

ONE

Introduction

SWAG DIPLOMACY

(Literary Mentoring for Self-Empowerment)

There are three things you need to be successful in life:
a backbone, a wishbone, and a jawbone.
Use your backbone for perseverance, your wishbone for goal setting,
and your jawbone for speaking out.

—Paraphrased advice from Ohio State senator
Nina Turner’s grandmother, Inez Emerson¹

From Linda Brent and Henry “Box” Brown in the mid-1800s to Maya Angelou and Malcolm X in the mid-1900s, African American autobiographers have offered relevant, interesting, and useful guides to personal and professional development for youth and young adults. This collection constructs a road map, beyond a “survival” or “how-to” guide; these narratives often are a guide of what *not* to do and how to learn from mistakes, grow a strong backbone, wishbone, and jawbone, and how to gain the courage to tell one’s own life story.

By way of organizing an expansive bibliography, this book weaves a textured patchwork of Black lives. Each chapter is organized into three sub-themes: *Message* (foundational scholarship and take away “main point” for the chapter), *Memoirs* (overview of relevant travel narratives and tribute to two authors), *Model* (example of program, resources, or ways message can be

applied). This outline reflects the “What?,” “So What?,” “Now What?” model of applied learning that is often used in experiential education.²

MESSAGE: START WITH A GUIDE

This manuscript marks a decade of community service-learning classes and precollege youth summits, workshops, and lectures I have held at University of Massachusetts–Amherst, Brown University, University of Florida, Clark Atlanta University, and several high schools starting in 2001. Community partnerships were essential to the development of this curriculum for empowerment education as they are at the forefront of mentoring praxis. Much of the curriculum is based on those partnerships.

Manufacturing Empowerment and Black Diplomacy:
Self, Communication, Tasks, and Innovation

Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) is widely regarded as the premiere mentoring program in the nation. In “A Little Guidance,” a promotional statement outlining their program’s effectiveness, it claims, “83% of former Littles surveyed agreed that their Big instilled values and principles that have guided them through life.”³ As acknowledged by BBBS, in order to ensure cultural efficacy in these national programs in which African American youth are heavily enrolled, it is imperative that mentors rely on research in Black adolescent studies. These texts must include groundbreaking work such as Joyce Ladner *Tomorrow’s Tomorrow: The Black Woman*, and Thomas Dortch (former president of the 100 Black Men organization), *The Miracles of Mentoring: The Joy of Investing in Our Future*. It is also crucial to employ survey research that privileges Black youth voices, places youth’s self-analysis and worldview as the point of departure, and incorporates African diasporic youth perspectives as means of analysis for how to mentor Black youth regardless of location.

Charles Green’s sociological research underscores connection of the term “mentoring” with the term “guidance” and shows that link exists regardless of national context. In *Manufacturing Powerlessness in the Black Diaspora: Inner-City Youth and the New Global Frontier* (2001), Green surveyed 686 youth ages 14 through 24 from New York, New Jersey, Washington, D.C., Richmond, Los Angeles, Trinidad-Tobago, Dominica, St. Thomas, Kenya, and Tanzania. In Green’s study, U.S. youth identified lack of guidance (22 percent) as their

highest concern. Guidance ranked as more important to address than drugs (19 percent) or lack of education (14 percent). Guidance weighs heavily on adolescents and young adults' abilities to envision a future beyond their present conditions. Green's approach of employing diasporic youth survey research is the only viable model for speaking intelligibly about Black youth in global contexts. In his findings, he argues that while there is an African diaspora in which youth operate, any attempt to alleviate burdens must be local in application because national and regional contexts prevent a "universal" approach to problem solving. Yet, as Africana scholars we must speak of the African diaspora in order to understand the larger context in which race has been formed in international contexts and racism and colonial waste has created recognizable patterns of cultural dismemberment for Black youth. International awareness must be an essential element of proposed solutions.⁴

Green argues that part of this lack of future vision stems from a cultural disconnection from the past: he writes that Blacks in the African diaspora are "without a clear understanding of their rich and diverse cultural history." Youth and "visionless leaders" are "distracted more and more from the important work of critical thinking and consciousness raising." This cultural disconnect can have a negative impact on youth's ability to gain expertise in basic functions needed to advance in the global workplace.

However, Black youth also need a working knowledge of global cultures, as they will be employed in a world of many nations. To that end, non-African-specific models of competence must also be consulted. Researcher Frederick Evers argues that competence in the work world is the ability to control or manage four specific areas: self, communication, tasks, and innovation/change. Evers, a researcher at McGill University in Canada, published *The Bases of Competence: Skills for Lifelong Learning and Employability*, in which he argues that teachers and university professors have a responsibility to more adequately prepare young workers for the dynamic challenges they will face in the "real world" after college life. He defines that preparation through concepts of "competence" and "lifelong learning."⁵

Evers and his research team surveyed three focus groups: graduates of a business school, employers that hired those graduates, and students currently enrolled in college. Results showed eighteen indicators as essential characteristics that students need to master in order to demonstrate "competence." These indicators fell into four categories of mastery that determined the relative success of young people joining the professional workforce: self, communication, tasks, and innovation.

“Self” is the foundation of knowledge skills needed for competence in employment; thus, *Black Passports* is grounded in a cultural necessity of African American youth to know dimensions of their rich history through historic examples of travel and global interaction in order to effectively advance in the twenty-first-century marketplace and fully participate in global democracy. Written and oral communication skills are a requirement for success and as job markets shift the ability to demonstrate flexibility to not only change but initiate and innovate change will determine a candidate’s economic viability.

