# Afro-Atlantic FLIGHT

## Speculative Returns and the Black Fantastic

MICHELLE D. COMMANDER

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# *ACKNOWLEDGMENTS*

On a fateful November day in 1995, my grandfather stood up to lead the St. Paul Pentecostal Church's congregation in a song titled "Running for My Life." The song, like other spirituals, contains interrelated meanings regarding hope, grace, and the opportunity to truly live even after death. I imagine that for my grandfather, it also spoke directly to his unwavering Christian faith as well as to the idea of escaping to an elsewhere—an otherwise existence. He sang, in part:

> I'm running for my life, I'm running for my life.
> I'm running for my life, I'm running for my life.
>
> If anybody asks you, what's the matter with me,
> Tell them that I'm saved and sanctified,
> Holy Ghost filled and I've been baptized.
> I've got Jesus on the inside and I'm running for my life.
>
> Won't you come on home with me?
> Won't you come on home with me?

At the end of the song, my grandfather suddenly collapsed and transitioned. The thought that he, who had seen oppression and terror in ways that haunt our moment; prayed with fervor for basic rights that we, perhaps, will never have to; and relocated to the North and then back to the South for a better chance at realizing social life, has returned to the home of his imagination is sustaining. This book has afforded me the wonderful

opportunity to reflect on the radical possibilities for disrupting Black social alienation and dispossession by using them as embarkation points from which to take flight.

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# *INTRODUCTION*

At slave castle–dungeons, the surrounds of centuries-old concretized necropolises pique the visitor's imagination. If one actively listens at these sites of memory of the transatlantic slave trade, one will hear the lamentations growled by the sea. Alongside the structures, fishermen attend to their business, and women in the nearby markets prepare smoked fish and sell household supplies and the like. Everyday life seemingly has gone on. The slave castle–dungeons in Ghana's Central Region, despite their more recently erected gift shops and artisans' rooms, remain wretched time capsules. They have become places of diasporan mourning whose overpowering presences mock the relative underdevelopment of the towns over which they hover. In recalling what the death journeys from these sites entailed and that fateful moment at which each ship disappeared into the coalescence of sky and sea, one shudders at how the violent disregard for human life could have ever happened.

On a practical level, it is clear that monetary greed was the principal factor that compelled the slave trade: a sordid system that plucked at least thirty million Africans and nonchalantly dispersed them throughout the New World. In 1781, the crew of the British-owned *Zong* slave ship encountered navigational issues en route to the New World from the Gold Coast (Ghana), resulting in panic about the possibility that they would not arrive in the Americas with viable, living commodities. In response to an

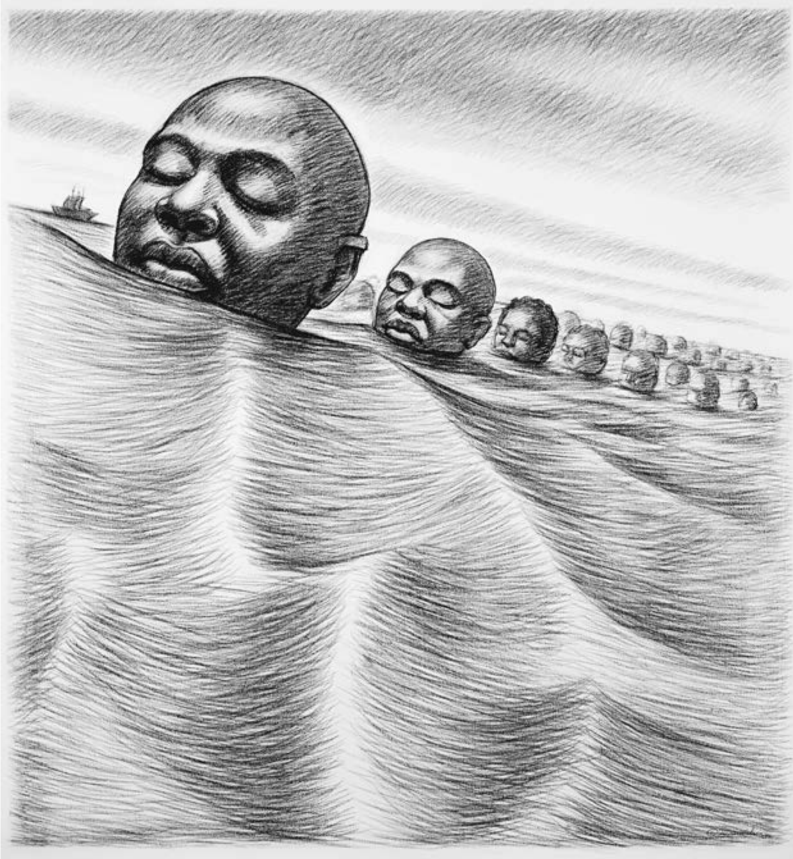
I.1 A view of Elmina, Ghana, from the slave castle courtyard. © Getty Images.

impending water shortage, crew members tossed Africans into the Atlantic; the slave speculators had concluded that the certain way to ensure that they maintained their entire investment was to file insurance claims to recoup the value of their property. The crew members' homicidal actions were very much guided by a capitalistic impulse, an acute individualism that rejected the humanity of others in service of the preservation and economic uplift of the self.[1] The *Zong* massacre is one of the most significant historical moments because it prefigured how speculators and businesspeople have continued to prosper despite Black social alienation and death, and because this incident and others like it spurred a legacy of Afro-Atlantic dissent. Given the continued devaluation of Black humanity and life, it must be articulated that the Middle Passage is alive with the specter of death: "At the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean there's a railroad made of human bones. Black ivory. Black ivory."[2] The expanse of the sea, a pathway marked by rupture, is haunted indeed.[3] What inspires the analysis that follows are the ways in which the enslaved and their descendants took and have continued to take back control over their bodies despite the threat of violence, turning the language of speculation on its head.

