure between the Egyptian, Coptic, and Wolof languages. It was there that Diop gained respect as one of the most prominent African scholars worldwide. It was also there that he earned the ire of several

⁶⁵ Diop, Cheikh AntaLe Laboratoire de radiocarbone de PIFAN. *Fundamental Institute of Black Africa*. Cf. Dakar: IFAN, 1968. *Physique nucléaire et chronologie absolue*. Dakar : IFAN, 1974.

⁶⁶ Akyeampong, et al. *Dictionary of African Biography*, 216.

prominent Egyptologists who began to unite in their attempts to refute his work.

As a Pan-Africanist with very anti-colonial sentiments, Diop was very outspoken politically, especially during the 1960s and 1970s. In addition to completing his scientific research, and theoretical writings, he found time to work as a political activist in Senegal. Diop believed it was hypocritical and inconsistent to advocate for the advancement of Africa and Africans without actively working toward the liberation of African people which he believed required economic and political unification. In *Black Africa: The Economic and Cultural Basis for a Federated State* he states, “to overcome the tremendous obstacles in the way of the economic unification of Africa, decisive political actions are required in the first place. Political unification is a prerequisite. The rational organization of African economies cannot precede the political organization of Africa.”⁶⁷ As a student, he joined and became a leader of the Rassemblement Démocratique Africain (African Democratic Rally), serving as its secretary–general for two years. He also helped to organize the First African Students Pan African Congress in 1951. In both of these positions, Diop actively struggled against the imperialism of the French institutions that educated him. As an opponent of Senegalese president, Leopold Senghor, Diop never achieved widespread political prominence although he eventually started his own political party and ran for the Senegalese presidency in 1983, coming in third. One political victory he did achieve was in spurring the nationalist movement to replace French with Wolof in Senegalese schools. Diop was a strong advocate for African languages arguing that “European languages must not be considered diamonds displayed

⁶⁷ Diop, Cheikh Anta. *Black Africa. The Economic and Cultural Basis for a Federated State*. Trans. by Harold Salemson. Westport: Lawrence Hill & Company, 1978. 58

under a glass ball, dazzling us with their brilliance.”⁶⁸ He spent much of his career highlighting the importance of understanding the ancient Egyptian language (rather than reading ancient scripts translated into a European language) in order to gain a deeper understanding of its meaning and also to enable one to recognize connections to other African languages. He demonstrated his conviction to his work by striving to center his own national language which had been supplanted by the European language of Senegal’s colonizers. Thus, Diop depicted the importance of political activism and its interconnectedness to scholarship especially as it pertains to African people.

While Diop excelled in physics, he would also make his mark as a linguist, mathematician, philosopher, anthropologist, historian, economist and an Egyptologist. His multi-discipline approach to the study of Africa enabled him to expound upon methodological constraints that restricted other scholars and their studies and to present a fully developed, multi-pronged argument in support of his thesis. His major works, *The African Origin of Civilization* discuss myriad facets of African culture including migration, ancient African kinship, linguistic elements, political systems, societal organization and evolution, and Africa’s contributions to the modern world. The ideas presented in his works are deeply intertwined and chiefly fall within three key themes. Firstly that the history of the ancient Egyptians was purposefully falsified to facilitate the enslavement and colonization of Africans. Secondly that ancient Egypt was a black civilization despite the fact that European scholars ardently denied this hypothesis. And thirdly that Africans (including the ancient Egyptians) share a common cultural heritage as evidenced by the similarity in their cultural values. Diop demonstrated the theoretical

⁶⁸ Diop *African Origin of Civilizations*

principles of Afrocentricity even before it had been formally delineated by centering African agency in the study of its peoples and its land.⁶⁹

It is no wonder that Diop (along with W.E.B. Du Bois) was honored as “the writer who had exerted the greatest influence on African people in the 20th century” at the 1966 World Festival of Arts in Dakar, Senegal.⁷⁰ Diop exposed the long-ignored fact that Greek and Roman civilizations existed on the foundations that had been laid by classical African civilizations. His analysis demonstrates that Kemet performs a crucial theoretical function as the philosophical predecessor to modern Western civilization and the cultural, linguistic, and social progenitor of contemporary African and African American societies.

While Diop was by no means the first to present proof of the blackness of ancient Egyptians, his interrogation brought this assertion to the forefront once more. He sought to build on the work that others before him had done, by offering more physiological, genetic, anthropological, and linguistic evidence in support of their thesis and exposing the deliberate nature of the Eurocentric falsification of history. While others believed that western academia’s belief in the whiteness of the Egyptians was merely due to a lack of rigorous scholarship or the inability of white supremacist thought to comprehend the truth of the Egyptians phenotype, Diop attributed it to their fascist and imperialist motives. “Thus imperialism, like the prehistoric hunter, first killed the being spiritually and culturally, before trying to eliminate it physically. The negation of the history and

⁶⁹ Diop, Anta Dheikh. *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality, Cultural Unity of Black Africa, and Civilization or Barbarism*. Chicago: Lawrence Hill, 1974. See also Asante, Molefi Kete. “Diop Dheikh Anta (1923-1986).” *Dictionary of African Biography*. Oxford University Press, 2011. Online

⁷⁰ Clarke, John Henrik. “Cheikh Anta Diop and the New Concept of African History.” in *Great African Thinkers: Vol 1, Cheikh Anta Diop*. Ivan Van Sertima & Larry Williams eds. Transaction Books: Oxford, 1986. 113

intellectual accomplishments of Black Africans was cultural, mental murder, which preceded and paved the way for their genocide here and there in the world”⁷¹

Diop was truly an early champion of Afrocentric thought. He believed that, “the general problem confronting African history is this: how to recognize effectively through meaningful research, all of the fragments of the past into a single ancient epoch, a common origin which will reestablish African continuity.”⁷² Diop advocated for a theoretical and intellectual “return to Egypt” in order to rectify the truth about African civilizations and negate the prevailing falsification of human history by European historians and thinkers. He also sought to renew African culture, thereby placing Africans in a better position to continue their heritage of making unique contributions to humanity. Diop’s work challenges African intellectuals to achieve academic autonomy, reclaim our lost historical consciousness, resist the degradation of Africa, and advance the human struggle for life and liberty.

Theophile Obenga

Following in Diop’s footsteps and taking up the mantle of his mentor, Theophile Obenga is considered one of the leading Francophone Afrocentric scholars of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. Obenga was born in the town of Mbaya in Congo, Brazzaville on February 2, 1936. After completing both primary and secondary education in the Congo, Obenga traveled to France to complete a range of advanced degrees including two master’s degrees in history and philosophy and a doctorate of humanities. Additionally, he completed advanced coursework in both Switzerland and the

⁷¹ Diop *Civilization or Barbarism*, 96.

⁷² Diop, *The African Origin of Civilization*.

United States and speaks French, English, Greek, Italian, Arabic, Latin, Syriac, and several African languages. Like Diop, he is a multidisciplinary scholar with training and expertise in history, linguistics, Egyptology, philosophy, and education. As both protégé and colleague to Diop, Obenga assisted Diop in defending the African origin of pharonic Egyptian civilization at the UNESCO symposium in Cairo in 1974—now recognized as one of the most famous and influential presentations of the ideas of Afrocentric Egyptology. He also contributed to UNESCO’s General History of Africa and the Scientific and Cultural History of Humanity. Together, these undertakings heightened Obenga’s profile as a scholar and brought him into the spotlight of the international academic community.

From 1983-1991 Obenga served as Director General of the Centre International des Civilisations Bantu (CICIBA) in Libreville, Gabon.⁷³ During the early 1990’s he and Cheikh M/Backe Diop (son of Cheikh Anta Diop) founded a francophone African Renaissance group in Paris before he moved abroad. While many universities in the United States were not receptive to Obenga’s ideas and philosophy, Temple University’s department of African American Studies (now the department of Africology and African American Studies), led by Molefi Kete Asante, had recently begun offering the first doctoral degree in the history of Black studies and had earned a strong reputation as a leading Afrocentric institution. At the invitation of Asante, Obenga joined the African American Studies department at Temple University to teach Egyptology in 1995. Subsequently, he returned to his homeland at the request of then-President Pascal

⁷³ CICIBA was a leading organization for the academic study of African history and culture. It produced journals and monographs and held many conferences until its financial support began to dwindle towards the latter end of the 1980’s.

Lissouba, but left the country once again in 1998 when Lissouba was ousted by Denis Sassou Nguesso. Upon his return to the United States, Obenga accepted a teaching position in the Africana Studies Center of San Francisco State University where he was a leading member of that department and eventually became professor emeritus. He has written over twenty books—mostly in French. His most well-known English works include *Ancient Egypt and Black Africa: A Student's Handbook for the Study of Ancient Egypt in Philosophy, Linguistics and Gender Relations*, *African Philosophy – The Pharaonic Period: 2780-330 BC*, and *A lost tradition: African philosophy in world history*.⁷⁴

As Diop's intellectual descendant, Obenga has operated as the primary interpreter and proponent of Diop's work, while working to build upon his theoretical foundation. Obenga continued the activist-scholar tradition: remaining politically active as an outspoken Pan-Africanist and Afrocentric scholar. He supported the idea of a common Bantu civilization that was heavily influenced by the ancient Egyptians as evidenced by a close analysis of the vocabulary and grammatical structure of both languages. His work serves to challenge the illusion of objectivity in the Western academy and exposes both the underlying inherent racism entrenched in Eurocentric presumptions and the overtly imperialist and hegemonic discourse employed by mainstream academia.

Obenga was among the early Afrocentric intellectuals who organized tours to Egypt. He took hundreds of people to view the lands, temples, and cultural artifacts of ancient Kemet. His expertise in Kemetite history, linguistics and Egyptology created an

⁷⁴ Obenga, Theophile. *Ancient Egypt and Black Africa: A Student's Handbook for the Study of Ancient Egypt in Philosophy, Linguistics and Gender Relations, African Philosophy*. London: Karnak House, 1992. *A lost tradition: African philosophy in world history*. N.p: Source Editions, 1995.

enlightening experience for four participants, highlighting the wonders of the ancient Egyptian world, and their cultural linkages to African culture and the African worldview.

Molefi Kete Asante

Molefi Kete Asante is widely recognized as one of the leading Afrocentric intellectuals in the field of Black Studies. He was born in Valdosta, Georgia in 1942 as the fourth of sixteen children to Arthur Lee Smith, a worker on the Georgia Southern Railroad, and Lillie Wilkson, a domestic. As a child, he worked odd jobs picking cotton, cropping tobacco and shining shoes at a white barber shop. In 1953 he was sent to Nashville Christian Institute, a religious boarding school. Asante became an activist quite early. As a high school student, he participated in the Civil Rights Movement. He joined demonstrations against local segregated businesses and participated in the Fisk University student march in Nashville. Asante completed his bachelor's degree at Oklahoma Christian College (now known as Oklahoma Christian University) in 1964. The following year he completed his master's degree at Pepperdine University, then in 1968 graduated from UCLA with a PhD in Communications. He took his first teaching position at Purdue, then a year later returned to UCLA to teach and direct the Center for Afro American Studies. In 1971, he founded and served as editor of the *Journal of Black Studies*, now one of the major publications of the field of Black Studies. Asante made quite an impact on the field of communications. He was appointed a full professor and chair of the Department of Communications at the State University of New York (SUNY) at Buffalo at the age of thirty. His research focused on the ways in which race impacted communication in American society and he soon became a leader in the emerging field of intercultural communications. In 1976 he was elected president of the

Society for Intercultural Education and published the first handbook on the subject, *The Handbook of Interultural Communication*, with his colleagues.

Asante's research focus shifted from investigating racial complications of American communication to analyzing cultural markers African American and African communication then again refocused on an examination of the theory of Afrocentricity. He transitioned from the Department of Communications to the Department of Black Studies where he also served as chair. He published a number of key texts on the theory that he popularized and expanded: *Afrocentricity: A Theory of Social Change* (1980), *The Afrocentric Idea* (1987), *Kemet, Afrocentricity and Knowledge* (1990 and updated in 2015), *Afrocentric Manifesto* (2007). In 1984 Asante became chair of the Department of African American Studies at Temple University and quickly began to build a legacy. He developed the first doctoral program in the field of Black Studies in 1986, establishing Temple as one of the leading institutions of the discipline by situating it to be one of the key training sites for its future scholars. The Temple program set a high standard for Black Studies departments--encouraging students to engage in service, experiential learning, internships, research and study-abroad--all in an African context. Asante emerged as a leading scholar in the field of Black Studies for two reasons: (1) he is a tremendously prolific writer who has written over 500 articles and 85 books; and (2) he positioned himself to impact the field in a unique way through establishing the only terminal degree that was available in the discipline for a decade and then by leading the department at Temple which continues to issue more doctorate degrees than any other Black Studies department in the nation. He has directed over 130 doctoral dissertations, and amply prepared his students to go on to lead the discipline by teaching, writing,

publishing, and chairing departments around the world.

Additionally, Asante has continued the work of being a scholar activist through building and maintaining Afrocentric institutions dedicated to promoting the agency and liberation of African people. He worked alongside research groups and international councils of both continental and diasporic Africans to establish a United States of Africa as a key step in achieving self-determination, African agency, and political unification for the global African world. He serves as the international organizer for Afrocentricity International, a Pan-African and Afrocentric organization working to promote economic, cultural and educational elevation in order to foster an advanced cadre of like-minded individuals locally, nationally, and internationally in order to realize the goal of an African renaissance. In 2011 he founded and became president of the Molefi Kete Asante Institute for Afrocentric Studies, a nonprofit, nonpartisan public policy organization based in Philadelphia. The organization is an independent research institute dedicated to forming an intellectual panopoly to advance diasporic African realities, assert African cultural values, and work towards the betterment of the world community.

While Asante is best known for his work elucidating the theory of Afrocentricity, he is also known as an ardent Egyptologist and one of the key intellectuals who has continued the legacy of Cheikh Anta Diop alongside Theophile Obenga. In 1988 he co-founded the Diopian Institute for Scholarly Advancement (DISA) which hosts the annual Cheikh Anta Diop International Conference. The conference was launched in conjunction with the doctoral program at Temple and strives to foster and support Afrocentric scholarship, strengthen and expand the scholarly African community, advance African agency at home and abroad, and work towards and the collective liberation of African

people. In 2000 Asante wrote *The Egyptian Philosophers: Ancient African Voices from Imhotep to Akhenaten*, a foundational work which dispels the myth of Greece as the origin of modern civilization and classic philosophy and shifts the attention to Egypt, providing profiles of eleven major African philosophers. Seven years later he authored *Cheikh Anta Diop: An Intellectual Portrait*, one of the few book-length projects on Diop which contains a concise manifesto and critical analysis of the life and ideas of the master scholar and African visionary. Throughout his academic career, Asante has continually advocated for centering Kemet as the basis for the study of African people and has emerged as one of the leading promoters of Cheikh Anta Diop's renaissance vision for Africa.

Over the years Dr. Asante has taken hundreds of people on tours with him to Egypt where he leads predominantly African American groups through the ancient majesties of Egypt and gives lectures which provide cultural context and allow for deeper, more nuanced understandings of the significance of the sites visited. Asante's tours have often included other notable Africologists. The tours typically last 10-15 days and explore the Great pyramids and major temples and tombs.