The legacy of Septima Clark, citizenship education, and the Freedom Schools are critical foundations of educational efficacy that show how empowerment education can change the world through local activism. Green argues that if powerlessness can be manufactured on a global scale, then so too can empowerment, especially through local action. Thus, this international memoir curriculum can assist Black youth in programs and schools both nationwide (locally) and abroad (globally).⁶

In *Black Diplomacy: African Americans and the State Department, 1945–1969*, Michael Krenn investigated the ways in which Black activists linked the civil rights movement to African independence, anti-apartheid, and anti-colonial struggles of the 1950s. However, he argues that, ultimately, the U.S. Department of State and Foreign Service “failed miserably” in efforts to provide necessary international space where Black voices could be heard.⁷ Yet, diplomacy as a formal and informal exercise holds promise for the leadership needed to address many issues facing the world’s Black youth. International outreach, connection, discussion, debate, concession, and—eventually—collaboration mirror the communicative process involved in mentoring work between agencies and individuals.

This curriculum goes beyond building self-esteem. In her self-empowerment theory model (SET), psychologist Carolyn Tucker argues that *self-control* is more important than self-esteem in the lives of Black youth. To this end, dimensions of self-control are explored in chapter 2, the first topical chapter of the book. Modeled after the Evers competencies of life, academics, employment, and growth through cultural exchange are the four core chapters that form the investigation of empowerment.

In my teaching, I have defined empowerment as having “strong bones,” as suggested by Ohio State Senator Nina Turner’s grandmother, Inez Emerson. Emerson identified three characteristics of success: backbone, wishbone, and jawbone, which are specifically explored in study abroad reflections where students recorded their interactions overseas.

In contemporary nomenclature the sense of self-love, strength, or power is often defined as having swagger or, in short, “swag.” Yet, these guides offer ways to move beyond appearance of a cool “pose” to a grounded and real sense of internal peace and well-being despite inevitable social, political, cultural, and environmental hurricanes. In times of tumult, having real swag means using an internal compass and knowing which way to go when storms hit, when charlatans begin pedaling lies as truth, and when deciding what to believe when everyone else is confused. Real swag requires not only confidence, but also informed, historical, and studied conviction. Essentially, at its best, swag is the ability to exercise self-control regardless of environmental challenges.

Sass and Swag: Literacy for Life

In his assessment of Black historiography, Pero Dagbovie argues for a new approach to history that places student experiences and needs at the center of pedagogical approaches. He advocates a movement to “operationalize history.” This builds on Columbia Teachers College Professor Carter V. Good’s work on a “functional history of education.” For those of us working with the millennial generation, this means incorporating the idea of swag in education or, more precisely, getting students to realize that swag is actually an aged and useful concept. For example, David Levering Lewis pointed out that people like W. E. B. Du Bois personified swag in the 1800s and 1900s: “Reduced to its essence, the legacy of W. E. B. Du Bois [includes] pioneering scholarship in the social sciences, investigative journalism and militant propaganda combined with organized protest, all of it distinguished by a courtly civil rights swagger through the corridors of academic, political, and economic power.”⁸ Part of what gave Du Bois his presence and wide sphere of influence was his international identity, gained by his fifteen trips to Europe, Asia, Russia, the Caribbean, and Africa throughout his ninety-five years.⁹

Parallel to the concept of swag, in *Smart and Sassy*, sociologist Joyce West Stevens identifies young Black girls’ “sassy” behavior as a sign of resilience to an all-too-often hostile world. Youth need to find a stride to move past the many challenges they will face, and sass is a way of, as bell hooks advocates, “talking back” to those who would doubt or suppress youth’s rise. Significantly, Stevens presents Black girls’ agency via “sass” as a strength-based analysis rather than as a solely “at-risk” maladaptive behavior. Invoking “sassy” Sarah Vaughn, Stevens argues that resilience is a key factor of adolescent development in marginalized populations. Like “swag,” sass becomes an adaptive behavior that, while sometimes turning into a reactionary and counterproductive response

to stress or crisis, can in fact be nourished and shaped into a productive coping mechanism.

In the decade and a half of my college teaching experience, I have witnessed hundreds of students struggle to get a foothold on success and self-efficacy. Efficacy—the power to produce an effect—means focusing on both intention and outcome. This reinforces Tucker’s assertion that “confidence” is not enough. Success means not just *feeling* successful, but also mastering the tools needed to overcome challenges. Essentially sassiness means being “bold, independent and courageous” in a way that propels one to *sustainable* success.¹⁰

An old adage warns, “You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make him drink.” For youth to be successful, they have to be bold enough to thirst for guidance and humble enough to accept it when offered. Equally as important, they must demonstrate a focus on self without deteriorating into self-absorption. The concept of peer mentor is an imperative aspect of holistic youth development, and the concept of shared experiences is central to this discussion. Mentoring nurtures self-love and transforms that into self-determination.