In various Afro-Atlantic folkloric tales, Mami Wata or Yemanja/Iemanja, a mermaid-like spiritual goddess of water who heals and liberates

those who summon her, often appears. During the slave trade, a group of Igbo Africans who, though shackled together on a slave ship, called on Mami Wata to "carry" them back home to Africa, a plea that she granted, endowing them with the needed strength to leap into the ocean.[4] Their screams, the clinking of metal shackles against the body of the ship, and their impassioned entreaties to Mami Wata are thus fabled to endure in the Atlantic's sonic atmosphere, offering a radical, haunting reverberation.[5] The ocean's very existence as an unwitting accomplice in the slave trade bears witness.[6] Its eternal groans and bellows, which can be witnessed in the landscapes and literaturescapes across the Afro-Atlantic, demand remembrance, articulate sorrow, and express perpetual rage against the shores of dispossession. Reminiscent of the story of Mami Wata and the Igbo slaves, it is noted often that some Africans en route to the New World threw themselves from slave ships with hopes of returning spiritually to their villages. Narratives in the Black American folklore tradition also engage with the speculative through the often retold and re-created story of the Flying Africans; these tales chronicle a group of Africans who, upon setting foot in the West, took a look around at the landscape and their imprisoned selves, and ascended into flight, "stealing away" across the Atlantic back to their homelands.[7]

This book explores how African descendants in the New World have extended the legacy of the Flying Africans. Specifically, I examine how writers, tourists, urban planners, and activists imagined the Africas to which African descendants might return, belong, and feel free through the lens of what I refer to as *Afro-Atlantic speculation*: a series of imaginings, including literary texts, films, and geographic sites, that envision return flights back to Africa. I analyze cultural production in which Black American artists either send their protagonists back to slavery or representative Africas, or chronicle the artists' actual trips to the African continent proper. The examination of these Black American neo–slave narratives and travel accounts are situated alongside acts—multilayered narratives that are performed by a cast of "real" traveling characters: Black American tourists and expatriates, tourism industry workers, traditional faith leaders and healers, and market vendors located across imagined Africas in Ghana, Bahia, Brazil, and the American South. Drawing upon and contributing to the disciplines of American studies, literary studies, diaspora studies, cultural anthropology, geography, and performance studies,



I.2 Donovan Nelson, *Ibo Landing 8*. © 2010, 54 × 52 in. (137.16 × 132.08 cm), charcoal on paper, Collection of Valentine Museum of Art in New York City.

I accumulate this multifaceted archive to examine thoroughly how the speculation that began with the folkloric myth of the Flying Africans endures in the post–civil rights moment.

I describe how this particular set of African-descended peoples creates and performs Africa, and I contend that this multigenre process—at times celebratory and romantic, at times disappointing—helps them attend to the dispossession caused by the slave trade. Each of the Afro-Atlantic sites explored herein is haunted by and promotes particular kinds of narratives about transatlantic slavery and imagined Africas. Along the

coastlines and interior regions of these sites sat major embarkation facilities from which human cargo was dispersed to the Americas during the transatlantic slave trade; these artifacts, coupled with cultural elements throughout each region, have become prominent tourist attractions, drawing thousands of Black American travelers each year. I perform the important tasks of mapping and examining the myths that Afro-Atlantic communities perpetuate about slavery and their purported retentions from the original Africa—the imagined, pristine landscape from which their ancestors were stripped—despite temporal and geographic separations. I argue for a more expansive reading of these circuits that not only considers flight and its related outcomes but also contemplates the possibility for increasing Black relations across the globe.

Literal and figurative flights closer to Africa are indicative of the ceaseless reconfigurations of resistance to elide racism and its attendant systems of domination. *Afro-Atlantic Flight* argues that myriad forms of radical cultural production travel among the people of the Afro-Atlantic in the post–civil rights era. I utilize the term *Afro-Atlantic* to account for the flows of a diversity of African-descended peoples and to clarify at the outset that though this analysis is centered primarily on Black American cultural production and migrations, it also interrogates how a range of African-descended groups contemporaneously perform and remember Africa. The folklore and myths that inform imaginaries about Africa are products of a complicated, transnational spectrum of longing; inherently, Afro-Atlantic speculative fictions are the result of collaborative processes whereby African cultural epistemologies are exchanged, imagined, and reconfigured. In the texts and movements explored throughout, Africa emerges as a signifier that is perpetually in flux, reinforcing the impossibility of literal returns despite the perpetuity of yearning as well as the hybridity of Afro-Atlantic identities.

The innumerable series of flights taken by Black Americans toward Africa are necessarily bound up with speculative cultural production, which consists of fantastic works that often blur chronological time and portray interactions between real, ghostly, and imagined figures. As a genre, speculative fiction "gives authors the ability to ask relevant questions about our own society in a way that would prove provocative in more mainstream forms. . . . [I]t is a literature of freedom, freedom for the author to

lose the chains of conventional thought, and freedom for the reader to lose themselves in discovery."[8] While recent Black speculative texts such as science fiction are often understood through the lens of Afrofuturism, I maintain that Afrofuturism is a subgenre of Afro-speculation of the twentieth and twenty-first century that is concerned with the artistic reimagining of the function of science and technology in the construction of utopic Black futures.[9] Afro-Atlantic speculative thought germinated in part as a corrective response to slavery, which the filmmaker Haile Gerima referred to in an interview with Pamela Woolford as "a scientific adventure, an attempt by an industrialized society to create a robotic or mindless human being, pure labor. . . . [T]he plantation school of thought believed [resistance and rebellion were] always provoked by outsiders, that Africans were not capable of having that human need."[10] Speculation became a subversive way of life for Black Americans, who were determined to self-actualize, forge communities, and experience pleasure on their own terms.[11] Afro-speculation as a modality for living is conjectural and conditional; the evidentiary matters not. Afro-speculation is an investment in the unseen and precarious; it is a gamble. It is the belief in the possibility of the establishment of new, utopic realities outside of dominant society despite the lack of proof that Black social life is conceivable. The humanistic qualities and liberatory nature of the genre renders speculative thought a fantastic, radical epistemological modality through which Afro-Atlantic identity can be lived across time and space.

The Afro-Atlantic speculative also relies on multilayered flights of the imagination. This is evident in mythmaking processes, which have long served as powerful tools by which many African-descended communities have sustained themselves. Centuries before the advent of today's technologies, Afro-Atlantic peoples and stories traveled, inspiring the establishment of transatlantic bonds that exceeded the borders of the Western imagination. The speculative fictions and acts addressed in this book, then, are synergistic and performative, traversing alternative spatial and temporal continuums. To be sure, the potential for Afro-Atlantic speculation as a genre and modality lends a sanguine quality to how one imagines the future. Yet, as I will demonstrate in the following chapters, Black American speculation regarding ancestral homelands can become divorced from its revolutionary potential if the imagination is hampered by myopic desires to reclaim precolonial Africa.

