

Butterfield, Leah

Article

Black American women's roots travel

Annals of Tourism Research Empirical Insights

Provided in Cooperation with:

Elsevier

Suggested Citation: Butterfield, Leah (2025) : Black American women's roots travel, Annals of Tourism Research Empirical Insights, ISSN 2666-9579, Elsevier, Amsterdam, Vol. 6, Iss. 1, pp. 1-9, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annale.2025.100173>

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/337830>

Standard-Nutzungsbedingungen:

Die Dokumente auf EconStor dürfen zu eigenen wissenschaftlichen Zwecken und zum Privatgebrauch gespeichert und kopiert werden.

Sie dürfen die Dokumente nicht für öffentliche oder kommerzielle Zwecke vervielfältigen, öffentlich ausstellen, öffentlich zugänglich machen, vertreiben oder anderweitig nutzen.

Sofern die Verfasser die Dokumente unter Open-Content-Lizenzen (insbesondere CC-Lizenzen) zur Verfügung gestellt haben sollten, gelten abweichend von diesen Nutzungsbedingungen die in der dort genannten Lizenz gewährten Nutzungsrechte.

Terms of use:

Documents in EconStor may be saved and copied for your personal and scholarly purposes.

You are not to copy documents for public or commercial purposes, to exhibit the documents publicly, to make them publicly available on the internet, or to distribute or otherwise use the documents in public.

If the documents have been made available under an Open Content Licence (especially Creative Commons Licences), you may exercise further usage rights as specified in the indicated licence.



<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>



Black American women's roots travel

Leah Butterfield

School of English Studies, The University of The Bahamas, University Drive, P. O. Box N-4912, Nassau, The Bahamas

ARTICLE INFO

Handling Editor: Dr. Ksenia Kirillova

Keywords:

Roots
Heritage
Women's travel
African diaspora
Black travel movement

ABSTRACT

This article examines Black American women's roots travel throughout the African diaspora between 2000 and 2023. By analyzing interviews with travelers alongside roots travel memoirs, this study shows how such travel responds to historical dislocation and U.S. inequities. The trips are characterized by an expansive quest for felt knowledge, transhistorical connection, familiar sights, and belonging. For Black American women, roots travel has ambiguous results. The trips can facilitate pleasurable affects and fleeting connections. At the same time, such travel rarely results in conclusive findings about one's heritage. As a result, travelers embrace and create small spaces of belonging, adopt the identity of permanent traveler, or find power in occupying the margins.

1. Introduction

Travel to connect with heritage is “one of the fastest-growing niches of the global tourism industry” (Zhu, 2021, p. 1). While trips related to ancestry are not new, in the 21st century, roots travel has gained popularity among Black Americans (Carter, 2019; Woodard, 2019). Roots travel occurs when members of a diaspora—those “traumatically separated from [their] homeland, whether through displacement, dispossession, or...permanent exile”—visit presumed ancient homelands or areas of ancestral significance (Leite, 2005, p. 277). The African diaspora's displacement stems from the transatlantic slave trade of the 16th to 19th centuries, which entailed millions of Africans' forcible migration. This historical trauma affects Black American lives into the present in what Hartman has termed “the afterlife of slavery” (2007, p. 6). By visiting places that help travelers understand their identity and history, roots travel can be a form of pilgrimage (Schramm, 2004, p. 141).

In her 2018 memoir, *Becoming*, former First Lady Michelle Obama recounts a roots travel experience: her pre-White House trip to Kenya with former President Barack Obama. The trip marked her first visit to Africa, which she expected to foster feelings of belonging: “I arrived there naively believing I'd feel some visceral connection to the continent I'd grown up thinking of as a sort of mythical motherland, as if going there would bestow on me some feeling of completeness” (Obama, 2018, p. 160). Her hope for “completeness” in Africa implies that her national identity felt lacking.

In Kenya, though, Obama found herself an outsider. She states, “I moved with the awkwardness of a tourist, aware that we were outsiders

even with our black skin” (2018, p. 160). She had hoped shared race would link her to Kenyans. “But Africa, of course, owed us nothing,” she reflects. “It's a curious thing...the in betweenness one feels of being African American in Africa. It gave me a hard-to-explain feeling of sadness, a sense of being unrooted in both lands” (Obama, 2018, p. 160). Where Obama expected joyful connection, she found instead the emptiness of unbelonging. Notably, her “sense of being unrooted” extends to “both lands,” the U.S. and Africa. To emphasize this point: Obama, who published her memoir after eight years in the White House, describes feeling incomplete in the nation she helped lead. This passage from *Becoming* demonstrates the unhealable wounds of the slave trade and the mistreatment of Black Americans into the present. Obama's anecdote also exemplifies one way Black Americans seek healing, knowledge, and belonging: roots travel.

This paper explores how Black American women experienced roots travel between 2000 and 2023, showing how these travelers embody a unique and expansive form of touristic mobility. Rather than the exotic, they seek the familiar, looking for similarities in customs, foods, and faces across the African diaspora. They prioritize felt knowledge and find power in leisure pursuits. Drawing on interviews with Black American women travelers and contemporary memoirs, I conclude that what roots travelers find on their trips is tenuous belonging, at best, with their perceived American privilege an impediment to reforming long-broken bonds.

However, some travelers do find small spaces that feel like home: an R&B concert, a shared meal, or a group of new faces that bear shocking resemblance to family members. Additionally, for some, embracing the identity of an eternal traveler or outsider brings its own sense of closure,

E-mail address: Leah.Butterfield@ub.edu.bs.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annale.2025.100173>

Received 16 November 2024; Received in revised form 7 March 2025; Accepted 7 March 2025

Available online 18 March 2025

2666-9579/© 2025 The Author. Published by Elsevier Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

providing an answer about where one belongs: on the road, on the margins. The margin, as bell hooks shows, can be a site of power, “a site one stays in because it nourishes one’s capacity to resist” (1989, p. 157). What is more marginal and powerful than a perpetual journey, a wandering through which one gains knowledge, a reprieve from U.S. struggles, and fleeting connection, if not a home?

2. Black American women’s roots travel, 2000–2023

2.1. Theoretical framework and literature review

Tourism researchers have devoted significant attention to travel related to historical, geographical, and/or ethnic ties, broadly referred to as heritage tourism (Tomczewska-Popowycz & Taras, 2022). Much of this research focuses on what has been termed diaspora, roots, or ancestral tourism to locations travelers consider a homeland (Basu, 2007; Leite, 2005; Prince, 2021). Relying on family trees, archives, oral histories, and DNA testing, some tourists even pinpoint precise locations where ancestors lived (Alexander, Bryce, & Murdy, 2017; McCain & Ray, 2003). Related forms of travel include trauma tourism (Sturken, 2007, p. 29), homesick tourism (Marschall, 2015b), personal memory tourism (Marschall, 2015a), and dark tourism, where travelers visit sites related to horrific events (Kidron, 2013; Miles, 2015; White & Frew, 2013).

I follow those scholars who use the term, “roots travel,” to describe trips motivated by ethnic heritage and shared race (Mensah, 2021; Pinho, 2008, p. 136–137). “Roots travel” connotes a “family tree metaphor,” demonstrating travelers’ search for kinship-level connections (Carter, 2019, p. 202). I also opt for the term “roots” because of its significance in Black American culture, recalling Alex Haley’s 1976 novel turned TV series, *Roots*, which became “a national phenomenon” (Jacobson, 2008, p. 42) and spurred interest in roots travel (Pinho, 2008, p. 135). Holsey describes how *Roots* also caused “the slave trade [to become] the primary basis through which many African Americans started to view their connection to the African continent” (2008, p. 155). *Roots* was rebooted as a miniseries in 2016, demonstrating its continued influence.

Developments in DNA testing through services such as Ancestry and 23andMe have influenced 21st-century roots travel, though this connection remains underexplored (Dillette, 2021, p. 424). Introduced in the mid-aughts, “recreational ancestry testing” is now a multi-billion-dollar industry (Milanich, 2019). Approximately one in five Americans have used DNA testing kits (Purcell, 2020), and millions have registered with ancestry websites to chart family trees (“Company Facts, n.d”). Some researchers argue that DNA testing contributed to the rise of roots travel (Angelo, Breiman, Wu, Nemhauser, & Walker, 2020).