Youth must start with a guide, but ultimately they must develop a unique persona and learn to trust their intuition to make their own decisions and find their own authoritative voice. Historically, Black Americans developed their strong sense of self-efficacy within a radically hostile environment. Both autobiography and travel writing exemplify precisely the types of intellectual and physical freedoms that the antiliteracy laws of the antebellum South, social strictures on women’s voices, and efforts to stifle ethnic solidarity sought to prevent. As written in the “Act and Resolutions of the General Assembly of the State of South Carolina,” penned in December 1800, denial of movement and literacy were essential to keeping African Americans subordinate: “Whereas, the law heretofore enacted for the government of the slaves, free Negroes, mulattoes, and mestizoes, have been found insufficient for keeping them in due subordination . . . be it therefore enacted . . . assembled or met together for the purpose of mental instruction . . . is hereby declared to be an unlawful meeting.”¹¹ It took a strong will to provide a counter-narrative to the White supremacist images of lazy, ignorant, violent, or over-sexed stereotypes. Challenges to instruction that enable self-definition still linger, and twenty-first-century youth need self-mastery as much as ever. As Perry Hall acknowledges in his article, “Introduction to African American Studies,” freedom and self-determination are the goals of literacy. In this case, I argue that real freedom moves beyond national boundaries and though literacy is no longer outlawed,

wading through an ocean of misinformation requires a wishbone similar to those determined to travel the Underground Railroad.

Race and gender identities are not static, and exposure to international settings illuminates the kaleidoscope of ways individuals form identities that at once affirm and transcend race, ethnicity, gender, or national groupings. Autobiographical travelogues are sites of self-definition that show how identity expression and relationships play out in myriad complex ways that are usually rife with tension. With close investigation, identity expressions often lack the romanticism that accompanies what Benedict Anderson termed “imagined communities,” and “we are the world” harmonies can easily fall apart when we interact with those *in* the world.

The narratives presented here blur lines of self/other and home/foreign. The voices provide readers with a wholly new opportunity for analysis of Black intellectual history, traditions of lifelong learning, and critical international studies. Above all, Black travel narratives demonstrate that writing, particularly self-writing in transnational contexts, in many ways reflects commitment to self-possession through evolving definitions and shifting perceptions of the world.

MEMOIRS: NARRATIVES OF EMPOWERMENT

By diverse pathways, well-known men and women such as Mahalia Jackson, Martin Luther King Jr., Althea Gibson, Ada “Bricktop” Smith, Bill Russell, Assata Shakur, Muhammad Ali, Tina Turner, Dorothy Height, and Malcolm X have penned their globetrotting stories. These travelers are joined by such lesser-known authors as cyclist Major Taylor, commercial pilot Janet Bragg, outrageous Black feminist lawyer and NOW (National Organization for Women) organizer Florynce Kennedy, and businessman activist Leon Sullivan. These narratives are filled with personal challenges, individual triumphs, community connectedness, national tragedies, and fascinating international encounters.

As technologies and economies draw nations closer together in the global web, children coming of age in the twenty-first century must increasingly understand their development in an international context. African American international memoir lends itself to a multidisciplinary lens—historical, sociological, geographical, and literary—and encourages insightful consideration of adolescent metamorphosis with the world as a textured setting. Resources abound.¹²

Methodology

I located two hundred *Black Passports* memoirs through three steps: First, I conducted a broad survey using search engines from the Library of Congress and academic journal databases such as JSTOR and PROQUEST to booksellers like amazon.com and bookfinder.com. Second, I scanned bibliographies by authors of groundbreaking publications about Black autobiography, particularly by V. P. Franklin, Margo Perkins, William Andrews, Roland Williams, and Joanne Braxton. Third, I combed tertiary sources in relevant bibliographies, encyclopedias, and list serves. The two most useful resources were Audrey Thompson's *African-American Histories, Biographies, and Fictionalized Biographies for Children and Young Adults: A Bibliography* (2001) and Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Evelyn Higginbotham's *African American Lives* (2004). Thompson's work identifies 494 names of biographies and autobiographies.¹³ Gates and Higginbotham's *African American Lives* identified biographies and autobiographies of 611 African Americans including over 130 autobiographies. To narrow the data set to a manageable collection, only book-length publications were listed in this study.

A significant number of the names included are found in these two comprehensive texts, but there are many references here that are missing from one or both of the Thompson and Gates and Higginbotham sources, most notably activist Assata Shakur, actors Angela Bassett and Courtney Vance, pilot Janet Bragg, African or American students schooled in Africa such as Phillipe Wamba and Dympna Ugwu-Oju, surgeons Rose-Marie Toussaint and Claudia Lynn Thomas, educators Susie Mae Williams White and Jan Willis, and "Chef Jeff" Henderson. *Black Passports* increases focus on many narratives that are marginalized or largely unknown whether in academic or community circles. However, one major limitation of the data set is an outgrowth of the types of autobiographies available: most are stories by entertainers or athletes. Educators well understand that to be competitive in the national and local employment markets, youth must increasingly focus on science, technology, and medical professions. Scientists and health professionals must tell their stories to increase the diversity of perspectives, particularly those that might be provided by engineers, architects, nurses, veterinarians or others with technical careers. Further, sport narratives add context to health education.

There are approximately two hundred narratives included in *Black Passports* (see page 9).

