Race, Place, & Space: Historicizing Blackness & Mobility

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Abstract

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This collection of literary texts and the analysis herein details the American obsession with kinesthetics and mobility -- specifically through the lens of African Americans as they try to be mobile in the face of racism. Works from James Weldon Johnson, William Attaway, and Toni Morrison are situated here as snapshots of the black lived experience and literary tradition of becoming mobile in the US despite a corrupting and inhibitive politics of placement that legibilizes black people as lesser and therefore undeserving of mobility or its benefits. Placed alongside the Negro Motorist Green Book, the travel guide that set many black drivers on a track for automobility, this chapter's analysis of literary works from black authors is meant to provoke the idea that mobility can, and perhaps should, be considered a right -- inalienable and protected as such.

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Acknowledgments

This dissertation was born of my need to over-intellectualize any and everything. Naturally, since I have always loved thinking about transportation and its impact on my own life, it made sense for me to use this as a starting point for the research that drove me to write this project. My infatuation with transportation and race, which I always thought required more pondering, morphed over time into the conceptualization of mobility you see here in these pages. With all that being said, there have been several bumps along the way, but through sheer will, determination, and help from my committee, family, and friends, this project is not just my contribution to the field but is many people's contributions to manifest a triumphant effort. Thank you all!

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Introduction: Race, Place, & Space: Historicizing Blackness & Mobility

The Oxford English Dictionary by no means offers an uncontestable definition of mobility. In fact, this project directly interrogates and rebukes the dictionary's reductive interpretation: "the ability to move or be moved freely and easily."[1] Implicit in its erroneous equivalence within the phrase "to move or be moved" is the assumption that these disparate acts are, in fact, equal. By this same logic, a person who moves and an object that is moved are technically each equally valid examples of mobility. To illustrate the fallacy within the OED definition, consider the difference when applied to two examples – an apple and a person. An apple can move or be moved, either by natural forces such as gravity or by the actions of some living being. A person can similarly move or be moved through autonomous choice, natural forces, or the actions of some other living being. An apple is an object and as such is devoid of autonomy. The critical distinction between the two is the presence of autonomy. In this project, autonomy describes the ability to freely choose and direct one's movement - physically, socially, and economically. This apple-person comparison illuminates the OED definition's inability to capture the crucial role that autonomy plays in this project's definition of mobility. Unlike an inanimate object, mobility (specifically the kind that living beings enact) in this sense constitutes far more than physical movement. To truly capture this nuance, the definition must instead expand to recognize a person's social and personal motivations, needs, and desires – their autonomy. To that end, throughout this dissertation, the term mobility will refer to an ever-present capacity for an individual to enact autonomous physical movement, take advantage of economic opportunities, and effect social change regardless of – and often in resistance to – how the world perceives them.

[1] Oxford English Dictionary, Mobility

In an effort to further illuminate the need to expand our cultural conceptualization of mobility, throughout this project I will detail the phenomenon of how people are perceived, categorized, and organized by others so that they can be rendered knowable through their legibility. To better define legibility and the process of legibilizing, consider a social situation: within seconds of entering a social space, we begin perceiving the objects and other people around us, organizing and categorizing them in a way that makes them easier to identify and interact with from that point forward. In short, legibilization describes this behavior and the process by which our perceptions are used to socially map others onto the social and physical landscape. Legibility, on the other hand, refers to perceptions (real or assumed by the viewer) of a person's gender, race, or other physical attributes. It may also encompass aspects of identity not as easily knowable, such as sexuality, class, or religious background.

Legibilization (i.e., the act of making someone or something legible), in and of itself, is relatively harmless. Legibilizing is how we make sense of our perceptions and thus our world. It can afford the perceiver some control and perhaps safety in their knowledge of the other party. Once perceivers legibilize the perceived, they can more easily compare themselves to this other person. In doing so, the primary goal may be to establish for themselves who or what this person is and how to most advantageously (or safely) interact with the perceived individual. Simultaneously, however, the perceiver also categorizes the perceived individual in relation to themself, often reinforcing their own status or group belonging at the expense and exclusion of another. Legibilizing is frequently employed in this manner, not only to categorize, but to hierarchize groups based upon their legible identities. The consequence of this form of legibilization is the creation and reinforcement of societal inequities.

Toni Morrison, whose literature and criticism will feature prominently throughout this project, conceptualizes how legibilization often dichotomizes the perceiver and the perceived, hierarchizing each in relation to the other. This technique, which she calls Othering, instrumentalizes legibilization to create in-groups and out-groups. Racism is a prime example of an application that combines Othering and legibilization. Within racism, white people Other black people because they perceive themselves to be the in-group, while black people become legible as an out-group. In *The Origin of Others,* Morrison describes Othering as alluring because it offers comfort through the "thrill of belonging" or being part of something larger than oneself (15-16). She posits that a "social and psychological need for a 'stranger,' on the other hand, develops to create an Other to better define the 'estranged self.'" Put more simply, Othering offers an opportunity for self-definition through both inclusion within the in-group and exclusion of Others from that same group. Only in defining the qualities which exclude these Others from the in-group can the in-group and its members self-legibilize.

Within the context of contemporary racism, this mechanism functions by establishing white people and whiteness as the default and casting black people as the lesser, excluded, aberrant group. Throughout this project, I employ the terminology "colouring" to describe the specific application of this othering technique as it pertains to the racialized legibilization and othering of black people. The spelling of the word is itself a reference to *The Autobiography of An Ex-Coloured Man* by James Weldon Johnson, a crucial text to this project. In Chapter One, I will explore colouring in detail. Through this examination it will become clear that, within the framework of this concept of colouring, the definitive quality of blackness is not any distinct characteristic associated with blackness itself but the mere absence of whiteness. Essentially, black

people are black because they are not white, although, in addition to this essential definition, attributes such as "dangerous" and "threatening" are projected upon blackness as well.

In *Origins,* Morrison details what she believes to be the reasoning behind the ill-treatment of those who are Othered, including black people. Morrison opines that these Others (or Strangers as she also conceives of them) receive negative treatment primarily due to the dominant in-group's (typically white people) fear and perception that they themselves may be in danger of becoming (or being perceived as) the Other, thus losing their preferred status. The loss of one's status within the in-group is tantamount to losing one's self (29-30). Returning to the US racism model, through the creation and reinforcement of their status as legibly separate from black people, white people establish themselves as (and thus remain) safe within the in-group. This status is then used to exclude and Other black people, complicating what "free and easy" movement looks like and often impeding it all together. Labels such as Negro, African American, and B/black make black people readily knowable (and therefore predictable) through their racialized legibility. These terms essentialize race and construct blackness as the defining characteristic of black individuals, regardless of their various other qualities. Obviously, in order to form an accurate perspective and truly know someone's character, a perceiver must do more than simply perceive and categorize the other person's legibility through appearance and assumption. Racism, through the instrumentalization of the fears of white people (including fears of being coloured and legibilized in the same ways that whites colour and legibilize black people) often negates or prevents the genuine interpersonal experiences required to form an accurate perception.

To elaborate further upon the topic of white fears and their myriad consequences for black individuals, consider the example of a white person traveling down a sidewalk. Upon perceiving a black person walking in their direction, the white person crosses the street to avoid interaction.

In doing so, they expose their legibilization of this black person (who has done nothing but walk in their direction) as a threat. The white perceiver, in an instant, assumes that the black person could be dangerous. This occurs because of the societal perception that black people are inherently dangerous. The perception of black people as dangerous has been stoked continuously through depictions of them in this light through storytelling, political discourse, and cultural/societal depictions. While parity of representation remains an issue, many of the individuals legibilized as black who have been presented within media and the cultural landscape have been conveniently painted as dangerous. Those who practice perception based on a monolithic comprehension of a group's legibility often employ those same monolithic assumptions to further legibilize an individual. They essentially assign traits from a not-present larger group to the present individual. In so doing, the perceived person's assumed characteristics become separated from them as an individual. Instead, they are cast as characteristic of the larger group to which they belong.

The same logic is true in reverse: whatever one black person does (especially if it is negative or reinforces the perceiver's preconceptions) could become the standard by which this white perceiver measures all other black people in their future interactions. In the sidewalk example, the white person has not genuinely interacted with the black person and has no true knowledge of their character. Instead, the white perceiver uses their preconceived assumptions to legibilize this black person, negating any opportunity for either party to prove or disprove what the white perceiver thinks. The white person never gives the black person the chance to showcase that they could be more than part of some dangerous monolith. While the burden should certainly not be placed upon the black person to prove or disprove their intentions and worth to each white person they happen to pass by in the street, they should be afforded the same opportunity to be judged on their own character. The black person's perceived capacity to cause harm outweighs

(for the white person) any perceived potential for them to be friendly or have a positive interaction. The perceived black person might be an apple for all the (lack of) agency the white person affords them.

In the sidewalk example, the white person predetermines without interacting with the individual that black people are dangerous. To label this disposition as racist is simple enough, but this dissertation seeks to delve more deeply into how racism operates to better understand how to combat and challenge racist acts and sentiments. The white perceiver's unchallenged belief in an indelible social hierarchy where black people are not individuals with individual characteristics in the same way as white people, and where white and black people are not equivalent, clearly indicates that they are racist. Black legibility, in their mind, is considered a knowable factor which they may use to navigate every present and future social situation involving black people. But why did the white perceiver cross the street? Here, the psychological gymnastics begin: first, the white person's perceived knowledge of black inferiority morphs into the assumption that this black person will naturally be angry that they are inferior. Why would they not be? In the white perceiver's estimation, the perceived black individual is part of the lesser race. The white perceiver momentarily projects themself into the legibly lesser black person's body and concludes that they would be angry as a member of a group that is legibilized as inferior. With this realization, the white person's assumption turns into a fear that this black person is upset about their assumed inferiority and as such will seek to harm anyone with white skin. They cross the street.

As circular as the white perceiver's logic is, their thoughts are informed by a need to legibilize, then categorize, and finally hierarchize themselves and the black person all within the span of a few seconds. To help make sense of how the process of legibilizing, categorizing, and hierarchizing occur, I will use three terms throughout this dissertation to describe what happens in

social interactions between two or more people of different legibilities: (1) place, (2) placement, and (3) the politics of placement. Place is a social category that someone occupies based on their legibility. A person can be put (back) in their place, signifying that they are not conforming to the perceiver's idea of normal behavior for their legibility. The term can also be used as a verb, as in the act of placing someone – which refers to when a perceiver legibilizes another person to create and assign meaning to their place in social hierarchies. When others place an individual, they utilize a politics of placement. A politics of placement is a complex system of beliefs about legibility, place, and placement that shape social interactions to favor the perceiver's preconceived ideas about others' legibilities. Like legibility, the politics of placement presents a treacherous and circular logic because placement privileges how others perceive an individual more so than how the perceived individual self-identifies or simply exists. Within the politics, this power tends to be solely the prerogative of the privileged perceiver, and the individual placed is accordingly deprived of their own autonomy unless that individual openly protests, thereby most likely putting themself in considerable danger. Once placed by the privileged perceiver, one's place thus becomes enormously risky to dispel. [2] Yet in spite of this potential danger and risk, I will be emphasizing throughout this dissertation that in their transaction of the politics of placement, white people most frequently aim to avoid making too explicit their own role within this politics and its lurking threat of danger.

This avoidance allows white people to feign ignorance and thus avoid accountability. Hardly anyone plainly states, "You are not white," to black people unless a black person's actions

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[2] Let me emphasize that place and placement are not fundamentally wrong: only when place and placement control (or are used by others to control) the individual's propensity to be mobile are they bad. In a society that operates via innumerable power dynamics across numerous situations, place and placement can and probably should influence (but not control) the individual's decisions. One's place, which derives from how they are legible to others, can change. That change comes from their autonomy and the world's continued acceptance of that autonomy.

so threaten to disrupt the smooth, tacit operation of the politics of placement that what should have remained tacit must become more openly enforced. When a black person tries to exist beyond white people's legibilization/colouring of black people's presumable place, the white person's feigned ignorance thus dissipates rapidly, and they are swift to remind the black person of their placement and the boundaries to which they must adhere. As black people become aware through these interactions that society at large views them as unworthy of mobility, they are faced with a decision. They may choose to invest their efforts in compliance and exercise their control to avoid upsetting the established power dynamic. Or they may conversely decide to actively undermine those power dynamics, as I discuss in greater depth in my discussion of Chapters One and Two. It will be made evident through these chapters' analysis that the sole route for black people to experience mobility is by first acknowledging their legibility, and then either manipulating (read here as cooperating with) or disrupting expectations of that legibility. What this looks like varies based on the individual, their geographical location, and their temporal context.

While frequently useful to black people as a strategic method, the central goal of performative submissiveness within the politics of placement is to coerce black people to alter their behavior and ways of being to assuage white people's fears - ultimately undermining the capacity for black mobility. Most crucial is how the politics calls upon those who occupy the lower tiers of hierarchies to do the performative work of subjecting themselves. The higher-ranked people would otherwise have to say, "I am better than YOU." In other words, they would have to make the politics too explicit—too obvious—and thus potentially open to embarrassing scrutiny. Too much scrutiny or resistance can dismantle the politics of placement. The beneficiaries who sit atop social hierarchies know this and, consequently, coerce those of lower standing into compliance and tacit acceptance for fear of losing their power and sense of identity. The

beneficiaries quell any signs of resistance, imagined or real, and justify their actions and reactions. More poignantly, because the politics of placement renders black people's willingness to succeed as an unwillingness to be subdued which in turn must be subdued, although black mobility is inherently resistant to this politics, black people are encouraged to resist such resistance, carefully suppressing it in a public performativity of submission if they are to avoid harm.

What does performative submissiveness look like in this context? It looks like shucking and jiving to make white people not view one as a threat. It looks like playing up the part of a mammy when white people are nearby. It looks like black people giving up opportunities to succeed lest they outshine a white counterpart and become open to punishment for their audacity. Whatever the presentation, this phenomenon without fail involves black people forced to present themselves in specific ways despite their own internal feelings or desires. So much of blackness (as it is understood through white supremacy) is already based on performativity that soon the act and reality become intertwined – or at least they begin to appear this way to those perceivers willing to believe black people are inherently monolithic. As elucidated earlier in this introduction, the politics of placement's primary goal is to render individuals legible in order to categorize them and predict their future behavior. The easier and more concealed this process can be made, the better for the beneficiaries of the politics.

As evidenced by the pervasive nature of racial stereotypes, legibility proves challenging to dispel. This is in large part due to the tenacity of assumptions that people perceive to be "knowable" about a person or group. Over time and with extensive repetition, these assumptions disguised as knowledge possess the potential to become doctrine. In other words, with widespread social acceptance and sufficient repetition of the assumptions which coincide with a person or a group's perceived legibility, passing observations evolve into stereotypes and prejudice. These

interpretations of individual legibilities become templates that guide one's present and future interpersonal interactions with the group based on what is ostensibly "known." Racism thrives on the dissonance created by privileging a perceiver's interpretation of another person's legibility over their true self, rendering the perceived party's agency to determine their own legibility moot. As effective as placement may be in limiting the self-legibilization and mobility of another, however, decision-making that relies on assumptions based solely on the perceived legibility of another is not always an operative strategy. Certain features can become knowable only after further inspection – that is, they require deeper engagement with the perceived individual. Thus, legibility makes people knowable only to a limited extent. On the one hand, legibilization tries to encompass past, present, and future perceptions of the self and others. It seeks to predict who a person was, is, or will be in any given social situation or context. However, unless the perceiver is willing to understand and interact with the other person on a deeper level, they deny themself the opportunity to truly know that other person. Moreover, despite having been formulated by false perceptions, legible traits can dramatically alter the way a person actually navigates the world. After sufficient time has passed with the politics of placement successfully applied to reinforce these legibilities, a black individual's publicly knowable, performative self threatens to yield all but completely to these legibilities, however deceptive this process is at bottom.

Reflected in a significant share of US literature, the same complicated interplay of one's legible identity and potential for mobility that has been identified in this project is almost always presented through the lens of white and male characters, but in this case with a major difference. The white men in these depictions typically demonstrate control over their socioeconomic status and mobility. They can move through physical and social spaces (for the most part) freely and easily. They are afforded the agency and potential to be mobile despite any bad qualities they may

possess. These narratives that center on white male characters moving through space illuminate America's literary obsession with movement as a means of enacting autonomy, rendering mobility an act synonymous with self-determinism.

To elucidate why, within the US literary and social imagination, the American literary figure must always be mobile or, at least, have the potential to be mobile, Phyllis Klotman coins the term "running man" to describe this phenomenon as a literary trope. One example of the running man trope is the journeying protagonist who seeks control over their destiny and destination. This conceptualization of mobility proves too reductive, though (Klotman 31). There are countless motivations to move through physical space. Klotman's running man runs not only to pursue physical mobility, but also journeys toward "an inward exploration," as Henry David Thoreau does in "Walking." The running man may also be running in an attempt to escape from society's maladies, as Natty Bumppo does in *The Deerslayer*. When coercion from others is a factor, the running man flees physical bondage, harm, or death that others would impose upon him. The running man may even enact mobility to run from ill-fated decisions, as Huck Finn does in his eponymous *Huckleberry Finn*. Whatever the reason, if mobility is simply self-determinism through spatial movement, then the running man is mobile because he chooses to move and does so. Yet his topographical movement does not account for those things that prompt him to begin that journey or entice him to continue it. The life he wishes for may still be out of his grasp if he reaches his destination and people there afford him less agency than he was afforded where he came from. The running man wishes for more than to be in a new geographical space. He seeks to be perceived and treated differently than he was mere minutes, hours, feet, or miles ago.

Walt Whitman's "Song of the Open Road" similarly attests to movement and the concept of mobility's hold on the American literary imagination. The opening stanzas offer a fitting

depiction of the (Euro)American view that movement through space is a means to exercise autonomy, selfhood, and self-determination. "Afoot and light-hearted," Whitman's narrator takes to the open road, "healthy and free," albeit with burdens he sets aside to proceed "loos'd of limits and imaginary lines."[3] Both he and the road are open in the sense that they welcome uncertainty and adventure. The narrator views the road as an avenue of mobility wherein he is in complete control of his destination and destiny – why else would he push aside his burdens so willingly? Whitman's narrator does not feel the need to detail what these burdens are, yet their proximity to his experience of limits and imaginary lines paints a picture that they are fleeting and dispensable like imaginary borders. The limits and imaginary lines that the reader may assume comprise his burdens are part of the social order he tries to leave behind (e.g., the politics of placement) upon entrance into the road. However, in due course, those impediments may yet exist on the open road.

That is to say, the impediments Whitman's narrator sheds upon taking to the open road are still very much felt by others. Whitman's narrator conveniently overlooks another category of being that would complicate his dichotomous perception of society vs. the road: black people. Were they a black person, Whitman's narrator's legibility as black would substantially impact their experience of the ostensibly open road. Whitman's narrator does acknowledge the existence of black individuals, musing that the "black with his woolly head" is not denied reception on the road.[4] Reception, however, is the bare minimum.

Contrary to the white narrator's relief from his burdens, Whitman's seemingly generous literary admission of the black man to the open road affords the black man no additional privileges. This becomes more evident in the narrator's inclusion of black people within the same category as other people commonly legibilized as undesirable and lesser, including the felon, the "diseas'd",

[3] Walt Whitman, quoted from "Song of the Open Road," stanzas 1, 2, and 4.
[4] Walt Whitman, quoted from "Song of the Open Road," Stanzas 2

and the illiterate person. Despite the narrator's capacity to so readily shake off the few burdens and limits he experiences upon his own entrance onto the road, he does not afford the same capacity or agency to those outside of the legibilized in-group to which he belongs. By legibilizing these groups as he does, the narrator limits black people, felons, and diseased people's ability to achieve the benefits of mobility to which he himself maintains access. He characterizes the black man and the criminal as inherently dissimilar from himself. To use Toni Morrison's vocabulary, he Others them. In doing so, he reveals that he ascribes to a politics of placement that limits how these Othered individuals can exist legibly in towns, cities – and now the open road. He effectively legibilizes these people by the limited information that he can perceive rather than affording them the same anonymity and capacity to self-legibilize or deviate from societal perceptions that white males like himself experience on the open road. Reception is the bare minimum these four figures can expect to receive. They are permitted conditionally to occupy the same space, but their individualism, agency, and motivation for accessing the open road are erased. Unlike Whitman's white narrator, they are not permitted use of the road to self-determine.

Later, when Whitman's narrator implores readers to get out of the cities and into the streets, the poem furthermore skews ableist and broadly excludes the unhealthy, weak, and diseased people that do not fit his archetype. The road is welcoming only to those who come with "sweet and determin'd bodies" (i.e., no diseased individuals or drunkards). Only those capable of complete physical and mental awareness and good moral character can benefit from what the road offers. Ironically, within a poem about the limitless potential the open road offers, Whitman still imposes limits (e.g., through legibilization and value-judgments about other peoples' character and good health indicative of their worthiness to access the open road) that characterize a person's right to take advantage of the open road's trials to reap its benefits. The "Great Companions," as he calls

those who fit this bill, are "swift and majestic men and women" who enjoy calm and stormy seas and travel many a mile on land. It is understandable that Whitman and his narrator might lack the ability to conceptualize and empathize with those for whom the open road is less than panacea. After all, the reader can assume that he has never experienced barriers quite like the ones which Othered individuals (e.g., the black person or the disabled person) face to their own self-legibilization and mobility. But what about those who are not the bravest? Those who, out of preference or necessity, seek calm seas and hospitality, preferring safety and stability? Are they not able to take to the open road, let alone be mobile? If the narrator's entreaty for people to join him on the open road is not ultimately intended to exclude these individuals, there is no evidence of such within the text.

Clearly, like many other American running men, Whitman's narrator favors his ability to be mobile over people he perceives as unfit to be mobile. Uncovering this truth subsequently reveals his subscription to a politics of placement. The narrator effectively deems mobility a privilege rather than an inherent right. Whitman is not entirely to blame for how he wrestles with the complexity of who can and cannot enact mobility on the road. Whitman's white, male viewpoint is symptomatic of the broader American literary obsession with movement and personal mobility that favors only those few who fit into Klotman's Running Man trope. In sad contrast, however, people like the black, the felon, the drunkard, or the diseased are permitted to enter the space only to remain at constant risk of unfavorable placement within a politics of placement.

In contrast to Whitman's *Song*, and most white literature of the period, African American literature of the late 19th and early-to-mid 20th centuries captures the complexity of black people's struggle to enact mobility despite the politics of placement. In fact, the power and proficiency with which these authors understand and relate this complex struggle has resulted in their forming much

of the very core of this dissertation project. Black authors and thinkers frequently contemplate how legible identity (i.e., legibility) is crucial to black characters and people as they move through space and navigate social landscapes.

One primary example of these authors capable of successfully parsing the complexities of black mobility is Frederick Douglass. Douglass, born into slavery, escapes from bondage in 1838. In 1845 he publishes his memoir, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*. Preceding the release of Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* by 11 years, Douglass wrestles in this text with concepts that aid in elucidating the unique challenges black people experience on the ostensibly open road. Unable to earn wages, choose his partner, and generally self-determine, Douglass' experience and subsequent view of the (supposedly) open road complicates and negates the free-spirited ease of access depicted in Whitman's *Song*.

Eventually, it is true, the enslaved Douglass's experience of observing the mobility of others in opposition to the limitations placed on his own autonomy results in his revelatory decision to escape bondage. Douglass describes how this observation became his inspiration to escape in a passage of his memoir. In this passage, Douglass looks out over the waters of the Chesapeake Bay, observing ships sailing into harbors. He describes their white sails, "delightful to the eye of the freemen," as appearing like "shrouded ghosts" that torment him with the fact that he, a human being, has neither the agency nor capacity to move as freely as these objects do (106). Where these mere objects are loosed from moorings, he remains in chains. Where they "move merrily upon the gentle gale," he moves only as the "bloody whip" demands him to (106). Douglass expertly juxtaposes the freedom the boats in their movement exhibit (rather than the men aboard) against his own lack of autonomy. This moment exemplifies the power of perceiving and acknowledging the binds that the politics of placement shackles black people with at the time. If

Douglass remained unaware of the distinction between his own capacity for mobility and that of white men and even inanimate objects, there would be no opportunity for him to thoroughly grasp what energetic, free mobility and bona fide agency might entail. Instead, through this contemplation of place and mobility, he resolves that he would sooner "be killed running than die standing" (107).

It is not long before Douglass is afforded an opportunity to act on his newfound understanding of agency. Douglass, in the following scene, realizes his power as for the first time he actively resists being beaten. Mr. Covey, the man to whom his master loans Douglass for labor, tries to tie the black man's hands and feet so that he can more easily beat him. Rather than remain compliant, Douglass punches and drags Covey to the ground. The two struggle to get the upper hand over each other. Covey calls for assistance from a man named Hughes. When Hughes arrives to help, Douglass promptly kicks him in the ribs, leaving him doubled over and wheezing. At this moment, Douglass kicks a man physically but in so doing he also metaphorically kicks the entire system that Hughes, Covey, and many white people revere and rely on as evidence that black people are inferior and should behave and be treated as such. As will be apparent in Chapter Two, white people frequently refer to black people's resistance as "kickin." This act, while designed to illicit imagery of violence against whites, describes a black person's refusal to perform according to whiteness' diminishing legibilization and placement of black people. Douglass does more than just kick at Hughes: he kicks at the entire politics of placement.

True to his pledge, Douglass continues to resist the placement that the politics assign to him. The final straw comes when he refuses to work to earn money on behalf of another one of his exploitative masters, Master Hugh. Douglass cites as his reasoning that the white man pockets most, if not all, of the money his hard labor earns (140-141). Unwilling to be further exploited,

Douglass decides to escape. Before he does, he uses Hugh's perception of him as compliant by continuing to give Hugh all the money that he earns. This performance of submission and obeisance lowers the white man's guard. When assured that the white man does not expect it, Douglass flees, but not before contemplating the potential consequences of his actions. "The wretchedness of slavery, and the blessedness of freedom were perpetually before me," he says, knowing that he is leaving behind dear friends and everything he knows. He weighs slavery against freedom and decides that his escape is worth dying for.

Given the gravity of his decision to escape, Douglass demonstrates (as he must) an acute awareness of the stakes he faces. He understands that he will indeed be killed if he is caught, or worse, sold back into slavery. Douglass faces a harrowing journey towards mobility and agency, and he knows that his fate hangs in the balance. Whitman's narrator in *Song*, who categorizes black people as fugitives and criminals, is correct about one thing: a black person like Frederick Douglass would be a criminal (better yet, a fugitive) should he escape. Death, severe punishment, or an even worse bondage than before are the potential consequences that Douglass knowingly embraces as he enacts his mobility. The payoff could be immense – or maybe the risk might result in disaster. Surely, isn't this courageous wooly-headed black man, in undertaking this endeavor, equally worthy of mobility as Whitman's narrator?

Further drawing upon the theme of resistance exhibited by Douglass in his escape, consider the enslaved people of the Antebellum period who "kicked" back without literally escaping in numerous subversive if minor act of rebellion. It's true, for example, that breaking tools or working slowly might allow enslaved black people to steal back some sense of autonomy, but the rewards were ephemeral since the enslaved black people ultimately remained in bondage. No amount of acquiescence or gaming of a system like slavery or segregation erases oppression – even successful

gaming and plotting merely force the oppressive forces to mutate. Instead, it is necessary to extricate oneself altogether from the system. This fact establishes escape as crucial to black mobility. Escape, both physical and in the sense of separation from the politics of placement and the oppressive systems which employ it as a means of control, is the metric to measure mobility for black people in the US.

Yet despite its evident essentiality, escape does not entirely remove black people from oppression. Rather, the escapee is now a fugitive who remains under constant threat of violence and a prompt return to bondage. Newly legible not only as black but also as a criminal who dares to defy the so-called natural order of life (read: the politics' socially, artificially-derived demand), the escapee will still have to hide. The mobility that they hope to enact will in varying degrees thus be forever informed by fear of becoming immobilized once again. This fear functions to pre-emptively negate the person's impulse to defy placement, without the need for further overt application of the politics of placement.

Enslavers and those who benefitted from enslavement calculatedly encouraged and reinforced this fear. They operated under the awareness that this fear would instill a coerced acceptance of placement in black people's minds, preempting any tendency toward revolt. In addition to beating and physically abusing enslaved people routinely, they would quell insurrections by making examples of previous insurrectionists. They would then spread the tales of these failures along with stories about how slave subservience was a model characteristic.

Slavery, to be sure, has long since been abolished. But its long and troubled aftermath persists. As Ta-Nehisi Coates emphasizes in the Foreword of *The Origin of Others*: "Racism matters, to be an Other in this country matters – and the disheartening truth is that it will likely continue to matter (xvi). Throughout this dissertation, it is this knowledge that racial oppression

exists and will likely continue to impact black individuals without intervention that requires that I pay close attention to the politics of placement and its effect on their mobility. Moreover, while comprehension of the politics is a vital aspect of becoming mobile, this does not necessarily guarantee one freedom of mobility. Rather, one must cautiously navigate and elude the seductive power (i.e., the promise of conditional safety, wealth, or social status) which seeks to maintain compliance and ultimately bolsters those politics. It is essential to eschew these temptations and instead concentrate one's efforts on consistent conscious acts which stand to better one's own position in spite of the politics.

In the dissertation that follows, my methodology to explore the politics of placement and its effect on mobility is a four-chapter analysis. Three chapters will be devoted to African American novels, with one devoted to inspecting a popular travel guide published in the mid-20th century. By performing my work in this way, I hope to illuminate the need to explore the progressive march toward black mobility that is often derailed by numerous obstacles.

Chapter One explores *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man,* following the life of its titular character who, by virtue of his light skin pigment and ambiguous facial features, can pass as either white or black. Published at a time when the Negro Problem/Question (NP/Q) – the post-Reconstruction social discourse about the legitimacy of black people's mobility — was particularly relevant, *Autobiography* relates numerous instances in which the narrator must grapple with the so-called race question. Due to the unrelenting preoccupation of white people with defending their right to remain in control of the legibilization of black people (and their reliance upon such legibilization to make sense of the overall structure of society, and to regard this structure as absolute and inevitable rather than open to radical change), the narrator eventually reaches a point at which he no longer wishes to unpack the complexity of his racial identity. This

decision, influenced as it is by the intense racial dynamics of the moment, is the result of what Barbara and Karen Fields refer to as racecraft.[5] That is to say, in keeping with their idea that racecraft is a process by which the hidden mechanisms of racism are meant to remain concealed, the narrator opts to conform to his prescribed place within the politics of placement and in doing so abandons his black legibility altogether in favor of whiteness. The narrator's witnessing of the unjust public burning of a black man causes him to feel disgusted and to assert that he does not wish to be part of a race that can be treated so poorly. He thereafter chooses to perform his own legibility based not on his internal self-identity, but instead on how other people legibilize him. More often than not, this conscious decision to forego control over how he is perceived results in his being treated as a white man.

By choosing not to be legible/legibilized as a black man, the narrator demonstrates that he lacks what W.E.B. Du Bois dubs self-consciousness. According to Du Bois, self-consciousness can function as a remedy to the double-consciousness that so many black people experience as a result of white people's constant need to place black people. Instead of self-consciously owning who he is and how he might develop and grow, the narrator relinquishes control over his own legibility. He, therefore, effectually accepts the racist status quo. While his capacity for agency and mobility may increase when he is perceived to be white, in exchange, he has relinquished his capacity for true self-legibilization, and therefore true mobility in the sense that I employ within this dissertation. Furthermore, in those instances when he allows himself to be perceived as white, the narrator undermines not only his own capacity to be mobile, but also other black people's

[5] Racecraft, which refers to the act of using the legible race of a victim of racism to hide the heinous acts of racists, is the central term behind Barbara and Karen Field's *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life* (2012). A sociological work that explores the historic perspective of how black people are constantly painted as to blame for their own oppression, *Racecraft* informs much of the work that I perform throughout this dissertation because the politics of placement derives much of its power from not allowing black people to hold white people accountable for their actions or the effects those actions have on black people.

capacity to enact mobility. By letting other people read him as white and passing as such, he becomes yet another (ostensibly) white person unwilling to intervene and disprove or challenge narratives about inferior black legibility.

Chapter Two's point of departure is William Attaway's novel, *Blood on the Forge* (1941). The story follows the characters Chinatown, Melody, and Big Mat Moss as they migrate north to work in iron mills as a result of the insidiousness of sharecropping and the politics of placement in the South. However, they soon realize that obtaining a better job in the metaphorical promised land of the North does not guarantee them a better life because their racial legibility still affects their potential to be mobile. The Mosses discover, like Frederick Douglass, that despite the changes they have wrought, they are still legible as black and therefore susceptible to being perceived and treated as racially lesser. A new system of placement, which I refer to as an economics of placement, re-legiblizes the Mosses as laborers (and black laborers at that), thus altering and building upon long-held tenets of the old politics of placement. Though their geographic location changes, black migrants/laborers still lack the ability to challenge or escape the system they work within. They still occupy the same place at the bottom of the social hierarchy. To make matters worse, the economics of placement teases the Mosses with an asymptotical mobility which keeps them from becoming fully mobile. That is to say, a false allure of upward mobility keeps the Mosses preoccupied with futile efforts to fully assimilate themselves within and to acquire full, culturally-accepted status as thoroughgoing members of American society. W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington's intellectual debate over the necessary measures black people must make to enact mobility illuminates the Moss brothers' struggle: on the one hand, Washington's position would call for them to be entrepreneurial and trust the economic system to work in their favor. Unsurprisingly, this approach does little to remedy already rampant and ever-present racism in the

marketplace. Du Bois, once again, offers his sound advice that black people should resist the temptation of the markers of mobility offered by the economics of black placement, imploring them to instead focus on higher pursuits of education and continued efforts toward suffrage. Be that as it may, the Moss brothers choose the former approach. They soon find themselves and the labor they supply exploited by white employers to aid in breaking the Irish and Slavic immigrant workers' strike. Enamored with the promise of mobility but beleaguered by the hard reality of manual labor, the Moss brothers continue to experience oppressive exploitation within the economics, never realizing the mobility promised to them. This chapter is a treatise on the functionality of systems such as the economics of placement and the ways in which they are constructed to intentionally immobilize black people.

Cultural artifacts like the *Negro Motorist's Green Book* attempt to remedy immobility by allowing black drivers safe access to the open road through what Cotten Seiler calls automobility. Chapter Three diverts from usual literary analysis and instead favors an archival deep-dive into four editions of the *Negro Motorist's Green Book* (1936-1964). The brainchild of Victor Green, a former US Postal Service employee, this travel guide is an extensive catalogue of black-friendly and black-owned restaurants, hotels, motels, rest stops, and many other sites that make black travel easier, safer, and more pleasurable. On the surface, the *Green Book* both acknowledges and seeks to fill a void black Americans have faced since the nation's inception by establishing consistent access to safe leisurely travel. Leisurely travel hints at the same type of adventurous spirit Whitman's narrator would certainly revere. However, these travel guides ultimately champion black automobility so much that they fail to explicitly address and provide discourse about the ongoing dangers of the ideology of placement that threatens black people in the US. Automobility, while important, cannot come at the expense of genuine black mobility because, just as migrating

north does not guarantee black people liberation, owning a car and driving do not ensure mobility. The travel guides vaunt automobility as a possible remedy for black people's immobilization in the nation, buying into the same narrative that white US citizens glom onto as a result of the impending construction at this time of the US Highway Interstate. This adaptation of stories that revolves around the concept of retrieving one's selfhood through driving fails to capture the full nuance of black legibility. Instead, it encourages black people to be auto-mobile, but not mobile. Moreover, while it's true that black Americans might have access to automobiles and the supplies needed to operate them, this does nothing to alleviate or equalize their incapacity, as compared to their white counterparts, even of being fully auto-mobile. Despite having access to the *Green Book* as a guide, black drivers still experience vulnerability to arrest and detainment by local police, inability to purchase gas, and other strictly physical impediments to auto-mobility.

Chapter Four concludes this project with an in-depth exploration of the point of departure and destination that makes mobility possible: home. Home, particularly for black people, is just as important to consider when discussing mobility because this space provides an emotional and psychological foundation and generates perspective about the limits and capaciousness of mobility. Just as the absence of whiteness defines blackness within the politics of placement, the open road can only become legible through its contrast with other types of space. No person exists in perpetual motion. When they stop moving to recoup their thoughts, calm their emotions, and ease their misgivings, home becomes a respite from the burden of performativity characteristic of trying to enact mobility while not afforded the inherent right to be mobile. Ideally, the home should be where the individual is free from the expectation that they must perform certain traits for the rest of the world to perceive and legibilize. While home, an individual can be afforded a refuge in which they may disengage from legibility and placement and be their essential self – in a word,

freely resistant to becoming perniciously *placed* not so much in *space* as in the distorting gaze of strangers which robs them of a vital, dynamic sense of their underlying agency and potential. Placelessness in this sense thus helps people become mobile through a healthy and nurturing relationship with others. It does not, however, mean that black people do not know or are unaware of their legibility. Rather, they can be unplaceable because they do not adhere to the rules of engagement that the politics of placement demands. However, a home is not always a bastion of placelessness – which is to say that this space is not free from the corruption wrought by the politics of placement. The politics often seep into the structure of the home, as is evident in Toni Morrison's novel, *Home* (2010). Morrison expertly narrates the story of the Money family. She depicts how, due to trauma experienced by their grandmother, siblings Frank and Cee Money are forced to navigate a politics of placement within their home that closely parallels the politics of placement that govern public space. The resulting lack of familial support and safety leaves the two grandchildren increasingly susceptible to placement's politics, economics, and ideology. Deprived of a home at such a young age, they struggle to find or create homes later in life, unable to be self-conscious or self-assured enough to trust in themselves as they try to enact mobility in a world that seeks to immobilize them. The final chapter explores the many parameters and nuances of home-building and the imperative for black people to conceive of and create homes free from influence and replication of the fixity of placement rampant outside the home.

Having established some of the mechanisms within this system and their effects, this dissertation attempts to make clear that it is not enough to acknowledge that racism exists and occurs. Rather, this project will follow the idea of racecraft, the term initially coined by Barbara and Karen Fields in their essential work in *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life*, to its logical conclusion. That is to say, it will examine how complex, often hidden, if powerfully

operative dynamics play out in the day-to-day life of the perpetrators of racism as well as in the lives of those affected by their racist oppressors. In doing so, I hope to create an opportunity to deeply scrutinize the ways these power dynamics flit between racism, sexism, and classism simultaneously and repetitively. Such dynamics encompass a dizzying array of obstacles strewn in the path of would-be black mobility.

Chapter 1 - Just Passing Through: The (Im)mobilization of the *Ex-Coloured Man*

James Weldon Johnson's *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man* follows its titular mixed-race narrator as he grapples with passing in a society that uses the politics of placement to legibilize black people as racially inferior. The son of a white father and a black mother who passes for white due to her fair complexion, he spends a large portion of his childhood as a legibly white child. As a white-presenting person, he becomes adept at categorizing and assigning social value to people based on their race. Notably, he internalizes that black people occupy the bottom of the (white-centric) social hierarchy and must therefore endure lives of hardship. When the narrator finally learns that he is (part) black, his world crumbles.

The *Autobiography's* narrator fears that since black people are seen as inferior, and because he is now black, he is also inferior by default. He is not entirely wrong. According to the logic of the politics of placement, he is now susceptible to a specific, insidious kind of legibilization that I will call colouring. He will be made legible via socially-derived conceptualizations of his racial color (as opposed to the physically-contrived color of, say, an apple) and thus be treated as a black person – which is to say, he will be treated as less than his white counterparts. Colouring proves more insidious than regular legibilization because once he is coloured, he becomes legible as a racialized Other in the eyes of his (white) perceivers.[6] Now categorized within the racialized order (for black people, this is at the bottom of the social hierarchy), he will be personally interacted with according to what white people ostensibly know about collectivized racial (black) identity.

His fear is not misplaced: the politics flattens black legibility and identity into a broader, monolithic comprehension of blackness, with several detractors and insufficiencies that are allegedly characteristic of all black people now foisted upon him. Now legible as part of the

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[6] To not confuse my readers, colouring will most often be spelled with a "u" throughout this chapter to pay homage to how Johnson spells the word in the *Autobiography* and to explain the process of racializing people.

disadvantaged outgroup of black people, the newly coloured narrator is easily placeable within the politics of placement and will therefore be susceptible to the whims of white people. The very same politics he previously practiced before discovering his (part) black racial makeup becomes a tool to keep him in his (newly-acquired) place. Like other black people, he will presumably be discouraged from trying to change his place in the social order lest he disrupts the widely-accepted racial order. Racist white people will use of the politics of placement to keep him and other black people in their place – meaning beneath white people. The narrator begins moving through life aware of the impact race (rather, racism) has on his life. Unsurprisingly, he tries to pass as white whenever he can to make his life easier and he can (hopefully) be mobile.

After a lifetime of passing as either black or white whenever either legibility is convenient, the narrator witnesses the tragic lynching of a black man and decides that he no longer wants to choose to be legible, let alone identify himself as black. In fact, he does not want to decide how he is legible anymore – even as white. Instead, he lets other people see him however they please. Still wary of colouring, though, he disguises himself by growing a mustache, changing his name, and effectively passing as a perceivably white man. I emphasize that he does all this to help him avoid (in his opinion) becoming a perpetual victim of black-specific racial violence. But by choosing to let other people legibilize him (which ironically increases the likelihood that people will still colour him as black), he reveals that passing is both a consequence *and* apparatus of the politics of placement.[7]

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[7] I employ apparatus here as Foucault does in "Confession of the Flesh." An apparatus orders the way power operates among people and institutions by connecting different forms of knowledge to support how that power disseminates through discourse. In this sense, passing (active or passive) both responds to and creates more need for others to respond to power dynamics that control the discourse on what is the more beneficial race to choose to gain access to certain spaces and privileges. (From *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings*, 194-228.)

It merits emphasis in this regard that although a person can passively pass or actively pass as white or black, how they perform this passing act (rather than what race they choose to pass as) matters enormously in our understanding of what kind of mobility (if any) they employ. To this end, it is essential to identify and understand the differences between the two types of passing I explore in this chapter: actively and passively passing.

When the narrator passively passes, he does not choose for himself how other people will perceive him. He essentially forfeits his autonomy to determine how his internal sense of self (i.e., his identity) is known to the rest of the world No doubt the benefits of passively passing could be great, but they could also be detrimental. Often, the narrator's passively passing is favorable because other people see his fair skin and assume that he is white. He can thus enjoy opportunities he would not have if he were perceived as black. But while letting others choose to see him as white rather than black could increase his likelihood of being mobile without the additional impediments that black legibility brings, in doing so, he forsakes his own (whole) internal identity. Remember, he is part white, but he is also part black. Moreover, when he lets other people choose to legibilize him as white and does not inform them that he is part black, he effectually validates the politics of placement's treatment of him and other black people. That is to say, when on these occasions he passively passes as black, he simply submits to all the socially accepted connotations of blackness (including being immutably black and unable to ever be seen as fully white). He will be coloured on these occasions and seen as just another black person: he will be outed as black, with no other choice but to accept inferior status and whatever treatment white people dole out to him. Ultimately, since black people are kept at the bottom of the social hierarchy through the politics of placement, he will be unable (or unwilling) to do anything to change the way he is treated. As a result, he will not be able to improve his position in life, let alone change how society

treats other black people. Passively passing as black thus implicates the narrator in being compliant with the politics of placement. He upholds legibilization, the threat of colouring, and validates the treatment he and other black people receive by ceding control of all (potential) future legibilization and treatment over to white people.

Active passing, on the other hand, the antithesis to passive passing, requires the narrator's direct and intentional choice to govern how he will become socially legible to the world. Even so, it is worth mentioning when the narrator chooses to pass specifically as *white*, although he takes accountability for his choice in how he becomes socially legible, he does not in this case vigorously push back against blackness's ostensibly inherent inferiority. Rather, he continues to bolster the narrative that blackness is bad compared to whiteness. Actively passing as *black*, on the other hand, although the more difficult choice, increases the likelihood that the narrator and other black people will be interacted with according to what they say and do rather than as templates onto which racial monoliths are projected. In this case, the narrator can diminish the value that colouring has on how he chooses to identify and be legible. Sadly, though, when the narrator becomes ex-coloured at the end of the *Autobiography,* he takes the path of least resistance and passively passes as a white man.

Let me add here at the conclusion of my introduction to this chapter that in my evaluation of the options and choices open to the narrator in the *Autobiography,* I will be leaning on W.E.B. Du Bois' introductory essay, "Of Our Spiritual Strivings," included in *The Souls of Black Folk*. There Du Bois posits that mastery of one's double consciousness (viewing oneself through the double vision of one's being caught within, if also occurring outside, the stereotypes and legibilities of racism) through practicing self-consciousness (a person's self-assured commitment to an identity not keyed to what other people think) is a prerequisite to black people's uplift.

Although failure to master double consciousness in this sense is not the sole deterrent to the narrator's mobility, it does further impede his struggle to unapologetically (and publicly) accept blackness as his identity at the novel's end.

In addition to using Du Bois' double consciousness to analyze the *Autobiography,* I will also rely on Barbara and Karen Fields's racecraft concept from *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life*. Their work clarifies how the Negro Problem/Question (NP/Q) – the post-Reconstruction social discourse about the legitimacy of black people's pursuit of suffrage and equal rights – obscures any potential answers to the so-called race question for the narrator. Instead, the NP/Q reinforces the false idea that the social ills affecting black people are their own fault rather than the fault of a fundamentally racist white society.

Section 1: The Colouring

The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man begins with the narrator explaining to readers how he feels like the "unfound out criminal" who confides in his readers against all good advice (3). Born without traits readily legible as indicative of blackness, the narrator initially assumes that he is white and proceeds through life as a white person because others perceive him that way. But while his furtiveness even after discovering that he is black realistically captures one aspect of unknowingly passing, the fact that he hides the secret of his mixed racial identity from others clearly shows that he cares about how other people perceive him. If people think he is white but later discover that he is black, they will think he has willfully deceived them. In truth, the deception they think the narrator engages in is actually their own failure to appropriately interact with him as an autonomous individual rather than a blank canvas onto which they project their assumptions.

Any negative feelings they have about how they treat the narrator are based on their (incorrect) assumptions, and any subsequent (mis)treatment of him is their own fault for having assumed so poorly.

When the narrator passes, he maps himself onto (and become mappable to others according to) currently structured social landscapes, precisely as Adrian Piper explains in her essay "Passing for White, Passing for Black." Piper holds that passing can be read as deceptive because the act only seems to uphold the validity of presumptive social mapping, but at bottom remains an act of bad faith. Indeed, passing potentially confounds perceivers of a passer's eligibility in that passing is always potentially prone to failure.[8] For example, the *Autobiography's* narrator might inadequately perform his intended legibility, or people could discover that he is not who or what he presents himself to be. His inadequacy would then highlight what Piper notes as the necessity to properly perform to pass adequately. Remember, passing is inherently a product of and would-be remedy to the politics of placement that requires a potential passer to perform correctly, whether intentionally or unintentionally, attributes that others associate with another social group. If the narrator fails to pass, perceivers will mark him as "not as having done wrong but being wrong" ("Passing for White" 6-7). Perceivers could oust the narrator as a fraud and deceiver in that case. But, as Barbara and Karen Fields emphasize, the inability of others to accurately categorize the narrator is not his problem: once again, they deceive themselves when they assume racial makeup is somehow skin-deep, blood-dependent, or otherwise culturally etched into a person's legible presentation (Barbara and Karen Fields 50-51).

[8] It bears mentioning that a black person who passes as white but is found out to not be (fully or at all, depending on the audience) white is read as deceptive and the crime is far more egregiously read by others — usually by white people who see the now-black passer as liar and deceiver. The black person who is seen as white in a black environment is seen as opportunistic in getting ahead, perhaps even as a deceiver to some extent. However, society will generally reward whiteness and white people by default: therefore, if a black person who can pass as white decides to be legible as white, they have an entire nation and two races of people who would advise them to because life is generally easier that way.

Because the narrator does not know that he is part black (and therefore is unaware that he is passing) when he is young, he grows up as a legibly white child who internalizes the politics of placement from an early age. His early experiences in positionality and racial categorization lay the foundation for why he thinks black people are susceptible to control by white people. In one memory, the narrator and his classmates actively legibilize one of their black schoolmates because he has a face "black as night" that "shone as though it were polished" (14). They colour the young black boy by calling him names like "Shiny Face," "Shiny Eyes," and "Shiny Teeth," and the monikers stick so well that boy comes to be known only by the shorthand nickname "Shiny" (14). The white students legibilize Shiny via race in a way that makes him indelibly legible as black for the rest of his life. His nickname is nothing more than a play on his appearance, but the moniker unrelentingly signals his race. They distinguish themselves from Shiny through what seems like a harmless observation of his physiological features – the darkness of his melanin shows more of the oil in his skin, and thus the nominal sheen occurs. While the white classmates internalize the politics of placement when they colour Shiny, they erase and minimize the black boy's complexity and nuance into a singular or flattened set of characteristics that make him easier to map onto white society's social landscape. The colouring of Shiny and other black people begins easily and creates an immutable mark on Shiny, meaning that he will never forget his (nick)name because the other white children will never let him. Despite his numerous achievements, he forever remains legible as black (and therefore lesser). Readers never get to know Shiny's name – something that Johnson is keen to demonstrate when Shiny and the narrator meet years later, and the latter cannot remember the former's name (202).

The narrator later learns how to further hierarchize black people within their own racial groups to grant privileges to some but not all of them. The narrator notices that even though Shiny

is black, the young black boy is not referred to as a "nigger" like the other black schoolchildren are (14-15). Shiny also has a nickname, but the other black students' names remain unknown. The narrator later learns that Shiny's extraordinary intelligence distinguishes him from the rest of the black students. Still, no matter how brilliant the black boy is, he is given no more access to or protection by whiteness. Shiny gets a nickname and some preferential treatment because he does not fit into the white children's expectations of what black children are like – meaning that they are less intelligent than their white peers. Even so, while the white schoolchildren know that Shiny is smart and is not just another "nigger," he is still black and beneath them on the social ladder. As young as the white schoolchildren are, they have a fair enough grasp of a proto politics of placement that they hierarchize white and black students and then compare black students to other black students as a means of socially mapping all their classmates to know how to label and treat them accordingly. Shiny forces the white children to create space for him outside of the binary but still within the hierarchy by being both black and intelligent.

Even though the narrator and his white counterparts know how to distinguish and hierarchize one black person from the larger group, when black people resist their disadvantageous legibility and placement, the white children subject all their black classmates to the same treatment to put them back in their place. On the way home from school, the narrator and some other white children follow their black classmates and chant a racist rhyme: "Nigger, nigger, never die, Black face and shiny eye" (15). When one of the black boys gets angry and throws a piece of slate at his verbal assailants, the white children retaliate and throw rocks back at him and even chase the other black students who had merely been onlookers. The white children do not hierarchize their black classmates at this moment. Instead, they punish the entire group for that individual's act of retaliation. At this moment, the white children lump all black people together into one group to

quell any potential threat to the social order. Even if they are not acutely aware, the white students replicate a core concept of white supremacy when they justify their assault of all black people in the vicinity based on one black person's actions.