Several studies note DNA testing’s role in Black American roots travel, including Dillette’s research on Ghana (2021, p. 419) and Benton and Shabazz’s discussion of “DNA pilgrims” to Sierra Leone (2009, p. 495). I build on their findings to suggest that DNA testing influences ideas about heritage even among travelers who do not take tests. Unfortunately, DNA testing can be flawed, especially for those in the African diaspora who may receive inaccurate and changing results (Kennett, Timpson, Balding, & Thomas, 2018). Despite these inaccuracies, DNA testing companies target African Americans whose ancestral knowledge was disrupted by the slave trade, the practice of renaming enslaved people, and the absence of most Black Americans in official records such as censuses until after the Civil War.

Even when their ancestry is uncertain, roots travelers find being present in significant historic locations meaningful (Basu, 2007; Lelo & Jamal, 2013). As Leite (2005) describes, “bodily presence and sensory engagement are critical elements in the homeland’s rediscovery” (p. 297). Roots travelers are often drawn to specific heritage sites, such as slave castles in Ghana (Bruner, 1996; Woodard, 2019). Some scholars have used Walter Benjamin’s term, “aura” (1969), to explain why visitors find such sites meaningful (Carter, 2019, p. 202; Rickly-Boyd,

2012). Organized trips perpetuate the focus on well-known heritage sites (Dillette, 2021; Holsey, 2008).

While much scholarship focuses on roots tourism’s spiritual aspects, travelers’ educational motivations for heritage travel are underexplored. Additionally, I extend findings about roots tourism’s ambiguous affective outcomes. Scholars have observed that roots travel can leave participants unsatisfied and lacking feelings of belonging (Bruner, 1996; Schramm, 2004). For Black American travelers, this can manifest as a racialized double consciousness (Dillette, 2021).

Though much scholarship focuses on West Africa, Black American travelers visit countries throughout the diaspora, even places where their ancestors likely never set foot. Williams (2018) and Pinho (2018, p. 3) show how Black American tourists visit African diasporic nations in the Caribbean and Latin America because such areas are seen as “a shorter route to Africa, or at least to Africanness.” Roots travel, these scholars demonstrate, extends beyond travel to Africa and highlights links across the diaspora (Gilroy, 1993).

Though tourism scholars often hesitate to use the term “cosmopolitan” in a positive sense, Black Americans’ expansive, learning-oriented version of roots travel aligns with Appiah’s vision of cosmopolitanism (2006). According to Appiah, cosmopolitanism is not “some exalted attainment,” but rather a commitment to cross-cultural conversations (2006, p. xviii). Williams and Nwankwo illuminate how Black women enact a “gendered cosmopolitanism,” pursuing self-fashioning and interrogating oppressive conditions despite “sexuality, gender, race, economic class and/or social status tend[ing] to foreclose their access to world citizenship” (2017, p. 383). Slate, in a similar way, shows how antiracist and anticolonial movements inform each other in a “colored cosmopolitanism” (2017). Black American women roots travelers who seek growth and connection in multiple locations, rather than a single homeland, reflect these cosmopolitan ideals. To return to the “roots” metaphor: trees do not contain only one root, but a web of roots extending in all directions. This vast network of roots reflects the wide-ranging journeys Black American travelers take in search of connection.

In line with the “new mobilities paradigm” or “mobility turn” in the social sciences, my analysis centers movement, not place (Cresswell, 2006; Urry & Larsen, 2011). Instead of focusing on a singular destination, as most roots travel scholarship does, I highlight patterns across locations within roots travel’s “constellation of mobility” (Cresswell, 2010, p. 18). Mobility as a lens also reveals how moving in particular ways and bodies can be acts of resistance. De Certeau (1984) describes urban walking as a subversive practice that evades the State’s disciplinary watch and highlights individuality, and Cresswell (1993) shows how Beat writers rebelled against cultural norms through mobility. Addressing the crucial role of gender, Butterfield (2020), Elkin (2017), and Smith (2001) depict women’s travel as transgressive and filled with feminist potential. In this vein, Black American women’s roots travel can be an embodied resistance to systemic inequalities and static, bounded notions of identity (Benjamin & Dillette, 2021; Mensah, 2021, p. 2).

I take an intersectional approach often neglected in tourism research (Crenshaw, 1991). Wilson and Chambers chart “small increases” in gender-focused studies but assert that such research remains sidelined (2023, p. 3). Arthur calls attention to Black women’s marginalization in travel history (2022, p. 2). Research on Black women’s travel has addressed how systemic injustices can spur travel (Benjamin & Dillette, 2021; Williams, 2018) and occur during travel, coming in the form of stereotypes, harassment, objectification, surveillance, exclusion, and other forms of violence (Browne, 2015; McKittrick, 2006; Towns, 2016). Other studies contextualize Black women’s travel in the Black Travel Movement and social media trends (Arthur, 2022; Peters, 2021). I respond to gaps in scholarship on Black women’s roots travel, the invisibilization of Black geographies (Boukhris, 2017, p. 685), and Williams and Nwankwo’s call to “plac[e] Black women at the center of travel theory” (2017, p. 383).

2.2. Sociohistorical context

Many tourism destinations encourage Black American roots travel. Ghana, for example, launched “The Joseph Project” in 2007 (Woodard, 2019, p. 24), labeled 2019 the “year of return,” and initiated a “Beyond the Return” campaign in 2020, all efforts to attract Black American tourists (Tetteh, 2020). Tanzania, similarly, targeted Black Americans by mapping a “Central Slave and Ivory Route” and “African Diaspora Heritage Trail” (UNESCO, 2006). These efforts, Fabian notes, risk Tanzania being “misconstrued as significant for African Americans” when the country was not a departure point for enslaved people bound for the Americas (2013, p. 105).

Yet, Tanzania and nearby nations including Kenya, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, and South Africa attract Black Americans interested in connecting with the “motherland” (Eyube, 2021). A former Mississippi mayor whose story garnered media attention in 2021 is a case in point: He moved to Tanzania and launched a “Back to Africa tours” business aimed at African Americans like him (“*Ex-Mississippi mayor*,” 2021). Tanzania’s marketing underscores roots tourism’s wide-reaching nature, stretching beyond locations associated with genealogical roots. Caribbean tourism marketers, likewise, have capitalized on the roots travel trend. Countries including Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Barbados, Bermuda, Jamaica, and St. Lucia market to Black Americans (Bermuda Tourism Authority, 2019; Edmondson, 2009, p. 139).

In the U.S., media about Black travel and ancestry also increased in conjunction with the Black Travel Movement (Benjamin & Dillette, 2021; Edwards, 2021). This movement includes social media communities (Arthur, 2022) and online publications such as *Travel Noire*, which launched in 2013 (Dillette, 2021, p. 413). The Black Travel Movement promotes Black women’s travel as a leisure activity, learning opportunity, and means to reflect on and refashion one’s identity.

3. Study methods

This interdisciplinary study explores how Black American women experienced roots travel between 2000 and 2023. It analyzes qualitative, semi-structured interviews with eleven Black American women who traveled to connect with their roots. Patterns from these interviews are related to the roots travel memoirs *Lose Your Mother* (Hartman, 2007) and *Searching for Zion* (Raboteau, 2013). By centering Black women, I foreground tourism as gendered and racialized (Wilson & Chambers, 2023). Moving beyond what Wilson and Chambers term “compensatory” and “bifocal” studies about women, this research takes an intersectional approach that emphasizes participants’ unique embodied experiences (2023, p. 6). In doing so, I heed Benjamin, Dillette, and Robinson’s caution that Black travel is not monolithic (2024) and respond to the call for a Critical Race Tourism that seeks to “empower racially marginalized communities, and to infuse joy into tourism landscapes” (Benjamin & Laughter, 2023, p. 2629).

I recruited most participants through the Facebook groups, “Black Girls Travel” and “Black Girl Solo Travel,” where group administrators posted calls for interviewees on my behalf. After fielding replies, I scheduled interviews with those who identified as Black American women. Four interviewees had a first-generation immigrant parent, but all were born and raised in the U.S. As seen in Table 1 below, interviewees included two women in their twenties, six in their thirties, one in her forties, one in her fifties, and one self-identified “senior citizen.” Participants’ ages reflect trends within the Black Travel Movement where women between 18 and 35 are one of the largest segments (Gill, 2019).