Once introduced to a character and storyline, youth can access additional information online. In addition to encyclopedia references like *African*

Aaron, Hank	Davis, Sammy, Jr.	Jordan, June	Robinson, Randall
Ali, Laila	Dean, Harry Foster	Kelly, Samuel	Robinson, Sugar Ray
Ali, Muhammad	Delany, Annie and Sara	Kennedy, Florynce	Ross, Diana
Ailey, Alvin	Denton, Sandy Pepa	King, B. B.	Rowan, Carl T
Anderson, Marian	Douglas, Gabrielle	King, Coretta Scott	Rudolph, Wilma
Angelou, Maya (Marguerite Johnson)	Douglass, Frederick	King, Martin Luther, Jr.	RuPaul, Andre
Ashe, Arthur	Dryden, Charles	Kitt, Eartha	Russell, Bill
Atkins, Cholly	Du Bois, W. E. B.	Lacy, Leslie Alexander	Scarborough, Wil- liam Sanders
Bailey, Pearl	Dunham, Katherine	Langston, John	Schuyler, George
Baldwin, James	Duster, Michelle	Mercer	Shakur, Assata
Baker, Vernon	Dympna Ugwu-Oju	Latta, Rev. Morgan	Simone, Nina
Baraka, Amiri	Early, Charity	Lee, Andrea	Smith, Amanda
Basie, Count	Edelman, Marian Wright	Leslie, Lisa	Smith, Tommie
Bassett, Angela and Vance, Courtney	Ellington, Duke	Lester, Julius	Steward, Austin
Bechet, Sidney	Estes, Simon	Lorde, Audre	Steward, Theophilus Gould
Beckwourth, James	Fisher, Antwone	Louis, Joe	Sullivan, Leon
Becton, Julius W., Jr.	Foreman, George	Love, Nat	Taylor, Major
Belafonte, Harry	Franklin, John Hope	Lynch, James R	Terrell, Mary Church
Bragg, Janet	Frazier, Joe	Malcolm X	Thomas, Claudia Lynn
Bricktop (Ada Smith)	Gibbs, Mifflin Wistar	Marrant, John	Thompson, Era Bell
Brooke, Edward	Gillespie, Dizzy (John Birks)	Marshall, Paule	Thurman, Howard
Brooks, Gwendolyn	Gordy, Berry	Mays, Benjamin	Toussaint, Rose-Marie
Brown, Elaine	Gould, William Benjamin	Mays, Willie	Turner, Tina
Brown, Henry "Box"	Gregory, Dick	McElroy, Colleen	Tyson, Mike
Brown, William Wells	Grier, Pam	McKay, Claude	Vaughn, Donald
Broyard, Bliss	Guillaume, Robert	Mingus, Charles	Verrett, Shirley
Bunche, Ralph	Hampton, Lionel	Montague, Magnifi- cent Nathaniel	Vincent, Carter O
Bussey, Charles	Harris, Gail	Morton, Lena	Walker, Alice
Calloway, Cab	Harrison, Juanita	Morrow, Frederick	Walker, George
Campbell, Robert	Height, Dorothy	Moton, Robert	Walker, Rebecca
Carlos, John	Henderson, Jeff	Murray, Pauli	Walker, Philippe
Carmichael, Stokely	Henson, Josiah	Newton, Huey P	Wamba, Philippe
Carson, Ben	Henson, Matthew	Obama, Barack	Ward, Samuel Ringgold
Chamberlain, Wilt	Heywood, Harry	O'Ree, Willie	Warwick, Dionne
Charles, Ray	Holiday, Billie	Oliver, Kitty	Washington, Booker T
Chuck D.	Hughes, Langston	Owens, Jesse	Isaiah Washington
Clark, Septima Poinsette	Hunter-Gault, Charlayne	Payne, Daniel	Waters, Ethel
Cole, Natalie	Hurston, Zora Neale	Pemberton, Gayle	Wattleton, Faye
Comings, Jeff	Jackson, Janet	Pickens, William	Wells-Barnett, Ida
Cooper, Anna Julia	Jackson, Mahalia	Poitier, Sidney	West, Cornel
Coppin, Fanny Jackson	Jacobs, Harriet	Powell, Adam	White, Susie Mae Williams
Craft, William and Ellen	James, Etta	Prince, Nancy Gardner	White, Walter
Cruz, Celia	James, Rick	Pryor, Richard	Wilkins, Roger
Davis, Angela Yvonne	Jamison, Judith	Robin Quivers	Williams, Patricia
Davis, Belva	Jefferson, Alexander	Rangel, Charles	Williams, Robert
Davis, Miles	Jemison, Mae	Reagon, Bernice Johnson	Williams, Venus and Serena
Davis, Ossie and Ruby Dee	Johnson, Jack	Rice, Condoleezza	Willis, Jan
	Johnson, James Weldon	Ringgold, Faith	Wilson, Mary
	Johnson, John	Robeson, Eslanda	Wright, Richard
	Jones, Quincy	Goode	Young, Andrew
		Robeson, Paul	

American Lives, the best online companion resources for this collection are blackpast.org (University of Washington Professor Quintard Taylor's "Online African American History Reference Guide: Black Past . . . Remembered and Reclaimed"), aaregistry.org (the online education collective African American Registry), bio.com (The History Channel/Biography Channel's online resource), and wikipedia.com (the world-wide encyclopedia). The memoir collection benefits from existing resources that present the "facts" about these authors, but by focusing solely on autobiographies, *Black Passports* emphasizes self-definition in life writing. In this section, I offer possible paradigms for analyzing life writing; an increased collection of memoirs and autobiographies is sorely needed to enhance the primary source analysis of Black life and culture. Without rich, first-person primary sources, the reliability of research, efficacy of policy makers, and depth of insight offered by historians or social analysis will be limited.