The black boy who throws the rock does so as retaliation against the white children's racist chant. Still, because the politics interprets black people's actions (no matter how small the gesture or whatever incites that gesture) as instigative and always in need of correction, he is legible as the initial assailant. The black boy's justified rage at being called a "nigger" causes him to respond to the psychological violence of placement with physical violence of his own. Even though he is a victim of psychological violence at work under a politics that seeps into children's songs so that they bear the implicit message that his people are "niggers," he violates one of the core tenets of the politics of placement when he harms a white child. Unfortunately for him, within the politics of placement, the white classmates' racist chant is normalized by the larger society's acceptance of black racial inferiority. The racist chant, therefore, does not register as the causal event that leads to the boy's retaliatory behavior. Karen and Barbara Fields would emphasize that in moments like this, the white children who commit racist acts (i.e., the song and chasing the black students) mask their racism by insinuating that the victim's race is the cause of any excessive reaction (*Racecraft* 43-44). In this scenario, the white classmates conveniently lump the black boy into a monolithic collective of black people. Once they color him this way, they assign him a trait (i.e., belligerence) that they think is inherent to black people to excuse their provocative actions and respond to his antagonism. In two logical leaps, the black boy who throws the rock is now legible as yet another angry black child rather than a child who is mad at being targeted with racialized psychological violence that he should (ostensibly) be accustomed to experiencing. In other words, the young white children engage racecraft to morph the black boy from an individual responding to a violent

encounter into part of the monolith of angry and violent black people whose actions are perceived as aggressive and overblown. His assailants could thus get away with their crime because they can paint the boy's actions as the actual crime.

After this episode, the narrator receives his first hint that neither race nor the politics of placement are as absolute as he thinks. He runs home after the rock-throwing incident to tell his mother, but when he refers to the black boy who attacked his fellow white classmates as "one of the 'niggers,'" she immediately becomes angry and tells him never to use that word again (15). Beyond expressing her disdain, she does not explain why the word is so heinous. She is not yet ready to reveal that she and her son are (part) black and would also be considered "niggers." No matter, because shortly after that, the young narrator is coloured for the first time in his life. The incident happens publicly among the same white schoolchildren whom he often joins in taunting black schoolchildren:

> One day near the end of my second term at school the principal came into our room and, after talking to the teacher, for some reason said, "I wish all of the white scholars to stand for a moment." I rose with the others. The teacher looked at me and, calling my name, said: "You sit down for the present, and rise with the others." I did not quite understand her, and questioned, "Ma'am?" She repeated, with a softer tone in her voice: "You sit down now, and rise with the others." I sat down dazed. I saw and heard nothing. When the others were asked to rise, I did not know it. When school was dismissed, I went out in a kind of stupor. A few of the white boys jeered me, saying: "We knew he was coloured." Shiny said to them: "Come along, don't tease him,' and thereby won my undying gratitude." (16)

The teacher does not name who the "others" are that the narrator should stand with later. She simultaneously attempts to erase race yet emphasizes its centrality in this situation. She

engages in what Toni Morrison calls capital-o Othering to assuage the narrator's discomfort as he learns he no longer belongs to the white student body (*Origin of Others* 15). The teacher never says aloud that he is black, yet he is still coloured in front of the entire class for the first time in his life through negation. The narrator belongs to these "others," which is code for black students, and must stand with them later.

When his classmates jeer at the narrator that they "knew he was coloured" all along and that he "was a nigger too," their logic is flawed. Some aspects of the narrator's physical appearance or behavior might give away his racial identity. However, the white school children probably do not have the investigative tools to detect and recognize racial qualities or behaviors in a person they had assumed was white up to this point. Before this instance, the white children never mentioned that he looked or acted any different than them. Only when a person of authority (i.e., the teacher) places him as black do they change their view. Their assurance is steeped in equal parts conditioned compliance to authority and groupthink. The narrator's initial colouring illustrates how race and racialization can lay dormant, a tool readily available to those seeking to enact the hierarchizing powers behind the politics of placement.

Even if his white classmates cannot determine his racial legibility properly, this makes no difference to the narrator, whose initial colouring causes him to question whether his actual racial legibility is noticeable to others. Up until this point, his skin was a boon to his existence because, within the context of the social structures present in the US at this time, whiteness, as he so adeptly mentions later when reflecting on the matter, is a prize in its own right: "So far as racial differences go, the United States puts a greater premium on colour, or better, lack of colour, than upon anything else in the world. To paraphrase, 'Have a white skin, and all things else may be added unto you'" (154-155). No longer among the ranks of those with a lack of colour, the narrator's world shatters

before him. Shaken by the encounter at school, he rushes home to look at himself in the mirror. When he does not find an answer to his questions about his racial identity in his reflection, he interrogates his mother: "Mother, mother, tell me, am I a nigger?" She tells him that if anyone calls him that word, he need not "notice them" (19). Her advice is insufficient: once again, rather than explain what the n-word means and why it is not okay to place/colour someone with this word, she tells her son to ignore anyone who uses it against him. But ignoring pejorative slurs like these is not an effective method of resolving the consequences of colouring. Slurs of this nature intentionally colour (and therefore place) her son as black. The words will incite and permit treatment that confirms his lower status within the US racial hierarchy. As if he notices the dissonance in her advice, the narrator asks if she is white. He assumes (rightly so) that race is inheritable from parents but does not parse the nuance of the matrilineal condition of race that passes onto children of black women. The narrator's mother clings to the idea that even though she is not white, the "best blood of the South" runs in the narrator's veins because his father is one of the most remarkable white men in the country (19). The narrator does not know it yet, but he faces the insidious one-drop rule that bars him from being entirely white and, therefore, a member of society capable of full mobility.[9]

The narrator's mother's logic about her son having the best blood in the South in his veins is equally faulty. By employing this reductive look at her son's racial identity, she effectively either ignores or condones the violence of placement herself. She cannot erase his blackness because the narrator's whiteness will not outweigh how other people will legibilize him if or when they find

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[9] Barbara and Karen Fields explore the one-drop rule in-depth but with a critical eye for what it really means. They emphasize how nonsensical overlaying a blood quantum on people is, citing that society's belief that a person can be lesser based solely on whatever amount of black blood is in their veins means very little when race is no more evident in blood work than one's behaviors. Regardless, the narrator's mother feels she needs to get ahead of the narrator's spiral by saying that he has good (read white) blood in his veins that cancels out what society believes is inferior black blood in him.

out he is part black. To them, he will be black. Moreover, the narrator cannot ignore everyone (or anyone, really) who calls him the n-word because labels like the n-word and nicknames like Shiny forever alter how the world interacts with black people and vice versa. The narrator cannot successfully ignore his racial identity because the world will never forget his race or fail to remind him where it places them in the social hierarchy. Black legibility and placement are so accepted in the politics of placement that if the narrator (or other black people) follows his mother's erroneous advice, his refusal to be placeable through descriptors or slurs like the n-word would likely be perceived as a direct threat to the hierarchy. He would then be susceptible to a violent retaliatory response from white people. For an example of this reactivity, think back to how the white children seek justice when they retaliate against the black boy who threw the rock and his other black peers.

Coloured as he is, the narrator grapples with race similarly to W.E.B. Du Bois' reaction to his first experience of colouring. As a young boy in New England, Du Bois and his classmates began to exchange visiting cards. A girl new to their community refused his visiting card (2). The newcomer, probably unaware of why the rest of the children would often include Du Bois, canceled their exchange in what was undoubtedly not her first use of racial legibility politics. She knew that Du Bois was not white, thus why she did not take his card. Du Bois noticed that he was different from his schoolmates for the first time and felt a veil cover his vision. Every white person in his veiled gaze he grew to despise. Eager to show them that he was better than they thought him to be, young Du Bois relished whenever he beat them in athletics, academics, and sometimes physically" (2). However, when that contempt he held for white people faded, he genuinely longed to gain access to their "dazzling opportunities." Instead of open doors that led to these opportunities, walls closed him off from them. He and the other "sons of the night" (i.e., black people) were left in eternal darkness.

The *Autobiography's* narrator's initial colouring in the classroom also leaves him outside the realm of whiteness with his (now) fellow "sons of the night," unable to enter and gain access to dazzling opportunities without fear of white people finding out about his racial identity. He knows that he is black now, and he cannot unknow this. Moving forward, the narrator becomes acutely aware of the "dwarfing, warping, distorting influence which operates upon each and every coloured man in the United States" (Johnson 21). Fascinated yet appalled by his colouring, he contemplates why black people experience life "not through the lens of a citizen, man, or human being, but from the point of view of a coloured man." The narrator experiences racism via the politics of placement as both systems dictate nearly every interaction he will have. As a black person, he must endlessly appease and affirm white people's perception of himself. He thus knows that he is black not because of some ontological self-assessment he conducts but because he receives labels like colored and the n-word from white people. Placement now shapes whatever he does: if he congregates in too large a crowd of black people, they will all be legible as a threat. If he retaliates for some white person's misdeed, he and his community could face harm – as the black classmates witness when the white classmates retaliate against them all for one boy's actions. Placement will make life difficult or dangerous for the narrator if he does not pay close attention and adhere to the rules of engagement demanded by the politics of placement.

Regarding these rules of engagement, the politics of placement shapes black people's thoughts about themselves as inherently and indeterminably inferior. Despite all the messaging and reinforcement that stokes their double-consciousness, black people can (and must) resist the politics of placement to preserve their sanity and humanity. The two halves referenced in Du Bois' concept of dual-consciousness diametrically oppose each other as they threaten to tear their host's black body and mind apart. The narrator in the *Autobiography* witnesses how he and other black

people experience the world with a "dual positionality" that closely resembles W.E.B. Du Bois' conceptualization of double consciousness. For Du Bois, black people's struggle to live in the US is due to a "contradiction of double-aims" that double consciousness creates and exacerbates. A black person might feel as if they must desert blackness to be mobile and still recognize that doing so forsakes their people – especially if their mobility is strictly a tokenized special case unavailable to all other black people, or strictly a special case of being able to pass as white. Caught between two positions with opposing results, Du Bois maintains that black people experience a push and pull on their souls caused and exacerbated by the politics of placement. The politics of placement encodes in every outlet possible (e.g., within the legal system, the media, or content produced for the general public) that black people are depraved, unable to learn, and should be content with their lives as they are. Even children's songs reflect this grim fact. Sadly, black people inevitably internalize these assumptions and views about themselves. Du Bois holds that black people must obtain and practice self-consciousness to reconcile both contradictory sides of the double-consciousness. Importantly, although Du Bois never uses the term passing or explores bi-racial people in "Of Our Spiritual Strivings," his analysis of the dual consciousness that engenders self-doubt is thus relevant to passing.

Even though passing connotes passivity, the word's present progressive suffix and infinitive verb form (to pass) suggest an active process that involves intentional decisions that will hopefully result in preferential treatment. This dissertation project's re-definition of mobility augments our understanding of active and passive passing. Black people, necessarily so, must find a multitude of ways to resist the politics of placement because this system undermines their autonomy and ability to be mobile. Black people like the narrator, who can adequately pass as white through physiology or proximity to other qualities assigned to whiteness, weigh the pros and

cons of choosing either white or black legibility as one (but not the only) way to resist placement. He must make a choice, not of whether to be white or black, but whether he should actively or passively pass. In a way that is especially applicable to my reading of the *Autobiography,* Du Bois' conceptualization of self-consciousness would have the narrator actively pass to (re)claim his autonomy and legibility from other people who do not afford him the agency to choose for himself. When the narrator of the *Autobiography* decides to pass as white or black, he selects the legibility that best suits him in each situation, thus exercising autonomy over how he presents himself. By tapping into his will to identify as part of a specific category of people, he takes the first step toward being self-conscious, which makes his task of influencing how others perceive him easier. In this way, self-consciousness requires him to first know himself *before* choosing how he wants to be seen by other people. The narrator's self-awareness is what makes actively passing a means toward mobility.

In contrast, the politics of placement thrives on passive passing. In passive passing, control is given over to the perceivers in a way that leaves a void where the perceived person cannot or chooses not to intervene. Without the ability to take control of their legibility, the passive passer becomes a blank canvas on which other people project their biased opinions. For example, when the narrator chooses to let people legibilize him how they see fit, he cedes control of his legibility to them. As a result, he can be perceived as white or coloured as black. Despite the benefits he could have in actively passing, he still chooses to passively pass at the novel's conclusion because he does not want to tolerate (rather, choose to tolerate) the abuse he sees black people endure. The irony, however, is that because he chooses to pass passively, he is still susceptible to how other people legibilize him, which does not prevent them from colouring him in the future. In short, he cannot challenge their legibilization of himself without ousting himself as a liar or deceiver. Thus,

by choosing to pass passively, the narrator of the *Autobiography* becomes an amorphous, malleable individual whose existence is dictated by others.

Passing thus explains (but is not the solution to) the ontological dilemma that the bi-racial or racially ambiguous narrator faces to ease the discomfort of his double-consciousness. Passing actively as the narrator does initially is not inherently wrong. However, it is not a noble act either. The narrator's choice to passively pass at the novel's conclusion is likewise not quite condonable, although it is understandable why he makes this decision. For most black people who can, passing becomes a legibly legitimate way to maximize their personal mobility. Sadly, by legitimizing whiteness as a standard to measure himself and other black people, the narrator forfeits his ability to achieve mobility outside the confines of the white-centric politics of placement. His ploy backfires for himself (in his own words, he must sell his "birthright for a mess of pottage"). My conclusion is thus that when the ex-coloured narrator chooses to identify as white for the remainder of his life, he validates the politics' implications for both communities and therefore immobilizes himself. His decision also moves beyond the limits of his own life and into other black people's lives. After all, life is already difficult, but black people who accept racial placement (their own or others') as a necessary condition of life make life harder for all black people.

Exceptionalism and tokenism offer those who cannot pass, in contrast to the narrator, ways to achieve favorable legibility. Both these tactics take advantage of the rift in black people's double-consciousness. However, tokenism and exceptionalism exert additional pressure on all black people to performatively excel or comply with the politics of placement. Through conformity to the politics, they receive conditional admission to possess, as Du Bois says, whiteness' "dazzling opportunities." The condition of entry? The admittee must not inadvertently or overtly challenge the status quo.

Let me offer an illuminating example of this through the case of Shiny. On the day of his high school graduation day, Shiny, the valedictorian, gives a stirring speech that, in the eyes of the narrator at least, no white boy of equal talent could duplicate. However, as even the narrator recognizes in retrospect, he fails to build a complex picture of his black friend, instead choosing to tokenize the young man rather than appreciate his talent. Shiny is "common *in his race*, a natural orator" (45). The narrator relies on stereotyping, a crucial component of the politics of placement, as he over-simplifies – even sells short – Shiny's accomplishments as proof of black exceptionality. These remarks, familiar to most black people well-accustomed to comments that routinely express astonishment that they are "articulate," seem flattering only on the surface. The narrator clumsily refers to Shiny's skills as "natural." In other words, the narrator thinks Shiny's success is due to his blackness, which bestows him with an uncanny sense of oratorial expertise. The manipulation tactic employs the veiling trickery of racecraft to paint black exceptionality as normal despite its rare occurrence. The tactic also aligns black exceptionality as a standard against which to measure and discard ordinary, non-exceptional black people.

Contrary to the narrator's or white people's opinions, Shiny's "natural" talent results from his concerted efforts to be a good orator. But the politics makes said efforts legible as another example of black people's innate superiority in passionate speaking. Rather than being legible as a well-practiced, thrilling, and compelling orator, Shiny is coloured as an exciting and engaging orator *because he is black*. This perception foregrounds that Shiny is black and talented rather than just gifted. White people exploit this interpretation to further emphasize to other black people (and themselves) that this black person is nonetheless exceptional, but only within the confines of the extant expectations surrounding black people. He is viewed only within the bounds of what whiteness and the politics have already agreed upon as a legitimate way for black people to be

made legible – in that they are naturally gifted and rousing public speakers. This engagement of racecraft obscures how a black person who tries and succeeds at gaining access to Du Bois' "dazzling opportunities" becomes potentially dangerous to the politics' racial order.

Section 2: The Musician and The Millionaire

Unable to attend college in Atlanta because a thief steals his money, the narrator moves to New York and passes as black. He frequents black nightclubs and hears ragtime for the first time in his life. After studying the genre, he melds his childhood classical piano training with the improvisational aspects of the music and develops into a sensational player. His mastery launches his once casual interest into a career that attracts the attention of a nameless white millionaire who offers to employ him (and compensate him handsomely) under the condition that he plays for no one else save this wealthy white man. Viewing this as an opportunity to increase his station in life, the narrator obliges. In his haste to be mobile, though, he overlooks the exploitative red flags that foreshadow his continued imprisonment within the politics of placement.

The wealthy white man effectively exploits his proximity to the narrator's musical gift to paint himself as a musical connoisseur and collector of fine arts. Under the rich man's wing, the narrator passes as a traveling white musician who plays a black musical genre exceptionally well. Meanwhile, the millionaire grants the narrator conditional admission into white society and the proximity of the social elite – but stops short of conferring membership to white legibility. When the narrator decides to terminate his companionship/contract with the millionaire to become a composer legible as a black man in the US, the white man guffaws the notion. He opines that black legibility will only spell failure for the musician/narrator. This section illuminates why the

relationship between the narrator and the millionaire white employer is exploitative in its mirroring of the US' relationship with black people. The first part of this section illustrates how exploitative white people are of black people and their cultural productions, including ragtime. The second part closely explores the narrator's decision to leave the millionaire's employ, interpreting and expounding upon the latter's reaction to indicate his acceptance of the politics of placement.

The narrator vividly paints the ragtime's origins in the Mississippi Delta. Black ragtime musicians were prolific improvisers and would often employ vulgar words to fit the melodies they wrote. The genre makes its way to the larger northern cities from black nightclubs and black social spaces that teem with black musicians who have no shortage of talent but few venues to play outside their small circuits due to segregation. There are, of course, white people who frequent these black nightclubs in search of a good time. Of these white people, some are musicians who hear the music and extend its reach to whiter audiences by taking out profanity so that these songs could appeal to more mainstream sensibilities (read white audiences) and generate a profit from the music. Rather than uplift the black originators of the genre as producers of culture, these white "imitators and adulterators" mimic the improvisation and alter the music in such a way that they erase the presence of black creativity through their dramatic overrepresentation as the faces of mainstream ragtime (99-100). Black artistic, cultural products like jazz, the cakewalk, or ragtime tend to become widely popular in white social circles through appropriation and marketability politics that largely reflect the racial politics of the time. As ragtime becomes increasingly popular, white authorship (though often skillful mimicry) routinely receives more acceptance than genuine black innovation and creativity. In fact, black aesthetics are often only widely acceptable when white artists perform or popularize them. Even when black musicians produce a legibly popular

music form, their appreciation is secondary to white imitators who vault their music into the larger society's consciousness.

The politics of placement is evident in how the music industry employs and even encourages the appropriation of black creativity and art forms. Black people (metaphorically and literally) play second fiddle to white musicians. White people's appropriation of black cultural practices and creations like ragtime is revelatory of white people's need to instrumentalize and profit from blackness while not affording black people their due credit, monetary compensation, or access to mobility. With high enough profits from music records, few black people could garner enough exposure to increase their chances of mobility. However, to receive the kind of success of Scott Joplin or Jelly Roll Morton, black musicians need an endorsement from white musicians and labels. In other words, black musicians, even financially successful ones, need acceptance by the white public to fully claim and enact mobility.

Appropriation aside, ragtime itself transgresses the politics of placement because black people, with historically limited access to classical piano and instrument training, nonetheless innovate and produce the entire genre. While the narrator revels in the ingenuity of black creativity, he still contemplates whether mastery of legibly elite practices like formal piano training would bring black artists more exposure to and acclaim within a more comprehensive (read white) audience. He sees a black ragtime musician play ragtime so masterfully that he wonders what the performer could accomplish with classical training. Although the narrator cannot be sure that the black man has any classical training, he assumes that classical piano training and music theory would be essential to this black performer's playing ragtime on the piano. Without knowing it, the narrator colours and places the ragtime aficionado when he assumes that the man has no classical training – or that classical training would even be valuable to this man's skillset. His assumptions

validate the politics of placement that favors mastery only legible within white cultural practices. White audiences would also assume that, without formal training, black musicians should not be talented musicians at all. But their assumption undercuts any credit black people could take for their accomplishments. Just as Shiny's skill at speaking is attributed to his natural black ability to speak powerfully, black ragtime performers could have their talent excused as something that blackness could explain. In truth, though, black performers' skill at ragtime just extends beyond a classroom and a politics that gatekeeps knowledge.

Proper coordination and pedagogical correctness might, on the one hand, transform a black ragtime performer into a musical genius. On the other hand, training might alter the magic of the trick at play – this particular trick is not a sleight of hand, but an overlooked fact that ragtime is a radical and transgressive genre *because* black people create and master it. Thankfully, the narrator finds and analyzes the nuance of his argument when he concludes that the performer's "lavish natural endowment" could alternatively eventuate, with formal training, his becoming some "mediocre imitator of the great masters," sans the panache that characterizes ragtime (101). The narrator seems to be under the impression that because he received classical piano training as a boy and now plays ragtime masterfully as any other non-trained musician, there must be some value to training. While his knowledge of music theory helps him hone his craft, the critical differences between him and the other performer are their personal experiences and how white people read their legibilities. The narrator could more adeptly explain what he does to white people who know music theory when he adds a trill between notes or a flourish at the end of a song. Those same white people might also assume he is white and account for his talent as common-sense proof that white people learn how to do things in an ostensibly correct (read socially acceptable within a white-centric culture) way. The other black musician may be able to describe his technique, but in

his deviance from what white society views as the correct way to discuss musical composition, his language and lexicon would likely render his talent and comprehension within the medium illegible to white people. He could, like Shiny, be exceptionally talented and well-practiced at his craft.

When the narrator colours the black man by thinking that he would be an even better musician with training, he gives credence to the politics of placement. Though unassuming, the narrator reveals that he regards that there are adequate ways of creating music (read white-centric) to be successful and therefore mobile in the music industry. When black people employ the politics of placement to determine how to be mobile, the success of that effort to enact mobility almost always requires white people's attention and sponsorship. Unsurprisingly, exploitation is often a consequence – as the narrator soon finds out with his wealthy benefactor. The agreement between the narrator and his rich white millionaire acquaintance illustrates how black mobility devolves into a benefactor/beneficiary model where the black people (the narrator in this case) are the beneficiaries who receive privilege and acclaim because their sponsor/benefactor vouches for and exposes their utility to broader (read white) society. When the millionaire explains why the narrator should only play ragtime for him and his friends, he emphasizes how the white social circles could benefit: "'Well, I have given them something they've never had before'" (120). The millionaire collects black artistry that (unfortunately for the narrator) comes in the form of the skillful fingers, mind, and body of a black man. There is hardly any nuance here. This white man wants a black man's services but must have complete control of his body. The millionaire holds too much power, evident in his desire and sense of entitlement to have exclusive access to this narrator's talents and his financial (and arguably bodily) autonomy. The millionaire is not content with taking no for an answer and also offers to pay for the narrator's travel expenses and clothing to sweeten the deal. The offer seems flattering at first but proves problematic soon after. The contract, as can be

expected, does become increasingly stifling. The narrator plays numerous dinners and parties. One day, the wealthy benefactor begins to "loan" him to other rich friends (120). The wealthy benefactor's desires and demands colour the narrator as black and therefore subservient and an object for the millionaire's exclusive use. Much as a plantation owner would lease or loan tradesfolk enslaved people, the millionaire loans the narrator to perform for friends.

The narrator must perform no matter how he feels and soon begins to question their arrangement. The millionaire's "powers of endurance in listening" often exceed the narrator's ability to perform. The narrator even plays for him alone at odd hours of the night in his apartments and not always for the white man's amusement: "He would sometimes sit for three or four hours hearing me play, his eyes almost closed, making scarcely a motion except to light a fresh cigarette, and never commenting one way or another on the music" (120). The millionaire still manages to consume the narrator's melodies, but when alone with the music, he now sits in a stupor, unable (or unwilling) to remark on what he hears. His cultural gluttony leaves him unable to appreciate the narrator's talents and the music's affective effect on listeners. Both men suffer from this lack of commentary, especially the narrator, who receives innumerable compliments when he plays at social functions and is thus encouraged to continue playing. The millionaire starves the narrator of these kinds of reactions. Now withholding his praise from the narrator, the millionaire craves black performance but is unwilling to reward the black person who creates it. Money is good, but the relationship sours because there is a contractual obligation coloring their relationship and colouring the narrator.

The narrator stays in the relationship because even though the labor exhausts him, his compensation is so generous that he can forgive the millionaire's thankless and appreciation-less purgatory. Even as the two men tour Europe, the millionaire's addiction to hearing the music

puzzles the narrator because he does not understand why this worldly man is never satisfied. The narrator is further confused when the two visit a party in Europe where other French and German musicians play the piano and ragtime as skillfully as the narrator does, if not better. Well into the night when the function takes place, a "bespectacled, bushy-headed" man takes the ragtime tune the narrator plays and re-works the music: "first in straight chords; then varied and developed it through every know musical form" (141-142). The display takes aback the narrator because this white man can transform and elevate ragtime. He realizes that what he has been doing (i.e., taking white music and translating it into a black genre) is nowhere near as unique and transformative as doing the opposite, as the bushy-haired German does. The ordeal triggers him to take stock of what he is doing with his talents and how he chooses to identify. The narrator decides right then that he wants to leave the employ of the millionaire to play ragtime and other black musical genres like slave songs through the lens of classical piano training. He will immerse himself in this task legible to the world as a black man.

The narrator's conscious decision at this moment demonstrates that passing as black could allow him greater latitude to do something incredible in music by challenging himself and his audience to take black art forms and creativity seriously. As a legibly white musician playing black music, he is a common trope and appropriator. As a black person playing and transforming white music into a black art form, he could (potentially) change more social perceptions of black people, their artistry, and their ingenuity.

Before the narrator ends his partnership with the millionaire, he divulges his plan to return to the US to pass as black to create and teach music out of respect for the white benefactor. Much to his chagrin, the millionaire deftly reminds him that his choice could make his life immensely difficult. His response is alarming but unsurprising. Now that the narrator/musician wants to leave,

the employer paints the black man's decision as foolish. The millionaire meets the narrator's earnest declaration with a derisive smile as he puts his hand on the black man's shoulder and says: "'My boy, you are by blood, by appearance, by education, and by tastes a white man'" (144). The millionaire believes that the narrator/musician should continue to pass as white rather than black because he appears to be white to other people. If physiology is not enough, then blood (that pesky reminder that Barbara and Karen Fields refute the validity of) should prove his whiteness. And of course, education and tastes are crucial as well. The millionaire, though he might not know it, paints the factors that make whiteness what it is superficially. These are all things that the narrator can either acquire or claim without other people knowing the whole truth of his racial identity. However, the millionaire never says that the narrator *is* white, a point that he builds to later in his argument.

Implicit in the millionaire's statements is that the abuses enacted within the US against black people will never change. Without stating it outright, he indicates that if the narrator leaves his employ, he will suffer the same fate as other black people. The millionaire appeals to the narrator to be more sensible and remain in Europe longer. However, his appeal exposes how much he accepts the inevitable fixity of race relations in the US: "Now, why do you want to throw your life away amidst the poverty and ignorance, in the hopeless struggle, of the black people in the United States?" (144). When he questions why the narrator would throw his life away, he characterizes the decision to return to the US to pass as black as wasteful – after all, by blood, appearances, and tastes, the narrator is (similar to) a white man. As the millionaire says, the narrator lives the life of a white man. Other people legibilize him as a white man and treat him as such. The millionaire sees no wrong in passing as white and cannot stand to see what looks like a legibly white man throw good social standing, the ability to travel, and a life of much lesser hardship out

the window to pass as black instead. The "handicap" he foresees the narrator could put on himself will be irreversible since the narrator would have to live "amidst the poverty and ignorance" with other black people in their "hopeless struggle" (144).

Interestingly enough, the millionaire's use of the word "struggle" is revealing, as a struggle involves (at least) two opposing parties. If read within the context of racial placement in the US, the millionaire's comments position white people as the opponents in black people's struggle to achieve mobility. The millionaire's characterization of black people's struggle, though pessimistic, paints a realistic view of race relations in the US at the time. As a wealthy white man, his perspective is necessarily limited to his own experience of seeing black people as racially inferior. He has had what amounts to a black servant at his disposal until this moment. The best outcome for him is to keep the narrator on an indeterminable retainer. He thus invokes the politics of placement to frame his argument as if he is offering benevolent advice in the narrator's best interest. To understand why the millionaire is anything but gracious (and how his actions reflect exploitative tendencies), we need to look no further than how the wealthy man views art and culture as fair game for white appropriation. The millionaire argues that music belongs to everyone, regardless of race and country, thus opening the door for him to justify the white appropriation of black art as entirely permissible.

Furthermore, the millionaire consumes the narrator's talents (to a gluttonous level), and now that his supply will run out, he chooses to keep the narrator in his employ by putting the black man (back) in his place. He opines that if the narrator wants to become a successful composer, he should remain in Europe. When this fails to convince the narrator, the millionaire turns to an extensive monologue positing that the narrator will not make a "good Negro" because he is educated and has traveled the world (145). Once again, the millionaire falls back on his statement

that because the narrator has spent time traveling and becoming more cultured, this black man in front of him has acquired white tastes. The millionaire's logic is that a legibly white man with travel experience and some form of education will never be happy with the limited life accessible to black people in the US. The wealthy benefactor can only legibilize black people as easily-satisfied and unambitious people with no drive to change their lives. Concurrently, however, he positions these same shiftless black people as being in an eternal struggle (one he deems "hopeless") with white people to better themselves and their lives. In short, the millionaire is wrong about black people. They do have ambitions and dreams. He stands in front of one right now.

The narrator insists that he must pass as black even if that means he will throw his life away to achieve something incredible for himself and black people. His persistence to pass as black, even as the millionaire pleads for him not to, demonstrates that passing is (or at least can be) a decision individuals make about how they are legible to the world while cognizant of the power dynamics in their past, present, and future relationships. The narrator wants to become a music composer as both an American and a black person to (hopefully) enact mobility as a black person. This act is the closest he ever comes to enacting mobility as a legibly black person. Despite the negative perceptions, he wants to choose to actively pass as black to show through his experience what black people are capable of. His goal is to associate with, identify, and uplift black people as students and masters of legibly white arts and forms while simultaneously keeping black creativity on full display.

After hearing the narrator's grand plans, the millionaire poses rhetorical questions and opinions about how race relations will never be hospitable in the US. He implies that he would rather the narrator play life's game by the rules of the politics of placement, choosing to passively pass as white rather than actively pass as black for fear of throwing away his life's work. The

millionaire clings to the politics of placement because he and other white people believe that black people are to blame for, and as such, must solve their own problems:

> I have given more study to the race question in the United States than you may suppose, and I sympathize with the Negroes there; but what's the use? I can't right their wrongs, and neither can you, they must do that themselves. They are unfortunate in having wrongs to right, and you would be foolish to take their wrongs unnecessarily on your shoulder. Perhaps some day, through study and observation, you will come to see that evil is a force, and, like the physical and chemical forces, we cannot annihilate it; we may only change its form. (145)

The "race question" up for debate refers to the Negro Problem/Question (NP/Q). The millionaire believes there are no solutions he can offer to solve black people's problems. Simultaneously, he champions the idea that the narrator should remain in his employ to avoid taking part in that hopeless struggle. The white millionaire repeatedly shifts blame to black people for their problems. He recognizes that they are unfortunate to have those problems but still absolves himself and the narrator from guilt for not putting forth the effort to solve them. The millionaire expertly employs racecraft to assemble a smokescreen of contradictory statements that remove him from being a culpable and willing participant in the politics of placement. The mechanics of racecraft and the mental gymnastics displayed by the millionaire in this scene are crucial components of how white society maintains the opinion that the Negro Problem/Question is the Negro's problem. The millionaire strikes a nerve with the musician. After their conversation, the narrator questions whether he wants to uplift black people because they are his people or to distinguish himself within a community where fewer could match his status and achievements

(147). Unable to answer this complex question, the narrator still returns to the US, but has doubts about his decision.

The millionaire accepts that racial hierarchy is inherent to the US' race relations because he thinks that the Negro Problem/Question (NP/Q) is an issue that black people must solve, rather than taking accountability for his part. His lack of a sense of personal responsibility is evident throughout his relationship and debate with the musician/narrator. The millionaire's opinions also hint at a more significant problem that the narrator faces due to the NP/Q: if he wants to be mobile and wrest his legibility and its implications from white people, he will have to wade through the smoke and mirrors of white people's constant need to shift blame onto black people. Rather than white people, he and black people are tasked with discovering or inventing solutions to the problems black people face (primarily caused or worsened by the actions of white people). In contrast, white people repeatedly absolve themselves of any wrongdoing. This is all to say that the problems black people face are not (solely) their own: they are part of a larger conversation about the social ills that white people with the near-exclusive power to enact social policy and legislation create and exacerbate. The Negro Problem/Question requires white people's involvement to solve because, like the white schoolchildren in the narrator's youth, they are the instigators of the problems at hand.

Section 3: Get Ready, There's a Train a-Coming

The Negro Problem/Question (NP/Q) consistently incentivizes the narrator to pass as white throughout the *Autobiography*. The NP/Q centers on black people's (in)ability to control and improve their legibility and mobility, yet strips them of any ability to do either because of the

politics of placement. Specifically, white people cannot or will not untangle their own identities from black people's legibility. Comfortable and familiar with the given order that the politics of placement offers, white people do not want to give up white supremacy. Thus, they talk to death the issue of black people's ability to determine for themselves what their legibility and destinies will be. So insidious is this web of white self-involvement in the NP/Q that even the language that describes the Negro Problem/Question – as if the so-called Negro himself is a problem to be solved – excuses white people from taking any blame for the obstacles they put in black people's way. The most avid supporters (i.e., white people) will endlessly debate the merits and detractors of integration and black people's mobility through the lens of white people. The third section of this chapter unpacks the Negro Problem/Question as a discourse that makes overwhelming use of the politics of placement to control both black and white people's lives. Specifically, a pragmatic close-reading of a debate between a group of white men (a Texan, a former Union soldier from Ohio, a Jewish man, and a professor) about the NP/Q in a train car reveals to the narrator that the NP/Q has little to do with black people's fundamental rights and is more about white people's anxiety about their own (ostensibly fraught) place in society. The Negro Problem/Question is not about black people and their issues but white people's existential identity crisis.

For context, before the Civil War, black people were chattel and non-citizens. In the wake of Emancipation and Reconstruction, white people thought their place in society was (or would be) under threat due to black people's new freedom and appeals for suffrage. Black people were no longer willing to remain at the bottom of the social order. Rather, they wanted access to (more) rights withheld from them that would grant them the ability to participate in all aspects of American life and democracy. The 15th Amendment further complicated both races' place in society, following through on granting black people the right to vote. With the right to vote, black people

began pressing politicians to assist with ongoing issues like poverty, crime, and lack of education. Unfortunately, the white majority proved unwilling to let go of the idea that black people's pressure would ultimately result in integration and appeals for (what had been until that historical moment) white-exclusive rights like mobility. As a reaction to black people's new voice and demands, the NP/Q stoked white people's fear of their displacement as inherently superior. Consequently, white people engaged in a series of political, academic, and scientific discourses that undermined black people's pursuit of equality and mobility to quell black uplift.

In the US's racist society of the late 19th and early 20th century, the politics of placement creates rules of engagement for putting black people and their legibilities onto a social map that would always see them as beneath their white counterparts. At the turn of the 20th century, the politics of placement supports racial hierarchy through its subversion of black mobility. The Negro Problem/Question makes this subversion easier. The NP/Q emerges in everyday conversations about black people's progress to the point that almost every discussion eventually leads to black people and their push for equal rights and mobility. One example of a popular talking point is that black people should solve their problems rather than appeal to the government (i.e., white people) for help. White people cite situations where the government intervenes to prove that black people are inept burdens to the rest of society. This brilliant discursive sleight of hand undermines black uplift because it confirms the assumption that black people are inferior, unintelligent, lazy, and degenerates while disguising white people's causal instigations. Black people implore the government and their white counterparts to see them as people, not burdens. However, they meet opposition whenever they call for white people to acknowledge their part in initiating and exacerbating these problems. Just as the black boy who throws the rock at the white schoolchildren did not encourage the white children to call him the n-word, he still deals with their outrage for

striking back at them. He bears the brunt of the violence because of his resistance to his poor treatment and his attempt to hold white people accountable for their actions. In that situation and on a larger social scale, white people are loath to take any blame and thus employ a politics of placement to cling to the NP/Q and the racial order they know.

Ultimately, the politics of placement bolsters the Negro Problem/Question's logic since it validates an order that white people find comfortable. Rather than question their assumptions about blackness as inferior, white people engage the NP/Q through a barely detectable form of racecraft to argue that black people cannot handle the responsibilities of their newfound freedom and will therefore become burdensome to society. The NP/Q is an aimless dispute *about* black people but not *for* their benefit. The collective white psyche centers (almost narcissistically) whiteness within all things that pertain to black people and their potential to be determiners of their own fates. White people thus build their legibility off the presence and erasure of black people. To be blunt, white people and their "dazzling opportunities" exist in opposition to, but also because of, black people's presence as a foil.

Given how desperately they cling to the politics of placement in their deployment of the NPQ, white people view a society where whiteness is not supreme as chaotic. To (racist) white people who believe oppressive structures that uphold white supremacy are justified and necessary, the social order itself ultimately proves frail if members of the lowest social strata (i.e., black people) can threaten the so-called white supremacy. Du Bois unpacks the ludicrousness of the NP/Q in *The Souls of Black Folk.* He refuses to answer people from "the other world" (i.e., white people) who ask him, "How does it feel to be a problem?" (1-2). These people from "the other world" never directly ask this question. Rather, they use the politics of placement to subtly hide their rhetorical sleight of hand, preferring to "flutter round" the question. They side-step and

smokescreen with euphemisms about exceptional black people and their minimal contributions to non-racism. These "others" try to appease their role in black oppression (e.g., "I know an excellent colored man in my town;" "I fought in Mechanicsville;" or even "Do not these Southern outrages make your blood boil?") (Du Bois 2). Pulling from the grab bag of excuses for racism, white people turn to tokenism (i.e., the excellent colored man), faux-advocacy (i.e., fighting in Mechanicsville), and avoidant aspersions about the South (i.e., boiling blood due to how Southerners inspire outrage). Rather than center and uplift black people, these white people tend to double down on talking around the issues rather than about them. In doing so, they do not have to take any steps to solve the Negro Problem/Question themselves because they can feign disdain and advocacy for black progress.

The Negro Problem/Question interrogates the legitimacy of black mobility through loaded questions and paternalisms that wrestle with white supremacy's narcissism and obsession with white purity. Black people's (perceived and actual) quest for equality troubles white people so much that the latter fervently converse about the former's mere presence as if it were a social ill. The NP/Q does not occur out of concern for black people's ability to self-determine. Instead, white people fearfully cling to the politics of placement to prevent their loss of advantageous status. Thus, The Negro Problem/Question responds to a perceived threat of disruption that encourages browbeating and over-discussion from white people willing to pathologize black people's innate inferiority. As a result, almost any conversation about "the race question" eventually devolves into proof that race relations is a necessary discussion because black people are being too unreasonable with their demands. To this point, the NP/Q is in nearly every conversation throughout the *Autobiography*. The narrator most accurately captures white people's

obsession with the NP/Q when he details how white southerners keep black people in their supposed place:

> The same thing may be said of the white man of the South; *most of his mental efforts run through one narrow channel*; his life as a man and a citizen, many of his financial activities and all of his political activities are impassably *limited* by the ever present "Negro Question." I am sure it would be safe to wager that no group of Southern white men could get together and talk for sixty minutes without bringing up the "race question." If a Northern white man happened to be in the group, the time could be safely cut to thirty minutes. In this respect I consider the conditions of the whites more to be deplored than that of the blacks. Here, a truly great people, a people that produced a majority of the great historic Americans from Washington to Lincoln, now forced to use up its energies in a conflict lamentable as it is violent. (75-76)

The Negro Problem is a pervasive discourse that directly impacts black people's plight for mobility but, unsurprisingly, also affects white livelihood. White people are willing to forego most real progress they could make as a group because they pursue the absolute resolution to their identity crisis in black people's disadvantageous placement (which white people create and further instigate). With this outlook, white people justify their obsession, discussions, and manipulation of the conditions of black people as necessary because their legibility is inextricable from black people.

The above logic about white people's obsessiveness over black people remaining in their place bears out in an experience the narrator witnesses on a boat ride where a prejudiced white passenger tries to have a black passenger removed from the boat cabin on the grounds that the latter should not be there because he is black. The black man, to his credit, remains in the space,

not out of pettiness, but because he is willing to abide by the unspoken rules of the politics of placement until they interfere with his life. Once the incident in the boat cabin subsides, the black man explains to the narrator that the white passenger's motivations are born of "prejudice" (150). Du Bois also uses the same term to describe the "vast despair that engulfs so much of black people's work toward mobility" because of white people's fear that black people do not know their place (8). White people's prejudice is so strong that black people must often preemptively comply with white people's unasked desires or sensibilities. In the situation that unfolds on the boat ride in the *Autobiography*, when prejudice interferes with the black passenger's liberty, he cannot and will not stand by and be told where and how he can be. According to the black passenger, the white person also can remove themselves from the cabin rather than him. However, this is less likely when the politics of placement dictate what spaces are open to black people. The power dynamics are such that white people do not have to remove themselves from the situation. Instead, their prejudice will likely embolden other white passengers to help remove the black man (150).

There are, of course, pros and cons to passive and active resistance to the politics of placement. The black man on the boat could have been dragged out of the area and arrested for not leaving the cabin. Instead, the scene unfolds as a lesson about active and passive resistance to placement and prejudice. The type of resistance matters because both test white people's fortitude and commitment to the politics. The black man could have made a scene (which would be read as active resistance) and have been dragged off the boat. His passive unwillingness, on the other hand, makes the white person's prejudice look unreasonable by comparison. The black man only sat in an area, and did not harm or interact with anyone. The white passenger's reaction would staunchly defend their right to remove black people for simply existing – an, albeit unfair, but not uncommon, prejudiced reaction to black people. The scene exposes the ethical and logical pirouettes white

people employ to avoid realizing that what they seek to uphold is unconscionable and unsustainable. The narrator captures the result of the exhaustion that white people experience in the following statement: "It is a struggle; for though the white man of the South may be too proud to admit it, he is, nevertheless, using in the contest his best energies; he is devoting to it the greater part of his thought and much of his endeavor" (75). The politics of placement requires active participation (and cooperation) from both sides to remain in place. When one party (usually the black one) does not adhere to the politics of placement, racial order as those who rely on the politics know it falls apart. To this end, active and disruptive resistance from black people might illicit an extreme response from white people, whereas passive resistance is sometimes enough to render the politics ineffective – as the interaction on the boat demonstrates.

Passive or active, resistance to placement demonstrates black people's desire to be mobile against all (racist) odds. While aboard a train, the narrator of the *Autobiography* narrator observes a Texan, an Ohioan, a professor (all three white), and a Jewish man as they debate about the NP/Q. Their heated discussion, unsurprisingly, devolves from being about black uplift into an argument over what white people will do if black people become mobile. From this argument, the narrator has the cracks of the Negro Problem/Question exposed before his eyes: white people's discomfort with black people's mobility (independent of white sponsorship and permission) is really what is as stake for white people as they talk the issue of black people's rights to death.

The Jewish man displays restraint in debate (born from his own experience of the politics of placement, no doubt), and has few, if any, lines of actual dialogue throughout the discussion. As the Texan and Ohioan spar, the Jewish man seems to agree that black people should be protected, but he refuses to implicate himself to defend black people. The narrator duly notes the Jewish man's diplomacy: "He knew that to sanction Negro oppression would be to sanction Jewish

oppression and would expose him to a shot along the line from the old soldier, who stood firmly on the ground of equal rights and opportunity to all men" (158). Though the Jewish man does a fine job on the fence, he does not press for black people's mobility, his silence or unwillingness to push back stems from pressure he feels to not ally himself with black people lest he be seen as a sympathizer. He understands that at this moment, with his legibility as a Jew, he is likely to be placed and put beneath all the other white men in the room. The Jewish man and the (yet-to-be-outwardly-coloured) narrator are most likely to be lumped together and treated similarly – after all, they are the two ethnic or racialized individuals and in the minority. Any comment the Jewish man makes defending black people could turn on a dime to project the same prejudice from black people onto him. He might become susceptible to similar ridicule and treatment that black people endure. It is no wonder the Jewish man decides to say hardly anything and offers no outright reproach during the debate. Once again, affiliation alone is tantamount to equal blame – as the black schoolchildren from the narrator's youth witness — so that when white people want to enforce the politics of placement, they consolidate violators into one group when necessary.

The young professor, unlike the Jewish man, tries to advocate as best he can (or is willing to) for black people. He agrees with the Ohioan that black people require more resources to rebuild themselves and their community and are not wholly useless. However, he bears this argument out alongside a statement that he spent a year in the South and must "confess that the problem could hardly be handled any better than it was being handled by the Southern whites" (158). The professor stumbles into a caveat of proponents of black mobility in the Negro Problem/Question discourse: even as an advocate for black people and their mobility, he uses his personal experience with the NP/Q as proof rather than relying on the thoughts and experiences of black people.He cannot possibly understand the stakes of the argument he makes. In the South, black people cannot

vote (without being harassed, if at all) and are still second-class citizens. The professor seeks validation in how he witnesses things being handled. Most of note, he is an educator with advanced degrees working at a university in Alabama. His ideas on the NP/Q might skew apologist regarding black people's ineptitude after the Emancipation. Unable to ignore the professor's obvious positionality for making the claims he does, the Ohioan waves away the professor's remarks, citing that because the man holds a university position in a state institution in Alabama, local politics and attitudes may have tainted his ability to weigh in on the issue. The Ohioan all but says this when he insists that the professor only thinks the NP/Q is being properly handled because he sits comfortably in a university surrounded on all sides by people who would oust him for any conflicting or contradictory opinions he may have. The professor occupies a seat of power in a space that discourages advocacy on behalf of black inferiority. When the educator posits that things are on track for resolution, he effectively excuses and co-signs white Southerners' actions and prejudices toward black people. With his flawed logic pointed out and laid bare, the professor goes silent after the Ohioan's comment.

The two men left to debate are the Texan and the Ohioan/G.A.R. man/former Union soldier. They butt heads initially over whether or not the Civil War was the causal event that sparks the NP/Q. The Texan maintains that the Civil War was a "criminal mistake on the part of the North" and that the South could never forget their humiliation. Aware that the Texan, like many Southerners in such debates, argues because of his vast ego and Southern pride, the Ohioan replies that the South was the primary instigator of the war. He ends his statement by saying that Southerners choose not to forget their defeat or instigative actions. The two men continue to verbally spar, with neither getting an upper hand for very long. Their rhetorical salvos lack an ethos outside of their own egos, however, and as a result their arguments lack ethical grounds to debate

the fates of a group of people neither of them gives a voice to. In fact, neither man is willing to include what black people are doing and dying for. Neither of their arguments considers that black people have any innate agency to determine what is best for themselves. They mention black people only to further preach about how the US interacts with black people as if they are wards. As they continue their back-and-forth, these two white men erase black people as they abstract black autonomy and legibility as nonexistent in their nation's development. Black people are only the fuel for this raging inferno of nationalism and self-aggrandizement.

"Fierce, eloquent, and profane in his argument," the Texan vehemently views black people as burdens on society unworthy of any support or sympathy (159). So sure is he that black people are not and should not be equals to white men, that he maintains that "no country at all" would be better than having black people "over you" (160). The Texan grossly misunderstands equality. His comment about black people being "over" white people reveals his fear that black people want more than equality. Many white racists who uphold the politics of placement have that same fear. They think black people wanting to be viewed as equals is proof that the blacks wish to wrest power from white people and become as powerful and vindictive as their white predecessors. In other words, white people believe that black people want to enforce the same oppression white people commit. By this logic, the Texan believes that if black people become his equals, they will commit the same travesties as the white people who held power before them. The sentiment, ludicrous as it is, reveals the self-obsession that whiteness pushes into any conversations about black mobility. For the Texan to say that having no country is better than having black people socially ranked as equal to him means that he would rather live without a nation-state than have to reorder the racial caste system. He essentially finds anarchy more acceptable than having civilized and competent black people be his equals, let alone hold seats of power.

To further instigate why black people do not deserve mobility, the Texan blames black people, not the Union, for the Civil War. He poses a rhetorical question: "Do you believe that all the niggers on earth are worth the good white blood that was spilt?" (160). He does not, detailing why voting is a wasted right on the ignorant black masses because "we [read white legislators and white people by extension] buy 'em like so many hogs." Once again, he inserts his own fears, voice, hang-ups, and prejudices to explain black people's motivations and habits, then launches into his claims as if they are backed by sound reason. Aware of the Texan's inner-turmoil-turned-fearmongering, the Ohioan retorts that in the northern cities like New York, Boston, and Chicago, ignorant voters exist everywhere and that not all those votes are from black people. Ignorance is hardly a good reason to hold over black people's heads the literal right to vote — ignorant white voters exist too. In response to the Texan's following comment about any education making "slick rascals" of black people, the Ohioan challenges the validity of the Texan's information. He asks how many educated black men the Texan knows. Having made the statement he just did, the Texan should have know a few of these "rascals." However, the Texan admits he knows only one, and he is in prison. That is, admittedly, only one black rascal, so the other ones the Texan alludes to must only be known anecdotally, if it all. To save face, he kicks off the following sequence of their argument with a question of his own: "'Do you mean to claim, ballot or no ballot, education or no education, that niggers are the equals of white men?'"

The Union man's answer points to the fragility of the Texan's argument. The Texan and every proponent of the politics of placement use all sorts of abusive tactics to stall black mobility. The Ohioan has a great point that the narrator speaks to earlier in the novel – oppression makes black people's success harder even though they are allegedly inferior. The Ohioan rattles off his answer excellently: "If the Negro is so distinctly inferior, it is a strange thing to me that it takes

such tremendous effort in the part of the white man to make him realize it, and to keep him in the same place into which inferior men naturally fall" (160-161). The Texan, unable or unwilling to engage with the idea of white people's efforts to constantly undermine black people, instead comments on black inferiority as he bolsters his claim for why the Negro is weaker and gets "shoved to the wall." In short, he thinks it is black people's fault that they get shoved to the wall. Additionally, this is to be expected because "no race in the world has ever been able to stand competition with the Anglo-Saxon…the masters of the world" (161). By aligning himself with the allegedly superior Anglo-Saxon race, the Texan deftly circumnavigates taking blame for his or the race's actions against black people. Instead, he centers how great Anglo-Saxons are and how weak black people are, separating the cause(rs) from the(ir) effect. To draw the point home, he adds that the black people of the South will never change history. The Texan aggrandizes all white people's accomplishments by subtly pointing out how black people cannot challenge history. Thankfully, the Ohioan shuts down his statement when he mentions that the Anglo-Saxon race stands on the shoulders of other great races and civilizations that came before them and had and will have their time to shine in the global consciousness. However, he does not rebut the Texan's statements about black people's innate inferiority. Once again, the conversation becomes a match between the two white men for the sake of their egos rather than black people's uplift.

As if sensing that he is losing the debate, the Ohioan pulls out a trump card: he outs the narrator as a black man who is passing as white. The Ohioan characterizes the narrator as a man who belongs to "the greatest race the world ever produced, [but] is almost ashamed to own it" (162-163). Before this point, the narrator has said nothing. In fact, the narrator still says nothing because the Ohioan only enlists his presence (not his voice) as proof that black people have tragic lives. The Ohioan's off-hand inclusion of the narrator sets the stage for both debaters to still center

(their) whiteness in a conversation about black people. Neither man lets the narrator speak for himself. For the second time in their argument, the two men bring black people to the fore only to erase them and their ability speak on their own behalves. Instead, the Texan and the Ohioan continue to argue about national pride and travesties. The Union man uses the greatest race label as a concession to the Texan while erasing blackness. Even if he disagrees with the statement about Anglo-Saxons being the greatest race, he instrumentalizes the narrator's passing as fuel for his argument. Moreover, he does not invite the narrator to comment for himself. In fact, neither man does. Readers only see the debaters engage with the narrator to point out his presence as a counterpoint, but they never hear a word from him otherwise.