## Freedom Dreams: Historical Flights and Black American Migration

I held all beyond [the veil] in common contempt, and lived above it in a region of blue sky and great wandering shadows.
—W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*

Black Americans have been perpetual travelers enraptured by the promises of flight since the Middle Passage. Flight is transcendence over one's reality—an escape predicated on imagination and the incessant longing to be free. On the slave plantation, resistance in the form of truancy and fugitivity often relied on individual- and group-devised trickery and silence to escape what Stephanie Camp refers to as the "geography of containment," wherein coordinated forces inside and outside the borders of the slave master's territory attempted to maintain control of enslaved people's movement.[12] In cataloging his escape from the bonds of slavery, Frederick Douglass stated that his "only chance at life was in flight."[13] By utilizing the speculative, haunting language of flight to describe the radical nature of his successful fugitivity and the steps needed to ensure the future ascension of other enslaved persons, Douglass prescribes a kind of fugitive epistemology that centers on Black unity and requires the strategic implementation of silence to give pause to slave owners, imbuing them with terror and increasing the possibility of a proper chance at a liberated social existence:

> I would keep the merciless slaveholder profoundly ignorant of the means of flight adopted by the slave. I would leave him to imagine himself surrounded by myriads of invisible tormentors, ever ready to snatch from his infernal grasp his trembling prey. Let him be left to feel his way in the dark; let darkness commensurate with his crime hover over him; and let him feel that at every step he takes, in pursuit of the flying bondman, he is running the frightful risk of having his hot brains dashed out by an invisible agency. Let us render the tyrant no aid; let us not hold the light by which he can trace the footprints of our flying brother.[14]

Flights of the imagination, as physical movements or devices of cultural production, reconstruct middle passages to reconceptualize the voyages as well as to lend a sense of revolutionary possibility to freedom

dreams.[15] Such movement is realized via countless modes of transport (by foot, boat, train, automobile, airplane, and so on) and remains important to Black Americans' enduring desire to move freely—to assert their corporeal and psychic liberty. The immediacy of doing away with the shackles of slavery led to the imagined promises of Black colonies, most notably the 1847 settlement of Liberia, which was led by the American Colonization Society and carried out by Black American freedmen. Black American settlers assigned Liberia the motto "the love of liberty brought us here," though their Christian uplift ideology almost immediately and perhaps unwittingly cast the West African nation into a pattern of tribal devastation that reverberates in the contemporary period and presages the problematic issues inherent in positing a literal return to Africa as the antidote to injustice and dispossession.[16] For those who remained in or returned to the United States after the early failures of Liberia, survival depended on their reactions to the reality of their continued oppression.

As Black Americans discovered during their years of bondage and just after the Emancipation Proclamation, the laws preserving the freedom of American citizens were intended for whites only, particularly for the protection of white men. Black American traveling culture ties freedom to mobility.[17] Mobility—a person's control over his or her place in the world—is central to subjectivity and to one's sense of self. Freedmen and runaways had continued their migrations, particularly to the North and West, where slavery was illegal and they assumed racism would be less intense.[18] In cities such as Boston and New York, Black American migrants competed with European immigrants for jobs and routinely were denied skilled labor positions, soon discovering that while discriminatory practices were not legislated, oppression and racism existed in the form of everyday practices and de facto segregation.[19] Whatever hopes Black Americans had held out for freedom after the Civil War withered away when Reconstruction failed in 1877.[20] Not only was the South still suffering from postbellum economic hardships, but also racial tensions were even more acute than in previous years, resulting in increased Black Code restrictions, lynchings, and white supremacist terror.

During the post-Emancipation moment, the goal for Black migrants was to carve out a homeland where they would be fully free and safe from domestic terror. Traveling culture in the first half of the twentieth century consisted of a range of relocations by ordinary people, mostly

within the United States, to flee Jim Crow laws and/or to find jobs in the differently racist North, Midwest, and West. The cosmopolitanism of the Harlem Renaissance, which saw the international movements of Black American artists and intellectuals as well as their political engagements with their African diasporic counterparts, demonstrated the unique role that transnational flights would play in the Black social movement, though the vast majority of Black Americans would not realize that level of mobility.[21] Black Americans in the North were accustomed to a marginally greater sense of freedom than their Southern counterparts, yet both groups were struck by the sense of liberty that they experienced in European countries as exiles and during military service, particularly in France during World War I. When Black soldiers, in particular, returned to the United States emboldened by the generally benevolent treatment that they had received, the gracelessness with which many American white people received them was more than simply disheartening. Specifically, the Red Summer of 1919 was filled with race riots, lynchings, and an eruption of other massacres, all of which were prompted in part by a perception that Black men were behaving "above their station" by wearing their decorated uniforms in public and that they were generally not as passive as they had been before they served overseas. W. E. B. Du Bois, who notoriously had argued that Black Americans should participate willingly in the war to illustrate the community's loyalty to the United States and thus increase the possibility of Black Americans being welcomed into the nation as recognized citizens, lamented in the wake of continued lynching and disfranchisement after the men returned:

> [The United States] decrees that it shall not be possible in travel nor residence, work nor play, education nor institution for a black man to exist without tacit or open acknowledgement of his inferiority to the dirtiest white dog. . . . But by the God of Heaven, we are cowards and jackasses if now that that war is over, we do not marshal every ounce of our brain and brawn to fight a sterner, longer, more unbending battle against the forces of hell in our own land. We return. We return from fighting. We return fighting. Make way for Democracy! We saved it in France, and by the Great Jehovah, we will save it in the United States of America, or know the reason why.[22]

In the midst of Du Bois's increasing but measured agitation, which he expressed in his writings in the magazine *The Crisis* and through his activism in the courts with the NAACP's legal division, the revolutionary outlook of Jamaican-born Marcus Garvey began to pique the imaginations of hundreds of thousands of restless African-descended people through his international Pan-Africanist organization, the Universal Negro Improvement Association.[23] Garvey had immediate plans, though they went unrealized, to repatriate African diasporans to a settlement in Liberia. Restrictions on this international mass movement—both economic and imposed by the U.S. government—curbed the formation of the Black nation that Garvey imagined, but some Black Americans continued to migrate within the United States in response to the collapse of a range of proposed legislative acts that were intended to mitigate the lasting effects of Reconstruction's disappointments.

Most Black Americans in the South, though, were unable or unwilling to migrate. They demanded their freedom in the face of a range of hindrances including the Jim Crow segregation laws, which limited the rights Black Americans were able to exercise and, to a disturbing extent, reinstated the slave plantation–era geography of containment. The immediate response to Jim Crow and the danger of certain death was further flight: the Great Migration of roughly 1.6 million Black Americans from Southern states to the North, Midwest, and California between 1910 and 1930 to find jobs and escape intimidation and discriminatory practices. The Second Great Migration in the 1940s through the 1960s propelled 5 million Black Americans away from the increasingly treacherous conditions in the South, where church bombings and threats of physical violence were prominent and legal penalties for anti-Black domestic terrorism were virtually nonexistent.[24] The majority of Black Americans remained in the battleground that was the South, and it was these everyday people who organized and supported the social movements that gradually improved their communities.[25]

In addition to civil rights activism within the nation's borders, Mary Dudziak suggests that beginning in 1960, which is heralded widely as the Year of Africa, the U.S. government felt tremendous pressure to incorporate Black Americans fully into society, as officials feared the establishment of a Black fifth column: a radical, clandestine organization that would seek vengeance within the nation.[26] Generally, Black Americans

were encouraged by successful African anticolonial movements, and civil rights leaders began traveling en masse to countries such as Ghana in the late 1950s, where they engaged with Pan-Africanism and socialist thought under the tutelage of Kwame Nkrumah and political exiles in the African diaspora, all of whom urged Black Americans to continue the fight back in the United States informed by a more radical philosophy.[27] The irony did not escape the U.S. government that sub-Saharan African countries were struggling for and gaining their freedom from colonization, while increasingly radical Black Americans, who lived in the supposed bastion of freedom, were still striving for basic liberty and looking to socialist nations for new methods to achieve that objective. During the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, violence grew worse in relation to the intensity of Black activism, but undeterred leaders emerged from local religious and social institutions to inspire and organize the movement. Captivated worldwide audiences watched in dismay as policemen violently brutalized peaceful demonstrators with high-pressure fire hoses and trained attack dogs. International newspaper and television images of the Black plight in the South provided evidence of U.S. hypocrisy regarding democracy, and the American government, which desired to possess more influence abroad, turned its attention to passing legislation that addressed civil rights disparities. Local strategists increased their protests through the establishment of boycotts, freedom rides, and sit-ins at white-only establishments, as well as the National March on Washington in 1963—all of which kept the international media's spotlight on their efforts and eventually helped accelerate the passage of the 1960s civil rights acts.