Of course, as Marian Anderson's nephew duly notes in the introduction to *My Lord, What a Morning*, autobiography offers a unique perspective, but research-based definitive biographies, like that of Allan Keiler's *Marian Anderson: A Singer's Journey* "complete the story."¹⁴ Readers are invited to begin with autobiographical sketches, but they are strongly encouraged to follow up with specifics offered by research-based biography. New work, such as Randal Jelks' *Benjamin Elijah Mays: Schoolmaster of the Movement* (2012), continues to enhance our understanding of important figures.

"Truth" in Autobiography: Promises and Limitations of the Genre

Some names in this work have been changed and some of the characters and incidents are fictitious.

—Charles Mingus, "Epigraph," *Beneath the Underdog*

In narratives by enslaved Blacks, authentication was essential. African American authors often had respected members of the White community attest that their narrative was true or real. Due to the propaganda of slaveholders, who portrayed Blacks as "happy slaves," narratives revealed the horrors of enslavement as recorded in the first person. There was an imperative for antebellum African American authors to assert the validity of their story, especially when the facts were "extraordinary," such as Linda Brent's hiding for seven years in a small space, Henry "Box" Brown's escape by shipping himself in a box through the United States Postal Service, or William and Ellen Craft's gender-bending escape from Georgia where light-skinned Ellen masqueraded as a sickly White

man and William “escorted” his “master” to the North for treatment of a supposed illness.

This trend of authentication can most easily be seen in Nat Love’s subtitle for his autobiography: *The Life and Adventures of Nat Love, Better Known in the Cattle Country as “Deadwood Dick” by Himself; a True History of Slavery Days, Life on the Great Cattle Ranges and on the Plains of the “Wild and Woolly” West, Based on Facts, and Personal Experiences of the Author* (1907). However, it would be a mistake for young readers to approach autobiography without any qualification of the notion of “truth” in self-writing.

As Charles Mingus writes plainly in the epigraph to *Beneath the Underdog*, autobiography is part fiction, either wittingly or unwittingly. For Mingus, the creative spirit that fueled his avant-garde jazz style on the bass also clearly influenced his autobiographical writing. Mingus wrote in the third person and took readers from the streets of Long Beach, California, to the halls of Bellevue mental institution. Discerning fact from fiction is a task for both author and reader. Autobiographical details are nuanced, and factual events are often incomplete with fabricated additions, as exemplified in Billie Holiday’s autobiography, which was penned by William Duffy from piecemeal interviews. Facts, when investigated by scholars, are recorded differently by authors: for example, Muhammad Ali stated in his 1975 autobiography that he threw his 1960 Olympic gold medal in the Ohio River, which scholars such as Augustus Wood argue primary source documents do not substantiate.¹⁵

Clearly, there are challenges that autobiography presents to readers who desire historical accuracy. These challenges can readily be seen in the narrative of Jack Johnson, who misrepresented some of his fight record and was married several years after he stated, and also in Zora Neale Hurston’s *Dust Tracks on a Road*, where she cited the wrong birth date and alluded to being born in Florida when she was actually born in Notasulga, Alabama. B. B. King openly admitted his memory clashed with scholarly record, but he wrote that he did not care because he was not telling a “cold-blooded history” but the tale of his life as his *heart* remembered.¹⁶

Even after accepting limitations when looking for “truth,” in texts, autobiography as a genre is limited as a medium of study. Individual “great man or woman” narratives obscure millions of everyday people who have full lives and who impact their local or national landscapes by simply living regular, anonymous lives. Focus on individuals ignores how relationship to others, particularly in social movements, forms the foundation of impacting social or political norms. Further, international memoirs exclude important autobiographies or biographies like those of civil rights movement or activist workers

(especially by Ann Moody, Rosa Parks, Constance Baker Motley, Harriet Tubman, Fannie Lou Hamer, or Medgar Evers) and do not investigate relevant cultural autobiographies or even memoirs like *Bourgeois Blues* by Jake Lamar, who lives abroad but has not yet published a full-length book on the subject.

Also missing are incarceration memoirs (George Jackson in 1970), private narratives like that of surgeon Dr. Vivien Thomas, businessman Earl Graves, or as-yet unpublished memoirs like those of activist-journalist Charlotta Bass. Last, nuanced race narratives or fictive autobiographies such as James Weldon Johnson's *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, John Howard Griffin's *Black Like Me*, or Ernest Gaines's *Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* might also provide useful discussions of race and pursuit of personal and social identity but are not presented here.

Autobiography is a valuable genre to explore in a quest to understand meaning of human life in general and Black struggles for human and civil rights in particular. In *Soliloquy*, his final autobiography, W. E. B. Du Bois wrote:

Autobiographies do not form indisputable authorities. They are always incomplete, and often unreliable. Eager as I am to put down the truth, there are difficulties; memory fails especially in small details, so that it becomes finally but a theory of my life, with much forgotten and misconceived, with valuable testimony but often less than absolutely true, despite my intention to be frank and fair.¹⁷

I argue that, despite admissions of omission, Dr. Du Bois's writing exemplifies the narrative of a writer seeking truth while at the same time disseminating a message of wisdom. Du Bois's series of three main autobiographies offers a persuasive paradigm for the value of the genre. In essence, I support John Blassingame's assessment, which situates Black people's writing in the first person as an indisputably important primary resource when interpreting Black historical experience and when attempting to formulate political and cultural possibilities for Black women and men.¹⁸

Self-definition is vital in a country where Black people are regularly portrayed as less than human. In the foreword to Jack Johnson's *My Life and Battles*, Geoffrey Ward goes so far as to call Johnson's autobiography "self-defense," revealing the level of persecution Johnson and others faced. Children labeled "at-risk" often are in need of these strategies for self-defense provided by first-person accounts.