Seeing that he must shut down the conversation, the Texan resorts to the age-old argument that miscegenation is the ultimate (and undesirable) result of black uplift, equality, and mobility: "Do you want to see a mulatto South? To bring it home to you, would you let your daughter marry a nigger?" (163). The Texan must swing things back to where the politics of placement is applicable. His incredulity at the idea of the South being full of mulattos is unconscionable. Not only is the South full of mulattos already, but many might not even have light skin. The legacy of the South and its relationship with slavery is one of inhumane acts of miscegenation done on the part of white men. Be that as it may, the Texan's implicative statements about racial-mixing touch a nerve. The Ohioan's argument slips away because of his hidden prejudices about miscegenation, and with his own daughter, no less. He replies to the Texan's hypotheticals with an absolute answer: "No, I wouldn't consent to my daughter's marrying a nigger, but that doesn't prevent my treating a black man fairly." For the first time in the debate, the northerner uses the n-word to describe black people. This label occurs here after the Texan strikes a chord that taps into the Ohioan's racist sensibilities. Curiously, this statement shuts down the debate for the soldier

altogether. He cannot abide by his daughter's marriage to an n-word. He switches back to black man within one sentence as if he catches himself or sees a difference between the two things. In fact, he also refers to black people in three different ways throughout this entire interaction to classify them (the n-word, black men/man, and Negro). He flits back and forth between the socially acceptable black or n-word and the almost scientific Negro as labels for black people as he progresses his argument from personal stakes back to a theoretical set of ideas. The Texan, pleased that he has unraveled the Ohioan, is done with the argument. He passes a flask of whisky around the cabin to signal his resignation from the dispute, and even goes as far as to concede that the northerner argues well, but black people will always be a problem in the South.

The conversation I've just recapitulated demonstrates quite vividly how debate about the Negro Problem/Question exposes the way white people refuse to engage with black people as inherently deserving of humanity and mobility. From the de-centering of black autonomy to the use of the narrator's condition of passing without letting him speak for himself, the debate proves that white perceptions of black mobility are fraught with pitfalls that can trip up even the most sincere sympathizer or the most well-meaning advocate. The narrator captures this dissonance quite adeptly when he muses that the race question's biggest obstacle is white people's acceptance that they hold (part of) the solution:

> The main difficulty on the race question does not lie so much in the actual condition of the blacks as it does in the mental attitude of the white, and a mental attitude, especially one not based on truth, can be changed more easily than actual conditions. That is to say, the burden of the question is not that the whites are struggling to save ten million despondent and moribund people from sinking into a hopeless slough of ignorance, poverty, and barbarity in their very midst, but that they are unwilling to open certain doors of opportunity

and to accord certain treatment to ten million aspiring, education-and-property acquiring people. (166)

The narrator concludes that the Negro Problem/Question is white people's problem with blackness and thus themselves. The NP/Q problem both starts and can stop with them. But they are unwilling to end their overabundant discussions of the NP/Q because the entire argument is an affective and effective apparatus that immediately situates all people, blacks and whites, on a racist social map. A bona fide solution to the question requires white people's acknowledgment of the centrality of race as a factor that inhibits black people's mobility in the US, which might illuminate to them that racist interpretations of legibility is an inhibitor to black people's mobility. Black people might have a slightly easier road toward mobility, but until white people are willing to grant black people agency, the Negro Problem/Question only affirms white beliefs that black people do not have the tools to dig themselves out of a hole white people dug in the first place. White people's removal of colouring and inferior racial legibility as a barrier to mobility is not the only thing black people need to be mobile, but it would make mobility vastly easier.

Section 4: The Final Colouring

The narrator has numerous chances to let other people legibilize and colour him throughout *Autobiography*. However, when he witnesses the public lynching of a black man, he can no longer disregard the politics of placement's violence toward black people and, consequentially, himself. This horrifying experience confirms to him that being black validates unpleasant and inescapable placement. Seeing that blackness is the same as a death sentence or resignation to poverty, he effectively undermines other black people's mobility as he chooses to

be mobile legibly as a white person more often than not. Even so, when he falls in love with a white woman, he decides to (eventually) confess to her that he is part black. His honesty initially backfires (she leaves him after receiving the news) but returns to marry him. Wary of being left alone, the narrator begins passing as a white man to remain secure in his marriage, fatherhood, and future business practices, but he ponders the merits and drawbacks of his decision. The final section of this chapter details the pivotal lynching scene and the implications of the narrator's decision to passively pass as white.

Before I explore the pivotal lynching scene in depth, it is worth mentioning that the narrator experiences life as a black personality (with all its access to a rich culture as well as its lack of access to treatment with dignity) in rare instances where he chooses to actively pass or has no other choice but to be coloured as black. As can be expected due to his constant internal back-and-forth with the politics of placement, he rarely colours himself intentionally unless he stands to gain more opportunities to see or live the black lived experience. His decision to be legible as black affords him access to "Negro life," but also reveals his misplaced (no pun intended) idea of perpetual black inferiority.

One the narrator's most profound experiences as a legibly black person occurs when he has to take a train ride in the porter's basket, where soiled linens and suitcases go while the train is underway to destinations. The narrator wants to go to college in Atlanta and makes the trip there, but someone steals his tuition and board money. Unable to buy a ticket to board as an official passenger, he finds out from a friendly black porter that work is available in Jacksonville, Florida. The porter also offers him a free ride in the cramped porter's basket. The narrator, eager to find some new place to live and with no other choice, jumps at the opportunity. Little does he know that the trip will mimic the Middle Passage in one of Johnson's few reminders to the narrator and

readers of one of the most studied events to shape modern black legibility and black movement through space. The narrator gets to live life, for that brief period, on the way to Florida as if he were a black stowaway — and he is miserable for it.

Johnson does not spare the narrator from a terrible journey in his direct call-back to black future enslaved people's trip across the Atlantic. The enslaved were packed into the cargo bellies of ships and kept crammed far too tightly into the space in a claustrophobic nightmare. The narrator too spends nearly twelve hours doubled up in the porter's basket, surrounded by used linens and unable to stand straight. The smell of damp, dirty towels sickens him, the air is hot and suffocating, and at each lurch of the car over the none-too-smooth track, the narrow compartment causes him to bump his arms and legs against the small walls. He even experiences nausea despite not eating before he boards the train. At one point, he has grave doubts about whether he will reach his destination alive. He retrospectively muses that he would prefer to walk if he had to make the trip again (65). His experience traveling in the porter's basket sees the narrator experience one of the negative experiences of being black in the US. He has no train ticket, so he must stow away like a criminal. If caught riding the train without a ticket, he would surely be arrested. His only option (outside of having to walk, hitch car rides, or train hop on cargo trains from Atlanta to Jacksonville), is to stow away like a fugitive. After the entire ordeal, his reaction to this trip fuels his reasoning for why he ultimately chooses not to be read as black. To the narrator, black people are constantly susceptible to becoming the victims of undignified travel and even worse racial violence. In the light of these moments when he undergoes some of that lack of dignity or sees racial violence against black people, he decides that he cannot bring himself to live life as legibly black if he does not have to. In rationalizing this decision, he tells himself that he lets other people

identify him as white because black people "allow" themselves to be the victims of poor treatment. This backwards logic bears out when he witnesses the lynching.

On the eve of the lynching, the narrator visits a small Southern town where he receives room and board with a schoolteacher to discuss the race question. Late at night or early in the morning, the town stirs with news of some horrible crime, and search parties teem throughout searching for a criminal. A practically formulaic lynching scene unfolds in the morning: two men on horseback drag a black man into the middle of the town. A crowd of white people gathers to watch the criminal (whose crime is still unknown to readers) receive punishment. The white people place a rope around the criminal's neck, but a cry comes out from the crowd to burn him. Since the politics of placement is nothing if not democratic (or at least democratically upheld), the man will be burned instead of hanged. The people tie him to a railroad post with chains and a rope. Throughout all this, the criminal/future victim does not utter a word or make a sound. He is fearful but also incredulous at the speed and efficiency of his death sentence. He never contests his sentence because he has no time to do so. Even if he does, the crowd there will not listen to him – they are all complicit in his death because they think they know what he has done and want to see justice. The alleged criminal will also not find support in the black community if he cries out for them. The few black people in the town gather on the outskirts of the whole scene but say or do nothing to intervene because any defense of what the white townspeople see as a legible criminal will place the crosshairs firmly on the defenders' backs. The entire scene is an example of how quickly and definitively the politics deals with transgressors and how the power of groupthink and mass acceptance of the outcome negates real justice. There is no proof that this black man is a criminal, but he receives the death penalty from the crowd because they are both jury and executioner. The politics of placement emboldens them to not only make a spectacle of his death

but to relish (if not fully understand) their power. Even so, while some (white) people cheer when the flames engulf the black man, others are taken aback at what they have done or allowed to happen. And the narrator, unable to take his eyes off the poor man, witnesses the entire scene in horror.

Afterward, the narrator tries to unpack the scene carefully. However, every conclusion he reaches to coax his nerves reflects an internalized form of racecraft in which he paints black people as willing potential victims of racism rather than condemn the egregious acts of white people. A "great wave of humiliation and shame" sweeps over him to know that he belongs to "a race that could be so dealt with" so harshly (188). He insinuates that black people are complicit in their placement and treatment. Instead of being ashamed for being part/half white (the part of him that would likely condone this sort of violence toward black people), he places the blame/shame on black people's unwillingness to resist and push back against this violence. He has had numerous conversations about the race question/Negro Problem/Question with black people enough to know they comply only to remain alive, but they also are willing resist poor treatment. The black man from the boat ride is proof of this. He has also seen firsthand that white people will go to great lengths (even at their peril) to preserve racial order — as both the Texan and Ohioan from the train ride prove when they perform psychological gymnastics to not let him weigh in on the NP/Q. But the narrator completes the act of racecraft by abstracting (and absolving) white racists' motivations as only reflections of the nation's politics of placement. While he is not altogether wrong in his conclusion, he does skip a logical step: white people in the lynching scene commit the egregious act. They should be held responsible for their actions, or at the very least accept what they have done. In contrast, some people go so far as to turn their heads away not to look.

Although their guilt haunts their complicity and willingness to stand by or participate in a communal lynching, no one in the crowd speaks out against the lynching. No one mentions due process. Instead, they all gather, instigate, and perform their roles as fellow lynchers. While their actions do reflect what the US co-signs as necessary justice for perceivably guilty black people, these white people's actions result in no immediate condemnation. This country, which the narrator casually bills as the "great example of democracy in the world," is the only space on earth where a human being could be burned alive (188). However, the nation will not hold its white citizens responsible for their actions. The US is complicit with lynchings, but such a broad statement does little to change the motivations of white people's racism.

The narrator further contemplates how white people, even those who mean well, distance themselves from the travesties they commit or witness. He returns momentarily to the idea that Southerners are unreliable sources for answers to the NP/Q. After all, many southerners would agree that lynchings are justifiable acts that quell black unrest and violence. The narrator even dismisses the idea that more liberal Southerners are trustworthy advocates for black people because he imagines their will to see to black liberation wanes under the sustained pressure of their environments. The professor from the train ride argument is a great example of this phenomenon: he concludes that things are being handled as best as they possibly can with white people still making decisions on behalf of their black counterparts. Even as black people are kept from voting and are relegated to stagnant job markets where they earn pennies compared to white workers, people like the professor are fine with the slow progress and status quo. Black people, on the other hand, are growing impatient all the while. In the narrator's own words, men like the professor will still "cower and tremble before 'Southern opinion'" (188). Southern opinion forces the professor from the train ride to cease his feedback about the NP/Q. These same white people will place

themselves apart from black people even if they offer their sympathies such that they will preface their thoughts with "glowing rhetorical tribute[s] to the Anglo-Saxon's superiority and to refer to the 'great and impassable gulf' between the races' fixed by the Creator at the foundation of the world," only to return to the fact that they believe in and will thus do very little to change the immutability of black racial inferiority (188-189). Their need to distance the two races prompts them to absolve themselves from further guilt, but they do not offer more solutions. Wide as that gulf may be, the narrator himself is proof that people of mixed race still find themselves sympathetic but not empathetic to black legibility's disadvantages even as they condemn the violence white people are willing to inflict. Logically speaking, people who can pass for white should be more likely to speak out against these travesties. But along with "three or four million people with the blood of both races in their veins," the narrator also fails to do this. Their silence reflects how the politics of placement remains in effect through guilt and shame about blackness and the insurmountable task to erase white supremacy from US discourse (188-189).

The narrator practically unravels all the excellent work he has done becoming self-conscious up to this point in the novel when he decides to let others legibilize him however they please:

> I argued that to forsake one's race to better one's condition was no less worthy an action than to forsake one's country for the same purpose. I finally made up my mind that I would neither disclaim the black race nor claim the white race; but that I would change my name, raise a mustache, and let the world take me for what it would; that it was not necessary for me to go about with a label of inferiority pasted across my forehead. (190)

The narrator mentions that he should not have to walk around the world as an inferior person but says nothing of his fairer skin's benefit as a label of superiority. Once again, let me

emphasize that passing is an active process that involves a choice to be legible in a certain way. When the narrator forfeits his autonomy to preemptively influence what other people read as his legibility, his ability to pass suffers because he gives up that initial point of control that is crucial to passing actively. He lets other people decide what race he belongs to, allowing them to choose how to treat him in future contexts. In effect, he erases his past and current self so that others can produce his future for him: a forfeiture tantamount to the social death of his past and present self. He (passively) passes and becomes mobile, yes. However, he can never achieve mobility as a *black* person.

To help erase his historical self, the narrator grows a mustache and changes his name. He gives up the armor his blood affords him and raises one made of his facial hair. The mustache gives him some level of personal comfort to know that other people who may recognize his clean-shaven face will not be able to identify him now. He hides behind his facial hair, which is a curious tactic since hair is one of the most identifiable legibility markers that differentiate white and black people. Hair on his head might give up the jig (e.g., the "woolly-headed Negro" that Walt Whitman alludes to in "Song of the Open Road" comes to mind), but facial hair might offer a better disguise. For good measure, he also changes his name, which could afford him an increased level of security even if he is recognized and will benefit his ability to pass more advantageously as white

After the fateful decision, the narrator is, to his credit, honest with himself about why he chooses to forfeit control over the ability to actively pass. The shame he feels at being black after the lynching, however, still informs his perception of not just himself but all black people more broadly:

> All the while I understood that it was not discouragement or fear or search for a larger field of action and opportunity that was driving me out of the Negro race. I knew it was shame,

> unbearable shame. Shame at being identified with a people that could with impunity be treated worse than animals. For certainly the law would restrain and punish the malicious burning alive of animals. (190-191)

The narrator's willingness to paint black people as agreeable victims of racial violence mirrors the contempt white people feel about black people's desire to put up with the conditions they experience. Rather than pin his shame on whiteness and its misdeeds and misconceptions, he doubles down on the idea that black people's futures are worse than animals' lives. With this view of a fixed and insurmountable obstacle, he resigns his right to resist the politics of placement that perpetuates fixity and immobility in black people. As he does, he falls into the trap that so many white (and black) people fall into, which leads to large-scale immobility for most black people.

While passively passing as a white man, the narrator later falls in love with a white woman, but finds that he does not want to lie about his race. His love for the woman and fear that she will not reciprocate his love because he is black complicates his decision to reveal his secret. He passes as white quite carelessly before this relationship, but now the stakes are much higher for both lovers because his passing could leave him vulnerable to being coloured by her, losing her because she will not have a black lover, or maybe even result in him losing his life when others discover that he is black and dating a white woman. She might also face ostracization for loving a black man. As he contemplates the pros and cons, he dissects his ability to play the part of a white man adequately. Paranoid that his new lover might be able to discern his true racial identity, the narrator second-guesses his ability to pass and even who he is at his core. He ponders whether there is a difference between him and the white men he often fools into thinking he is white. If there is, the difference is only superficial: apart from what they can detect with their eyes (and, of course, their prejudices and preconceived ideas about what constitutes blackness), his secret is somewhat safe.

Passively passing as he does, though, he is at the mercy of these white men who could either prove or disprove his whiteness, just as they would his blackness.

Despite his self-doubt, he continues his relationship with his lover and eventually asks her to marry him. He does not want to continue to lie to her about his race, though, because should they marry, he may cause her to deal with the struggle he hates so much. He characterizes his inner struggle with a poignant metaphor: "I am sure I should have found it easier to take the place of a gladiator, no matter how fierce the Nubian lion, than to tell that slender girl that I had Negro blood in my veins" (200). His inner debate has no nuance: whiteness in this scenario is a gladiator that tries to defend itself (to the death) against blackness, portrayed as a Nubian lion. He knows that whiteness will make his decision to marry easier, but the pesky Negro blood in his veins makes this seemingly straightforward task dangerous.

After this internal battle, the narrator finally decides to do the one thing he has never done publicly since the lynching: he colours himself black. He tells his partner and immediately notices a difference in how she perceives him. She eyes his whole face and body like so many other white people have throughout his life. He feels her grow cold as she looks at him "with a wild, fixed stare as though [he] was some object she had never seen" (205). The narrator transforms into an object immediately upon this revelation, and his greatest fears come true. He feels her trying to discern who he was, is, and will be to her in these few seconds. Ironically, he runs the same risk of this kind of exposure when he decides to let others choose his legibility for him. He just never cares more about the stakes in this situation because this is his current lover and potential wife. Scenarios like this are always likely, but now that his lover invests her whole self in the relationship, he hates that she sees him as a liar and a deceiver. Seen for the first time this way, he morphs from an object

into a “thick-featured and crimp-haired” creature with black skin (205). She excuses herself from the scene and his life, and he curses that he has Negro blood in his veins.

Not willing to give up, the narrator sends his former lover a letter to explain why he felt the need to lie about his race. In that letter, he asks a crucial question that he promptly answers: “What is it that stands in the way of our happiness? It is not what you feel or what I feel; it is not what you are or what I am. It is what others feel and are. But, oh! Is that a fair price?” (206). His appeal to his former lover rests on one statement that directly exposes the politics of placement and its role in their love lives: that other people dictate whether they can love each other as a black man and a white woman. He questions why others should have any control over his life and implores her to question this too. Though he does not know, he confronts what is crucial to Du Bois’ idea of self-consciousness: that he, nor any black people, should move through the world at the behest of white people or anyone else but themselves is utterly appalling. He alone should know who he is and be comfortable and self-assured enough to determine for himself what treatment he deserves from others. Self-consciousness can assure him of his ability to transcend the limitations white people prescribe to them as indicative of black legibility. His life should be his own, and only through self-consciousness can he elude white control through the politics of placement. His words strike home for his lover. She returns and decides to marry him.

It bears mentioning that the narrator succeeds in winning over his lover *as a black man* willing to fight for his right to love her, a white woman. Only when he sheds his fears about how others will perceive them both (but namely himself) does she relent and come back to him. This should be proof to him that his self-consciousness as a black person who identifies as black is a strength rather than a weakness. He might still be susceptible to poor treatment and receive fewer

opportunities as a legibly and intentionally-black identifying man, but he would become morally unimpeachable for standing as actively black rather than passively as white.

Be that as it may, the narrator still remains wary of his decision and thus undoes the good work which he laid the foundation for in his letter. Even though his white lover chooses to marry him, the narrator remains hyper-vigilant that she will see some “shortcoming” that she unconsciously attributes to his racial makeup rather than who he is as a person (210). He sees himself through her eyes and detects blame where there is none to see or assign, and if she would frame any flaws he has as a fault of his race rather than who he is, she effectively could colour him as black. As with Shiny, the narrator remains susceptible to constant reminders of his race and a label that sticks no matter what he does. In this case, though, his wife seems able to threaten him with colouring. As a result, he experiences the erasure of his ability to control his legibility in his relationship and this sends him further into a spiral about his ability to pass as white adequately since both partners know his secret. The politics of placement makes his race so immutable that personality traits threaten to become part of his racial makeup in his dealings with his wife.

After all his efforts, the narrator feels he has never been black but just a spectator of black people. His voyeurism grants him access to Negro “inner life” in the clubs and old gambling venues he frequents as a young man. Since he no longer chooses to present as black to the public, however, he feels that he has become “a coward, a deserter, and…possessed by a strange longing for my mother’s people” (210). Even in his remorse, he does not claim to be black. Black people are his mother’s people. Readers could assume that these are also his people by association and matrilineal blood, but he exposes why the politics of placement sinks so deep that he wants no association with blackness altogether. The narrator moves forward in his life as a white man. He knows that means he can never claim the accomplishments and successes black people, his mother’s people,

have earned as they struggle with oppression. The narrator feels that he pales in comparison to Booker T. Washington and other "race men" because his motivations to be a white man make him selfish and cowardly. He is not a race man. He is a white man. In his own words, he states: "I am an ordinarily successful white man who has made a little money. They are men who are making history and a race. I, too, might have taken part in a work so glorious" (211). [10]

As the novel concludes, he finally sees that whatever mobility he experiences will result from his having chosen whiteness over blackness (even if passively) and will represent white mobility, not black mobility. He sells his "birthright for a mess of pottage" and feels the loss every day, but he still swears never to tell his children so that he never colours them for the rest of their lives as he was. However, by not telling them that they are (part) black, he leaves them susceptible to the same threat of sudden and uncomfortable coloring in school, work, or their love lives – just as he experienced in his life. The most regrettable thing about his decision to passively pass and not tell his children is that he will repeat the cycle of colouring that his mother exacerbated when he was a child. By not informing his children, the politics' effects will find their way to his children and (possibly) forever scar them. This next generation will have to try and solve the Negro Problem/Question for themselves and do all the work their father did. The narrator's metaphor of the mess of pottage translates to black people's experience of mobility: black people must choose to be unabashedly black and question the conditions of their lives *and* white people's role in creating those conditions.

[10] In truth, these race men that Booker T. Washington looks to in such high regard are examples of entrepreneurial black men who advance themselves and become the tokens. They become the leading reason black people are told that they can succeed and provide examples for how to do so. Washington believes that the Negro Problem/race question can be solved only through individual progress: "what one man can do, another may do." (*Solving the Negro Problem in Detail* 1-2). This logic falls apart given that tokenism creates standards that are not sustainable for a larger and more diverse group of people. This will be discussed in more depth in Chapter Two.

Conclusion

The politics of placement gate-keeps mobility as a privilege only people of the best legibility can experience. Passing is not the only way to avoid blackness' impact. Sometimes, exceptional black people become the standard by which other black people are to follow. These exceptional black people thus police themselves and other black people on the grounds that they somehow possess the key to mobility through sheer hard work. An example of intra-community politics occurs in the *Autobiography* when the narrator travels to Washington D.C. While there, a black doctor whose home he stays at states that lower-class black people should not represent all black people's legible potential. He refers to low-class black people as "lazy, loafing, good-for-nothing darkies" not worthy of graves but still the ones that give black people a bad name (155). Instead, he posits that "we [meaning he and other black professionals of higher-class rank] are the race, and the race ought to be judged by us, not by them. Every race and every nation should be judged by the best it has been able to produce, not by the worst" (155-156). He views black professionals like himself who occupy the elite class of black people as the best the race offers. He is almost as harsh as the Texan from the train car ride. In that harshness, though, a significant problem emerges: he reproduces the same system that views black people as collectively inferior within the black community. No black person who uses this politics or is susceptible to this politics of placement can be mobile. When the so-called best that the race has to offer is black people of a high class, the black people at the bottom of the hierarchy must strive to be as prosperous and well-mannered or risk their dismissal or erasure from social arenas. In other words, black people of the lower class must strive toward exceptionalism (not always present as tokenism) as a norm in their lives. To do this would only exacerbate the double-consciousness of black existence.

To better understand the black doctor's statements, the narrator's observations about the three different classes of the black race (i.e., the desperate class, the servant class, and the upper class) are helpful. To the narrator, the distinct classes of black people exist "not so much in respect to themselves as in respect to their relations to the whites," which is to say that an intricate hierarchy always maintains order through black people's relationship to whiteness (76). The "desperate class" consists of laborers and criminals (e.g., lumber and turpentine camp workers, ex-convicts, bar-room loafers) whom white people regard as if they are mules: "A thing to be worked, and beaten, and killed for kicking" (77-78). In return, the desperate class harbors a sullen hatred for all white men but still conforms to the politics "much as a trained lion with low muttered growls goes through his stunts under the crack of the trainer's whip." Many members of the desperate class might become violent at the slightest offense from white people. As a result, they are prominently legible as a threat to white people and the social order. Even though the desperate class represents a small proportion of the black people, "it often dominates public opinion concerning the whole race," partly because this class confirms white peoples' ever-present fear that black resistance is always possible (77). This is the class most prominent in the fearful discussions that occur in the NP/Q about black uprising, mobility, and racial war. White people fear black resistance so much but then exacerbate this (perceived) threat through increasingly discriminative and heinous acts that transform the possibility of violence from the desperate class into a probable insurrection. White people obsess over probable insurrections so much that they have no other choice but to cling to the Negro Problem/Question discourse to calm their fears: why would a race so inferior pose any threat to the allegedly might Anglo-Saxons? Uncertain but aware enough of the danger of insurrection, white people like the Texan from the train ride look to maintain peace (read here as order) through the threat of violence. In yet another instance of racecraft at work, the

desperate class's existence justifies white people's preoccupation with the entire black community's oppression.

White people are more agreeable and accepting of the second class of black people due to occupations representative of this class: servants, washerwomen, waiters, cooks, coachmen, and other domestic service capacities. Legible as "simple, kind-hearted, and faithful," they are not a threat and can thus secure their place with proximity to white people and (ostensibly) better legibility. One result of that better. Legibility is that they receive affection rather than repulsion, and these black people return the favor: "*Any white person is 'good' who treats them kindly, and they love him for that kindness"* (78). Since minimal friction ever occurs between these two groups, black people's second (servant) class is the example of ideal black obeisance that the politics of placement requires. While the relationship between the second class of black people and white people seems symbiotic at first glance, it is still rife with disproportionate power dynamics that always rely on black people's subservience.

To be fair, a significant impediment to black mobility is that, often, white people conditionally permit some black people (read the exceptional few) to be mobile as long as they remain subservient and of value to white people. The narrator explains how many southern white people "despise the Negro as a race" but still carry "a strong affection" for some black individuals (171). Those few black individuals are usually friendly members of this second class of black people who live "on terms on the greatest intimacy" with their white counterparts but only because they care for white children, keep the white family's secrets, and offer comfort and counsel when asked. In short, these black people are instrumental in the upkeep of white people's lives and can thus remain close to white people who view their sole purpose as props and supports for their (read white-exclusive) mobility and comfort. In truth, these black people's chances of mobility diminish

because they are instruments of white comfort. After all, white people do not benefit from a self-conscious black populace willing to resist placement.

The third and final class of black people (to which the black doctor/host from D.C. belongs) includes tradespeople, professionals, well-to-do folk, and generally educated black people. These are the "slick rascals" the Texan refers to on the train car ride. This class either unconsciously or knowingly recreates the politics of placement because they are "as far removed from the whites as the members of the first class" (78-79). They often shield themselves from the more overt forms of racism through their distance from white people and the desperate class. Their willingness to differentiate themselves from the rest of the black population signals a need to rely on a politics of placement that puts them above other black people they see as beneath them. The third, high class of black people threatens the mobility of the other two classes because they become the models by which those very same classes become adequate according to white society. By setting the bar so high and with privilege so out of reach to other black people, they embody yet undermine black mobility because they are exceptional and revel in their exceptionality rather than question it. As a result, the other two classes of black people revere and condemn the third class as traitors.

The idealized class of black people within the politics of placement in the U.S. is the second servant class because this group does not press to change the status quo and is agreeable to white people's politics. However, any ideal representative class of black people that the politics of placement regards as the best is a ruse because an ideal class representing all black people should be questionable (i.e., they must be allowed to kick, as it were). Moreover, black people must demonstrate an unwillingness to receive conditional favorable legibility to be mobile. Mobility requires a self-consciousness firmly rooted in self-respect rather than external coercion. This proposition is fundamental to how this dissertation defines mobility.

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Chapter 2 - The Economics of Placement in William Attaway's *Blood on the Forge*

The politics of placement is endemic within the United States in *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man*, particularly as pertaining to the ongoing discourse about black people's place in society. The Negro Problem/Question (NP/Q), or the race question as it is otherwise known, forces the ex-coloured narrator to passively pass as legibly white for the remainder of his life so that mobility does not remain out of his reach – even as his decision to be legibilized by other people lends currency to the politics of placement and allows the system to continue and flourish.

Beginning in post-Emancipation America, these politics begins to morph and intensify over time into a more insidious placement system that strengthens NP/Q arguments about what black people's place should be on a larger national scale. Black people, no longer sources of free labor, begin to trouble the open market with their desire for compensation. Thus, labor organizing is one of the many focuses of the NP/Q's debates. Since the nation has no free black labor force anymore and the US economy is still evolving, the nation's relationship with black people must change too. An economics of placement emerges that ties black people's black legibility to their labor potential, resulting in their employment in positions that still indicate that they are the lowest members of the social order. There are still black janitors and porters, but now black workers can occupy positions in manufacturing and other fields that rely on manual labor and a workforce that will not strike. At the same time, black people are told that their ability to make money and enter the labor market is proof that they now have access to the mobility they have craved. However, since the economics still legibilizes black people first and foremost due to their being black, black people remain unable to change the social order, let alone be truly mobile. Black people (now legible as laborers in this new economics) migrate away from the South to search for better job opportunities as a solution to their immobility, but their hope is misplaced and misguided.

William Attaway's *Blood on the Forge* (1941) exposes and challenges the farcical mobility its protagonists (Chinatown, Melody, and Big Mat Moss) attempt to enact after they migrate north to seek jobs in the iron mills of Allegheny County, Pennsylvania. Once north, they slowly realize that their legibility as black laborers continues and worsens their continued oppression within an economic system that builds upon the all-too-familiar politics of placement. The white supremacist and patriarchal economics exploits and teases them with an ersatz mobility that hinders them and the entire black community. As a result, the Moss brothers remain as impoverished and overworked as they were in Kentucky.

Attaway thus does not valorize the Great Migration of post-Emancipation America as a historical moment in which black people finally enact mobility.[11] On the contrary, he is quite critical. Migration occurs – that much is not debatable. Mobility, though, is less likely. While Northern wages and working conditions are ostensibly better, industrialization and capitalism (re)legibilize black labor as the new standard for black inferiority. For example, race still dictates what jobs a person can hold. Black people are hired as janitors, bellhops, mill hands, and miners to do the most arduous work for the lowest pay. Their skin color, mannerisms, or cultural norms still make them legible as black, but now their labor adds to their racial legibility.

Even so, black laborers are eager to migrate north because the South's politics of placement leaves them immobile – at least in the North, they have the potential to be mobile despite being black. Desperate to make a better living in the North, black people migrate under the impression that doing so will eventually lead to better living conditions and chances to be mobile than where they came from. Once the black laborers arrive, they learn that they have been brought here to

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[11] Erin Royston Battat's comparison of Attaway's more pessimistic choices with fellow authors and artist Jacob Lawrence in her chapter entitled "Steel Mill Blues" insists that Attaway wanted a story that painted a realistic if grim depiction of black migration. (70-78)

send a message to Slavic and Irish immigrant workers who threaten to strike for better wages, shorter work shifts, and other benefits. Because black laborers like the Mosses are less likely to strike (having been conditioned not to do so by the South's politics) and are willing to perform the work for less pay, they make excellent strikebreakers. Rather than resist or resent the trickery that the mill owners play by pitting the two groups against each other, the immigrants hate these new black low-cost alternative workers because they disrupt the strike and forestall everyone's claims to mobility. The mill owners thus stoke unrest between the immigrant and black communities to continue exploiting both groups and maintain racialized order. Placement in the new economics recodes racial legibility through labor capital and does little to ensure black people's (or anyone's) mobility.

Forge connects race, labor, and materialism to illustrate how direly black people must find alternative ways to be mobile without participating in the economics of placement. Despite migrating, the Moss brothers cannot change their place in society by earning more money or buying homes because black laborers' racial legibility still dictates their access to mobility. The four sections in this chapter explore the complexity of black people/laborers' struggle to enact mobility and navigate the politics and economics of placement. The first section examines how the South's politics pushes the three Moss brothers away from the region due to ongoing exploitative practices like sharecropping: unable to better their position in life and under constant threat of death, they cannot remain in the South. But the second section explores how the promise of better jobs, wages, and working conditions entices black people to migrate north even as these narratives of prosperity in the North raise several red flags. From there, the third section highlights the false allure of promised prosperity in the North through several interpersonal and intrapersonal events that showcase how the economics forces Melody and Chinatown to acculturate through

indoctrination into a system of placement that seeks to undermine their ability to be mobile. The immigrant laborers at the mill pressure the Mosses to acculturate, mistakenly believing that their own model of success within the economics of placement will be transferable to their black counterparts. Unfortunately for the black laborers, though, what works for the immigrants will not work for them because the economics of placement employs a politics that tethers each group's ability to be mobile through their different legibilities. The Moss brothers try to become mobile while not letting the mills destroy their bodies and minds, but when they try to acculturate (in varying degrees), the mobility they pursue is farcical because it requires them to uphold systems that only offer conditional upward mobility. For example, Big Matt Moss finds himself advancing up the system only to be granted a conditional, temporary power to turn on the striking white immigrants. Indeed, when he seems to assimilate so well into the Northern iron mills' economics of placement that he finds himself deputized by the local police department to help break up the strike, his at best temporary admission into the ranks of the mobile is undercut from below as well as less than thoroughly granted from above. That is to say, as I demonstrate in the final sections of this chapter, his so-called authority, ultimately compromised from above, is also not respected, in the final reckoning, by the beleaguered immigrant laborers over whom he is granted temporary sway. His attempt to exercise it ultimately results in his being killed by a young Slav worker. Any mobility he hoped to enact was a tragic delusion.

Section 1: The Push – The Meticulousness of the Politics of Placement

Initially, in the South, the politics of placement situates Big Mat in a precarious tug of war between standing up for himself in the face of exploitation and adhering to rules that will keep him

and his family safe (i.e., knowing his place). The first section of this chapter details the verbal exchanges (and the results thereof) between him and Mr. Johnston and the riding boss on Johnston's property. Each incident illustrates the politics' fickleness and justifies why Mat must carefully choose his words so that neither man thinks he needs to be put back in his place. The two white men use the sharecropping labor contract he is under (and the social contract of his eternal contract of his eternal obeisance to white men) to police him into compliance within the politics' social understanding of unquestioning black compliance. When Mat threatens the both these contracts, he immediately becomes legible as resistant to the politics of placement. Now seen as a dissenting black person, Mat stokes the white men's fear that he is too emboldened by the progress black people have experienced since Emancipation. To quell their fear, each white man resolves to put Mat back in his place.

To better explain why Mat's interactions with Johnston and the riding boss is so fraught, this section uses seminal works from W.E.B Du Bois and Booker T. Washington to explore methods of black resistance in the face of immobility. Though neither author explicitly uses the word mobility in their projects, their analyses of the Negro Problem/Question and black social uplift of their time bring a fresh perspective to this project's (re)definition of mobility and contextualize the politics of placement (and economics) that will push Mat and his family out of Kentucky. Be that as it may, the two offer opposing stances. Booker T. Washington's "Atlanta Exposition Address" (1895) – also known as the "Atlanta Compromise" – purports that strategic cornering of the (few) parts of the market that black laborers could hold could be a remedy to black immobility. His strategy would be worthwhile, except that it also relies on white people not interfering with the black laborer's market – something that the NP/Q complicates since it still influences white attitudes about their need to be involved in whatever contexts pertaining black

mobility. Du Bois offers scathing criticism of Washington in the essay "*Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others"* (1903), insisting that the only way to ensure black uplift remains an ongoing project is to push to hold white people accountable for their racism. Education and voting, most notably, are Du Bois' primary measuring tools for black people's continued uplift. While Washington's approach upholds the economics, Du Bois' calls for outright resistance to placement. Both thinkers, regardless of stance, contextualize the emergence of the economics as a microcosm of (but not a replacement for) the politics.

In the exchange between Big Mat Moss and his landlord, Mr. Johnston, Mat forces this white man to confront the injustice that sharecropping and the politics have on him. As a black person. Mat violates one of the tenets of sharecropping (a system that tethers poor black people to a life of exploitative farming and debt peonage) and the politics of placement. Mat informs Johnston that the land is no longer fertile enough to produce a crop and that a mule might help. Most notably, Mat opts to imply rather than directly ask for a mule to help: "We got to have a mule, suh" (14). Mat knows that to ask Johnston for the mule outright could be read as him being too forward in his approach, so he chooses the safer option of stating a fact and letting Johnston fill in the gap. Johnston ignores Mat's implicit request by pushing back and saying that the land always has and will continue to produce a crop. Mat, in turn, rattles off what the white landowner already knows: dry weather and general overuse mean that the land is too depleted to sustain a profit much longer. Johnston knows that if he acknowledges that the land is non-arable, he will effectively have to excuse the sharecroppers' failure to generate a profit. Unable to exploit Mat or his brothers any longer, he might lose his black labor source to better job prospects. Johnston swiftly employs the politics to quell Mat's audacity, put the black man back in his place, and protect his monetary investment.

Intent on granting Mat the mule once the black man demonstrates that he knows his place in the social order, Johnston sifts through the black man's statement in search of an angle: the mule would make the work easier, but there is no guarantee of a successful crop yield. And Johnston must still quell Mat's ambitious ask and use of implicative language. Johnston has his angle to do both tasks: Mat's statement about the land and mule is a blatant transgression of their labor contract and a violation of the politics that dictate Mat's place. By reading the situation this way, Johnston can adeptly maneuver past looking like a villain in this situation by implying that Mat does not understand the social conditions he lives within. Since the politics derives power through hierarchies that all participants (black, white, or otherwise) adhere to because they know their place within the order, he can manipulate Mat back into his place with a simple question. Johnston asks: "You ain't kickin', are you Mat?" (14). He asks if Mat is "kickin'" to shed light on the violation. He knows that Mat knows that black people who "kick" threaten the politics of placement. Assured that Mat will take the hint, Johnston can rest easy.

Rather than strike Mat, Johnston generously employs the politics of placement to make this a teachable moment. What Mat's implicative statements (and Johnston's reaction to those statements by extension) signal to Johnston is that any direct or indirect resistance to the politics of placement has the potential to disrupt white people's order and peace. Mat questioning the sharecropping arrangement (which has the politics of placement built into its framework) can be legible as resistance. Read with such an interpretation, "kickin'" allows Johnston the flexibility to read Mat's statement as incendiary. He reminds Mat of the power differential between the two men so that Mat will never forget his place in society. In situations like these, when a person of black legibility forgets or challenges their placement, reminders are necessary. More of a statement than a question, Johnston's inquiry allows Mat to self-correct to quash any insinuations of

exploitation. Johnston subtly reminds Mat that, as a black man, he cannot expose (let alone criticize) how this white man's behavior — even if those behaviors exploit him as a black person. Poor black sharecroppers like Mat are supposed to work off the debt they incur to white landowners. If unsatisfied, Mat and his brothers cannot question the contract's conditions or pack their things and move somewhere else to earn a better wage. Mat is trapped in a system that does not wish to see him defend himself. He hangs his head and says he is not kicking. Satisfied to see that Mat knows his place, Johnston promises Mat the mule to work the land.

The sharecropping system is thus driven by the politics of placement. Mat and his brothers cannot question or resist the arrangement for fear of losing their jobs or their lives, and even if they leave Johnston's employ and go into business for themselves to generate profit on land they own, they will make themselves targets. Black people's success in an open market (created by, policed by, and full of racists) likely angers white people who view black success as antithetical to their white right to mobility. Johnston especially might not be too keen to see his former workers generating more profit than he does.

If the Moss brothers leave the sharecropping profession (easier said than done) and find work in the broader Southern marketplace, they will still live in a society where white people's intrusiveness could make or break their success. Booker T. Washington excuses this fact as a necessary if regrettable inconvenience in "The Atlanta Exposition Address," a speech he gave to a white audience at a world fair in 1895 about the need for an improvement in race relations. In this speech, Washington calls on black people to "Cast down [their] bucket where [they] are," imploring black people to attend trade schools and gain marketable technical skills but not be overly ambitious with misconceptions that they must also be able to vote (152). On its surface, what Washington proposes does resemble mobility for black people. By his logic, black people

could be mobile (or something approaching that) if they would adhere to what amounts to the politics of placement and use capitalism to (try to) improve their lives. As skilled laborers, they can enter the market and have increase their wealth and the wealth of the Southern labor market. However, market entry is not tantamount to fair play.

Washington's school of thought, unfortunately, maintains that black people's contentedness with being moderately, but not fully, mobile – which is to say they will not get "the itch" or "kick" to leave for better job opportunities lest they be reprimanded — is the way forward. What Washington asks of black people is unreasonable and dangerous because their continued push toward mobility requires their ability to be legible as more than just a source of labor. However, even if white people accept this advice from Washington, they will do so and (likely) still cling to the politics of placement. As such, black laborers and skilled tradespeople will still receive constant reminders that they are the cheap and dispensable source of labor that they and their ancestors always have been in the US. With legibility and the politics still in play, a glass ceiling forms, under which black people's chances of disenfranchisement increase while odds for mobility decrease.

Washington's address plays well with white Southerners of the time who both fear black mobility and revere profit margins. Washington delivers his compromise at a time of "unusual economic development," basically affirming that black people must have a role to play in the new economy (45). That role, to his point, does not have to be wholly different than the one white Southerners are already familiar with. Washington holds that black people can and should increasingly be welcomed into the marketplace as compensated laborers. His sentiment has context: Southern labor markets are increasingly fragile following the loss of an enslaved labor force. Low-cost and exploitative business models like sharecropping thus flourish, but only insofar

as the labor sources (i.e., black people) cannot escape exploitation and demand better working conditions and practices. At around the same time, the north sees a boom in industrial manufacturing which requires a larger, more docile labor force. Seeing the Southern black labor force struggling to make ends meet, let alone be mobile, northern businesspeople encroach on a labor pool once only open to Southerners. In the power vacuum that evolves for what regional labor market will pull black laborers to its cause, Washington's model thus appeals to both Northern and Southern interests because it legibilizes black people as a source of potential labor ripe for employing.

As if sensing that white people are still wary of compensating and collaborating with people who were not long ago enslaved, Washington implores white Southerners to trust the black people who already live in the South because they can still be of value to the Southern economy. Rather than employ incoming European immigrants to fulfill labor needs, white Southerners should invest their money in the already present and employable black laborers. After all, they are already suited to the labor and know their homes and regions as much as their white counterparts. Most white employers are aware that black people are more likely to know their place and are therefore susceptible to the politics of placement. Johnston explains that he employs black sharecroppers exclusively to tend his land because, in his words, "niggers ain't bothered with the itch; knows how to make it best way they kin and they don't kick none" (15). The white landlord knows that black laborers will not push back against how the system works. If they do, he has only to ask a carefully-concocted non-question to remind them of the power differential between white people and black people. Johnston knows that the Moss brothers (and any black people) are less likely to press for mobility when they receive reminders of the potential threat of violence.

Washington insists that white Southerners view black people (not as people but) as a source of labor. This re-legibilization shifts focus from black people to better suit their needs. Instead of viewing black people as people, they become a tenable labor force in the market – with all the history of and potential for (more) exploitation. Washington's proposal exposes why the politics of placement gives way to the economics of placement – black people's personhood shifts from being centrally about their race to their labor potential. In this way, black people's legibility does not transform altogether but warps slightly. Washington essentially paves the way for placement to flourish.

Booker T. Washington's approach to black mobility has numerous faults – as W.E.B. Du Bois points out in his essay "Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others" – the worst of which is that black people must accept inferior civic legibility in exchange for (fraught) peace. White governments (northern and southern) read the so-called "Atlanta Compromise" as precisely that: a compromise between black people and the nation (i.e., white people) to solve a decades-old argument about the fate of black people. Of course, one speech does not solve racism, so the compromise remains an ongoing project. Both compromising sides (ostensibly) give something up for peace, but black people lose far more in this compromise, because, without the right to vote, they are susceptible to immobility.

Du Bois holds that Washington's approach to solving the Negro Problem/Question is misguided, citing that the Compromise's core principles, "Thrift, Patience, and Industrial training," all rely on society's acceptance of black people as a viable labor source capable of autonomy but inextricably tied to what they can do for white society (53). Du Bois agrees that while Washington's three principles are worthwhile endeavors for black people, maintaining that these things alone will uplift the black populace only exacerbates white people's assumptions that

black people are automatons that will work for little pay. While Washington's strategy does help re-legibilize black people, it simultaneously shifts the nation's focus to what black people can contribute economically, and, to this extent, in Du Bois' words, "a gospel of Work and Money" threatens to "almost completely to overshadow the higher aims of life" (45).

As part of Washington's model, black people should (at least temporarily) forgo arguments about needing the right to vote since these things will only complicate race relations and never get complete buy-in from white society. But Du Bois pushes back against black people not pursuing the right to vote or better themselves through education. In his mind, the vote (and the pressure necessary to protect the black voter base) is crucial to any uplift that black people can hope to have. Without "the right to vote, civic equality, and education of youth according to ability," black people cannot protect what progress they do make (48). Any sustainable uplift requires the ballot box to at least have a say in changing how the system works. But because black people are still held in the grip of the politics of placement, having a voice could disrupt the racial order.

Du Bois posits that the only remedy to the fixity of black legibility is black people's ability to push back against injustices and the politics of placement. A sure path to financial security or a better life may not be so sure tomorrow or any other day. Du Bois' approach, while tedious and full of setbacks, accounts for various shifts in power dynamics that the politics engenders. Black people must control their destinations, destinies, and above all else, be able to shift how society perceives them to be genuinely mobile – all things that Du Bois alludes to in his critique of Booker T. Washington. Resisting compliance to conditions of the politics can actively disrupt placement. In other words, black people must be able to kick when necessary.

Although Mat might initially be read as "kickin'' for a minor offense he truly kicks when he later informs his riding boss about Mr. Johnston's promise to provide him with a mule to

sharecrop the land. The riding boss's retort again employs the politics as Johnston does, albeit more overtly. The boss demands respect and subjection as he empowers himself and marginalizes Mat: "Maybe you don't know who you talkin' to boy – givin' me short talk," he says, and then orders Mat to "say suh" (27). Under threat of violence for his non-compliance with the politics, Mat replies, "yessuh." The boss replies: "Got to keep steppin' on you niggers, or you git outta hand – forgit jest who you talkin' to" (27). The boss implies that Mat forgets whom he is talking to, but Mat's memory is not the issue. By speaking to the boss as he does, Mat shows that he is not willing to police himself while in the presence of his white superior. Forgetting his place is seen as a direct challenge to placement, especially at this moment where the actions of the placeable person (Mat) trigger the placer's (the riding boss) fears and insecurities. Mat's alleged forgetfulness indicates his resistance to placement by not confirming to the riding boss' belief in how the politics of placement functions via self-evident power relations that all parties (should) know. The riding boss is indignant. He (like Johnston) believes that Mat should know to confirm and conform to the politics of placement – meaning be subservient and not kick – they inadvertently prove how fragile the politics is. The entire system of placement depends on the apparently inferior group's constant verbal affirmations of the power structure's existence.

Regardless of how brittle the system is, it is effective. Place and placement seep into everyday interactions that become reinforcers of the politics. The riding boss reveals his logical algebra (and his fears and insecurities) when he describes Mat's transgression as him "git(ting) outta hand." Mat should know always to perform obeisance when in the presence of a white man. If both are aware of the protocol, then no more needs to be said or done since they can expect each person to adhere to these unstated rules. The politics' fragility is why Johnston and the riding boss interpret Mat's transgression as unsettling. Without constant reminders of the perceived or

perceiver's place in society, the politics cannot function because the system relies on recognition of and adherence to place and placement. As an apparatus that works within the larger paradigm of white supremacy, the politics obsessively tracks and polices black people to remind them of their place.

Mat, however, does the unthinkable when, rather than know and act according to his place within the politics of placement, he strikes the riding boss so hard that he nearly kills the white man. The punch Mat delivers to the riding boss' neck is effectually him "kickin'" at his treatment as a black man. Though Mat does not know it, he also strikes back against white supremacy and the politics that seek to render him immobile. However, the riding boss's injuries are not fatal – meaning that Big Mat will forever be legible to the white world as a defector of the politics. After this most egregious transgression of striking a white man, Mat knows that because he is the culprit and because he is black, his life and the lives of his family members is forever changed. He will forever be a fugitive, and the immutability of race in the politics of placement will also inculcate his brothers (Melody and Chinatown), and his wife, Hattie, as fugitives of the law. Fugitivity, or the latent potential for it, colours all black people as racially legible possible fugitives of a racially charged law.

What, then, about the migration of Mat and his family northward after the episode in which Mat kicks? In this respect, it is helpful to bear in mind Lawrence Rodgers' assertion, in *Canaan Bound: The African American Great Migration Novel*, that migration novels too often oversimplify black migration as equivalent to and indicative of black people's mobility. Rodgers offers that when black people are coloured by fugitivity, their legibility can be readable as that of a criminal. Unsurprisingly, moving through life as a criminal is untenable and, therefore, impedes the very purpose of migration: the person must practice hyper-vigilance not to be caught. Rather than

migrating, they flee the consequences of their actions and threats of violence and detainment. Being a black fugitive is especially dangerous. Any resultant mobility or movement has the potential to be born of white society's coercion. Since Mat is now a fugitive, he must consider how his fugitivity will be legible and move accordingly.

A subset of Phylis Klotman's running man trope, the fugitive flees one space for another because cannot stay in their current space. For black fugitives, the stakes increase exponentially. Mat and his family are black, so the repercussions, if they are caught, will be disproportionately severe. Lawrence Rodgers argues that fugitivity motivates many narratives of black migration. The fugitive migrant novel's protagonists attempt to flee to a better life. Migrant novels (*Blood on the Forge* fits under this umbrella term) are part of a genealogical progression of increasingly liberating migration narratives that complicate migration as an act that can but does not always result in mobility for black migrants or fugitives. From the fugitive slave narrative of the Antebellum era to fugitive migrant narratives of the late 19th and 20th century, black people are pushed out of their homes to live a life of (hopefully) less hardship.[12] Though there is no guarantee of safety once in the North or the West, black people flee to these spaces because nothing could be as constricting as the discrimination and politics of the South. A recurring idea forms that the North is a promised land (or Canaan, from the biblical story). However, the North is far from a promised land, as fugitive migrant novels of the 1930s (the products of what is popularly referred to as the Black Chicago Renaissance) healthily criticize that belief because black people are not immune to racism and the politics there:

[12] Farah Jasmine Griffin's extensive analysis of poems, literature, and paintings from between 1923 and 1992 provides fresh context about the migration narrative as a lynchpin of African American literary traditions. Much of the imagery matches the time period's politics: fugitivity underlies the reason why black migrants leave their homes. The end goal, it seems, is to find a new home and new space of belonging.

> Fugitive migrant novels…undermine the utopian connotations derived from popular images of the North as the biblical land of Canaan. Unable to imagine any inhabitable geography (symbolic or real), they offer the migration form's severest critique of ascent as a mechanism to achieve racial and cultural advancement. (Rodgers 98)

As much as the North is not Canaan, it is still better than the South, a place where black people cannot hope to be mobile in the name of not upsetting the social order that the politics of placement dictates. The politics has deep roots in white supremacy's fear that failure to remind black people of their place would disrupt the racial hierarchy. The social order is always on the brink of an upset in white people's minds. For an example of white people's attempts to keep black people in their place via an economic model, look no farther than sharecropping. Sharecropping organizes and legibilizes black people's labor (and, by extent, black people) in comparison to white people and their labor. Under such a model, black people's acceptance and subjugation become integral to the system's continued existence and necessary for black people's survival. Consequently, anything short of refusal to adhere to the system's rules results in the Moss brothers' immobilization.