Yosef Ben-Jochannan

Yosef Alfredo Antonio Ben-Jochannan, was an unapologetically African writer and historian who was known to be a powerful orator and a prolific author in addition to being a lawyer, engineer, historian, and Egyptologist. Born in 1918 in Ethiopia to a Puerto Rican Jewish mother and an Ethiopian Jewish father, Jochannan attended multiple universities in Puerto Rico, Barcelona and Havana, Cuba where he earned his Ph.D. in cultural anthropology. He held teaching positions at many institutions including City

College in New York City, Cornell University, and Malcolm King in Harlem and Al Azar University in Cairo. He is remembered as one of the most vital and radical Afrocentric scholars of his generation. Dr. Ben was an incredible teacher who was known and respected in the classroom, the community and the streets. He was often criticized for not being academic or scholarly enough because he opted to use clear, simple language rather than the lofty rhetoric of academe. To this he retorted that he purposely spoke and wrote in terms that laypeople could easily comprehend as a means of making learning accessible and effectively disseminating knowledge to the African community and those who needed it most rather than hoarding it in the ivory tower. It was quite evident to his colleagues, community, family, students, and anyone who knew him, that he tasked himself with rescuing African people from modern day intellectual bondage of colonialism, Eurocentric ideology, and internalized racism which he worked towards using the weapons of history, culture and identity. ¹¹

Dr. Ben was well known for his participation in the “street universities” common to Black communities during the Black Power Movement of the 20th century. He and his longtime friend, Dr. John Henrik Clarke, could often be found lecturing together to Harlem community members hungry for knowledge work focused primarily on Black presence in ancient Egypt. His writings contend that the pharaohs came out of the heart of Africa, that the original Jews were black Africans from Ethiopia, and that Caucasian Jews adopted the faith and customs later. He has often been accused of distorting history, and since his work challenges the prevalent view of Egyptian and African history according to popular western Egyptologists. It is, therefore, controversial to Western scholars and the academy. While the subject of many of his books is ancient Nile Valley civilizations,

he also wrote and co-wrote elementary and secondary school texts in the 1960s. His writings and ideology have been instrumental in revolutionizing the way that Black people relate to Africa and the Nile Valley.

Ben-Jochannan was a rather prolific author, penning forty-nine articles, pamphlets and books, during the course of his more than fifty year writing career--several dealing with ancient Egypt including *Black Man of the Nile*, *African Origins of Major Western Religions*, *Africa: Mother of Western Civilization*, and *The Black Man's North and East Africa*. Most of his works were self-published, but many were reprinted by Black Classic Press, the Baltimore-based publishing company that holds the distinction of being the oldest independent, Black owned publisher in the United States. Dr. Ben's publications were written in his distinctively raw, unfiltered, and incredibly direct style. He attacked popular ideology pathologizing black life and culture. He refuted these misconceptions by demonstrating the incredible achievements and accomplishments made by African peoples since the beginning of time, especially those civilizations that went on to influence the social thought of Greek culture and philosophers. Like Diop, he illustrated the cultural unity of indigenous African people in the north, south, east, west, and central regions of the continent. This was done, not in an attempt to overly simplify the richness and diversity of culture throughout the continent, but to highlight the consistencies visible throughout these myriad cultures and to prove that the culture of the inhabitants of the ancient Nile Valley civilizations also demonstrated the same cultural continuity. Dr. Ben's excavation of early peoples and societies in Africa are fully supported by copious maps, drawings, diagrams, photos, and other illustrations that positively aid the reader in coming to a full understanding of African history and its relation to world history.

Starting as early as the 1950's, Ben-Jochannan led incredibly popular guided tours throughout key sites in the ancient Black world-- the Nile Valley, Sudan and Ethiopia. Ben-Jochannan's fifteen day trips to Egypt, often referred to as "Dr. Ben's Alkebu-Lan Educational Tours," created from an ancient name for Africa, typically ran two to three times a summer, bringing up to as many as two hundred people to Africa per season. Many viewed the trip as a pilgrimage to the sacred cradle of civilizations, and for many visitors, these trips held special significance as it was their first time setting foot on the Motherland.⁷⁵ The experience was incredibly memorable firstly because of the well-curated itinerary which often included sites such as the temples of King Ramses II and Queen Nefertari at Abu Simbel, the temple of goddess Isis at Philae Island and goddess Hathor at Dendera, the royal tombs of the Valley of the Kings, the Luxor mortuary temples of Makare Hatshepsut, Ramses II, and Ramses III, the worship temples of Luxor and Karnak on the east bank, the sphinx and pyramids on the Giza Plateau, Imhotep's impressive step pyramid, and the famous Egyptian Museum in Cairo. More importantly, the sights of these ancient wonders were supplemented with Dr. Ben's brilliant historical commentary and scholarly analysis. During his transition service, New York City Council Member Jumaane D. Williams (D-Brooklyn, pronounced that Dr. Ben's "extensive research on Egypt, black culture and history gained him notoriety not just among educators, but people of more color across the world."⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Renowned Egyptologist Runoko Rashidi was one of those whose first trip to Africa was a tour of Egypt with Dr. Ben in 1991 during which he gave his first lecture in Africa. Dr. Ben was a mentor and friend to Rashidi who returned to Egypt with him three times as his personal assistant.

⁷⁶ Burroughs, Todd Steven. "'Doctor Ben,' Legendary Scholar of Egypt: Dean of the Harlem Street University." *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, vol. 8, no.1, June 2015, p.B-2.

In response to questions about the motivation behind his many repeated pilgrimages to Egypt, Dr. Ben sagely responded, “I wanted people to see their faces were the same.”⁷⁷ As a master educator, he realized the importance of not only teaching his people about civilizations built by their ancestors and the incalculable impact they had on modern society, but also recognized the power in helping people to travel to these lands for themselves. He understood the significance of African people having direct physical contact with the land from which they had been forcibly removed while receiving the knowledge of their history and identity which had been deliberately distorted and withheld by those who sought to oppress them. He wanted them to not only learn through reading and hearing that the Egyptians were their ancestors, but to see the physical proof for themselves to restore their sense of pride and identity.

In a tribute to his mentor and friend, Runoko Rashidi notes that “Dr. Ben has brought history to life for the masses of African people. This is perhaps his greatest legacy and gift.”⁷⁸ While Rashidi ostensibly makes this statement in reference to Dr. Ben’s work as a historian who figuratively brings history to life, in a more literal sense he actually did bring ancient history to life through his Egyptian tours which allowed African Americans to physically see, smell, touch, and hear about the land and deeds of their ancestors. The importance of having that experience, especially for a people as culturally disconnected and dislocated as African Americans, cannot be overstated. In the spirit of *sankofa* it is critical that one realize where they came from in order to understand

⁷⁷ Kestenbaum, Sam. “Contested Legacy of Dr. Ben, a Father of African Studies,” *New York Times* [New York] 27 March 2015: Online. <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/29/nyregion/contested-legacy-of-dr-ben-a-father-of-african-studies.html>

⁷⁸ Rashidi, Runoko. “Yosef Ben-Jochannan: A Note and Photo Essay about His Life, Work and Influence.” *Africology: The Journal of Pan African Studies*, vol. 8, no.10, February 2016, p.82.

who they are and where they are going. Dr. Ben was clear on this fact when he stated, “It must be remembered however: a man without the knowledge of where he has been knows not where he is, or where he is going. The African (Black man) refuses to be such a man any longer; if he ever was.”⁷⁹ Thus, Dr. Ben is remembered as one of Africa's great intellectuals who brought knowledge to the people and brought the people to the knowledge of their ancestral home.

Jacob Carruthers

Mzee Jedi Shemsu Jehewty (popularly known as Jacob Carruthers) extended Diop’s legacy by fiercely and repeatedly engaging in what he often referred to as “intellectual warfare.”⁸⁰ Carruthers was born in Dallas, Texas on February 15, 1930 and raised in Houston. He completed his undergraduate work at Samuel Huston College in Austin, Texas in 1950. He earned a Master’s degree in government studies from Texas Southern University in 1958; and a Ph.D. in Political Studies from the University of Colorado in 1966. He held teaching positions at Prairie View College and Kansas State College before moving to Chicago in 1968 to work at the Center for Inner City Studies at Northeastern Illinois University where he taught history and education for thirty-two years. In 2005 the center was renamed in his honor.

In 1975, one year after Cheikh Anta Diop and Theophile Obenga’s infamous showdown at the UNESCO conference in Egypt, Carruthers went to Dakar to visit Diop. During their meeting, Diop impressed upon Carruthers the importance of studying

⁷⁹ Qtd. In Anonymous. “Yosef A.A. ben-Jochannan: A Bibliographic Introduction.” *Africology: The Journal of Pan African Studies*, vol. 8, no.10, February 2016, p.3.

⁸⁰ Carruthers, Jacob. *Intellectual Warfare*, Chicago: Third World Press, 1999.

ancient Egyptian civilization—especially its languages. Carruthers immediately set about learning *Mdw Ntr* and encouraging others to do the same. The necessity to learn the ancient language of Kemet in order to have direct access to the knowledge held in its artifacts led to the establishment of key African organizations and institutions.

Carruthers and several of his colleagues formed a new intellectual movement known as the Chicago School of Afrikan Centered Thought or the “Chicago Group” which represented an influential group of African-centered thinkers who established Chicago as a foundational site of African scholarship and activism in the Midwest.⁸¹ In 1978 Dr. Carruthers along with Josef Ben Levi, Dr. Anderson Thompson, and Dr. Conrad Worrill founded the Kemetic Institute, an Afrikan research organization dedicated to “the restoration and reconstruction of African civilization through scholarly research, African centered education, artistic creativity and spiritual development.”⁸² With Carruthers serving as the director, the Kemetic Institute began offering community classes on classical African civilizations and languages. These courses provided African community members with an introduction to Middle Egyptian grammar utilizing actual phrases and epithets from historical texts and inscriptions found on tombs and temples which would allow students to translate and understand basic common Kemetic phrases and were especially recommended to those who desired to travel to Egypt. The courses also taught students about the history, culture and literature of ancient Egypt, focusing on its social and political history, its relevance to other African civilization and its impact on modern

⁸¹ The Chicago group included Dr. Anderson Thompson, Dr. Harold Pates, Lorenzo Martin, Dr. Bobby Wright and others

⁸² Carruthers, Ife. *History of the Kemetic Institute*. Retrieved 7/31/2019 from <http://www.ki-chicago.org/about_us.htm>

African communities and on world culture. Prior to founding the Kemetic Institute, the Chicago Group had also launched other scholarly institutions and organizations including the Communiversity, the Association of Afro-American Educators and the Association of African Historians.

In 1984, Carruthers along with John Henrik Clarke, Asa Hilliard, Leonard Jeffries, Maulana Karenga, Yosef ben-Yochannon, and Rkhty Amen founded the Association for the Study of Classical African Civilizations (ASCAC), an independent organization that he served as president for five years . ASCAC is a study group dedicated to studying African civilizations and promoting the African worldview in order to contribute to the rescue, reconstruction and restoration of African history and culture.

Dr. Carruthers authored several important books that provided a framework for a scholarly approach to the research and study of classical African history and Kemetic civilization that was centered in the African experience. His works include *Intellectual Warfare* (1999), *Mdw Ntr* (1995), *The Irritated Genie* (1985), and *Essays in Ancient Egyptian Studies* (1984). He co-edited *The Preliminary Challenge* (1997), *Reconstructing Kemetic Culture* (1990), and *Kemet and the African Worldview* (1986).

Carruthers followed in the footsteps of the great African thinkers of his time including his mentor, John Henrik Clarke, and thus had a unique understanding of the connection between history, culture and heritage and its relationship to the pursuit of liberation. Carruthers' studies of Kemetic cultural epistemology have been particularly enlightening especially as it pertains to the social-political dynamics of knowledge He emphasizes the importance of recognizing, reclaiming and restoring the culture of ancient Kemet as a methodology for modern day cultural transformation. His work

highlights the politics of identity especially as they relate the individual to the community and enact social transformation that ultimately results in cultural transformation.

Carruthers lays out a clear guide of the specific conditions that must occur in order to achieve Pan-African unity and liberation which begins with adopting an African worldview steeped in classical Kemetic culture. He argues that this is only possible after one is able to correctly identify and gain a clear understanding of European epistemology and the dangers its assumptions pose to African people. Additionally, one must employ a liberatory sense of self-determination by deliberately reclaiming our own cultures and ensuring their survival through the consummate infusion of the African worldview into all of our institutions. This ideology reflects the depth of Carruthers' Diopian insight and the intensity of his dedication to scholarly activism in service to the African community.

Carruthers made many significant contributions to the advancement of African agency most notably in the areas of teaching and building independent African-centered institutions which are imperative components of nation-building and self-determination. He actively worked towards the African renaissance that was Diop's vision. However, he also realized the importance of bringing African people back to their homelands. As founding president of ASCAC, Carruthers brought an unprecedented 1,000-person group of African American teachers, students, artists, and scholars to the Nubian Cultural Center in Aswan, Egypt for a conference and two-week tour of Nubia and Egypt.

Asa Hilliard

Asa G. Hilliard III was an African-American teacher, psychologist and historian who studied ancient Egyptian history, culture, education and society. Born in Galveston, Texas on August 22, 1933, Hilliard grew up attending segregated schools in Houston,

Texas before moving to Denver, Colorado at the age of twelve. He excelled as a young scholar and went on to attend the University of Denver where he earned a bachelor's degree in psychology in 1953. After working odd jobs and teaching junior high math and social studies, Hilliard joined the U.S. Army and served as an officer from 1955-1957 before returning to the University of Denver where he earned a master's degree in counseling and a doctorate in educational psychology in 1963.

After finishing his terminal degree, Hilliard joined the faculty of San Francisco State University as an assistant professor in the Department of Secondary Education in 1963. Hilliard eventually served as the chair of the Department of Secondary Education and then Dean of the School of Education. He also worked with the Liberian Peace Corps and served in a variety of capacities while on an advisory team to the Monrovia Consolidated School System during his tenure at San Francisco State University. In 1980 Hilliard was appointed the Fuller E. Callaway Professor of Urban Education at Georgia State University, with joint appointments in the Department of Education Policy Studies and the Department of Educational Psychology and Special Education. He wrote countless articles on ancient African history, teaching strategies and public policy. Hilliard's career was dedicated to eradicating prevalent misconceptions about the lesser intellectual capabilities of African American children, exploring ways to more effectively train educators to educate children, and teaching the truth about the history of Africa and the African diaspora.

Asa Hilliard quickly became recognized as a leading expert on pedagogy and best practices for teaching African American children that were rooted in the African experience. He created curriculums based in an African cultural context for various

school districts, developed numerous workshops on multicultural education for teachers and administrators across the United States, directed a variety of educational projects aimed towards improving teaching practices and student learning outcomes, and served as an educational forensic expert witness for the NAACP when it challenged culturally based IQ testing practices for admission into gifted programs.

As one of the foremost multicultural educational theorists in the nation, Hilliard advocated for the Afrocentric paradigm within the context of school culture. In 1987, the Portland Public School District commissioned him to compile information about the history, culture, and contributions of African Americans in the fields of Art, Language Arts, Math, Social Studies, Science and Music. The resulting compilation, known as the Portland Baseline Essays, were adopted by the district in 1989 and quickly began being used by school districts across the United States as a multicultural curriculum development resource for educators.

After joining Jacob Carruthers and other Afrocentric intellectuals in founding ASCAC, Hilliard served as its first vice president, and eventually opened his own ASCAC chapter in Atlanta. He was also actively involved in other professional and Africologist organizations such as the National Council for Black Studies, the Council of Independent Black Institutions, the Commission on Research in Black Education, the Association of Black Psychologists, and the National Association of Black Social Workers, many of which he also served in leadership positions.

Over the course of his career, Hilliard received hundreds of honors recognizing his professional accomplishments and celebrating his dedication to learning and Kemeti-centered educational practices. In addition to the fellowships, honorary degrees, and

prestigious awards that he received, in 2001 he was bestowed with the honor of being enstooled as a chief in Mankranso, Ghana and given the title, Nana Baffour Amankwatia II (meaning “generous one”) in recognition of his lifetime commitment to pan-African unity and development.

Hilliard produced provocative scholarship centering Kemet and Kush that both rejected white supremacy and substantively contradicted its assumptions and ideology. While he has written more than a thousand publications, two of his most prominent texts are *SBA: The Reawakening of the African Mind* and *The Maroon Within Us: Selected Essays on African American Community Socialization*. As an educator and historian, he was passionate about Kemet education as a model of African educational excellence-- especially for its potential to mitigate the miseducation that white supremacy wielded as a weapon of destruction for African people. Utilizing this model, Hilliard advocated for a paradigm in which religion, culture, and education came together in a quest for virtue and reclamation of culture, identity and wholeness.