Interviews averaged one hour and addressed why women pursued roots travel, their travel experiences, and the affects and effects of their trips. I asked participants to list everywhere they had traveled and to reflect on each roots-related trip. Their travel destinations are charted in Fig. 1 below, with duplicates and non-roots-related destinations removed. Though this research covers travel between 2000 and 2023,

Table 1

Participant information.

Name	Age	Where from
Audrey (pseudonym)	35	Texas
Brittany	28	Michigan
Charmaine	40	Born in Virginia, living in New York
Devin	30	Born in New York, living in Texas
Ikeoma	51	Virginia
Latonya	36	North Carolina
Miya	22	California
Nerri (pseudonym)	39	Born in New Jersey, living in the Midwest
Rickita (a.k.a. Ricki)	37	Grew up in Virginia, living in Florida
Stephanie	“senior citizen”	New York
Tia (pseudonym)	37	Born in Arkansas, living in Texas

Data reflect participants’ ages and locations at the time of our interview.

most participants had taken roots trips within the preceding five years and tended to describe recent trips in the greatest detail.

I examine memoirs alongside interviews. Memoirs are narrativized accounts of true events that circulate in an “intimate public” of readers (Berlant, 2008, p. 6). For this reason, autobiographies are ethnographically useful, providing a glimpse into lived experiences and personal reflections (Henery, 2017, p. 436; Wiegmann, 2011). Memoirs also reveal themes relevant to broader communities (Henery, 2017, p. 440). Following Erica Williams, I consider travel writing a “valuable Black feminist tool... that can be used to explore Black women’s lives and trajectories in the African diaspora” (2021, p. 145). I selected this study’s memoirs because they are among the few Black American woman-authored memoirs about international roots travel published between 2000 and 2023.

My approach to interviewing and analysis is informed by critical and feminist ethnography (Madison, 2012; Schrock, 2013). As such, I treated interviewees as co-producers of knowledge, in line with the notion that personal narratives “are not separate from theory: they are theory” (Benjamin and Laughter, 2023, p. 2632). I took care to ensure each interviewee wanted to speak with me and understood their rights. Before the interviews, I sent participants informed consent forms outlining the study’s purpose, data protection procedures, and participant rights. I requested verbal consent to interview and record. At the end of each interview, I asked participants whether they wished to be identified by their name or a pseudonym. Though departing from typical ethnographic practice, this choice aims to credit interviewees as this study’s crucial shapers of knowledge. Many participants preferred to be named and recognized for their comments.

I analyzed the interviews and memoirs thematically and inductively (Cresswell, 2009, p. 164). First, I identified patterns across the memoirs and coded them into broad themes such as “belonging” and “identity.” I then held interviews over Zoom, which were audio-recorded and transcribed. For reliability, I compared transcriptions to the recordings and, if any uncertainty arose, reviewed my hand-written notes. I coded the transcriptions into high- and low-level themes (Madison, 2012, p. 44). The high-level theme, “belonging,” for example, contained the low-level themes “home” and “familiarity.” Quotations from the interviews and memoirs were grouped according to theme. I then analyzed the most prominent themes by drawing on the theoretical and scholarly context outlined above. Compiling multiple data sources—memoirs and interviews—enhanced validity. I emailed interviewees follow-up questions in cases where there were gaps in data. Further, I used “member checking” by sharing a draft of this article with several participants (Cresswell, 2009, p. 178).

My positionality undoubtedly shapes this study. My camera remained on during interviews while participants could choose whether to be on camera. Though I share some characteristics with those I interviewed—gender, nationality, and, in some cases, age and class—I am white, a racial difference which heightens the already-strained

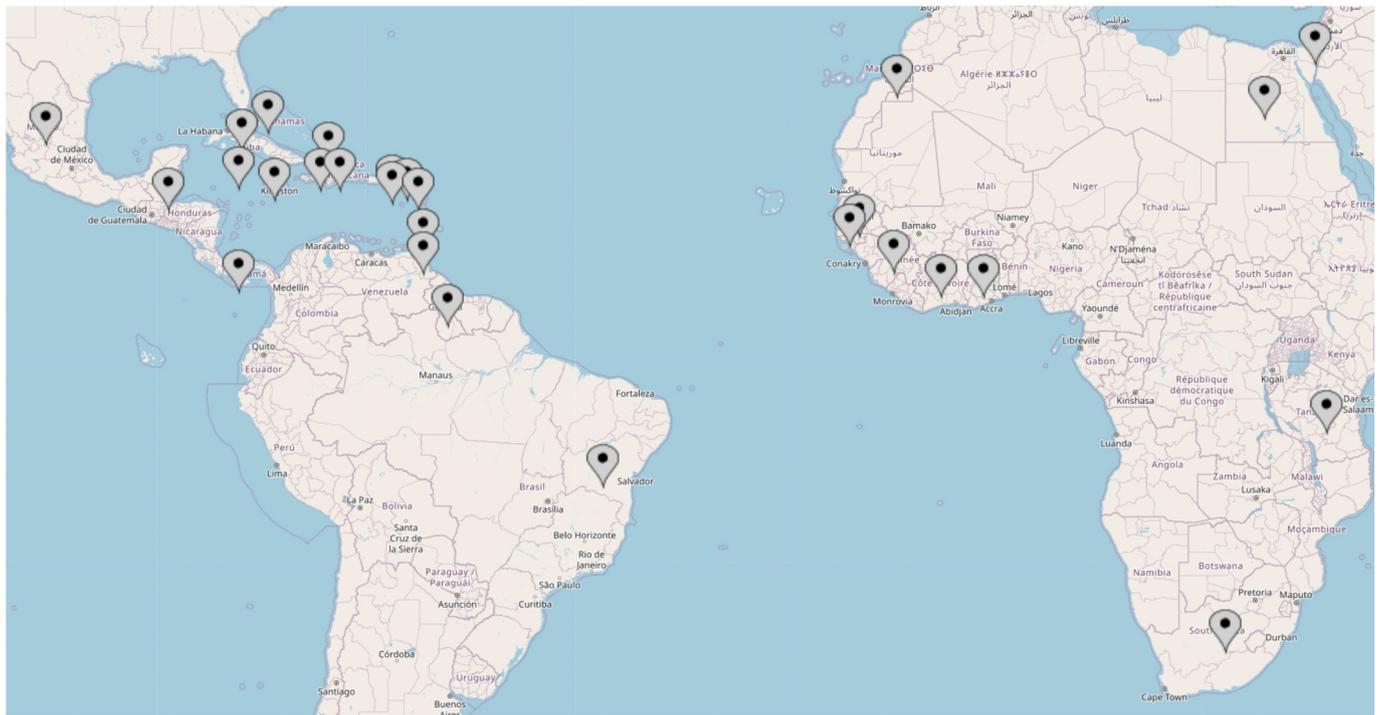


Fig. 1. Participants' international roots travel destinations.

This map indicates where participants reported taking roots trips. This map does not necessarily depict accepted national boundaries.

power differential between researcher and researched. Aiming for reflexivity and openness, I gave interviewees space to ask informal questions before and after interviews. In many cases, their questions challenged me to self-reflect. This also led to productive dialogues about our shared interest in travel and common goal to produce knowledge that improves Black women's lives. In some of these conversations, we discussed how only researching white women, with whom I share lived experience, would not address urgent social issues and would continue the legacy of white feminists excluding women of color from feminist projects. These conversations "work[ed] the hyphen" between me and participants to encourage shared meaning-making (Fine, 1994, p. 72). By emphasizing that interviewees could contact me at any time after we spoke, I aimed to frame our dialogue—and this research—as ongoing and open-ended.