Section 2: The Pull: Pitching the Economics of Placement

Even as the politics of placement or fugitivity pushes Mat (and now his brothers) out of Kentucky, the pull of the economics of placement beckons them northward. The North (Canaan or not) is an appealing space where mobility seems possible because more work is available there and with more work, there are more opportunities to have trappings of mobility. To increase the likelihood that black people will migrate north, the US government seizes on the new legibilizing

power of racialized labor by employing labor agents from the Bureau of Freedmen, Refugees, and Abandoned Lands to reallocate and relocate black laborers. Though black people are not immediately aware, the burgeoning economics of placement is an extension of the politics of placement. The marketplace (rather than black people) will dictate black legibility and the conditions for mobility once they arrive in the North. In short, black people become the total of their racial legibility and potential to perform labor. As a result, the term black laborers will be used interchangeably with black people throughout the rest of this chapter to indicate the centrality of labor within the economics of placement.

Melody Moss, Chinatown Moss, and Hattie (Mat's wife) are outside their home when a white man arrives on horseback. The three eye him with suspicion: he could be here to take something from them or worse. Instead, he tells them that the North has jobs available and offers far better wages than the Southerners could match. They suspect that this man is probably a jackleg (a southern nickname and euphemism for labor agents from the Bureau of Freedmen, Refugees, and Abandoned Land, or the Freedman's Bureau – the federal governing body that controls its nominal groups following the Civil War) sent here by Mr. Johnston to test their loyalty to their contract.

This jackleg's appearance (like many Bureau agents) is a common occurrence following Reconstruction. As part of the Freedman's Bureau, Southerners resent labor agents, thus legibilizing them as "jacklegs" to subtly imply that an agent is akin to a cattle rustler: except in this case, they steal human chattel.[13] Legible as untrustworthy thieves, jacklegs are basically criminals in the eyes of white Southerners. Southern ire is understandable since their once free labor force now requires payment. The white planter class and controllers of sharecropping

[13] Subtly implied here is that black people are still perceived as chattel, being the cattle in this scenario that the cattle-rustler/jacklegs steal from their employers.

contracts fear jacklegs because these agents help bolster the narrative that the North is better for black people than the South. This messaging is seductive for black laborers.[14] Agents and the bureau they represent usher in a new era wherein domination by seduction overtakes domination by fear and repression – terms this chapter borrows from Jerome H. Schiele's essay, "Mutations of Eurocentric Domination and Their Implication for African American Resistance." Mat and Mr. Johnston's back-and-forth illustrates how the politics uses terror and repression to cow Mat into submission.[15] Johnston has only to insinuate that Mat is "kickin'" to threaten him and mat falls back in line. Three particularly ruinous caveats of domination through fear and repression is that it (1) aggravates the oppressed, (2) reminds the oppressors of the immorality of the exploitation they employ, (3) and causes the kind of tension present between Mat and Johnston and Mat and the riding boss. Needless to say, domination through fear and repression is not sustainable given that black people are finally free and have options to work and live elsewhere.

In fact, Southerners fear the impact jacklegs/labor agents can have on their financial viability because what these labor agents do is integral to the transition from the politics to the economics of placement. Labor agents effectively (re)introduce the logic of a racialized labor force (i.e., black people) to a Northern audience and increase the chances that black people will migrate away from the South. Racializing the labor force is a critical element of transitioning from domination by terror/repression to domination by seduction. Black legibility is already perceivable. With money still being made from black labor, the nation primes the social

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[14] William Cohen (*At Freedom's Edge: Black Mobility and the Southern White Quest for Racial Control*) details how the Freedman's Bureau gathers momentum in the wake of the Reconstruction's backlash – with labor agents making even more visits following the attacks on black politicians and people all over the South.

[15] Schiele's work, albeit from studies that take place throughout the early 1970s to the early 2000s and also concerning immigrant populations, is extremely relevant in how the basis of the economics becomes a dominant narrative. The pull to the north constitutes an ideological shift similar to what occurred in 1970s African American communities. In this way, what occurs in the early 20th century is still relevant to the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Moreover, the focus on immigrants couches the argument quite well as a foil to how I argue mobility is possible for black people.

consciousness to metonymize black people as a labor source – and transfer all the benefits, repercussions, and prejudices of and against blackness into the marketplace. In short, the economics of placement distorts yet augments black people's legibility. Since black people are a sizeable labor pool, the US attempts to solve the Negro Problem by racializing labor and allowing black people to participate in capitalism.

The establishment of The Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands is the first clue that black legibility is undergoing a transformation to become central to the nation's newer economic model of racial placement. The Bureau's name – *Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands* – trivializes black legibility. Black people are (falsely) made equivalent to refugees, untethered from the nation they have lived in all their lives, and callously equated to abandoned land. In short, the Freedmen's Bureau equates black lives with commodifiable land and refugeeism. All these topics exist under the jurisdiction of one government bureau, implicitly sending the message to society that free black people cannot govern themselves and must be part of a more significant governmental effort to allocate their new place for them. Black people are effectively the nation's responsibility rather than stewards of their destinies. With such treatment, black people have as much agency and autonomy as abandoned lands. Rather than afford black people humanity, the Freedman's Bureau further racializes them and deprives them of that humanity.to

Labor agents of the Freedman's Bureau use the racialization of labor to source jobs and place black people in other positions where the demand for (black) labor is higher. They even cover the costs of black laborers' migration to the new city or region. For the first time in history (at least theoretically), black people tether the market's success to their whims and desire for a better life. Unsettled by black people's presence as a competitive force in the labor market,

established planters and landlords throttle black laborers' wages – and see black laborers leave their employ in droves. Compensation becomes so meager that black laborers must physically migrate to places where greater economic prosperity is available. As a safety precaution, the planting class develops a language that simultaneously puts black people "in their place" and quells any migration. Johnston's "kickin'" term codifies a black person's threat to the lucrative Southern economics of placement's social (and financial) contract. Hattie, Melody, and Chinatown are afraid that this jackleg could be part of an elaborate trap set by Johnston to catch them speaking poorly of him. That act would surely be a sign of them kicking.

As a remedy to the shortcomings of domination through fear, domination by seduction shifts the burden of morality from the oppressors and places it on the oppressed group's shoulders to make their own decisions – even if these decisions exist within the set parameters of the new system of power (i.e., the economics of placement) (Schiele 140). Domination by seduction accomplishes this by first pulling away from overt oppressive rhetoric and fear-based tactics. Instead, it favors selling narratives to black people that their acceptance in white society is encouraged and achievable. The labor agent/jackleg in *Blood on the Forge* does exactly this when he attempts to lower the Moss family's guards by subverting the politics' strict order of legibilizing black people. While, on the surface, his offer seems benevolent, he will eventually try to recruit Mat and the two brothers to work in the northern iron mills.

Sensing an opportunity to include Hattie and disarm the trio, the jackleg begins his rhetorical salvo by referring to Hattie as "ma'am." The gesture affords her respect so that he can gain her trust. However, this term of endearment confuses her – she is more accustomed to being referred to with the moniker "A'nty, as white folks did when they didn't know her first name" (30). "Aunty/a'nty" familiarizes (quite literally, as if she is actual family), legibilizes, and colours

any unfamiliar black woman to render her a matriarchal black female. The term is a relic of the Antebellum era when a slave woman's legibility is made familiar with language evocative of the family structure to ease the egregiousness of the slave-master relationship for white people's consciences. Ma'am, however, is a term of respect usually withheld for only white women. Hattie is suspicious of this stranger's disregard for the usual politics that would typically call for him to colour her. In fact, all the black people in this scene are uneasy given the jackleg's casual tone: the agent's pitch does not employ the everyday politics of placement's harsh and racist language. For example, throughout his interaction with the Moss family, he does not use the n-word. From time to time, he does slip and use the infantilizing "boy" to refer to the Moss brothers, but his overall word choice remains respectful and measured as he recruits them. The scene is rife with tension because he tries to seduce them in an unfamiliar way.

As strange as the jackleg's appeals are to the Moss family, his tactics are quite necessary to adequately seduce them. Schiele posits that white supremacy must alter its approach to black subjugation to remain viable. Shifting from a model of domination by repression/terror to a model that favors seducing the oppressed allows white supremacists to imbue black people with seemingly autonomous decision-making. The jackleg wants to disarm the trio so that they make the decision to leave on their own with no (overt) coercion necessary. However, their decisions still represent subjugation – just through feigned autonomy. His strategy of not using overtly racist language allows him to enter the conversation (or so he hopes) as an equal. If his calculations are correct, they might also think the same of him. Unfortunately, the Moss family remains skittish.

When the jackleg realizes he will get nowhere with flattery, he foregrounds the family's current immobility. Next, he insists that if they migrate north, prosperity is inevitable. He hints at a topic from the Mosses' conversation before his arrival – sharecropping is just slavery by another

name. He asks Chinatown and Melody how much money they make with Mr. Johnston. They respond that they do not know how much they get paid because Johnston records their pay in a book, and then "what's writ against [them] leaves [them] owin' him" (31). Sharecropping bosses and landlords know, as enslavers before them, that they must control laborers through limited information. Johnston's unwillingness to show the brothers the ledger reveals that he does not wish to let them know how much revenue they make. Finally, he balances the numbers himself (that he would even give them the courtesy of balancing the books seems farfetched) and concludes that the Mosses owe him money. Unable to prove any misdeeds or hold Johnston accountable, the Mosses must pay Johnston to work on his decreasingly fertile land.

Seeing that the exploitative system puts the Moss family in debt, the jackleg now knows he can tempt them away from Johnston's employ. In his next move, he reveals how he must re-legibilize these black people not as people but as (potential) black laborers. The jackleg nearly gives up the game he is playing when he inquires whether Big Mat is home. The entire scene is reminiscent of a buyer at the auction block looking for the fittest black man to do the job he needs. All the others will suffice, but he came for the prize stud, which is Mat. He is the actual target of this pitch, while Chinatown and Melody are additional acquisitions: "They need men up there – good men – all they can get. If Big Mat speaks for this family, tell him they can use him and all the other able menfolks in his house" (31). The jackleg subtly implies that Mat is the spokesperson for the family, not Chinatown or Melody, who are the other "able menfolks" and extra prizes/bodies to do labor. The jackleg racializes the Moss brothers as black laborers at this exact moment because he hierarchizes the Moss family based on their utility – in a way that legibilizes and colours them as if they are on the auction block. Mat is the highly sought prize for northern steel mill labor. His reputation alone earns him placement with the nominally descriptive "Big"

preceding his given name, Mat. By comparison, the jackleg never asks for Melody or Chinatown's names, referring to them as the other able menfolks in the household. Mat, on the other hand, is legible to northern industries as a sizeable black body that can perform their work adequately.

Desperate to seal the deal, the jackleg pivots and inquires, "Look here, are you boys satisfied with the way you're getting on around here?" (31). Chinatown and Hattie parrot back, "Oh, yessuh, we satisfied," and "Yessuh, they ain't kickin' none," respectively. The brothers and Hattie fear that Johnston could dock their wages if he finds out that they are "kickin'" by talking to this jackleg about their work. Their unease reflects how they are disciplined by domination through terror and repression: even when Johnston is not here, his presence is still felt. The jackleg pushes past their apprehension with more seduction as he takes a ten-dollar bill from his pocket and hands it to Chinatown. With that, he says: "Just suppose you made two hundred dollars. Up North in the mills you three would make more'n that mich in a month" (31-32). Before he sees the money, Chinatown will not be fooled by this story full of lies. Mr. Johnston is proof that white people who promise him money will lie and produce no payment later. With the bill in his hand, though, his grin and mood change slightly. The cash (and the jackleg's willingness to gift it to them without any strings attached) puts weight behind the jackleg's persuasive tactics. Now the black trio seems to have proof that a better, more profitable way of life does exist. Confident that this offering is enough incentive for them to migrate, the jackleg departs, but not before he instructs them to go to Masonville Junction to board a train that will take them north. However, none of them know that Mat has just attacked the riding boss earlier that day, which will force them to the North regardless to avoid retaliatory violence.

That the Mosses who witness the jackleg's sales pitch are susceptible to alluring messages about money is not groundbreaking. That they would desire to live in a space where they can earn

that money and not be abused as they are in the South is even easier to believe. Pursuing more ideal ways to traverse the world and being favorably legible to others is a significant selling point for anyone, but especially black people who exist within the margins of society. Instead of a fixed placement based on their legibility, black people would jump at the opportunity to untether their current legibility from other people's views and perceptions. What the jackleg effectively sells Chinatown and Melody is a (rudimentary) version of the American Dream – that oneiric and imaginary ideal of self-betterment and self-determination. The American Dream obsesses over the (symbolic) erasure of placement but not legibility. Since the Mosses still live in the US, the current shift to domination by seduction capitalizes on the American Dream concept to lure black people into situations and spaces they might not otherwise know about under the pretenses of mobility.

The jackleg's work is made easier by the influence of Booker T. Washington's doctrine from the Atlanta Compromise. In fact, domination through seduction captures Washington's ethos quite effectively: black people, desperate to seize any opportunity to be mobile, turn to conservative-leaning discourses about thrift and industrial training as means to better their lives. Helped along by a robust consumerism culture, labor now constitutes a means of participatory inclusion in broader US society. Crucial to this work is the proliferation of narratives about how black people can move up the social ladder by migrating elsewhere in the country. Jacklegs/labor agents help spread the word about the benefits of controlling one's legibility and place by moving to where work is needed. Black peoples' legibility thus depends on their labor rather than any ability to self-determine. The economics then seizes upon black people's desire and willingness to better their social legibility and therefore gain access to mobility through participation in capitalism more broadly.

Washington's method becomes a strategic tool to sell black people the idea that business and commerce can somehow lead white people to accept some instances of black mobility. Booker T. Washington implores black laborers to attain technical training and raise no fuss about discrepancies and unfairness in the system. Unrepresented in government and with the idea that their success is their responsibility alone (never mind holding white bosses, politicians, and methods of white supremacy accountable for exploitation and abuse), black people attempt to enact mobility in the open market. Should black people choose to play along and cast down their buckets, though, they must accept that preordained inferior legibility controls the likelihood that they will succeed or be mobile. Washington urges black people to serve a purpose within their society but fails to dispense with placement and legibility in his strategy for black racial viability on the market. His proposal paves the way for white society to further disenfranchise black people by distinguishing black people as civically and occupationally inferior.

Yet, in keeping with Washington's model, and while expediency demands that white Southerners need at least to humor black people's desire to be mobile, at bottom, white Southerners continue to perceive black people as innately inferior regardless of labor potential. As black laborers fill the market, white people who cling to the NP/Q and the politics of placement can rest assured knowing that black mobility is still a farce. These black people will be hirable only because they are black and can perform labor. When they serve their purpose or start kicking in ways contrary to the economics, they become dispensable. The dream thus appeases black people with stories of potential mobility to distract them from their faux autonomy within white supremacist capitalism. White people can effectively reconfigure what legibility entails to re-tether black people's legibility to their labor, along with all of blackness' negative connotations and unfavorable status.

Even if the Moss brothers break away from the exploitative work and find jobs as specialists in technical areas, as Washington purports, they would find themselves in a job market still driven by the politics of placement and white supremacy. Laws often disregard how rampant bigotry and racism are when finding employees. Lawrence Rodgers illustrates the dangers of legalities within the supposedly open market of the economics of placement:

> Social Darwinism…offered pseudo-scientific, laissez-faire justification for letting African Americans rest on the lowest end of the economic strata…the United States operated on a level economic and social playing field that encouraged the most fit to prosper. If blacks fell by the wayside, it was merely because of the immutable, if cruel, laws of the marketplace following their logical designs. (44)

Rodgers exposes a crucial flaw in Booker T. Washington's method for black mobility. Black people still must compete in a market run by racists who could blame black laborers' failure in the job market on the erratic market itself. The Negro Problem/Question already makes white society question the benefits of black people being mobile. Since the market is controlled by the same people who accept the politics of placement and believe that the NP/Q is unsolvable without white interference, black laborers' immobilization thus stems directly from discourse about their inability to demonstrate responsibility (fiscal or moral) in their work and life. Local and state laws reflect these assumptions in the job market. Employers could cite better employable characteristics for white candidates and always have black laborers work for lower wages or jobs that were allegedly suitable for black people. The economics of placement exposes and subsequently exploits the disconnect between black productivity and personhood. The only possible way to conceive an excellent black laborer is if they are working.

The Moss family already stagnates in immobility as sharecroppers and will likely stagnate if they migrate north because they are black people. They will just as easily be legible, both in the North and the South, as inferior compared to their white counterparts or other racial groups. As black laborers, they receive a conditional pass into the North to vie to be mobile and jump at the opportunity. But the economics of placement inhibits their ability to change their legibility/place because the system re-legibilizes them as laborers who perform work that is also racialized in a market-driven by the whims of racists. Unsurprisingly, then, the system attempts to seduce the Moss brothers with myths and narratives of how to be mobile despite all of these preconditions by ignoring the white supremacist-leaning tendencies of the society in which they live. Hopeful (and probably desperate) for a chance at mobility, they permit their (knowing or ignorant) willingness to be part of a controllable workforce that must perform work to maintain (acceptable) legibility. In such a system, the Mosses and other black laborers enter a social contract that intentionally does not afford them enough time or space to exist as anything other than a laborer. As a result, Chinatown, Melody, and Big Mat will leave the South for the North, still unable to change how society perceives and interacts with them due to the fixity of how blackness remains inferior no matter the social context.

Section 3: The Labor/The Work/The Blueprint

The Mosses might still be readily legible to others by way of their skin color, mannerisms, or cultural norms but capitalist pundits who perceive/legibilize them into sources of labor use their racial markers to organize labor within the new economics. With black labor as the new marker of black inferiority, the Moss brothers enter the labor market at a disadvantage but with hopes of

becoming mobile. Once in the North, though, they realize that hard work alone will not ensure mobility. Instead, they must performatively follow the new economics of placement doctrine even as this system warps how they are legible to the world and even themselves. The third section of this chapter follows how Attaway brilliantly connects race, labor, and materialism to illustrate why the Moss brothers' attempts to ascend the social hierarchy through acculturation fail.

The brothers' failures read as dire lessons for why black people must find ways to be mobile without participating in the economics of placement. Particularly, black laborers' conditional admission into the north and the economics can earn them proximity to the benefits of being white, but they must (1) accept the conditions of capitalism that exploit their labor, (2) consume and hoard material things (homes, automobiles, and wives) to perform an improved social status, and (3) build communities and family structures identical to the ones white people have. In short, only if black people can acculturate, assimilate, and ascend within currently defined social hierarchies can they seem to become mobile.

Attaway does not shy away from scathing and overt criticism of the idea that black migration away from the South is the solution to black people's immobility. Instead, he depicts the Moss brothers' journey to the North as a return to slavery rather than a triumphant migration away from bondage. In Attaway's novel, such a journey echoes the Middle Passage to insinuate that the economics of placement recreates the United States' original economic system that relies upon chattel slavery and the mass transportation of black bodies. After hearing the jackleg's pitch, the Mosses and other black Kentuckians undergo a self-imposed legibility transformation into migrants: they believe they will migrate to the North as people free of the politics' stranglehold on their lives. These would-be migrants from all over Kentucky descend on Masonville Junction, ready to travel. Attaway immediately wakes them from their (American) dream as he

(re)legibilizes them as chattel. He depicts, in excruciating detail, how the laborers/chattel are packed into train boxcars and shipped from Kentucky to Pennsylvania.

During the ride, Big Mat is miserable. His muscles "cr[y] out for movement" as urine (not his own) drenches him (11). Chinatown fares no better, especially since the rattling of the wheels and boxcar keeps them both awake. The constant lurching and rattling even threaten to dislodge Chinatown's gold tooth. The brothers' journey within the US mirrors, even if it does not fully replicate, their ancestors' journey to the United States. Both they and their enslaved ancestors are at the mercy of a system that sees fit to subject its labor source to such terrible conditions. With their bodies commodifiable, transportable, and (ultimately) disposable in the symbolic act of moving through space in deplorable conditions. The would-be migrants leave Kentucky as chattel, travel as if they are human cargo, and arrive in the North – after undergoing an ordeal similar to the Middle Passage – as laborers.

The Mosses arrive in Allegheny County, PA, to meet the economics' greatest beneficiaries: the iron mills. The black laborers (in fact, all the laborers at the job site) must collectively work together to keep this collection of screaming metal beasts working. The machines lift tons of weight "easy as a guy takes a spoonful of gravy to his mouth" (56). Hoppers fill furnaces faster than a man can wipe sweat from his forehead. Cranes handle more loads than a thousand men could in months. In sheer volume and productivity, the men clearly cannot match the machinery's work, so they slowly become the mill's stewards in an ironic twist.[16]

Disillusioned by the scale of their task, the black laborers ask: "What does that make a man?" (56). The answer, grim as it may seem, is that they are even lower in the hierarchy than

[16] In fact, Peter Gottlieb explains that this kind of awe at the sheer mechanics and scale of the mills in Pittsburgh, PA is not uncommon. However, black laborers begin to see that the mills are not the only competition. They also have to compete with immigrant laborers who were also instrumentalized to keep the mills working at full capacity. (70-73)

stewards: they are merely nutrients for machines to ingest and excrete. True to form, whenever a mill accident occurs, either injury or death takes men off the shift, only to replace them with another man. An endless supply of fresh laborers arrives from all over the country to try and sate the mills' insatiable appetite. Black laborers lament the trickery that made them give up an unpleasant life in the South for this hell on earth: "We have been tricked away from our poor, good-as-bad-ground-and-bad-white-men-will-let-'em-be hills. What men in their right minds would leave off tending green growing things to ten iron monsters?" (44). When newcomers like the Mosses realize they must succumb to the torturous mills as the mill veterans and company men do, they pine for the barren hills that could hardly raise enough crops to pay their old landlords or subsist upon. In fact, exploitation was always part of their former way of life, and while that life was miserable, they did not choose where they were born. The risk of bodily harm from simply existing within a Southern politics of placement emotionally taxes black people, but the Northern economics does the same, and these black laborers chose to migrate to a space where these conditions are rampant. Now that they are here, they realize the labor is different and exploitative in other ways.

The black laborers' collective dismay at being deceptively promised a life where they could provide for themselves builds to a crescendo within the first few months when the northern mills continue to re-legibilize black laborers at the individual level. The Moss brothers lose critical parts of their identities the longer they work in the mills. Attaway uses placeholders – or names that signify a character's diegetic, historical, and cultural attributes – so that readers and the novel's characters know how to legibilize characters within the social order. For example, Chinatown has a gambling habit, a broad smile, and loves his gold tooth and anything material. Names of this sort make the Moss brothers a triumvirate representation of complex black legibility. Big Mat's

legibility as the strong automaton, Chinatown's grinning trickster ways, and Melody's ability to play the blues are all elements that make these characters familiar to the reader and (subtly) to other characters. Unfortunately, the economics of placement forces the Moss brothers to drop their idiosyncrasies to better serve the economic system. As I will now demonstrate, the system, as an oppressively legibilizing process, strips laborers of their personalities to make them malleable to the system's needs.

The youngest brother, Chinatown, derives his name/placeholder from his squinty eyes, incorrigible gold-toothed grin, and love of gambling. Ignoring the latent racism attached to his name, he is a consumer who spends money as fast as he gets it. Wanting to accrue as much as possible, he is susceptible to the myths of prosperity and mobility. He tries to subvert his black legibility by showing off feigned mobility through markers of wealth – mostly with his gold tooth. In his eyes, black and white men alike see the tooth and assume that he must be wealthy to flaunt his prosperity in such an over-the-top way. In truth, he instrumentalizes his gold tooth to make himself legible as someone with the illusion of wealth. He thoroughly depends on other people to validate his legibility, and thus allows society to have the final say on who he is and what treatment he can expect from people. Even though he actively tries to enforce how others legibilize him, like the narrator from *Autobiography*, he still forfeits his own control because he must have others' validation and interpretation of him.

What Chinatown attempts to do by accruing wealth is what Herbert Gans, a critic of Ethnic and Racial Studies, would refer to as acculturation. Acculturation and assimilation are two entirely different concepts.[17] Gans cites that acculturation can occur automatically and be unintentional or intentional, as when "parents push their children to do well in school or status-seekers learn the

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[17]Admittedly, while Gans explores how immigrant populations in the 20th century enact mobility through two acculturation and assimilation, his work is prescient and relevant to this project's study of black people (152–164).

lifestyles of those whose status they seek to achieve" (153). Immigrants and their descendants largely control whether acculturation occurs. On the other hand, assimilation is often impossible without non-immigrants' formal or informal acceptance of the immigrants. The critical difference between the two mechanisms is that acculturation relies upon the immigrants' autonomy as they accumulate and apply knowledge of the newfound culture to move up the social ladder. Assimilation, on the other hand, relies heavily on the perception of others to effectively gate-keep or let someone into the social hierarchy. To this end, the immigrant's acculturation is a product of their performative practices of Americanism. Still, their assimilation is in the hands of "true Americans," who wield power to grant them access to the American moniker. Only when enough people perceive the immigrant as an American (through performative acts that indicate as much) is the immigrant treated as if they are an American citizen. Naturally, the goalposts are movable so that the parameters of citizenship remain malleable to the benefit of the larger society. In this malleability, the conditional nature of sometimes-adequate legibility becomes the difference between a person being deserving of mobility or not.

When racial identity is a factor, as it is with blackness, one must dually perform obeisance to racism and discrimination to acculturate. The allure of acculturation as the solution to immobility is equally (if not more so) felt by black people at the height of industrialization. But try as he might, some people do not wish to legibilize Chinatown the way he wants. He obsesses over his gold tooth, showing it off whenever he grins, smiles, or laughs to get other people to see that he has achieved some measure of success. In the South, Mat's wife, Hattie, had asked him why all the family should go hungry while he has the gold tooth, and he retorts that because he worked hard to acquire it, he should be able to show it off as he pleases. Chinatown believes in the North, as he did in the South, that this piece of gold in his mouth makes him deserving of respect.

Chinatown, unwilling to give up his prized possession, doubles down on his love of his tooth even as the work at the mills gets harder and exhausts him. However, the tooth means very little to other men, immigrant or black, who spend their money on things of worth to them. The other men could care less because they have their eyes on fitting in at the mill through their work ethic rather than flaunting their so-called wealth. The other mill workers, unlike Chinatown, try to acculturate into life at the mills, seeking to only draw attention to themselves in the work they do in case this leads to promotions. Moreover, for white mill workers, such an acculturative attempt to fit in does promise eventual assimilation, in keeping with Gans's argument that would-be assimilation requires a reciprocal confirmation on the part of non-immigrant whites: precisely what the immigrant whites can expect. But compared to them, Chinatown remains stuck in his ways and stuck at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Effectually, his gold tooth—his would-be sign of acculturation up the latter of success which he naively persists in maintaining up North—does not result in the coveted reciprocity of an act acceptance by whites which alone would mark his assimilative entry into their world.

Regarding promotions in the mills, many black men attempt to advance in the labor ranks, only to find that few make it, and that those few who do must struggle to keep their prized role as a black "boss." One of the only black men to receive just such a promotion is Bo, a black laborer who proves his mettle time and again. As one of the only black supervisors in the mills, he explains to Melody that black people are only in the mills because of "trouble," a euphemism for breaking strikes. His short exchange with Melody reveals how his social ascent through acculturation within the politics and economics of placement creates the same oppression that his lower-ranked fellow black laborers actively try to thwart:

> "I got to show no favorites and be eight times as good as the next man…Somebody all the time gunnin' for me. Don't like to see a nigger in my job."
>
> "Then how come they to make you a boss in the first place?" asked Melody.
>
> Bo laughed. "Same way all us niggers got here in the first place – 'cause o' trouble. If it wasn't for trouble wouldn't be no niggers in the mills at all." (126)

Bo knows that he is at the mercy of white people who conditionally allow him to serve as an example of the economics of placement's faux-benevolence. His every decision is being surveilled, so he cannot show any favoritism toward black laborers. If he fails to keep everyone in line – including his black employees – he will lose his promotion. Therefore, he can keep his job as one of the few black bosses, but only if he upholds the politics and economics to motivate and undermine other black laborers' mobility. What happens to Bo is symptomatic of the relationship black laborers have to the economics of placement. The few black laborers who advance into managerial positions become tokens for other black laborers to mimic. Black laborers begin to model their own behaviors after these managerial tokens to receive the same benefits and witness the same (faux) mobility in the workplace. In doing so, however, they show that they are willing to maintain the workspace's racial order and white supremacy. As for Chinatown, if he thinks his gold tooth offers him currency in the new economics of placement, he is sorely mistaken: he will have to earn respect through his work ethic rather than what he can buy because of that work ethic.

Even with this (conditional) power, Bo symbolizes what black laborers could become with compliance to the system: a boss with power. Since they have never had such influence, they strive to replicate Bo's mobility but remain under his and the mill owners' control. Bo also notes that black laborers have been brought north to be strike-breakers – the owners of the mills will not pay higher wages to some workers when there is a workforce ready and willing to take those jobs at

the current rate or lower. This further implicates black labor as a strategic remedy to uprisings against labor exploitation. Should immigrants or white workers start a strike for better wages, working conditions, etc., the influx of black labor quells their notions and restores order through hierarchical order changes in the mills.

Northern mills and factories continue to place African Americans at the bottom of social hierarchies through employment opportunities that uphold the racist politics of placement and white supremacy. Immigrants are still more likely to be mobile than black laborers because of their legible proximity to whiteness and an eagerness to become mobile in the ways deemed adequately legible. The mill's economics/politics of placement recognizes and rewards immigrant workers' willingness to acculturate into the North's metrics for mobility. Ascent, acculturation, and mobility allow European immigrant workers to use the new politics and economics to merit and enact mobility. However, black laborers do not experience mobility as their European counterparts do because their racial legibility makes them immobile regardless of their accomplishments. Bo is a boss, and he still must conform or be vaulted from his position. And, as I will make clear throughout the remainder of this section, an immigrant or black person's support of the destructive structure that underlies placement validates their oppression and disadvantages their ascent and the ascent of others.

The economics thus seizes on the resultant dissonance between the black and immigrant communities by offering the latter group a means to be mobile that the former cannot replicate. Norms such as communal domesticity, child-rearing, and investing earned money in a home grant the immigrant community conditional access to mobility for their compliance with the economics of placement. Zanksi, a Slavic immigrant who works on Chinatown and Melody's mill team, champions these norms as he tells the two black men that they must seek all these things to make

life livable in the North and be mobile. The economics of placement offers Zanski a way out of poverty. As a result, he does not question the validity of a system that affords him comfort. His musings reveal that he thinks black laborers can only be mobile if they replicate his success – even though they are black and the politics and economics treat both groups similarly, but not the same. Emphasizing his closer proximity to fully assimilated whiteness to serve as a model for black laborers to measure themselves against, but failing to recognize that blacks face a formidable disadvantage which he does not face, from this vantage point, he can lay the blame on black people themselves for being stuck at the bottom. From this vantage point, he can pathologize black people and other groups.

All Zanksy's statements and suggestions are symptomatic of his acceptance of systemic whiteness and its metrics. For example, he says that the black men never move out of the temporary housing, have no children, and "no woman," insinuating that black men are unhappy because of these choices (82). Zanski measures his acculturation by how much property he has and his capacity to start and take care of a family. In the economics of placement, a person's home becomes one of many ways to measure mobility. Since the black laborers remain in makeshift log cabins, Zanksi assumes they do not know or care about the value of moving from the bunkhouses to more permanent quarters.

Beneath Zanski's flawed logic is a crucial element of the economics' racialization of the legibility of placement. When even one member of a racial group demonstrates some trait, the trait can apply to any number of other people in that social group. Unfortunately for black laborers, because more than one of them does not move out of the bunkhouses, they will all be legible as predisposed to remaining in deplorable conditions. The Slav attributes black laborers' unwillingness to move out of the bunkhouses or take wives as indicative of a deep-set issue with

all black people. His creation of a monolithic image of black people reduces racial complexity, which lets him more easily claim that the black laborers self-sabotage their mobility: "Colored feller alike. Work in mill but ain't feel happy" (82). Zanksi (knowingly or not) leans into white-supremacist beliefs that paint black laborers who use sex workers and gamble as irresponsible, lazy, rootless, and undeserving of mobility. Black laborers seem willing to live in depravity because they do not move out of the bunkhouse. Zanski thus judges their decisions as foolish and easy to fix.

Chinatown protests the remark about not having a woman, however, saying that the sex workers down in Mex-Town are, in fact, women. The black man conflates sex work as the full extent of womanhood (a wholly problematic yet normalized understanding of feminine subjectivity within the politics and economics of placement) necessary to show how mobile he is and stands by his statement. Zanski replies:

> That ain't woman…that ain't woman who keep white curtains in a feller's house. Whore girl ain't wash curtains…Feller from Ukraine workin'. His woman wash the curtains, and the kids growin' in the yard…Them kids work in the mill sometime. Their kids grow in the yard. (82-83)

Zanksi again showcases a narrow, formulaic assessment of female legibility that maintains old models of legibility in the new economics of placement. He insists that a "real" woman would stay home and keep the curtains clean. "Colored fella ain't have woman keep white curtains in a man's house. No kids. Fella ain't got kids move no place. He stop at grave…Pretty soon Rosie [his daughter] get married, eh? I move some more quick" (142). Zanski reduces women's legibility to nothing more than maids and factories to bear his progeny throughout the *Forge*. He (the "feller") works while his kids "grow in the yard." However, those same kids, the ones for whom he wants

a better life, will eventually work in the mill like their parents. Zanski instrumentalizes women and children as property to improve his own status – in much the same way white people do with black laborers. To be mobile, he not only has to collect material but also human relationships that reflect his grounds for respectability. He is thus willing to believe that everyone has a place, and they must act according to that place to ensure order and viability for the system.

Unable to fathom Zanksi's statements about black men and their shortcomings, Melody asks: "That makes you feel happy?" (83). Zanski responds, "I think about that when the heat comes." Melody concludes, "That wouldn't help me none." The black laborer's inability to comprehend the immigrant's stance indicates that their mobility experiences do not translate to each other. What one deems valuable or suitable is at odds with the other's views. This is not by luck: black laborers are not afforded the same privileges as immigrants who have (debatable) proximity to whiteness. If black people try to replicate the same progress without acknowledging the differences between their respective placements, they will just serve the needs of the mill owners rather than themselves. Melody seems to intuit this phenomenon and states that these standards are of no help to him.

Zanski makes one statement about how black laborers are like plants far away from their native soil, drawing home how *Forge* critiques the economics' reductive logic of acculturation. When Mat, Melody, Chinatown, or any other black men follow Zanksi's model in the North, however, a rupture between nativity and authenticity forms. Black people fuel the economic gears of the North by their mere acceptance of subjugation, exploitation, and violence. Rather than build a "proper" community according to Zanksi and the standards he subscribes to, Mat self-soothes through sex and conditional companionship when he falls in love and "shacks up" with a Mex-Town sex worker named Anna. Through his choice, Mat effectually confirms his low status in the

system's hierarchy and authenticates his placement at its bottom by centering material, capital, and a woman as markers of his economic prosperity.

The metaphor about black people being plants far away from their so-called native soil is a false one. It obscures the fact that the Southern black experience is artificial and socially produced. Black people are not "native" to the South. Even though the South is where these black laborers in question came from, the space tethers black people to a politics of placement that immobilizes them. They cannot "kick" there or be upwardly socially mobile without fear of retaliation or being put back in their rightful place. And in the North, little appeasement is possible because any wife and children a black laborer has will also result in their subjugation. Zanski's broad and formulaic ideology is irrelevant and illogical across dissimilarly legible communities. He unreasonably expects black laborers to exhibit and embody the same type of mobility that immigrants and their American-born white counterparts exhibit. But no matter how low the immigrants might be in the social order, they were never black, nor will they ever be. There is no need for them to fear the same treatment that black people fear. The cold, bluntly stated truth is that what works for one group will not work for all.

Section 4: The Strike

No matter how respectable they are or how hard the Mosses work, black laborers are still legible as inferior. Though pessimistic, Attaway's approach characterizes much of the literature in publication during the Black Chicago Renaissance, a literary and critical movement from the 1930s to the 1940s. Many novels and critical essays feature a keen focus on the pivotal role of kinship among black people that could remedy their troubles in new locales and how necessary

preservation of black Southern identities and cultural practices was at the time. These depictions would often insinuate that black people must reject ascent through assimilation, which, when aspired to by black people, only becomes a faux mobility. Numerous authors (Attaway, Richard Wright, and Margaret Walker, to name a few) interrogate the ascent myth for black people, explicitly citing anti-capitalism as the only way to thwart the economic system that values their labor more than their personhood. The black laborer's pursuit of a "nonmarginal place in which to reside and prosper" fails because society is unwilling to stop placing black people as lesser by default (Rodgers 98-99). For these reasons, *Blood on the Forge* retrospectively complicates the farce of black mobility by showing why refusal to assimilate within racist structures that justify racial immobilization is crucial for black mobility. Attaway demonstrates that to be mobile, the Moss brothers must refuse to adhere to the white supremacist standards for mobility. They can preserve their lives, kinship, and cultural identity – the most accurate markers of mobility that allow them to place themselves rather than let others place them. In contrast, though, Big Mat, the brother with the most potential in the economics, fails because he tries (and fails) to assimilate.

Big Mat's placeholder fits his legible value into his name: "Big" Mat is the brother who is most equipped to thrive in the North. He is all that white society values in blackness – large in physical stature, frighteningly strong, and with an unmatched work ethic. He can work from sunrise until sunset and does not display a particularly keen intelligence, making him an even more convenient vessel to uphold the politics and economics of placement through ignorance. For these reasons, he is the only brother given the potential to be mobile after proving his worth in the mills. He even understands that he succeeds when other black laborers do not because of his devotion to a trade that is (ostensibly) better than the work he used to perform: he muses that this work suits him more than farming because he can outwork lesser men. Industrial work suits him better than

sharecropping because the mills' power dynamics allow him to use his comparative value against other laborers — black, white, immigrant, or otherwise. As a result, Mat's productivity compared to others makes him more capable of mobility because he assimilates into the work itself and the culture of the mills (i.e., competitive work and overworking himself during shifts). He swiftly ascends the hierarchical social ladder, but there is a limit: he forgets that his blackness is unchangeable even if he is higher within the hierarchy. His ascension becomes a cautionary tale for how assimilation, denied to black people according to Gans's distinction between assimilation and acculturation, makes true mobility impossible for black people because white supremacy permanently labels him as black and reinforces that he must never forget his place. The moment he does not adhere to the standards set by this system, he experiences a social and physical death.

As I indicated earlier, black labor in the mills is the product of the mill owners' attempts to break the immigrants' strike. By design, the economics sours relationships both between the various groups of white laborers and between white laborers and blacks to maximize mill owners' profit and to maintain social order. When the labor strikes begin, Bo is attacked. Afterward, Bo shrugs off the incident, explaining to the Moss brothers that this is just the way things are. When Melody agrees that better wages and manageable shifts should be standard, Bo reprimands him:

> That ain't no way to talk…you a nigger. Only reason a nigger in the mill is cause o' trouble. I tell you that before. Only reason I git my job as foreman is 'cause I stick when the rest strike. (176)

This moment of intra-racial placement situates how crucial acceptance of placement is for black laborers' survival. Bo once again reminds Melody that as a black man, he is in the North because black men provide necessary labor in conditions where no one else would dare put their body or life on the line. As such, he should practice compliance to the best of his abilities. Bo

invokes tenets of the politics of placement in his explanation. If Big Mat could not question Johnston or the riding boss' intentions in their conversation, neither can Melody question the system here in the North.

Steel production in the mills should benefit immensely from a labor force unified across racial lines. However, intra-racial deployment of the politics and inter-racial discord and discontent between black and immigrant laborers maintains the hierarchical racial order and prevents any such unity. The economics forces all laborers, black and immigrant, to compete for jobs and symbolic status. Any agreement between the immigrant and black laborers is lost because they uphold the very structure that exploits both groups. Black laborers are despised because they will perform work at a fraction of the cost of what the immigrants want. The immigrants receive more compensation and are promoted more readily than their black counterparts. Each group becomes wary of the other because they each have different motives for performing the labor, but also (whether they acknowledge this or not is unclear) occupy different places in the economics of placement. Much like enslavers and planters of the antebellum South, corporations understand that to exploit and discipline black bodies to work for no pay, compliance from all Others was necessary. Lower-class whites and immigrants become bosses who, even with minimal power, pathologize and oppress black laborers. Immigrants who would otherwise be written off as too racialized became models for the corporate system because, at least, they are not black. In such a gesture, the creation of Whiteness drives a wedge between any form of unity that lower-placed blacks and Italians, Slavs, and Irish people could have.

Additionally, the mill owners know that black workers will continue to migrate north and work under poor conditions because the pay is better than in the South. Exploitative labor practices like sharecropping already rob black laborers of steady wages to acquire material or demonstrate

financial agency. Rather than be jobless, they would accept jobs for more meager compensation than immigrants and lower-class whites. Black laborers are also less likely to "kick" because they know their place and fit perfectly into the new system where their bodies are still disposable. As a cheap and controllable source of labor, black labor can subdue union members (i.e., often immigrants or lower-class whites) should they choose to strike. The racialization of labor thus makes black people targets of racial violence – as Bo experiences firsthand.

Blackness threatens and incentivizes the European immigrants to accept increasingly exploitative and dangerous working conditions or be jobless. As the primary malcontents of the mills' current wage system, the Slavic and Italian immigrant laborers no doubt realize that the black men have been brought north to break their strike. The Irish take the better-paying jobs once many Slavs and Italians are laid off for going on strike. And black labor brought from the South by the trainload ensures no shortage of work at the lowest levels. The resultant hierarchy privileges docility in workers who do not "kick." The success of the economics of placement depends on its racialization of the types and availability of labor which fracture a would-be unified labor force.

After earning the moniker "Black Irish" for his unmatched work in the mills, Big Mat effectively completes his ostensible assimilation and ascension into northern society when the chief of police deputizes him as a boss to help break the strike. The chief's use of the title "boss" employs (whether intentionally or unintentionally) language reminiscent of the past politics of placement in Kentucky. Once he deputizes Mat, he says: "Just remember Monday that you're the boss in this here town. Anythin' you do is alright, 'cause you're the law. So don't take no back talk" (196). The title, authority, and lack of accountability the riding boss and Johnston revel in are now Mat's to wield over perceivably white immigrants and black people alike. Mat's power, however, is temporary, and therefore conditional. He has no guarantee that his job as boss or

deputy will continue once the strike ends. The chief of police knows that the power he is giving this black man is temporary, though, and gives Mat the position to hold only during the strike – which is to say that there are limits to the black deputy's power. While this could be read as a gross abuse of police power, the politics of placement is still in effect. The chief cannot have a rogue black deputy acting with impunity. Mat is merely a steward (or a pawn) in the anti-labor movement.

Despite his power limitations, Mat feels like a full-fledge steward of placement. Drunk with the newfound power, he heads home, considering the implications of this new placement:

> All of his old hatreds came back and added flame to his feeling. He had been called 'nigger' since childhood…The name that they gave to him had become a badge signifying poverty and filth…They had taken his money and his women. They had made him run for his life. They would have run him with dogs through the swamps. They would have lynched him. He would have been a twisting torch. And he had escaped the South. Now here in the North he was hated by his fellow workers. He was a threat over their heads…So always with him was a basic distrust of a white. But now he was a boss. He was the law…He was a boss, a boss over whites. (196-197)

Mat's logic transforms inferiority into a god complex. He now wields the only power that matters – the power of a boss. He recalls how the n-word signifies both his blackness and inferiority with hatred. To be a nigger denotes one is born into and will remain in poverty. To be a nigger justifies the torture the black community faces for no other reason than arbitrary hierarchies that cyclically continue that oppression. Ironically, his former place at the bottom of the Southern social order inspires no empathy for those Mat now sees as beneath him. He fails to recognize that they will fear him just as he feared the riding boss. The underlying vulnerability of his inflated sense of

his power emerges when he discovers, to his chagrin, that Anna, his partner, is at home, ready to humble him with a placeholder that aims to re-place him as inferior and lacking.

Moments before he confronts Anna about his deputization and what that means for the power dynamic between them, Mat feverishly rolls through how he will use this power to show her that he is better than her. Anna, who has chosen to "shack up" with Mat under the condition that she will not sleep with other men anymore, feels neglected by her lover. Mat, overworked and tired from the mills, rarely pays her any attention. As a result, she sleeps with other men for money, including Melody, which Mat does not know. Mat, intent on confronting her about his recent lack, drums up months of ire:

> This night he would have it out with Anna. He had handled people, and they feared him. Their fear had made him whole. Now he would go to Anna a whole man. She would fear him too. Now all of the doubt and indecision of the past seemed a ridiculous thing…At one time he had wondered why men were violent against him. Now he knew that in this world it was kick or be kicked. From this moment on he would be the kicker. Anna should know that he was a new man. She should know that he was a boss. (217)

Fear is central to how Mat perceives his power as a boss because fear is the only way he comprehends the legibility of his former bosses. Blinded as he is by his rage, Mat fails again to recognize how fear is a fundamental part of how the politics of placement operates. He was kept from "kickin'" in Kentucky through fear of repercussions. He validates fear as a necessary mechanism to put Anna in her place. If she and other people fear him, they are right to do so. Mat muses what Mr. Johnston and the riding boss would say if they could see him now. He revels in how the economics works and concludes his mental tirade with a damning statement: "in this world

it was kick or be kicked." Mat fully transforms into an apologist for a violent system that cows people into submission – he is an arbiter of it. He is the kicker, and he aims his kick at Anna.

The next scene depicts how the politics of placement (and economics) extends into gender roles. Specifically, the expectations for legible domesticity in women like Anna, who must exist to exclusively serve Mat's needs (sexual, homecare, etc.). To Mat and other arbiters of the politics and economics, she breaches the social contract between her and Mat because she emasculates and destabilizes the home-space structure Mat tries to build. Mat's rage, which reflects his need to reestablish domination and security within the relationship and the broader community, spills over into his use of place-setting for Anna. She, to him, should know her place and fall into line. Now intent on running away, Anna has no desire to be put (back) into any place she deems unworthy of her ambition. She calls him a "peon," a term Mexican immigrants use with similar (but not the same) intentions as white people's deployment of the n-word. The n-word denotes how blackness determines a black person's placement and limits. Peon fits within the economics of placement because it attempts to erase the centrality of race in favor of one's labor and the capital it generates for others rather than the self. Terms like peon reinforce a person's immobility. The economics still relies upon race, but it uses differently coded language to denote how immobility exists. For instance, a black person with a car and a house can still be a peon because their labor and capital primarily benefit others rather than themselves.

Mat has heard this term before since Mexican immigrant laborers around the mills use it to describe people who are like "slaves bound on the soil – slaves bound on the job" (227). He even recognizes that the term "peon" is used much like "nigger," and understands the contempt behind its use. In any event, his newfound power has little to no effect on the hatred he reads in Anna's use of the word to describe him and place him. Unwilling to believe that this woman could make

such a statement about his character, he quickly avoids sitting in the placement/placeholder too long: “But [in the North] there was no riding boss. He had to keep saying it to himself: there was no riding boss…there was no riding boss…” (227). Mat cannot fathom being anything less than all-powerful in his new role and cannot, or will not, be re-placed as inferior.

To further deflate Mat’s self-esteem in this moment and out of sheer anger, Anna refers to Mat as not being “Americano.” In Anna’s eyes, “Americano[s] live in big house back in hills…[and has a] big car” (222-223). That she conflates American identity with what someone owns is no accident. Once again, the economics of placement uses one’s living quarters and possessions as their place metrics. The American(o) Dream is to have a big car and a house. Mat, who can supply her neither of these things, is thus, a peon and not an American(o). Singlehandedly, Anna denies Mat the citizenship, inclusion, and assimilation he so desires.

Mat remains, as has always been, a peon in her estimate because he is still a pawn used to turn a profit for mill owners rather than himself. Anna’s use of “peon” reflects how new codifications of place are bound to replace old placeholders and re-place the individuals tied to those placeholders. Anna’s outburst is her way of “kickin,’” and her actions mirror what Mat did back in Kentucky when he did not say “suh” to the riding boss. Mat is the boss whose placement within the politics Anna questions when she kicks. This woman undercuts his place and (temporary) authority to show that he does not measure up to his title. Anna’s insistence that Mat is a peon who cannot provide for her reminds him of how volatile and conditional placement is. Mat equates upward progress within the social order with the power to control other people. He cannot assimilate into the new social order, and Anna knows that his shortcomings before his deputization are bound to show up after. So she gives him another name: peon.

For her refusal to acknowledge or honor Mat's new place in politics and economics, Anna is severely beaten with a belt. Mat's transformation into a man he would have feared back in Kentucky is complete. This scene illuminates how neither individual using placement and placeholders as weapons wins. Big Mat becomes a woman-beater, and Anna is beaten. Even after all of this, Mat is still no closer to comprehending the futility of his assimilation. Mat heads toward the town to break up the union organization meeting, unhinged because he cannot influence how others perceive him to be a peon. Anna's insult still undercuts his power, so he realizes that he cannot change how everyone perceives him, even with his new title. This revelation shows how ultimately vulnerable the economics of placement is as a social paradigm. The earlier scenes with Mr. Johnston and the riding boss from Kentucky illuminate the necessarily reciprocal enactment (always latently tenuous) of the kicker and the kicked roles. Just as Johnston and the riding boss had to correct Mat to remember his place – an act that dually places the underling and the master – he too requires that those beneath him acknowledge his power to make him legible as a boss. Because this reciprocal relationship remains so tenuous deep down, the superior figure requires fear to keep it moving along smoothly and without a hitch. Mat tries to use this weapon with the strikers. Amid the melee, he cracks heads, strikes chests, and realizes that "this was the only place for a big black man to be" (232). That is, until the young Slav who kills him brings back a distant memory:

> [Mat] was confused. It seemed to him that he had been through all this once before. Only at that far time he had been the arm strong with hate. Yes, once he had beaten down a riding boss. A long time ago in the red hills he had done this thing and run away. Had that riding boss been as he was now? Big Mat went farther away and no longer could distinguish himself from these other figures. They were all one and all the same. In that confusion he

sensed in these mills a new Mr. Johnston was creating riding bosses, making a difference where none existed. (233)

The line between memory and present blurs as Mat finally contemplates who he is, who he was, and how the "boss" title leads him to his untimely death. The young Slav who kills him possesses the same impudence and resistance to placement that he had toward the riding boss back in Kentucky. Like the riding boss, his power stems from a desire, a need even, to dispel any insurrection. Above all else, Mat fears insurrection and the destabilization not because of the existent order but because insurrections will negatively impact his power and identity. By the time Mat realizes he is exactly like the riding boss, it is too late, and the fear backfires.[18]

The deputies and law enforcement officers come across Mat's body in the strike's aftermath. The chief of the police's statements about Mat reveals how the black man's legibility has not changed at all and how the system that coopted his body and legibility to its end will continue doing so:

> Sure is a shame that big nigger had to go and git himself killed. But I don't think we can pin it on nobody. Just accidental in the line o' duty, that's all. He was game, all right, but crazier 'n hell. That's the thing 'bout nigger deputies – they're fightin' the race war 'stead of a labor strike. Always be like that, I guess, as long as they come from the South. There'll be somebody to take his place, an' that there's one reason why the union ain't gonna win. They didn't figure on the South when they started this here. (233-234)

Mat helped break the strike, but his labor and body were all the police and mill owners wanted from the beginning. Upon Mat's death, the chief mourns the lack of labor Mat could have

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[18] Phyllis Klotman details the tragedy of Mat's death as the result of whiteness valuing black utility over black personhood. In truth, the white-washed landscape and social scape of the North push and pull Mat in whatever way it needs to so that the racial order can be maintained. That Mat recreates the power dynamic of the former boss is *Forge's* greatest irony (463-464).

continued to perform had he remained alive. In the chief's eyes, had Mat not let the fight for racial legibility get in the way of his work – because after all, he was brought here, as Bo mentions earlier, to prevent trouble – he would still be alive. The war against labor strikes will require stewards so long as the financial gains of the mills use the economics of placement to take advantage of black laborers and benefit police like himself to restore order. The chief's coy remark that black men who fight the futile war between the races will always lose echoes the failure of Booker T. Washington's strategy for black uplift. White people who cling to the Negro Problem/Question obsess over how black people are inferior. When black people kick, whether for better treatment or more rights, they put a crosshair on their backs because they challenge the order. The police, who maintain this order and deputize Mat, do not accept him into their corps, and blame him for his death. The order the police chief defends makes him complicit in Mat's death. In the end, Mat's death is filed as an accident, collateral damage symbolic of the fate of any black laborer/person who upholds the system. Meanwhile, black laborers from the South were, are, and continue to be a means to an end that will never benefit them should they never fight the race war.