From the early 1980’s until his death, Hilliard lead study groups to Egypt and Ghana frequently. These African heritage tours quickly became well-known for the depth and breadth of their educational content. In 2007, he took his final tour to Egypt for ASCAC’s 24th annual Ancient Kemet (Egyptian) Studies Conference where he lectured on the link between Kemet and Pan-Africanism and toured with his group. After falling suddenly ill, he was flown to Cairo and treated for complications with malaria. Unfortunately, he succumbed to his illness and joined the ancestors while in the land of the great ancestors. He was mourned by many including 200 ASCAC members who fittingly assembled in the Valley of Kings at the tomb of Thutmose IV to perform a ritual

celebration of his life and legacy. Hilliard advocated for African people to resist mental oppression and reclaim their identity in order to restore wholeness, purpose and direction. He believed it was imperative for the education of African people to work towards restoration of memories, reconstruction of self, and rebuilding of spirituality. Ultimately his teachings and his tours to Egypt worked towards accomplishing that very goal.

Other Kemetologists

There are many other scholars and intellectuals who have continued the work of these founding African scholars including Runoko Rashidi, Ashra Kwesi, Tony Browder, Greg Carr, Anderson Thompson, Rhekety Wimby, Ra Un Nefer Amen, Cain Hope Felder, Charles S. Finch Nzingha Gaffin and Zizwe Poe to name a few. These scholar's lives, writings, and Egyptian study tours played an important role in the Egyptian travel movement that emerged during the 1980's and 1990's as a result of Diopian historiography, which places Egypt at the beginning, both chronologically and conceptually. Many others are worthy of mention yet are too numerous to list here. However, this serves as an excellent opportunity for further study and analysis. The lives, writings and ideologies of all of these scholars had a direct impact on many African Americans' desire to visit Egypt as they illuminated the historical and cultural significance of the birthplace of civilization. The study tours they offered provided a simple, practical mode of travel for a people who historically had unique barriers and restricted access to travel in comparison with their white counterparts.

These visionary Egyptologists realized not only the vital importance of studying, learning, theorizing and teaching about Egypt, but also the critical need to physically

bring African Americans to the land of Kemet. Runoko Rashidi, author of *Introduction to the Study of African Classical Civilizations* and world traveler renowned for studying the global African presence proclaims, “every African should try to visit Egypt at least once during their lifetime. It is a pilgrimage to our sacred motherland-the cradle of civilization-and one is never the same afterwards.”⁸³ Collectively, these scholars understood that in order to bring healing from “post- traumatic slave syndrome”⁸⁴ and undo the damaging rhetoric of white supremacy and Eurocentric education it was imperative that they allow African Americans to set foot on the land of our ancestors. It became clear that through travel--meeting the people, breaking bread together and interacting on a one-to-one basis, they would begin to see the insidious nature of the lies and stereotypes they had been taught both overtly and imperceptibly. Through viewing the mighty pyramids, setting foot in glorious temples and sailing the sacred Nile river they would begin to recognize what is valuable and vibrant about African cultures and themselves.

The scholars presented here demonstrate that travel to Africa (and especially Egypt) is an important step in the re-education of the African mind and remains important for the mental, social, political, psychological development and well-being of African people. The intellectual and historical context they provide lays an important foundation for the next steps of this study. Their legacy lies in centering and promoting the blackness of ancient Egyptians which is central to how the writers in the next sections contemplate the spacial and temporal ways in which their own identities operate. This legacy serves to

⁸³ Rashidi, Runoko. “Yosef Ben-Jochannan: A Note and Photo Essay about His Life, Work and Influence.” *Africology: The Journal of Pan African Studies*, vol. 8, no.10, February 2016, p.83.

⁸⁴ DeGruy, Joy. *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America’s Legacy of Enduring Injury & Healing*. Milwaukie, Oregon: Uptone Press, 2005.

provide a powerful impetus for the themes of Blackness and identity found in both 20th century travel narratives and 21st century travel blogs.

CHAPTER 3

WRITING EGYPT: AFRICAN AMERICAN TRAVEL MEMOIRS ON EGYPT

Diop and his colleagues stirred African American interest in travel to Egypt through their controversial ideology and radical support for the truth about the Africanness of Kemet. Other scholars such as Ben-Jochannon, Asante, and Hilliard for instance offered frequent popular study tours. A different group of Black intelligentsia, many of them authors and celebrities, prompted African American interest in Egypt with profiles of their travels to Egypt. The Egyptian travel writings of Maya Angelou and Malcolm X are, perhaps, the most well-known among African American autobiographers, and have been covered extensively elsewhere—for that reason, this study focuses instead on a few lesser known writings. The editor of *Ebony*, Era Bella Thompson, President of Morehouse, Benjamin Mays, and Hip Hop artist Chuck D's wrote about their time in Egypt, as tourists and pilgrims, seeking to understand and explain the continent back home. In *Black Passports*, Stephanie Evans highlights the empowering potential travel memoirs hold for Black youth, as a means to provide answers to some of life's most basic, yet elusive philosophical questions of ontology, epistemology, axiology.⁸⁵

Travel memoirs give direct insights into one's position as a global citizen that provide youth with the tools to understand who they are, how they learn about the world, and what they should do as a result of this knowledge. Evans argues that travel memoirs written by African American authors highlight sociopolitical aspects of exchange that color and shape intercultural interactions. I posit that these interactions and exchanges are especially meaningful when they take place in the homeland on the continent of Africa.

⁸⁵ Evans, *Black Passports*. 54

Additionally, these memoirs illustrate African Americans' evolving views of Africa in relation to their own shifting political views and changes in social status in the United States.

Many African Americans lack a strong sense of identity due to their culture being intentionally removed during enslavement and continually, structurally prohibited by white supremacist institutions. While some are cognizant of this fact and intentionally seek out opportunities to reclaim their culture and sense of identity, many others remain woefully unaware, or worse, resistant. For African Americans, identifying with Africa and African culture poses a risk to their acceptance, assimilation and inclusion in American society, despite the fact that there is no longer a similar risk for Caucasian immigrants who are free to recognize and celebrate their German, Italian, Polish, Irish, etc. heritage and still be regarded as an integral faction of America's "melting pot."

Chuck D

African American travelers to Africa chronicled their efforts to reconcile and understand Africa as an ancestral land, their ties to the people, and their identity as American. In 1992, Chuck D, the front man of Public Enemy grappled with these ideas during his first visit to Africa.⁸⁶ Public Enemy is well-known for the creation and promotion of political and socially conscious rap. Early in 1992, the group cancelled a planned trip to South Africa due to political violence from white supremacist gangs protesting negotiations to end apartheid. Flava Flav also broke his collarbone, ruling out a trip abroad for the whole group.

⁸⁶ Chuck D is the stage name of the American hip hop artist and producer, Carlton Ridenhour. Rather than using his legal name, throughout this study I refer to him as Chuck D (the name he chose for himself, performed under and wrote under) in affirmation of his divine right to self-determination.

The organizers of Panafest Ghana invited Public Enemy to perform during the festival, which was held in summer 1992 to bring together people of African descent across the world. Chuck D recorded his first impressions of the continent on his inaugural journey to the continent writing “going to Africa made it clear to me that we as a people, around the diaspora, have been oppressed and exploited to the benefit of European countries and their people.”⁸⁷ While the rest of his narrative focuses heavily on the warmth of the people and the richness of his experience on the continent rather than on oppression and exploitation, it is certainly an undercurrent that winds through his narrative. He makes mention of this issue again after seeing large posters of a white Jesus and a white Santa Clause in a shop windows in Kumasi—first realizing the impact of Africans on the continent worshipping a falsely depicted white Jesus, then acknowledging that the same white Christians who brought the white Jesus to Africa are very ones who enslaved Africans directly beneath the churches of their “slave castles” (more aptly termed as slave dungeons) and painted his name on the bows of the death-trap ships that they used to transport stolen Africans to the Americas during the *maafa*.

Chuck D’s memoir, *Fight the Power*, is characterized by its rhythm, spoken word flow and his sense of defiant, cultural self-definition. His words on the page and in his lyrics speak of black knowledge which he issues with the delivery of a traditional Black pastor in a tantalizing mix of rap, hymn, and sermon. His incredibly well-known anthem, “Fight the Power” would rouse a crowd, inspiring people to wear African medallions and find new knowledge and appreciation for their own culture while his lesser-known

⁸⁷ Chuck D and Yusuf Jah. *Fight the Power: Rap, Race and Reality*. Delacourt Press: New York, 1997, p.154.

memoir extended his strong rhetoric by layering it with deeper analysis of the music industry, hip hop culture, and Black unity.

One of the most strikingly compelling, and relevant aspects of Chuck D's memoir is that he explicitly notes the importance of African Americans physically traveling to Africa and presents a cogent argument for why it is necessary and important that Africans in America return to the continent.

Africa is definitely the future for our existence as a people. Not only do we have to be in line with Africa mentally, but we have to be in line with Africa physically. Africa has to be a physical reality. People from other nationalities have a place to go and call home. The Italians go back to Italy, back to their motherland, the Japanese have Japan, the Chinese have China, the Irish people go back to Dublin and get reconnected. Right on down the line. There are some Black people who say, "I want to go to Rome. I want to go to London." Black people have to go back to Africa. If we can't physically go back, we need to develop an African state of mind.⁸⁸

There is a tendency among African American writers to focus on Ghana more so than Egypt—to identify more closely with lands from whence they were enslaved than with the lands their ancestors once ruled.⁸⁹ Chuck D and Maya Angelou both spent time in Egypt before going to Ghana, but the stronger focus in each of their memoirs is on Ghana. They both reported experiencing moments of connection, belonging and togetherness that they simply did not feel while in Egypt. Albeit, in both cases they spent

⁸⁸ D and Jah. *Fight the Power*. 172

⁸⁹ In *Black Passports* Stephanie Evans notes that among African American authors who travel to Africa and write travel memoirs (primarily in the 20th century), the most popular destinations are Liberia, South Africa, Ghana and Nigeria. Civil War in Liberia from 1989-1997 halted tourism. A second civil war was waged from 1999-2003. Since the country's stabilization, tourism has slowly resumed, but Liberia is no longer a popular destination for African Americans. Unrest and corruption in Nigeria has also stemmed the flow of tourism, while Ghana and South Africa's tourism industries have grown in the 21st century as they continue to develop tourism as an industry.

significantly more time in Ghana, their words reflect a special affinity for West Africa that is evident very early. In Angelou's case this is evident moreso through intimation and omission—her portrayal of Egypt doesn't quite have the same level of love, warmth and familiarity that is seen in her depiction of Ghana—but Chuck D makes the statement quite explicitly. “When I looked down as we were landing in Ghana it hit me, ‘Damn, Africa.’ When we landed in Egypt, technically, we were in Africa, but when we took off to go to the west coast of Africa I really felt it.”⁹⁰ Later, he reiterates the sentiment, “It was so organized, nice, green, definitely different from where we had just left. Egypt. This was *really* Africa, and we really felt good about it.”⁹¹

Several intersecting factors influenced his difference in perspective between the two African countries. The geographical landscape was certainly one of the first things he notes. Chuck D comments that Egypt reminded him of Texas (most likely because of the dry, sandy climate) while the greener countryside of Ghana made him feel like he was actually in Africa. The shift in the racial and cultural landscape of modern Egypt undoubtedly comes into play. While Diop demonstrated that the ancient Egyptians were Black, modern Egyptians certainly participate in a culture that is more aligned with Arabic and Islamic culture than with Africa. Therefore, African Americans, looking to reclaim their forgotten African heritage may feel a stronger affinity for the people of Ghana (with their dark skin and familiar phenotypes) and for its culture.

While Chuck D describes Cairo as a “one -of-a-kind place,” and admires the

⁹⁰ D and Jah. *Fight the Power*. 155

⁹¹ Ibid

pyramids for their sheer enormity and the sense of wonder they evoked,⁹² he is clear that his experience in Egypt left much to be desired. “Cairo is the oldest city I’ve seen. I didn’t like the way it seemed to be evolving.”⁹³ He concludes his short visit by expressing disappointment in the airport’s lack of food, long wait, and noisy, crowded atmosphere. More important than what he states, however, is what he neglects to state. Not once in his account of his travels in Egypt does Chuck D speak of the people of Egypt as kin or the land as home.

The dichotomy of belonging vs. outsider is a common one in many African American return narratives. In *Lose Your Mother* Sadiya Hartman describes feeling alienation and emotional turmoil retracing the route enslaved Africans travelled from the inland to the Ghanaian coast then to the New World. Rather than a sense of belonging, Hartman left Ghana disillusioned in her inability to connect to the continent as ancestral land. Era Bell Thompson came to a conclusion that bridges Hartman and Chuck D’s perspectives of Africa as motherland. After visiting eighteen countries in Africa, Thompson wrote

I am proud of the African blood in my veins and proud of my black heritage...Africans are my brothers, for we are of one race. But Africa, the land of my fathers, is not my home. I am an American—an American by nationality, a citizen of the United States by birth. I owe my loyalty and my allegiance to but one flag. I have but one country.⁹⁴

By contrast, Chuck D ends his chapter on Africa maintaining a feeling of belonging and unity with the continent and criticizing America for its violent treatment

⁹² D and Jah. *Fight the Power*. 154

⁹³ *Ibid*

⁹⁴ Thompson. *Africa Land of My Fathers*. 281.

and exclusion of African Americans. Following a discussion of the importance of Tommie Smith and John Carlos' black-fisted protest during the national anthem at the 1968 Olympics, he gives his own analysis of the symbolism of the American flag as found in one of the group's popular hits.

The red in the flag is for the blood that we've shed. I look at the flag differently. We should look at the American flag like a Jewish person looks at the swastika...The stars in the flag represent the stars that we saw when we were getting our asses beat. The blue in the flag is for the sad songs that we sang throughout our history, singing the blues and singing church songs, thinking that we're going to go to heaven to live in paradise while the white man has heaven right here on earth and we're living in hell. The stripes in the American flag are for the whip marks on our backs. The white in the flag is for the obvious—there's no Black in the flag. So "Ain't Nuttin' ButterSong" deals with how we look at things differently.⁹⁵

Chuck D and Thompson clearly demonstrate conflicting viewpoints in their perspectives of national and cultural alliance and source of personal pride. Chuck D devotes ample time to discussion of the significance and trauma of the transatlantic slave trade. He recounts his visit to what he terms, "slave Dungeons with a capital D. That shit will never be referred to as 'castles' by me. Fuck that,"⁹⁶ and describes in detail the visceral reaction he had to the smell, taste, and feel of death that he experienced. He cites Olaudah Equiano's account of the Middle Passage and quotes the opening scene of the film *Sankofa*, stressing the importance of remembering the horrors that our ancestors endured and the necessity that we teach future generations what the ancestors endured. Despite his focus on the history of African enslavement, Chuck D makes it quite clear that he understands that our heritage began hundreds and thousands of years before the

⁹⁵ D and Jah. *Fight the Power*. 203

⁹⁶ D and Jah. *Fight the Power*. 159

first Africans were brought to the Americas in chains. He displays a familiarity with the work of Cheikh Anta Diop and includes quotes from his work, *Precolonial Black Africa*, to illustrate the magnitude of the strength and might of the ancient Kingdom of Ghana. He also references Dr. Khalid Abdullah Tariq Al-Mansour's scholarship on ancient African kingdoms in northern, southern, and eastern Africa. Surprisingly he does not mention these scholar's contributions to Kemetic studies or the significance of the ancient Kemetians and their impact on world culture.

