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United States
Revisiting Hotels and Other Lodgings: American Tourist Spaces through the Lens of Black Pleasure-Travelers, 1880–1950

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Technology and social history converged in the late nineteenth century when the introduction of the handheld camera and the emergence of a black tourist class in the United States coincided. But these two developments shared more than a moment in history. The camera could be used to provide visual confirmation of prescribed social relations and ideals. Black tourists at mainstream vacation spots implicitly defied prevailing expectations for tourist spaces during an era of officially sanctioned racial segregation. Black bodies recorded unwittingly on film enjoying popular tourist destinations inherently reflected the black belief that African Americans, as consumers, were entitled to occupy such places despite white hostility. Moreover, the small black middle and upper classes that could claim leisure time and leisure spaces also enlisted photography and other print media in deliberate fashion. By documenting their own tourist experiences and holiday venues into the early twentieth-century era of continuing racial separation, African Americans created visual texts that asserted their respectability and rightful place within the ranks of “good” society.

Losing Ground in Mainstream Venues
The pleasure-traveling public of black Americans in the late nineteenth century, like its white counterpart, consisted of the most economically privileged segment of the African American population. This elite group amounted to roughly 10 percent of the black population and included professionals—doctors, lawyers, professors, writers, publishers, clergymen, politicians, judges, political office holders—as well as successful independent entrepreneurs. These “aristocrats of color” were linked nationally through a network of black fraternities, sororities, fraternal lodges, and social clubs. This group expanded to some extent in the early twentieth century as the

Waiters at the United States Hotel dining room (detail), Saratoga Springs, New York, c. 1890s (see fig. 2).
popularity of the automobile made less-expensive short, day, or weekend excursions accessible to a middle stratum of blacks—civil service workers, porters, social workers, and the like.

After the Civil War, blacks who could afford to patronize resort hotels and other new vacation spots joined a new class of wealthy Americans created by nineteenth-century industrialization. Thus, many upper-class African Americans enjoyed the celebrated playgrounds of the nation’s monied whites. A set of black vacationers from all points in the country summered in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century northeastern resorts like Newport in Rhode Island, Saratoga Springs in New York, Atlantic City, Cape May, and Sea Isle on the Jersey shore, and Sag Harbor on Long Island. Further south, Silcott Springs in Virginia and Harpers Ferry in West Virginia attracted others. In the Midwest, African Americans vacationed at Bois Blanc Island, a northern Michigan retreat near Mackinaw Island.²

An early twentieth-century photograph of Broadway, the major thoroughfare of Saratoga Springs, includes two well-dressed black gentlemen promenading along with white visitors, confirming the presence of African Americans at this spa (fig. 1). Yet the placement of the figures in the picture attests to the mounting tide of white opposition to black commingling with whites that typified the infamous segregationist era of race relations following Reconstruction. By emphasizing the vanishing point from several different lines, the photographer underscores the expansive, boulevard-like quality of the street rather than the two black figures, just right
of center in the foreground. The image was taken roughly a decade after the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* Supreme Court decision legally authorizing racial segregation as national practice. Racial proscriptions against blacks were already spiraling after the Supreme Court’s declaration in 1883 of the unconstitutionality of the Civil Rights Act of 1875, which had sought to make hotels and other such facilities accessible to African Americans. After *Plessy*, these proscriptions proliferated by law and custom all over the country. Black vacationers, regardless of status, increasingly found accommodations at mainstream travel destinations closed to them entirely, separated from those offered to whites by time (blacks were served on different days or at different hours) or offered to them in distinct locations. So, for example, it was not unusual that from the 1880s until it was destroyed in 1926, blacks could use the round yellow wood pavilion on Pablo Beach, Coney Island, Florida, on Mondays only. Similarly, in 1882, Detroit’s Kirkwood Hotel denied rooms to the Fisk Jubilee Singers as a matter of policy. The manager told a local newspaper that African American guests were harmful to his business.⁴