Conclusion

Attaway poignantly uses Smothers, a mentally ill yet clairvoyant laborer, to offer readers glimpses of the futility of black mobility via the economics of placement. Smothers' prescient message is grim but telling: "Steel fool you and kill you. The mill take my legs," he warns the brothers soon after they arrive at the mills (67). True to his word, the mill fools the Moss brother before it steals something dear from each of them. Chinatown loses his sight. Mat loses his boss

title and life simultaneously. Melody, however, loses something that more acutely offers him a way of preserving not just his individuality but also his mobility.

As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, Attaway uses the Moss brothers' names/placeholders as a way to flesh out a triumvirate of black legibility. Melody represents the part of black legibility most attuned to resisting the politics of placement through vocalizing the issues inherent in the system and how they affect him. He does not call out the issues in a way meant to show disdain, as his way of expressing this resistant attitude is through the blues, a more passive than active mode of resistance. Melody's placeholder name stems from his ability to play the guitar and his love for playing the blues, a musical art form that vocalizes the trauma, pain, and joy of being black in a world that does not value blackness. Melody's name-as-placeholder signifies his cultural ties to a black tradition. The blues is a genre that black people famously create to lament and reveal the travesties of their lives, which is a valuable tool to release the tension of the constant threat of violence from the politics of placement. The blues genre thus helps Melody make sense of and to the world because it allows him to translate his thoughts, emotions, yearning, and pain (from his unique position as a black person) to listeners who may or may not understand the black lived experience.

Sorrowful words and chords resonate in even the most prejudiced ears. Audiences who hear Melody's music interpret the experiences and emotions and can more readily engage with him as a person through this historically black art form without needing to tie in the immutable negative impacts of black legibility. However, the mills take his "picking hand" from him when he smashes it while sealing a furnace (127). The injury becomes so bad that he cannot play the guitar anymore. The callouses on his fingers disappear, making it impossible to play chords even if he wants to. Without the ability to play the guitar, Melody becomes more fuel for the mills.

Unable to feel the music that gives his name meaning, Melody stagnates in immobility. As a bluesman, he voices black people's (passive) resistance to the politics and economics of placement in song rather than in conversation – songs that are the soundtrack to an upset workforce. Although not read as (actively) kickin,' the blues often does "kick." Melody rarely plays his guitar after migrating north and eventually loses his cultural symbolism as a bluesman.

If Melody (or any black person, for that matter) would attempt to acculturate and assimilate into the culture and economics of placement in the mills, might he actually become mobile? What would that look like? Acculturation looks like moving into more permanent housing. Acculturation looks like spending money on wives rather than sex workers. Assimilation, on the other hand, looks like the Irish immigrants calling Big Mat "Black Irish." Assimilation looks like Melody playing the guitar in a pleasing way so that the Irish immigrant can enjoy himself. Yet acculturation and assimilation work far easier for the immigrants than their black counterparts. As Gans explains through the experience of immigrants, assimilation offers a seductive path to equality because if a marginalized group member performs social norms adequately, mobility seems to become possible. Compliant members of marginalized groups avoid overt identity-based social control and experience conditional mobility that allows them to self-determine to an extent. Such logic seems to imply that one's decisions or actions are more important than socially-derived legibility. However, mobility is frustratingly asymptotical for black laborers precisely because black people buy into the economics of placement's narratives about how black laborers' mobility is within reach and in their control. These narratives conflict with the reality black laborers experience: their legibility renders them disposable within the economics because they are present in the North to break strikes. They can be replaced by other black laborers willing to cross the picket line. Black laborers, like Bo, can receive promotions but these advancements come with the condition that

they must keep all the other black people in line. The promotions also serve as (false) proof that hard work, assimilation, and acculturation will result in better social standing. In short, try as they might, black laborers cannot be mobile if they buy into the economics of placement because the entire system is built on lies and obfuscation that leave black people vulnerable to criticism, immobility, or death. It is for this reason that Attaway's characters, in moving from north to south, experience a spatial displacement which nevertheless does not entail a social replacement of their prior, frustrating place at the bottom of the social hierarchy.

Mobility, as defined within this project, remains elusive for the Moss brothers. A world in which they are mobile due to assimilation within a hierarchical social ladder is antithetical to this project's definition of mobility. True mobility requires rejecting placement altogether by destabilizing norms and the system's hierarchy. Gans offers some consolation to the above points about black people's means for avoiding participation in the economics: entrepreneurial immigrants, ethnic worker enclaves, and other groups find niche fields that boost their potential to succeed or fail without surrendering ethnic, cultural practices, or associations. Black people who preserve and protect their racial identity as they pursue mobility — but without performativity within the politics and economics of placement — do not need to assimilate or acculturate. As a result, they remain products outside of social control and can enact mobility more fully. In its most radical sense, black mobility should not recreate the conditions or results that the economics and politics of placement offer because these systems are designed to exploit black people's labor, body capital, and blackness. If black laborers adhere to the standards of white supremacist mobility, they may find ways to cope with the economics of placement that emerges after Emancipation, but are less likely to become genuinely mobile.

So then, a crucial question is: can black people be truly mobile as long as the politics or economics of placement is in effect? The answer is no, pessimistic as that may seem. Black mobility is hard to imagine without a radical reconceptualization of mobility and its many parameters. Black laborers are still rendered immobile even after acquiring capital and rising through the ranks. To overcome this immobilization, black people must reject and refuse to recreate the behaviors that support the economics and politics of placement as well as white supremacy — meaning that assimilation, ascension, and acculturation are antithetical to proper mobility. In place of assimilation, they must employ a radical ontological ploy by embracing their blackness, preserving those practices that make them legible not only to the world but themselves as black, and demanding external acceptance of that legibility as constitutive of their personhood. Under Cedric Robinson's interpretation of black radicalism through Black Marxism, black people's sense of duty to "preserve the collective being, the ontological totality" is crucial if they wish to survive within and outside capitalism. In effect, black radicalism restores those traditions and cultural capacities that function outside the politics and economics of placement and their racist modes of legibilization in the visible social world.

Many cultural artifacts and practices like the blues, "shootin' the dozens," and kinship ties become as crucial to the black community as home-building and the family unit are to white society. In contrast, Cedric Robinson, in developing his conceptualization of Black Marxism, holds that any manner of upholding the white supremacist system is detrimental to the black laborer. White supremacy intentionally erases black genealogies and culture, which leads to the racialized capitalism characteristic of the Atlantic Slave Trade and slave-based caste systems of the Caribbean and North America. Any erasure of black genealogies (and therefore personhood) leaves a power vacuum for the legibility of black people within unfamiliar contexts. The ensuing

blank slate becomes the impetus for (external) re-categorization of black people and the re-definition of their legibility within these new systems. Black laborers' resistance cannot successfully utilize the same format established within European radical traditions because it is born of wholly different legibilities. Black radicalism is not legible within (or acceptable to) the structure of white supremacy because it presents a danger to the current order. By deploying a radical black tradition, black laborers can pry back control over their destiny. Any semblance of mobility black people wish to enact would require their own intentional (dis)placement within space, time, and systems of oppression.

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Chapter 3 - Black (Auto)Mobility and the Ideology of Placement in *The Green Book*

In *Republic of Drivers: A Cultural History of Automobility in America*, the practice and condition of "autonomous, free movement by way of automobiles," also known as automobility, imbues people with more acute control of their spatial movement than at any other time in US history (Seiler 2-3). People who drive cars realize that more unrestrained and spontaneous movement through space is not the only benefit of driving – the vehicles, newfound access to more areas, and tourism can boost a person's legibility in social circles.[19] With rapport and a curated set of experiences, a person could use their automobility to access new potential successes and ostensibly control their destiny. Automobility certainly seems like a worthwhile pathway to mobility given the new access to space and glorious opportunities. However, American politics, economics, and culture rely so heavily on placement that a driver's legibility can signify their unworthiness to be auto-mobile. In short, placement can be as inhibitive to automobility as it is to mobility.

While automobility can look like mobility, legibility and placement complicate the latter because the politics of placement brings order to early driving experiences. Other realms of US life where placement and legibility politics are unwaveringly present incorporate the politics into their spaces. For example, the politics of placement men use in patriarchally ordered domestic spaces seeps these power dynamics into the open road to legibilize women as inferior and therefore unsuited to drive. Early driving manual think pieces reason that women are not capable drivers,

[19] Geographer Eric Leed muses that the right to travel is very much part of the definition of the free autonomous individual and is crucial to a person's experience of their character. From the "voluntariness of departure" and the freedom they have in determining how to enact their mobility, to the "pleasure of travel free from necessity," individualistic tendencies reverberate throughout early discourse about driving to restore character (13). In the same breath, however, Leed points to how travel also signifies that a person "can truly be apart from something larger than themselves," implying that people who drive become part of a community that alters how the world sees and interacts with them (13). This communal driving concept becomes essential to how automobility empowers the self and the nation.

citing women's emotionality, inability to make decisions quickly, and their proclivity for irresponsible consumerism as detractors of their worthiness to take on driving's responsibilities.[20] This rhetoric is not accidental. These manuals are produced by male authors who spread and add to discourses that signal to other men that women are unsuitable as drivers, which legibilizes women as rash and irresponsible beings in the eyes of the manuals' readership. These manuals thus perform the work of keeping women in their place (not only in men's minds, but also the space of the open road) by bolstering what men already believe to be true of women's inherent legible traits. As a result, women are kept in their place while men enjoy the right to drive as if it were natural. As I will emphasize throughout this chapter, discourse and publications can do as much to bolster or inhibit a social group's inclusion or exclusion from legibilities favorable for (auto)mobility.

Similarly, placement also orders the ostensibly open road for black drivers hoping to participate in automobility because they share women's alleged inability to handle driving responsibilities. Try as they might to dispel harsh criticism of their humanity, black people are still seen as irrational, second-class citizens. This narrative follows them onto the open road, where they become potential victims of a racist politics of placement that seeks to strip them of their automobility. E.L. Doctorow provides a realistic (albeit glib) depiction of this in *Ragtime* (1975). Coalhouse Walker Jr., a black jazz musician, often drives along Firehouse Lane and passes by the Emerald Isle Company of firefighters to reach his destinations. The firefighters (all white men) stand outside and seethe that he has a Model T while they still rely on a horse to pull their pump. One day, they stop Walker to demand he pay a $25 toll. The toll is as fictitious as it is coercive:

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[20] Seiler notes that these early driving manuals carry much of the sexist tropes that litter everyday life's experiences for women, but they do give way to later iterations that show women in vehicles. The evolution of their depictions is telling, however. Initially ornamental to the cars themselves, women are seen as accessories. When they do ultimately get behind the wheels of cars (as drivers), there still exists a paternalistic tone that denotes conditionality.

Walker has never paid to drive on Firehouse Lane in previous excursions. The chief reveals that the intent behind the sudden need for payment is to put Walker (back) in his place: the firefighters are collecting money so that they can afford an automobile of their own to drive to fires, just as Coalhouse "drive[s] to whorehouses" (146-147). Unphased by the insult, Walker remains respectful but as he contemplates his next move, the fire brigade uses their ladder and horse-drawn pump tank to prevent him from driving away. Walker is trapped.

Hemmed in as he is, Coalhouse Walker Jr. realizes that he is trapped physically and psychologically. He decides not to reply to the insult because he knows that the politics will let these white people instigate violence from him (verbal or physical) and then use that to retaliate with more of their own violence. But he also knows that the toll is the fire brigade's way of placing him beneath them. According to the narration, Coalhouse should know to pay the toll and "ingratiate himself in the fashion of his race" (147). Adhering to the politics of placement would see Walker acquiesce, pay the illegitimate toll, and show gratitude to the firefighters for the pleasure of having done so. But he knows that if he pays, he could (hopefully) avoid abuse for the time being. He also knows that the firefighters want him to affirm his place in the social order by paying which could give them license to continue harassing him (now and in the future) or other black drivers. He is no fool: he knows that any quarter given has the potential to worsen his situation. Yet Walker is still unwilling to forfeit his dignity even in the face of violence and injustice. While he relishes the opportunity to belittle these white men, he remains composed and sizes up his options. Fleeing would be best, but blocked in as he is, he risks totaling his automobile. Seeing that he has no other course of action, he decides to leave his car and try to seek help in the nearby town. Once there, he finds a police officer and tells him what is transpiring back on Firehouse Lane. The officer refuses to help him, saying that the firefighters must have had their

fun by now. He advises Walker to take his car and leave before he causes more trouble than he already has. Walker returns to Firehouse Lane only to find his Ford in the ditch next to the road and thoroughly vandalized – presumably by the firefighters.

The firefighters' animosity toward Walker stems from their insecurity regarding their legibility compared to black people. Their insecurity echoes the initial rumblings from white people at the height of the Negro Problem/Question discourse near the end of the 19th century and early 20th century. When the brigade sees Walker driving, they fear that this isolated event signals black people's burgeoning license to become (auto)mobile. In their eyes, one successful black man slights them, their social order, and their (white) right to remain the only group to whom (auto)mobility is accessible. Walker's leisurely automobility throws the firefighters' outdated horse and buggy system into sharp relief, but it also makes the firefighters question their own place in the social order. While they must rely on animal labor to do their work, Walker moves leisurely in his car. The brigade's insecurity seeps past the porous boundaries that guard the open road and puddles at Walker's wheels, threatening to immobilize him. Walker must be either ignorant or unwilling to adhere to the politics of placement by flaunting his wealth and privilege in front of them. Whatever his motivations are, the firefighters decide to put Walker back in his place. With his impudence to blame for their actions, the firefighters limit (if not destroy altogether) Walker's (auto)mobility.

Walker is sure of one thing: he and other black drivers endure the threat of violence at the hands of white pedestrians, drivers, and politicians whether they resist or adhere to placement. Be that as it may, he still tries to seek justice. The tragedies that ensue because Walker pushes back against the brigade's placement of him are as expected as they are formulaic. Walker tries to sue the firefighters, but no lawyer in town will represent him because he is black. His word against an

entire white firehouse brigade means nothing since judges see his skin, hear his story, and think his ingratiation was the solution. Walker's wife, Sarah, tries to get the Vice President to help grant her husband an audience. However, when she, a black woman, steps out of the crowd toward the white politician, a Special Service member sees her as a threat and hits her in the chest with his rifle butt. She dies later from the trauma the wound causes. Grieving and with no other means of redress, Coalhouse Walker Jr. sets fire to the Emerald Isle Company Firehouse and guns down many firefighters as they run outside to (what they think is) safety. He eventually gives himself up, but the police gun him down instead of taking him to jail. From start to finish, Walker's saga is a tragic representation of black people's inability to hold racists accountable.

In the aftermath of Walker's death, the social commentary centers not on what the firefighters did to this black man but on what Walker should have done differently. White people colour Coalhouse Walker Jr. as "a strange proud black man," citing his "monumental negritude" as the cause of all his trouble (155). "Monumental negritude" dually exaggerates the proportions of his pride as it augments the role of blackness as the source of the man's ego. The euphemism places Walker and characterizes all black people as overly-sensitive, prideful, and petulant for their desire to defend themselves against abuse. Reading black people within the placement parameters, though, white people believe that black people should always be obeisant. The ideology makes no space for black dignity – instead, black dignity is legible as misplaced stubbornness. Therefore, the desecration of Walker's vehicle is his fault, and he should have cleaned the car himself and gone about his business. Walker's pride is legible as unreasonable, but this irrationality erases the firefighters' egregious actions. Rather than sit with the fact that the toll that begins the entire ordeal is fictitious and implicates the brigade as instigators, social commentary after Walker dies does not mention this crucial fact. The townspeople only know that

white people are killed at the hands of a black man. Like the young black boy who threw a rock at the white children in the *Autobiography*, placement uses racecraft to erase the misdoings of racists and places the blame firmly on black people.

From the moment the fire brigade stops Walker to the moment he dies, he receives no validation for his actions. The company violates his right to be auto-mobile. The police officer chides him, saying that the firefighters are just having fun (at Walker's expense, no less). When Sarah tries to get help, she dies because the Vice President's security detail sees her as a black woman and, therefore, a threat. The lawyers who hear Walker's case will not defend him because he is black. Even people who talk about Walker's death trivialize his experience as a series of reminders for black people to remain in their place. White people's constant dismissal of his desire to drive and defend his right to hold exploiters accountable reveals that more than just politics or economics of placement is to blame. There is an all-out ideological acceptance of placement that pervades society such that this black man receives blame (ostensibly) because he is black and does not know (rather, refuses to) know his place.

Walker reacts to what I will call an ideology of placement in this chapter. The ideology seeks to control his automobility (and mobility) because he is black through constant reminders that he must adhere to what the ideology demands. The term ideology accurately captures the scale at which the politics of placement and economics of placement must simultaneously reiterate in all contexts that black people must know their place. The politics and economics of placement make placing oneself in relation to others (and vice versa) a part of everyday life. As is typical of an ideological belief or belief system, when fewer and fewer people question the social order or why it exists, the belief grows stronger and more immutable. People then build their belief systems around the doctrine that black people are inherently inferior and deserve no redress. US

government, economics, and everyday social life echo this facticity and bolster the belief. No one sides with Walker because he is black, and they assume (before and even after hearing his grievances) that he is wrong for pushing back against placement. The unquestionable fact of blackness as inferior makes the ideology function more fluidly in these situations and take hold as an ideology: day-to-day social life incorporates the politics of placement. The political system is responsible for the infrastructure of the roadways that makes black people hyper-visible. The policing system surveils black drivers, and the judicial system doles out (in)justice to them. The auto-mobile black person cannot escape placement by merely driving because placement shapes nearly every social space they enter.

In an ironic twist, what Coalhouse desires as a black man (i.e., automobility) is what many white Americans want during the early 20th century. Sadly, the ideology of placement crescendos at about the same time that the Interstate Highway System is being built. The highway becomes a beacon for many people to imagine automobility as the remedy to immobility, but the simultaneous booms of these two events widen the gap between the races: white people are included in the respectability politics of the road as they exclude black people from this right to drive. Placement becomes a central doctrine in who should or should not be auto-mobile.

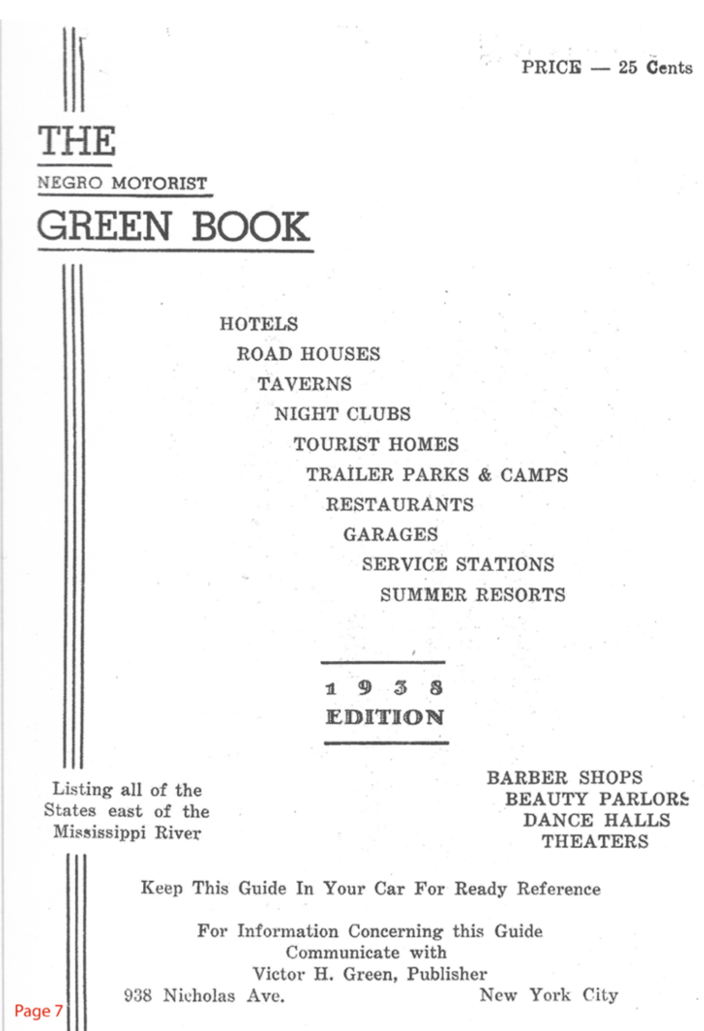
As more money and political favor pour into the interstate, consumerist culture and respectability politics emerges from discourse about automobiles and who has access to the road to further drive a wedge between the races. The automobile becomes nothing more than machinery bought with capital and operated on roadways where drivers police themselves to discern who is or is not a capable driver. The mid-twentieth-century interstate, with its ideology of placement and various modes of surveillance, necessitates travel guides like *The Negro Motorist's Green Book* to provide much-needed means for black people to enact automobility safely. Over the nearly three

decades of its publication, the *Green Book* reimagines what automobility can look like for its black readership. The guide is effectively a directory of businesses that are black-friendly and black-owned so that with the guide in hand, black people gain access to leisure and consumerism. The *Green Book* echoes the national consensus that automobility can remedy immobility but rarely offers explicit social commentary about racial discrimination while driving. Since placement remains a fixture of the respectability politics of driving, most if not all of the guide's discourse spreads information that fundamentally cannot liberate black people from the harmful effects of placement. Automobile ownership, leisurely travel, and patronage of black-friendly and black-owned businesses are worthy markers of increased financial standing, but they are hardly solutions for black people's immobility. With such a limited scope of how to enact true mobility, the guide cannot challenge the ideology of placement and leaves black drivers still susceptible to placement and racist violence.

Chapter Four proceeds with a central through-line: the ideology of placement that orders the ostensibly open road situates driving while black as an affront. This chapter treats *The Negro Motorist's Green Book* as a series of texts that trace how black automobility evolves between 1938 and 1964. Images of the guides' pages (1938, 1947, 1954, and 1963 editions, specifically) weave themselves between close readings of listings and features, providing in-line and in-depth analysis of the editor's nuanced rhetorical and pictorial choices. To substantiate how the ideology of placement shapes the experiences of black people in their march toward mobility from a historical perspective, Cotton Seiler's *Republic of Drivers: A Cultural History of Automobility in America* is crucial. Seiler's account of driving's early history sets the stage for why the ideology of placement co-opts the road's respectability politics to entertain black people with ideas about consumerism, individualism, and the possibilities of the open road. Toward the end of this analysis,

Alexander Ramsay's aptly titled play, "The Green Book, A Play," provides fresh context to situate the repercussions of the black people's buy-in of the ideology of placement.

Section 1: The 1938 Edition of the *Green Book* and Driving While Black



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THEATERS

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Fig. 1. *The Negro Motorist Green Book*, 1938

Despite the guide's reverence as one of the most prominent tools to help black people employ automobility, the *Green Book's* language and rhetorical decisions do not prioritize or

explicitly state this mission. The guide's best way to challenge the ideology of placement is implicit messaging about how susceptible black people are to losing their right to drive. Instead, the guide evokes rhetoric and language that prizes modernity and propriety, implying that black automobility necessitates black drivers' obedience to responsibility politics and yet another economics of placement built around consumerism. The 1938 issue of *The Negro Motorist Green Book* suggests that mobility is equivalent to automobility and consumerism. Since the guide does not debunk placement's politics or economics, black people are sold that they can be auto-mobile and therefore mobile. From the guide's cover page to its page-long list of driving rules, black people's automobility still depends on their compliance within a more extensive system of oppression. At its core, the 1938 edition (necessarily but unfortunately) protects its profit line more than black drivers.

More than twenty years after Doctorow's novel's events, Coalhouse Walker Jr.'s story still reflects black drivers' issues on the road. However, the 1938 cover of the *Green Book* deemphasizes the influence the ideology of placement has on black drivers and instead foregrounds travel businesses and leisurely institutions. The editors order the list of accommodation categories into what amounts to a table of contents, sandwiching taverns and nightclubs between hotels, roadhouses, and tourist homes (Figure 1). The editors then double down on this choice, wedging restaurants between trailer parks, garages, and gas stations. The list concludes with summer resorts, barbershops, beauty parlors, dance halls, and theaters. The ratio of sites necessary for black people's safety to leisurely sites is 6:8 – a disproportionate lean toward sites that center on relaxation and tourism. While this approach offers black people a pleasant distraction from living life at the risk of being placed is a good marketing tool, burying sites that are necessary for black drivers' safety among more leisure-based sites could lead black people to

think (if only momentarily) they have access to all these places and services. The safe sites become ancillary to the more fun ones, as evidenced by the disproportionate ratio. Admittedly, the list does prioritize safe spots at its beginning but it trails off with sites that cater more toward fun activities not as crucial to black safety. Safe lodging spaces and black-friendly travel services should outrank and outnumber tourist attractions – even though the latter is potentially more profitable – because garages and black-friendly services stations are critical stops for black travelers. Logically speaking, these sites should be closer to the beginning of the list (i.e., at the top of the page). Instead, they sit toward the end of the list, bookended by restaurants and summer resorts. The editors sandwich these popular tourist attractions and leisurely services between necessary sites to allay fears and reservations black customers have about traveling. If black readers/drivers think that driving is dangerous, they could just as easily forgo even when they use the guide making any trips. The guide capitalizes on the potential for black people to engage in consumerist activities as a distraction from enduring unsafe roadways.

The guide's prominent featuring of leisurely sites, attractions, and services might seem coincidental, but it is anything but. The publication's profit margin can be protected given that many of the listings are for black-friendly and black-owned businesses willing to pour more money into the guide for vital advertising space. Leisurely sites sit strategically between more crucial areas and services but ultimately distract the would-be drivers from what the all-too-familiar knowledge that the ideology of placement still orders the road. These hotels, restaurants, summer resorts, and garages are all for Colored People. The guide can turn readers' minds toward more enjoyable pursuits by not explicitly stating that these sites are all for Colored People. Thus, the *Green Book* avoids colouring its readership explicitly as it adopts a suggestive tone that avoids explicitly saying that the potential for racial violence exists.

As further proof of this appeal to the readership, at the bottom of the cover page is the phrase, “Keep This Guide in Your Car For Ready Reference” (see Figure 1). The phrasing is capacious: anyone could keep a guide in their car for ready reference. White people might need a guide to help them reach their destination, but traveling black people need more assurance of their safety before setting out to a destination. After all, the *Green Book* is a guide, not a license or shield. The suggestive tone implies that black drivers maintain a casual relationship with their automobility and the benefits it can bring. Later editions’ cover pages do denote the dangers of driving while black more intentionally than the 1938 edition, but overall, the guide focuses on consumerism and automobility whenever possible. The guide’s primary goal should (ostensibly) be to keep black people safe as they travel. The best way to achieve this goal might be to highlight as many times as possible that black travelers will have a guide that prioritizes their safety above their leisure. While there is value in not overstating the omnipresent threat of racial violence that most black people know intimately, the guide ultimately foregrounds consistent (but not hyper-vigilant) awareness in its strategies. The guide’s decision to feature leisure so prominently ensures that it can remain in circulation, but by not explicitly addressing fears that racial violence is possible, the consequences for black drivers could be drastic.

Regarding hyper-vigilance, the *Green Book’s* suggestive approach leaves black people susceptible to a politics of placement that makes responsibility a prerequisite of driving. What does a responsible performance of automobility look like to drivers? Who sets the parameters for this performance? The answer to these questions can be found in Figure 2. A good driver is responsible for paying attention to other people on the road and prioritizing safety. However, this push to be accountable is a performative act that validates the politics of placement and driving simultaneously. The ideology of placement’s deployment of responsibility creates parameters of

how responsible driving looks so that drivers drive responsibly to continue to be auto-mobile. The ideology, once instilled in driver's minds, forces auto-mobile individuals to police themselves and others by responsibly practicing the "Safe Driving Rules" (see Figure 2). All drivers – but especially black ones – are part of a hyper-vigilant community that polices its members to the extent that any demonstration of improper automobility results in losing one's license and right to drive. Unlike their white counterparts, Black drivers are legible as drivers and black. As with the Negro Problem/Question, driving while black invalidates black people's eligibility to control their destiny or destination. Naturally, driving with black skin even more encourages unwanted surveillance from white police, drivers, and pedestrians, but also more hyper-vigilance. Black people are already hyper-visible and therefore hyper-vigilant about how they are perceived by

SAFE DRIVING RULES

1. Watch out for the drvier who crosses the White Line.
2. When the other car passes you, watch out that he doesn't cut in on you.
3. Watch out for the driver who doesn't know any better than to pass on a hill.
4. Even when the light is Green, look out for the reckless driver comming from left or right, who is ignorant that the Red light is against him.
5. Watch the driver ahead — you can't be sure whether or not he'll signal when he turns.
6. Even on highways, look out for parked cars.
7. Watch the car comming down the steep hilltowards you. Maybe the driver doesn't know enough to go into second.
8. Don't assume that the other fellow has good breakes.
9. At night look out for pedestrains walking on your side of the highway.
10. On Icy Roads look out! Some drivers don't know any better than to brake suddenly on ice.
11. Going over a hill, be ready for drivers who may be fools hardly as to make a turn across the road.
12. When you are passing, look out for the car that may be suddenly pulling out to pass just ahead of you.
13. Maybe the cop won't catch the car that passes you at 80, but "sudden death" is liable to.
14. On a three lane highway, watch out for the driver who thinks the middle lane is his exclusively.
15. Remember that Junior thinks that the ignition key is something to play with.

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Fig. 2. *The Negro Motorist Green Book.* 1938

others. Black drivers risk forfeiture of their ability to drive if others view their practices as erratic, unsafe, or resistant to the ideology. With all of this in mind, driving for black people is a privilege they must earn but it can also be taken away under the auspices of blackness as a disqualifier for driving.

The "Safe Driving Rules" in Figure 2 offer a glimpse into why the act of driving, for black people at least, is more privilege than a right. The rules' diction reveals that black drivers are responsible and self-reliant only if they consider that they must exercise more caution than their white counterparts about who else is on the road. As a result, black drivers must be hyper-vigilant of other people's actions because they cannot afford to lose their automobility for their own mistakes, let alone someone else's. To this point, these rules focus more on other drivers' bad habits and practices than the reader/driver's issues. Seven of the fifteen rules contain warnings to "watch out" for "reckless" and "ignorant" drivers (11). These "fools" have the power to immobilize the reader/driver through their irresponsibility. Black drivers should be aware of (wary even) bad habits and practices other drivers may have since not doing so could lead to their loss of the ability to drive. With such an illustration of how susceptible black drivers are to the perceptions and problems of other people, the *Green Boo*k (implicitly) demonstrates that driving is a losable privilege. Even though the guide does not explicitly colour its readership, the implicit message is one that black drivers are aware of: they cannot afford to make any mistakes because more eyes are on them than their white counterparts. If Coalhouse Walker Jr.'s story indicates what can go wrong on the road even when they perform driving well, black people know that any wrong-doing will cost them their automobility. Responsibility is not enough. The tone and rhetorical choice to focus on the transgressions of other drivers alludes to how the ideology of placement still orders the way black people navigate the world (both in the static spaces of towns

and the fluid space of the road). As a result, their automobility is susceptible to others who may not know the stakes. Black drivers must hyper-vigilantly perform a self-awareness that ultimately showcases that they take their responsibility as drivers seriously. Sometimes, this is still not enough.

Where hyper-vigilance falls short, the *Green Book* tempts black people with language and rhetoric of modernity. The black community's buy-in to remain legible as responsible drivers who believe they are genuinely autonomous in their movement is crucial. Green and the editors continue to employ responsibility politics from the ideology of placement as they refer to black readers/drivers who use the guide to navigate space and their place in society as "Up-to-Date people" (see Figure 3). This message again hints at the "responsibility" that black drivers must demonstrate to maintain their privilege of automobility. The "up-to-date" descriptor, meant to distinguish black people who use the *Green Book* on their trips from those who do not, renders responsibility a characteristic of modernity and respectability. The push to be modern and respectable persuades black readers/drivers to step into the present and be socially aware of the gravity of their automobility. Failure to carry the guide makes them relics of the past and bumpkins unresponsible and unfit to drive. The latter faction of black people either cannot afford the guide or have no access to it. The responsibility of keeping the *Green Book* on one's person masks the necessity of this act — violence on the road makes carrying the guide a requirement for safety, and subtly shaming black people who cannot or do not have access to it is regressive.

UP - TO - DATE
PEOPLE
USE
THE GREEN BOOK'
ON THEIR TRIPS

Page 19

Fig. 3. *The Negro Motorist Green Book.* 1938

Where the guide leads its modern and up-to-date readership next reveals why respectability is at the core of its mission. The *Green Book's* suggestive approach prompts black people to play along with an economics of placement as they practice automobility, through consumerism that lends itself to purchasing respectable goods and services. Nevertheless, the auto-mobile individual (white or black) remains legible as a consumer willing to buy their way into the space to access the open road's privileges. As an extension of responsibility politics, the *Green Book* taps (black) business owners and consumers' economic sensibilities to beckon both groups into consumerism to enact their automobility. There are no shortages of types of ads (see Figure 4). Like the cover page, the leisurely services (Goldman's Wine and Liquors) sit next to the necessary ones (General Auto Repairing Brake and Auto Service). Green and the editor team dance around the road's

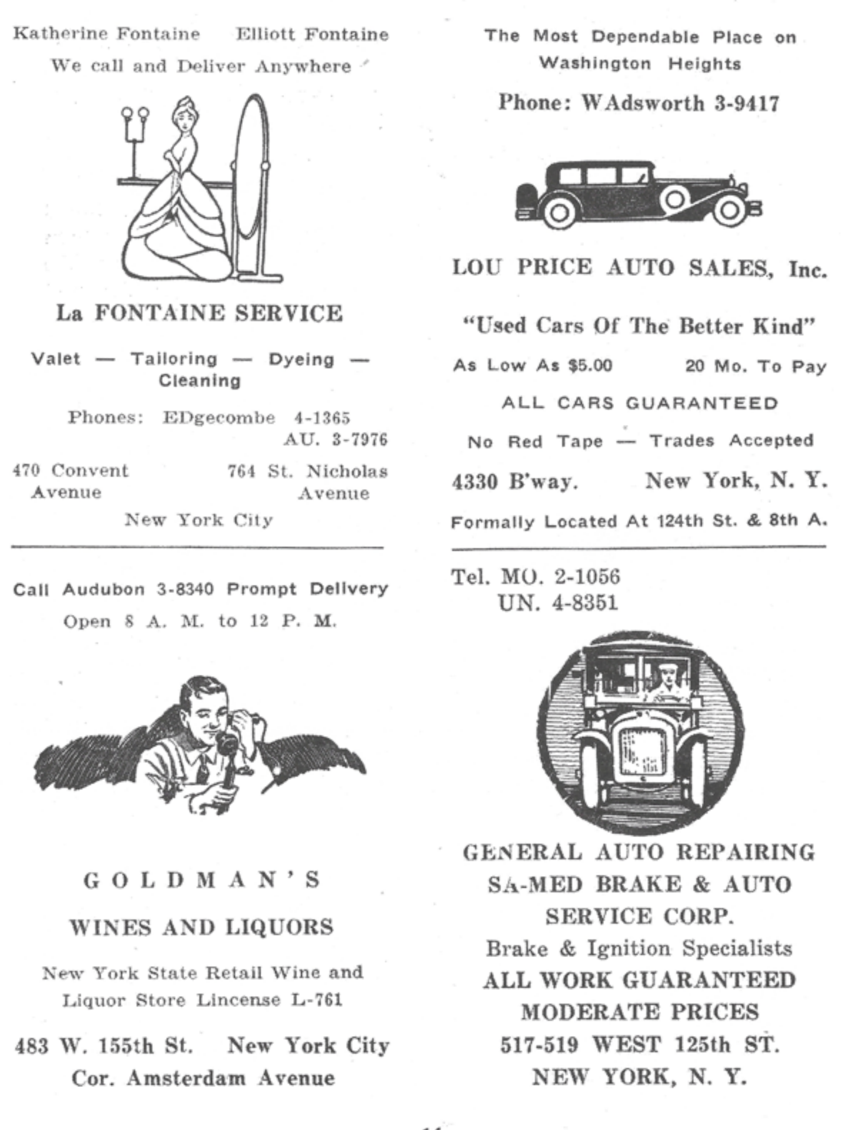
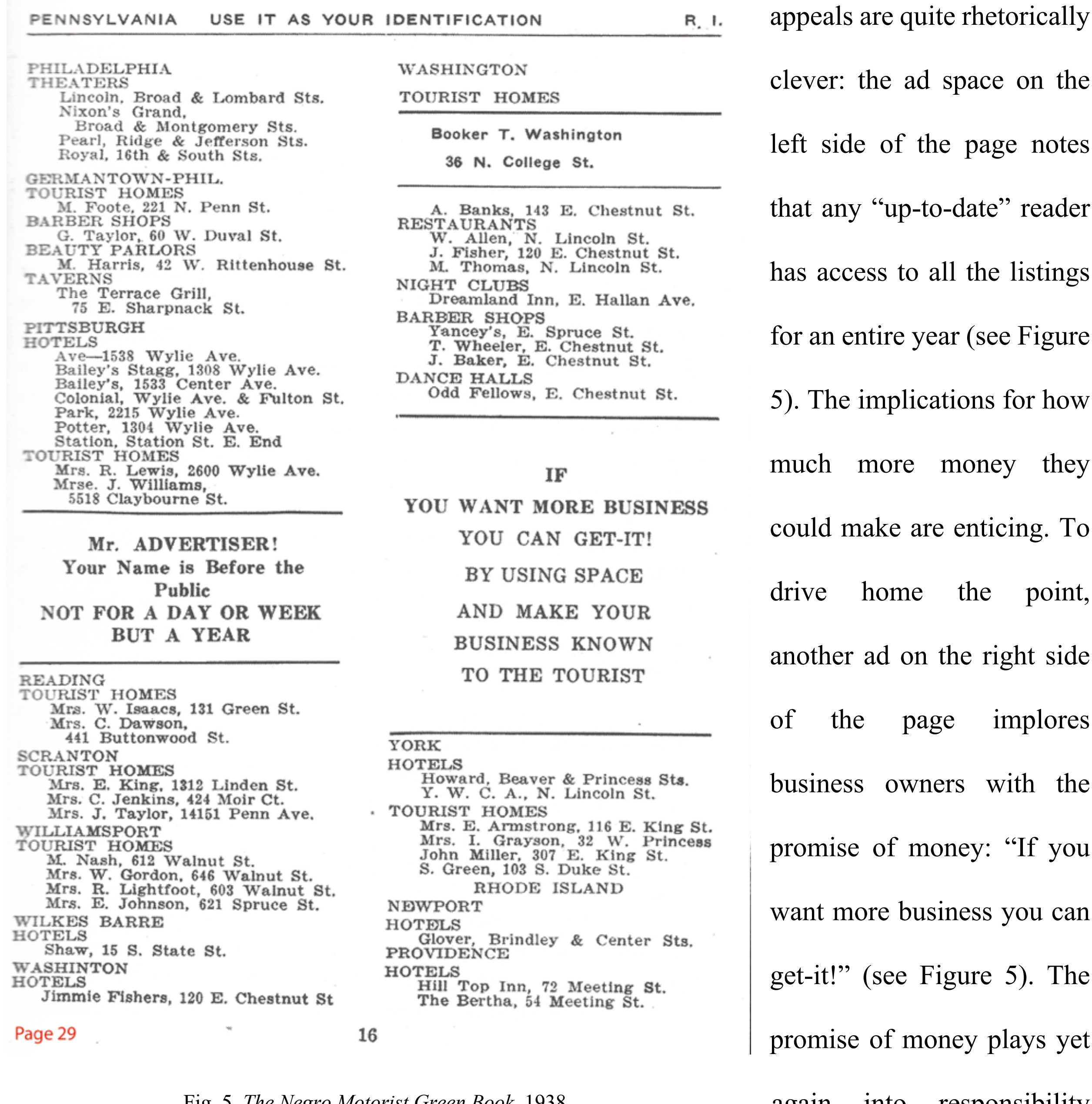


Fig. 4. The Negro Motorist Green Book. 1938

potential violence while graphically explaining what readers/drivers can expect as consumers. A business owner can find through the guide appeals to submit their business name and address. The appeals are quite rhetorically clever: the ad space on the left side of the page notes that any "up-to-date" reader has access to all the listings for an entire year (see Figure 5). The implications for how much more money they could make are enticing. To drive home the point, another ad on the right side of the page implores business owners with the promise of money: "If you want more business you can get-it!" (see Figure 5). The promise of money plays yet again into responsibility politics wherein money is indicative of success and respectability. The business owner should leap at the opportunity to apply for ad space in the *Green Book* because doing so will make them more money. Money goes into the pockets of black and black-friendly business owners, but there is very



PENNSYLVANIA USE IT AS YOUR IDENTIFICATION R. I.

PHILADELPHIA
THEATERS
Lincoln, Broad & Lombard Sts.
Nixon's Grand,
Broad & Montgomery Sts.
Pearl, Ridge & Jefferson Sts.
Royal, 16th & South Sts.

GERMANTOWN-PHIL.
TOURIST HOMES
M. Foote, 221 N. Penn St.
BARBER SHOPS
G. Taylor, 60 W. Duval St.
BEAUTY PARLORS
M. Harris, 42 W. Rittenhouse St.
TAVERNS
The Terrace Grill,
75 E. Sharpnack St.

PITTSBURGH
HOTELS
Ave—1538 Wylie Ave.
Bailey's Stagg, 1308 Wylie Ave.
Bailey's, 1533 Center Ave.
Colonial, Wylie Ave. & Fulton St.
Park, 2215 Wylie Ave.
Potter, 1304 Wylie Ave.
Station, Station St. E. End
TOURIST HOMES
Mrs. R. Lewis, 2600 Wylie Ave.
Mrse. J. Williams,
5518 Claybourne St.

Mr. ADVERTISER!
Your Name is Before the Public
NOT FOR A DAY OR WEEK
BUT A YEAR

READING
TOURIST HOMES
Mrs. W. Isaacs, 131 Green St.
Mrs. C. Dawson,
441 Buttonwood St.
SCRANTON
TOURIST HOMES
Mrs. E. King, 1312 Linden St.
Mrs. C. Jenkins, 424 Moir Ct.
Mrs. J. Taylor, 14151 Penn Ave.
WILLIAMSPORT
TOURIST HOMES
M. Nash, 612 Walnut St.
Mrs. W. Gordon, 646 Walnut St.
Mrs. R. Lightfoot, 603 Walnut St.
Mrs. E. Johnson, 621 Spruce St.
WILKES BARRE
HOTELS
Shaw, 15 S. State St.
WASHINTON
HOTELS
Jimmie Fishers, 120 E. Chestnut St

WASHINGTON
TOURIST HOMES

Booker T. Washington
36 N. College St.

A. Banks, 143 E. Chestnut St.
RESTAURANTS
W. Allen, N. Lincoln St.
J. Fisher, 120 E. Chestnut St.
M. Thomas, N. Lincoln St.
NIGHT CLUBS
Dreamland Inn, E. Hallan Ave.
BARBER SHOPS
Yancey's, E. Spruce St.
T. Wheeler, E. Chestnut St.
J. Baker, E. Chestnut St.
DANCE HALLS
Odd Fellows, E. Chestnut St.

IF
YOU WANT MORE BUSINESS
YOU CAN GET-IT!
BY USING SPACE
AND MAKE YOUR
BUSINESS KNOWN
TO THE TOURIST

YORK
HOTELS
Howard, Beaver & Princess Sts.
Y. W. C. A., N. Lincoln St.
TOURIST HOMES
Mrs. E. Armstrong, 116 E. King St.
Mrs. I. Grayson, 32 W. Princess
John Miller, 307 E. King St.
S. Green, 103 S. Duke St.
RHODE ISLAND
NEWPORT
HOTELS
Glover, Brindley & Center Sts.
PROVIDENCE
HOTELS
Hill Top Inn, 72 Meeting St.
The Bertha, 54 Meeting St.

Page 29 16

Fig. 5. *The Negro Motorist Green Book.* 1938

little push to challenge the ideology. Once again, the term up-to-date showcases modernity and popularity within the consumer-base. Evidently, there is a right and wrong way to be auto-mobile.

As one of the guide's first iterations, from the cover to the end page, the 1938 edition uses language to invoke that readers should be "travel-wise" and use the *Green Book* to partake in consumerism and leisure. The guide expertly champions a newfound automobility that requires black drivers to be responsible, participate in patronizing businesses that are black friendly, and view the entire driving practice as a means toward mobility. Although all these things are noteworthy, they are apparatuses of the ideology of placement because they distract from the presence of legibility and placement that still operate on the road. Automobility is not enough to indicate that mobility is possible. As Coalhouse Walker Jr.'s story reveals, any system that requires black people to employ responsibility politics is one where automobility (and mobility) is conditional. Instead of dissuading its customer base, the guide emphasizes that black readers/drivers are legible as patrons *and* black: a decision that foregrounds consumerism rather than activism. While this choice reflects the editor's desire to remain fiscally sound, it leaves much to be desired for envisioning scalable racial mobility for black people.

Section 2: *The Green Book,* 1947 Edition; the Long Road Ahead

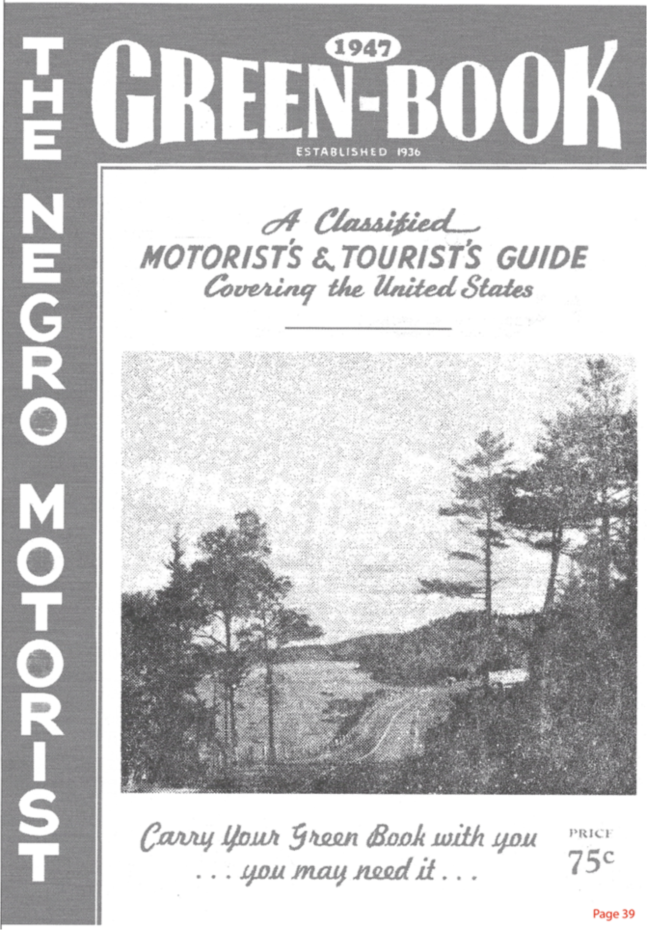


Fig. 6. *The Negro Motorist Green Book.* 1947

The 1947 issue of the *Green Book* better speaks to the budding national obsession with the car and the open road by using capacious imagery and graphic design to convince black readers/drivers that they too must tap into the American rhetoric of reclaiming one's character as a sign of redemptive individuality. The editors accomplish this through strategic erasure of black people from photos that over-emphasize the idyllic open road, automobility, and an increased consumerism. As a result, black readers/drivers can project themselves into imagery and discourses about automobility. In that sense, driving becomes a possible cultural pastime rather than a fraught privilege for black people. This tactic proves fiscally sound for the *Green Book*, as

its black readership is susceptible to images and tourist content that valorizes the car, the road, and tourism as a tonic to the stifling day-to-day life of work – even as their black legibility in the ideology of placement orders their entire driving experience. As a result, the 1947 edition exacerbates the black reader's/driver's desire to drive while de-emphasizing how black legibility complicates the experience of driving. Instead, the 1947 edition of the *Green Book* 1947 features a standardized narrative that the car and road will liberate the (black) self at the outset of the creation of the Interstate Highway System. The US' obsession with the car as a cure for immobility, and how the *Green Book's* strategic photography and advertising thus bolster a sense of false security for black readers/drivers.

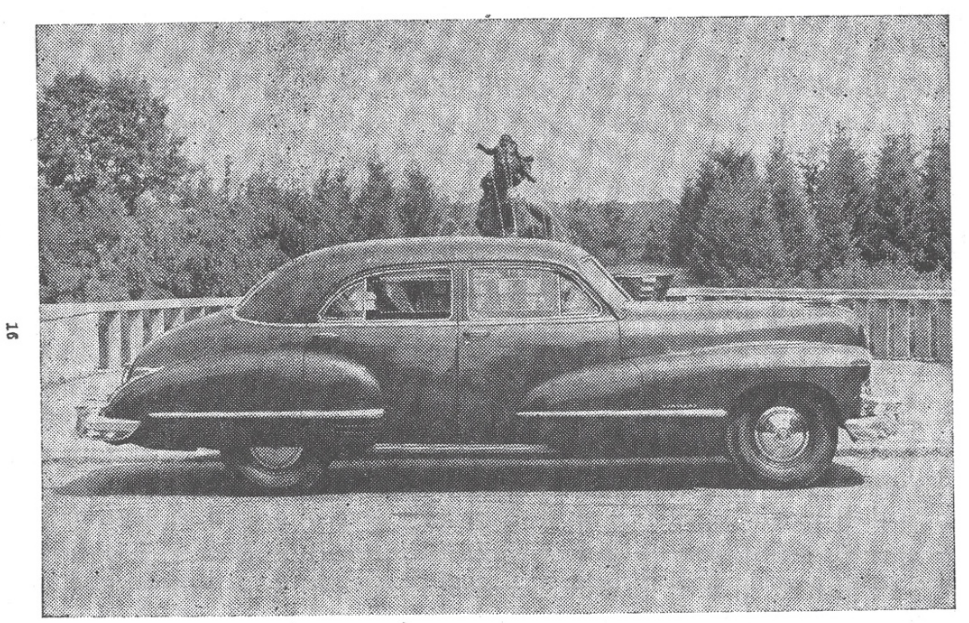
The visually-pleasing 1947 guide cover page centers the road more than the Negro motorist. The photograph of an (empty) iconic highway winding its way into the frontier/horizon with trees on either side is not the largest object on the page but is the most prominent feature (see Figure 6). The guide's title is broken in half, with "The Negro Motorist" occupying the left border and the other half, "*Green Book,*" sitting atop the page. Symbolically, the Negro Motorist is literally in the margins as the open road holds the nation's attention – a theme echoed throughout the rest of the 1947 edition. Readers then find a much tenser disclaimer about the need to carry the guide sitting under the photo: "Carry your Green Book with you…you may need it…" (29). While the 1947 edition does reiterate the 1938 edition's message about the need to carry a guide, the tone hints at a darker set of consequences should black drivers not have the guide on their person. The editors' phrasing is simultaneously imperative and suggestive. The two ellipses leave a capacious space for the reader/driver to fill the gaps where the guide refuses to: black people must carry the guide when they travel because there is always a potential threat of something (presumable violence) when driving while black. This suggestive tone is seen throughout this iteration of the

guide, constantly asking readers to infer and project their thoughts and aspirations into these spaces of written discourse. Rarely does this *Green Book* edition explicitly state or show what it means, which puts the onus on its readers to know and interpret the messages as they see fit.