4. Findings

4.1. Roots travel motivations

For many 21st-century Black American roots travelers, the urge to travel stems from marginalization. Those who consider the U.S. their home often view it as a hostile one. Interviewee [Ikeoma](#), (2023, 51), summed this up with a metaphor: "My relationship with the U.S. is that of a battered wife." She continued, "This is supposed to be home...but I feel like I'm being abused." So, she escapes through travel for weeks and months at a time, facilitated by her flexible schedule as a travel nurse. [Charmaine](#), (2022), 40, also emphasized feeling alienated in the U.S., commenting, "This might not be home for me." Black people, she explained, "are [considered] American, but only to a certain extent." She cited police killings of unarmed Black people and politicians fomenting racism as factors in her sense of dislocation, the same reasons 30-year-old [Devin](#), (2022) gave for her growing discomfort in the U.S. Devin explained, this dehumanization "makes you want to only be with your own community."

For roots travelers, Black "community" is understood to extend across the African diaspora, and travelers hope that visiting

predominantly Black nations will provide an escape from mistreatment. [Bianca Williams reaches the same conclusion in her study of tourism in Jamaica](#), stating, "American realities led these Black women to travel to Jamaica and imagine that its people and its land would provide not only an escape but also, more importantly, a community of belonging" (2018, p. 14). These dual goals of escaping the U.S. and finding belonging elsewhere are at the heart of Black American roots travel.

4.2. Transhistorical travel and felt knowledge

Roots travelers aim to learn about other places and, in doing so, to learn more about themselves. Interviewees used words including "learning," "history," and "culture" when describing their trips, evoking [Appiah's cosmopolitan ideal](#) (2006). [Audrey](#), who traveled with her girlfriend to The Bahamas, gave a typical explanation for what they sought on their trip. She stated, "[We were] looking forward to the culture...their food, the way they live, just what their life looks like on a day-to-day basis." For [Devin](#), who lives in Austin, Texas, pursuing knowledge through travel is necessary because of inconsistencies in Black history education. She explained, "You can't rely on our education system to teach any of that. You have to go on your own and look... That's probably another big reason why Black people love traveling, especially to places that connect with us, because we don't have any other way of learning about it." During the late 2010s and early 2020s, many states passed bills prohibiting "critical race theory" in schools and limiting how instructors can discuss race in the classroom ([Schwartz](#), 2021). As a result, students may lack a comprehensive Black history education.

[Charmaine](#), (2022), a nurse practitioner, added that this educational gap extends to geography. "In the United States," she said, "we're not even really taught that Africa is a continent of countries." Educators and media tend to homogenize Africa. In addition, media often depict Africa as bleak and dangerous. [Audrey](#), 35, explained her desire to visit Africa: "You see [Africa] on TV, but you really want to see it in real life because...what you see on TV isn't real." These perspectives show some travelers' skepticism about schools and media, leading them to seek

knowledge through travel.

Interviewees described how travel leads to a unique kind of learning. This type of travel relies on sensory, embodied engagement beyond a one-dimensional tourist gaze (Urry & Larsen, 2011, p. 24). One concept that came up repeatedly, though unnamed, was “aura.” Benjamin defines “aura” as an experiential quality that can only be felt in face-to-face settings (1969). During travel, aura is the emotive, mystical quality tied to objects, scenery, and people with unique, known histories. For roots travelers, aura facilitates transhistorical connections (Leite, 2005, p. 286). Latonya, (2022), 36, demonstrated aura’s role by taking a Bob Marley tour in Jamaica and describing how meaningful it was to sit near his grave. Raboteau also recounted a visit to Jamaica’s Bob Marley Museum, describing it as “simultaneously a Technicolor tourist attraction and holy ground” (2013, p. 87). Though she criticizes the commercialization of Marley’s life, she cannot help but be moved by the aura of Marley’s home. Miya, (2022), 22, sought aura closer to home. Having learned through family tales that an ancestor worked on a still-standing Mississippi plantation, she explained, “I want to go visit. I want to go see if I can feel something because, honestly, when we go to those type of areas, energy is still very much felt.” The “energy” of a place, the aura it carries due to its history, draws in roots travelers.

DNA tests can contribute to a place’s aura. Two interviewees reported taking DNA tests to trace ancestry, and another two had relatives who had taken tests and shared their results. One participant commented that she planned to take an ancestry test and then travel “to where I’m from.” Those participants who had DNA ancestry information felt their test results solidified their connection to regions. Los Angeles-based Miya, (2022), for instance, shared excitedly that she is “most definitely going back to the homeland because [I’ve] done an Ancestry DNA test.”

Charmaine, (2022), who was born in Virginia, managed to trace her lineage to the 1840s through archival research. Hoping to discover earlier roots, she turned to African Ancestry, which claims to use its comparatively large database of African DNA to give more accurate heritage results than other companies. Charmaine, (2022) was excited by the promise of learning her roots, forking over an “obnoxious amount of money” (around \$300) and cheek swabs. For women, this company only traces lineage on the maternal side. As it turns out, Charmaine’s results did not locate her in Africa; they showed her mother’s side to be Native American. The rest of her roots remain unknown.

So, Charmaine pursued her search for African roots through travel. Along with most Black American travelers to Africa, she visited the continent without knowing which region her ancestors came from. All she knew for sure was her ancestors were enslaved, so she visited a West African slave fort. These forts are popular tourist destinations for Black Americans, seen as authentic remnants of the slave trade (Carter, 2019, p. 202). As MacCannell notes, however, tourist attractions “become ‘authentic’ only after the first copy of [them] is produced” (1999, p. 48). MacCannell goes so far as to argue that “the reproductions *are* the aura” (1999, p. 48). Slave forts’ meaning for Black Americans, then, is derived in part from their circulation in American culture (Schramm, 2004, p. 140). Tourists have heard about slave forts before they reach them, coming into the sites with preformed expectations (Carter, 2019, p. 202). Influenced by these expectations, visitors to slave forts are typically somber, reflecting on slavery’s wrongs and its lingering effects (Holsey, 2008, p. 198; Woodard, 2019, p. 19).

Charmaine, (2022), who traveled to Ghana during the “Year of Return,” recalled visiting Elmina Castle and taking time to “sit there and just take it all in.” However, she expressed frustration that Ghanaians seemed to view the slave fort as “just a building.” She elaborated, “They just live amongst the building, and you asked them about it, and they felt like, ‘Oh that’s an American problem.’” As Hartman and Raboteau recount in their memoirs, Africans often view slavery as an American preoccupation (Bruner, 1996). For locals, Hartman explains, Elmina castle was merely “a monument to a past that no one wanted to remember” (2007, p. 69). Like Hartman, Charmaine found her visit to

Elmina “disappointing.” She had hoped to learn more about slavery’s legacies from the Ghanaian perspective. Instead, the fort’s guide gave an inaccurate history of slavery. When Charmaine asked about “basic [historical] information,” the guide could not answer her. Charmaine traveled to Ghana in search of knowledge about the slave trade from a “[non-]Eurocentric perspective,” but she found little new information.

Many travelers seek heritage experiences closer to the U.S. Scholars have shown how the Caribbean is often seen as a “detour” on the way to Africa (Pinho, 2018 p. 3). This was true for several interviewees drawn to the Caribbean because of its convenience and association with relaxation. As Audrey put it, traveling to the Caribbean is the “cheapest, easiest [international] vacation” from where she lives in Dallas, Texas. Many Caribbean locations also appeal to Black travelers because they are seen as closer to “conceptualizations of a ‘traditional’ African culture” (Williams, 2018, pp. 78–79). Charmaine stated, “Some of those places like Jamaica, they’re not as watered down... a lot of them have kept the [African] culture solid.” For these reasons, more interviewees visited the Caribbean than Africa.

However, for two interviewees, visiting Africa spurred a desire for Caribbean travel, complicating the narrative of the Caribbean as a stop-over on the way to the “motherland.” Brittany, (2022), a graduate student studying Psychology, traveled first to Egypt. She referred to this trip as the “foundation” for a search for roots that she continued in the Caribbean. She said, “Egypt was the outline for me, and the Caribbean was the inner part of the puzzle.” For Nerrí (pseudonym), (2022), 39, standing on the West African coast only made her more aware of the extent of her ancestors’ dispersal. She recalled how she stood looking out over the Atlantic during her 2018 trip to Côte d’Ivoire: “I was thinking, my ancestors came from here at some point and they ended up in the Caribbean, and then some of them went to Latin America, some of them went to United States, and here I am on this side, where they were taken.” For her, Africa was a starting point. “It was around that time,” she recounted, when she decided to visit different Caribbean countries with the goal of “discover[ing] Africa in each of the islands.” These reversals of the typical roots travel pipeline reflect a cosmopolitan desire to know the entire diaspora, gathering bits of knowledge and belonging from different places. Nerrí’s goal of finding Africa in each place also suggests a longing to link disparate parts of the diaspora, charting a global network of the familiar.