By the early twentieth century the so-called Jim Crow system of segregation was firmly established and affected both public and private vacation facilities. In 1916, for example, the commissioners of the State Reservation at Saratoga Springs announced their decision to install separate black and white bathhouses in the park and to limit the former “as the number of colored people applying for treatment is not over one per cent of the aggregate number of both races at present.”⁵ The commissioners capitulated to the discomfort and vigorous opposition expressed among the white public regarding any existing practice of blacks occupying the same pleasure spaces as whites. The very next year, W. E. B. Du Bois (1868–1963) observed that the issue of “ever-recurring race discrimination” generally made it “a puzzling query as to what to do with vacations,” whether traveling to national or regional popular resorts, major cities, or remote getaways.⁶ Even Booker T. Washington (1856–1915), the Great Accommodationist who urged blacks to accept segregation patiently while he personally enjoyed the facilities at “a first-class, midtown hotel” whenever he visited New York City, experienced in the last four years of his life the bite of Jim Crow while traveling there. He became embroiled in a strange scandal in 1911 when a white carpenter and his “wife” accused him of trying to break into their house in the Tenderloin District and of accosting the woman verbally in a sexually suggestive manner. After that incident, Washington found his access to the stylish Hotel Manhattan suddenly withdrawn. His appeal to the hotel owner fell on deaf ears, and he never again enjoyed comparable facilities in that city. One year before he died, Washington was reduced to sending the maitre d’ of the McAlpin Hotel in New York a copy of his latest book and promising to eat his meals in his room, not the hotel dining room, if permitted to stay there. He received
no reply to this request. Apparently, one alleged misstep by this prominent, “exceptional” Race Man was sufficient to cast him into the same heap as other African Americans regarding certain travel amenities.

This pattern of discrimination continued after the First World War into the Depression and the Second World War era. Indeed, flouting the rules of segregation in recreation and leisure, however innocently, could be dangerous for African Americans and lead to physical reprisals from angry whites. Wendell Dabney, an African American newspaper editor, explained the situation that black visitors to Cincinnati faced in the 1920s:

Hotels, restaurants, eating and drinking places, almost universally are closed to all people in whom the least tincture of colored blood can be detected. The Bartenders’ Union has passed a resolution forbidding its members to wait on a colored person, and they live up to it. At the Stinton Hotel, the colored man is not welcome even to standing room in the lobby. No matter how prominent he is, if he desires to see a white man on one of the upper floors he must take the freight elevator, or the lower compartment of the elevator, the “Jim Crow” compartment, we may call it.

Similarly, in the 1930s, black vacationers in Ocean City, New Jersey, faced bathing restrictions, according to one contemporary sociological study. Ironically, even within African American ghettos of major northern cities, blacks were not permitted in certain hotels: the Jim Crow system kept the famed Hotel Theresa, a Harlem landmark, a segregated establishment closed to African Americans until 1940. Not until after then did it become celebrated for its clientele of popular black entertainers like Lena Horne and Duke Ellington. As late as 1943, after conducting an informal survey of 105 northeastern travel establishments, black journalist George S. Schuyler complained, “Many colored families have motored all across the United States without being able to secure overnight accommodations at a single tourist camp or hotel.” He concluded from his investigation that blacks would have an easier time traveling abroad than in the United States.

As the momentum toward Jim Crow hardened into a racialized caste system during the late nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century, it was mainly left to African American propietors to provide hotels and boardinghouses for black tourists and travelers. For instance, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the Banneker Hotel in Cape May, New Jersey, catered to an all-black traveling clientele. Cincinnati’s Dumas House hosted black guests at least through 1894. For several decades after 1910, Ella Holmes operated her Holmes Cottage for summering blacks on Walworth Street in Saratoga Springs. Reporting on a trip to Chicago in 1921, Du Bois wrote favorably of the Vincennes Hotel: “I stayed at the Vincennes. Around me were ghosts of white folks
who used to live at this beautiful, quiet, and exclusive hotel. Now Negroes own it and it is still beautiful and quiet but, thank heaven, neither exclusive nor dear. Every Negro in the United States ought to take a trip to Chicago, just to stop at the Vincennes with his family.”

An equally acceptable alternative to black-owned operations in mainstream resorts and pleasure capitals were white-owned establishments in major cities catering to an exclusively black clientele. In the early twentieth century, Cincinnati’s Old St. Clair Hotel, patronized by wealthy whites, was converted by its white owner into a first-class hotel for blacks and renamed the Hotel Sterling. Only places like the Sterling and the Gordon hotels in Cincinnati hosted leading members of the national black community, Du Bois and Marcus Garvey (1887–1940) among them. Despite their prominence, these luminaries could not find accommodations in hotels with white customers. White business adventurers apparently capitalized on this situation, as did their black counterparts, and exploited profitably the special need among blacks for travel amenities produced by the Jim Crow system. Whether black or white owned, places like the Sterling, Gordon, Banneker, Holmes Cottage, and the Vincennes functioned as insular leisure residences within hostile vacation environments.