The guide evidently depends on black readers/drivers knowledge of what dangers await them on the road, but rather than outright imploring them to carry the guide. If a violent or unpleasant event should occur, the guide might not even be to blame on account of their disclaimer. The guide's editors effectively downplay that placement and racial violence exist, even as they warn black drivers to take preemptive measures against these threats. However, this preventative safety measure will not interrupt the racism black drivers could experience on the road. If attacked or followed by people hoping to threaten them, merely holding up the *Green Book* as a sign of peace would be ineffective. The dissonance between the cover and the rest of the guide is massive. Logically speaking, a consistent interventional approach should be far superior to a preventative one. Even though black readers/drivers have addresses of respite points they can point to on a map. The guide cannot guarantee safety because it merely allows black people to know where to go so that, hopefully, they can avoid potential threats. I will explore the merits of preventative vs. interventionalist approaches more toward the end of this chapter. For now, **t**he photo on the cover page and the suggestive tone of the disclaimer can potentially bolster a misplaced optimism in the black community about how open the road is and how the car liberates black drivers.

Given the editors' willingness to foreground the idyllic road through imagery, it bears mentioning that the road and car do not mistakenly become fixtures in US history, politics, and literature in the early 20th century. According to Cotton Seiler, automobility emerges in the US "during and as a strategic response to the crises precipitated by the transition from proprietary to corporate capitalism" (25-26). The desire to control one's movement through space germinates in

American thought as the ideal remedy to how capitalism ruins a person's potential to govern themselves. As capitalism evolves, corporate business models like Taylorism and the innovations of Henry Ford's assembly line system exacerbate how laborers work (and consequently how they live their lives after said work). Henry Ford's assembly line for the Model T captures this loss of autonomy very well: workers could perform the same routine task all day and never move more than two feet from where they stand (26-27). The work itself (and the system that creates that work) transforms people into laborers. The scientific Taylorization of the workplace and workforce, with down-to-the-second surveillance and repetitive tasks requiring little free thought and autonomy, stifles laborers' selfhood. Workers witness their transformation into automatons and lament their loss of independence, often looking back to the past when rugged individualism had shaped the lives of their ancestors, parents, and even themselves. In such a world, autonomy (or perceived autonomy) and individuality become currency for a person to break away from the mundane and eschew socially derivative placement that capitalism and the economics of placement insists upon. Laborers demand better wages to afford lives commensurate with their labor output. Once in control of the monetary production of their labor, they self-soothe through consumerism. Cars become the newest commodity they can purchase to (theoretically) escape the monotony of work and home life.



Page 56 This is Cadillac's 62 Model

Fig. 7. *The Negro Motorist Green Book.* 1947

The *Green Book* effectively but misguidedly taps into discourse about the car as a liberating vehicle for black drivers. Numerous think-pieces and ads for cars like Cadillac's 62 model (see Figure 7) are excellent snapshots of idyllic automobility. The car sits in the foreground of the frame, quite literally the object of desire and every bit the symbol for driving on the open road – even as it sits idle in front of a statue with trees in the background. Even though a black driver (or any driver at all) is nowhere to be found in the photo, the reader can transpose their own likeness onto the image mentally. In this instance, the erasure of a person and capacious imagination of the *Green Book's* readership feeds into the narrative that black people too can be auto-mobile individuals, even as the guide's cover page warns that the *Green Book* is necessary for their safety. Black readers/drivers can see themselves touring the nation in one of the most modern pieces of machinery available. The conflicting message is that black automobility is possible, but it requires a stricter set of parameters that black people must comply with to achieve. This is a far cry from the care-free conceptualization that white drivers purportedly experience. The effects of slavery and Jim Crow are still being felt at this time, and the long-lost sovereignty that white US citizens

claim to experience seems trivial in comparison. The *Green Book* effectively valorizes automobility even as black people's history of immobility calls for in-depth handling of why and how black people might see the car as a means of liberation.

To the above point, an economics of placement bolsters the idea that Americans have lost their autonomy and are becoming increasingly static, docile, and lacking in character (a socially derivative term that sees massive proliferation throughout social sciences, business, and politics of the 1930s and 40s).[21] While American character is not necessarily synonymous with owning a car or buying things, the correlation does offer more avenues to self-determine by being able to move through space at will and self-express. To retrieve some of that character and autonomy over their legibility, they can buy an automobile to drive around their town, their state, or the nation. Consequently, consumerism ushers in an era where (auto)mobility seems a likely solution to the restlessness Americans experience. The newest commodity (i.e., the car) spurs the growth of the automotive and travel industries, making the road, the car, and consumerism the redeemers of American character and selfhood in what sociologists and political theorists dub an ongoing assault against American identity.

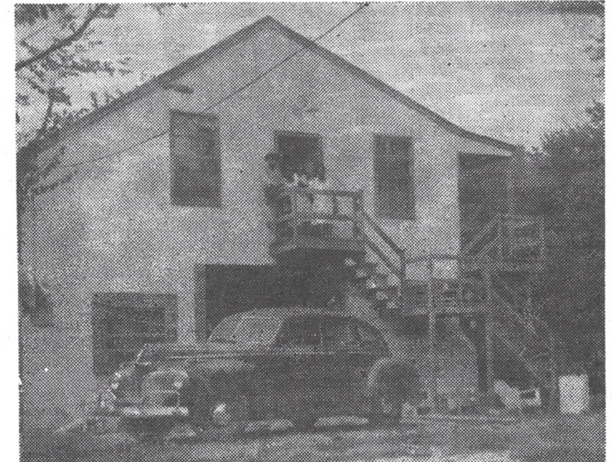
[21] Cotton Seiler devotes an extensive section of his analysis to the birth of the modern highway system and the national obsession with automobility. In his first chapter of *Republic of Drivers*, entitled "Individualism, Taylorization, and the Crisis of Republican Selfhood," he explores how the loss of uniquely (read fabricated) forms of American identity necessitates the restoration of those identities via character. Automobility offers a remedy. (17-36)

The 1947 issue capitalizes on the opportunity to open black drivers' worlds up to the travel industry as a means of engaging in consumerism and tapping into more of automobility's benefits. The black readership sees several advertisements for places like the Bill Board Esso Service Station and the Riverside Tourist Court lodging space in New Orleans (see Figure 8). The guide's strategic use of photography to appeal to black readers/drivers shows rather than tells that these places exist, yet again letting the readers do the work of transposing themselves into the pictures as possible patrons of the gas station and motel. These businesses are thus rendered as real (not imagined) spaces open to black patronage. As a component of automobility, consumerism through the tourist industry is one of the best ways for black drivers to enact mobility that has long been out of reach.

Phone Jackson 9617 On U. S. No. 90
E. L. Marsalis J. L. Wicker

BILL BOARD ESSO SERVICE

2900 S. Claiborne Ave. New Orleans, La.
Repairs, Washing, Greasing, Tire—Battery Service & Complete line of Standard Products. Tourist Information
E. L. Marsalis Sr. Prop. Phone: CEDAR 4009



RIVERSIDE TOURIST COURT
3501 Riverside Drive - Jefferson Parish - New Orleans 20, La.
In Connection With - Bill Board Esso Service

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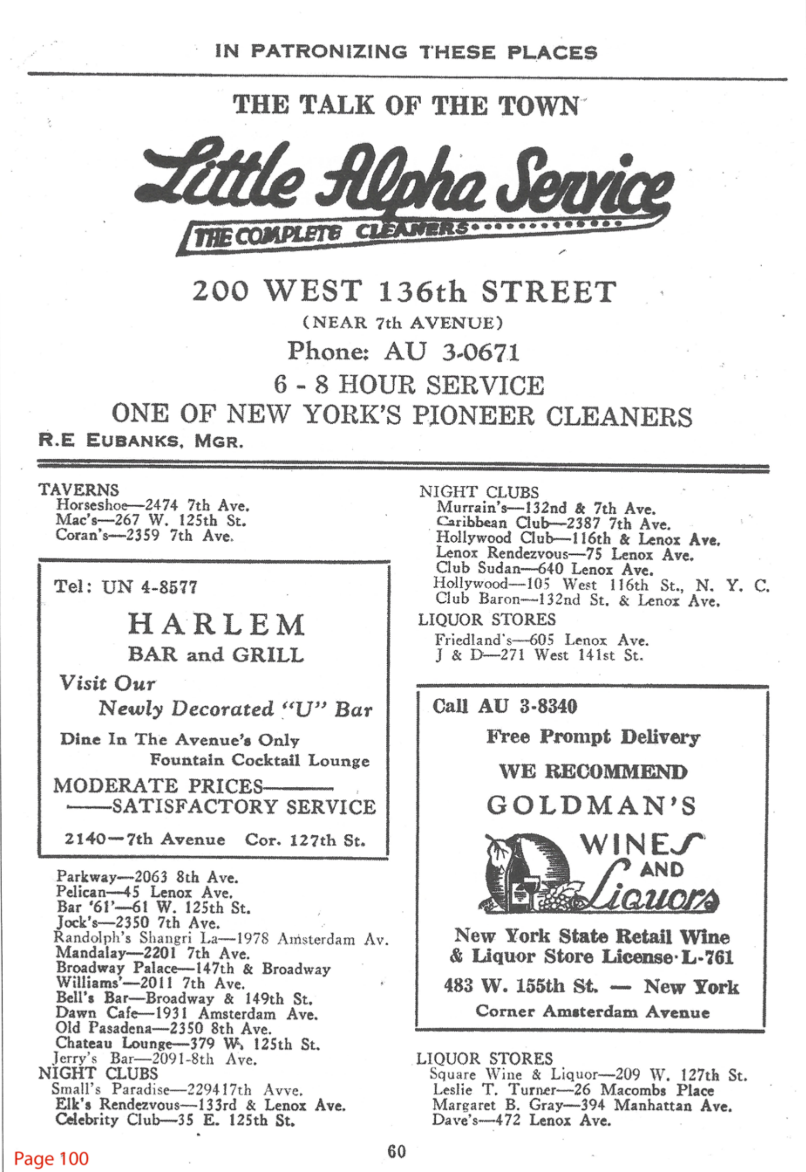
Fig. 8. *The Negro Motorist Green Book.* 1947

Still, the *Green Book* is not just an arbitrary list of titles, addresses, and pictures. The guide's editors also experiment with making advertising more appealing through formatting. The editors weave visually appealing sections between the more general listings, giving bold fonts and scripts to specific businesses to better distinguish them from the surrounding text. In fact, the Little Alpha Service Cleaners uses three script types and takes up more real estate on the page than the other two ads combined (see Figure 9). These ads receive more space to sell their respective business' services, too, as is evident in the cleaners' phone number, brief service timeline description, and not one but two call-outs for how well-regarded they are in New York (e.g., "The Talk of the Town" and "One of New York's Pioneer Cleaners"). Goldman's Wines and Harlem Bar and Grill receive similar treatment even if they take up less space on the page, with the former's tiny but distinguishable


IN PATRONIZING THESE PLACES

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

Little Alpha Service

THE COMPLETE CLEANERS

200 WEST 136th STREET
(NEAR 7th AVENUE)
Phone: AU 3-0671
6 - 8 HOUR SERVICE
ONE OF NEW YORK'S PIONEER CLEANERS
R.E EUBANKS, MGR.

TAVERNS
Horseshoe—2474 7th Ave.
Mac's—267 W. 125th St.
Coran's—2359 7th Ave.

Tel: UN 4-8577
HARLEM
BAR and GRILL
Visit Our
Newly Decorated "U" Bar
Dine In The Avenue's Only
Fountain Cocktail Lounge
MODERATE PRICES——
——SATISFACTORY SERVICE
2140—7th Avenue Cor. 127th St.

Parkway—2063 8th Ave.
Pelican—45 Lenox Ave.
Bar '61'—61 W. 125th St.
Jock's—2350 7th Ave.
Randolph's Shangri La—1978 Amsterdam Av.
Mandalay—2201 7th Ave.
Broadway Palace—147th & Broadway
Williams'—2011 7th Ave.
Bell's Bar—Broadway & 149th St.
Dawn Cafe—1931 Amsterdam Ave.
Old Pasadena—2350 8th Ave.
Chateau Lounge—379 W. 125th St.
Jerry's Bar—2091-8th Ave.

NIGHT CLUBS
Small's Paradise—229417th Avve.
Elk's Rendezvous—133rd & Lenox Ave.
Celebrity Club—35 E. 125th St.

NIGHT CLUBS
Murrain's—132nd & 7th Ave.
Caribbean Club—2387 7th Ave.
Hollywood Club—116th & Lenox Ave.
Lenox Rendezvous—75 Lenox Ave.
Club Sudan—640 Lenox Ave.
Hollywood—105 West 116th St., N. Y. C.
Club Baron—132nd St. & Lenox Ave.

LIQUOR STORES
Friedland's—605 Lenox Ave.
J & D—271 West 141st St.

Call AU 3-8340
Free Prompt Delivery
WE RECOMMEND
GOLDMAN'S
WINES AND Liquors
New York State Retail Wine & Liquor Store License·L-761
483 W. 155th St. — New York
Corner Amsterdam Avenue

LIQUOR STORES
Square Wine & Liquor—209 W. 127th St.
Leslie T. Turner—26 Macombs Place
Margaret B. Gray—394 Manhattan Ave.
Dave's—472 Lenox Ave.

Page 100 60

Fig. 9. *The Negro Motorist Green Book.* 1947

pictographic bottle and a glass of wine set amid grapes. With such imagery and formatting, the guide entices business owners who can afford the ad space to increase the amount of money they invest in listing their businesses. And as a benefit of their investment, they get more out of their advertising as the guide circulates, letting business owners jockey for a piece of the market and the black readership's attention.

Consumerism aside, the myth of long-lost individualism creates more than just a market for the tourist industry. Uncoincidentally, discourse about rugged individualism and character raises growing concerns about how that individualism will affect the collective American's safety. Once automobiles and auto-mobile people become increasingly normal, the US government realizes that more should be done to curtail a nation of individuals' worst (read selfish and ungovernable) tendencies for the broader society's sake. In short, drivers practice their newfound skill at the risk of pedestrians who cannot afford or do not want vehicles. As a result, news articles of the period capture the stark distinction between motorists and pedestrians, with accounts that range from utter rancor to outright glorification of drivers (Seiler 51). Fittingly, as drivers became a lightning rod for political debate over the fate of individualism and self-governmentality, the auto-mobile person necessitates transformation into an automobile subject in public discourse almost overnight. As a result, disagreements over how to regulate drivers' actions and proclivities are born out of equal parts panic and strategy to create something more profound than just a method of transportation. Driving could arguably be one of the US' greatest pastimes – but only with proper surveillance and a certain amount of control to ensure responsible, safe drivers are present on the roads. The US government now has (more) valid reasons to build out the country's infrastructure.

The Interstate Highway System very closely depends on people's ideological acceptance of automobility as an expression of individualism, even as surveillance and licensing become

integral to the driving act. To convince Americans that the endeavor to build a large, publicly-funded infrastructure system is necessary, Dwight D. Eisenhower and the Clay Committee create a cohesive narrative that builds on academic discourse regarding the impending threat of foreign governments and their assaults on American individualism. Apparently, Americans' innate character to be (or remain) a rugged individual that can and does exist outside the limits of overbearing government control is under threat by communist Russian ideologies. Rather than take the course of stating that the individual will be lost in the country's effort to fight off communism, the Republican Party steers the conversation in the direction of how this collective push will ultimately benefit a nation of free thinkers and individuals, protecting them from unsafe and communist sensibilities and interventions. The Clay Committee thus steeps much of its rhetoric in language that shoehorns the US's need to develop better highways for safety and military defenses. Among other things, the Interstate Highway system is meant to promote "safety, to accommodate more automobiles…for defense purposes, if that should ever be necessary…[and] for the economy. Not just as a public works measure, but for future growth" (Smith 652-653). The Eisenhower Administration harnesses fear about the advent of communist Eastern European governments (e.g., "defense purposes" alludes to how the US must be able to deploy its military defense system via this new infrastructure quickly) to green-light funding a massive array of infrastructural projects that would be years in the making. The feat is made palatable to US citizens by growing unrest about Germany and Russia's technological advances and ability to mobilize their national defense for wartime with high-tech infrastructure. The legislation's language also hides its community-driven agenda to create roadways funded through tax dollars by foregrounding the necessity of the work because individuals will benefit immensely.

As the work begins and more drivers take to the existing roads, potential drivers must practice a politics of responsibility – drivers who practice safe driving and quintessentially American values are seen as the most suitable auto-mobile subjects (recall the Safe Driving Rules from the 1938 edition of the *Green Book*) and are therefore model citizens in the interstate era. Unsurprisingly, though, responsible citizens are overwhelmingly legible as white and male, with nearly anyone else at risk of losing the privilege (but in their mind, the right) to drive and take part in what is arguable an American pastime. To this extent, automobility becomes a helpful ideological apparatus for local, state, and national government because the practice encourages subjects to be governable to maintain the right or privilege to drive.

Automobility is a convenient solution to both the perceived loss of character and identity and the government's need to control citizens because the practice of driving is what Foucault refers to as a technology of the self: "a practice that permits individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, a way of being, to transform themselves to attain a certain condition" (*Technologies of the Self* 18). The crucial phrases in Foucault's description are "by their own means" and "with the help of others." While driving allows people to take ownership of their movement through space, there must be something to drive on, a vehicle to drive, and destinations to reach. All of the aforementioned things rely on a market of vehicles, a road built by the government, and a thriving touring industry. After all, where would a driver go without a road, a highway, or a destination? To this end, the technology of the self must use the communal and social stage to prioritize the self. Simply stated, drivers could be ideologically tied to the idea that they engage in self-determination and express their individuality even as they take part in a national, communally-funded, and taxable capital project. Yet the moment they violate a law, rule, or more of the

roadway, they forfeit the right to drive. Foucault ends his definition by saying that technologies of the self are a means to an end. I agree with Foucault, especially because when people engage in automobility, they create their freedom to self-govern and become worthy of attaining the right or privilege to drive. But even so, automobility, this technology of the self, shifts toward the purposes of a larger entity – in this case, government.

With the psychological groundwork laid, the US Interstate Highway System will be easier to justify to the American people through a consistent valorization of automobility as a redeemer of some long-lost autonomy. The government can transform citizens into subjects through public projects and legislation so long as the drivers believe that these small forfeitures are worthwhile to the act of driving. What would eventually become the interstate highway system combines all the necessary components to make US citizens into subjects that would uphold any apparatus of their own volition with minimal emphasis on the facticity of that control. To ease the dissonance of government control for the individual, the US government pilfers political and academic discourse to bolster the idea that American individuality, the core of automobility, is still under attack. Thus, the line between individual rights and state-sanctioned privileges blurs, convincing citizens that their liberties with automobile ownership and consumerist travel are due to their own autonomous decisions rather than surveillance, licensing, and policing. While the interstate highway offers drivers freedom, the freedom comes at the cost of oversight by police, state-mandated driver licensing, and performative self-discipline. For all these reasons, the Interstate Highway System is pivotal for the racial ideology of placement.

However, that placement operates so well on the road should be no surprise. After all, the interstate is a product of politicians who not only adhere to but create the means for the politics and economics of placement to exist in daily life. Why would the road not also operate according

to the rules of racists, misogynists, and classists? Ultimately, segregation is one of the many institutional and everyday practices born of the politics of placement that shapes the modern interstate through a transformation into the ideology of placement. Separation of the races employs placement as a tool to create and enforce a supplemental racial order within a given space. Though these things operate differently on the road than in more static spaces like restaurants and schools, legibility follows black drivers. For example, when black people see a sign that reads, "Whites Only," they do not have to guess if they belong in that space — bold letters plainly announce that black people do not belong there. However, the ostensibly open road does not have the words "Colored Only" or "Whites Only" written or posted anywhere on the lanes, highway signs, or traffic signals. When a black person enters this space, they may not even appear to be black as they whiz by with other drivers. Only at points of intersection, which could, in fact, be at actual intersections, do black drivers become legibly black and therefore placeable.

ADVERTISING SOLICITORS

We have a few territories open for representatives. The opportunity is open to a fine energetic and ambitious man or woman.

There may be an opening in your territory sometime. Liberal Commissions. Write for particulars, state your qualifications.

VICTOR H. GREEN & CO.
200 West 135th Street
Room 215-A
New York 30, N. Y.

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Fig. 10. *The Negro Motorist Green Book.* 1947

As further proof that the *Green Book* will keep up its advertising practices, at the end of the 1947 issue, the editors have a call for solicitors who will help find more business owners to buy advertising space in the guide. "Ambitious" and "energetic," the two qualities the editors specifically call for in a solicitor, are the mark of a good representative for the guide and its mission to bring more business and awareness to the cause (see Figure 10). To further entice people to apply to work for the guide, "liberal commissions" stands

out as one of the shortest sentences of this ad. However, these traits and incentives to find business and bring awareness to the guide can backfire. With a rapidly spreading national discourse around how automobility will be the great redeemer of the American character, the *Green Book* promotes its vision of automobility as being equally redemptive for black readers/drivers. However, because the entire system is an extension of the ideology of placement, black people can only hope to enjoy a restrictive automobility.

Section 3: The Site of Sightseeing, *The Green Book,* 1954 Edition

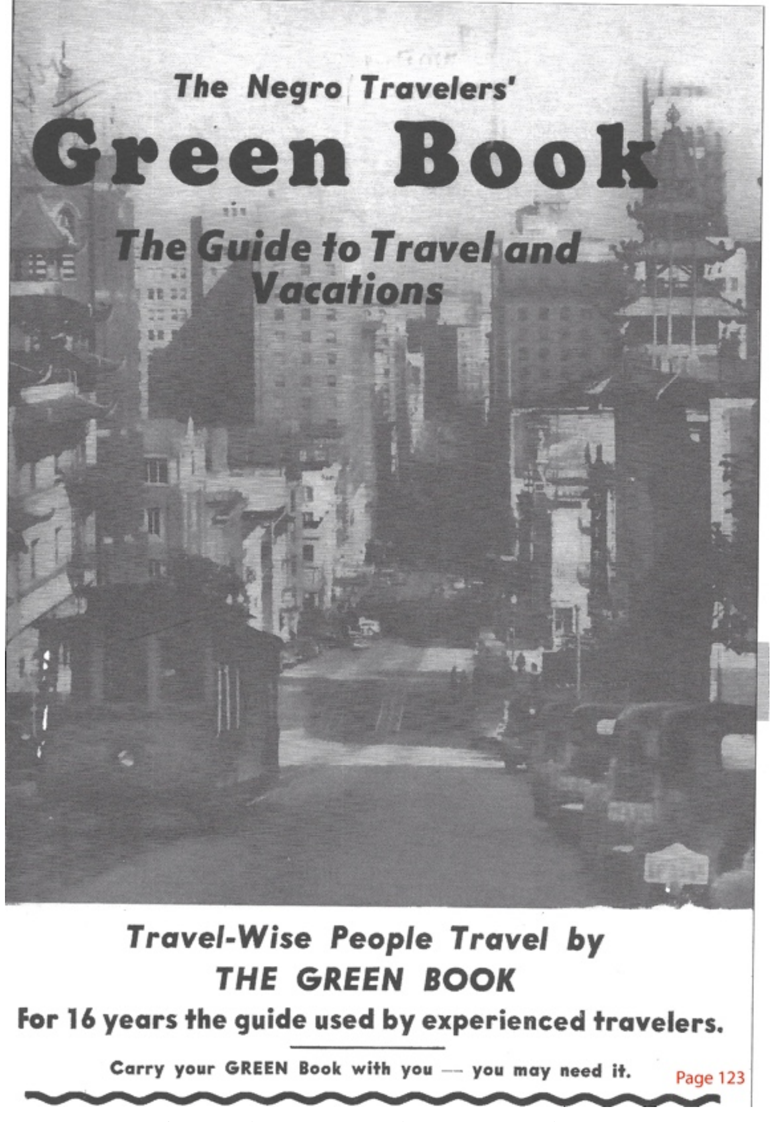

Fig. 11. *The Negro Traveler's Green Book.* 1954

Rather than continue to use the generic term "motorist" to describe black drivers, the 1954 edition changes its title to *The Negro Travelers' Green Book*. Now plural and possessive, "Negro Travelers" sits atop the cover page, not quite the center of attention (it has smaller font size than *Green Book*) but more prominent than in previous iterations. In the same vein, the cover page de-centers the automobile, depicting a trolley gliding smoothly past cars parked on either side of a street in San Francisco (see Figure 11). The juxtaposition of a popular form of public transportation

with private car ownership communicates that the same potential for self-determination and leisure exists even without absolute control over one's locomotion. The car sits in the margins now, and the trolley, a more passive but leisurely form of transportation, beckons black readers to take their time as they enjoy the travel industry. However, the changes in terminology and formatting are cosmetic. This issue hits shelves one year before Rosa Parks famously refuses to give up her seat at the front of a bus in Montgomery, Alabama — meaning that this picture idealizes mobility that still does not exist without the threat of turbulence for all black people. Sadly, black travelers still travel within a segregated nation. Even when they patronize black-friendly and black-owned businesses, they pump money into the black travel industry that exists as a reactive answer to the segregated economics of placement.

At this point in the chapter, I want to emphasize that without a nuanced and dynamic depiction of automobility that intentionally leads black people's discourse with a healthy criticism (i.e., more overt than hinting) of placement, black people will unknowingly support the ideology of placement. The *Green Book* has enough readership at this point of its circulation period, so, hypothetically speaking, the editors could champion more avenues toward (auto-mobility) than just patronizing black-friendly businesses. But the *Green Book's* over-emphasis on the black tourism industry does not entirely ignore racial violence, but it does normalize that racial violence as a factor in black automobility. Let me be clear: neither Victor H. Green, agents of his travel industry company, nor black people are to blame for their participation in the ideology. Racial legibility and placement are built into the Interstate, government, the judicial system, and legislation. Though a work of fiction, *Ragtime* offers a damning illustration of what black people cannot afford to ignore. At any given point, they can become targets of racial violence for driving while black. Coalhouse Walker Jr. was doing nothing wrong, but the white firefighters decided

they had had enough of what they saw as his flaunting on that fateful day. The *Green Book* could provide more of a lens to explore the injustices black drivers face while traveling to curb this potential threat of violence. Instead, the 1954 version persists with business as usual as it sells the black readership the dream that driving and touring can remedy black immobility.

The 1954 edition does engage the topic of placement more explicitly than ever before. But even this gesture falls short of being critical of the system of racism that black people face. In the opening pages of this edition, the editor's notes state:

> The white traveler for years has had no difficulty in getting accommodations, but with the Negro it has been different. He before the advent of Negro Travel Guides has had to depend on word of mouth and then sometimes accommodations weren't available. But nowadays things are different – he has his own travel guide that he can depend on for all the information that he wants and with a selection. Hence these guides have made traveling more popular and without running into embarrassing situations. (125)

The editors explicitly state that white travelers can find accommodations but never detail what exact obstacles black travelers face. Once again, the reader/traveler must recall, imagine, and project what those troubles are because the guide is not explicit. For example, a black traveler might not find a hotel to stay at or a place to eat due to scarcity, segregation, surveillance from police, or white civilians' mistrust. These things all fall under the broad and innocuous term "embarrassing situations." The editors' unwillingness (it can hardly be called an inability at this point) to call these tragedies what they are indicates that the *Green Book* — like the black people who use it — still exists within an ideology of placement that has yet to bestow upon black travelers the right to travel and tour without harassment like white travelers. Progress has been made; this much is true. But that progress comes mostly in the form of a bank of information (kept in a glove

compartment) that helps black people travel safely. It does not change the conditions that cause the need for said information.

To disseminate its information, the 1954 issue gains more traction in the black community through solicitors, whom the *Green Book's* editors refer to as "agents" (see Figure 12). The appeal for more agents centers on money so much that the profits a potential agent can earn eclipses the guide's mission to provide safe travel for black travelers. The word money appears three times: once in the ad subtitle, in the first sentence, and one last time in the final sentence. Rather than racial uplift, money is a means toward mobility for agents. According to the publishers, there is no easier time to make money because, in their own words, "never has there been a greater demand than now…[for]…people to purchase them [the *Green Book* guides]" (see Figure 12). Demand is high, but people do not know where to find a guide. The Victor H. Green & Co. publishing company tries to solve this problem by hiring agents who can help inform customers and boost sales. The move helps the guide cannibalize its own ad space to increase its presence in the overall discourse. It is, frankly, quite ingenious.

However, the ad has no description of what the people buy the guides for, nor is there any mention of seeking destinations to help them travel safely. Instead, the editors implore that the company will help the agent "make the sale." An interested reader would likely overlook the vagueness of this ad's language and focus only on how

EASY MONEY FOR YOU!

You'll earn money—Yes, even if you've never tried before. Because people want to buy our guides. Never has there been a greater demand than now. — People don't know where to purchase them — We make it possible for you to make the sale. Join our agents staff now. Write for information on how to get started, so that you can make some easy money with little or no effort.

VICTOR H. GREEN & Co.
Publisher
200 West 135th St.
New York 30, N. Y.

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Fig. 12. *The Negro Traveler's Green Book.* 1954

they could potentially make money with "little or no effort." The guide strategically appeals to the black individual's purely self-interested economic mobility rather than larger racial and social issues pertinent to the black community at large – a misgiving that allows money and black people's pursuit of it to validate the ideology of placement through consumerism.

REPRODUCED ADVERTISEMENTS ARE NO LONGER VALID

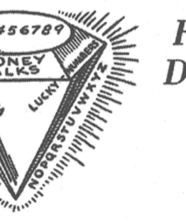
Dreams or Problems Worry You? Send in Your Dream or Problem Today!

Prof. Diamond's DREAM Formula

Opportunity . . .

At Last It's Here!

A Sure Way!



Respect Your Dreams. They May Mean Wealth Success Happiness

INTRODUCTION

For many years men have traveled all over the world trying to find an accurate method of analyzing life's DREAMS and PROBLEMS. Unfortunately, few have succeeded in discovering the secrets of DREAMS and the PROBLEMS of life.

Not only do I analyze your DREAM, which guides your every move in life, but I also solve your PROBLEMS by use of the AMAZING DREAM FORMULA. We have helped thousands with their DREAMS and PROBLEMS.

Mail in your DREAM or PROBLEM together with $1.00 to Prof. DIAMOND P. O. Box 172, G. P. O. New York 1, N. Y. When you mail in your DREAM or PROBLEM, you automatically become a member of the DIAMOND DREAM CLUB, which entitles you to many FREE benefits. The DREAM FORMULA will not fail you.

Send in for information regarding Prof. DIAMOND'S DREAM CHART, which reveals the secret numbers you live under, as compounded by the DIAMOND DREAM FORMULA.

Distributed and Copyrighted 1949 by Prof. Diamond, P.O. Box 172, G.P.O., N.Y.C.

PHOTO CREDITS: First & fourth covers, also pages 12, 13, 15, 16, 17 by courtesy of The Californians, Inc., San Francisco, California.

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Fig. 13. *The Negro Traveler's Green Book.* 1954

Whereas greater emphasis made to inform the readership about their legibility as black and what this means for their automobility, the *Green Book's* choices to center on consumerism greatly expose the editors' intent to normalize black consumerism in the travel industry. Doing so bolsters the argument that mobility is possible through travel, tourism, and consumerism – *despite*

black legibility Most of the new listings and articles explain what businesses are worthy of patronage. From new car models to fortune-tellers, ads often lean consumerist rather than practical. Goods and services that might otherwise seem frivolous find ad space because there is a class of black people able and willing to purchase them. As the travel industry grows, the guide renders black people legible in the travel industry as more capable of the idealized mobility of their white counterparts than at any other time in history through the consumerism that the travel industry preys upon. The types of businesses that could apply for ads expand beyond the simple accommodations and tourist attractions of the 1938 edition to include ones such as Professor Diamond's Dream Formula, a service that will interpret one's dreams and solve their problems, asks readers to mail in their dream or issue along with $1 (see Figure 13). In return, they can expect…not much. The Dream Formula is never described in detail. Advertisements like these likely signal the *Green Book's* turn toward more of a for-profit bend than in previous iterations. These types of businesses, while fun or beneficial, do not drive change in the entire black community's ability to be mobile. Instead, they appeal to the black middle-class people with discretionary income to spend money on such things. But while the presence of a black middle class might indicate that mobility is occurring for black people, the ad itself shrouds its pursuit of black people's money in mystique and deceit. The black dollar keeps such businesses afloat.

Consumerism of products and services is not the only avenue for mobility the guide explores. Tourism (which still relies on a class of black consumers with discretionary income) encourages black readers/travelers to travel. Beneath the photo of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge lies a caption that focuses on the actual journey to the bridge before detailing the infrastructure and layout (see Figure 14).

Fig. 14. *The Negro Traveler's Green Book.* 1954

While massive infrastructural buildout and the engineering feats alone make the bridge an impressive roadway structure that gets people from San Francisco to Oakland, the bridge alone is hardly worthy of tourism. It is nothing more than a conduit, a literal bridge to get people to more areas where they will tour and spend their money. While not as alluring to travelers, the guide's attempts (and success) to inform its readership of infrastructural accomplishments capitalizes on a key concept in the travel industry: informational tourism. People can learn about other places by reading about them, and then travel to them. The guide would effectively advertise the site and encourage readers to drive there as a result, further bolstering the travel industry. During the 1950s, drivers feel a sense of local, regional, or national awareness (if not pride) that they now had access to numerous sites that would otherwise be left to television, radios, and books to describe. The *Green Book* features an increasing number of sites worth seeing – even if these sites were more

modular and user-driven than for leisure. Regardless, providing history and detailed descriptions of places like the above bridge opens the door for the editors to instill within black travelers an awareness of the roadway that will lead them to sites worth seeing.

With all the information and ads aside, the editors still fail to acknowledge black travelers' real problems when traveling. Of course, overt disparagement of the racist system black readers/travelers operate within could cost the *Green Book* readership and corporate sponsors: assets that are much needed since Victor Green and Co. established themselves as stewards to the black travel industry with their eponymous reservation bureau and sight-seeing travel firm (see Figures 15 and 16). Now advertising its own sister companies and ventures, the *Green Book* can cannibalize its customer base.

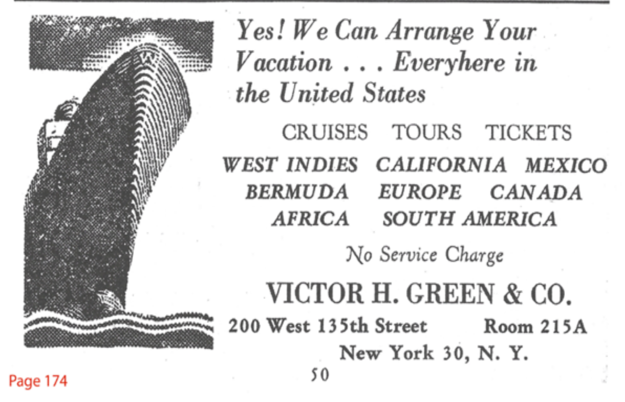

Fig. 15. *The Negro Traveler's Green Book.* 1954

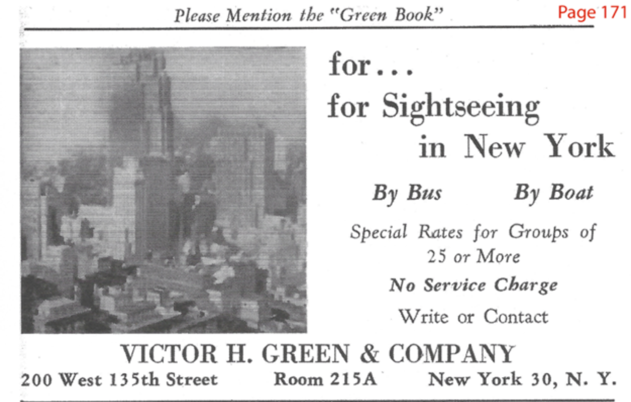

Fig. 16. *The Negro Traveler's Green Book.* 1954

RESERVATION BUREAU

Going to take a trip, attend some convention—make sure of your accommodations before you leave.

Housing Conditions Make This Necessary

Reservations for all Hotels, Tourist Homes and Vacation Resorts throughout the United States, Alaska, Mexico and Bermuda can be made for you through our Reservation Bureau.

We have contacts with all Hotels, Tourist Homes and Vacation Resorts. Send us a list of the cities that you expect to pass through, the dates wanted, how many in your party and have us make your reservations. Fees are moderate.

Saves You Time and Money — Write Reservation Bureau

VICTOR H. GREEN & CO.

200 West 135th Street Room 215A New York 30, N. Y.

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Fig. 17. *The Negro Traveler's Green Book.* 1954

By 1954 the *Green Book's* services expand beyond listings of the places black people could travel to, lodge, and tour in the continental US. The guide now features sightseeing tours of New York, its own Reservation

Bureau that can book travel arrangements ahead of time, and even a booking agency for international cruises and tours. All these expansions indicate how lucrative the travel and tourism industries are, but also points to the ostensible financial stability black travelers who use the guide (see Figure 17). The guide's editors use an extensive amount of their own ad space to advertise their services. As a result, the Green and Co. Travel service companies arrange travel and accommodations for many black consumers who read the *Green Book*. The *Green Book's* advertisement of its services completes a feedback loop wherein the guide creates a self-containing (and capitalistic) ecosystem – black travelers looking to spend money can buy the guide, use its resources themselves, or use its parent company to assist them in their travel. Black people probably had more money to spend now than they had since the beginning of the guide's publication, which means that the guide stands to make even more money with its exploits in the tourism market. Note that the sightseeing tours of New York include no service charge but do include "Special Rates for Groups of 25 or More" (see Figure 15). If black people travel to New York, they have only to book a reservation with the same company that sold them the *Green Book* in the first place. At this point in its

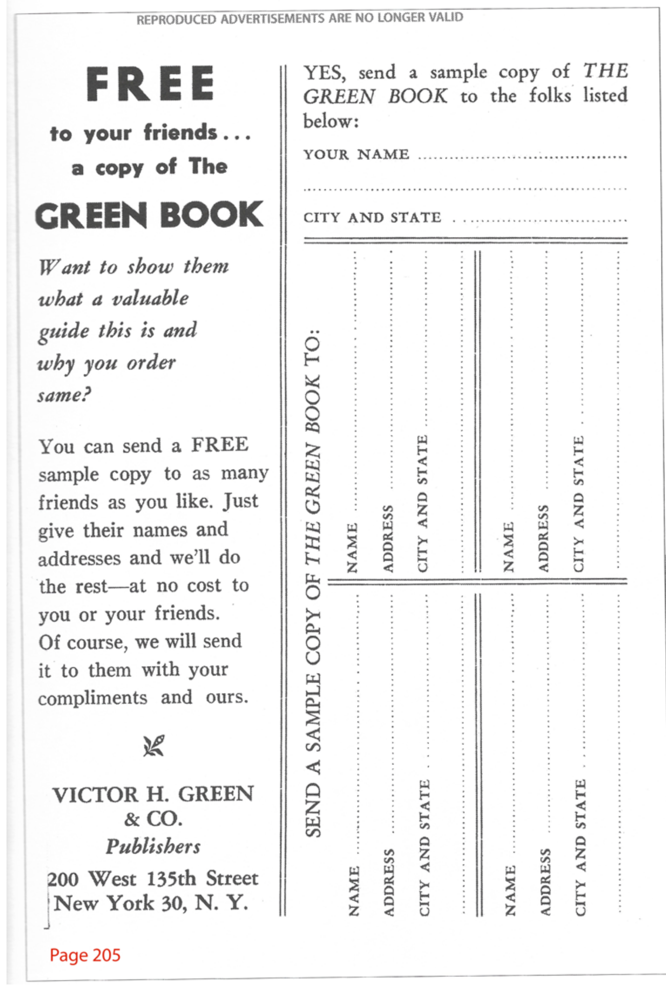

Figure 18. *The Negro Traveler's Green Book.* 1954

publication period, the *Green Book* has slowly built its empire as the source publication and the tourism trendsetter for black people, legibilizing the readership as consumers in a profitable market. Booker T. Washington's approach to black progress might glorify this model. However, Victor Green profits off a publication that does not adequately engage with the idea that its very business practice depends on the cornered market it exploits. As long as black people live in a segregated US, they will continue to need the services Green and Co. offer.

The final page of the 1954 edition features a removable stub that allows the reader to send a free sample copy of the *Green Book* to a friend or family member. In what seems to be its best marketing strategy yet, the guide has its readership spread the news of the guide by word of mouth and by offering a (free) sample of the guide. The reader volunteers the recommended person's name and address (hopefully, the recommended person gives their consent) so that they can be sent a free sample copy.

As I draw this section to a close, I want to emphasize that consumerism in and of itself is not particularly detrimental to black people. They should be able to buy anything they need or want. However, the kind of consumerism that the 1954 edition of the *Green Book* posits ultimately skews individualist and performative. Throughout this edition of the guide, tourism is one of the only ways to be mobile, even as this practice falls short of black people's hopes for undisturbed (auto)mobility. Should black people leave the relative safety of their metal bubble, with all its looking glass, mirrors, and loud parts, they would find themselves in a landscape still shaped by bigotry and, more broadly, the economics and politics of placement. The gas station they stop at might have a clerk who refuses to let them use the pump. At best, the restaurants may be unfriendly, "For Whites Only" at worst. Travel perils are not always tantamount to a black person's possible

death, but they do tax black people searching for some semblance of that uniquely American Dream: to take to the open road in search of unencumbered experiences and a better self.

While the ideology of placement takes advantage of the national obsession with individualism and automobility, the black community's mobility is undercut because they cannot participate in the same ways. Black people who enact mobility that the guide advertises have money and can travel. But since they still must use a tool like the *Green Book*, they are less mobile than they might hope because they still operate within the bounds of what is permissible mobility for black people. Even unintentionally separating black people and where they can spend their money from where white people do validates the existence of placement. The tools black people create and use to resist the ideology of placement cannot operate according to the whims of the same system they intend to game or dismantle – which is why the *Green Book* falls short in its mission to keep black people safe. Something as simple as providing black travelers a discursive space to read about people's negative and positive experiences on the road would constitute a more preemptive approach to keeping black people safe before they engage with automobility. Resistance must be wholly radical for the results to be radical — and how mobility is defined in this project requires a radical disengagement with place and placement.

Section 4: Close Reading *The Green Book,* 1963 Edition

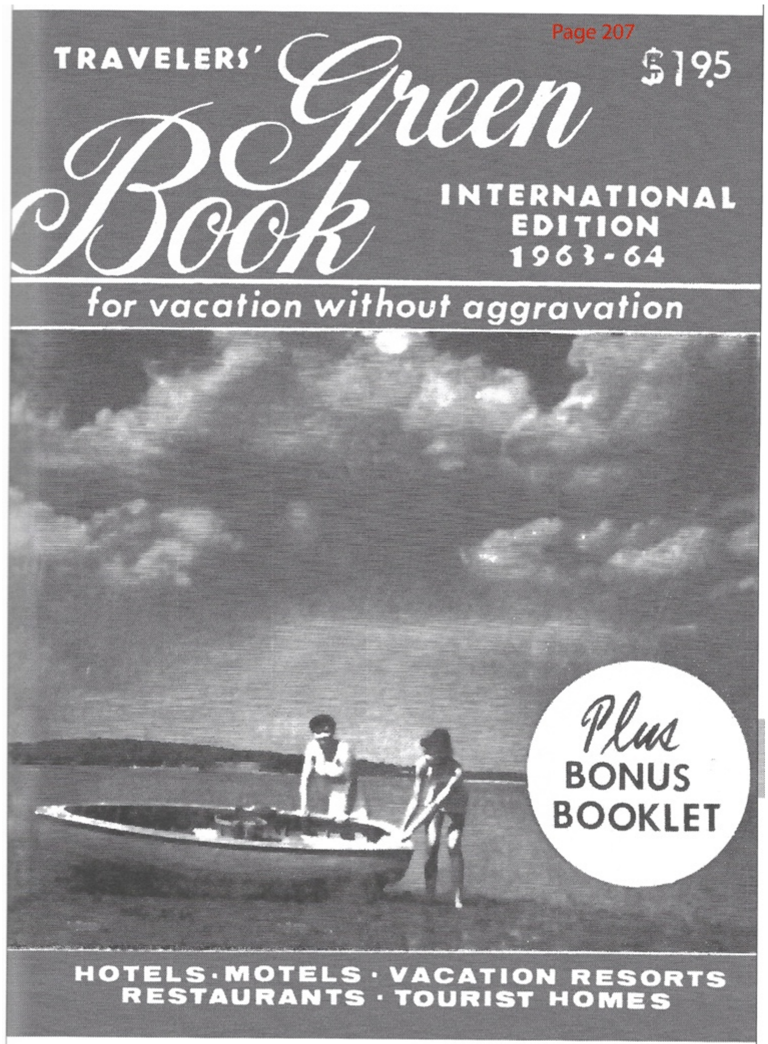

Fig. 19. *The Negro Traveler's Green Book.* 1963

Where once black bodies were wholly absent from the *Green Book*, the 1963 edition features a photograph of two black people (women, no less) in ankle-deep water pushing a canoe either into or out of a body of water. The decision to drop the familiar "Negro" from its title, making it *The Travelers' Green Book,* clashes with the now prominent use of black people on the cover, but perhaps the gesture is meant to show, rather than tell. To this point, the rest of the 1963 edition archives even more black people unabashedly enjoying their travel, showing a radically re-

imagined way for black people to see that mobility is possible. The guide still has its pitfalls: the final iteration of the guide's motto, "for vacation without aggravation," downplays the gravitas of racial turmoil (see Figure 19). The editor's choice to not specify and decry the problems inherent in black people's adherence to the ideology of placement is unfortunate. But where the *Green Book* does not explore this problem in detail, Calvin Alexander Ramsey's *The Green Book, A Play* (2010) does. Ramsey's characters complicate the ideology of placement and, in doing so, honestly critique the *Green Book*'s inability to challenge how placement remains a part of black people's self-perceptions and their perceptions of other racial groups. In this final section, the guide's best progressive tendencies are put in conversation with Ramsey's criticism to show how even with the guide's historical references to important black founders of American cities such as Jim Beckwourth, photography that puts a face on black business owners and entrepreneurs who use ad space, and Langston Hughes' work still fall short.

Fig. 20. *The Negro Traveler's Green Book.* 1963

Doing so allows me to show how mobility necessitates a radical re-imagination of legibility, placement, and what mobility was, is, and can be for black people.

Let me first address the 1963 *Green Book* before turning to Ramsey's play. I begin with the observation that Jim Beckworth is black, though this fact is never explicitly mentioned in the "History Makers" feature in the 1963 *Green Book* to which Figure 20 refers. The *Green Book's* editors withhold this information, opting instead to build up his accomplishments through what looks like a comic about his historic accomplishments. The reader/traveler might not know that he is black from reading the excerpt, but they would see that he was a hunter, trapper, chief of the Crow Indians, and a founder of Denver. All the man's accomplishments amount to a remarkable life, but because the editors never explicitly reveal his blackness, the omission makes his history almost mythological.[22] How could one person do all these things, white or black? To learn later that he is black drives home the point that black people can achieve incredible things regardless of being black in the United States' ideology of placement – even in the past when black people had even fewer rights and were less likely to be mobile. The revelatory history helps debunk a past where black mobility was impossible, allowing black readers/travelers to retrieve and (re)claim histories that build an opposing narrative for what black people are capable of in the US. However, all of this work proves to be a laborious task unless the reader already knows who Jim Beckwourth is. In that case, the reader/traveler must once again fill in the gaps to understand the gravity of his inclusion in the guide. If the guide assumes readers know whom Beckwourth is before reading this edition, this decision still ostracizes people who do not know this history.

[22] I even had to research this fact and was surprised to see a black man was so pivotal to the settling of the West. It is precisely this kind of archival deep diving that significantly benefits the guide, and yet not stating explicitly that he is black undermines the gravity of placing Beckwourth in this publication. This is another instance where the editors could amplify the accomplishments of notable black people.

In contrast to the “History Makers” column piece about Beckwourth, the guide tries to include more grounded views of (then) present-day black mobility with pictures of black business-owners. Mrs. Ressie Harris, owner of Quinn’s Hotel, beams into the camera, her image sitting to the left of her hotel’s name and ad (see Figure 21). In a rare instance where the guide’s editors eliminate guesswork for the readers, this photograph does not force the reader to assume who she is or if she owns the space. Nor do they have to project their visage onto the ad. Instead, they can project themselves into another venture and imagine a world where they can accomplish what she has (or even more). The photo of Mrs. Harris is more inclusively and profoundly centered in the 1963 edition than she might have been in previous issues. Whether this is due to the increasing presence of photos in publications like the *Green Book* or the editors’ intentional rhetorical move to include more black faces, the result is that this image of a black woman who is the proprietor of “the most fabulous hotel for colored” proves (or seems to prove) that she has achieved mobility. Black readers can see themselves in her, an owner and business-person succeeding even within the ideology of placement. But the caveat is that she owns the best hotel that black people, not the broader (read white) public, can stay at while traveling. Mrs. Harris’ success helps black readers imagine themselves as black business owners, and lodge safely, but

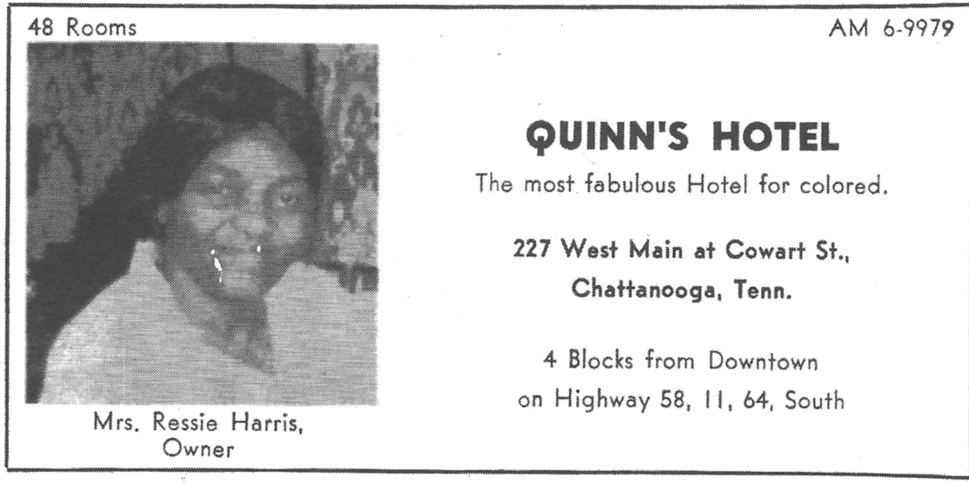

Fig. 21. *The Negro Traveler's Green Book.* 1963

she does not erase the constant reminders that they live in a world where they are coloured (both in this project's sense) and colored (i.e., in the language of 1960s America).