4.3. Connecting through faces, socializing and food

Black American travelers describe how being surrounded by faces similar to their own contributes to racial pride and feelings that they are among long-lost kin (Holsey, 2008, p. 215). During their first moments abroad, many interviewees felt instant connection due to racial recognition. Latonya, (2022), from North Carolina, recalled her first international trip to Haiti: “Just seeing everybody this one race...[was] the most eye-opening experience.” Though she was traveling for work, being in Black community made the trip enjoyable. Nerrí, similarly, described meeting Afro-Cubans: “That brought such joy to my heart,” she said, continuing, “[I] get a kick out of seeing people that look like me when I travel.” Ricki, who lives in Miami, also enjoyed encountering familiar faces and “blend[ing] in” in Morocco. “As soon as I got there,” she recounted happily, “I just sunk into the background.”

For Ikeoma, (2023), who lives in Virginia, recognition during travel went beyond skin color. While in Africa and the Caribbean, she was mistaken for a local and encountered strangers who resembled family members: “My mouth dropped open because she looks exactly like the women on my mother’s side of the family...the skin color is different. However, the bone structure is still the same...When I looked at her, I said, ‘You could come to my family reunion, and they would think you were one of us.’”

Travelers also found commonalities with locals through socializing, sharing meals, and recognizing customs. Audrey, for example, connected with Bahamian resort employees to such an extent that they

remained in contact a year after her trip. Describing her visits to Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire, [Stephanie, \(2022\)](#), a self-identified senior citizen, related, "It was the socializing where I learned the most." During these encounters, Stephanie felt kinship. "It's like an adopted child finding their biological parents, that's how it felt," she shared.

[Latonya, \(2022\)](#) also used kinship terms to describe Jamaicans. She recalled conversing with a tour guide: "We talked about slavery, the history...Our conversation felt like brother and sister, like we could talk in the same language, like we could understand each other." By referencing slavery, [Latonya, \(2022\)](#) suggests this shared history led to mutual understanding. She continued, "We even talk[ed] about the foods that African Americans eat versus what they eat. One African American dish that we love is macaroni and cheese, and it was funny listening to how the Jamaicans make macaroni and cheese...It felt relatable and natural." For [Latonya, \(2022\)](#), macaroni and cheese—a dish that appears in variations across the West Indies—signifies her connection to Jamaica.

Scholar [Perry makes a similar culinary link between The Bahamas and the U.S., comparing conch fritters to hush puppies and noting the prevalence of grits in both countries \(2022, p. 352\)](#). These similarities extend to Africa where many American and Caribbean dishes likely originated ([Wallach, 2019](#), pp. 13–14 and 42–43). As [Ikeoma, \(2023\)](#) observed, "In Ghana, they pretty much eat our soul food. Different seasonings, but it's the same type of food: black-eyed peas, the okra, the rice...Very similar." This familiar cuisine stems from the forcible movement of enslaved people and the ensuing centuries of intermigration among Black people in the diaspora.

4.4. The pride and pleasure of chosen travel

Gaining knowledge and belonging are not the only reasons Black women travel. They also travel to counter stereotypes about who American travelers are. Scholar [Jackson argues, "The pursuit of leisure is an assertion of humanity and an inalienable right," yet it is "denied to people who are not white" \(2020, p. 1\)](#). Travel, as a leisure activity, is associated with whiteness ([Peters, 2021](#), p. 203). [Tia](#), who traveled extensively in Latin America and Europe, affirmed, "There's an assumption that an American [traveler] is a white person." As a result, she was often assumed to be African or European during travel. [Ricki](#), similarly, recalled being mistaken for African or French. The international image of an American is typically a white person. Through travel, Black American women take pride in occupying the historically white male position of globe trotter.

Some participants saw Black leisure as political. The term, "conspicuous consumption," describes how a "gentleman of leisure" publicly consumes valuable goods as "a means of reputability" ([Veblen, 2009](#), p. 53). For some interviewees, conspicuous consumption is a way to attain fleeting social power, showing that Black women can take luxurious vacations. [Latonya, \(2022\)](#), for instance, chose destinations associated with glamour. She said, "I picked Greece to show that we can do this, we can travel the world." She plans to do a "flying girl dress" photoshoot while there, a tourist experience costing several hundred dollars ("Santorini flying dress photoshoot price"). As [Latonya, \(2022\)](#) implies, the image of an elegant woman vacationing in Greece is not typically associated with Black Americans. By occupying this position, Latonya feels she sends the message: "a Black girl can do it, and a Black girl can travel."

Spending money on leisure, for [Latonya, \(2022\)](#) and others, is a celebration of Black overcoming. One of [Williams' interviewees explains this logic, stating, "We're in the first generation, second maybe, of privilege. And we're just now learning how to get manicures, pedicures, massages and feel like we, we deserve something. So, we take it a bit overboard, 'cause now we feel like we're just the shit" \(2018, p. 90\)](#). This comment reflects how spending money can contribute to pride, something Devin discussed. She explained, "[Travel] has to do with pride. I remember being younger and there being a lot of negative [con]

notations on Black culture when it comes to women." Devin alludes to stereotypes such as the welfare queen which position Black women as poor and lazy ([Collins, 2000](#), p. 80). To counter these representations, Devin said, "For Black women, we want to make a lot of money... and flaunt how badass we feel." Devin and Latonya reflect a subset of travelers who respond to historical and present-day oppressions by adopting one of the few positions of seeming power they have access to: a consumer.

4.5. Unbelonging and the intangibility of home

Though interviewees described travel as pleasurable and recounted moments of connection, most travelers were also disillusioned, feeling like outsiders as often as they felt belonging. Even those who experienced heartwarming conversations acknowledged divides from locals. For instance, despite Latonya's optimism about her "sisterhood and brotherhood" connection in Jamaica, she admitted feeling awkward when discussing skin tone. When the guide commented on her "being light," she had to pause before responding. During the interview, she used the phrases, "I was careful," "I was prepping," and "I wondered if I should say it that way" to describe her process of forming a response. This hesitation reveals Latonya's anxiety about causing offense which stemmed from differences between her and Jamaicans.

The most significant factor in Black Americans' outsider status in the diaspora is their perceived economic privilege ([Alex-Assensoh, 2010](#); [Teye, Turk, & Sönmez, 2011](#)). While roots travelers tend to see themselves as Black first and American second (if at all), people abroad generally view their nationality—and its implications of wealth—as their most important feature. Though [Stephanie, \(2022\)](#), who works in the performing arts, felt spiritually connected to West Africa, she admitted she was not "received by Africans with open arms." The main reason for this disconnect was the perception of Americans as privileged. Stephanie described, "There was always that issue, that because we came from America, we came from the land of plenty." Though she developed friendships with Africans, these friends maintained "the perception, which has validity to it...that we represented and reflected wealth."

Stephanie's experiences align with other interviewees and roots travel authors. [Hartman, in her memoir, describes locals confronting her as an outsider on her first day in Ghana by calling her obruni, "a stranger, a foreigner from across the sea" \(2007, p. 3\)](#). Over the following weeks, she is constantly reminded of the contrast between her self-identity and how Ghanaians view her. She states, "Chance encounters in the street made plain the difference between how I saw myself and how I was seen by others. In my estimation, I was the aggrieved; to others I was a privileged American and as such was required to perform regular acts of penance" (2006, p. 56). Penance, in this case, meant spending money.

[Raboteau, the biracial daughter of a Black father and white mother, also highlights this dynamic, narrating an awkward experience with a Ghanaian taxi driver. The driver, who assumes Raboteau is Middle Eastern or white, complains to her about Black American tourists. He does not understand why she wants to visit a slave fort, commenting, "Only black Americans come across the water to cry about that place" \(2013, p. 214\)](#). He continues, "They have big money to spend on their tears. But with all that money, what are they crying for?" The cab driver's comments reflect how economic disparity hinders mutual sentiments of transnational kinship. Interviewees described similar alienation across the diaspora due to their perceived wealth, comments which can be summed up by Charmaine's observation that when "you see [an] American, you see money," a stereotype that transcends race.