As Jim Crow solidified, black tourists were rendered invisible in white representations of mainstream resorts. Instead, the visual record shows blacks mainly as servants and helpers for whites. Thus, images of black waiters standing attentively at their posts in the dining room of Saratoga’s United States Hotel (fig. 2) and a black nursemaid watching the children...
under her care in that spa’s Congress Park (fig. 3) confirmed the preferred racial order. They replaced the peripheral notice of black vacationers at popular white tourist venues, shown in the photo of two black men strolling on Broadway opposite the hotel (see fig. 1). These images raise questions about whether the dignified carriage and presentation of African Americans within resort settings inhered in them as independent users of such spaces, as it does for the two black men promenading on Broadway, who appear to be taking in the sights for their own enjoyment. Instead, the meticulous dress and bearing of the waiters, seen against the backdrop of the impressive dining room interior, ironically underscore the privilege of the invisible white hotel patrons. The neatness of the maid’s attire similarly reflects the propriety of her white employer and her employer’s children. Even assuming that the waiters and maid in the photographs chose to project a public image of self-respect in these poses, the point is that the camera permitted such an impression within the context of servanthood, but not consumption.
Framing Respectability in All-Black Venues

Besides seizing the initiative to develop black-serving leisure spaces in established resorts and metropolitan centers, African Americans developed their own all-black tourist venues. Through their photographic inventory of these places, they revealed a self-assessment that countered prevailing notions of them as “a race” and as individuals. Major examples of venues for the black elite include Oak Bluffs on Martha’s Vineyard, Massachusetts, Highland Beach in Anne Arundel County, Maryland, and Idlewild in northern Michigan. But there were certainly smaller, more localized versions of the more celebrated spots—American Beach in Florida, for instance.14

Technically, Oak Bluffs was never frequented exclusively by African Americans. Rather, at a time when mainstream vacation havens strictly observed an exclusionary policy toward blacks, Oak Bluffs evolved as the sole town on Martha’s Vineyard that tolerated a noticeable black community of both permanent residents and summer visitors. The town initially developed as a Methodist summer camp meeting and revival center in the antebellum period of the nineteenth century. Eventually, the religious atmosphere faded and made way for more varied secular pursuits, and blacks came to the town as both year-round small business operators and service workers profiting from the burgeoning leisure industry. Around the turn of the twentieth century, Charles Shearer (1854–1934), who had first arrived with his family to start his own laundry operation for white summer residents, transformed his facility into a guesthouse, including tennis courts, catering to African Americans. One of the daughters of this former Boston hotel maître d’ had recognized the need for suitable accommodations for black visitors there. Mrs. Anthony Smith operated another “deluxe” black-run Oak Bluffs inn for African Americans in the first part of the twentieth century. After Reverend Oscar Dennison established a black church mission in Oak Bluffs, his presence and congregation helped solidify and anchor the year-round African American population. This church, another indication of the town’s relative openness toward blacks in an unfriendly age, spurred an increase in black summer tourists from nearby cities. In time, certain streets and neighborhoods in Oak Bluffs were firmly established as black summer enclaves. By the end of the Second World War, the resort was firmly established among blacks as a beachfront haven and as a special spot where one could rub shoulders with “certain prominent personalities” from around the nation.15

Black visitors to Oak Bluffs documented their experiences visually through photography as a record of their travel and status among that class of Americans who could participate in leisure activities. Take, for example, the well-dressed group of black tourists shown formally posing some time at the turn of the last century outside of Thayer Cottage, an Oak Bluffs rooming house on the religious campground there, despite the fact that
the campground did not generally welcome African Americans during this era (fig. 4). Although we no longer know the identity of the tourists, the photograph itself is a document of many things: not only their presence at the vacation site, but also, as the quality of their stylish yet modest clothing suggests, their ability to afford such a vacation and their embrace of contemporary standards of middle-class self-restraint. The photograph captures the sitters as a group participating in one of the rituals of tourism as discussed by photo historian Michel Frizot: the “official” pose beside a landmark whereby the subjects stake their claim upon or association with that site. Furthermore, the cottage in the photograph displays a bourgeois mix of historicist elements typical of the period. These African American tourists, in other words, decidedly linked themselves, in dress and location, to mainstream tastes.