If *Green Book* allows its readership to imagine themselves at present relaxing and taking advantage of leisurely sites, then the guide's black readers can also imagine themselves in the not-too-distant future too. This future (at least, as the *Green Book's* editors imagine it) would be one where black people already occupy physical and discursive space. Figure 22 depicts the table of contents for the 1963-64 edition. However, most of the page is covered by a photo of yet another black woman who also smiles at the camera's lens, her arms wrapped around a palm tree while she gently holds a coconut with a straw protruding from it. The readers of the guide do not know where this beach is (the guide offers no help in that regard) or when the photo was taken, but the beach is likely segregated or for black people only. In this ambiguity, the guide again repeats one of its problematic moves, putting the onus on the reader to imagine where and when this woman exists. Readers know that she vacations so calmly because of the *Green Book.* The editors purposefully employ rhetoric that allows the readers to imagine that this woman is genuinely relaxed now (or will be in some not-too-distant

27th Consecutive Issue

FOUNDED 1936

By Victor H. Green

Travelers' GREEN BOOK

"Assured Protection for the Negro Traveler"

1963-64 EDITION

Published by

VICTOR H. GREEN CO.

L. A. WALLER

MELVIN TAPLEY

Co-Publishers

This edition of Travelers' Green Book is dedicated to our many friends and advertisers whose cooperation and encouragement made it possible: Mrs. Alma Green, Reginald Pierrepointe, Carlton Bertrand, Atty. J. J. Fieulleteau, Atty. Hope Stevens, Constance Curtis, Al Lockhart, William Capitman, Hy Schneider, Wendell Colton, Peter Celliers, Ken Brown, Thomasina Norford, Dr. P. M. H. Savory, Ted Shearer, Vondel Nichols, Frank Palumbo, and YOU.

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LOCKHART AGENCY

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All Rights Reserved—Editorial & Advertising
Offices are located at 200 W. 135th St., New York 30, N. Y.

Cover by
WILLARD SMITH

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Fig. 22. *The Negro Traveler's Green Book.* 1963

future) where that beach is not or will not remain segregated. To this end, the black readership can also hope to enjoy the beaches she frequents as she does in the photo. While, on its surface, this seems beneficial to the readership, the move once again hides or does not engage explicitly with the idea that the woman is black in the US' ideology of placement.

Even without the audience performing the bulk of the work of re-imagining what mobility in the past, present, and future can look like, the editors still present a reductive narrative that mobility is possible through simply owning a copy of the *Green Book*. The woman with the coconut only receives "assured protection" because she has the *Green Book*, but even then, sometimes this is not enough. The image below shows the anthropomorphic *Green Book* guide cartoon mascot named Gee Bee, who offers obvious de-racialized advice for how to travel correctly (see Figure 23). The walking, talking guidebook implores readers in planning their trip ahead of time so that they "know where they have been before [they] get there." The mascot oxymoronically parrots a well-known if not often spoken truism that drivers of any race must do to perform responsible automobility as one of many conditions of their continued access to the road and automobility. Gee Bee's benign advice does not address the stakes for black people enacting automobility. Of course, prior research and planning are helpful. The guide lists sites to arrive at, not necessarily the ways to get there – and the journey is as perilous (if not more) as arriving at the wrong destination. While too heavy-handed an approach in relaying safe practices for black people on the road might backfire, it is precisely this kind of failure to call attention to

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Fig. 23. *The Negro Traveler's Green Book.* 1963

the perils of driving while black that opens the door for black people to buy into systems like placement that in turn render them immobile and frustrated with the system. To the reader, anyone who does not carry a copy of the *Green Book* could be asking for trouble, which is not to say that they will extend no empathy toward an unfortunate black traveler who is accosted for being in the wrong place at the wrong time. However, the implications to the reader insist that driving while black entails accepting one's disadvantageous position in society.

The Green Book, A Play (2010) explores how widespread acceptance of the ideology of placement is in the black community. The play is set in 1953 and follows the Davis family (mother, Barbara, father, Dan, and their daughter, Neena) who list their home in the *Green Book* so that black travelers driving through Missouri have a safe place to sleep. Their guests throughout the play are a black military officer named Captain George Smith and his wife, Jackie, a Polish Jew and concentration camp survivor named Stefan Lansky, and an ambitious black Harlem-based *Green Book* agent named Keith Chenault. A crucial plot point throughout the whole play is that the Davises do not take payment from any of their patrons, saying they would prefer to offer their guests rooms for free. The play critiques the assumption that black entrepreneurship leads to mobility, implying instead that centering the individual's mobility, rather than the larger black community's mobility, does little to create sustainable uplift for all black people – as Keith Chenault proves in how he effectively accepts and reinforces the ideology of placement.

Chenault's grasp of the *Green Book's* limitations leads him to make decisions that allow him to experience upward mobility at the expense of the larger black community. In town to broker a deal that will allow black people to patronize one of the town's many gas stations that Colonel Jones, a racist local businessman, owns, Chenault situates himself as a black entrepreneur who appreciates what he calls "the black dollar" (Ramsay 34). According to him, Victor Green hopes

for a day the guide is no longer necessary. Chenault, however, believes that if integration were to occur, he would be out of business. To him, "Segregation…can last forever as far as I'm concerned" (29). Chenault, unfortunately, is an apologist for the system that imposes immobility upon black people. He states later that he believes in "playing the hand you're dealt," a sentiment that offers black people no way out of whole-scale racial immobility even if a few black individuals do achieve mobility. Driven by a philosophy that buys into the concept of placement, he is willing to take advantage of the problem black people face — namely racial immobility in the form of segregation — to profit. Chenault either overlooks or is content with black people remaining in their place (i.e., under white people) so that they can be patrons in his business model.[23] Chenault continues his rant at a later point in the play, saying that John D. Rockefeller only circulates the *Green Book* at his Esso gas stations to access the very same "Negro dollar" he chases (34). He says that every decision made about black people should be about the dollar rather than systemic progress, presumably because the dollar (at least in his mind) is an easier metric to measure black progress with and is easier to attain. By his logic, black people would effectively engage in the economics of placement that sees their legibility as consumers as their only worthy attribute to the larger US society.

Before he can continue, Stefan Lansky arrives. For all intents and purposes, Lansky looks like a white man. The black guests and Davises legibilize him as such. No one is more suspicious, though, than Keith Chenault. Lansky explains that he was initially intent upon staying at the Governor's Hotel, but upon reading a sign that read, "No Negroes Allowed," refused to stay there (41). Chenault retorts immediately, saying that there should be a sign at the Davis house that reads,

[23] Chenault would be well-liked by Booker T. Washington for his ability to use his market savvy to carve out a niche in the black travel industry. This becomes problematic when, rather than uplift black people to succeed the same way that he does and make money, he takes their money so that they can feel as if they are taking part in the capitalist structure and attaining the experiences and trappings of perceivably middle-class life.

"No white people allowed," and continues to insinuate that the *Green Book* is black people's "thing" and that white people have their own "thing."

Chenault's statement simultaneously gives credence to and reverses the practice of segregation to exclude this perceivably white man from staying at the Davis family home. While Chenault wants black people to have their own space, his sentiment would likely only validate white people's arguments about why the races should remain separate. If black people want their own space anyway, why interrupt that order through integration if both races wish for separation? Admittedly, black people and any group that has been marginalized should have space to themselves if they live within a more extensive system of oppression. But a "blacks only" space that black people create for their safety from the external forces of oppression differs from a blacks-only space that is the product of whites-only spaces that intentionally designate what spaces black people cannot exist within. The former exists as an escape from oppression, whereas the latter is a product of oppression. Chenault's take on the situation leaves no room for black people to move outside the strict boundaries of segregation. The entire system is built on intentionally keeping black people separate from white people. What Chenault wants, though, is to exclude white people, not to escape from them, but because this perceivably white man seems to feel that he can arrive at this black-specific space and receive service.

Lansky states that he is at the Davis' home because he refuses to stay anywhere that practices discrimination since his illuminating relationship with his black friend, Samuel, who helped him once the concentration camp he was in was dissolved at the end of World War II. Before Chenault learns Lansky's backstory through exposition, his back and forth with Lansky only foments his rage at what seems to be a white man virtue-signaling that he refuses to participate in an ideology of placement of which Chenault is an apologist. Only when Chenault hears that

Lansky's friend Samuel is black does there seem to be a shift in his tone. Chenault implies that Samuel is Lansky's Mr. (Victor) Green. Clumsy as his attempt to draw similarities between two very different people is, Keith somewhat turns a corner here. Willing to see that other people endure trauma that leaves them with different mentalities, he is at the very least empathetic. But only to a point. When Lansky explains that he is fearful for how the world operates and that another Holocaust could happen, Chenault insists that black people in the US accept that "prejudice is something that's been with [them] for three-hundred years and is almost an American tradition" (57). Lansky replies, telling the black man about the danger of accepting this kind of evil. The two men talk past one another throughout this conversation several times, with Chenault remaining obstinate about black people's plight in the US. Chenault believes that what happened to Jewish people in Germany could never happen in the US. Lansky disagrees. Belligerently, Chenault cites that laws exist that prevent that kind of thing from happening and that the (US) Civil War even decided the matter. Chenault stakes his worth on the fact that black people will be treated as people in the US even if they are second-class citizens. Content with his answer, he even says that there are men who take on the responsibility of talking about such things, "race men," of which he is not one. In his willingness to drive the point home, he remarks: "A true race man would never put himself first — but that's what businessmen do" (65).

Travelers' Green Book 1963–64

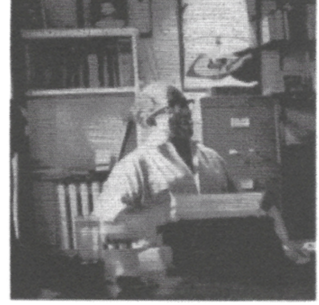

Fig. 24. *The Negro Traveler's Green Book.* 1963

Keith Chenault is not wrong about race men. Like the narrator in the Autobiography believes, race represent a noble class of black people (not just men) who advance the needs of black people. They are revered even if not often mimicked because their mission is a worthy yet dangerous. In a show of how far the *Green Book* has come, the 1963 edition has a full-page advertisement for Langston Hughes' "Fight For Freedom," an extensive fifty-year recollection of the progress of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) (see Figure 24). In Hughes' words, the organization seeks "to end racial discrimination and segregation in all public aspects of American life," a goal that is only achievable through continuous and collective effort on behalf of black people to change the ideology of placement. In gathering this collective history of black progress, Langston Hughes puts the needs of the black community ahead of his own – in exact opposition to how Keith Chenault operates. Hughes' activism shows that black people collectively pushing for better legibility in the larger US society could result in better legislation that offers safety and protection against abuses that individuals

might suffer. The *Green Book's* promotion of this critical work acknowledges that individual acts of transgression against the ideology of placement leave the individual black person open to violence and humiliation (or "aggravation," as the *Green Book* characterizes these terms). The fact that the editors include such a pivotal and outspoken work and race man is significant. Earlier editions might have avoided such an overt rhetorical gesture with a radical sentimentality. Even though the guide is selling Hughes' work, the move still stands out insofar as it foregrounds the work of a race man explicitly.

Not a race man himself and proud of that fact, Keith Chenault believes that because he went to college, got a degree, and has a good job, his dream of buying a Brownstone to divide into four units to collect four rents each month means he will be mobile. He intends to be upwardly-mobile as possible by purchasing a home to transform into a turn-key operation as so many white developers and business people do. But, by having this as a goal, he is in direct contrast to what the Davises have achieved and cultivated in Central Missouri, where black people do not have to pay for their stay and use their money elsewhere. The Davises offer more avenues toward mobility than Keith because they uplift more than just their own family. The kind of mobility this dissertation posits requires connections and a thriving class of people rather than individual interests. If the collective presses for progress, mobility becomes more possible because a consensus exists to safeguard that right to be mobile.

As their conversation ends (it nearly becomes an argument for Chenault), the black man reiterates that integration can only spell the detriment of black people in the US. His logic is that no white people will ever allow black people to patronize while establishments, and no amount of government will ever undo this vicious cycle. When Lansky asks if the black man has any trouble while driving his red convertible around the country, Keith has only this to say:

> A young Negro man driving a red convertible? Of course, I'm always being stopped by the police. You have to know how to handle people to get along…I haven't had any trouble yet. When a deputy stops me I show them the *Green Book* and explain how the book and I are trying to keep things peaceful: separate, but equal in the good old USA. That's like music to their ears. (66-67)

Chenault goes beyond just saying that he encounters trouble on the road. Instead, he recounts what is undoubtedly one or several episodes of interaction with white people (police, no less) while on the road, where he tells these white listeners what they want to hear. The doctrine of separate but equal in hand, he rifles off that he and his guide are merely trying to keep the status quo as is. But Keith's own story mirrors Coalhouse Walker Jr.'s experience: a black man, in a flashy car, dressed well, and with ambitions that only his pride or monumental negritude could match gets pulled over by white authorities under the impression that he does not know his place. The difference between the two characters is that Chenault relies so heavily on the idea that white officers who stop him will not harm him because he has the *Green Book.* His logic is fundamentally flawed and leads him to conclude that the guide protects him. His assumption is not ill-conceived; after all, the guide bolsters this kind of thinking because it does not give black drivers/travelers a means to intervene to stop the racist ideology of placement from affecting their driving experiences. Instead, it offers preventative tools to keep black people safe *before* any incident occurs. Keith Chenault theorizes that as black businesses continue to thrive, black people will remain separate from white society because they have nowhere else to go and want to stay that way. But even with his statements, black people are increasingly vocal about how society does not offer enough freedom from harassment and persecution to afford them the luxury of those

messages on the cover pages of that same guide: “Vacations without Aggravation.” In truth, the guide offers no explicit protection. It is not a badge.

Keith, angered by the Jewish Lansky’s insistence that this way of thinking about race is detrimental to black people, insinuates that the Jewish man must have received preferential treatment (at least more than black people). This line demonstrates how deeply Chenault believes (or has been conditioned to believe) in the ideology of placement. Here is a potential ally he could have, but he shuns the man because he disagrees about how black people can be mobile. Keith goes on to rant about how every foreign immigrant chooses to look down on black people in the country without knowing the whole story. To drive the point home, Keith reveals that he has secured a contract with Colonel Jones to allow black people to use his service stations on the condition that they pay twice the price that white people must pay. The agreement, unfair as it is, is a triumph for Keith because at least the doors of commerce are now open for black people to use establishments they once had no access to. Ironically, though, this is a form of integration, whether Keith knows it, but one where black people come up short. This conditional integration is exploitative and places black people under the strain of more financial and psychological immobilization (to say nothing of the potential physical immobilization should they not have the money to pay for their gas and have to go elsewhere). He has, as it were, made a deal with the devil. And the fruits of his endeavor are seen when the Smiths, guests who have also stayed with the Davises, return to the house bloody and beaten because they tried to use one of Colonel Jones’ stations since Keith Chenault told them of the deal he had made. He neglected, however, to say they would have to pay double the amount white patrons would, though, and when they refused to pay that amount, they were attacked. The entire ordeal is tragic. In light of the Smiths’ violent

experience, Keith Chenault's individualistic thinking gets him nowhere because he (like the Smiths) is still black in the US, regardless of the *Green Book*.

There is a redemptive parable within the story. The Davises do not take payment from any of their patrons, saying they would prefer to offer their guests rooms for free, consequently freeing up mental space and money for other things. They do the same for Lansky, not because he is white or Jewish, but because he needs a place to stay. Their benevolence is one of the things that endears the Davises as arbiters of proper black mobility – they eschew making money so that black people have a safe place to stay and can use that money for other things. The literal integration of black and ostensibly white interests at this moment points to Keith's greatest fear: the absolution of black-only spaces where he can make money. The Davis family's act embodies what mobility will require of black people in the same way that Langton Hughes' book does: a collective push to make the conditions of mobility more knowable to black people/travelers.

Conclusion

Let this following statement be clear: while this chapter is critical of the *Green Book's* earlier methods, the guide's and success in capturing the historical shifts in discourse around black automobility and travel leading up to the Civil Rights Movement and desegregation is indelible and brave. The guide evolves from an array of safe lodging addresses and mini-lectures about car maintenance to an anthological repertory of black entrepreneurs, innovators, businesses, and civil rights activism soundtrack. The *Green Book* is an archive of black people's imagination of the road and automobility. Furthermore, the case could be made that the editors make many of the *Green Book's* rhetorical decisions intentionally for the black reader/driver/traveler not to focus on

the potential tragedies driving while black brings. However, such a tactic veers overly optimistic, and while optimism is good for keeping hope and faith alive, it is not a bottomless well from which to draw. The earliest editions of the *Negro Motorist Green Book* exemplify why automobility alone is not radical enough to indicate that black people are mobile. These issues present a formulaic automobility that glorifies the Interstate Highway System, a product of the ideology of placement that makes black drivers susceptible to the US government's subjectivity. The potential for violence and oppression might be overlooked to keep things bright and shiny. Still, as the Smiths' experience in *The Green Book, A Play* illuminates, carrying the guide with the best intentions does not offer protection. A more deliberate approach to prevent violence against driving while black is necessary.

At this point in the dissertation, mobility requires that black people continually practice self-awareness of their legibility and others' – not to recreate the insidious nature of placement but to optimize their perspective on how mobility is possible outside of the bounds of placement. Here is where the radical re-imagination of free and autonomous control over one's life becomes necessary. Black people must constantly interrogate their relationships to power with questions about their own and other people's governmentality and the intentions of why they might choose to place someone in comparison to themselves. Black people must be willing to deny control mechanisms from outside/external forces to liberate themselves from power dynamics that are always in flux from moment to moment, space to space, etc. Only when enough black individuals collectively acknowledge these power dynamics exist and agilely navigate past them can they create an environment and discourse that allows them to express individuality. How would an individual do this when ideology influences their every move? The answer varies, and no blueprint

exists. Mobility is as radical as it is episodic – fleeting, ephemeral even, but worthy of introspection and interrogation.

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Chapter Four – At the Intersection of Home and Canaan: Home, Placement, and Mobility

Chapter Three's focus on automobiles and automobility in African American literature reflects an emerging modernization of the new parameters of black mobility. By the time Toni Morrison's *Home* is published (2010), literary depictions of mobility are necessarily becoming complex since black people move from the politics and economics of placement (as addressed in Chapters One and Two) into a culture and ideology of placement that seeks to hide its worst tendencies to suspend mobility, safety, citizenship, and many other rights for black people. To be mobile in the late 20th century and early 21st century, black people will need more than a vehicle and money. Houses can help too, but this project proves that mobility requires something less tangible to make mobility real and sustainable.

Toni Morrison's *Home* confirms that placelessness is one (but not the only) remedy to black immobility. Specifically, her handling of the home concept offers her characters a chance to become placeless -- that is, to not be placeable according to the politics of placement. The politics of placement would render the home a commodifiable space capable of affecting how a person is legible within social hierarchies. By that logic, a person's performative stewardship of physical home-spaces (e.g., a house, an apartment, a condominium, a hut, or any abode) becomes inextricably part of their legibility. As a result, bifurcations and degrees emerge to differentiate levels of legible adequacy. A person who owns their home is likely legible as responsible and financially sound. As a result, people feel the need to buy a house to project that they are mobile to the rest of society. If they cannot buy a house, they rent an apartment. Locale adds another layer of performativity to this song and dance: the apartment or house should also be in an ostensibly

good neighborhood.[24] Once situated in a home-space, these people judge others and themselves according to how well-kept or organized their home-spaces are. Therefore, an individual's home-space can be proof that they are mobile. However, this chapter posits that the home-space or house is only constitutive of, not synonymous with, the home. The delusion that home-spaces are synonymous with the home illustrates how the politics of placement emphasizes that people's legibility can and should be susceptible to other people's perceptions and rules regarding where and how they live. A placeless person can, however, acknowledge how others perceive them and even mull over their practices while not allowing either factor to control every aspect of their lives.

I define home as a sanctuary where individuals reclaim their individuality before and after engaging with the outside world and become placeless. Home allows people to measure themselves rather than obliging them to be measured by others. In a home, someone can nurture the version of themselves that the rest of society cannot easily access. While this conceptualization of home is extensive, it is hardly novel. Many of Toni Morrison's literary and critical works attempt to create a "race-specific yet not racist space" that mirrors how this chapter envisions home.[25] Morrison's home transcends space and time and requires constant psychological and emotional upkeep of relationships instead of physical property. In her 1998 essay "Home," she draws out the radical distinction between what she calls "the race-house" (a euphemism for US society's obsession with the politics of racial placement) and the home. Even though the race-house situates racial construction around ideas of "legitimacy, authenticity, community, and

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[24] What is deemed "good" as I use the term here often revolves around typically white-centric standards of optical niceties (e.g., beautified lawns, access to amenities, no black people in the community, etc.). The last item, that no black people are in the community, is something I will speak to later in this chapter.

[25] Wahneema Lubiano (who wrote the introduction for and compiled the essays that make up *The House that Race Built: Black Americans, U.S. Terrain*) goes into far more detail about how Morrison sets up the home as a space of resistance for black women. I'm taking Lubiano's ideas and am generalizing for black people as a whole, but it bears mentioning that black women have a particularly hard time resisting racism because the politics of placement complicates their ability to resist at all even within the black community. Black men can often make this act harder.

belonging," it offers black people no sense of community or belonging within a racist society (7). Black people's experience in the US reflects the residual effects of this race-house as it places them within a politics that leaves them immobile. Morrison, in opposition to the race-house concept, envisions home in a way that renders race and placement impotent and fosters black people's belonging through communal physical and psychological spaces that create and maintain relationships.

Morrison's home concept captures the nuance of what makes a home a home: namely, the relationships that can transform a home-space into space that imbues its inhabitants with community, self-assurance, and security. To this point, Zanski in *Blood on the Forge* might overlook the intricacies of black life in the US, but he is not entirely wrong when he tells Melody and Chinatown that establishing a family will help them be mobile. Family is the closest thing to a home's set of relationships that assure a person of who they are. The resultant security allows the individuals therein to be individualistic, share a common past, and foster a sense of belonging to a community.[26] This is all to say that a home is not temporally bound or spatially containable within four (or more) walls. With its relationships and permissiveness of individual agency, the "race-specific yet non-racist" home creates placeless black people. To this end, home is a space of resistance — especially for black people — because it provides a foundation to practice placelessness outside of placement within a constrictive, racist legibility and a contaminated relationship of oneself to oneself. Zanksi, a Slavic immigrant with no stakes in black livelihood, knows nothing of the race-house. His place is far more different than the Moss brothers'. As such, his advice is as formulaic as it is misguided. *Home's* main characters (i.e., Frank, Cee, Lily, and

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[26] Abu Noor Madi and Raja Khaleel Al-Khalili explore the complicated role of mourning and trauma as redemptive of memories and future selves in "The "Tilted Man's" Quest for Home: Mourning and Melancholia in Toni Morrison's *Home*."(1).

Lenore) struggle to establish homes and become placeless. When black people do not have a sense of belonging or community, they experience homelessness.

Not to be confused with houselessness, homelessness leaves black people malleable, obeisant to others, or worse. In short, homelessness can inhibit placelessness because the insecurity homelessness engenders can coerce black people to adhere to the politics of placement. For example, a black person's criticism of another black person's lack of care for their home-space can often devolve into pejoratives about how the slacker shames the whole black race. To "un-race" the few spaces they do have some control over, black people must practice a placelessness in the homes they create and the communities they are part of. When they bring a politics of placement into their home-space or larger community, they bring with them the order of the exploitative race-house model Morrison describes. The same systemic politics that forces black people to submit to white people destabilizes the black home. The error diminishes belonging, renders those within more likely to be homeless, decreases individuals' ability to be placeless, and ultimately reduces their likelihood of mobility.

The ideological error to employ the politics of placement in the black home is disappointing but understandable. After decades of The Negro Problem/Question shaping US race relations, society develops a vocabulary and social manual to navigate placement's more egregious intentions. None of the characters in *Home* can pass for white like the narrator in *Autobiography*, so they must confront the fixity of their black legibility – while avoiding the pitfalls of the politics of placement. At the end of the 20th century, the politics has evolved into a multi-faceted apparatus that can ensnare black people, leaving them unable to know when coercive placement will occur. To point out when these moments happen, this chapter once again leans on Barbara and Karen Fields's handling of racecraft to explore how acts of racism hide behind the illusion of race's

immutability. This tactic preserves the order and power of all parties' support of racialization. In short, acts of racism often produce and bolster the facticity of race for the victims but hide the heinous acts of racists. Racists and placement's supporters thus validate their actions by simply blaming said actions on black peoples' blackness/race/place/legibility. However, black people's blackness, actions, and reactions to racism should not be the sole focus of conversations about race. Instead, the ludicrous lengths perpetrators of placement and racism are willing to go to should be the focus. Think back to how the young white schoolchildren in the *Autobiography* throw stones at all the black schoolchildren, not just the boy who threw the rock. The white students' overreaction merits more than a curt response about "stepping on niggers" to keep them in line, as the riding boss from *Blood on the Forge* would say. Racecraft can simultaneously be behind white people's attacks on black people and be present in some black people's missions to undercut their own (and other black people's) potential to become placeless. If racecraft bolsters the politics of placement, placelessness is the best remedy. Morrison's characters can eschew the pseudo-facticity of black legibilities to become mobile through placelessness.

Morrison offers a wellspring of examples to draw from in *Home* to showcase how placelessness operates and becomes manifest. The Money family's exodus from their home in Bandera County, Texas excels in its illustration of how placelessness and home curb placement:

> Residents of fifteen houses had been ordered to leave their little neighborhood on the edge of town. Twenty-four hours, they were told, or else. 'Else' meaning 'die.' It was early morning when the warnings came, so the balance of the day was confusion, anger, and packing. By nightfall most were pulling out – on wheels if available, on foot if not. Yet in spite of the threats from men, both hooded and not, and pleadings from neighbors, one elderly man named Crawford sat on his porch steps and refused to vacate. Elbows on knees,

> hands clasped, chewing tobacco, he waited the whole night. Just after dawn at the twenty-fourth hour he was beaten to death with pipes and rifle butts and tied to the oldest magnolia tree in the county – the one that grew in his own yard. Maybe it was loving that tree which, he used to brag, his great-grandmother had planted, that made him so stubborn. (9-11)

Though there is no mention of race in this entire description of events, the clues abound – the hoods of threatening men, the promise of death for an entire group of people – to imply that the characters in this scene are white and black, respectively. A politics of placement is behind this mass eviction. The black people who own their home-spaces are no longer welcome. Alternatively, maybe they were never welcome. Whatever the case, they must flee or die because white supremacists believe these black people's continued presence is a threat to the dominant white social order. However, while other members of the fifteen families flee, a man named Crawford refuses to leave. He sits on his porch and awaits his death. His last act demonstrates his will to be placeless in the face of the politics. Rather than leave his home (and it is a home, not just a home-space), he defies white fearmongering and the ideology that begets it. A placeless black person who lives in a society where racism operates can and should acknowledge their legibility to avoid the ever-present possibility of harm. Even so, they can effectively refuse to be controllable and eschew placement for placelessness in crucial moments. Unfortunately, however, as the violent death of Crawford indicates, these moments of resistance can mortally threaten those who resist. What happens to Crawford is evidence of placelessness and the violence it can spark.

Racecraft, as earlier defined in my chapter on Johnson's *Autobiography*, is very much at issue in the case of Crawford and his refusal to leave. On the one hand, in defending his right to remain in his home, he does something which white people would also do if facing forceful eviction. But, in an insidious enactment of racecraft, the white people who view him and his home

as a threat can conveniently blame him for his death due to his impudence and audacity as a black person in defying their demand for him to leave.

Crawford does not die for the sake of some house where his family once lived. He dies for *his family's home*. The tree the white assailants tie his dead body to (after they gouge out his eyes) was planted by his great-grandmother years before. Though the tree is nothing more than bark and other organic matter, his great-grandmother's *act of planting the tree* undermines the politics of placement of that time and space because she encourages her black family to settle here and create a home. By planting that tree, she literally puts down roots in a space where white people do not wish her to settle and put down roots: in doing so, she threatens the would-be placement of her family within a racist space. In short, she troubles the preconceived legibility that her white neighbors have of black people. Rather than come and stay on the land for a short time, she signals that she will remain there for a long time – well after her death, even, and she will continue to live on because her black family will remain there too. She sows seeds (or a sapling?) that will be a tribute to her family's resilience in the face of an ongoing threat of placement. Despite her and her family's ostensible otherness, their non-belonging, their segregation outside the white community and its paranoically exclusionary sense of home, she fixes her family's place firmly in Bandera County and sets off a chain of events that will make this space her family's home. The tree will be a symbol. The family will nurture it as they do their relationship*s* with each other. Like the tree which signals their belonging, they too will foster belonging with each other. Crawford's great-grandmother also helps her family transcend racial placement as it is physically manifested as well as temporally felt. When she puts down roots and defies the politics of placement in the past, her family will also be able to defy the politics in the future. In giving her family reason to remain in this space, she demonstrates and fosters placelessness outside the confines of a

constrictive legibility of placement. So when Crawford refuses to part ways with his family home, he does so because it is the site where he and his family have established and intended to continue their sense of belonging through their acts of placelessness. With such literal roots in this space, it is no wonder Crawford readily dies at the hand of the white supremacists.

Frank Money: Placelessness Despite Trauma

Frank Money, a major character in *Home*, struggles to find home and be placeless due to trauma from his childhood and his stint in the army during the Korean War. If having to depart his home in Bandera County, TX at such an early age was not traumatic enough, Frank grows up in a small town in Georgia named Lotus – which he describes as the worst possible place to live because time passes so slow there, everyone knows each other, and placement operates so insufferably. He leaves the tiny town as soon as he can. Unfortunately, his only ticket out of Lotus is through the military during the Korean War. He enlists alongside some of his childhood friends and ships out to Korea. Once there, he witnesses their violent deaths one by one. Plagued by shame and survivor's guilt, he commits unspeakable acts on opposing soldiers and civilians alike. After his duty, he develops PTSD that manifests in frequent violent episodes brought on by vivid hallucinations. He drinks to quiet his mind and ease his guilty conscience, but when that does not work, he finds something home-like in the arms of women with whom he lives. Frank takes each woman's emotional labor and financial support for granted, and when they tire of his emotional withholding and lack of effort to sustain the relationship, he moves on to the next town and the next woman. One day, Frank receives a note saying that his sister, Ycidra or Cee for short, is in danger, and he must hurry if he wants to save her. Frank must sober up enough to make a cross-

country trip from Seattle to Georgia to save her. More than just a physical space, the home, represented by Frank's and Cee's familial bond, is the locus of comfort that drives Frank to abandon his own journey to help his sister. More than Lotus or any other woman in Frank's life, Cee gives his life purpose and grounds him in familial familiarity. In short, his relationship with Cee is the closest thing Frank has to home.

Frank Money begins his journey in a Seattle mental health institution after police book him and send him there for being drunk and loitering as a black man. Usually, loitering is enough to earn him jail time. But he is not in jail. Though initially put into a patrol squad car, the cops notice his PTSD symptoms (e.g., Frank often has unpredictable and explosive bouts) and assume he requires institutionalization rather than jail time. The entire scene in the institution is a loosely woven collection of Frank's memories and his mind's musings about his current predicament. He runs through his options for escape and what that would look like. He has no shoes, which presents a whole host of issues. Any man who walks around barefoot in the winter will likely end up in jail for vagrancy, the crime entailing anyone who stands or walks without clear purpose anywhere.[27] Frank knows that the appearance of not having to be anywhere could result in his immediate arrest and jail – or worse, a return to this institution. But he knows he must escape. Despite being shoeless, he escapes and tries to find help. Luckily, a church is nearby where a black pastor gives him overnight shelter, some food, and a copy of the *Green Book* to help him get home safely.

Frank's ongoing battle with PTSD episodes continues throughout his journey to the South. Readers receive further exposition about his past through interactions that hint at but do not

[27] Barbara and Karen Fields talk at length about the criminal act of black people being in a space where and when they are not meant to be in *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life*. Their analysis of vagrancy laws points to society's need to examine the black body as Other through clues about its utility. In short, without anywhere to be, white people will try to put black people in a space or in their place to reiterate that their autonomy is not theirs (35-47).

confirm his ostensible placelessness. One of the more fascinating results of his PTSD is colorblindness. In one of the novel's expository flashbacks, Frank remembers that the rapid flash of color from a woman's skirt and blouse triggers his first PTSD episode shortly after he returns from Korea. The scene that ensues enlists imagery that plays with the idea of colorblindness and the racial color-line:

> Her flowered skirt was a world's worth of color, her blouse a loud red. Frank watched the flowers at the hem of her skirt blackening and her red blouse draining of color until it was white as milk. Then everybody, everything. Outside the window – trees, sky, a boy on a scooter, grass, hedges. All color disappeared and the world became a black-and-white movie screen. (23)

Morrison blurs how color operates as she ushers in a symptom of Frank's PTSD: colorblindness. The woman's red blouse and colorful skirt trigger Frank's wartime trauma so that naturally occurring colors suddenly drain from his vision. He rethinks his place in the social order due to this inability to see color anymore. He wonders if this is how "dogs and cats or wolves saw the world" since only animals – not humans – experience the world in black and white (23). As the scene unfolds, the audience receives subtle yet effective reminders that Frank still knows how racial color (i.e., the black/white racial binary) functions:

> At the next stop he got off and walked toward a Chevron station, its black flames shooting out from the V. He wanted to get into the bathroom, pee, and look in the mirror to see if he had an eye infection, but the sign on the door stopped him. He relieved himself in the shrubbery behind the station, annoyed and a little frightened by the colorless landscape. The bus was about to pull away, but stopped to let him reboard. (23-24)

Frank's colorblindness could indicate his intentional attempt to become placeless, but such an assumption overlooks how color operates on two fronts for him. Even when actual colors like red, blue, and green fade from his vision, Frank still understands how black and white racial color operates in the society that legibilizes him as black. As such, he cannot ignore his racial color in this scene (or colour, as I use throughout this project). The woman in the bright skirt and blouse is presumably black because she sits in the same train car as Frank. Since Frank is black and the racial color line keeps him from better seats on the train, he must ride in the colored car. Racial color is artificial, socially derivative, and dictates how Frank is legible as black and how the world treats him. Regardless of how much Frank's trauma dis-places his experience, he does not experience placelessness because he is still controllable according to the racial color politics – as evidenced when Frank knows better than to enter a restroom facility at a train station that has a sign that reads "For Whites Only." Frank must relieve himself in the bushes – an offense that could be a crime if he is caught. As if by instinct, Frank can navigate the world unable to see color in his episodes, but he can also know his legibility (i.e., racial color) as black.

Frank can predict but not control when these PTSD episodes occur, further indicating that he is not placeless – placelessness, like active passing, requires intent. When he cannot see natural colors, he feels the need to "hurry up and hide" lest his behavior is seen as erratic and leads to incarceration or worse (24). But placelessness can be born of necessary resourcefulness familiar to black people no matter where they have come from, and Morrison captures this resourcefulness and agile thinking when Frank finds a friend in a train porter named Billy on the way through Chicago. Billy takes Frank to a diner where the patrons tell stories of forced exoduses and how they came to be in Chicago. Though their recollections often lean heavily on witty banter and

comedic timing, such recollections concurrently sharpen yet dull the circumstances that lead to their migration.

The patrons compete (good-naturedly) to see who has the most depraved upbringing or tragic story. One person flees their home due to threats from “white sheets,” code for KKK members. Another person replies that they left their home because of “the rent man.” Some had to stay in ice houses and chicken coops. Others say they ate offal to survive and made their way to Chicago in freight cars. Yet to hear these black people in the diner express these tragedies, each event and cataclysm is just part of a black person’s life. They throw their pain, misery, and wit into stark relief against the backdrop of life under Jim Crow. Morrison captures their communal trauma bonding through laughter, which the narration describes as “loud and knowing” (28). This laughter is not at the expense of fellow black patrons and acquaintances. No, the black patrons laugh at each other to soothe the hurt of their exoduses. They know that the forced evictions, rent hikes, and deplorable traveling conditions are typical, sad as they are, for black people to experience. So, they relay the stories and pass on crucial information about who they are and why they must endure. These are people whose ancestors were packed into ships like cargo. Now they get to cities in this promised land in freight cars of trains. Their tenacity, not the conditions of the politics of placement, brought them here, and so they relay their experiences to pass on their knowledge. They retrospectively make themselves placeless as they relay how they deliver themselves from violence, subjugation, debt, and numerous other boogie men. The diner scene is a sort of clinic of therapeutic placelessness in the face of oppression.

All the above is to say that the diners prove that circumstance can provide enough pretext and liberty for individuals to retrospectively rewrite their history in a way that validates their placelessness. In *Home*, historical revisioning (that is, revision of the events of one’s life in a way

that acknowledges their legibility and what they wish to change about that legibility) helps a person become placeless. Personal historical revisioning allows individuals to control their legibility – if only in a retrospective manner – and helps them become placeless in the present. This revisioning does not reflect an individual's desire to erase what has already happened to them. Instead, the revisioning considers the entire causation event and uses all information from that context (i.e., the tragedy, the comedy, etc.) to inform the individual's need to control their legibility moving forward. If what I describe here sounds like learning, that's because it most definitely is. As an extension of learning, personal historical revisioning focuses even more on an individual's placement and legibility and how that past condition of immutable perception can be brought to bear on more current and future matters. With the kind of revisioning on display at the diner, the black patrons can more readily become placeless because they acknowledge who they are and how they were perceived in a past situation. They then bring this to bear on the present issue at hand to affect their future legibility.

Another character who demonstrates effective and healthy historical revisioning is Billy's son, Thomas. After Billy and Frank leave the diner counter, they head to Billy's home, where Frank meets the young boy. Thomas' right arm hangs limply at his side: he was the victim of a white cop who brazenly shot him for holding a toy gun. Billy tells Frank that even though he no longer can use his arm, the incident has a profound and positive impact on the boy's trajectory as a scholar. Rather than dwell on the trauma so much as to make it an impediment to his future, Thomas stays out of the streets and keeps his head in books. His mother and father also nurture his new pastimes and endeavors. The result? He is a mathematic "whiz" who wins competitions for his intellect and is the recipient of numerous scholarships (31). Rather than catastrophize the incident and limit his potential to be anything more than disabled, Thomas and his family shift

attention to the blessings the incident reveals. As if to draw the point home, when Frank asks the boy what he wants to be when he grows up, he simply replies, “A man,” which seems more than the cop who shot him was willing to perceive him as (32-33). Thomas is placeless at such an early age because he refuses to let his past (or present) legibility dictate his future. The young boy demonstrates how acknowledging his legibility can inspire more significant potential to be mobile.

On the other hand, Frank Money continues to warp rather than more radically transcend his perceivable legibility. The next day, he needs neither a mirror nor Billy to tell him that he badly needs a shave and better clothes, but Billy still tries to oblige: “You look like….” Frank cuts him off: “Don’t say it.” When the pair go to Goodwill, even the woman at Goodwill knows Frank needs better clothes (36-37). He knows he looks like a vagrant. If police see him as some black male vagrant, they will have an excuse to put him in jail. As such, Frank’s appearance and legibility weigh heavily on him. Whether he hushes Billy due to shame or annoyance, what becomes clear is that he does not want his friend to confirm what he and everyone else already know. Instead, he wants to undergo his transformation from vagrant to respectable citizen in relative silence. Frank, the war vet, might command some respect, but not as much as he might like.

The dressing room at Goodwill is a space that encourages if not confirms placelessness. There, “a bum or a respectable family man” could intentionally shed old clothes in exchange for newer ones and, in the process, alter their legibility (36). The vagrant might still be a vagrant, but their garments belie this legibility. The folded clothes on the table and the coats and jackets hanging on the racks are all clean and thus beckon Frank to swap the markers of a vagabond for more respectable clothing. Frank goes one step further and pins his war medal onto his breast pocket. His action reflects his pride in being a vet and a performative need to show the world that he is not a vagrant. As he places the medal on his breast pocket, he attempts to place himself within

the social order to command more respect from would-be perceivers. While this gesture might seem like placelessness, it is not. He is still hyper-aware of how others will perceive him. Frank's actions reflect his need to perform to standards set by the politics of placement. Unfortunately, as I am about to demonstrate, even this self-defensive strategy threatens to backfire.

Frank tries to decide what style of footwear he should purchase. As in the case of black household, place-making occurs in what someone wears as well as in how a house is (or is not) maintained. Rather than opt for a dress shoe, which would ostensibly make him seem like he was of higher status or more respectable, Frank opts for a more practical work boot. Then, ironically enough, now that he looks more presentable, the scene turns ugly. After leaving the Goodwill, Frank and Billy are seen by two police officers who stop and search them. Two other black men who happen to be outside the clothing store are also stopped and included in the search, lumped into whatever trouble the police think Frank and Billy are up to. What transpires is completely legal yet strips the black men of their dignity. As they search the four black men, however, the officers' remarks reveal that they have some semblance of coded honor for veterans, even if they are black:

> "Okay," said Billy. "Now for some grown man's shoes. Thom McAn or do you want Florsheim?"
>
> "Neither. I ain't going to a dance. Work shoes."
>
> "Got it. You got enough money?"
>
> "Yep."
>
> The police would have thought so too, but during the random search outside the shoe store they just patted pockets, not the inside of work boots. Of the two other men facing the wall,

> one had his switchblade confiscated, the other a dollar bill. All four lay their hands on the hood of a patrol car parked at the curb. The younger officer noticed Frank's medal.
>
> "Korea?"
>
> "Yes, sir."
>
> "Hey Dick, They're vets."
>
> "Yeah?"
>
> "Yeah, look"' The officer pointed to Frank's service medal.
>
> "Go on. Get lost, pal."
>
> The police incident was not worth comment so Frank and Billy walked off in silence. Then they stopped at a street vendor's tray to buy a wallet. (36-37)

The stop-and-frisk search is the cops' way of corralling what they think is a group of black men who look suspicious. That is to say**,** any black man with clothing that seems too good for black people to afford looks suspicious, and, in the light of this distorted logic, the most well-dressed of the bunch, Frank, stands out because he sports new clothes that could have been stolen or bought with stolen money. Moreover, even if the other men are not sharply dressed and look like vagrants, the officers believe that they have an excuse to stop them and search them for drugs, weapons, or anything else.

Randomly stopping and searching black people for any reason (or no reason) at all reminds black people that their racial legibility is inescapable. Moreover, according to the skewed logic of racecraft, any consequences of that legibility are their fault. Even in what is egregiously racial-profiling and corrupt theft from the law enforcement officers, the two black men (and the other two who were part of the stop and frisk) are to blame for the entire experience on account of their race. The insidious circularity of racecraft comes into play here in that the consequence of such

racial profiling—for example, too much resistance or back-talk from the men being unfairly corralled—could itself potentially result in the arrest of these men, as if they, and not the cops, had triggered this whole dismal scene in the first place. Racecraft, in other words, insidiously displaces blame and punishment away from its proper (if hidden) target.

Even so, Morrison delivers this scene's statement on legibility and racial placement with a sleight of hand of her own, given how Frank's medal saves him and the other black men from further embarrassment. The police already have the black men up against the wall (figuratively if not literally), confiscate a switchblade, and take their victims' money. Yet when the younger officer notices Frank's medal, he does not inquire who (else) among them is a vet. Instead, he assigns them all veteran status and addresses his partner with this assumption. All the black men are let go out of feigned respect for Frank's achievements – by the loosest association possible.

Ycidra "Cee" Money: Placelessness in the Wake of Trauma

Home can be a nostalgic concept that connects an individual to a positive identity or a sense of self. Quite necessarily, home is built around family or a sense of community at the very least. When a person has a home, they feel like they belong. When they do not have this stable base, they are constantly undercut by the symbolic structure of placement outside the household and carry their trauma with them through every relevant social interaction. In this section, I explore how homelessness, not houselessness, prevents Cee from being placeless and, therefore, mobile.

While the black community of Bandera County, Texas is driven from their homes, Ycidra (or Cee as her family and friends call her) is born in a church on the group's way to Lotus, Georgia. Miss Lenore Money (Cee's grandmother) interprets Cee's birth in a church (rather than in a house

or a hospital) as some reductive representation of the girl's destiny for misfortune and inadequateness. Throughout Cee's childhood, Lenore often refers to how the girl was born in the street. Although Cee is houseless at birth, unfortunately for her, the house/home-space holds so much social cachet to Lenore that her grandmother uses this to demean her granddaughter. Rather than view the home as a locus where someone can more easily know themself and others, Lenore interprets a person's living quarters at birth as metonymic of their value and indicative of their capacity for mobility. With her grandmother's form belief that she is forever marked as lesser for having been born without a home, Cee grows up with constant reminders that she will amount to nothing because she was born a "gutter-child." Lenore scoffs at Cee constantly rather than empathize and try to build her granddaughter's confidence.

Although Cee is not born in a house, she is born into a home, regardless of what her grandmother thinks. In fact, Frank recalls that Cee was delivered "on a mattress in Reverend Bailey's church basement" on their way from Texas to Georgia. Though not a house proper, a church basement must be a better place to be delivered than the road, as Lenore is so quick to posit. Whether or not Lenore thinks of the church as the metaphorical house of God or not, the elder woman insinuates that her grandchild had no home at the time of her birth. Choosing respectability over logic, she thus paints the picture that Cee was not born in a respectable place – even when the church, at least in black communities, tends to be revered as a space of belonging, community, and relationship-building. By the metrics of other black community members, Lenore's statements are invalidated.

While Lenore's respectability politics paints the church Cee is born in as inadequate, the Money family does, in fact, lose their house prior to Cee's birth when they, in addition to the other black people from Bandera County, Texas, are displaced from their property by white

supremacists. However, I argue that a home does not begin and end at the property line. Nor can a deed describe what a home is. Rather, a home entails the healthy, self-affirming relationships that can occur within actual spaces, but which are ultimately more important than any physical place or space. Where Lenore's logic skews faulty is that she thinks of physical, inhabited, and owned property being representative of a home. By her logic, the church is not a home because the Money family cannot call it home (i.e., they do not own the space, rent it, or have any other ties to it). However, because Cee is born among people who love her, the little girl does have a home — just not by the strict standards her grandmother subscribes to.

Given how central relationships are to home, being at home (ideally) entails that a person is immersed in a politics of inclusion and acceptance. The home should be nowhere near as rigid and constrictive to their sense belonging as the politics of placement is. If the politics of placement gives a person a false definition of themselves, the home can act as a remedy, but only if the politics is nowhere to be found in said home. As proof of this, Crawford's great-grandmother encourages a home to blossom and grow, much like the tree she plants, cultivates, and nourishes. In keeping with this foundational genesis and origin, Crawford and his family cultivate the land, but they also enable themselves to make and re-make this space into a safe space of inclusion, belonging, and growth. In much the same way, Cee's mother might not have a house to give birth in, but she does her best to lay the foundation for her daughter in a sense of home.

One of the ways Cee's mother provides that sense of home is by giving her the name Ycidra. Weeks before Cee is born, her mother hears a woman say, pronounce, and spell her name: Ycidra. In Cee's mother's words, that name is "like music amid the argue and heat of the crowd," so much so that when her child is born, she gives her the name Ycidra (40). The name, one that Cee's mother affectionately hears and latches onto, is fraught with sentiment because her mother

loves the sound of it. In addition, wanting to impart what the name Ycidra stands for (i.e., a name that soothes some of the chaos she and the Money family feels after their forced eviction) while also loving the sheer sound of the name, Cee's mother thus names her daughter in this highly significant way. This gesture is Cee's first proof that she has a home, despite her grandmother's words, in the form of her name and a loving family willing to give her something so affectionate and so valuable. The family unit she is now part of will be the foundation for Cee's home, meaning Cee is born into a group of people she will forever have ties to no matter where she goes.

The family unit is a primary and solid group that can ground individuals with who they are to themselves, the family, and the rest of the world. However, Cee's grandmother all but completely betrays the security of Cee's family unit. Within that unit, Cee's self-confidence is constantly undermined. Cee's mother and father are away at work and therefore unable to defend her from her grandmother's cruelty. Unable to intervene in Lenore's gross mistreatment of their daughter, Cee is the victim of parental neglect and abuse. Frank, her overprotective brother, always shields her from harm when they are around town. As a result, Cee rarely has to stand up for herself to anyone outside their home, and cannot possibly stand up to her controlling grandmother. With assaults on her confidence from outside and within the home-space, she never receives unconditional love and a space where she is accepted for who she is and how she might freely develop, explore her own potential, and grow. Instead, she remains scarred and rendered vulnerable by this early experience: a creature adrift but recurringly placeable throughout the larger society by others, she never quite feels home because of their aggressive forms of placement.

On the surface, Cee's story might confirm what Lenore believes to be true: that Cee effectively lives life constantly adrift because she was not born respectably (i.e., in a house). Despite all the things that happen to Cee, her story mirrors Frank's insofar as both characters have

a desire to find or establish a new home. To find their home, both must become placeless but for different reasons. Frank, who deals with his trauma constantly, finds placelessness through a perseverant historical revision of his past to make his future more controllable. Cee, on the other hand, must become unplaceable through reconciling how placeable she is. As a young black woman, she will always be legible within the politics, economics, and ideologies of placement as placeable. As a result, her placelessness will look different from Frank's. She must not allow herself to be placeable by people like her grandmother, her lovers, her employers, and anyone else who might try to take advantage of her good nature and aloofness. Only when Cee can shrug off the scathing criticism of her grandmother and others' control of her can she become placeless and establish a new home.

The above statement is not to say that Cee must not acknowledge her legibility as a black woman. She will be legible because other people will legibilize and colour her. It bears mentioning that illegibility is not synonymous with placelessness. Cee is legible as racially black, and her gender is that of a girl/woman. These two traits will dictate how she navigates the world. She lives within a family that operates within an overly prescriptive culture that reveres and recreates the politics of placement wherever necessary. Her grandmother refuses to embolden her to think for herself and values only that she can perform tasks that girls and women should. Frank never allows her to protect herself because he always steps in to protect her from every danger. Her parents never help heal her trauma and establish that she has value outside of her grandmother's comments. Instead, the whole family relies heavily on innate qualities of each family member's social legibilities – rather than allowing each person to grow and explore who they are within this family and outside of the home-space and family structure. Unsurprisingly, Cee is especially prone to placement.

Given how she grows up, Cee does not exhibit a keen sense of self-preservation in any social context because her home-space was driven by a politics of placement rather than inclusion and belonging. But the disintegration of the black family unit is not the sole reason for Cee's or Frank's immobility – that reductive logic echoes the Moynihan Report's conclusions. Rather than accuse black people of any failure to create an idyllic family unit, the societal constraints that destabilize said black family units and pressure black people to adhere to a strict sense of what stability looks like – namely the politics, economics, and the ideology of placement – are to blame. For example, the assumption that a mother and father must have a home (i.e., a home-space) with access to social amenities that society deems necessary already limits black people's familial structure. The assumption that a home-space/house must operate by the standards of a social order that ties mobility to capital and materialism undercuts black families because their access to these things is harder to achieve. Cee's own mother and father cannot provide that idyllic home by themselves even as they work endless shifts to save money for their own house. They and the children live in Miss Lenore's house, with Lenore's ongoing support with food, money, and living space. Lenore, who values her house and social status above all other things, despises that the Money family takes refuge in her house and limits her enjoyment of what she sees as her well-deserved material comforts. Lenore has so much materially to offer her family but does very little to secure the family unit's joint mobility or everyone's sense of belonging. Instead, she sees the extended Money family as a threat to her stasis, stability, and mobility. She takes her ire out on Cee, the most placeable family member, due to her age and gender. Outside of the Money household, Cee's legible race and gender only exacerbate the already limited agency she has. As a result of constantly being put in her place by Lenore and her other family members, Cee's trauma makes it easier for those outside the Money household to take advantage of her through placement.