Another factor leading travelers to feel like outsiders was appearance. Black Americans often expected to blend in based on what they understood to be a shared race, but many found themselves standing out instead. [Nerri, who was born in New Jersey, hoped to be perceived as African while there. "From the moment I started connecting with West Africans," she said, "I always asked, do I look African? If you saw me in](#)

the street, would you consider me a part of such and such tribe?" Wanting to fit in on the surface reflected a desire to connect to her origins. To her questions about whether she looked African, Nerri said, "They told me 'no,' and I'm like 'Oh my God, I just want to belong somewhere.'" Nerri (pseudonym), (2022), whose parents are from the Caribbean, already has links to Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago, yet she also craved belonging in Africa, hoping to associate herself with an African community through shared physical features.

Whether due to money, language, or dissimilarities in appearance, interviewees all admitted to feeling like outsiders where they sought belonging. Even Tia, whose father is Ghanaian, experienced painful "rejection" when she traveled there. She was excited at the outset of her months-long stay. "I was like, this is going to be great. I'm going to find my roots... I was actually believing that they were going to accept me as one of them," she told me with a sigh, "and I was going to be home." Instead, she felt profoundly disconnected. Despite having identifiable Ghanaian heritage, Tia was viewed as an outsider. "They were like, 'You're American. You're not one of us,'" she shared, continuing, "It was not my home... So, I basically had to learn to find my identity in something else because it wasn't going to be found there." Tia found through roots travel that her "homeland" was in no way a home. As Williams & Nwankwo sum up, "For the displaced, home may be a real or imagined site of longing that is irretrievable" (2017, p. 385). The irretrievability of home is a defining feature of roots travel.

In the absence of a clear-cut home, however, Black Americans find and create pockets of belonging, following a legacy of fostering safe spaces stretching back to maroon communities of escaped enslaved people. Brittany, for example, recalled the comfort of her religious community's weekly potlucks. She reflected, "I do not feel like the U.S. is home, but I feel like Michigan is home." For Stephanie, home is "the 'villages' [she has] been a part of" in Harlem, New York. She explains, "We all took care of each other... It wasn't a physical home, [but] there was a sense of someone having your back."

In Miya's case, she found belonging in a literal village, the Mississippi town where her ancestors lived and died. Miya first traveled to Itta Bena in her early twenties, visiting grave plots and holding the deeds to family land. While there, she needed a vehicle. In a trusting gesture, one of her uncles who "never lets people borrow his cars" offered it to her. "This was huge," Miya said, "super-huge. I became a [legend]. My cousins were gossiping about me through the whole night." For Miya, this village of relatives delivered trust, warmth, and historical connection. Through roots travel, women reflect on, reconnect with, or discover these pockets of community and care, spaces of familiarity amidst oppressive conditions.

4.6. Embracing a traveler and outsider identity

Where does this sense of unbelonging leave roots travelers? On feeling like an outsider in Africa, Charmaine said, "That kind of leaves you nowhere. You go to Africa and you're not sure if that's home for you, and you're in [the U.S. where] this all you know, and this isn't home." This lack of answers left Charmaine more persistent in the search for belonging, scheduling a six-month trip throughout Africa and Asia. This choice reflects a common one among interviewees and roots travel memoirists, yet one that rarely appears in existing roots travel scholarship: adopting the identity of a perpetual traveler and seeker.

A traveler identity, of course, requires time and money, making it inaccessible for those with inflexible jobs, caretaking duties, or limited resources. For those who can manage it, though, chosen travel is a way to embrace uprootedness, finding happiness through mobility and experiential learning. As Ricki, who lived in Europe for years, asserted, being born in the U.S. has one clear benefit: a powerful passport. She reflected: "The U.S.... [gave] me this passport to be able to go anywhere in the world. I take me being from here as that blessing... I know that I can't stay here. I know that this place is not my home. I was just meant to be born here to be able to go out into the world." (Ricki's), (2023)

comments show how oppressive conditions at home and unanswered questions abroad can propel roots travelers into ongoing quests of self-fulfillment.

Roots travel memoirists echo these themes, ending their books mid-journey or with the implication that their narrators will continue traveling. Raboteau, for instance, ends her narrative, "still on the road, still unfixed," driving through swamp land outside of New Orleans (2013, p. 249). "The promised land," she states, is "always out of reach." (2013, p. 42). Hartman concludes by recounting her visit to the Ghanaian town of Gwolu where—still feeling like an outsider—she embraces "the fugitive's legacy" of flight in pursuit of freedom (2007, p. 234). For Black Americans, these memoirists affirm, "home" equates to longing and mobility.

For some participants, of course, never-ending journeys are not appealing. Tia's travels led her to realize, in her words, "There's no place I belong." Rather than sulking in this outsider status, she embraced it. "My journey is over," she stated. "I resolved the restlessness and the yearning inside of me... by learning that it wasn't going to get resolved and just being okay with that." Like previous generations of Black women, Tia learned to occupy the margins, gaining insights through this vantage point. As hooks puts it, the margins are sites of creativity and power, "the spaces where we begin the process of re-vision" (1989, p. 153).

5. Conclusion

Between 2000 and 2023, increasing numbers of Black American women traveled throughout the African diaspora for roots tourism (Dillette, 2021, p. 413; Holsey, 2008, p. 14). This trend is a confluence of popular 21st-century tourism types including solo women's travel, ancestry tourism, and the Black Travel Movement. By analyzing interviews with eleven Black American women roots travelers and contextualizing them with patterns from roots travel memoirs, this study sought to uncover common travel motivations, experiences, and outcomes.

Black American roots travelers have countered their ancestors' histories of forced migration with chosen travel, searching for knowledge, belonging, pleasure, and power through travel in the African diaspora. Countering scholars' tendency to focus on roots travel's spiritual aspects, I show how travelers prioritize felt knowledge and transhistorical connection, visiting strategically selected places to understand themselves and their histories. Further, this study diverges from prior research by showing how travelers visit a range of locations potentially significant for their self-understanding, not only well-known heritage sites.

In their search for felt knowledge, Black American roots travelers take a uniquely expansive approach. In contrast to tourists who visit one imagined homeland, many Black American roots tourists seek to understand the entirety of the African diaspora. In part, this results from a lack of ancestral records with which to pinpoint one's heritage. However, it also reveals a broader set of learning objectives—these travelers seek knowledge as widespread and far-flung as the diaspora itself, rather than a narrowly focused understanding of one place. Such travelers, I have suggested, reflect Appiah's version of cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitans, he writes, are committed to pluralism and "[realistic] about how hard the truth is to find" (2006, p. 144). For this reason, they cast a wide geographical net in their pursuit of knowledge. The roots travelers in this study view Africa as a "motherland," with almost all participants having visited or noted it as an intended destination. However, they viewed travel to Africa as only one facet of a larger, continuous search for meaning.

During travel, participants sought connection through familiar faces, social exchanges, and cuisine. When travelers found belonging, it was often one-sided or brief, hindered by cultural differences. Above all, travelers' perceived American privilege overshadowed bonds of shared heritage. Research on travel to Ghana shows how economic disparities

hinder connection (Bruner 1996; Dillette, 2021), a finding I suggest holds true across a range of destinations. However, travelers still described temporary or one-sided experiences of belonging as pleasurable. Williams references such experiences in the context of Black woman's travel to Jamaica, arguing, "these illusions and fantasies [of belonging] that are fulfilled fleetingly are still powerful and productive. Illusions can... still provide pleasure and joy" (2018, p. 118). By emphasizing roots travelers' positive affects, I counter the tendency to depict such travel as "characterized by an underlying seriousness of purpose... that sharply differentiates it from more common modes of leisure travel" (Leite, 2005, p. 278). This research has shown how, for Black women travelers, leisure and roots travel often overlap, with somber moments and joyful experiences occurring in the same trips.