In line with the short-lived "days of hope" that had disappointed, oppressed, and disfranchised Black Americans since Reconstruction, the post–civil rights era is marked by a conservatism that has upturned the discourse of civil rights liberalism and "makes its arguments about racial conditions without endorsing racial inequality."[28] As a result, affirmative action and other programs that were developed beginning in the early 1960s to redress economic and social injustices and promote Black upward mobility remain political fodder and, consequently, are rolled back continuously, reinforcing high unemployment rates and keeping significant numbers of Black Americans living below the poverty line.[29] In his June 1965 commencement speech at Howard University in Washington, D.C., President

Lyndon Johnson gave a compelling rationale as to how affirmative action programs might address hundreds of years of systemic discrimination:

> Freedom is not enough. . . .
>
> You do not take a person who, for years, has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, bring him up to the starting line of a race and then say, "you are free to compete with all the others," and still justly believe that you have been completely fair. . . .
>
> This is the next and more profound stage of the battle for civil rights. We seek not just freedom but opportunity. We seek not just legal equity but human ability, not just equality as a right and a theory but equality as a fact and equality as a result.[30]

Johnson's speech presciently cautioned that the period after the passage of the civil rights acts would not be paradisiacal—that the 1970s and beyond would be a crucial, enduring phase of the journey toward the realization of civil rights for all Americans. By the 1980s, Manning Marable issued a call for a new Reconstruction after the promises of the 1960s civil rights legislation and affirmative action strategies had been met with extreme resistance from the American political right:

> The vision of a society freed from bigotry and hunger, freed from unemployment and racial violence, will be realized only through a Third Reconstruction which seeks the empowerment of the laboring classes, national minorities, and all of the oppressed. The "freedom" of capital must be restricted for the common good. A Third Reconstruction will arise in the not-too-distant future, to fulfill the lost promises of the first and second social movements. Its vision is quite clear. It is now only a question of power.[31]

Under contemporary neoliberalism, the negative effects of continued disfranchisement are framed as signs of Black pathology, a belief that requires a willful ignorance of how slavery redounds in the post–civil rights moment.

Freedom remains elusive as racism is persistently renovated. In response, mobility has been transformed further into a politics whereby Black Americans have desired increasingly to establish a sense of home elsewhere. Saidiya Hartman astutely notes about the state of Black social alienation and desire for living otherwise in the post–civil rights mo-

ment: "The transience of the slave's existence still leaves its traces in how black people imagine home as well as how we speak of it. . . . It's why we never tire of dreaming of a place that we can call home, a place better than here, wherever here might be."[32] Black Americans suffer from ever-evolving, intersectional forms of captivity—overrepresentation in the prison-industrial complex; race and gender discrimination and profiling; and unequal access to quality education and health care.[33] Dishonor and dispossession pose a perpetual predicament, but this is not to suggest that it is a position of absolute powerlessness, as evidenced in the centuries of Black American migration and cultural production during and since slavery and the range of radical social movements that have grown out of an acute rejection of domination and injustice—particularly the continued interest in establishing and improving relations between African peoples worldwide. Flights in the post–civil rights era illustrate that, as Nikhil Singh writes,

> one consistency of the black political imagination across its ideological and generational divides has been its combination of grassroots insurgency and global dreams. Perhaps it will only be by again inventing forms of politics, solidarity, and identification linking the local and global scales of human oppression that we will be able to address the increasingly obvious inadequacies of the modern nation-state as a vehicle of democratic transformation and egalitarian distribution for the world's peoples.[34]

**From Diaspora to Neoteric Pan-Africanism: Moving toward Black Fantastic Thought**

On the eve of the U.S. voyage into the new social realm produced by the end of the mid-twentieth-century civil rights era, Malcolm X offered a series of prescriptions about the significance of transnationalizing the U.S.-centered Black social movement. X had traveled throughout Africa in 1964, making a well-documented visit to Ghana, where a relatively large contingent of Black American exiles and expatriates had settled. The actress, singer, and author Maya Angelou recalls that Malcolm X advised her and other Black Americans to return to the United States to assist with the struggle for civil rights: " 'The country needs you. . . . You have seen Africa, bring it home and teach our people about the homeland.' "[35]

In his autobiography, X recounts a speech that he made to a captivated audience in Ghana in which he did not outright reject the sense of diasporan loss that compels a desire for the motherland, but he refigured return as a recalibration of the collective mind-set, which he deemed necessary for the evolution of an efficacious, perdurable transnational Black radicalism: "I said that physically we Afro-Americans might remain in America, fighting for our Constitutional rights, but that philosophically and culturally we Afro-Americans badly needed to 'return' to Africa—and to develop a working unity in the framework of Pan-Africanism."[36] X's instruction to relegate Africa to the political and cultural imaginaries was an evocation of a proto-Black fantastic ideology, and it served as an early prediction of the unsustainability of diasporic-centered thought.

Scholars generally have maintained that peoples of the African diaspora possess the following attributes regarding their foreparents' dispersal: an imagined sense of an African homeland, alienation in the host country, a desire to return to Africa, and a "continuing development of a collective consciousness informed by the historical struggles for liberation and motivated by the shared sense of obligation to preserve the collective being, the ontological totality."[37] Of import here is Michael Echeruo's suggestion that it is the burden of return that is the condition of possibility for the diaspora:

> No person can claim to be part of a diaspora who cannot, however improbably, claim also to be traceable by descent to a lineage and (hence) to a place. . . . The power of the idea lies in the principle of it: that a return is possible forever, whenever, if ever. It is this possibility—this inalienable right to wish a return, to reclaim connections to a lineage, however fractured, that makes one individual a part of a diffuse and disparate collection of persons we call the diaspora. . . . The commitment to return is not an obligation. It is only a prophetic expectation to be realized in Never-time.[38]

This passage from Echeruo is fascinating in his assertion that the possibility of return sustains. For African diasporans, whose condition was produced by the transatlantic slave trade, there often exists a "rift of separation, 'the loss of identity,'" which can only "be healed when these forgotten connections are once more set in place."[39] Stuart Hall maintains that the reparation of that which is forgotten or fragmented does not hinge on

return; return is not discounted wholly, but he finds that the formation of cultural identity is possible by thinking in terms of one shared culture, where an imagined Africa is the constant that brings and holds diasporic communities together, often resulting in the type of transnational social movement that Malcolm X envisioned. Regarding Africa, Hall surmises that it is "the great aporia, which lies at the centre of our cultural identity and gives it meaning," signifying that though Africa is invoked as an instrumental referent, it is impassable and inherently contradictory.[40] As such, a literal return to origins is rendered futile as an unyielding political strategy.