In sum, this bibliography complements important work on Black travel like Farah Griffin and Cheryl Fish's groundbreaking anthology *A Stranger in the Village: Two Centuries of African American Travel Writing* (1998) and Elaine Lee's *Go Girl!: The Black Women's Book of Travel and Adventure* (1997). Whereas these texts focus on travel writing as a genre, this bibliography focuses on travel writing as memoir to situate travel within a larger life narrative. Exploratory exercises can be assigned by mapping one person's life: W. E. B. Du Bois, Dizzy Gillespie, Duke Ellington, Juanita Harrison, Katherine Dunham, and Coleen McElroy would be optimal examples because of their vast travel itineraries. The database can be fascinating from K–12 studies to advanced doctoral research and is a practical guide for addressing life's issues through memoirs. Of the hundreds of choices, I have selected a dozen authors as tantamount to virtuous models and as samples of possible instruction.¹⁹

The Guidance Council: Archetypes for Life Writing

Indeed, as will be discussed in the “Life” chapter, a “role model” is as complicated a notion as gender norms of “shameless” boys and “modest” girls in the tenth century BCE. Hero worship is a dangerous hobby because it obscures the necessity to celebrate icons without glossing over their faults. Even heroes have crises of character or, at the very least, actions that warrant “real talk” critique. Notably, though Makeda is hailed as a wise and honorable queen, also known as Bilqīs of Yemen, she actually beheaded her first husband because he was not ruling his inherited kingdom honorably. She allegedly got him drunk on wine, chopped off his head (which she displayed on the palace gate), and then retook her rightful power bestowed by her father. Yes, one must choose role models carefully, and even when hailing their virtues, we must pay close attention to the finer plot points of decision making, even with larger-than-life heroes.²⁰

Despite the muddy terrain of defining role models, as a teacher, I cannot resist identifying those narratives that, according to my personal values of virtue, creativity, and competence, strike me as heroic and worthy of admiration. I call this list of twelve my “Guidance Council.” These are life stories from the larger data set that I find inspiring. Mary McLeod Bethune wrote that the goals of higher education are to “investigate, interpret and inspire.” Too often, researchers and teachers fail to divulge what inspires them. But many authors of autobiographies named their role models as sources of inspiration. Astronaut Mae Jemison admired performer Eartha Kitt, cut her hair short to model South African singer Miriam Makeba, and studied African dance, like Judith

Jamison. Most touchingly, when she earned her place in the NASA program, she was able to meet actress Nichelle Nichols, who played Lt. Uhura on the *Star Trek* TV show Jemison watched as a young science fiction enthusiast. Inspiration is in dire need in order to propel young imaginations to space and beyond and to adequately prepare youth for global political realities.

I have paired narratives with the parables afforded by close reading of memoir. Ida B. Wells and Frederick Douglass (“Introduction”), Katherine Dunham and Dizzy Gillespie (“Life”), Anna Julia Cooper and W. E. B. Du Bois (“School”), Mae Jemison and Jeff Henderson (“Work”), Jan Willis and Malcolm X (“Exchange”) and Angela Davis and Barack Obama (“Conclusion”).

There is ample opportunity for creative learning with this rich list. As a sample, I created a vocabulary list of thirteen hundred words from these twelve epic narratives from which geographic comprehension, historical analysis, academic confidence, and personal satisfaction can grow. This word list is introduced in chapter 4 and provided in full in appendix B.

Having reviewed this data set of two hundred narratives, I observed patterns in how Black travel narratives have been written. When considering a life narrative, readers must pay special attention to how the author shapes identity, knowledge, and power. As Margo Perkins argues in her comparative analysis of Angela Davis, Elaine Brown, and Assata Shakur, narratives reflect experience and also can help authors advocate for transformative action. Authors of autobiography continue to ask and answer these questions and, as Miriam Makeba sang, a luta continua: the struggle continues. Part of that struggle is self-definition. Yes, we need a “jawbone,” but how are we supposed to sound and what shall we say?

After surveying the larger data set I propose a typography of eight narrative styles.²¹

Autobiographical Archetypes

Activist—fights for something; generally uses institutionalized tools; advocate

Survivor—recounts harrowing experiences of overcoming adversity

Seeker—quests for knowledge, understanding, or adventure

Relation—focuses on family, community, culture, or location

Rebel—fights against something; generally operates outside of institutionalized norms

- Icon—expresses selfhood; foregrounds ideas or image
- Messenger—spreads gospel or heralds morality; brings word about life meaning
- Professional—frames story through life work or occupation

Two most striking examples of this typology can be seen in two recent publications: Theresa Runstedtler's *Jack Johnson, Rebel Sojourner: Boxing in the Shadow of the Global Color Line* (2012) and Touré's *I Would Die 4 U: Why Prince Became an Icon* (2013). The titles of the biographies explain the major theme of the subject's life and, in Johnson's case, the tone of his narrative. The categorical classification can also be seen in narratives like Ida B. Wells' title *Crusade for Justice*, chosen by her daughter for the posthumously published work.