Around the same time that Oak Bluffs was establishing itself as a summer retreat for African Americans, a similar resort was developing further south in the Chesapeake Bay region. Denied access to a Maryland vacation stop, Frederick Douglass’s son, Charles (1844–1920), bought a nearby beachfront parcel of land, which he and his wife established after 1893 as a seaside haven for family and friends who also purchased land in the area. At first called Arundel-on-the-Bay, the place was later renamed Highland Beach. This leisure set was limited to a tight circle of Washington, D.C.–based, high-ranking black elites. In 1922 it was incorporated as the first black town in Maryland.

Highland Beach vacationers claimed mainstream middle-class values (figs. 5–7). In these images the subjects are distributed evenly within the frame to convey a sense of balance and order in their lives, even as they “relax.” The photo encases them in activities—croquet, possibly picnicking, bathing—that all fell neatly within the list of acceptable and/or fashionable pastimes at the turn of the twentieth century. Croquet, in particular, reached a peak of popularity in the United States in the late nineteenth century as a French import via England, and the American middle and upper classes associated it with the leisure life of the wealthy in Britain. As a sport practiced by mixed sexes, croquet was rather unique for the time, so the presence of men and women together at play did not challenge social convention (fig. 5). Croquet and picnics are manifestations of human activity on lawns or in backyards, both of which were pacifications of the wilderness. The vegetation and trees are dwarfed by the human imprint on both scenes and therefore associate black vacationers with the cultivation of the wild or with domesticity—a core value of the age. Thus, the
potentially overwhelming tree seen towering over the picnicking group is
harnessed by the swing and the bench beneath it and by the placement of
women on both (fig. 6). As the swing was a favorite prop in mainstream
photographic poses of women during this period, the young black woman
sitting on the tree swing visually anchors the shot and embodies its intent.
The parasols and swimwear donned by the female bathers define them as
respectable bathers of the late Victorian period (fig. 7). The men in both
images announce their vigilance and honor, almost as sentries among the
women, by the rigidity of their stances. One holds a lady’s handbag and
parasol (see fig. 6), putting aside any apprehensions for more gentlemanly
concerns, and the other has gracefully lowered himself behind the woman
seated on the swing, holding on to one of the ropes. A single male among
the women, seen at the left near the shoreline (see fig. 7), stands at attention
like some sort of watchman, clutching a thick, clublike stick. Thus, the men
in both images advertise their readiness to guard and protect womankind.
As a trio, these Highland Beach photographs scream African American
conformity to prevailing social and cultural norms.18

In the Midwest, Idlewild emerged in the early twentieth century as the
foremost black summer spot—a place like Highland Beach where African
American vacationers evinced bourgeois values. Founded in 1912 on
2,700 acres of overcut timberland in Lake County, Michigan, the resort
drew patrons like Dr. Daniel Hale Williams (1858–1931), a heart surgeon,
founder of Chicago’s Provident Hospital, and an influential man in
contemporary medicine, who was also one of the largest property owners
at Idlewild. Williams built Oakmere, a summer cottage, and created a
park of the same name across the street. Eventually, the Oakmere Hotel
was established near the park. The exterior architecture of the Oakmere
displayed the simplicity and rusticity increasingly prized among rural
vacationers in the 1910s and 1920s as a reflection of the burgeoning
camping movement (fig. 8). His modest but “modern” bungalow is
“made luxurious with electricity and Oriental rugs” (fig. 9).19 The limited
furnishings—a stark departure from the overstuffed homes of the late
Victorian period—may reflect the extent to which “bareness and restraint

fig. 5
(above, left)
Patrons at croquet,
Highland Beach,
Maryland, c. 1898.
Gregoria Fraser Goins
Papers, Moorland-
Spingarn Research Center,
Howard University.

fig. 6
(above, center)
Picnickers under a
swing, Highland Beach,
Maryland, 1899.
Gregoria Fraser Goins
Papers, Moorland-
Spingarn Research Center,
Howard University.

fig. 7
(above, right)
Swimmers, Highland
Beach, Maryland.
Gregoria Fraser Goins
Papers, Moorland-
Spingarn Research Center,
Howard University.