Given that the original Africa is no longer there and cannot be reclaimed, it is intriguing to analyze what Black Americans discover and create upon setting foot in Ghana, Brazil, and South Carolina as cultural roots tourists and "ex-patriots" or expatriates. Black American engagement with that which ceases to exist raises questions about what compels them to relocate permanently or return to that which is ethereal. Because the African portions of their histories were virtually erased during the Middle Passage and throughout their centuries of bondage in the New World, where multiply cultured, tongued, and historied peoples were strewn together, some African-descended peoples' attempt to recover the source—generations after the initial break—has depended on their ability to travel and imagine other possibilities for living. While the fact of diasporic longing attends to the emotive, this examination is concerned more with what follows yearning. The difficulties inherent to return projects prompt the movement of several people described herein toward the Africa in their imaginations, but the larger initial questions become: What can emerge from homelessness? What new worlds are imagined out of thin air? Unlike diasporicity as a political framework for understanding Black lives in the West, fantastic, speculative thought such as Pan-Africanism is not beholden to nor has it ever been concerned solely with conversations about territory or sovereignty. My aim, then, is not to discount diaspora wholly but to demonstrate that travels toward Africa can become problematic if they are clouded by an individualist concentration on homeland returns.

During her monologue, the embodied ghost child and titular character of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* recalls the Middle Passage, offering a sharp critique of the U.S. Reconstruction project as well as the attendant

consequences of transatlantic slavery and racialized violence: "all of it is now . . . it is always now . . . there will never be a time when I am not crouching and watching others who are crouching too."[41] The very prescience of Beloved's rememory and, by extension, Morrison's authorial voice captures the political sentiment undergirding the movement toward the utilization of the speculative by Black Americans in the post-1965 era.[42] Morrison's tale of rememory and the establishment of Black American communities during the Reconstruction period reinforce the importance of effectively coming to terms with painful pasts to position oneself for the possibility of social life. As a political project, *Beloved* reconstructs the memory of the Middle Passage as symbol and symptom, asserting Morrison's position that that which happened in the traumatic past has an impact on the African-descended today.

Alternatively, Kamari Maxine Clarke argues against the centering of the Middle Passage in the understanding of Black life transnationally, cautioning that "unless African American diasporic cultural production is understood in relation to contemporary issues on the African continent, the signifier of Africa in the African Diaspora will remain an insignificant symbol of African realities, always present in its invocation of African Americanness, but absent in the continuing trajectories of plunder in postcolonial Africa."[43] Clarke understands such claims on Africa to be what Fred Moten refers to as an "externally imposed murderousness—an effect of the strange of nostalgia in diasporic civil society and neo-imperial rapaciousness."[44] Clarke's provocative statement calls for a particular kind of reverence that imposes on anyone who identifies as or assigns "African" as a self-descriptor the responsibility of acknowledging the more pressing issues in present-day Africa. This book responds to Clarke's critique by considering the performative aspects of this obligation and by reflecting on whether Clarke's charge operates in reverse. Are African governments, for example, responsible for recognizing and enlisting in the effort to better the welfare of diasporic Africans if and when they wield the language of kinship to usher "home" diasporic persons with the financial means to travel and buttress African development and investment strategies?

Related provocative arguments regarding the Black American utilization of speculative thought in cultural production and homeland travels often raise class concerns.[45] The ability to escape is indeed predicated on

the possession of the wealth to move for most migrants, rendering the ability to fantasize in these ways a mark of the privileged. It should be noted, however, that imagining an alternative life does not always cost financially; oral myths, for instance, are often passed down generationally, remembered, and repeated, which suggests that financial upward mobility is not a prerequisite for spiritual ascents. The quest for social and psychic freedom, to be sure, hinges not on the taking of literal flights. What I seek to encourage here are more measured readings of those who elect to fly toward Africa, particularly more expressed empathy for those who fail in their attempts to take up what José E. Munoz refers to as "disidentification" survival strategies to escape marginalization in the contentious post-1965 moment in the United States by claiming their ancestral pasts through African self-identification (naming) and in representations generally.[46] This is especially vital when these imaginings are not coupled with what critics might imagine are the proper connections of travelers and cultural producers' diasporic plights to current affairs on the African continent. Clarke's usage of "insignificant" is compelling in that it reads as presentist, even in her sincere regard concerning eradicating the continued pillage of Africa by establishing humanitarian diasporas. While Black Americans are not the only diasporic people who claim, long for, or represent Africa in their nomenclature and cultural performances, they and others occasionally position Black Americans as the single people of the diaspora. And while it is the case that Black American voices are privileged at times to an alarming degree, it is unsettling that Black American cultural production, participation in cultural roots tourism, and histories of expatriation are sometimes dismissed and critiqued as effectively neocolonialist. Black Americans are now regarded by some scholars as exceptionalists who participate in the perpetual "scramble" for Africa, imposing their own individualistic narratives without regard for those of contemporary Africans. The idea that roots travelers and cultural producers absolutely arrest Africa in the distant past and take much more from the continent than they give has the potential to render Afro-Atlantic speculative acts, in general, as decidedly parasitic and ahistorical. The impasse that results from such distinctions is nearly impossible to overcome.

Yet, as I will show about Hartman's travel narrative, *Lose Your Mother*, which has been described by some critics as fretful and pessimistic,

Hartman actually frontloads her disappointment in her failure to integrate into Ghanaian society as a returned daughter rather than crafting a chronological narrative of lamentation. This move allows her to turn to speculative methods to fill in holes in slavery's archives and to imagine the interior lives of African slaves, rescuing from oblivion the stories of those traumatized by their kidnapping, sexual violence, and other Middle Passage horrors. Offering more generous readings of pilgrimage narratives allows for the exploration and delineation of the possibilities for Afro-Atlantic speculation as a means by which African societies and New World–based slave descendants might more fervently assert agency over what and who is remembered as well as find accord in their related, centuries-long experiences with empire. I argue throughout this book that the passage of time alone does not rectify slavery's sordid histories; for there to be any sort of unification and the implementation of a truly transnational political column to address the emotive and systematic ways in which Black people are socially alienated—what some may understand as an efficacious, indefatigable Pan-Africanism—continental and diasporic Africans must recognize the impact of transoceanic slavery and postcolonial histories on Black communities worldwide. Slavery does not belong to diasporans solely; it, too, is bound up inextricably with the postcolonial condition. Africans kidnapped and sold in the slave trade are as much the ancestors of diasporans as they are the foreparents of those who remain on the African continent. All should acknowledge the lost ones and relate to one another in sincerity, or else systemic breaches will continue to stunt any significant movement toward new spaces of linkage.