For interviewees and memoirists, roots trips frequently resulted in more travel. This underscores how mobility "can be a source of status and power, an expression of the rights to movement" (Urry, 2007, p. 9). All participants described travel plans, most of which had a heritage component. Many interviewees also made it clear that travel had become part of their sense of self. For some, adopting a traveler identity goes together with embracing an outsider identity. Though roots travelers may locate moments and spaces of belonging, they frequently arrive at Hartman's conclusion (2007, p. 46)—which echoes previous generations of Black thinkers—that the only path forward involves embracing the permanent condition of being a stranger, at home and abroad (Baldwin, 1955). Of course, this study is limited by its sample size and participant recruitment method, which may influence the findings. Since most participants were members of travel-related Facebook groups, they may be more likely to travel widely and embrace traveler identities than other Black American roots tourists. Future research should continue to explore the interplay of identity, mobility, race, and gender.

In conclusion, this research shows how Black Americans expand the geographical scope of roots travel, searching for ancestral connections across the diaspora. In doing so, these travelers demonstrate mobility's role in (re)distributing power and model a cosmopolitan ethic of global knowledge-making. Additionally, their experiences suggest a need to revise the definition of roots tourism. Rather than travel only "undertaken by members of migrant communities in the diaspora who seek to return to their country of origin or ancestral homeland" (Mensah, 2021, p. 2), roots travel also includes visits to places that *feel familiar or like home*, even if not an actual homeland.

Finally, this study shows the role of hopefulness in roots travel. Black women roots travelers dream of a world in which the wounds of the transatlantic slave trade are healed, of finding diasporic belonging, and of being fulfilled and powerful. On the one hand, these dreams are impossible to achieve. Roots travel cannot create a geographical home for those whose ancestors were forcibly uprooted. Travelers cannot reach back through time to grasp the hands of their kin. Yet, such hopes carry these women across the globe, the authorities of their own stories, learning through their senses and from those they meet. Even though their dreams may never be realized, these travelers keep seeking, journeying and, in doing so, shaping the future of travel and Black womanhood.

Funding

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Leah Butterfield: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Supervision, Software, Resources, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annale.2025.100173>.

References

- Alexander, M., Bryce, D., & Murdy, S. (2017). Delivering the past: Providing personalized ancestral tourism experiences. *Journal of Travel Research*, 56(4), 543–555. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287516643414>
- Alex-Assensoh, Y. M. (2010). African Americans, African immigrants and homeland-diaspora development in Africa. *African Diaspora*, 3(2), 207–234. <https://doi.org/10.1163/187254610X526922>
- Angelo, K. M., Breiman, J., Wu, H. M., Nemhauser, J., & Walker, A. T. (2020). Heritage and genealogy travel health concerns in the era of in-home DNA testing. *Journal of Travel Medicine*, 27(4). <https://doi.org/10.1093/jtm/taaa004>, May.
- Appiah, K. A. (2006). *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a world of strangers*. W.W. Norton.
- Arthur, T. O. (2022). "We bring home the roots": Black women travel influencers, digital culture bearing, and African internationalism in Instagram. *Social Media + Society*, 8(2). <https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051221103843>
- Baldwin, J. (1955). *Notes of a native son*. Beacon.
- Basu, P. (2007). *Highland homecomings: Genealogy and heritage tourism in the Scottish diaspora*. Routledge.
- Benjamin, S., & Dillette, A. K. (2021). Black travel movement: Systemic racism informing tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 88, Article 103169. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2021.103169>
- Benjamin, S., Dillette, A. K., & Robinson, E. (2024). Black travel is not a monolith. *Tourism Geographies*, 26(1), 13–31. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2022.2149848>
- Benjamin, S., & Laughter, J. (2023). Toward critical race tourism: Valuing counter-narratives and endarkened storywork. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 31(12), 2628–2644. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2022.2093358>
- Benjamin, W. (1969). The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction. In H. Arendt (Ed.), *Illuminations*. Schocken Books.
- Benton, A., & Shabazz, K. Z. (2009). Find their level: African American roots tourism in Sierra Leone and Ghana. *Cahiers d'études africaines*, 193–194. <https://doi.org/10.4000/etudesafriaines.18791>
- Berlant, L. (2008). *The female complaint: The unfinished business of sentimentality in American culture*. Duke University Press. Ebook.
- Bermuda Tourism Authority. (2019). *Discover the African Diaspora Heritage Trail* Accessed November 2024. <https://www.gotobermuda.com/article/discover-the-african-diaspora-heritage-trail>.
- Boukhris, L. (2017). The black Paris project: The production and reception of a counter-hegemonic tourism narrative in postcolonial Paris. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 25(5), 684–702. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2017.1291651>
- Browne, S. (2015). *Dark matters: On the surveillance of blackness*. Duke University Press.
- Bruner, E. M. (1996). Tourism in Ghana: The representation of slavery and the return of the black diaspora. *American Anthropologist*, 98(2), 290–304. <https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.1996.98.2.02a00060>
- Butterfield, L. (2020). Towards a feminist politics of mobility: U.S. travel and immigration memoirs. *Feminismo/s*, 36, 129. <https://doi.org/10.14198/fem.2020.36.06>
- Carter, P. L. (2019). Looking for something real: Affective encounters. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 76, 200–213. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2019.04.004>
- Collins, P. H. (2000). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Company Facts (n.d.). Ancestry corporate. Accessed November 2024, <https://www.ancestry.com/corporate/about-ancestry/company-facts>.
- Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241–1299. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039>
- Cresswell, T. (1993). Mobility as resistance: A geographical reading of Kerouac's 'On the Road'. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 18(2), 249–262.
- Cresswell, T. (2006). *On the move: Mobility in the modern western world*. Routledge.
- Cresswell, T. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (3rd ed.). Sage.
- Cresswell, T. (2010). Towards a politics of mobility. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 28, 17–31.
- De Certeau, M. (1984). *The practice of everyday life*. University of California Press.
- Dillette, A. (2021). Roots tourism: A second wave of double consciousness for African Americans. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 29(2–3), 412–427. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2020.1727913>
- Edmondson, B. (2009). *Caribbean middlebrow: Leisure culture and the middle class*. Cornell University Press.
- Edwards, K. (2021). *Black travel: The movement*. Travel and Leisure. <https://www.travelandleisure.com/travel-tips/travel-trends/black-travel-movement>.