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[were] slowly being accepted by the middle class” in the years after 1900. Williams, at the picture’s center, is defined as an educated man by the instructional materials that surround him—books, papers, and even a human skull. By his neat attire, his unsmiling face, his preoccupation with reading, and his unpretentious house furnishings, Williams projects sobriety and seriousness even as he relaxes in his retreat. Through the camera, Williams conveys the message that although vacationing, he remains a staid and thoughtful individual, unwilling to sacrifice a commitment to work—a perennial virtue among Americans of his class—for play. Williams also sold land to his wealthy friends, thereby virtually creating an enclave of like minds and tastes. That taste is evident in the interior of an Idlewild hotel dining room, where order and modesty are projected through the camera lens (fig. 10).
Claiming the Landscape

As real estate speculators, Idlewild’s founders understood well that middle-class blacks hungered for land, places where they would be assured a welcome, and spaces they could claim. These speculators divided the terrain into plots and sold them to African Americans as summer vacation retreats from the sweltering cities of Chicago, Detroit, Indianapolis, and Cleveland. Eventually, scenic views at the resort were named after prominent black landowners. Gass Point, for example, was named for Charlie Gass, who sold plots at Idlewild while employed as a shoeshine man at the Pantlind Hotel in downtown Grand Rapids, Michigan (fig. 11). Similarly, in the 1920s, Dr. Williams purchased a large plot and named it the Daniel Hale Williams Subdivision.22

The importance of such gestures cannot be overstated. The practice of naming views and sites has a long history in the commodification of the landscape. As historian Dona Brown has shown, “The naming of unnamed places and things was crucial to making the region scenic: The more named things, the more places for tourists to visit, and the more orderly and differentiated the landscape became.”23 Equally as significant was the fact that the landscape had been named for a black man. Historically and ideologically dispossessed men like Gass could claim a bit of the American landscape for themselves. Understood this way, the sweeping view of Gass Point pictorially proclaims that everything in the horizontal and vertical range of vision belongs to African Americans.

Embracing the Pastoral

From the visual record, it is evident that black Americans shared the same passion for the pastoral that typified mainstream domestic travelers in the period studied here. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Americans sought rustic retreats and encounters with nature as antidotes to what were perceived as the unhealthful, stultifying, and corrupting aspects of modernization—congested residential arrangements, aesthetically and intellectually uninspiring vistas, and the escalating pace of work. As part of this national drift, African Americans with the means,
time, and inclination opted to remove themselves from cities to beaches, country getaways, and wild spaces to enjoy the restorative qualities associated with these settings.

In their vacation selections and photographic record of them, African Americans participated in a national critique of industrial life and urbanization. One black school principal, who decided in 1917 “to leave the city for absolute rest” by vacationing on the homestead of another African American family in rural Georgia, reported: “Every day was
back to nature,... a long ways from the railroad.” Du Bois’s rapturous description of Idlewild in 1921, bordering on poetry, must be appreciated in this same sense. He wrote, “For sheer physical beauty—for sheen of water and golden air, for nobleness of tree and flower of shrub, for shining river and song of bird and the low, moving whisper of sun, moon and star; it is the beautifullest stretch I have seen for twenty years.”

At Idlewild, the absence, or near absence, of any humans in these photographs celebrates the virtues of nature. A serene Lake Idlewild balances the expanse of the sky, offset only by a few tall trees (fig. 12). And in the photo of the approach to Idlewild, the lake dominates the foreground, but this time a lone individual runs toward the island across a quaint wooden bridge, away from the viewer, in a hurried escape from the mainland and all the complications it implies (fig. 13).

Photographs also celebrated country life at Highland Beach. A group of three women, including one who appears to be elderly, have been captured by the camera taking a moment to admire the water and the pristine, bucolic shore in the distance (fig. 14). A country porch, filled with empty rattan furniture, beckons any who may approach to slow down and quite literally sit a spell (fig. 15). The low camera angle sweeps the viewer fully across the porch toward the vanishing point, in the center of the shot, an open door revealing yet another unfilled seat awaiting a weary occupant. Household wicker furnishings connoted for late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Americans the more leisurely pace of undeveloped, preindustrial societies, perhaps because of their Asian origin. Significantly, in order to preserve its rustic character, Highland Beach did not permit commercial development, and this continues to be true today; the retreat now claims about sixty homes.