In my assessment of the twelve Guidance Council narratives, there are several ways we might characterize their voice:

- Ida B. Wells, *Crusade for Justice* (1970): Survivor, Rebel
- Frederick Douglass, *The Narrative of . . .* (1845): Survivor, Messenger
- Katherine Dunham, *Island Possessed* (1969): Survivor, Icon, Professional
- Dizzy Gillespie, *To Be or Not to . . . Bop!* (1979): Icon, Professional
- Anna Julia Cooper, *The Third Step* (1945): Seeker, Messenger
- W. E. B. Du Bois, *Darkwater* (1920): Messenger, Icon
- Mae Jemison, *Find Where the Wind Goes* (2001): Seeker, Professional
- Jeff Henderson, *Cooked: From the Streets to the Stove, from Cocaine to Foie Gras* (2007): Survivor, Professional
- Jan Willis, *Dreaming Me* (2008): Seeker, Messenger
- Malcolm X (Al-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz), *Autobiography of . . .* (1965): Rebel, Messenger
- Angela Davis, *An Autobiography* (1974): Activist, Messenger
- Barack Obama, *Dreams from My Father* (1995): Relation, Icon

The Guidance Council Reading List appears on the following page.

Students can access *Black Passport* narratives and the *Swag Diplomacy* online resource to decipher ways these and other travelers have penned their stories. They can use this paradigm to discover ways to tell of their own life travels, past, present, and future.



Fig. 1.1. Ida B. Wells. 1897, Project Gutenberg.

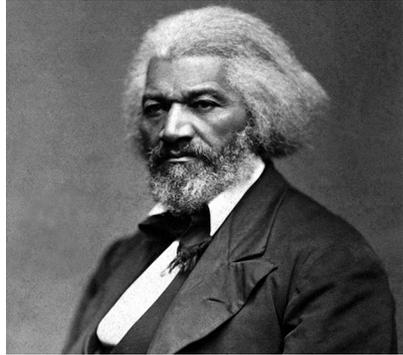


Fig. 1.2. Frederick Douglass. circa 1879, National Archives and Records Administration.



Fig. 1.3. Anna J. Cooper. *A Voice from the South*, 1892. Book cover.



Fig. 1.4. W. E. B. Du Bois. 1918, Library of Congress, Cornelius Marion (C. M.) Battey, photographer.



Fig. 1.5. Katherine Dunham. 25 January 1956, Library of Congress.



Fig. 1.6. Dizzy Gillespie. Normandie, France 20 July 1991, Roland Godefroy, photographer.

Guidance Council Reading List. Pictures: public domain or used by permission.



Fig. 1.7. Jan Willis. Wesleyan.

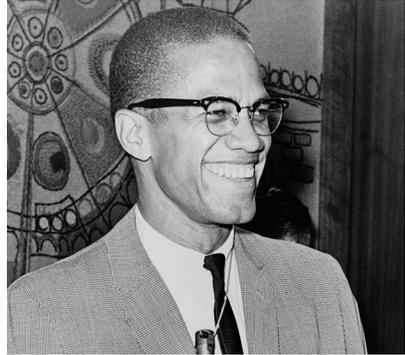


Fig. 1.8. Malcolm X. Library of Congress, 12 March 1964.



Fig. 1.9. Angela Davis. 15 October 2006, Hunter Kahn photographer.

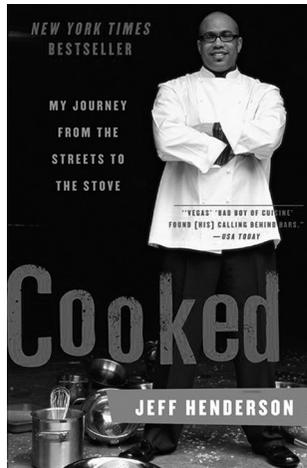


Fig. 1.10. President Barack Obama. 14 January 2009, Pete Souza, the Obama-Biden Transition Project



Fig. 1.11. Mae Jemison, 1992, Official NASA Photo, Endeavor.

Fig. 1.12. Jeff Henderson. 8 October 2008, foodnetwork.com.



Literacy as Liberation: Frederick Douglass and Ida B. Wells

Many types of voices emerge from autobiography, sometimes within one text, so the genre is not a monolith, and certainly not all authors are heroes. However, African American life-writing, by virtue of the traditions of antiliteracy laws, slave narratives, and the audacity of “authoritative voices,” epitomizes the heroic survival tradition of narratives, including Frederick Douglass (“*The Narrative Life . . .*”) and Ida B. Wells (*Crusade for Justice*). In *The Black Scholar* (1973), John Blassingame identified Black autobiography as a foundational cornerstone of both literary and historical traditions. Citing Frederick Douglass as a primary example, he argued that autobiography is “one of the most important forums Blacks have used to state their positions, to leave a record of their resistance, to inspire future generations, and to promote their national development. . . . As a historical document, the autobiography was a counterweight to the White historian’s caricature of Black life.” Blassingame’s essay identified the location of this genre at the intersection of two distinct disciplines and, in doing so, suggests a basis for an argument of autobiography’s inherently interdisciplinary nature.²² Regardless of the disciplinary approach, Douglass is widely recognized as the grandfather of Black narrative, as his powerful oratory and committed autobiographical efforts led the way for many others to tell their story. Though there were many powerful tales before him, including Olaudah Equiano more than fifty years prior to Douglass, his was the popularized account that came to personify the African American abolitionist imperative—the paradigm of freedom’s voice.²³