Era Bell Thompson

Era Bell Thompson was born in Des Moines, Iowa in 1905, the granddaughter of enslaved Africans. She grew up as part of the only black family in the small town of Driscoll, North Dakota. After working various clerical positions for public agencies and doing a stint as a housekeeper, Thompson finished college and was eventually hired as an editor for *Ebony* magazine. She became a foreign correspondent for *Ebony* when she accepted a three-month trip across eighteen African countries. Beginning in April 1953, she travelled through the continent starting in Liberia and ending in Egypt. Thompson's African journey allowed her to produce a half dozen *Ebony* features on the continent in addition to the monograph that described her experiences in Africa in some detail. Her book, *Africa, Land of my Fathers*, describes her journey, first as journalist chronicling a rapidly changing continent for African American audiences at home, as a Black person, seeking a connection with the motherland, and finally as a tourist.

Both Thompson and *Ebony* shared a cheery, optimistic, and patriotic view of Black life in America. The inaugural issue of the magazine included an editorial entitled, "The Happier Side of Negro Life," which declared in a rather flippant and carefree tone,

“We’re rather jolly folks, we *Ebony* editors...We like to look at the zesty side of life. Sure, we can get all hot and bothered about the race question (and don’t think we don’t) but not enough is said about all the swell things that Negroes do.”⁹⁷ Most of the pieces included within its pages focused primarily on strides that African Americans were making within American society and avoided “negativism and advocacy.” Rarely publishing political or controversial pieces, the periodical stood in stark contrast in tone and purpose to other popular black publications of the time period such as *The Crisis* and *The Defender*. Its owner, John H. Johnson, built the publication on a staunch foundation of American consumerism, soliciting backing from white advertisers eager to gain access to the quickly burgeoning African American market. His investors, who liked its positive perspective and lack of militant views, realized the untapped potential that lie in the emerging Black middle class and sought to harness it for their own benefit.

Likewise, Thompson sought to extoll American ideas--exuding hope and advocating for integration and assimilation. Her first book, *American Daughter*, which she wrote as the result of a fellowship awarded from the Newberry Library, was a light-hearted account of her childhood that emphasized warm interactions in her local community and displayed her pleasantly humorous outlook on life. Simultaneously it downplayed and trivialized the few experiences with Jim Crow racism she chose to recount. Rather than challenging the status quo, her work strove to counter negative representation of Black people in the white American press by presenting herself as a personal example of how positive, progressive, and eager to assimilate African Americans could be.

⁹⁷ Qtd in Campbell, *Middle Passages*, 283.

As such, both Thompson and *Ebony* had absolutely no interest in Africa or its inhabitants until the state of world affairs made it impossible to continue to ignore. The decolonization movement occurring across the continent of Africa during the 1950's and 1960's commanded attention around the globe, and especially with the Black population in the United States. Here Thompson was presented a unique opportunity to cover the progress being made in the "homeland" in a similar fashion to the work she currently did in America. Positioning people of color worldwide in a positive light, would elevate the opinion of Africans, not only among "Negroes" but also in the eyes of white Americans, which would undoubtedly reflect well on African Americans as their long, lost descendants. In the opening pages of her book, she readily admits that she previously had no knowledge of the land of her ancestors, nor any desire or motivation to return to Africa.

Until a few months before, Africa had been the last place on earth I wanted to visit. Until a few years before, my knowledge of the continent, like that of most Americans, both black and white, was geared to concepts handed down by Livingstone and Stanley nearly a hundred years ago. And like most American Negroes, I was so busy shedding my African heritage and fighting for my rights as an American citizen that what happened to my 175,000,000 brothers beyond the sea was a matter for the missionaries. Had anyone called me an African I would have been indignant. Only race fanatics flaunted their jungle ancestry or formed back-to-Africa movements...⁹⁸

Thompson goes on to reflect on the media stereotypes, negative depictions of heathens and savagery, and overall ignorance of the continent that contributed to her decision to distance herself from her heritage. Her use of stark, connotative language including words such as "distaste, repulse, deny, embarrassed, dirty, poor, wrong"

⁹⁸ Thompson. *Africa Land of My Fathers*. 16

accurately conveys her original perspective, but neglects to properly identify the system of white supremacy as the source of that ideology and the systemic and political reasons that the United States had for purposefully cultivating a chasm between Africans in America and those remaining on the continent. She seems, instead, to blame herself for her ignorance and prejudice. As Africa's fight for independence became a focal point of interest in America, Thompson's views began to shift. "Along with a few million other American Negroes, I began to take new interest and a growing pride in the Motherland."⁹⁹

Eventually, the plan for Thompson's African journey began to take shape. She was able to have her trip co-sponsored by *Ebony*, for whom she would write several articles, and the publishers at Doubleday & Company so that she could gather material to write *Africa, Land of my Fathers*. She decided to follow a route commonly used by other American journalists and authors. She would start in the West Coast at Liberia, follow the coastline through Nigeria and the Gold Coast, head inland to the Belgian Congo and Ruanda-Urudi before turning south. The southward route would take her through the British Rhodesias to South Africa, then turning east she would cross Mozambique before going north once more through Tanganyika, Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia and Eritrea and then end her rather inclusive tour in Egypt. The fact that a journey to Africa of this magnitude was being undertaken by a single woman was unprecedented in the time period. In fact, the only other woman to complete a comparable trip on the continent was Eslanda Goode Robeson who traveled to South Africa, Uganda, Tanganyika, Zanzibar, Kenya, the Congo, and Egypt. Like Thompson, Robeson's journey had a professional

⁹⁹ Thompson. *Africa Land of My Fathers*. 18

component to it as she completed the tour as part of an anthropological study although she had a very personal interest in visiting Africa as well. Robeson also shared her findings in a book published in 1936, almost two decades before Thompson began her sojourn.

Besides recording the trip for publication purposes, Thompson had private reasons for her visit as well. Her chief personal prerogatives for her journey were to get an accurate perspective of the land and people and to determine if she would be viewed as family or stranger given her lack of connection to her ancestral homeland. She writes, “I, too, wanted to return to the land of my forefathers, to see if it is as dark and hopeless as it has been painted and to find out how it would receive a prodigal daughter who had not been home for three hundred years. And I wanted to know what my own reaction would be to my African ancestors.”¹⁰⁰ Shortly after she lands in Monrovia, Thompson answers that very question directly. “My first reaction to my aborigine brothers was negative.”¹⁰¹ Thompson falls prey to the attitude of classist elitism common amongst many middle to upper class African Americans of that time period who openly showed disdain for their poorer comrades. As she describes the reasons for her aversions, she displays signs of American xenophobia. She does manage to find commonality with the Liberians as she notices the economic inequality and lack of financial power present even in Africa. “It was a black man’s country, but there was the same lack of business leadership found in Negro neighborhoods in the States.”¹⁰² Thompson registers her

¹⁰⁰ Thompson. *Africa Land of My Fathers*. 10

¹⁰¹ Thompson. *Africa Land of My Fathers*. 21

¹⁰² Thompson. *Africa Land of My Fathers*. 22

surprise at the white monopoly in business ownership being mounted by primarily Syrian and Lebanese immigrants, but realizing that it is a sore subject, does not present any direct critique, opting to merely imply the existence of an intentional system of economic oppression similar to the one currently existing in America.

Despite the somewhat dismal start to her journey, Thompson soon returns to the positive, uplifting messaging characteristic of her writing. While visiting Ife, sacred city of the Yoruba, known as the site of the Garden of Egypt, she exclaims, “Here, indeed, was proof of the African’s cultural past, priceless art fashioned by black hands many centuries ago. If these were my ancestors, I had reason to be proud.”¹⁰³ Thompson revels in the treasures found in Ife. She celebrates Timbuktu as the for its immense power, prosperity and position as the intellectual center of the ancient world. She praises Kwame Nkrumah and Ghana for proving its naysayers wrong and demonstrating that Africans could indeed provide capable leadership for their own countries. She presents several examples of the beauty and greatness of Africa and its inhabitants and would go on to write several *Ebony* articles along the same vein.

After visiting then Nigerian House of Representatives, Thompson is incredibly impressed by the ornate structure and the luxurious amenities included therein. Within the context of her work at *Ebony*, she tended to focus on evidence of the “betterment” of the race—highlighting important “firsts” and accomplishments. Upon expressing her approval and pleasure at this obvious sign of progress to the building’s caretaker, he “beamed” and replied, “I suppose we don’t realize how far we’ve come...until somebody tells us.” Thompson offers no commentary after recounting this tale, but the reader is left

¹⁰³ Thompson. *Africa Land of My Fathers*. 54

with a sense that the man's response is rather primitive at worst or woefully uninformed at best—perhaps Africans are simply ignorant of the world around them, and need an outsider to explain to them just how good they've got it. This line of thinking fits with the narrative presented by Thompson as her tone often comes across as rather well-meaning but a bit condescending at times. A different reading of the caretaker's response, however, might suggest that because the Nigerians are acutely aware of the history of their country and their people (even before Nigeria became a country), this small step up from the ruin and disrepair inflicted on their lands during the period of colonialism is miniscule in comparison with the greatness that existed before the Europeans arrived to pilfer the continent.

By the time Thompson reached Egypt, she was at the very end of her three-month journey, and understandably mentally and physically exhausted from her trip. Perhaps this is the reason why she devotes only a few pages of her book to Egypt and its people. Thompson ostensibly seems to view the "Land of the Pharos" in a distinctly separate category than she does the rest of the continent. In fact, it seems that she does not actually see Egypt as an African country. Upon disembarking from the plane, she refers to Cairo's as the "world of tourists" signaling a direct juxtaposition between the other countries she had visited on the African continent. Immediately after checking into her hotel, Thompson announces that, "the African phase of my author-journalist life was over. No more interviews and notes, no more hunting for blood brothers among Africa's aborigines."¹⁰⁴ Here it seems abundantly clear that to Thompson, Egypt is not Africa—or rather, while she is clear it exists on the continent in a geographic sense, its people are not

¹⁰⁴ Thompson. *Africa Land of My Fathers*. 271

“Africa’s aborigines,” or natives to the land and are not her blood brothers.

The distinction Thompson sees between her ancestors and the people of Egypt is further demonstrated as she briefly discusses Egypt’s new-found independence. Egypt’s President Mahommed Naguib’s interest in Sudan’s independence had recently been celebrated as the “first modern union of Africa’s Arab and Negro peoples.”¹⁰⁵ While this separate categorization for Egyptian people as Arab was widely accepted throughout the twentieth century, Thompson demonstrates inconsistency on the following page, perhaps as a result of the confusion she admits to, when she declares that, “Egypt got more confusing by the minute. Arabs, Egyptians, Jews, Nubians, Indians—they were all colors from black to blond. The term ‘Negro’ did not set here well either.”¹⁰⁶ Here it appears that she separates Egyptians from Arabs, but still does not see them as “Negro.” Later in her culture-focused descriptions of the scenes she encounters while exploring the new and old city of Cairo, she makes a point to mention a cultural difference she notices between the way Egyptians and Africans carried their babies, once more indicating the separation and distinction she sees between the two.

It is interesting to note that even though Egypt had very recently declared itself a republic a mere two weeks before Thompson landed there, she made no journalistic inquiries about Egyptian independence. This is especially significant because African independence is a common theme in Thompson’s work.¹⁰⁷ She wrote several *Ebony* articles discussing strides towards independence in Liberia, Ghana, and the Congo, but

¹⁰⁵ Thompson. *Africa Land of My Fathers*. 270.

¹⁰⁶ Thompson. *Africa Land of My Fathers*. 271.

¹⁰⁷ Broussard, Jinx Coleman, and Skye Chance Cooley. "Ebony's Era Bell Thompson Travels the World to Tell the Story." *American Journalism* 26.1 (2009): 7-30. *CrossRef*. Web.

despite the fact that she visited Egypt at a particularly salient moment in the country's history, she decided not to conduct any more interviews nor take any notes.

While in Egypt, Thompson consciously chooses to play the role of tourist rather than journalist. Here, more than any other point in her story, there is a particular focus on her American identity. "For these last three days on the continent I was going to be myself, and American—an American tourist, no less. Tomorrow was the Fourth of July...I would start my celebrating now."¹⁰⁸ For the next few days Thompson orders room service, enjoys the ministrations of the hotel's maid and porter, and goes on sightseeing excursions. Interestingly, in the hotel lobby she encounters a porter who was "dark enough to be a colored man," but rather than questioning him about his heritage, she continues on her way, deciding she was "done with worry about race."¹⁰⁹ Here, her story comes full circle

While her depictions of Egypt and of Africa were not always flattering, they nonetheless served an important purpose in providing exposure for many African Americans who, like Thompson, had previously had no interest in returning to the continent. Additionally, she provided a very practical account including information on local culture, visas, transportation, and accommodations, that would be of use to those who desired to travel in the future.

Benjamin Mays

Benjamin Mays' autobiography, *Born to Rebel*, includes a chapter on his experiences with race and caste while traveling outside of the United States between

¹⁰⁸ Thompson. *Africa Land of My Fathers*. 271.

¹⁰⁹ Thompson. *Africa Land of My Fathers*. 272.

November 1936 and January 1937. Mays was a minister and civil rights leader. While the purpose of his trip was to attend the World Conference of the YMCA held in Mysore, India, in January of 1937, Mays departed New York two months early to visit places including visited Britain, France, Ceylon (modern-day Sri Lanka), China, Japan, Palestine and Egypt in addition to his intended destination. He hoped that his journey would provide him respite from recurrent conversations about identity, racism, and discrimination and a break from the emotional toll of remaining constantly aware of his Blackness. “I thought that for three and a half months, as I traveled around the world, that I would be able to forget color, race, and prejudice; that I could be just a man among other men; that I would have a brief respite from thinking and talking about the race problem. I was mistaken.”¹¹⁰ He had envisioned being able to simply exist as a free human being without the spiritual, intellectual and physical burdens of oppression, but soon realized that leaving the geo-political space of the United States would not provide escape. While he marveled at the incredible diversity of the conference participants and his rare experience with equality, his Blackness would still subject him to discrimination in certain spaces along his journey and his nationality status as an American would invite conversation regarding U.S. racial relations from curious foreigners and fellow Americans in others. Rather than serving as a reprieve from considering and confronting race issues, his trip instead functioned as an important lesson in global race relations and international reactions to U.S. segregation.

En route from Palestine to Egypt, Mays’ cabin mates engaged him in conversation about racism and discrimination in the United States. After inquiring as to whether the

¹¹⁰ Mays, Benjamin. *Born to Rebel*. Charles Scibner’s Sons: New York, 1971, pg. 149.

stories they heard about segregation and lynching were true and receiving affirmative answers to both questions, they asked Mays about his religious beliefs and those of white Americans. The fact that they both practiced Christianity was astonishing and confusing as they had experienced no racial barriers within their own religion of Islam.

Mays describes several situations in which he was shunned, ignored, segregated or discriminated against, but also recounts the first time in his life that he received preferential treatment over white people. Ironically, it was due to the one topic of conversation he had hoped to avoid—race. As he traveled throughout India, Mays had the opportunity to speak to student groups at several YMCA branches. As the press got wind of his visits, they began to be very interested in having press conferences with him. To Mays’ surprise, as his train arrived in Madras, Madura, Trivandrum and Colombo, the reporters and photographers gathered to meet his group were much more interested in photos and interviews with him, rather than his white colleagues—a brand new experience for an African American living in the Jim Crow South. “Never before had I experienced preferential treatment over white people.”¹¹¹

Mays reveals very few details of his trip to Egypt but does make a point to include two observations: (1) The poverty he witnessed in Egypt and India were even worse than what was experienced by poor Blacks in America. (2) True to his expectations, he did not experience discrimination among “the colored peoples of Egypt, India, Ceylon, China, and Japan.”¹¹² Interestingly, for a man who spent a lifetime rebelling against racist society and uplifting black excellence, he makes no special mention of his journey to

¹¹¹ Mays. *Born to Rebel*. 158

¹¹² Mays. *Born to Rebel*. 159

Egypt as his first visit to the African continent.¹¹³ It is unclear whether Mays actually viewed the Egyptians as Africans, and as thus, his brethren. It is more probable that he saw them simply as people of color given that he does refer to them as such and lumps them in together with other Asian peoples in the same geographic proximity. This seems understandable given that at the time of Mays' 1936 visit, Egypt was not widely considered to be an African country, even among many educated African Americans.