De-Racializing Space

The security offered by black-owned resorts, especially those in rural areas, joined with a general belief in nature’s benefits in the minds of blacks to invest these particular spaces with special health-inducing powers during the Jim Crow era. In black-owned rustic spaces, there was the tranquility that came from having escaped the rhythms of a work routine. But there was also the serenity that came from having escaped the protocols of...
systematic and systemic racial discrimination. Du Bois expressed this sentiment by contrasting mainstream resorts or tourist centers at which blacks were permitted with certain limitations—places like Atlantic City, New York City, and even Oak Bluffs—with Idlewild, a resort created specifically for African Americans: “Not for one moment in fine joy of life, absolute freedom from the desperate cruelty of the color line and for the wooing of the great silence which is Peace and deep Contentment—not for one little minute can they rival or catch the bounding pulse of Idlewild.”

For African American tourists, then, black-owned resorts represented a return to a primeval nature, but a completely de-racialized nature that therefore exuded healing, humanizing qualities in a singular and utopian way. So when African Americans viewed photographs of black-owned country resorts, they could infuse these places with a curative power bearing a distinctly “race”-free character. In the country, blacks would not only be healed of the detrimental effects of city life, they would also experience a soothing balm for the wounds of life under segregation. Highland Beach’s decision to ban commercial development should be understood in this light as well.

**Affirming Citizenship**

African American tourists believed in the ideology of the American landscape and its nationalistic association with the frontier where the “American Character”—vigorous, youthful, pure—is formed and regenerated. Black-owned tourist venues granted African Americans the rights of land ownership that historically were tied to conceptions of American citizenship and the right to vote. Historian Marguerite S. Shaffer has described how in the early twentieth century “tourism solidified into a popular leisure activity” that helped shape a national identity for all Americans. As early as the 1830s the act of surveying the American landscape developed, both
in prescriptive guidebooks and in touring practices, into a patriotic exercise. Traversing representative locations across state and regional topographies, the American tourist encountered and reconstructed a narrative history that included Native American villages, colonial settlements, Revolutionary battlefields, and sites of agricultural innovation and industrial development.27 As travelers, African Americans participated in the celebration of the nation with which they identified. In an especially telling photograph, summer visitors to Idlewild in the 1920s pose in front of the clubhouse next to an American flag (fig. 16). Quietly, unselfconsciously, and yet defiantly, the shot proclaims the full citizenship of African Americans at a time of severe compromise of their civil rights.

Marketing Black Tourist Spaces
As the advertising industry exploded in the first three decades of the twentieth century, African Americans exploited formal ways of publicizing safe travel options among themselves. Black resorts like Idlewild and American Beach in Florida were marketed through real estate corporations and publicity media of all sorts—photographs, brochures, guidebooks, and newspapers, to name a few. The printing and circulation of maps, for example, helped to sell Idlewild land merely by giving tangible, physical substance to African American dreams (fig. 17). Taking advantage of new marketing technology, Idlewild boosters even provided a twenty-three-minute silent promotional film to advertise the developing resort’s amenities.28 In the mid-1920s, Frank B. Butler (1885–1973), a real estate broker, grocer, and civic leader, formed a corporation to develop the seaside resort that would bear his name. The founder of Butler Beach in St. Augustine, Florida, presents a thoroughly professional image of himself and his real estate company, which specialized in vacation properties, in a photograph from about 1925 (fig. 18).29
fig. 18
(right)
Frank Butler at the front counter of Butler Realty offering African Americans beachfront property in St. Augustine, Florida, c. 1925. Courtesy of Florida State Archives.

fig. 19
(below, right)
Mack Wilson's pavilion, c. 1927. From the Eartha M. M. White Collection, Carpenter Library, University of North Florida, Jacksonville, Florida. This facility was the first recreational spot on Manhattan Beach in northeastern Florida operating twenty-four hours a day to offer lodging, food, and entertainment to an all-black clientele.

in the back of the frame amid an orderly layout that exudes efficiency, a picture of the consummate businessman ready to serve. In this image, which probably accompanied advertising text in black newspapers and magazines, the modest office is furnished with wicker seating and table, suggesting the unhurried, charming idylls in store for the happy purchasers of the lots featured in what appears to be a large map on the left wall.