Each of the flights discussed in this book reveals the extent to which writers, travelers, the travel industry, and local and national governments operate in concert to produce return for diasporans and the temporal stakes inherent in such constructions. These moments are ripe with possibility and illustrate that an embracing of a neoteric Pan-Africanism—that is, new underground political expressions that are marked by fantastic modes of transnational Black social relations outside of normative politics—has substantially more potential for lasting reform than the economic elevation of an elite few. Derived from a movement of avant-garde Latin and Greek artists during the Hellenistic period that championed a new style of literature in rejection of the strictures of more traditional forms, *neo-*

*teric* is used here to signify newness in thought or to describe those who speculate about contemporary Black politics innovatively. In calling for a neoteric Pan-Africanism, then, I am suggesting the necessity of a break with an old order that has tended to allow the radical potential of Pan-African thought to be usurped by governmental entities with suspect and sometimes downright malevolent intentions. My formulation of *neoteric Pan-Africanism* is inspired in part by Richard Iton's "black fantastic," which he outlines as an "unsettling [of] governmentalities and the conventional notions of the political, the public sphere, and civil society that depend on the exclusion of blacks and other nonwhites from meaningful participation and their ongoing reconstitution as raw material for the naturalization of modern arrangements."[47] The speculative acts outlined throughout this book, to be sure, are not solely concerned with advancements toward idyllic Afro-futures. Each series of flight is imperfect yet instructive in locating what radical Black comportment might look like in the present moment. Neoteric Pan-Africanism is not synonymous with or even contingent upon literal returns. It is about determining how to live more freely in the present and how to fly resolutely into the future.

As an interdisciplinary endeavor, this book analyzes various forms of cultural production and employs their tropes as heuristics to reflect on the stories that I encountered in each imagined Africa. Important here are the converging threads, which consist of the major myths about slavery and Africa that circulate at each site; tour guide and governmental narratives geared to Black Americans and other African diasporan visitors; tourist reactions to the landscapes of each site; specific stories about how people chose to move from the United States and what that movement entailed; how Black Americans renarrativize local histories; and tourists' transitions to expatriates in the Africa of their imaginations. This book also draws from my interviews with and observations of expatriates, frequent travelers, roots tourists, tour guides, and local and state officials from 2005 to 2014. I attended and participated in a number of cultural events, including Candomblé ceremonies, *samba de rodas*, Door of Return ceremonies at slave castle–dungeons, slavery reenactments, orisha festivals, several Ghana@50 events, and the official closing ceremony of U.S. President Barack Obama's historic first visit to Ghana in 2009. At each location, I also acted as a participant-observer of several tours that were designed for African diasporan travelers.

*Afro-Atlantic Flight*'s framework and analyses of real and imagined flights are distinct and complement a growing body of scholarship that critiques diasporan imaginings and mythmaking about slavery and Africa as developed in post–civil rights Black American fiction. The narrative politics that undergird such cultural productions, which center on protagonists who are dealing with loss and complex spiritual burdens, offer tools with which to examine whether and how the dispossession experienced by Black Americans is assuaged by literal fantastic movements across temporalities vis-à-vis engagements with rememory, remnants of transatlantic slavery, and imagined Africas.[48] By focusing on everyday travelers in the post-1965 era rather than a few eminent figures as well as by centering on the duplicitous scripts utilized by government officials and cultural roots tourism industries to promote particular kinds of Africas for diasporic consumption, this book also broadens discussions about the relationship between Africa and its transatlantic slavery diaspora. Competing agendas such as development, Pan-Africanist activism, and repatriation often complicate the promise of neat homeland returns to Africa. Guided by earlier anthropological, historical, and literary analyses, this book evaluates and reframes return as a sustainable Afro-Atlantic political strategy.[49] *Afro-Atlantic Flight* engages with the performative aspects of the speculative—that is, how the African-descended constantly reimagine Africa through exchanges between similarly dispossessed Afro-Atlantic peoples. The vestiges in these imagined Africas are bound up with memories, longings, and series of mythmaking that have sustained these Afro-Atlantic peoples as they forged communities in the Americas. The continued embracing and commemoration of these essences also operate in the contemporary moment as impetuses for roots tourism and permanent migrations.[50]

Chapter 1 examines the turn to speculative literary and filmic texts about slavery and Africa during the post-1965 era by analyzing how writers have applied the trope of flight in cultural production about Black Americans. As a literary and filmic device, flight offers the space for protagonists to come to terms with their complicated transnational identities by allowing—often forcing—them to experience their ancestral pasts as a restorative measure. Through the examination of a range of travel memoirs, novels, and films, including Haile Gerima's *Sankofa*, Saidiya Hartman's *Lose Your Mother*, Thomas Allen Harris's *É Minha Cara/That's*

*My Face*, and Reginald McKnight's *I Get on the Bus*, I argue that such productions of slavery and Africa have helped structure and advance the Afro-Atlantic imaginaries that are examined in subsequent chapters.

While chapters 2 and 3 expressly demonstrate how the formal and informal heritage tourism industries in Ghana and Bahia, respectively, perform Africa to ascend into Western modernity, chapter 2 considers the post–civil rights migration of expatriates to Ghana, a nation that has a storied history of welcoming Black Americans (mostly well-known political figures and professionals) "home" since Nkrumah led the nation to its independence from the British in 1957. There has not been another government-sponsored effort to attract Black Americans to return to the country as permanent residents since the 1966 coup that deposed Nkrumah. However, there have been recent, extensive tourism and diasporan investment pushes that rely heavily on the Nkrumah triumphalist narrative and the promotion of vestiges from the era of the transatlantic slave trade. Homeland myths and Pan-Africanist rhetoric draw in Black Americans, initially satiating their longings for kin recognition and the sense of freedom that are attached to geographic returns. This Afro-Atlantic exchange sets up a critical conversation about the uses of speculation and the possibilities for establishing a neoteric Pan-Africanism. I explore what ordinary Black Americans seek when they flee the United States and locate the significance of the breaches they encounter when they arrive in the imagined homeland as produced and performed for them in Ghana.