Surprisingly the only group with which Mays reports having feelings of kinship are the Indians. After being invited to speak to a group of students by the headmaster of an untouchable school in India, he was surprised to be introduced to the students as “an untouchable who had achieved distinction.”¹¹⁴ After getting over his initial shock, horror, and indignation over being referred to as such, Mays eventually realizes that Blacks are, in fact, the equivalent of the untouchable caste in American society. He reflects on the experiences he has endured with segregation and discrimination and concludes, “I just as they—through the mere accident of birth, was indeed an untouchable!”¹¹⁵ Later, he again draws parallels between Indians and Negroes as he draws similarities between student populations and notes their warm response to him. “Speaking to college students in India was much like speaking to Negro students in the United States. They, too, were groping for a better life and needed motivation and inspiration. They responded warmly to my speeches, expressing their appreciation by long applause”¹¹⁶

Mays concludes by stating his belief that the caste system of India is much worse

¹¹³ Mays returned to Egypt in 1953

¹¹⁴ Mays. *Born to Rebel*. 158.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*

¹¹⁶ Mays. *Born to Rebel*. 159.

than racial segregation in the United States. His support for this theory revolves around a willingness to show concern across racial/caste lines which he had witnessed in the U.S., but did not witness in India (with the exception of Ghandi). Considering the brevity of his visit, this conclusion may have been drawn based on insufficient evidence and the same “erroneous notions” he of which he accused Indian members of the press who sought to discuss American race relations.

Minor Narratives

In 1955, Janet Harmon Bragg, the first African American woman to hold a commercial pilot’s license, visited Africa for the first time. The story of her extraordinary life is told in her autobiography, *Soaring Above Setbacks*. As a professional registered nurse, Bragg founded and operated three nursing homes on the South Side of Chicago. Although she had no children of her own, Bragg served as a surrogate mother to a great number of Ethiopian students studying in the United States. When Emperor Haile Selassie traveled to the United States on a diplomatic visit in 1954, he requested an audience with her after hearing so much about the beloved caretaker from the many of the young men he sent to study in America. When the two met, the emperor invited Bragg to visit Ethiopia as his guest, as a token of his appreciation for all she had done for the Ethiopian students.

Bragg admits that “at the time I wasn’t actually excited about going anywhere in Africa.” Nevertheless, in August of 1955 she agreed to accompany four of her “children” who were returning to Ethiopia after recently finishing their college courses. She spent three months in Ethiopia, inspired by seeing a country successfully being governed by Blacks. In 1965 she returned to the continent to accompany a friend on a business trip

and was able to visit Senegal, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Ghana, Nigeria, and Egypt. While in Cairo Bragg describes visiting the biblical Land of Goshen and touring the pyramids and the Sphinx. As a result of her African travels, she eventually became a travel agent and was able to escort a group of Black senior citizens on their first trip to the African continent. Bragg remains a legend in the travel industry who has both inspired and assisted African American travel to Africa.

Another important account of African-American travel to Egypt is from legendary R&B deejay Nathaniel “Magnificent” Montague. Montague is best known for his trademark chant, “Burn, Baby! Burn!” This catchphrase, which became known as the rallying cry of the 1965 Watts riots, is also the title of his memoir. In its pages, Montague spins the fantastic tale of the story of his life as a self-proclaimed “hustler.” Struck by wanderlust at the age of fourteen, he began running away from home. The first time he left, he hitchhiked cross-country from New Jersey to Los Angeles. Eventually, he joined the Merchant Marines in 1944 at the age of 16 and had the opportunity to meet Hugh Mulzac, captain of the *Booker T. Washington*, and the first African American to earn a shipmaster’s license in the United States. At that point, Montague confesses, he didn’t even know who Booker T. Washington was, but eventually he would become an avid historian and owner of one of the most substantial privately held collections of African American artifacts in the United States. His collection would even include correspondence by both Washington and Mulzac.

The transformation from hustler to historian began when Montague had the opportunity to visit several countries in Africa and began to develop an “immense pride

of race and culture.”¹¹⁷ Near the end of the war, his liberty ship landed in South Africa, and after being briefed on the rules of apartheid, the crew was allowed onshore.

Montague describes being in absolute awe of the power and intricacy of the rhythms created by the South Africans he befriended. At a Zulu gathering, he draws cultural comparisons between the frenzy he witnesses at a hunting dance and his experiences seeing saints shout and speak in tongues in his Mother’s Holiness church. In Liberia he thought he was in America and in Nigeria he marvels at the sophistication of the dark, statuesque people he encounters. As he passes through Alexandria, Egypt he adds, “*they were colored!*” (author’s emphasis).¹¹⁸ His visit to Egypt is documented only by that one short phrase—an affirmation of the Africanity of the inhabitants of Egypt.

There are several other accounts of African American sojourns to Egypt. While the majority of this section focuses on authors writing during the 20th century, one notable exception is the work of the self-taught author, brilliant orator, and staunch abolitionist, Frederick Douglass. In 1848, John Gorham Palfrey of Massachusetts testified during the 30th congress of the United States House of Representatives on “The Political Aspect of the Slave Question.” In his speech, Palfrey offers Captain Hannibal (of Carthage), Alexandre Dumas, and Frederick Douglass as intellectuals representing the talent emerging from the descendants of the ancient Egyptians.¹¹⁹ In 1854 Douglass delivered a lecture in which he condemned the field of ethnology and polygenism, one of

¹¹⁷ Montague, Magnificent and Bob Baker. *Burn, Baby! Burn! The Autobiography of Magnificent Montague*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003, pg. 25.

¹¹⁸ Montague. *Burn, Baby! Burn!* 25

¹¹⁹ Muller, John. “Dr. Frederick Douglass Uplifted on the Floor of House of Representatives.” *Frederick Douglass in Washington D. C. The Lion of Anacostia*. 15 April 2018, <https://thelionofanacostia.wordpress.com/tag/egypt/>

its nascent theories being promoted by Northern scholars, Louis Agassiz and Samuel George Morton. Douglass effectively refuted their major arguments utilizing logic and citing respected European authors. One of the most important claims he denounced was Morton's allegation that the ancient Egyptians were white.

Visiting Egypt in 1887, Douglass wrote: "I do not know of what color and features the ancient Egyptians were, but the great mass of the people I have yet seen would in America be classified as mulattoes and negroes. This would not be a scientific description, but an American description. I can easily see why the Mohomidan (sic) religion commends itself to these people, for it does not make color the criterion of fellowship as some of our so-called Christian nations do. All colors are welcome to the faith of the prophet." Despite the Arab influence of modern Egyptians, Douglass clearly identifies racially with them, in a way that other American authors were unable to. He recognizes the effects of time and miscegenation on the Egyptian population as he links them directly to African Americans. Additionally, his analysis leaps to a direct comparison between the hypocrisy of Christians using the Bible to support their racist ideology and the color-blind practices of Islam also discussed by Benjamin Mays and El Hajj Malik El-Shabazz on their Egyptian journeys. After his visit, Douglass published an essay arguing once more for the Africanity of the Egyptians. He writes, "I have long been interested in ethnology, and I have wanted the evidence of greatness under the colored skin to meet and beat back the charge of natural, original, and permanent inferiority." In the genius of the pyramids and unquestionably African features of the sphinxes, Douglass found his evidence.¹²⁰

¹²⁰ Herschthal, Eric. "New York Times: Frederick Douglass's Fight Against Scientific Racism."

Other accounts of African Americans in Egypt include Cornell West's trip to deliver the Edward Said Memorial Lecture in Cairo, mentioned in his 2009 memoir, *Brother West*. Writer Juanita Harrison travelled the world between 1927 and 1936, chronicling her adventures in Egypt and Syria, among other countries in her book *My Great Wide Beautiful World*. Harrison recounts the joys of Egyptian feasts and expresses appreciation for a lack of boundaries and freedom from racial oppression—a rare experience for black women during her time.¹²¹

In 1934 Rev. Michael King or M.L. King, was senior pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church and a prominent minister in Atlanta. His church sent him on a trip to Rome, Tunisia, Egypt, Jerusalem and Bethlehem then Berlin, to attend a Baptist World Alliance meeting. This trip had a profound effect on King. In Germany he witnessed the rise of Nazism, which the Baptist alliance repudiated in a resolution. When the senior King returned home in August 1934, he changed his name to Martin Luther King Sr, and his son's name to Martin Luther King Jr, an ode to the 1517 theologian who lead the revolution that split the western Christian church.¹²²

Visual images of Egypt also played an important role in widespread recognition and appreciation of modern Egypt among African Americans. The iconic image of Louis Armstrong playing the trumpet for his wife, Lucille, in front of the Sphinx and great pyramids in Giza, Egypt in 1961 was seen all over the world, further cementing the

Frederick Douglass in Washington D. C.: The Lion of Anacostia. 22 February 2018, <https://thelionofanacostia.wordpress.com/tag/egypt/>

¹²¹ Jaunita Harrison, *My great wide beautiful world* (MacMillan Company: New York, 1939), 81.

¹²² DeNeen L. Brown, "The story of how Michael King Jr. became Martin Luther King Jr.," *Washington Post*, January 15, 2019, accessed <https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/2019/01/15/story-how-michael-king-jr-became-martin-luther-king-jr/?noredirect=on>

Blackness of Egypt to African American audiences. The incredible scholarship of Black Kemetologists combined with evidence of trips to modern Egypt completed by high profile African Americans sparked a new marked interest in Egyptian travel for African Americans.

CHAPTER 4

VISTING EGYPT: MODERN NARRATIVES OF TRAVEL ACCOUNTS

While the pioneering work of the Kemetologists who fought to center Kemet in the study of Africa laid the foundation for this travel phenomena; the writings and travel memoirs of African American authors worked to build a heightened sense of awareness of Egypt, its history, its peoples, and its culture. This chapter reviews first-hand accounts of modern African American travel to Egypt. This section will illustrate the experiences of these travelers by recognizing the agency of these African voices and examining their experiences in their own words. The data used in this section is gathered from travel blogs published on the world wide web, and sourced via a series of web searches and online posts made in travel groups geared toward and with a predominant membership of African Americans.

While many scholars often overlook non-traditional forms of data such as blogs, and social media posts, Malleus and Slattery's study of personal travel blogs demonstrate the significance of blogs as rich and meaningful sites for studying intercultural interaction.¹²³ Their case study of an American writer's blogs written in relation to her travels to Zimbabwe illustrate the many benefits of utilizing travel blogs as a form of cultural production and as helpful and cogent indicators of self-representation. Blogs are a useful site on which to conduct research because several of their innate characteristics naturally lend themselves to producing valuable and enlightening data. Blogs produce

¹²³ Malleus, Rick and Elizabeth Slattery. "Personal Travel Blogs as Texts for Studying Intercultural Interactions: a Pilot Test Case Study of an American Sojourner's Blogs from Zimbabwe." *Springer Plus*. 2014, <http://www.springerplus.com/content/3/1/211>. Accessed 4 July 2019.

data conducive to thematic or content analysis for many reasons. Pfister and Soliz demonstrate that blogs allow individuals to represent themselves and their own experiences accurately rather than being (mis)represented by another individual.¹²⁴ This is particularly important to researchers operating within the Afrocentric paradigm as it is imperative to support African agency and to give individuals the power to tell their own story and craft their own narrative.

Blogs have been criticized by more conservative thinkers as being illegitimate and producing skewed, misleading or untrue information because they make authorship easily accessible to anyone with an internet connection and electronic device. Yet when approached from a different perspective, this becomes yet one more reason to embrace this new form of digital communication. Blogs represent a certain form of structural, political and ideological freedom. The writing style, subject matter, method of recording information, operational structures, and what is deemed to be relevant content are entirely at the discretion of the author. For a people who have historically been restricted from the production of knowledge and information in mainstream institutions of western society, the promise of autonomy held in the unrestricted nature of blogging is particularly liberating. The participatory culture of this medium lends itself easily to communal learning. Within the discourse of communication between marginalized people, blogging must be studied in terms of its ability to reflect experiences that have been trivialized, denigrated or ignored in the past, particularly the voices of oppressed peoples and those who seek to uproot the established status quo.

¹²⁴ Smith Pfister, Damien, and Jordan Soliz. *(Re)Conceptualizing Intercultural Communication in a Networked Society*. *Journal of International & Intercultural Communication*. Nov 2011, Vol. 4 Issue 4, p246-251.

This study aims to investigate the liberatory potential of blogging and online communities. The final sections of this study, focus on three major questions: (1) What is the importance and significance of travel and mobility? (2) What challenges do African peoples face in modern day travel? (3) What opportunities exist for Digital Pan-Africanism to mitigate these challenges? These two questions will be addressed within this chapter and the final question will be further explicated in the conclusion.

Significance of Travel and Mobility

Historically, mobility and the ability to travel freely have been closely identified with a range of other freedoms and opportunities associated with modern citizenship. In his work on the significance of race to transport history Seiler notes that “personal liberty consists in the power of locomotion, of changing situation or removing one’s person to whatsoever place one’s own inclination may direct.”¹²⁵ Since enslaved Africans first set foot on the stolen ground of the United States, there has been a concentrated effort towards mobility as a means of obtaining freedom and a corresponding effort in restricting their mobility as a means of oppression. The significance of the use of a “railroad” (the most advanced means of transportation in the time period) as a harbinger of freedom and symbol of liberty is no mistake. Africans used every mode and method of transportation, from sophisticated to crude to unconventional in order to gain their freedom.

There is a very direct and reciprocal relationship between racism and systems of modern transportation. As exemplified by Henry Ford’s mass-produced Model T, modern transportation systems depended on industrialization. This industrialization was largely

¹²⁵ Seiler, "The Significance of Race to Transport History." 307.

possible and widely successful because of cheap or free labor from immigrants and enslaved or imprisoned Africans as well as resources stolen from Africa through colonialism. These systems were all rationalized by and built upon concepts of race and racial hierarchy, thus resulting in the modern transportation industry supporting structural racism while simultaneously being produced by but also restricted from people of color.

For many white Americans, the widespread availability of personal motorized vehicles led to an innate sense of freedom and commenced celebrations of the “freedom of the open road.” While this new form of transportation represented a unique opportunity for African Americans to avoid the inequity and discrimination of segregated public transportation, it came with other restrictions to their freedoms. The mobility of Black motorists was impacted by their lack of access to food, fuel and sleeping accommodations while traveling and hampered by expectations to conform to white social mores such as avoiding passing white drivers, staying out of sundown towns and frequently being stopped, questioned and harassed for driving while black. The importance and significance of travel is precisely the reason that Black travelers have had their mobility either attenuated or forcibly removed through slavery, genocide, segregation, isolation, and incarceration.