- Elkin, L. (2017). *Flâneuse: Women walk the city in Paris*. New York, Tokyo, and London: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.
- Ex-Mississippi mayor moves to Africa, starts business. (2021, January). Associated Press News. <https://apnews.com/article/africa-tanzania-mississippi-dar-es-salaam-d8f16a5b0974c82f4c974ce4311cb147>.
- Eyube, O. (2021). *Africa's top 10 most visited tourist attractions in 2021*. Business Insider Africa. <https://africa.businessinsider.com/local/lifestyle/africas-top-10-most-visited-tourist-attractions-in-2021/p8syvypq>.
- Fabian, S. (2013). East Africa's Gorée: Slave trade and slave tourism in Bagamoyo, Tanzania. *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 47(1), 95–114.
- Fine, M. (1994). Working the hyphens: Reinventing self and other in qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin, & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 70–82). Sage.
- Gill, T. M. (2019). "The world is ours, too": Millennial women and the new black travel movement. In D. Willis, E. Toscano, & K. Brooks Nelson (Eds.), *Women and migration: Responses in art and history* (pp. 395–413). Open Book Publishers.
- Gilroy, P. (1993). *The black Atlantic: Modernity and double consciousness*. Harvard University Press.
- Hartman, S. (2007). *Lose your mother: A journey along the Atlantic slave route*. Macmillan.
- Henery, C. (2017). And so I write you: Practices in black women's diaspora. *Meridians*, 15(2), 435–463. <https://doi.org/10.2979/meridians.15.2.08>
- Holsby, B. (2008). *Routes of remembrance: Refashioning the slave trade in Ghana*. University of Chicago Press.
- Hooks, B. (1989). Choosing the margin as a space of radical openness. *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, 3, 15–23.
- Jackson, A. (2020). *Heritage, tourism, and race: The other side of leisure*. Routledge.
- Jacobson, M. F. (2008). *Roots too: White ethnic revival in post-civil rights America*. Harvard University Press.
- Kennett, D. A., Timpson, A., Balding, D. J., & Thomas, M. G. (2018). The rise and fall of BritainsDNA: A tale of misleading claims, media manipulation and threats to academic freedom. *Genealogy*, 2(47). <https://doi.org/10.3390/genealogy2040047>
- Kidron, C. A. (2013). Being there together: Dark family tourism and the emotive experience of co-presence in the holocaust past. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 41, 175–194. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2012.12.009>
- Leite, N. (2005). Travels to an ancestral past: On diasporic tourism, embodied memory, and identity. *Anthropologica*, 9, 273–302.
- Lelo, L., & Jamal, T. (2013). African Americans at sites of darkness: Roots-seeking, diasporic identities and place making. In L. White, & E. Frew (Eds.), *Dark tourism and place identity*. Routledge.
- MacCannel, D. (1999). *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*. University of California Press.
- Madison, D. S. (2012). *Critical ethnography: Method, ethics, and performance* (2nd ed.). Sage.
- Marschall, S. (2015a). 'Travelling down memory lane': Personal memory as a generator of tourism. *Tourism Geographies*, 17(1), 36–53. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2014.925963>
- Marschall, S. (2015b). 'Homesick tourism': Memory, identity and (be) longing. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 18(9), Article 876892. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2014.920773>
- McCain, G., & Ray, N. (2003). Legacy tourism: The search for personal meaning in heritage travel. *Tourism Management*, 24(6), 713–717. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0261-5177\(03\)00048-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0261-5177(03)00048-7)
- McKittrick, K. (2006). *Demonic grounds: Black women and the cartographies of struggle*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Mensah, I. (2021). Roots tourism. In D. Buhalis (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Tourism Management and Marketing*. Elgar. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781800377486.roots.tourism>.
- Milanich, N. B. (2019). *Paternity testing had a long history before today's DNA kits. The science hasn't always matched the hype*. Time Magazine. <https://time.com/5603888/paternity-test-history/>.
- Miles, T. (2015). *Tales from the haunted south: Dark tourism and memories of slavery from the civil war era*. University of North Carolina Press.
- Obama, M. (2018). *Becoming*. Crown Publishing.
- Perry, I. (2022). *South to America: A journey below the Mason-Dixon to understand the soul of a nation*. HarperCollins.
- Peters, C. (2021). Instagramming diasporic mobilities: The black travel movement and differential spatial racialization. *Communication, Culture and Critique*, 14(2), 201–219. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ccc/tcaa033>
- Pinho, P. S. (2008). Brazil in the map of Africanness: Examining roots tourism and international black relations. In P. Birlé, S. Costa, & H. Nitschack (Eds.), *Brazil and the Americas: Convergences and perspectives*. Vervuert.
- Pinho, P. S. (2018). *Mapping diaspora: African American roots tourism in Brazil*. The University of North Carolina Press.
- Prince, S. (2021). Affect and performance in ancestral tourism: Stories of everyday life, personal heritage, and the family. *Journal of Heritage Tourism*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1743873X.2021.1883033>
- Purcell, K. (2020). Home genetic testing: A nationally representative multi-mode survey, Consumer reports (Accessed November 2024) <https://article.images.consumerreports.org/prod/content/dam/surveys/Consumer%20Reports%20Home%20Genetic%20Testing%20October%202020>.
- Raboteau, E. (2013). *Searching for Zion: The quest for home in the African diaspora*. Atlantic Monthly Press. eBook.
- Rickly-Boyd, J. M. (2012). Authenticity & aura: A Benjaminian approach to tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 39(1), 269–289. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2011.05.003>
- Santorini flying dress photoshoot price. (n.d.). Santorini Travel. Accessed January 2025. <https://www.santorinitravel.com/santorini-flying-dress-photoshoot-price/>.
- Schramm, K. (2004). Coming home to the motherland: Pilgrimage tourism in Ghana. In S. Coleman, & J. Eade (Eds.), *reframing pilgrimage: Cultures in motion* (pp. 135–151).
- Schrock, R. D. (2013). The methodological imperatives of feminist ethnography. *Journal of Feminist Scholarship*, 5, 54–60. <https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/jfs/vol5/iss5/5>.
- Schwartz, S. (2021). Map: Where critical race theory is under attack. *EducationWeek*. <http://www.edweek.org/policy-politics/map-where-critical-race-theory-is-under-attack/2021/06>.
- Slate, N. (2017). *Colored cosmopolitanism: The shared struggle for freedom in the United States and India*. Harvard University Press.
- Smith, S. (2001). *Moving lives: Twentieth-century women's travel writing*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Sturken, M. (2017). *Tourists of history: Memory, kitsch, and consumerism from Oklahoma City to ground zero*. Duke University Press.
- Tetteh, B. (2020). Beyond the Year of Return: Africa and the diaspora must forge closer ties. *Africa Renewal*. <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/september-2020/beyond-year-return-africa-and-diaspora-must-forge-closer-ties>.
- Teye, V., Turk, E., & Sönmez, S. (2011). Heritage tourism in Africa: Residents' perceptions of African-American and white tourists. *Tourism Analysis*, 16(2), 169–185.
- Tomczewska-Popowycz, N., & Taras, V. (2022). The many names of "roots tourism": An integrative review of the terminology. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 50, 245–258. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhtm.2022.02.016>
- Towns, A. R. (2016). Geographies of pain: #SayHerName and the fear of black women's mobility. *Women's Studies in Communication*, 39(2), 122–126. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07491409.2016.1176807>
- UNESCO. (2006). *The central slave and ivory route*. United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. <https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/2095/>.
- Urry, J. (2007). *Mobilities*. Polity Press.
- Urry, J., & Larsen, J. (2011). *The tourist gaze 3.0*. Sage.
- Veblen, T. (2009). *The theory of the leisure class*. Oxford University Press (Original work published 1899).
- Wallach, J. (2019). *Getting what we need ourselves: How food has shaped African American life*. Rowman and Littlefield.
- White, L., & Frew, E. (Eds.). (2013). *Dark tourism and place identity*. Routledge.
- Wiegmann, P. (2011). Amy Jacques Garvey "On a trip from coast to coast": Roots, routes, and emancipation. *Comparativ*, 21(5), 88–105.
- Williams, B. (2018). *The pursuit of happiness: Black women, diasporic dreams, and the politics of emotional transnationalism*. Duke University Press.
- Williams, E. L. (2021). Black girl abroad: An autoethnography of travel and the need to cite black women in anthropology. *Feminist Anthropology*, 2, 143–154. <https://doi.org/10.1002/fea2.12041>
- Williams, J., & Nwankwo, I. K. (2017). Travelin' women: Black feminist migrations, diasporas, and cosmopolitanisms. *Meridians*, 15(2), 382–388.
- Wilson, E., & Chambers, D. (Eds.). (2023). *A research agenda for gender and tourism*. Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Woodard, H. (2019). *Slave sites on display: Reflecting slavery's legacy through contemporary "flash" moments*. University Press of Mississippi.
- Zhu, Y. (2021). *Heritage tourism: From problems to possibilities*. Cambridge University Press.

Interviews

- Audrey (pseudonym). Interview with the author. September 16, 2023 and August 21, 2024. n.d.
- Brittany. (2022). *Interview with the author*. February 26, 2022.
- Charmaine. (2022). *Interview with the author*. April 4, 2022.
- Devin. Interview with the author. February 10, 2022. n.d.
- Ikeoma. (2023). *Interview with the author*. September 8, 2023.
- Latonya. (2022). *Interview with the author*. February 22, 2022.
- Miya. (2022). *Interview with the author*. February 23, 2022.
- Nerri (pseudonym). (2022). *Interview with the author*. February 26, 2022.
- Rickita (Ricki). Interview with the author. September 11, 2023. n.d.
- Stephanie. (2022). *Interview with the author*. February 13, 2022. .
- Tia (pseudonym). (2018). *Interview with the author*. July 12, 2018 and February 2, 2022.

Leah Butterfield is an Assistant Professor of English at The University of The Bahamas. She has published in *Feminismo/s*, *The Routledge Handbook of Latinx Life Writing*, and elsewhere. She researches women's memoir, travel, migration, and social movements within and beyond the United States. She received her Ph.D. in American Studies and Women's and Gender Studies from the University of Texas at Austin.