Chapter 3 focuses on what it means when the movement toward Africa takes place within the diaspora by focusing on the narratives produced by Black American emigrants and travelers who maintain residences in and split their time between the United States and Bahia. Black American travel to Brazil began in earnest in the early twentieth century, when the nation promoted itself as and was widely believed to be a racial paradise—a model for positive race relations and a site of capitalistic possibility. Black Americans traveled to Brazil during the 1920s through the 1940s with hopes of experiencing life without color-line limitations but quickly realized that while racial categories in Brazil were not the same as those in the United States, a problematic bias remained, which drastically reduced Black American interest in the country. By the 1970s, Black Americans cast their sights on the northeastern state,

Bahia, which is often described as the most important spiritual center of the country because 80 percent of its population is African-descended and because of its attendant cultures. Today, Bahia's tourism market attracts a large contingent of Black American tourists to its festivals and Candomblé strongholds in Salvador and Cachoeira, as there is the impression that Afro-Brazilians have been able to retain Africa in ways that Black Americans have not, and many have identified Bahia as the place to achieve happiness and the American Dream. This reading of Bahia is based largely on the myths that Afro-Bahians themselves propagate about their relationship to their nation and Africa. Such narratives and the ensuing performances of Africa are, in part, indicative of Afro-Bahians' attempts to assuage their *saudade* for freedom and the motherland. This chapter examines how the variegated act of longing occurs as Black Americans and Afro-Brazilians grapple with their diasporan positions and collectively produce and sustain Africa in Bahia. I also explore the stories that are imparted to Black Americans regarding liberty, race, and nation in Brazil and chart what occurs when bodies that are Black and therefore other in the local (the United States) attempt to identify with and live among a presumed sameness on an intradiasporic scale.

Chapter 4 investigates how Black American cultural producers in the U.S. South have applied speculative thought to challenge and renarrativize persistent Southern myths that venerate the antebellum period, forcing narratives of supposed pastoral pasts to confront slavery and racism in a public fashion. It then considers the post-1965 Black return migration to the U.S. South and how expatriates within the United States have invented their African selves in South Carolina as well as the crafting of this selfhood in the purview of Africa as it is enacted by the nearby Gullah sea island culture. Further, this chapter offers a reading of Black separatist schemes centered in the South and concludes with an examination of how the African Oyotunji Village in Sheldon, South Carolina, has redefined homeland returns by literalizing the development of an African nation in the Lowcountry. As one approaches the entrance to the Oyotunji Village, one is greeted by a sign that reads: "Welcome to Oyotunji Village. You are now leaving the United States of America." Founded in 1970, Oyotunji is a Yoruba-based revivalist community that has fashioned its culture after village traditions practiced in precolonial Nigeria. Unlike other manifestations of Yoruba spirituality in the diaspora, the

*òrìsà voodoo* practiced at Oyotunji is strictly Black nationalist and rejects syncretism with Western faiths. The Oyotunji people's understanding, representations, and performances of Africa are steeped in a mimetic form of the Yoruba faith, which they utilize to authenticate their post-modern, separatist nation to tourists. The Oyotunji maintain their village financially by organizing Yoruba-inspired festivals throughout the year, providing spiritual readings to guests for a fee, and initiating those interested in becoming Yoruba priests and priestesses. Through physical movements shaped by flights of the imagination, these Black Americans alleviate a degree of the pain caused by the initial break, and, in the face of the Lowcountry's geography of silence about slavery, reclaim connections with their ancestors, the spiritual realm, and Africa.

The conclusion of *Afro-Atlantic Flight* reflects on the limitations of and possibilities for the collaborative cultural productions that are outlined throughout the book and ponders the turns that Afro-Atlantic speculation and return might take given the advancement of speculative, scientific technologies, such as DNA testing, which purport to detect and establish ancestral linkages between dislocated Afro-Atlantic test takers and peoples in specific African countries.

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This book underscores, then, that to imagine the potential for Black social life in the midst of imminent death requires faith in the immanence of speculative Afro-Atlantic flights, whose radicalness can be understood in concert with what Grace Hong has conceptualized as the "leap" in her discussions about Black feminism. Hong describes the leap as an action that

> defies the real—the demands of physics, of gravity—in order to be impossibly airborne, even if for a moment. The "clear leap" implies a work of imagination, the ability to believe that a different future might be possible, despite the seeming inevitability of a crushing present. It does not concede the future to the present, but imagines it as something still in the balance, something that can be fought over, "in order to blast a specific era out of the homogeneous course of history."[51]

For a growing number of Black Americans, life in the United States feels hopeless; the constant, futile search for belongingness in quasi-promised

lands within the borders of the nation has exhausted them.[52] It is through the implementation of return flights toward the Africa in their imaginations that Black American authors, filmmakers, laypersons, and travelers attend to dispossession by emphasizing the significance of Africa to Afro-Atlantic identity, renarrativizing master accounts, and creating and representing new worlds and alternative existences.

# *NOTES*

## Introduction

1. The Zong massacre is examined beautifully in Baucom, *Specters of the Atlantic*.
2. Baraka, *Wise, Why's, Y's* (Africa section). The "Black ivory" sequence was articulated in a live performance, which is printed in the transcript for Bill Moyers's *Fooling with Words* (Part One) television program.
3. My utilization of *haunted* here is inspired by Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*.
4. As retold in Buxton, *Haunted Plantations*, 59–63.
5. Mami Wata also brings weather-related wrath and takes human lives if she is offended. Stories abound in communities on Ghana's coastline about beach-goers being violently grabbed and swept into the ocean as the ancestors' vengeance for the slave trade.
6. See Rediker, *The Slave Ship*.
7. I cite the Middle Passage as a significant moment in the history of Pan-Africanism in which there was an eruption of Black radicalism and to acknowledge the Middle Passage's significance to more recent flights of the imagination. The Flying Africans myth is reimagined in a range of African diasporic literary texts, including Lovelace, *Salt*; Marshall, *Praisesong for the Widow*; Morrison, *Song of Solomon*; and Schwarz-Bart, *Between Two Worlds* and *The Bridge of Beyond*.
8. David Wyatt, quoted in S. Jackson and Moody-Freeman, "The Black Imagination and the Genres," 2.
9. For more on Afrofuturism, see Dery, "Black to the Future"; Nelson, "Introduction"; Womack, *Afro-Futurism*.
10. Gerima and Woolford, "Filming Slavery," 92.
11. In "The Evidence of Felt Intuition," Harper beautifully examines the importance of speculative logic to Black queer and other minoritized subjects who find that they must engage with the fantastic to realize social life.