Cee's journey throughout *Home* demonstrates how the trauma of homelessness (once again, not lack of a house to live in, but the severance from adequate communal ties and belonging) from such an early age makes it difficult for her to be placeless in a fluid and mobile sense.

Lenore sees one of Cee's greatest disappointments in her choice of men. When Cee comes of age, she marries her first boyfriend, a slick city kid named Principal (known as Prince), a young man from Atlanta who moves to rural Georgia for unknown reasons. During their courtship, the young man borrows Lenore's car to run errands and show off his automobility around town – without Cee. The two young people marry soon after they meet because Lenore will not abide by two young people "shacking up" outside of wedlock. Shortly after that, they move in together. The move proves Lenore's point about Cee's inability to judge a romantic partner's character because Prince, with his silver tongue, convinces Cee to move to Atlanta, where he promptly abandons her. The only reason he courts and marries her in the first place is to gain access to her family's car. Rather than face the ire of her grandmother, Cee decides to remain in Atlanta, intent on making her way on her own. Her decision to stay in the city indicates that she knows she has no home to go back to. Cee knows she will find only insults and more degradation from her grandmother for her foolish (but predictable) decision.

Cee chooses not to return to Lotus because she has no pleasant memories to associate there. It's worth mentioning, however, that--unpleasant memories notwithstanding--a sense of home, as Evelyn Jaffe Schreiber explains, can be achievable through a process of memorization even so. Such memorization can create "a psychic support for the self" that actually protects from trauma. [28] Indeed, through a therapeutic mode of historical revisioning undertaken within a community

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[28] Schreiber notes the need for black people to have a "psychic support for the self" in her introduction to *Race, Trauma, and Home in the Novels of Toni Morrison* (2). In her interpretation (which Wahneema Lubiano also quotes in her own introduction to *The House That Race Built: Black Americans, U.S. Terrain*), the home helps Morrison's

rather than alone, memory can re-inscribe the self through affirmation and a "sense of belonging" (9). Frank's experience at the diner in Chicago details this power of community and memory as remedies for trauma. The black people in the restaurant all walk through their trauma with what borders on nostalgia; what they describe of their memories is traumatic, yet what ensues could just as easily be a blues song, with everyone's input about their troubles on clear display. A (fleeting but necessary) community forms as they recount and are recounted to about each person's pasts, yet they share these memories with an understanding that they might still have to sleep in chicken coops or ridden to safety in a train car. What the diners display in their connectivity and fondness is similar to how Schreiber describes nostalgia as far more active than people's recollection of memories because nostalgia fills in voids where memories cannot produce a narrative with continuity. Schreiber leans heavily on Jacques Lacan to draw this point to its logical conclusion, noting that nostalgic memory in this active sense "serves a protective function, providing a sense of imaginary fulfillment" against the backdrop of constant reminders of who someone is or should be. The diner patrons process their trauma to survive and, in doing so, fulfill their sense of self. They reconstruct memories of home to protect their current selves from the racial house of US society. The resulting communal memory lets these people bond over their shared trauma as a healing experience. Where once there was tragedy, their trauma now reads as humorous (i.e., the "knowing" laughter) and a deep connection materializes between people who have different backgrounds but operate under the same system of oppression (Schreiber 20-21). The continuity of nostalgia in this active, reconstructive sense, along with the community it fosters, presents an opportunity to heal each person's broken self. As I indicated in my earlier section on Frank, this ability to heal recenters the diners which Frank encounters as placeless in the face of retrospective

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characters develop a sense of self that allows them to heal from racial trauma. The benefits are myriad, but particularly, home helps these characters develop self-consciousness that allows them to navigate racist situations.

placement. The diners wax poetic and comedic about the pasts that brought them to this moment and space. The whole scene is equal parts self-deprecation and uplift and the diners who take part become (momentarily) placeless. In the complex interplay between self-deprecation and yet uplift, a sense of community is available to Frank, but he does not join the other diners. Unable to feel safe in the setting, Frank chooses not to share anything, and his statement about where he is from proves that he does not wish to be part of this community. The trauma he suffers has been a part of him since his childhood and is particularly hard to shake because he did not have a space of belonging like the one here as a child. As the home is a space of belonging and community that forms the self, neither Money sibling has a fond memory that beckons them back to Lotus. Cee has hardly any reason to be nostalgic or have any fond remembrance of the past, so home and placelessness, for her, are far more elusive than for the other characters.

Insecure but intent on making her life better, Cee unwittingly takes an ill-advised new job working in-residence for a doctor who (unbeknownst to her) performs experimental sterilization surgeries on black women. The seemingly benevolent surgeon – known initially to Cee as Dr. Beauregard and later Dr. Beau – and his wife, Mrs. Beauregard, take in black women needing medical care. The two already have an assistant in a black woman named Sarah, a black woman who onboards Cee so that she can prep surgical materials and help patients. After she volunteers to be the subject of his experimentation, Cee nearly dies and is left infertile. Once again, because of Cee's trauma and desire to find or establish a home, she cannot see the devious red flags leading up to her new employment.

A white doctor performing surgeries out of the basement of his house should indeed signal that the whole operation is strange, but because Cee is so ill-prepared for the world, she does not question the arrangement. The whole affair is unorthodox, unexpected, and exhilarating for Cee

because of its novelty – it is far from doing laundry or waiting tables. The position is also a reminder that she is not utterly useless as her grandmother would have her believe. Still, Cee lacks both the formal education and sufficient life experience needed to aid her in discovering the exact nature of the doctor's scheme. As Cee cleans and preps one day, her eyes rake over the tomes in the library. She promises herself she would "find time to read about and understand "'eugenics.'" She perceives books such as *Out of the Night, The Passing of the Great Race, and Heredity, Race, and Society* as "medical books" (65). Although Cee is unaware of their significance, these academically-positioned texts are discursive tools that create and re-create the necessity of placement through the scientific racial violence enacted on black bodies like her own.

Ycidra's lack of awareness about Dr. Beauregard's intentions is tragic but expected. Cee has never been provided a model for how healthy relationships (familial, work, or romantic) should function. She honestly does believe the Beauregard residence to be "a good, safe place" where the Beauregards and Sarah treat her almost like family. To Cee, Sarah has "become her family, her friend, and her confidante" (65). Family is the first identifier Cee gives Sarah, a woman she only met a few months prior. Sarah could be friend or foe, but that would not alter her role because Cee's only experience of family is dysfunctional. She does not know what a functional family looks like. Her grandmother would withhold love and affection. Her mother and father are practically nonexistent, and Frank sees her as a perpetual damsel in distress. By comparison, the cordiality of the Beauregards and Sarah's open arms are a respite from her usual degradation and restrictions. Eager to establish anything that resembles a familial bond, Cee unassumingly links her new employer(s) to some of the most crucial interpersonal relationships a person can have – she tries to make a home with them. As a stand-in for a family member, Sarah offers stability and a means by which Cee can identify as part of something more than just herself. As a friend, Sarah

would be able to tell Cee precisely what she needs to hear and beg impartiality. And as a confidante, Cee can trust that she can talk about anything with Sarah. Remember that Cee must live on-site as well, meaning that the couple and Sarah have saved her from being houseless – which Cee might interpret as their rescuing her from homelessness. Between Cee's naivety, her newfound trust, and her need to remain housed following Prince's abandonment, she makes mistakes – mistakes that she would have avoided had her own biological family provided a more stable upbringing. Her ignorance and eagerness to trust – both voids left by an unstable family that renders her placeable – sadly primes her to overlook the many red flags that signal abusive treatment and placement. She unwittingly becomes one of Dr. Beau's patients and only learns what he is up to in retrospect after Frank rescues her at the behest of Sarah. Only when she returns to Lotus to heal from her psychological and physical scars (with the help of the matrons of the small town) does she receive a homecoming and the tools to make herself placeless.

The older black women of Lotus who heal Cee could be a case study on how mobility should operate to benefit black families and homes. These women, perhaps more than any other character(s) I analyze throughout this entire dissertation, enact mobility that allows them to navigate the world despite their complex legibility and positionality. Morrison writes these women as far from perfect, but nonetheless placeless. They are women who are central to Lotus' black community. After all, these are black women: descendants of enslaved people two or even one generation removed. They can handle healing one of their own who has lost their way. They do not have much education, yet they find a way to heal Cee's physical and emotional scars. They come together to support families in need and require no other prompt than to see people in need in the first place. And unlike Lenore, they do not seek more money to secure their place in society. Instead, they do what they can to help others because when the community is strong, they all can

be strong and can depend on each other in the future. They are mobile in ways that Lenore only wishes she could be.

Cee finally takes part in collective communal parsing of her trauma when she is taken in by Miss Ethel and the town's older women. They heal Cee's body and mind as they set her on a path to placelessness. With their help, Cee goes from an immature girl from an abusive and placement-fueled household to a woman who will make her own decisions, money, and consequently, her own home. With regards to this help, it is helpful to recall Schreiber's citation of Lacan's notion that nostalgia is a "momentary fulfillment of an imaginary completeness," where that specific type of memory attempts to re-create imaginary wholeness to fill someone's lack within the symbolic order and social structure. With nostalgia as psychic support, being nostalgic about a home that never existed gives Cee what Lacan calls a "positive gaze" (20). The racial house of larger society does not provide Cee with a positive gaze.

The older women of Lotus give her a sense of placelessness, but not before they break her down to nothing to rebuild her better than her past self. The matrons of Lotus already think very little of the medical industry for how its practitioners treat black women. They know, either through their own experiences or from hearsay courtesy of women they trust as sources on the matter, that black women's bodies are priceless to the medical community's research, even if their existence outside of their practical use for medicinal experimentation means nothing. The matrons of Lotus belittle Cee for her evergreen trust: how could she trust a white man who performs surgeries (not even in a hospital!) on black women? In truth, though, these are things that Cee could not have foreseen herself. From a very young age, she was without much of the stability that would even allow her mother, father, or any other family members to discuss the potential of such a threat. Frank was more brawn than brains. If he detected even the remotest danger, he would

intervene to keep Cee safe for that moment but fail to impart any knowledge as to why the girl should be wary. Lenore never gives Cee the chance to succeed truly. She would instead scrutinize the girl at every turn, fulfilling a prophecy of her own making about her granddaughter's life. Dr. Beau's exploitation of Cee is expected, given how the girl is not prepared for an encounter with someone like him.

Of all the ladies of Lotus, Ms. Ethel reveals the secret to placelessness that will most benefit Cee – she must think for herself to better herself. Her advice seems like common sense, but what she says is crucial to helping Cee take care of herself instead of letting others do this for her. Cee never has to think for herself, honestly. She putters along, Frank watches over her, her mother and father do love her but are all but absent, and her grandmother is a menace. Her grandfather is an apologist for his wife's indifference toward her family. More will be written about that later in this chapter, but at present suffice it to say that Cee's family firmly places her as the gullible, useless little girl, and a baby (emphasis on this signifier) sister – so she takes these placeholders in stride. When her hair is a mess, she fixes it so that her grandmother will cease disparaging commentary. When Prince leaves her, she chooses not to come back to Lotus and stays in Atlanta. She knows she needs a new job to pay rent. She seeks a new job and takes the one with suspicious conditions but chooses that work anyway. Most of Cee's decision-making bears some weight from her current legibility and the sense of self her family engenders within her in her day-to-day life. While not complacent with being placeable, Cee is far from placeless because she never gets to center her own needs and desires.

Nearly everything Cee does stems from her legibility, a politics of placement, and a desperation to meet other people's needs in a way they view as adequate. As a result, she spins her wheels (pun not intended). She gets nowhere because most if not all her decisions benefit others

who employ a politics of placement (for various reasons). To become placeless, Cee must know and center herself. Ms. Ethel is especially critical of how much influence Miss Lenore has over Cee:

> "Don't tell me you going to let Lenore decide again who you are? If you thinking about it, let me tell you something first. Remember that story about the goose and the golden eggs? How the farmer took the eggs and how greed made him stupid enough to kill the goose? I always thought a dead goose could make at least one good meal. But gold? Shoot. That was always the only thing on Lenore's mind. She had it, loved it, and thought it put her above everybody else. Just like the farmer. Why didn't he plow his land, seed it, and grow something to eat." (125)

Before she launches into her parable about the goose that lays the golden egg, Ms. Ethel instructs Cee not to let Lenore dictate who Cee is. Cee and her grandmother's abusive and exploitative power dynamics are finally called into the foreground. Elder, grandmother, defunct guardian, disciplinarian – these are just a few of the legibility descriptors of Lenore. Lenore is many things and aspires to be many more, but Ethel sees that she is one thing most of all: money-hungry. Like the farmer who kills the goose to learn its secret rather than continue to extract its blessings, Lenore does not nurture the family she has and thus hinders its individuals' prosperity.

Before this conversation with Ms. Ethel, Lenore influences nearly every decision Cee makes. Ms. Ethel offers Cee the reins to her life and packages the entire lesson within the parable of the goose that lays golden eggs. Lenore should have no sway over her granddaughter's welfare precisely because she obsesses over placement in the unhealthiest of ways. Lenore would rather have money in a community where so many other black people do not than an actual family that

loves her and she loves. As such, Cee must shake off her grandmother's control and influence. That is Cee's first step toward making herself placeless. Ethel continues:

> "'See what I mean? Look to yourself. You free. Nothing and nobody is obliged to save you but you. Seed your own land. You young and a woman and there's serious limitation in both, but you a person too. Don't let Lenore or some trifling boyfriend and certainly no devil doctor decide who you are. That's slavery. Somewhere inside you is that free person I'm talking about. Locate her and let he do some good in the world." (126)

Ms. Ethel, for all her insults and backhanded compliments, pushes Cee to believe in herself, which would lead the girl toward more self-directed mobility. Cee must seed her own land to cultivate a life she envisions as ideal for herself, not someone else. Morrison directly calls back to how Crawford's great-grandmother planted that tree that was both her grandson's pride and demise. An ongoing narrative of what happens when a person puts down roots (both literal and figurative ones) in space is ripe for analysis. Cee, who goes where the wind blows her – or better yet, where other people insist that she does – has no roots and is thus susceptible to the whims of people, job stability, and so many other factors. She should bear in mind the impact all these things will have on her life, but they need not dictate who she is and the choices she makes daily. Regardless of her lack of education, independent of the whims of an economy, Cee must put down roots and cultivate a sense of self before she can adequately be placeless.

Ethel takes care to remind Cee that she is legible due to her youth and womanhood. After all, these traits will not be imperceivable to other people who wish to interact with her. Ethel's gesture reinforces that Cee will need to be aware of her legibility, but that other people's perceptions should not get in the way of what she, Cee, wants. To disregard these limitations could

be dangerous for a young woman, but Ethel sees that there is no need for another woman to be swatted down for unknowing disregard or cluelessness of the politics.

It is worth noting here that Ethel does not explicitly mention Cee's race throughout this interaction. Her omission resonates as a common-sense acknowledgment of what they both already know. After all, this entire story revolves around black people searching for a home in the US' racial house. Race is inescapable. From Jim Crow to vagrancy laws, race needs no further mention. Therefore, Cee needs to and will succeed despite her race. When Cee takes in all of Ethel's advice, her response demonstrates a new perception of herself. She is conscious of who she is and declares that she will not leave Lotus because "this is where I belong" (126). Note that she uses the word "belong." Knowledge of one's belonging to a space or group offers comfort and clarity. The narration captures why shortly before this conversation Cee does not feel that she belongs to her family or home: "Branded early as an unlovable, barely tolerated 'gutter child' by Lenore, the only one whose opinion mattered to her parents, exactly what Miss Ethel said, she had agreed with the label and believed herself worthless" (128). Now that Cee can see her grandmother as Miss Ethel does, she has a better sense of how much of an impact Lenore had on her as a child and how ludicrous the old woman's standards were. Free from the absurdity that clouded her judgment, Cee accepts that she is lovable. She is not a gutter child. In the light of her new knowledge, she sees that even her mother's inability to counter Lenore's worst behaviors is understandable even if it was detestable. Even so, the fact remains that Cee's "own mother, Ida, never said, 'You my child. I dote on you. You wasn't born in no gutter. You born into my arms. Come on over here and let me give you a hug.' If not her mother, somebody somewhere should have said those words and meant them" (128-129). Cee's mother could have given Cee a home with something as simple as

a hug. With that hug, Ida could have refuted Lenore's allegations of Ycidra as a "gutter child" and built a better relationship and memories for her daughter.

When home, a person leaves their inhibitions at the door. Performativity gives way to comfort among other people fortunate enough to coexist in that mutual space. Cee finds home, placelessness, and mobility difficult because she had no home, to begin with, was part of a toxic cycle of placement from a very young age, and as a result, could hardly stand on her own two feet. With all of this in mind, she decides that Lotus will be her home, but on her terms:

> So it was just herself. In this world with these people she wanted to be the person who would never again need rescue. Not from Lenore through the lies of the Rat, not from Dr. Beau through the courage of Sarah and her brother. Sun-smacked or not, she wanted to be the one who rescued her own self. Did she have a mind, or not? Wishing would not make it so, nor would blame, but thinking might. If she did not respect herself, why should anybody else? (129)

Cee does not want Frank to rescue her anymore. She does not allow Lenore to control her. She will not be able to bear children because of Dr. Beau's botched procedures. From this point forward, she will depend on herself and her intellect to ensure that no one else takes advantage of her in the same way again. She poses a rhetorical question to herself: Does she have a mind? She quickly answers that, yes, she does. She cannot wish for others to rescue her. She cannot – rather should not – blame others when they do not save her. She must save herself because she is worth the rescue. Her new resolve to think for herself causes her to part ways with her old self. Cee is placeless, mobile, and at home for the first time in her life.

Lenore & Lotus: No Place for Placement, No Home for the Houseless

Cee and Frank's grandmother, Lenore, initially appears to be mobile. After collecting her first husband's life insurance after he is killed by racists who view his successful business as a threat to the social/racial order, she moves to Lotus, Georgia. Once in Lotus, she finds a new husband – Salem Money – who does not interfere with her decisions or desires as she (literally) holds the purse strings in the relationship (43-45). While Lenore's unfortunately acquired fortune grants her financial and social stability within her new partnership and community, true mobility eludes her. In valuing her present stability and living standards over those of her family and the larger community of Lotus, she impedes mobility all around her as well as for herself. Consequently, she becomes the resident snob of the town, investing only in snide comments about people she sees as lesser. She views the Money family from Texas as obstacles to her enjoyment of the life she thinks she deserves. Unlike Crawford's grandmother, she passes nothing more than judgment down to her family. Lenore is the opposite of Crawford's grandmother because she reaps what she has (not) sown. This section explores how Lenore's reluctance to open her home to others prevents that home-space from ever becoming a home for the Moneys. Her decisions and actions set the entire family up for a life wherein their place by society is more likely defined by others rather than themselves. They never receive the same reprieve and safety expected within a family home, and as a result, are unable to achieve placelessness easily.

Lenore, however, is anything but a flat character. The dynamism of her misgivings explains why she clings so stubbornly to a politics of placement that prevents her and her family's mobility. Lenore experiences insecurity after her husband dies at the hands of racists who see his successful business as unnatural given that he is black. They figure he should know his place, earn less than his white counterparts, and enjoy fewer fruits of his labor. When they kill Lenore's husband, they send a not-so-subtle reminder that she too must stay in her place. The death of Lenore's husband

signals her loss of all emotional and psychological security. As a black woman (and a widow, at that), she cannot own her deceased husband's gas station. If she stays in that town, she will have to carve out a life without the man she loves. Her home (not her house but her emotional connection and the foundational relationship to her partner) is in disrepair. Should she stay, Lenore would remain near her late husband's killers, and they would surely come for her next. The intimidation works. Lenore has no choice but to leave. From this point forward, her decisions largely function as attempts to recreate her sense of security and well-being by any means necessary. It is the impact of her husband's brutal murder that indelibly imbues Lenore with an instinct towards survival. As with many black women working to survive in this period, this often means rigidly adhering to the politics of placement and its many requirements, even to the detriment of her family and herself.

Lenore struggles to keep intact the faux mobility she enjoys and holds so dear as she employs a politics of placement that hinders the entire family through a constant cycle of placement within the home-space. This act discourages placelessness therein and beyond. Lenore creates a politics that centers around her idea of perfection – her home-space will be her utopia.

Shari Evans explores how an ongoing "dangerous and compelling impulse to create a utopia" occurs throughout one of Morrison's other novels, *Paradise* (381). Though *Paradise* is not part of this chapter's analysis, Lenore's desire to create an environment that shields her from the outer-world's violence reflects the same idea of utopic space in *Home*. Evans has an extensive backdrop of theorists to pull her ideas from, most notably Patricia Yaeger, who posits that utopias built into programmed space both limit and delimit ethical behavior and therefore can create themes that control individual and community identities. One of the effects of the ongoing need to preserve a narrative of programmed space is the prevention of change and growth."[29] Beyond

[29] This quote is from Patricia Yaeger, as cited from Shari Evans, pg. 382. Yaeger holds that utopias are tempting because they allow people to take advantage of the programmed space's themes to reconstitute order and safety –

programming a planned activity or how to use a space, however, Yaeger argues that some spaces are themed, meaning that they express concepts or doctrines that become 'persuasive' to their audience. The term persuasive hides what is an ideologically charged coercion toward compliance – meaning that those subject to such compliance consent to their own control without any idea of why they do so. If that sounds familiar, it is because this is how the politics of placement ideologically ties participants to its practices. Lenore follows the impulse to create a utopia of her home that reflects the politics of placement because this system made her (ostensibly) mobile. Why not employ it in her household? When she does, she limits any individual agency to resist and revise the themed space of her household lest she loses control. And true to Patricia Yaeger's concept of themed space, Lenore sets up her house in a way that iterates and reiterates that she not only belongs but is the undeniable leader and provider for everyone therein.

Theming spaces suggest that repetition of a particular story, or a narrative per se, will ideologically situate inhabitants in relation to each other and the space itself (Evans 389). Social space outside of the home-space consists of many programmed spaces and themed spaces that can influence a person. The home-space (and, by extent, the home proper) should not require theming lest said theme blurs the line between social and domestic space and causes the inhabitants' belonging to hinge on their adequate performance of standards that betray the self for the social order. In short, the home-space should not operate in the same way that external socially-themed spaces do. Evans has the remedy to Lenore's utopic theming in the form of the heterotopia: "Home is a paradise, a utopia, for Lenore, when it should be a heterotopia." In keeping with Evans' point, Lenore's themed space of the home, like the themed and programmed spaces of other social contexts, requires suppression of difference or dissent. Intent to preserve the household's theme of

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two things that Lenore badly lacks. Lenore literally uses placement to order her home-space because the familiar **features of** the race-house are all that she knows.

her control, she beats her grandchildren, non-verbally threatens Salem's security, and keeps the children's parents in the dark about the actual goings-on in the house. Unfortunately, with a house where she sets the rules, Lenore has a utopia that comes at the expense of everyone else and even herself. The ideological pull of Lenore's themed space falls apart, and she is eventually left alone in her house, in a metaphorical bed of her own making.

One of the easiest ways for Lenore to regain some security is to have a house. Another is to have money. Fortunately for her, "her (now deceased) husband had savings, insurance, and a piece of abandoned property belonging to his cousin in Lotus, Georgia" (44). The five-hundred-dollar life insurance pay-out she receives for her late husband's death does little for her emotional loss but does help her with the first two tasks: she moves to Lotus, buys a house, and finds a new husband. Salem Money affords her respectability by making her legible as a wife in the community. In their partnership, however, her security stems from her ability to control Salem through her money and the security that she, and not Salem, brings to the table. She wants more control in this relationship than she had in her past one. To this end, Salem plays the part of the agreeable husband well so that he can avoid conflict and have some semblance of security.

Lenore does little to make the house she has built into a home for them both because she goes from being a victim of placement to one of its most significant users in her home-space. She treats Salem's daughter and her family poorly when they arrive at her doorstep. Lenore perceives them as leeches and resents them. When Cee and Frank's father and mother go to work, Lenore pours water instead of milk over Cee and Frank's shredded wheat breakfast. Whether she still has much money left after buying her home or car expenditures, withholding milk from grandchildren is extremely tight-fisted. She then hides her withholding act from the children's parents because she knows that the optics of not feeding her grandchildren will likely lead to a disruption in her

ability to continue to control the power dynamics in her house. When the children have welts and stripes on their legs from when Lenore beats them, the grandmother has them lie to their mother and father. She tells them to report that they got those bruises from playing out by the stream where brambles and huckleberry thorns grew. She intentionally hides that she beats the children from their parents because she knows what she is doing is extreme. Whatever she does, she does in the shadows lest their parents, adults with the ability to take their children and to live elsewhere and expose her, discover her behavior.

Salem not only witnesses but benefits from Lenore's misdeeds. Even when the "salt pork was halved for the two of them and all the children got was its flavor," Salem says not a word, presumably because he gets to share the pork with Lenore. Lenore is both a cook and judge in this situation. She can withhold food from her husband just as easily as she does from her grandchildren. She instigates placement to hold the children and Salem hostage in the house by access to food. However, the performativity of her harshness dually validates her treatment of her grandchildren and further buys silence from Salem. Frank, young but wise, deciphers the complex relationship between his empowers "because he was scared Miss Lenore would leave him the way his first two wives did" (43-44). Salem will never leave so long as he can still access Lenore's money. In the meantime, all he must do is avoid situations that draw her ire. Salem falls in line and remains silent. He reveals his true intentions when Lenore suffers a stroke later in the story and cannot communicate well. He misunderstands her intentionally and goes about spending the money she has as he pleases.

Regarding the dynamism of her motivations, Miss Lenore is quite a feminist character precisely because she does not want to be legible as just another wife and woman in the community unable to control her own life for black children, black men, and whiteness in general. Feminism

is not antithetical to mobility because it fundamentally opposes the kinds of placement that rely upon once-thought immutable concepts like gender.[30] Morrison's enduring motif of writing empowered black women who refuse to conform to usual standards that others dictate, and in this novel such a motif prevails to emphasize a vital issue. Black women must shrink themselves to make room for others. There are practically no physical spaces in the patriarchally-ordered home where black women do not have to engage in performative selflessness for the family's sake. The few spaces the hierarchy relegates them to (or places them in) are replete with responsibilities that pull focus from the self to the family. The kitchen, washroom, bathroom (which over time becomes less a respite and more the last stop for others' cleanliness and care) are all spaces that place black women with and within a politics of placement that requires them to make themselves as small as possible for the maximum benefit of their families. Even the bedroom allows women to hold only as much value as their output allows: the sex act and its offspring or the child-bearing act. Lenore never has children herself, which is another refusal to conform to the performativity these spaces impress upon her. Miss Lenore can and should push back against forces that would see her be placeable and unable to be in control of her life.

Lenore's status as a woman who does not conform to the ideals of the patriarchy and politics of placement fits into Catherine Rottenberg's concept of the "New Woman," even if she is black. The "independent, professional, and more sexualized figure" emerged in the early twentieth century but excluded black women (94). Miss Lenore (as the narration and Lotus

[30] Harack goes into more depth about how the masculine and feminine roles in Home replicate the normalized dichotomy (i.e., masculine = caretaker) on the surface but the feminine characters are the ones doing most if not all care work in the domestic space and external spaces. Frank depends on his partners, and even as Cee struggles to find a foothold, she receives support from women. Even Lenore manages to fend for herself where men fall short. In this sense, the women of the novel seem well-equipped to be mobile. For more context read Harack's "Shifting Masculinities and Evolving Feminine Power: Progressive Gender Roles in Toni Morrison's Home" 377, 379-382, 390.

residents call her) has so much control over her household that she quite literally refuses to be placed with the label of "Mrs." She is even just known by her first name (preceded by the independent and bachelorette *Ms.* or *Miss* rather than the maritally expected *Mrs.*) instead of Mrs. Money. Black women were instead expected to live up to the New Negro female ideal, an "asexual and politically active woman who dedicates herself to the advancement of the race and eschews self-exploration or self-empowerment" (99). Yet Lenore does not fit under the New Negro Woman model either. Her commitment to advancing the black race is questionable. She barely advances her own family. Lenore offers no "othermothering (mothering of someone who is not one's child) to her grandchildren in the wake of their mother and father's absence. As a result, they do not receive "maps of experience that would inform [them] of [their] heritage and empower [them]" (O'Reilly 12).

Instead, Lenore exemplifies judgmental femininity born from the politics of placement as she polices the actions of other women and community members to make sure they knew "their level and hers" (Morrison 92). Overall, Lenore fails to do the work of creating the homeplace "as a site of resistance," where children are taught to love and value themselves, "a teaching that has political ramifications for black children growing up in a racist society" (O'Reilly 33). Morrison herself postulates that a progressive model of race and gender is necessary to create a sense of home, where "personal responsibility to confront one's past helps them become a productive member of the community who can care for others, pass on knowledge, and aid in the self-actualization of the next generation" (Harack 372). Once again, since Lenore cannot provide stability for her family, her strengths cost everyone else dearly while she dubiously benefits.

Lenore believes that she and Salem are doing the Money family "a big favor letting…homeless relatives live in their house after the family got run out of Texas" (44). That

small act of false benevolence tracks well, given that she obsesses over the optics of how her actions make her look to the rest of the community. She thinks the family "got run out of Texas" when they faced the threat of racist violence – something she could empathize with since she also flees the town in Alabama after her husband's death. But rather than extend her hospitality to people she could empathize with, she immediately turns their misfortune into a means to build up her brand and self-worth. She harbors a potent resentment for Cee:

> Lenore took it as a very bad sign for Cee's future that she was born on the road. Decent women, she said delivered babies at home, in a bed attended to by good Christian women who knew what to do. Although only street women, prostitutes, went to hospitals when they got pregnant, at least they had a roof overhead when their baby came. Being born in the street – or the gutter, as she usually put it --- was prelude to a sinful, worthless life. (44)

The audience can trace how Lenore places Cee beneath decent women and even prostitutes and street women in the hierarchy of birthing places. Cee's mother had to give birth while the family fled Texas and could not find suitable arrangements at a house or hospital. Lenore's only criteria for whether a child was born under suitable birthing conditions is nothing more than a place that offers a roof above the child's head. But the rooftop is just a structure that keeps the weather out of the house. Lenore does not concern herself with the conditions of whether Cee's mother provided her a home because she sees the house and home as synonymous and interchangeable. Whatever Lenore's logic, Morrison refuses to make a roofed space equivalent to a home.

At least in Lenore's eyes, being born on the street preordains Cee for an unsavory life. Of course, Lenore's logic is even more irrational given that she thinks that the conditions of her granddaughter's birth precondition her for a life unkind. She does not offer any other remedy for

these (potential) ills and instead provides only grave predictions and superstitions about the pre-ordinance of birth. Doing so shows a fundamental flaw in her thinking: she must not understand or believe that mobility despite one's placement or legibility is possible. After taking the child and her family into her house, Lenore shows that she is unwilling to help her granddaughter or her family be any better than they were in the past. She builds no bridges, offers no loving advice, and gives no matronly wisdom. Instead, she tears down her granddaughter day after day to fulfill the self-fulfilling prophecy she foresaw for Cee all those years ago. Lenore brings the worst aspect of exploitative placement — the treatment of place as an absolute and immutable fact of another person's existence — into what should be a home space where fixity should not be welcome. As a result, she stunts Cee's potential to thwart her grandmother's misgivings.

If Lenore's self-fulfilling prophecy for Cee is true, then Lenore's own improvement of her station in life after her husband's death must have been a fluke. Fluke or not, Lenore enjoys the benefits of her escape from poverty, violence, placement, and immobility. Still, she is unwilling to lend other people the helping hand they need to do the same. As I've emphasized elsewhere in this dissertation, black people who employ placement in ways that mimic the politics, economics, and ideologies of placement prevalent in white society cannot hope to be mobile themselves – or engender others to be mobile. Lenore offers the girl and her family little more than a living room floor, even though she could offer much more given how her husband's death was so tragic. Rather than empathize, she lets those around her fend for themselves. Granted, her "house was big enough for two, maybe three, but not for grandparents plus Pap, Mama, Uncle Frank and two children – one a howling baby" (44). But the discomfort she feels at living in a crowded house should not excuse her resentment of Cee, the little girl 'born in the street,' every chance she gets.

Lenore's origin story should prevent her from employing the politics of placement but sadly, it does not. She should be able to control her life and eschew placement that deems her as only fit to reproduce black children and support the black family. In doing so, she can be placeless, but placelessness does not always beget mobility. Placelessness is simply one step toward enacting mobility that avoids traditional or ideologically grounded placement. Lenore, in a sense, is placeless because she does not feel the need to perform wife or grandmotherly duties. While that would typically indicate that she is mobile, she undermines the potential to build a home where mobility can continue to flourish – for herself or her family. Mobility is someone's capacity to move about the world and resist static legibilities. It is not fixed. It can be diminishable by external forces but also reappears when and where necessary. Mobility requires constant assessment and reassessment of one's motivations and actions to preserve the capacity to be mobile. Lenore does not foster sustainable mobility in her home because the inhospitable environment she creates ensures that neither she nor her family can continue to be mobile. Her family does not have a respite from society's overbearing control over their legibility, placement, and mobility.

Moreover, mobility for black people (i.e., black mobility) must be scalable to a social level. Such scalable mobility, that is to say, properly has broad social implications. In contrast, Lenore fails to spread a sense of home all around herself to the point that those in the shadow of her power might grow, flourish, expand the horizons of their legibility, and become truly mobile. Lenore places other people. As a result, she reaps what she has sown. None of her actions make her lovable. She unceasingly focuses on herself and how others make her look and feel, a habit that ironically earns her very little respect among her peers. She traumatizes her grandchildren and seems indifferent about her husband. Frank and Cee cannot stand her, and Salem wastes no time taking advantage of her money once she has a stroke. Lenore acquires wealth and the status

she clings so dearly to but does nothing more with it than let it stagnate. She allows both these things (or the optics) to control her every move to ensure her continued safety and security.

Lily: Placelessness through Resilience

Lily, the woman Frank Money lives with and hopes to be a better man for, is perhaps the most mobile and placeless character in *Home*. She comes from a solid black home (not just a household or home-space) where her parents did their best to instill in her that she can and will do whatever is necessary to succeed. And for the most part, she does just that. When Frank becomes a nuisance, she lets it be known that she does not need him. Restless to own her own house, she does not wait for Frank or any other man to offer his wealth to help her achieve her goal. Instead, she gets a new job that pays her more for her time and proceeds to save until she can afford the down payment. Lily is not, however, immune to the politics of placement – no person truly is, and she must navigate past racism and sexism because she is legible to the world as a black woman. She grapples with these legibilities to navigate situations where she is at a disadvantage to eschew placement and become mobile. Moreover, in keeping with the novel's main theme—pursuit of a bona fide sense of home – Lily's struggle eventually culminates in an uncomfortable conversation with her real estate agent about a house she wants to buy.

The agent employs racecraft as she fumbles to foreground the unspoken (yet still in effect) politics of placement for Lily. To set the tone, racism is a form of placement that hinders mobility and placelessness for Lily and black people generally. The Fields cite racism as a social practice that is equal parts "action and a rationale for [said] action," and often both at once (17). Racists take for granted (i.e., are ideologically bound to) the objective reality of race and in the process, a shorthand emerges where "racism, something an aggressor does, becomes race, something the

target is, in a sleight of hand that is easy to miss" (17) The distinction between the two is essential because when racism should clearly register, the perpetrators, supporters, or casual beneficiaries of racism often balk at the idea that the order is unnatural, not innate, and not immutable.

Lily's relentlessness to build enough wealth to buy a house is enviable. She even finds one that she thinks is perfect. Unfortunately for her, she cannot buy a house in her chosen neighborhood because she is black. The scene that unfolds between Lily and her real estate agent is painful to read, if for no other reason than that this is one of the rare instances of explicit (rather than implicit) racial placement. If read too quickly, nuances are lost, and racecraft is hidden. The following scene must thus be read slowly, carefully, and alertly:

> "They're sold already?" asked Lily.
>
> The agent dropped her eyes, then decided not to lie. "Well, no, but there are restrictions."
>
> "On what?"
>
> The agent sighed. Obviously not wanting to have this conversation, she lifted her desk blotter. And pulled out some stapled papers. Turning a page, she showed Lily an underlined passage. Lily traced the lines of print with her forefinger:
>
> No part of said property hereby conveyed shall ever be used or occupied by any Hebrew or by any person of the Ethiopian, Malay, or Asiatic race excepting only employees in domestic service.
>
> "I've got rentals and apartments in other parts of the city. Would you like…"
>
> "Thank you," said Lily. She raised her chin and left the office quickly as pride let her. Nevertheless, when her anger cooled and after some mulling, she returned to the agency and rented a second-floor one-bedroom apartment near Jackson Street. (73-74)

When Lily asks why she cannot buy a house in a particular neighborhood, the real estate agent bristles: surely, this black woman should know her place, or at the very least, understand that her question has an obvious answer? The real estate agent tries her best to avoid saying that Lily might be able to afford a house in the community she wants. Still, the powers that be (i.e., real estate legislation and deed clauses) prevent her from being able to buy that house, let alone build a home in that community. The agent starts by saying that there are “restrictions,” as if Lily would be able to fill in the gaps for herself. When Lily does not and pushes the matter, the agent sighs and reveals what those restrictions are. Even when she must reveal to her client those restrictions, the agent does not open her mouth. Too uncomfortable to say that Lily cannot buy the house because she is black, the agent instead turns the paper around for Lily to read and points to the specific section that holds the clause preventing Lily’s purchase. The agent’s unwillingness to verbalize what she knows illustrates how the hypocrisy of placement that operates at such an institutional level only exacerbates the discomfort of both parties who must adhere to placement’s rules in real-time and space. The agent does not want to tell this black woman what her place is explicitly, but not doing so would surely lead to the woman’s further discomfort or even death. For Lily, the black woman, there is no other option than to adhere to the politics of placement or risk embarrassment now and death threats later. The scene is suspenseful because the audience knows that Lily must conform to the rules and clauses, not push back right now, and reassess her goals. Meanwhile, the agent masks her own discomfort through a short nonverbal interaction that puts Lily in her place.

The agent’s inability (or unwillingness) to put what she knows into words immediately results in her having to show Lily the text as it exists in her materials. Lily herself must decode (not that there is much to decipher) what is written to find out that black immobility is built into

housing agreements. The clause she reads confirms that no Asian, black, or Jewish person can own or even occupy the house. The clause, like the agent, skirts its real intention as it eschews explicit placing for implicit placement of these racial and religious groups. No black, Jewish, Asian, etc. person should be able to occupy or live in that house. Occupying a house implies that the person is a squatter and that they are not meant to be there.

To use a house makes the space into a tool. In all these scenarios, a house becomes a home because of the residents' relationship to and intentions for the space. One of the unspoken fears that the politics of placement instills in white people is that the mere presence of black people signals the impending threat of an overthrow of their power. By this logic, once a black person occupies, uses, or lives in a house, they are one step closer to creating a home in that space. Once they make a home in that space, they can build a community to bolster their claim to the home-space and (possibly) more of the surrounding area. With community, they establish a home – which signals their mobility as a threat to the order which the politics of placement is meant to preserve. Buying a house is one thing. Making that house a home is another. If there is any lesson in Crawford's or Lenore's first husband's death, a home is a significant marker of black people's attempts to be mobile. These attempts are usually met with violence.

The real estate agent's exasperation at explaining to Lily that she cannot buy a house in that area is fascinating. Apologists of the politics of placement do not want to state that the politics exists explicitly. Instead, they invoke racecraft to stealthily employ the politics without having to say aloud what all parties should know. An excellent example, we may remember, is when Mr. Johnston and the riding boss from *Blood on the Forge* lead Big Mat to police himself to reestablish the order they want. They would rather imply (initially) their desired result than state what Big Mat should do because this method controls the situation and does not make them look like the

instigators of violence. Instead, they paint Mat as the instigator because he does not play along with their desires and the politics. Even more insidious is that racecraft offers no excuse for the type of violence Big Mat or Crawford encounter when they do not adhere to the white people's desires.

When white people employ racecraft, they absolve themselves of the discomfort of confronting the egregious and illogical nature of their racism. Rather than state outright why a thing is not possible, they are flustered by black people's audacity or lack of knowledge. These white people proceed to hint, engage in logical gymnastics, and attempt to erase their own part in the racism they support. Under normal circumstances, a black woman should know that the politics prevents her from buying a house in a white neighborhood. The real-estate agent first chooses not to explain what she assumes Lily should already know. Then the agent gets Lily to do the dirty work in this situation and read the clause for herself. The agent then hides behind the clause's coded language to imply that Lily should set her sights on a more reasonable neighborhood (i.e., a neighborhood where black people are allowed to live). Racists and apologists (the real estate agent falls under the latter category) for racism often avail themselves of the deception that race does not equal racism. Barbara and Karen Fields capture how real estate agents would often treat black people disappointed in the whims of a racist market with the retort: “Don't blame me because you're colored” (*Racecraft* 97). The agent in *Home* seems to imply just that when she refuses to say aloud why Lily can't buy the house.

Racecraft allows white people to maintain order with minimal work necessary. The other sleight of hand occurs in how this order is held with the false statement that black people cannot live in white neighborhoods because they are black. Black legibility is not necessarily the threat at hand. If that were the case, white people would murder as many black people as they possibly

could be based on black people's mere existence. The threat that the politics of placement veils with racecraft is that black people's politics of belonging is the real threat. Black homes are crucial to the success of the individuals therein. The deed clause does not state explicitly that residents do not want black people to create homes. However, how the real estate agent balks at Lily's ignorance exposes that she and the clause she hides behind interpret black homeownership as black people's first step in a perceived takeover of what is programmed and themed white space. The agent does not admit to Lily that if she attempts to live in that white neighborhood, she might make herself susceptible to violence from white neighbors who fear that if black people own their homes, they might garner a sense of belonging that could establish a more prominent black community in their (formerly) white neighborhood. Lily's presence as a black homeowner would be tantamount to the neighborhood's decline.

Ultimately, Lily chooses not to buy the house. She rents an apartment instead – in fact, the apartment that she and Frank live in together until he leaves to save Cee. While the two are together, Frank is a tremendous burden to Lily. His trauma (or unwillingness to work through it) and his need for Lily to serve as his therapist, girlfriend, and mother are too much to handle. Unhappy in the relationship, she constantly points out his inconsistencies and flaws – she never skirts the issues, even if she does remain with him for companionship. Truthfully, she is glad to be rid of him because with him gone, she can refocus her efforts on her ambitions rather than his idleness. In the emptiness that follows Frank's departure, Lily reminisces about what brought her this far in life. She remembers that her father named her Lillian Florence Jones after his mother because "a tougher lady never lived" (80). With such a namesake, he urged Lily to "find her talent and drive it" to lead a happy and successful life. Self-assured, Lily resets her focus to be successful,

whatever that may mean. The universe rewards her for her resolve: she happens upon a purse full of coins outside her apartment.

Having come from what seems like a supportive home with sustainable messages about strength and resilience, Lily best exemplifies how placelessness helps one overcome immobility as a black person (a black woman, no less). She does not have to forget that she is black and a woman. These things color her experience, but she can strategize around them for the desired results. She also does not have to forget her past or bury her racialized and familial history: doing so would only destabilize her ability to push back against future instigators of the politics. Once unplaceable, Lily recognizes the faults and oversights in ideological processes of the politics of placement at work and even parses the nuance of racecraft's trickery. She can now be mobile.

Conclusion

Toni Morrison's *Home* illustrates many of the themes that this dissertation project's re-definition of mobility aims to cover: continuous self-surveillance of one's legibility, assessment and reassessment of other people's legibilities in relation to each other and the self, and a drive to more thoroughly secure one's own autonomous control over their social situation. Morrison paints a realistic view of characters who live with all the pitfalls and successes that their attempts at mobility entail and does not shy away from how inextricable race and gender are from placement because both concepts dictate whether mobility is possible for her characters. Finally, *Home* reveals that where racecraft is present, how critical the home is so that an individual can establish placelessness to defy racecraft. The novel also illustrates strategies like trauma-bonding to drive home (pun intended) Morrison's point. Morrison masterfully draws attention to and criticizes the ostensible facticity of place through the metaphor of home as a site of placelessness and resistance.

Being placeless and black in a society where innumerable reminders exist to place and re-place a black person in myriad contexts is extremely difficult. Therefore, the onus for mobility should not rest solely on the black individual who wishes to be mobile. Instead, the vast American race-house all around us which Morrison speaks of in her critical works—a race-house jointly populated by (if not a bona fide home to) both whites and blacks--must be questioned and opposed in the most radical, underlying sense if black people are ever to have the same chance at mobility that white people have.

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Concluding Thoughts

To characterize this project as an exploration of black people's struggle to move across space freely and easily does neither this project nor black people justice. This project has become my attempt to redefine mobility using black people's experiences. Because black people exist in a nation that has never honestly parsed the nuance of what mobility is or can be, I believe now, as I did at this project's beginning, that mobility should entail more than just people or objects moving through physical space.

I began this project suspicious that the OED's definition of mobility was deceptively simplistic. To interrogate this definition, I have critically studied three African American novels and a travel guide that were published over the span of almost 100 years just to learn what nearly every African American Studies scholar knows: that black people in the US are susceptible to racism no matter what they do. They have had to live with two conflicting perspectives of who they are, to try to live a better life without succumbing to societal pressure to abandon their blackness, to try, at least, to travel to and from their destinations safely, and to try to create a home that is more than just a physical house. What my analysis of these factors in my dissertation showcases is that black people have been deprived of many rights – but chief among them is the right to have a capacity they can tap into to move around their world and change how they are perceived and interacted with by others *despite what those other people think or believe*. This capacity, which I define as mobility in this project, best encapsulates why black people's struggle to be mobile is perhaps the most powerful way to inspect the national (mis)conceptualization of this word. Mobility was never just about movement through space. At several historic moments, physically moving through space has allowed (some) people to transcend physical and social

boundaries meant to keep them *where and how* they are. This, in any event, is the way white immigrants have traditionally conceived of voyaging to a so-called new, liberating world. But for many migrants, immigrants, and refugees of color, movement through space has often meant either a death sentence or has come with several caveats. Certainly for black people, this experience colors (and also colours) their lives because mobility can be and often is withheld via a politics (and economics and ideology) of placement that underlies the racism black people witness daily.

Placelessness, though, offers black people a path toward mobility that is fulfilling and worthwhile. But why is my (admittedly prescriptive) idea of placelessness a prerequisite to being mobile? In a racist hierarchy, the consequences of not being placeless could be soul-crushing. For example, Frederick Douglass will not remain in his place any longer after seeing that sailing ships have more autonomy than he does. He resolves to escape and in doing so, removes the physical and psychological shackles from his feet and hands, making himself (in his moments of resistance, defiance, and escape) unplaceable by white people – i.e., placeless. However, Douglass' resolve to escape placement is not something that all black people are willing to risk. In Chapter One, hardly anyone knows that the ex-coloured narrator in *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man* is (part) black until he says that he is. Until then, people either assume that he is white or try to prove that he is black by finding subtle physical or behavioral clues that are (ostensibly) characteristic of blackness. Whatever their expectations are of the narrator, they let their finite observations and predetermined ideas about him control how they interact with him until they are certain of who (or what) he is. Their placement (or colouring) of him thus oversimplifies the complexity of this black human being. And the narrator, unwilling to choose how he wants to be legible to the world, goes along with their placement of him to not stir trouble. If placeless, on the other hand, he could be as unique and complex as he wants to be. But because he takes the path of

least resistance and validates being white as preferable to being black, he normalizes and validates placement's oversimplification of his own identity – and other black people. The *Autobiography's* narrator might be ex-coloured, but he will never be placeless unless he gives up placement as a valid currency for his or other people's self-worth.

In *Blood on the Forge*, the Moss brothers try to acculturate into the harsh working conditions of the North and its economics of placement. They and their fellow black laborers are still black, though, and thus occupy the bottom of this new social hierarchical order. Upon arriving in the North, the Mosses realize that they have been brought there because they are a cheaper, more readily compliant workforce than the immigrant laborers already there. When the immigrant laborers threaten to strike for better wages and safer working conditions, they clash with black laborers who continue working. In response, the immigrants harbor resentment toward the black laborers and wield their infinitesimal amount of privileged advantage over black workers. Within these conditions, the Moss brothers accept that their labor is inextricable from their legibility and try to improve their lives using their labor as currency to try to move up the social hierarchy – but by accepting their legibility, they accept that the placement they also receive is valid. For conforming to the economics of placement and not being placeless, Chinatown loses his eye, Melody loses his ability and will to play the guitar, and Big Mat is killed trying to dispel strikers whose labor gains he would never see the fruits of.

As insightful and well-received as the *Negro Motorist's Green Book* is and was for its time, the guide falls short of any true radical moves that will poise black people to be mobile as I define it in this project. With the guide in tow, black readers/motorists/travelers enter the open road hoping to have a good time and be safe as they spend their money and time on nice vacations and travel experiences. But the guide is only there for preventative purposes – it will help them reach

their destinations, even provide them with these destinations, but it cannot keep them safe all of the time. As Coalhouse Walker Jr. and the Smith family discover, the guide offers little protection from the hard truth that an ideology of placement organizes their entire world. The black driver moves far and wide around the nation and has enriching experiences just like the *Autobiography's* narrator, but such a driver (because such a driver is black) is still not mobile.

I ended this project with a chapter about Toni Morrison's *Home* because her characters demonstrated an uncanny ability to forego placement's effects more often than any other publication I have studied. She also manages to do this with people who evolve throughout the course of the novel to take their inadequacies as human beings and their legibilities as black people, put them aside, and still become placeless and therefore mobile. Frank makes amends with his tour in the Korean War. Cee gives up trying to please their grandmother, Ms. Lenore. And Lily is determined to buy her house somewhere else regardless of her experience with the real estate agent. No doubt these characters are far other than oblivious to their blackness. They know this well, but they will not let black racial legibility and placement impede their ability to exist in the world they know they create. Rather, an experience of home (as I define this term in Chapter Four) based on supportive interpersonal relationships and the spaces they foster enables these characters to find themselves in (and as) a liberating self-awareness free of racist legibilization, such that they are dynamically open to exploring potentialities within themselves while cultivating solidarity with other black people.

The literature and analysis throughout this dissertation are as prescient as ever, especially considering recent protests in America's ongoing struggle to recognize the large-scale immobilization of black people economically, psychologically, and even physically. Most of this dissertation's critical work was written as these events unfolded in my very neighborhood. As our

country continues to wrestle with its own dark past in depriving black people of the right to be mobile, I look to my own re-definition to unpack the term: in doing so, let me again emphasize that mobility is not a catch-all for moving from one place to another. Nor does it succeed despite adversity. Mobility depends, rather, on a person's self-awareness free of the contamination of being placed and fixed which black people must continue to resist. Mobility of this sort is simultaneously selfless and selfish. People who employ it consider the long-standing effect placement can have on themselves and other black people. And lastly, fighting for mobility to be seen as a right is not just the responsibility of immobile black people in the US. They should not have to prove their worthiness to move freely and easily, nor change the perceptions of people who perceive them to be inadequate. Placeless black people should feel free to hold white people accountable for their actions without taking on the extra burden themselves or having to prove their worth to whites. Placelessness lets black people be black, unapologetically.