In a prefatory letter to Frederick Douglass’s first autobiography, abolitionist Wendell Phillips wrote, “I am glad the time has come when the lions write history.”²⁴ In his chapter on “narrative authority,” Robert Stepto argues that Douglass’s narrative has become the paradigm of voice and empowerment in the African American autobiographical tradition. Stepto lauds Douglass for his ability to offer compelling and creative prose that no other voice supersedes.²⁵ However, Douglass’s fiercely independent voice is one that, at some point, benefited from nurturing or affirmation from those also engaged in the struggle, and in turn, he passed that affirmation to Ida B. Wells who passed the passion to those, like Michelle Duster her great-granddaughter, who are active today advocating for a long-overdue Ida B. Wells monument in Chicago. Many independent, proud, and creative people of power have themselves been nurtured into being by powerful mentors. We see this in the “young lions” like Soroya Corbett, Frank Moten, and Duster, whose lives are testimony to the benefits of mentoring.

Though he rightly acknowledged that not all autobiography is of exceptional literary quality, Blassingame situated Black people's writing in the first person or as the act of reflection as an indisputably important primary resource when interpreting Black historical experiences. As was standard for the times, he focused on the male contribution to literature by arguing that "the central theme which runs through these autobiographies is the demand for recognition of Black manhood." As women historical theorists and literary critics gained access to publication in the 1980s and 1990s, it became apparent that autobiographies were also about demands for recognition of Black womanhood.²⁶

As outlined in chapter 5, Black women's narratives warrant special attention because their status as women meant they had to fight not only racial barriers to travel, but gendered barriers to mobility based on social expectations to conform to static existence circumscribed by the "Cult of True Womanhood." Piety, purity, domesticity, and submissiveness were also tied to stagnation and lack of voice. In *Black Women Writing Autobiography: A Tradition within a Tradition*, Joanne Braxton identified five types of subgenre in Black women's autobiography: slave narrative, travelogue, reminiscence, historical memoir, and modern autobiography. She then argued that the historical trajectory of Black women's autobiographical literature ranges from 'survival' narratives in the early stages to self-expression and self-identification, liberation via public voice, dealing with issues of acculturation, seeking personal fulfillment, and, ultimately, self-creation. Detailing representative stories of women, including Linda Brent, Ida B. Wells, Zora Neale Hurston, and Maya Angelou, Braxton traced the contributions of Black women's self-writing, much of which has provided guidance and fortification for this present study.²⁷

In a more closely defined analysis that complements Braxton's comprehensive approach, Margo Perkins has compared three autobiographies of Black power movement participants. Perkins' *Autobiography as Activism: Three Black Women of the Sixties* provides a gendered alternative to well-known male narratives by figures like Malcolm X, George Jackson, and Eldridge Cleaver. Perkins argued that autobiographies by Angela Davis, Assata Shakur, and Elaine Brown "advocate and model transformative action" and allow women to "tell their own side of the story . . . to reinvent themselves . . . and contribute to the shaping of a people's collective consciousness." This idea of literary activism and constructing Black consciousness grounds ideas of self-efficacy, which is a foundation of global competence.²⁸

Like Douglass, Ida B. Wells's autobiography is paradigmatic of a "strong bones" narrative because it traverses topics from her 1883 lawsuit against

discriminatory treatment on the Chesapeake, Ohio, and Southwestern Railway and her research and reporting of the antilynching campaign. The train lawsuit helps inform civil rights movement discussions in the nineteenth century and enhances discussions of struggle long before the 1950s and 1960s.²⁹ The lynching of Wells' close friends in March of 1892 and the dissemination of her *Free Speech* newspaper in May of that year laid the groundwork for a lifetime of her *Crusade for Justice*.

Wells participated as a co-founder of the NAACP and marched for women's suffrage, seeing all causes for rights intertwined. In *Crusade*, she wrote, "Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty, and it does seem to me that, notwithstanding all these social agencies and activities there is not that vigilance which should be exercised in the preservation of our rights."³⁰ Despite a lifetime of struggle, Wells knew that as a country, we were not "there" yet; she understood the path to justice for all still lay ahead and required a collective diligence, not present even in the last days of her life in 1931. The killing of thousands, including Trayvon Martin in Florida, Kendrick Johnson in Georgia, and Phylicia Barnes in Maryland, shows we have a long way to go as a country to ensure the safety of Black youth.

Wells and Douglass are cornerstones of a civil rights curriculum because of the intersections of race, gender, and national politics, but also because they were both involved in bringing national issues to the attention of international communities. Wells' *Southern Horrors* and similar writings on lynching rightly place civil rights at the intersection of both governmental and public dimensions and identify the role that global advocacy plays in domestic issues. The crusade for justice continues in the form of discriminatory incarceration policies and what activists including Angela Davis have termed the "prison industrial complex." Michelle Alexander's book, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (2010), outlines youth in marginalized populations and is a prime example of how youth must learn the history of activism, because much justice work remains to be done.

These stories directly connect self-education, desire for community building, and access to a passport, combined traits that social conservatives in the dominant culture have long understood make one particularly unsuitable for mental or physical enslavement. Frederick Douglass knew the value of learning: literacy and submission were incompatible. He also understood, as did Ida B. Wells after him, that calling international attention to oppression in the United States impacted domestic conditions. These two hundred diverse texts show that travelers' quests for identity, education, and empowerment were not uniform, and thus individually and collectively these narratives offer useful examples of suitably multidimensional Pan-African identities. The stories offer