12. S. Camp, *Closer to Freedom*, 6. Camp credits Houston Baker for coining the phrase "geography of containment," which she goes on to expound upon throughout the book.
13. Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, 91.
14. Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, 95.
15. The concept of Black fugitivity has been a topic of much theorization recently (see Best, *The Fugitive's Properties*; Chaney, *Fugitive Vision*; Goffman, *On the Run*; Harney and Moten, *Undercommons*; and Rusert, "Delany's Comet"). Alexis Pauline Gumbs, a scholar producing wonderful work at the intersections of Black feminism and Afro-futurism, recently published an essay that chronicled the Eternal Summer of the Black Feminist Mind's trip to the Lowcountry of South Carolina to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the Combahee River uprising, which was led by Harriet Tubman in 1863. Gumbs discusses a head injury that Tubman experienced at the hand of an overseer that caused Tubman to be "immobilized yet aware of her waking surroundings. Sometimes she went to sleep at night like the rest of us and woke up with important information about the future. . . . [A]bout a year before Harriet Tubman moved to Beaufort, South Carolina, to work and strategize for the Union Army, she had a dream. She woke up triumphant and was reported to have repeated all day with gratitude and wonder a prophecy in the present tense: 'My people are free.' . . . How far could she see?" (Gumbs, "Prophecy in the Present Tense," 143–44).
16. A wealth of literature on the Liberia settlement exists across disciplines. See, for instance, Barnes, *Journey of Hope*; Clegg, *The Price of Liberty*; Crummell, *Destiny and Race*; Delany, *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States*; Huffman, *Mississippi in Africa*; M. Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation*; and Moses, *Liberian Dreams*.
17. A plethora of texts on Black American migration exists. A wonderful online reference is the Schomburg Center's "The African American Migration Experience," which covers in great detail Black migrations from slavery to the present day.
18. For texts from and about the fugitive slave tradition, see, for example, Bordewich, *Bound for Canaan*; Brown, *The Narrative of William W. Brown*; Craft and Craft, *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom*; Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*; and Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*.
19. For more on the relations between Black Americans and immigrant Europeans, see Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White*; Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*; and Roediger, *Working toward Whiteness*.
20. Extensive analyses of Reconstruction's impact on the Black community can be found in Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America*; and Foner, *Reconstruction*.
21. See Archer-Straw, *Negrophilia*; Fabre, *From Harlem to Paris*; Huggins and Rampersad, *The Harlem Renaissance*; D. Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue*; Locke, *The New Negro*; and Stovall, *Paris Noir*.
22. Du Bois, "Returning Soldiers."

23. For an extended analysis of Garvey's movement and impact, see Grant, *Negro with a Hat*.
24. These migrations have been explored brilliantly in Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora*; Grossman, *Land of Hope*; Hahn, *A Nation under Our Feet*; Lemann, *The Promised Land*; Sernett, *Bound for the Promised Land*; and Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns*.
25. See, for instance, Franklin and Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*; Kelley, *Freedom Dreams*; and Lee, *For Freedom's Sake*.
26. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights*.
27. See Gaines, *American Africans in Ghana*; and Meriwether, *Proudly We Can Be Africans*.
28. Singh, *Black Is a Country*, 10. The "days of hope" are examined cogently in Sullivan, *Days of Hope*.
29. For more on these trends, see Marable, *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America*.
30. L. Johnson, "Commencement Address at Howard University."
31. Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*, 212.
32. Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*, 87. Excellent discussions about living *otherwise* can be found in Ashon Crawley's important research. See, for instance, Crawley, "Otherwise Movements."
33. For a compelling examination of the ever-expanding U.S. prison-industrial complex, see Gilmore, *Golden Gulag*.
34. Singh, *Black Is a Country*, 220.
35. Quoted in Angelou, *All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes*, 139.
36. X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 357.
37. C. Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 171. Also see Clifford, *Routes*, 244–77; Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*; and Shepperson, "African Diaspora."
38. Echeruo, "An African Diaspora," 13–14.
39. S. Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," 235–36.
40. S. Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," 235. Other texts on the transnational defining and redefining of Blackness and Africa include Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*; and Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa*.
41. Morrison, *Beloved*, 248–49.
42. Childs offers an impressive reading of the historic restriction of Black American mobility and Paul D's masculinity in *Beloved* by examining Paul D's experiences in relation to the prison-industrial complex. Childs, " 'You Ain't Seen Nothin' Yet.' "
43. Clarke, "New Spheres of Transnational Formations," 59.
44. Personal conversation with Fred Moten on July 3, 2013.
45. See Adeleke, *UnAfrican Americans*, and Gruesser, "Afro-American Travel Literature and Africanist Discourse"; and chapter 3 of Tillet, *Sites of Slavery*. For a scathing critique of the mythmaking in Afrocentrism, see C. Walker, *We Can't Go Home Again*.

46. Munoz, *Disidentifications*.
47. Iton, *In Search of the Black Fantastic*, 17.
48. I am indebted to the scholarship presented in Byerman, *Remembering the Past in Contemporary African American Fiction*; Rushdy, *Neo-Slave Narratives*; Spaulding, *Re-Forming the Past*; Wall, *Worrying the Line*; and Woolfork, *Embodying American Slavery in Contemporary Culture*.
49. The texts that I am in conversation with here include Bailey, *African Voices of the Atlantic Slave Trade*; Ebron, *Performing Africa*; Gaines, *American Africans in Ghana*; Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*; Holsey, *Routes of Remembrance*; and Meriwether, *Proudly We Can Be Africans*.
50. This multidisciplinary examination, then, is informed by and in direct conversation with the histories and ethnographies outlined in K. Butler, *Freedoms Given, Freedoms Won*; Capone, *Searching for Africa in Brazil*; Clarke, *Mapping Yoruba Networks*; Hellwig, *African-American Reflections on Brazil's Racial Paradise*; Santana Pinho, *Mama Africa*; and Seigel, *Uneven Encounters*.
51. Hong, "'The Future of Our Worlds,'" 107–8.
52. An important narrative that charts a convincing argument for self-exile because of perpetual disfranchisement is R. Robinson, *Quitting America*. America, Robinson maintains, is where he has lived his life "within the innermost of concentric circles; my comfort, my protection, my psychic security provided by the bold unbroken line of the smaller of the rings. Two *countries*, one within the other. The outer, official, distant, alien, unaffirming, hostile. The other, safe for my spirit's function, respectful of my long-sequestered story, loving of my *me*" (244). No longer feeling safe in an increasingly dangerous, racist United States, Robinson and his family migrate to his wife's native St. Kitts, where Robinson feels fully free for the first time in his life.

**1. Fantastic Flights**

1. Harris, *É Minha Cara/That's My Face*.
2. Christol, "The African American Concept of the Fantastic as Middle Passage," 165.
3. Christol, "The African American Concept of the Fantastic as Middle Passage," 164–66.
4. Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 5.
5. Rushdy, *Neo-Slave Narratives*, 3.
6. Rushdy, *Neo-Slave Narratives*, 7.
7. Eyerman, *Cultural Trauma*, 1.
8. Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 7.
9. Eyerman, "The Past in the Present," 162. Eyerman is partially quoting from the introduction to Paul Antze and Michael Lambek's edited volume, *Tense Past: Essays in Trauma and Memory* (London: Routledge, 1996).
10. Kaplan, "Souls at the Crossroads," 513–14.
11. Rushdy, *Remembering Generations*, 8.
12. McKoy, "The Limbo Contest," 209–10.