Foster contextualizes Black access to leisure pursuits as contributions to the quest for universal human rights.¹²⁶ His study of vacation, travel and leisure pursuits by African Americans between 1890-1945 demonstrate the importance Blacks attached to enjoying themselves despite facing serious threats of rejection, hostile or unsafe environments and

¹²⁶ Foster, Mark. “In the Face of ‘Jim Crow’: Prosperous Blacks and Vacations, Travel and Outdoor Leisure 1890-1945.” University of Chicago Press. <http://www.journals.uchicago.edu/t-and-c>. Accessed on 21 March 2019.

even physical violence. Carter's study of race and leisure travel highlights the emergence and importance of black travel agents as facilitators of knowledge and necessary harbingers of safe passage due to the historic safety issues behind many African Americans preference to take trips in large groups.¹²⁷ Many African American travelers feel safe enough to travel alone or in smaller groups now. Older generations tend to still travel in groups, either as a force of habit or as a means of seeking out company. The role of travel agents in the Black community has shifted to a focus on distribution of both travel-related and cultural information. One agent explained how she works to dismiss negative myths of Africa among African Americans. "[W]e have sent hundreds of people to Egypt. I guess I kind of specialize, and a lot of Black people did not realize it, Egypt is an African country. The Europeans [Whites] will have you thinking it is in the Middle East etc. Any place but Africa, because...Timbuktu was the learning center of the world."¹²⁸

While travel and mobility are indeed important to the happiness and freedom of all human beings, these elements are especially paramount for African people in order to reclaim their lost heritage and restore the greatness of their ancestors. Edward Wilmot Blyden, forefather of the Pan-African movement, believed that in order for the Black race to advance, it was necessary to restore African self-esteem. He argued that self-confidence would come as a natural product of education about the prominence and distinction of classical African civilizations. While Blyden ultimately advocated for

¹²⁷ Carter, Perry L. "Coloured Places and Pigmented Holidays: Racialized Leisure Travel." *Tourism Geographies* 10.3 (2008): 265-84.

¹²⁸ Carter, Perry L. "Coloured Places and Pigmented Holidays: Racialized Leisure Travel." *Tourism Geographies* 10.3 (2008): 272.

African Americans to return to Africa permanently, he also regarded travel as an important method of gaining that essential knowledge of African antiquity and pride in our ancestral land. When he had the opportunity to travel to Egypt and visit the pyramids for the first time he wrote,

I felt that I had a peculiar “heritage in the Great Pyramid”...built by that branch of the descendants of Noah, the enterprising sons of Ham, from whom I am descended...I seemed to hear the echo of those illustrious Africans. I seemed to feel the impulse from those stirring characters who sent civilization into Greece...Could my voice have reached every African in the world, I would have earnestly addressed him in the language of Hilary Teage: ‘Retake your fame!’¹²⁹

For Blyden, the power of endurance—an idea that would later evolve into his concept of the African personality—was the greatest strength of the race.¹³⁰ This power could be reignited through a realization of the greatness of the African past and certainly experienced through travel to the motherland.

Challenges to African American Travel

Scholars have demonstrated that opportunities for leisure are an important part of general life satisfaction for the majority of the population.¹³¹ However, there is very little empirical research on tourism attitudes, preferences and behaviors of African American tourists. Steven Phillip’s study on discrimination and leisure found that respondents’ perceptions of racial discrimination has a significant impact on the quality of their leisure

¹²⁹ Blyden, Edward Wilmot. “From West Africa to Palestine.” In *Black Spokesman: Selected Published Writings of Edward Wilmot Blyden*. Edited by Lynch, Hollis R. London: Frank Cass & Co., 25.

¹³⁰ Schramm 42

¹³¹ Edginton, Christopher et. al. *Leisure and Life Satisfaction*. New York: McGraw-Hill: 1998.

experiences.¹³² Earlier studies demonstrate there is a lack of reliable research on African American travel patterns. The little research that has been completed seems to offer varying outcomes with some studies finding very few differences in Blacks participation in leisure travel after variables for education and income were adjusted while others demonstrate marked differences between blacks and whites participation in recreation.¹³³ While African Americans are traveling more frequently than they have before, and more frequently than they are perceived as doing so, they are rendered as invisible in the travel industry where services, products and opportunities are marketed almost exclusively to white consumers.¹³⁴ Invisibility in travel & tourism industry have been the catalyst for many new diverse black businesses emerging with the purpose of catering to African American travelers.

There is one significant study conducted by Mandala Research in both 2010 and 2018 that investigates African American travelers' motivations and economic impact on the travel market. Several of the major barriers to travel for African Americans are similar to the general travel market, with 28% saying they are too busy to travel and 25% reporting they can't afford it, and sharing the impact of not having anyone to travel with, or airport hassles (13%). There is one noticeable difference that separates Black travelers from whites as 15% share that concerns about racial profiling play a role in their travel decisions.

¹³² Phillip, Steven. "African American Perceptions of Leisure, Racial Discrimination, and Life Satisfaction." *Perceptual and Motor Skills*. 1998.

¹³³ Craig and Philip argue that this difference is directly related to the difference in preference for rural areas for blacks and whites.

¹³⁴ Philip. "African American Perceptions of Leisure." 45.

Much of the prior research has suggested that differences in findings on black and white participation in travel and leisure have two primary sets of reasoning behind them. One is the marginalization theory which examines African American behavior as a function of their marginal status in the United States. It suggests that they may not be financially capable of engaging in travel due to their propensity to consistently receive less income and accumulate less wealth than their peers in similar industries with similar educational levels. The ethnicity theory posits that African Americans prefer to engage in different types of leisure activities than whites do due to cultural preferences and differences in values. It questions whether existing research is completed in a bias manner, favoring experiences or activities that African Americans are less exposed to or less likely to enjoy. A theory that is conspicuously absent in earlier research, but beginning to be explored more often, are the effects of prejudice and discrimination on African American travel behavior. Alderman's work reveals that the legacy of racial discrimination in the United States curtails some travel behavior but encourages others.¹³⁵ For example, many African Americans report leaving the United States (specifically to visit sites within the African diaspora) in order to escape issues of racism, discrimination, and structural inequality that they face daily in the U.S.

One other challenge African Americans face is being aware of oppression inherent to the tourist/consumer and host/producer relationship and being reticent to participate. On a trip to a primary school in a local farming community in Tanzania, Elise Ayeh reflected on her perceived responsibility to uplift the communities she visits.

¹³⁵ Alderman, Derek H. "Introduction to the Special Issue: African Americans and Tourism." *Tourism Geographies* 15.3 (2013): 375-9. Web.

“When I participate in activities like this, I always ask myself, how am I helping these people and not encouraging exploitative tourism?”¹³⁶ Tourism certainly reflects social inequality and at times can contribute to it as well, but new research is showing that it can also be utilized as a means of reducing social inequality or alleviating its impact for both the producer and consumer of tourism related activities. Meyer presents an outline and critique of pro-poor tourism¹³⁷ which highlights supportive policies and economic growth as a means of absolute or relative poverty reduction but only at a micro level.¹³⁸

A final challenge that presents itself to African American travelers is that of finding a safe space in order to engage in self-care. Patricia Hill Collins speaks on the importance of safe spaces to the physical and mental health of Black women.¹³⁹ In the past, travel into unfamiliar and unknown territory carried the potential of creating more problems for African American travelers who relied on resources such as the *Negro Motorist Green Book* to navigate safely within the United States, but ironically found a respite from Jim Crow and racism when they traveled abroad.¹⁴⁰ Today many African Americans continue to report feeling safer abroad than they do at home in the midst of microaggressions at work and school, racially motivated gun violence even in houses of

¹³⁶ Ayeh, Elise. Primary School Visit in Tanzania. *Facebook*, 24 Jan 2019. www.facebook.com/EliseAyeh. Accessed 24 Jan 2019.

¹³⁷ Pro-poor tourism is defined as “tourism that results in increased net benefits for poor people” (Bennett 168).

¹³⁸ Meyer, Dorothea. “Pro-poor Tourism—Can Tourism Contribute to Poverty Reduction in Less Economically Developed Countries?” *Tourism and Inequality: Problems and Prospects*. edited by Stroma Cole and Morgan Nigel. CABI, 2010. 164-182.

¹³⁹ Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. London: Routledge, 2008.

¹⁴⁰ Foster, Mark. “In the Face of ‘Jim Crow’: Prosperous Blacks and Vacations, Travel and Outdoor Leisure 1890-1945.” University of Chicago Press. <http://www.journals.uchicago.edu/t-and-c>. Accessed on 21 March 2019.

worship, presidential support for blatantly racist and xenophobic policies and remarks, and repeated cases of fatal police brutality which are processed through the U.S. justice system with seeming impunity. While some African Americans (especially those who have never traveled before) are resistant to exploring new experiences, many more excitedly reach towards opportunities to leave the United States, even if only for a short time, especially in favor of traveling to black and brown countries.

Findings

The bloggers depicted in this section represent a diverse set of backgrounds and experiences. They include two men and ten women from nine cities in seven states—all of whom self-identify or present as African American. Their educational experience skews on the high side as nine out of twelve of them indicate completing some college. This is representative of the African They represent a variety of industries mostly within professional fields. Four out of twelve are married and six have at least one child. The data set was chosen at random from sixteen self-identifying African American bloggers. Each blogger's post focuses on their visit to Egypt and gives details of their personal experience, explicates cultural similarities and differences, includes tips for others who would like to travel to Egypt, and offers tidbits of information that they found useful or interesting. The following sections detail each of the themes that emerged from analysis of the data.

Theme: Why Egypt?

Tourism is a key industry in Egypt. As one of the country's most important sources of income, it was responsible for roughly 12% of its GDP between 2010 and

2018.¹⁴¹ Tourists visit Egypt for a wide variety of reasons, particularly for its history—the rich museums and tombs, the awe-inspiring pyramids, sphinxes and temples, and the natural beauty of the deserts and Nile River. Many of the bloggers shared these same motivations for their visit as it is a popular tourist destination, but some demonstrated ambivalence. Avid traveler, Nikki Okrah, shares her initial hesitation to visit the land of Pharaohs.

“Personally, Egypt was not very high on my travel list which was a HUGE mistake. I lived and worked in Dubai for a little over a year (2015-2016) and my colleagues and friends, some of whom were Egyptian, had mentioned I should not rank it highly on places to see while in the region. Instead, I opted for trips to Lebanon, Israel, Palestine and Jordan. I finally went in March 2018 because a close friend had been based in Egypt for work and another friend encouraged me to visit so we can explore the country Egypt over-delivered and it is a highly underrated travel destination.”¹⁴²

Okrah’s initial personal desire to travel to Egypt was already low and reinforced by Egyptian friends of hers. She lists other countries that she visited instead, which are all in the Middle East. Gary Bushrod gave a number of reasons for his desire to travel to Egypt,

...it originates back to when I was a non-bill-paying lad and was learning stories of the Bible. All of the illustrations and stories of Ancient Egypt often sparked my curiosity. For years, I thought Egypt was a mythical place. I also learned much about the country in elementary school, and was fascinated by Egyptian royalty, the pyramids and even hieroglyphics. In adulthood, I began to pursue membership into Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Incorporated. In the Spring of 2006, I was initiated into the Brotherhood and my desire to visit Egypt magnified ten fold. There are many connections between Alpha Phi Alpha and Egyptian culture. Not to mention, in all my travels, I have yet to visit the Motherland. I figured it

¹⁴¹ “Egypt Tourism Revenues” *Trading Economics*.

¹⁴² Okrah, Nikki “How Egypt Exceeded My Expectations.” *Travel Noire*, 27 Dec. 2018, <https://legacy.travelnoire.com/traveler-story-nikki-egypt/>. Accessed 2 Aug 2019.

was time for that to end!¹⁴³

Bushrod was noticeably more excited and invested in his trip. His desire to visit Egypt stemmed in fulfilling childhood fantasies rather than a sense of racial pride which was a key motivating factor for Michelle Robbins. “I learned how Egypt had been white washed when I was young. I knew that all of these temples and pyramids, mathematical equations, and scientific break throughs came from ancient Kemet, so I wanted to see them for myself”¹⁴⁴

Theme: Safety

One issue that concerned several respondents prior to or during their trip was safety. Veronica Wells reports that increased political unrests and news of violent protests three months before her trip made her family concerned, so she postponed her trip by five months. When she finally went, she had an amazing experience that exceeded her expectations and was reminded by her tour guides to spread the word that there was little to no threat to tourists in Egypt. When Wells learned about the bombings in Boston the last night of her trip, she finally concludes that “(n)o place is completely safe” and fear should never curtail one’s dreams.¹⁴⁵

Tay the Travelista doesn’t mention concerns about safety from political demonstrations but includes several practical safety tips in her Egyptian travel blog. She

¹⁴³ Bushrod, Gary. “#CatchGinEgypt - Part I: Cairo, Egypt.” *CatchGifUCan*, 11 Nov. 2016, http://www.catchgifucan.com/travel-1/2016/11/8/catchginegypt-part-i-cairo?rq=Egypt&fbclid=IwAR2IKTKn2ToJ0PV9HayBZF385gWgjHL_jhq-_AW1igyswtkKGfnCfQERrJ0. Accessed 20 August 2019.

¹⁴⁴ Robbins, Michelle. “One Time for the Culture: Cairo, Egypt” *Michelle on the Move*. Nov 2018. <http://michelleonthemove.com/2018/Nov/39483099>. Accessed 5 June 2019.

¹⁴⁵ Wells, Veronica. “Tell the Truth About Egypt.” *Madam Noire*. 29 Apr 2013. <http://madamenoire.com/273676/tell-the-truth-about-egypt/2/>

recommends hiring a guide who will act as both teacher and bodyguard; cautions travelers to be prepared for extra security in airports, checkpoints, hotels and popular tourist sites; and warns them about cultural differences on the road. Four other respondents also commented on road safety, warning visitors that lane markings are purely for decoration rather than guidelines. Ultimately, Tay emphasizes in the only bold text in her entire post: “**Egypt is extremely safe.**”¹⁴⁶

Popular travel blogger, Oneika Raymond, had a very different experience. “The good news: I’m in Aswan, Egypt and it is beautiful. The bad news: I got pickpocketed last night, on my second night here,” she writes. Raymond explains that two men had created a distraction in the street and then lifted her wallet containing \$250 USD and her credit cards. She acknowledges that she made several mistakes: placing her wallet in the large front pocket of her backpack, wearing her backpack on her back instead of in front where she can monitor it more easily, and carrying more cash than she needed for one day, rather than leaving her valuables at the hotel. Fortunately, she was able to recover her cards, but not her cash. Overall Raymond admits to struggling to create a fair and balanced post that doesn’t blame Egypt for her mistakes, but also doesn’t downplay her disappointment in the country.¹⁴⁷

Theme: Blackness, Identity and Belonging

Themes of Blackness and Identity are often discussed within the discourse of

¹⁴⁶ Tay the Travelista. ”15 Interesting Things You Should Know About Egypt” <http://www.taythetravelista.com/15-interesting-things-you-should-know-about-egypt/>. Accessed 19 June 2019.

¹⁴⁷ Raymond, Oneika. ”Pickpocketed in Egypt.” *Oneika the Traveller*. 24 Mar 2013. <http://oneikathetraveller.com/pickpocketed-in-egypt.html> Accessed on 26 May 2019.

African American travel to any diasporic destination or African country. “In Egypt I learned about the country, about history, particularly black folks—don't ever let anyone tell you the ancient Egyptians weren't black...”¹⁴⁸ Wells was incredibly adamant about the identity and racial affiliation of the Egyptians, while other respondents felt a sense of family or belonging, but didn't explicitly state a sense of shared heritage

Candace Edwards recalls, “Everywhere I went, I was called ‘cousin’ and ‘daughter.’ Complete strangers invited me into their homes for tea! I was saddened by the clear poverty and desperation. But I felt at home.”¹⁴⁹ Well-known blogger Gloria Atanmo had a similar experience, “I noticed I and other black [American] travelers got seemingly preferential treatment. They were friendly to everyone, but whenever they saw me...their faces immediately lit up and they greeted me with, ‘Hello my cousin!’ ‘My color!’ ‘Welcome home my sister’ ‘Yes, my queen.’”¹⁵⁰ Tay the Travelista also felt like royalty and enjoyed the shouts of “Hey cousin” and “Welcome Home Family”¹⁵¹ These encounters satiated their longing for kin recognition and provided a sense of family, return and belonging which are important.