Mack Wilson, who ran a sort of one-stop operation “providing entertainment, dining, lodging, and bathing facilities” for African American seaside vacationers on Florida’s Manhattan Beach, was hardly shy about announcing his services (fig. 19). A c. 1927 photograph of his establishment illustrates
how he used the exterior walls as a billboard, proclaiming messages to
ocean bathers and beach denizens in apparently hand-painted block
letters to say “Mack Wilson Café Open Night and Day.” The garishness
and abundance of his signage was in keeping with the spirit of the Roaring
Twenties, a decade of heightened mass marketing. Notably, there is one
professionally printed poster—for Orange Crush soda. The market for
this carbonated drink, invented in 1916, had expanded greatly, most
likely because of aggressive advertising.

Postcards provided another advertising medium for all-black resorts.
The publication of postal cards by private outfits was not permitted in
the United States until 1898. Then it was not until the First World War
that American postcard printing technology caught up with German
competitors—at the time barred from the U.S. market because of the war.
Rushing into the vacuum, American postcard manufacturers experienced
a boom in the decade following the Great War, when the view card, as
opposed to the greeting postcard and the historic-site postcard, enjoyed
great popularity. A view card for Highland Beach advertises examples of
the simple, rustic structures and waterside plots (upper right quadrant)
available to black patrons of this retreat (fig. 20). The blank edging
forming a perimeter for the four photos marks the card as a “white-border”
postcard of the type produced between 1916 and 1930; the handwritten
script on the lower right-hand corner of this particular view card
supplies a date—1930.
Historian Lizabeth Cohen’s work on American consumption offers compelling insights that may be applied to the marketing of black tourist spaces during the 1930s and into the postwar era. Probably the most consulted source of information for black travelers, the Negro Motorist Green-Book (later known as the Negro Traveler’s Green-Book), did not appear until 1936, but continued publication through 1967, when the achievements of the civil rights movement and desegregation rendered its information less compelling. Victor H. Green, the guide’s editor, explained the need for his publication: “The idea of ‘The Green Book’ is to compile facts and information connected with motoring, which the Negro Motorist can use and depend upon.” Green was savvy about the growing use of the automobile by vacationing Americans. He enlisted the help of readers and black businesses in his effort to produce a state-by-state national roster of “hotels, road houses, taverns, night clubs, tourist homes, trailer parks and camps, restaurants, garages, service stations, summer resorts, barber shops, beauty parlors, dance halls, [and] theatres” that were open and hospitable to black travelers (figs. 21, 22). By 1940 the Green-Book included listings for forty-three states (excluding the South) and Washington, D.C., entries for New York City apart from New York State, and a section labeled “Southward,” consisting of accommodations below the Mason-Dixon line.

The comprehensiveness of the volumes and the diligence with which Green pursued this goal suggests that he, along with his advertisers and subscribers, approached the issue of black travel consumption as a nationalistic enterprise. To Cohen, American-made consumer items were symbols of the nation, so that acquiring them was a way of fulfilling citizenship. When vacation trips across the American countryside are similarly seen as politicized consumer items, African Americans who “purchased” cross-country...
holidays enhanced their status as Americans. This view was especially prevalent during the 1930s and 1940s, when the Depression and Second World War turned consumption into a patriotic act. This attitude would explain Green’s solicitations for additional, geographically diverse listings from his readers—not that this request was unrelated to his concern for the publication’s sales, but by building a list of vacation outlets he facilitated African American citizenship in a political and social sense. Blacks could belong more fully to their country by participating in the growing national preoccupation with motoring for pleasure.\textsuperscript{33}

Augmenting the utility of Cohen’s argument, the federal Works Progress Administration turned its attention in 1935 toward the production of national travel guides, the American Guide series. The Roosevelt administration showed an unprecedented sensitivity to the needs of African Americans, publishing its own \textit{Directory of Negro Hotels and Guest Houses in the United States} through the National Park Service in 1939.\textsuperscript{34}