For some travelers, the prospect of escaping minority identity & discovering a

¹⁴⁸ Wells, Veronica. “Tell the Truth About Egypt” *Madame Noire*. 29 April 2013. <http://madamenoire.com/273676/tell-the-truth-about-egypt/>

¹⁴⁹ Edwards, Candace. “Sweet Ahmed: My Most Cherished Memories of Egypt.” *The Key of Candie*. 25 Sep 2018. [Http://thekeyofcandie.com-sweet-ahmed-my-most-cherished=memories-of-Egypt](http://thekeyofcandie.com-sweet-ahmed-my-most-cherished=memories-of-Egypt). Accessed on 20 Augh 2019

¹⁵⁰ Atanmo, Gloria. “Why Egypt Should Move to the Top of Your Bucket List. *The Blog Abroad*. 27 May 2018. Accessed <http://theblogabroad.com/2018/05/27/exploring-egypt> Accessed on 23 June 2018.

¹⁵¹ Tay the Travelista. “15 Interesting Things You Should Know About Egypt” <http://www.taythetravelista.com/15-interesting-things-you-should-know-about-egypt/>. Accessed 19 June 2019.

cultural identity is one that they may not have even considered prior to their trip, but discover as a surprising advantage of travel to certain spaces. Michelle Robbins identifies as a black woman, but presents as "racially ambiguous." During her first journey to Egypt, she suddenly realized "for the first time in my life I blended into the crowd. It was surprisingly liberating for me to be indistinguishable from those around me. I thought to myself, 'Wow, so this is how white people feel every day.'¹⁵² The brief experience of no longer being a minority and the recognition of a privilege, she never even realized existed, were enough to keep her in awe.

Keisha Rogers, an African American expat living in Qatar, has a very different view: "because we are an oppressed and stateless people, we gravitate and often hold onto other Black cultures that look cool. While understandable, it's kind of embarrassing. We have our own rich heritage to be proud of and it ain't Egyptian or Rasta or anything else originating from the other side of the Continent." Roger's trip to Egypt was everything she wanted it to be, and she undoubtedly enjoyed herself, but she viewed the belief that those who populated ancient Kemet were Black as patently false.

Our ancestors were kidnapped from west and central Africa, this is a fact. But for some reason we want to claim the civilization that undoubtedly enslaved other Black people (Nubians) once they rose to prominence. My guide in Luxor was a Nubian woman, and she was surprised and honestly happy to hear that I didn't consider Egyptian culture my own. Her words 'yeah a lot of Black people from America are fascinated with our culture, they really love it, why is that?' That's not kinship, that's confusion. Then just visiting the different sites and really LOOKING at the relics, those are not my people fam [crying laughing emoji] they have an Asiatic look that I couldn't immediately place. But the people in subservient positions were painted Black. Honestly even if they did have melanin, I'm of the firm belief that shared skin tone does not equate to a shared life experience.

¹⁵² Robbins, Michelle. "One Time for the Culture: Cairo, Egypt" *Michelle on the Move*. Nov 2018. <http://michelleonthemove.com/2018/Nov/39483099>. Accessed 5 June 2019.

The Nubians are proof of this. The fact that we're more drawn to Egypt and not Sudan further validated my beliefs that we're just chasing prestige when lauding Kemet [emoji depicting brown woman with arms crossed upwards in an "X"]. In any event, I gladly acknowledge my west African ancestry. It's simply a fact, and my family personally traced it back in the 90s. My bloodline led to the Senegambia. That's a whole other coast away from Kemet. When you know who you are and where you come from you don't chase after anything else.¹⁵³

Rogers implies that certain African Americans use trips back to Africa to repossess imagined origins, because they do not have any of their own. Her comment that shared skin tone does not equate to a shared life experience, is a remix of the common African American vernacular saying, "All skinfolk ain't kinfolk," meaning that one's outward appearance or racial identity does not necessarily correlate to their ideology, loyalties or philosophical location. Of course, this sentiment is true, as there are more than a few Africans who have allowed self-hatred and the lies of white supremacy to separate them from or poison them against their own, but Rogers mistake lies in her complete lack of any evidence in support of the thesis she poses. Diop's work is full of data documenting the cultural commonalities that equate to the "shared life experience" that she believes do not exist. While it is commendable that Rogers has traced her family line to the Senegambia, it is unfortunate that she doesn't seem to understand or acknowledge just how recent that ancestral tie is. Despite her blatant rejection of ancient Kemet, they indeed formed the pillars of modern African civilization.

¹⁵³ Rogers, Keisha. "Expat Travels: Egypt." *An Introvert Abroad*. 27 Oct 2018. <https://www.keisharogers.com/2018/10/expat-travels-egypt.html>. Accessed 22 July 2019.

Theme: Race and Racism

Even though the majority of the respondents felt a sense of kinship and family connection with the Egyptian people—one that possibly may have been exaggerated for commercial purposes—two of the respondents reported being targets of flagrant racism. Fatima Ali and Valeri Clark, both of whom live in Cairo use their blogs to speak out against Egyptian racism. Ali, who is of Sudanese descent and has lived in Egypt since she was nine months old, shares “At some point in my life in Egypt, I grew fed up with the daily negative comments that I hear from people on the streets about my color.”¹⁵⁴ She continues, “Being a black woman, you will experience some of the most ignorant, racist comments you will ever hear. I would never recommend coming to Egypt to any black person. What an irony.”¹⁵⁵ Both Clark and Ali describe the crude and derogatory names hurled at them on the street such as *samara* or “blackie” and *abeed* or slave. In terms of an explanation for this behavior, the women point to the discrimination in Egyptian media and the identity crisis that many Egyptians go through involving “imaginary geographies” in which Egypt is not located in Africa and Black people do not come from Egypt. This dangerous rhetoric fuels the hate and discrimination that are prevalent in Egypt.

¹⁵⁴ Ali, Fatima. “Racism in Egypt.” *Black in Egypt*. Translation by Cairene. <https://thedomainoftheStrange.wordpress.com/about/>. Accessed on 29 July 2019.

¹⁵⁵ Ali, “Racism in Egypt.”

Theme: Intercultural Connections

Two of the respondents reported experiencing a particularly deep and meaningful connection with an Egyptian during their stay. For Edwards, this was a young merchant boy she refers to as “Sweet Ahmed,” also the title of her blog post. While exiting Edfu Temple with her husband, she was approached by a handsome young boy selling bracelets. After haggling for several moments she bought four of his bracelets for \$2 USD and continued towards the exit. The boy followed her, asking questions about her nationality and children in halting English. At the end of their exchange he offered her one of his bracelets as a gift and the two took a picture together. The encounter was brief but incredibly meaningful to Edwards. “People. Connection. Memories. Spreading love. THAT’S what life is about! I will never see Ahmed again. I may not always remember his name or even his sweet face. But I will always remember the encounter and how it made me feel.”¹⁵⁶

Oneika Raymond had a similar experience with an elderly man who offered to help her when she had lost her way. As the victim of a recent pickpocketing scheme, Raymond was especially tense and distrusting. “I turned to this little man, wiry and impish as Rumpelstiltskin, and curtly told him no: we didn’t need his help and we were fine. I pursed my lips and my body, on full alert, tensed instinctively. I was on guard now”¹⁵⁷ When the old man who introduced himself as Fathi offered to give Raymond and her husband a tour, Raymond refused, determined not to allow herself to be swindled

¹⁵⁶ Edwards, Candace. “Sweet Ahmed: My Most Cherished Memories of Egypt.” *The Key of Candie*. 25 Sep 2018. [Http://thekeyofcandie.com-sweet-ahmed-my-most-cherished=memories-of-Egypt](http://thekeyofcandie.com-sweet-ahmed-my-most-cherished=memories-of-Egypt). Accessed on 20 August 2019.

¹⁵⁷ Raymond, Oneika. “Egypt: A Lesson in Friendship” *Oneika the Traveller*. 27 Sep 2013. Accessed www.oneikathetraveller.com/egypt-a-lesson-in-friendship.html.

once again. But Fathi promised he wanted nothing from them but their time and company and which proved to be true. He took them through textile markets, spice stalls, a school, and a church as he translated and gave historical context. After declining his offer to take them to his favorite restaurant, he took them to one more stop where he gave them tea and told them the story of his life as a guide for 50 years, punctuating the story with pictures and letters from his friends around the world. That single interaction had a profound effect on Raymond and she began to re-think her earlier behavior. She wrote,

I was ashamed of myself: I had made a decision about Fathi before giving him the chance to show me who he really was. How silly. How ignorant. How unfair. It is reckless to let your view on a whole country or people be coloured by unfortunate incidents that are sometimes beyond anyone's control. I was pickpocketed by thieves and harassed by vendors, but the current political and economic situation in Egypt makes this sort of desperation almost understandable. And in all the drama, I had forgotten that one of the best things about travelling is these fortuitous meetings with interesting local people. The kind of people who take the time to show two clueless foreigners around, the kind of people who fully invest themselves in trying to make you feel at home even while abroad. Thank you, Fathi, for the reminder.¹⁵⁸

These two seemingly random occurrences emphasize the significance of human relationships to the African worldview and the value it places on communal bonding. This ancient vestige of ancestral memory was unconsciously rekindled between these Egyptian men and African American women most likely without any of the parties involved being fully conscious of the importance of what had just occurred.

¹⁵⁸ Raymond, "Egypt: A Lesson in Friendship"

CHAPTER 5

SHARING EGYPT: DIGITAL PAN-AFRICANISM AS A METHOD FOR INCREASING AFRICAN AMERICAN ACCESS TO TRAVEL

The previous section addressed the significance and importance of travel and mobility as well as challenges and barriers that may prevent or impact travel in the African American community. It is important to note that inequity in access to travel is a multidimensional phenomenon arising from a lack of means, experience and proficiency including, but consisting of much more than limited financial resources. Freedom of mobility is a critical human right that Africans in America have long struggled to gain and retain.

The study explored the life experiences of twelve African American bloggers who made the conscious decision to visit and write about Egypt. Thematic analysis of their work allowed several patterns to emerge from the data. Ultimately, their writing serves to illuminate some of the important issues faced by African American travelers including safety, identity, community and oppression. Unfortunately though, these writers fail to center their work, thus limiting their effectiveness. While the work they produce is helpful and centered in the African American experience at the surface level, they are not deeply rooted in a position of agency and accountability; they lack a liberatory thrust. While this crucial piece is missing, it is still helpful to examine their work in terms of its potential for African agency. Diasporic travel blogs that are written from the proper philosophical location and that center African cultural values and promote agency have the potential to radically engage Africans around the diaspora.

The first chapter of this dissertation sets a foundation for the study by establishing the historical context for the topic and expounding upon the parameters of the study. In chapter two, I build on the narrative by cataloging African Egyptologists who radically and emphatically laid claim to Kemet despite intense opposition from Western academe, thus providing the impetus for African Americans to travel to Egypt to seek to learn more about their ancient heritage in Kemet. Chapter three continues this narrative by examining the popular accounts of Egyptian travel by prominent African American writers, actors, musicians, and scholars. In chapter four I review firsthand accounts of modern African Americans who travel to Egypt, utilizing their self-published travel blogs as important data. Here in the final chapter, I move away from the focus on Egypt as a specific destination and explore the broader possibilities offered through close this study by exploring issues around injustice in tourism, examining the importance of travel within the Afrocentric paradigm as a method for developing transnational solidarity among African people, and highlighting the implications of this study for the future of Africology. I conclude by introducing the theory of digital pan-Africanism, and I advocate for its use as a modern tool of diasporic unity in the struggle for liberation.

Tourism and (in)Justice

Cohen identifies five categories of tourist experiences: recreational, diversionary, experiential, experimental, and existential.¹⁵⁹ Two of those categories are relevant to this study. The first is experiential tourism in which the traveler purposely seeks out authentic experiences and pursues meaningful engagement with the people, history, culture, food and environment. The second is existential tourism in which authentic travel experiences

¹⁵⁹ Cohen, Erik. "A Phenomenology of Tourist Experiences." *Sociology*. 13.2 (1979):179-201.

activate an existential state of being. Much of the research that has engaged this topic has focused on the emotions, sensations, relationships, and sense of self that emerges from this sort of travel with emphasis placed on the importance of geographic perspectives. While these modes have proven helpful in allowing cultural outsiders to more completely engage with their destination, it holds even greater potential when being utilized by diasporic Africans seeking to establish connections with other African people and reestablish consciousness. Utilizing this type of travel within a frame of reference in which the traveler's language, direction and attitude is properly located and phenomena are viewed from the perspective of an African worldview allows for more meaningful interaction and makes cultural reclamation possible.

Within the past two decades, tourism studies have increasingly begun to highlight the negative, imbalanced and exploitative relationships that develop between hosts and visitors in less developed countries that are heavily dependent on tourism. Dispossession of indigenous people, destruction of sacred spaces, environmental racism, class polarization, and tensions between residents of differing socio-economical status are a few of the global inequities that arise as a direct result of tourism. Many other issues emerge from specific tourism niches such as sex tourism and organ transplant medical tourism. Overall, it is clear that in its current state the tourism industry actively contributes to the cultural, political and economic oppression of local populations. There is a clear need for developing equitable relations between tourists and locals that are built on ethical and principled practices.

In seeking solutions to these inequitable systems, scholars have begun creating tourism models fusing social justice methods with systems of tourism. Barton and

Leonard present a rather well-grounded study illustrating how social justice tourism can affect racial reconciliation and sustainable community development in the deep South.¹⁶⁰ Their method involves teaching tourists about the struggles of oppressed peoples, allowing the tourists to engage in local development projects, and undertaking literal or figurative pilgrimages that allow them to gain enhanced understanding thereby inciting their participatory action in reducing inequity. Through performing a case study with the Emmett Till Memorial Commission dedicated to racial reconciliation within Tallahatchie County (the site of the trials for Till's murderers), the researchers come to realize how difficult it is to truly challenge certain perceptions and encourage people to consider a worldview that is not complementary to their own. While this study saw a few minor successes, I believe that the true opportunity in this new approach lies in utilizing this strategy as a form of pilgrimage tourism designed to bring greater understanding and unity between Africans in the continent and those in the diaspora. The authors note that: "tourism builds relationships and under the right conditions, relationships can grow into institutions"⁹⁶ Institution building has been one of the major goals of the Black community for many generations. While global movements such as the Black Power Movement, Negritude, and the fight for the independence of African nations have worked to unite African people ideologically, introducing a physical component of unity by visiting the land, learning directly about the people's struggles and proposed solutions, and joining resources could yield greater success.

Freya Higgins-Desbiolles assesses the potential for justice through tourism by

¹⁶⁰ Barton, Alan W., and Sarah J. Leonard. "Incorporating Social Justice in Tourism Planning: Racial Reconciliation and Sustainable Community Development in the Deep South." *Community Development* 41.3 (2010): 298-322. Web.

highlighting examples of the ongoing efforts of justice-oriented activists, organizations, and communities. She utilizes Holden's definition of justice tourism: "a process which promotes a just form of travel between members of different communities. It seeks to achieve mutual understanding, solidarity and equality among participants."¹⁶¹ An earlier analysis from Scheyvens further characterizes justice tourism as containing the following qualities:

- Builds solidarity between visitors and those visited
- Promotes mutual understanding and relationships based on equity, sharing and respect
- Supports self-sufficiency and self-determination of local communities
- Maximizes local economic, cultural and social benefits.¹⁶²

Higgins-Desbiolles focuses on tourism's potential for global justice and global solidarity but acknowledges that the fleeting nature of the tourism encounter renders it difficult for one to affect real and lasting change. Her contextualization of the inequity and power imbalance promoted by current tourism practices rightfully condemns the oppressive practices of tourism but wrongly portrays local and indigenous people as victims rather than granting them the agency they deserve. Pinho's analysis better addresses this issue by depicting the ways in which individuals who act as hosts within the tourism industry may be negatively impacted but also engage geopolitical dynamics and international tourism as a means to strengthen their own cultural identities and assert the agency of their local communities.¹⁶³ This stronger and more centered line of

¹⁶¹ Higgins-Desbiolles, Freya. "Justifying Tourism: Justice Through Tourism." *Tourism and Inequality: Problems and Prospects*. Eds Stroma Cole and Morgan Nigel Wallingford: CABI, 2010, p.199.

¹⁶² Scheyvens cited in Higgins Desniolles, "Justifying Tourism," 200

¹⁶³ De Santana Pinho, Patricia. *Mapping Diaspora*. 5.

reasoning provides an important opportunity for Afrocentric inquiry.

Travel, Tourism, and Afrocentricity

Many Afrocentric scholars have interrogated the break in the cultural, spiritual, and moral well-being of African people. Jacob Carruthers, Asa Hilliard and others have theorized that we are not a whole people as our wholeness has been interrupted due to ongoing mental oppression. “We are on the bottom and descending. The maafa continues to take its toll. We are unconscious, unorganized, unfocused and lost from our purpose.”¹⁶⁴ Hilliard promotes education as the key to combating the effects of genocide from without and cultural surrender from within.¹⁶⁵ Education is imperative for the rebuilding of culture and identity and necessary for cultural, social and personal transformation. Much of the research around education contains a paradigmatic focus on content, perspective, and theory. I believe it is essential to add to this a pragmatic focus on travel as a means of re-educating African people. Travel to Africa is an often overlooked component of the re-education of the African mind and is essential to our mental, social, political, and psychological development and our cultural well-being.

Travel and tourism have been essentially ignored by Afrocentric scholars outside of those who focus on educational trips to Egypt as discussed earlier in chapter two. This is perhaps largely due to tourism’s classification as a recreational pursuit for which the Afrocentric scholar has little time or use. One of the critical interventions made by Ama Mazama in *Afrocentric Paradigm* is her emphasis on the functional aspect of

¹⁶⁴ Hilliard, Asa. *SBA: The Reawakening of the African Mind*. Gainesville, FL: Makare Publishing Co, 1998, 3

¹⁶⁵ Watkins, William H. “Asa Grant Hilliard III: Scholar Supreme.” *Review of Educational Research*, vol. 78, no. 4, 2008, 1001.

Afrocentricity. “From an Afrocentric perspective, where knowledge can never be produced for the sake of it, but always for the sake of our liberation, *a paradigm must activate our consciousness* to be of any use to us.”¹⁶⁶ One of the prominent features of the African worldview is its focus on the functional aesthetic. This predilection towards the practical and utilitarian seems to exclude travel from the purview of African centered phenomena based on its status as a leisure activity. However, this study contends that travel can combine recreation and purpose and be exercised in a manner that maintains the functional aspect of Afrocentricity.

Harris asserts that the “central motivation in African American life is the desire to achieve freedom...Freedom is the ability to conceptualize the world in ways continuous with one’s history.”¹⁶⁷ Asante argues that “the minimum characteristics of an Afrocentric project should include...a commitment to correct the dislocations in the history of Africa.”¹⁶⁸ In order to conceptualize the world in a way that is continuous with one’s history or to correct dislocations in the history of Africa, one must first *know* their history. Historical understanding is a natural consequence of intentional travel. Hence, digital pan-Africanism becomes critical to the goals of Afrocentricity because of its potential to increase African American access to diasporic travel.

Defining Digital Pan-Africanism

In *Literary Pan-Africanism*, Christel Temple examines the opportunities for

¹⁶⁶ Mazama, *Afrocentric Paradigm*. 16.

¹⁶⁷ Harris, Norman. “A Philosophical Basis for an Afrocentric Orientation.” *The Afrocentric Paradigm*. Ama Mazama, ed. Trenton: Africa World Press, 2003. 112

¹⁶⁸ Asante *Afrocentric Manifesto* 41

intercultural exchange and unity building that can be seen through African writers' depictions of their African American characters—an opportunity that initiates steps towards resolving 400 years of miscommunication among the children of Africa deliberately facilitated through the lies of white supremacy. Temple's analysis illustrates strategies that whites have used to sabotage the relationship between Africans and African Americans and breed resentment due to the tangible and intangible privileges offered to Africans living in the United States. Unsurprisingly, while presenting incentives for Africans to distance themselves from African Americans, white supremacy has simultaneously denigrated Africa and Africans in the eyes of African Americans through the use of negative propaganda and racist stereotypes. Sadly, many African Americans have learned to view Africans as primitive and problematic and seek to couch their identity in their nationality status as Americans rather than seeking to reclaim their African heritage and culture.

I seek to employ a strategy similar that Temple utilizes as she applies Pan-Africanism as a context to evaluate and critique the African perspective of African American life and culture. Digital Pan-Africanism provides a useful mechanism by which to measure the African American vision of Africa and also to adjust that mindset towards a location that is aligned towards a theory of agency and the African worldview. Here I borrow from and adapt seven tenets established by Temple's literary paradigm in order to outline the features of digital Pan-Africanism as it relates to diasporic travel and travel writing.¹⁶⁹ I add one additional tenet of my own to her list.

¹⁶⁹ Digital Pan-Africanism is a theoretical framework that may be applicable to multiple cyber enterprises. Here I focus on its application to travel as this study seeks to highlight the importance and potential of diasporic travel, but it may be applied to myriad other areas of study and practice.

1. The journey seeks to regenerate relationships, historical understanding, and future interaction between diasporic Africans dispersed through the European enslavement trade and continental Africans.
2. The traveler introduces mutual understanding and nurtures the relationship between Africans and African Americans.
3. The philosophy and ideals of the narrative resulting from the journey parallel tenets of contemporary and/or traditional Pan-African ideology.
4. Texts of this category utilize similar terminology expressive of return, that consistently demonstrates the usage of the prefix “re-.”
5. The African people depicted in the resulting narrative are generally not depicted in a stereotypical or patronizing manner but are centered as agents rather than victims or spectators.
6. The traveler/author’s social, cultural, political and/or ideological deliberateness is Pan-African, Afrocentric, and/or African-centered.
7. The traveler/author has purposefully spent significant time among African communities on the African continent.
8. The traveler/author stands in solidarity with indigenous Africans and intentionally seeks to support their self-determination.¹⁷⁰

Also important, is Temple’s emphasis on dedication to Pan-African regeneration which “describes the contemporary, non-romanticized ideology that members of the

¹⁷⁰ Temple, Christel. *Literary Pan-Africanism: History, Contexts, and Criticism*. Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2005, 4.

African world should unite, using collective talents and skills to build a strong Africa.”¹⁷¹
This resurrects the Diopian objective towards an African renaissance and underscores the need for Africans of varying ethnic backgrounds to develop new ways of facilitating cooperation and unity amongst one another.

This study has demonstrated the importance of travel for African American heading for their ancestral homelands, but also seeks to address the potential for institution building inherent in the utilization of 21st century technology. Hodkinson illustrates the capacity of the internet to contribute to the development or reinforcement of certain subcultures⁹⁷ Daniel Miller and Don Slater’s *The Internet: An Ethnographic Approach*, uses ethnography to document how people use new technology to create and maintain relationships across territorial boundaries. Kline & Burstein view blogging as a metaphor for interactivity and explore its capabilities for community building between individuals and groups.¹⁷² All of these studies carry exciting implications for application to pan-Africanism.

Utilizing digital methods in efforts around pan-Africanist activism leverages the ability to disseminate information and mobilize at a fraction of the cost of older, traditional techniques of communication and have a faster, wider range of distribution. Rather than writing informational pamphlets, sending them to the printer and paying for each copy printed, then distributing them throughout a city, activists can quickly type and publish information to their website or social media page where it can immediately be

¹⁷¹ Temple, *Literary Pan-Africanism*. 7

¹⁷² Kline, David, Daniel Burstein, Keijzer A. J. De, and Paul Berger. *Blog!: How the Newest Media Revolution Is Changing Politics, Business, and Culture*. New York: CDS Books, 2005, xxi.

seen by followers around the globe. Kang and Shuett's study on sharing travel experiences in social media demonstrates the importance that today's society places in social media as a platform.¹⁷³ Their results found that a significant number of travelers use social media to search for independent and credible travel information which they then use to plan and execute their own travel experiences. Harnessing this efficient method for revolutionary efforts is crucial.

In *Afrocentric Manifesto*, Molefi Asante contends that "Africans must pursue in the most determined manner the practice of renaissance, that is, rebirth of the culture, philosophy, traditions, and values of the continent, not in some antiquated form but in the spirit of creative responses to the contemporary times."¹⁷⁴ In the spirit of progress and modernity, it is critical that Afrocentric scholars employ all tools at their disposal including 21st century technology and communication methods, in order to achieve the ultimate goal of liberation and victorious consciousness.

Opportunities for Digital Pan-Africanism

Utilizing digital Pan-Africanism holds exciting implications for the future. It provides yet another strategy for African people to wield in the quest for human freedom. Below, I outline several modes through which liberatory technology can provide greater access to diasporic travel.

Travel as a possibility—Viewing and reading the blogs of others makes travel a

¹⁷³ Kang, Myunghwa, and Michael A. Schuett. "Determinants of Sharing Travel Experiences in Social Media." *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing* 30.1-2 (2013):104.

¹⁷⁴ Asante, Molefi Kete. *An Afrocentric Manifesto : Toward an African Renaissance*. Cambridge: Polity, 2007, 68.

more concrete and distinct possibility for those with little or no travel experience and those who lack knowledge or skills to properly execute a trip to the continent of Africa. Black travel pages such as Black Travel Movement and Black & Abroad have gained widespread exposure which encourages African Americans to travel more often. Travel Noire, has created a space for people of color to see themselves in the travel industry; by curating beautiful images of African people all over the world and creating helpful tools and resources for Black travelers they are making the travel industry a more accessible and inclusive space.

Travel as a community experience— the use of the internet and informational technology holds the ability to transform personal reaction into social interaction, converting a spectatorial culture into participatory culture thus allowing a writer to effectively bring someone who cannot or does not yet have the desire to travel on a journey around the world. This allows for the direct exchange of cultural information and enhances inter-diasporic communication and participation through sharing what might have been an individual experience not long ago.

Healing through travel—there is currently only one travel festival that caters primarily to travelers of color. Created in 2018 by Evita Robinson, founder of Nomadness Travel Tribe, Audacity Fest was conceived to create safe space for black and brown travelers from around the world and is intentional in its mission, part of which reads, “We travel for cultural exchange as much as we do for self-preservation. We have the audacity to celebrate our joys, and power through our pain.”¹⁷⁵ Both traveling and the act of writing about travel may serve therapeutic purposes for African people who feel

¹⁷⁵ Audacity Fest. “Manifesto” 2018 <http://audacityfest.com/manifesto/>

invisible, marginalized and oppressed in their home countries.

Access for those who are physically unable to travel—while blogs serve as a wonderful travel reference, vlogs (video logs) and virtual reality software allow individuals to simulate the experience of travel when they are unable to do so. Although it does not allow for the level of personal connection and interaction with other Africans, it does allow one to critically interrogate and gain deeper understandings of history and culture in a way that cannot be replicated simply by reading a book.

Logistical Accessibility to travel—Information shared online helps Africans with logistical plans to arrive safely. Groups like Travel Africa Movement provide information specific to individual metropolitan African cities, and general cultural tips applicable to wider areas that help African Americans navigate continental travel. Companies such as Innclusive offer Black owned home stay options as a means of providing more affordable accommodations without running into issues of discrimination that runs rampant on popular mainstream apps.

Economic Accessibility to travel—African American travelers are using both formal and informal methods to make travel more accessible to those who previously were unable to afford it. Companies such as Airfordable allow customers to purchase airline tickets on a layaway or payment plan. Brands such as #Roadto100Countries offer a Tricks to Travel system that demonstrates how users can utilize points and miles to travel essentially for free.

Build and sustain travel communities—as African Americans travel more extensively and frequently as a whole, they begin to build online communities. Groups such as Nomadness Travel Tribe create familial networks between Black travelers that

serve to create and fortify diasporic bonds and connections around the world, establish online and real-life friendships, relationships and romance, create safe space to discuss racial concerns and experiences, facilitate vicarious travel and construct virtual identities. Nomadness founder Evita Robinson is also the creator of Audacity Fest, the first travel festival for millennials of color. The event includes panels, one-on-one fireside chats, international music & DJs, celebrity appearances, food, vendors, and community love and is a safe space for black and brown travelers from around the world to build ideas, meet other travelers, and experience parts of the world through on site activations. The festival allows Black travelers that have largely interacted with each other online to converge in one geographic space and cement familial relationships.

Safety Concerns for African Travelers—while the *Negro Motorist Green Book* has gone out of print due to the ending of *de jure* segregation in the United States, Black travelers still face racial oppression and *de facto* segregation. In 2018, Donisha Prendergast, granddaughter of legendary reggae artist, Bob Marley, was racially profiled while leaving an Airbnb in Rialto. A neighbor saw the group moving suitcases out of the house, assumed a burglary was in progress, and called the police. Prendergast reported that the police swarmed her group, racially profiled and detained them; she plans to sue the Southern California police department.¹⁷⁶ In 2016, the story of a group of black women being kicked off of a Napa Valley Wine train went viral and inspired the hashtag #LaughingWhileBlack, where people around the world shared stories of racial bias

¹⁷⁶ Yancey-Bragg, N'dea. "Bob Marley's Granddaughter Plans to Sue California Police after Alleged Racial Profiling." *USA Today*, Gannett Satellite Information Network, 9 May 2018, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation-now/2018/05/09/bob-marley-granddaughter-airbnb-racial-profiling-lawsuit/595420002/>.

encountered primarily while traveling.

As a result of these and countless other stories, Black travelers and consumers have become anxious to find Black-owned businesses-- particularly in travel and tourism--that they can patronize without fear of discrimination. One such response to this need is *The Global Greenbook, A Black Survival Guide* created by I Love Black People and hosted at www.iloveblackpeople.com. The guide currently contains over 5,000 Black-owned and Black-friendly businesses in 200 cities around the world and is available for pre-order on their website.¹⁷⁷ “We are using technology to build a global network to help protect Black people from the harm & humiliation of racism & xenophobia, especially while traveling and in a new environment.”¹⁷⁸

Opportunities for Afrocentric Cultural Heritage Tourism- DNA testing companies are now offering cultural heritage tours to customers who have traced their familial heritage, however these tours are often very expensive and operate from a Eurocentric framework.¹⁷⁹ This is a wonderful opportunity for Afrocentric travel companies to provide culturally relevant experiences that promote African agency. Green Book Travel is a full-service Black-owned travel company that specializes in hosting culturally immersive trips with an emphasis on the African Diaspora, while serving as an online source for travelers to connect with global black businesses.¹⁸⁰ There lies great potential

¹⁷⁷ <https://web.archive.org/web/20191121173251/https://iloveblackpeople.com/collections/t-shirts/products/the-global-green-book-pre-order>.

¹⁷⁸ “Black Survival Guide - I Love Black People - Global Green Book.” *I Love Black People*, <https://iloveblackpeople.com/>.

¹⁷⁹ “Take a DNA Test, Then Buy an Airplane Ticket.” *New York Times*. 22 Jan. 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/22/travel/ancestry-dna-test-travel.html>

¹⁸⁰ “ABOUT US.” *Green Book Travel*, Green Book Travel LLC, 2018, <https://www.greenbooktravel.com/about>.

for partnership with a Black-owned DNA testing company.

While this study focuses on one particular area of relevance for digital Pan-Africanism, there exists a world of possibility for its application outside of travel. One example is Obadele Kambon's use of digital spaces to create his own language school enabling him to teach indigenous African languages to Africans around the world thereby facilitating their reclamation of an important part of their heritage. He has also developed several apps centered around disseminating lectures on African history and spirituality, capoeira instruction, and resources for African homeschoolers. These are just a few of the many areas of potential for liberatory use of technology.

It is imperative that scholars of Africology recognize the transformational potential residing in digital pan-Africanism and immediately begin to utilize it as a tool for institution building, consciousness and liberation. Digital pan-Africanism allows agency to be more widely disbursed. It may also serve as a means for historically subordinated groups to re-center themselves, build solidarity across geo-political boundaries, and engineer a sense of communal consciousness.

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