Trade associations of black entrepreneurs in resort centers also promoted their facilities in patriotic terms during this period. In the summer of 1945, for example, an all-black business organization called the Atlantic City Board of Trade produced a substantial illustrated brochure advertising an assortment of black-owned amenities at the famous beach resort. The brochure text reveals the extent to which both the convention committee and its black consumer base were invested in projecting an optimistic Americanism. Aware of the stakes of a hard-fought war in which intolerance toward another group (Jews) was a major component, the board anticipated American victory and its aftermath, a future in which all people, including African Americans, might “live in freedom.” Identifying themselves as full-fledged American “citizens,” the board members offered to assist other “citizens” at a time of national crisis: “Atlantic City is today serving thousands of returning veterans … [and] many tired and war torn workers…. Our citizens are happy to add this very vital contribution [leisure] to these deserving folk and to offer its good health-giving and recreational facilities toward a bigger and better post-war period.”\textsuperscript{35} It is notable that the text never explicitly mentions African Americans; it does not contain a single use of the word “Negro” or “colored people”—the polite reference to blacks at the time. Rather, the authors prefer the more oblique allusion to “our people”—the referent for which is supplied by portraits of apparently African American board members displaying an appropriate combination of seriousness, rectitude, and friendliness in their expressions (fig. 23). Atlantic City black business people preferred to look beyond the history of discrimination in the travel industry (from which they benefited as sellers in a sheltered market) and promote their activity to all Americans as a patriotic service to veterans, their families, and exhausted war-industry laborers. Thus, to invest in an Atlantic City holiday was to contribute to the welfare of the national public.
There was more at work in the catchy cover of the same brochure (fig. 24). Three fetching young women appear in bathing suits to welcome readers to their city. Here, the Board of Trade reflected its appreciation for the power of sex to sell anything to anybody. Moreover, the board may have taken a lesson from Hollywood, which in the 1940s invested heavily in movie posters and pin-up ads featuring leggy, beautiful women to advertise movies. Like the film studios, the Board of Trade hoped to sell entertainment. And just as the studios used “fair-skinned and smiling” white girls for their promotions, these black businessmen were selective in employing only light-complexioned African American women with amiable expressions for their ad.36

Cohen argues that American consumption after the Second World War became politicized, as the purchase of goods to meet individual goals came to be associated with national prosperity through the support of free enterprise during the cold war. This type of thinking permeated American society and is key to understanding the message conveyed by a brochure advertising Idlewild, the Michigan summer retreat (fig. 25). Appearing
around 1950, the pamphlet was published by the Idlewild Chamber of Commerce. The left panel promotes a major Idlewild operation, Phil Giles Enterprises. The activities symbolically surrounding the happy couple at the heart of the right panel fall well within the range of “wholesome,” “traditional,” and “family”-based pursuits so prized during the 1950s. The hiking circle on the lower left corner of this right panel underscores the point by depicting the ideal family of four—mother, father, son, and daughter. The use of the circle motif itself in fact connotes perfection and completion. Implicit in this pictorial communication, then, is first the idea that an Idlewild experience allowed a vacationer to support an American business. Moreover, the text of the brochure, which includes the phrase “all around you ... it’s yours to enjoy,” gives African Americans a sense of ownership and pride in the leisure spaces that they had carved out for themselves.37

Conclusion
Like Edward Mitchell Bannister (1828–1901), the painter photographed at the Newport, Rhode Island, harbor (fig. 26), privileged African American tourists between 1880 and 1950 achieved a communion with the national landscape unheralded in the history of black people in the United States. The significance of this image of a black artist taking a prospect—that is, creating a landscape—cannot be overemphasized. Barred from mainstream hotels, African Americans constructed alternatives—their own hotels, country cottages, and beachside resorts—or supported white-owned hospitality establishments that welcomed them. There, they maintained
contemporary standards of decorum in their bearing and accoutrements. There, they purchased land, and named it in honor of themselves. There, they traversed the terrain with intent—finding respite in the face of modernity and emotional, spiritual, and intellectual restoration as human beings in the face of Jim Crow. There, they affirmed themselves as members of the American body politic. Through the necessity of all-black resorts, black tourists reconfigured domestic vacation travel such that they, too, became part of the history, literature, and art associated with the commercialization of the American landscape.

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Notes
8. Wendell P. Dabney, Cincinnati’s Colored Citizens: Historical, Sociological and Biographical (Cincinnati: Dabney, 1926), 75.


26. Ibid., 160.


32. The Negro Motorist Green-Book (New York: Green, 1940), passim.


35. Atlantic City Board of Trade Brochure, 1945, Moorland-Spingarn.
