Women and Migration
Responses in Art and History

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In this chapter I shall explore the Pan-Africanist work in the US and abroad of leftist, working-class African American activist Audley ‘Queen Mother’ Moore. I first met Moore at the 1970 ‘Atlanta Black Power Conference’. I knew little about her at the time, except as an iconic Black Power and Nationalist leader of the Black Reparations movement. In later years, guided by a desire to explore multiple migration frames and to move beyond the small circle of college-educated middle-class US Pan-Africanists previously studied, I enlarged my migration/diaspora focus to incorporate the thinking, activism and travels of prominent working-class activist Queen Mother Moore.¹ How, for example, did

Moore discuss class (one’s education, occupation, family background, status, and income) and its impact on the global travel, political thinking, and cultural engagements of US-based twentieth-century Pan-Africanist women, and, in turn, how did her ideas and movements effect our understanding of Pan-Africanism and Black women’ global migration?² How did Moore’s work and interests connect with the long-established Black US nationalist traditions?⁵

In his impressive biography of another member of this group, Shirley Graham Du Bois,⁴ entitled Race Woman: The Lives of Shirley Graham Du Bois, historian Gerald Horne offers a rich account of Du Bois’ leftist, Pan-Africanist, and Communist leanings and travels that are nearly comparable to Audley Moore — however, he, like a number of scholars writing on this topic, makes no mention of Moore.⁵

² Anna Julia Cooper, part of an earlier generation of Pan-African intellectuals along with fellow Oberlin College graduates Mary Church Terrell and Ida Alexander Gibbs Hunt, had attended and occasionally delivered talks at Pan-African meetings in Europe in the early twentieth century, at the invitation of fellow US Pan-Africanist W. E. B. Du Bois. In 1900, Cooper traveled to London to deliver a speech entitled ‘The Negro Problem in America,’ at the first Pan-African Conference and was elected a member of its Executive Committee. Hunt attended and served in an official capacity at the meetings of the First African Congress in Paris in 1919, and, the second conference, also in Paris, in 1921. At the London meeting of the Congress, in 1923, she delivered a paper titled ‘The Coloured Races and the League of Nations.’


⁴ Biographies of these women appear in Dictionary of American Negro Biography, edited by Rayford W. Logan and Michael R. Winston (New York: W. W. Norton, 1982) but few leftist or working class Pan-Africanist Black women, like Shirley Graham Du Bois and Audley Moore, appear. A biographical sketch of one leftist global traveler who served as a Russian resident-in-exile Eslanda Cardozo Goode Robeson, appears; her prominent family background may have contributed to her inclusion. Moreover, the multi-lingual and global traveler Terrell, unlike Robinson, Graham Du Bois and Moore, also attended and delivered speeches at predominantly white women’s domestic and international meetings including the International Congress of Women and the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom. See Stephanie Y. Evans, ‘African American Women Scholars and International Research: Dr. Anna Julia Cooper’s Legacy of Study Abroad’, Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad, 18 (2009), 77–100.

Until recently, there were far fewer written accounts of working-class female activism and global travels, and fewer autobiographical texts written by the less socially prominent women activists compared to those by and about educated middle-class women. Yet working-class women were there, working diligently for racial and social justice in the world — traveling across the US and the Atlantic Ocean to deliver talks, attend meetings, and promote woman’s causes in Africa, Europe, and, occasionally, in Asia. One such figure was Audley Moore, the focus of this essay. In keeping with the African and the diasporan cultural linkages and philosophies she espoused, Moore urged people to fight and pray for ‘the freedom of Africans everywhere at home and abroad.’

She attended Kwame Nkrumah’s memorial services in Guinea and Ghana, in 1972, respectively. While in Ghana, the Ashanti people honored her with the title by which she would become known: ‘Queen Mother.’

In this essay I will explore how class influenced the political vision, global travels, cultural imaginings, and representations of a Black woman. Many scholars who write about the complex nexus of these

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See Farmer, ‘Reframing African American Woman’s Grassroots Organizing,’ p. 93.
experiences and perspectives, as related to the Black global and US woman’s experiences in the twentieth century, make no mention of Moore. This essay explores the strategies and intellectual frameworks she employed in her Pan-Africanist thinking and activism. In doing so, I seek to broaden the understanding of her work in particular, and Black women’s class- and identity-related engagements with global, political and cultural work more generally. This project exposes the tremendous loss to Pan-African historical and cultural narratives due to the historical obfuscation of women, particularly working-class Black women, from the work of global and migration scholars. This essay seeks to offer a critical account of how gender and class influenced Black women’s physical, political, and ideological travels in the US and abroad. Fortunately, there are a series of oral interviews and media appearances
with Audley Moore, in which she recounts her life experiences, political experiences and global travels.⁷

Born on 27 July 1898 in New Iberia, Louisiana, Audley Eloise Moore experienced the personal pain and humiliation of life in Jim Crow Louisiana at an early age. Exacerbated by knowing that one of her grandfathers had been lynched and a great-grandmother raped, the death of her father when she was in elementary school was a blow that might have fostered Moore’s resolve to create a strong independent life. Her mother had died when Audley was born, so she was orphaned early. Alone, Audley assumed financial and parental responsibility for her two younger sisters, requiring her to end her education at the fourth grade level. It was wartime, so she relocated with her siblings to New Orleans in search of employment. She worked as a hairdresser after graduating from the Poro hairdressing program, and as domestic service worker. Like so many Black people across the US, during the First World War and especially during the inter-war 1920s and 1930s, she was drawn to the Black Nationalist movement, African and diaspora liberation, and the self-determinist ideology of Black Jamaican Marcus Garvey, under the aegis of his Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) established in 1914. While in New Orleans, Moore became active in the local UNIA chapter, organized in 1920 by a small group of local women. Its membership was mostly made up of working-class women and men. It grew exponentially, with reportedly more than 2,000 members six months after its founding. In response to Louisiana’s long and infamous history of racial segregation and trauma, a record number of chapters blossomed in the state. Moore and her sisters relocated to California and Illinois before eventually settling in Harlem, New York City, in the 1920s — the epicenter of the Garvey movement and the new home of Black US, African and Caribbean diasporan populations.

In an interview published in a 1973 issue of the Black Scholar, Moore reflected on Garvey’s visual, spiritual, and political lure to her and other

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Louisiana Blacks, proclaiming: ‘He brought something very beautiful to us — Africa for the Africans. That was our inheritance. Africa for the Africans at home and abroad. That we were somebody. […] That we had a right to be restored to our proper selves.’8 Noting peripherally a socioeconomic dimension to her recollections of her struggles and early motivation to become a political activist, Moore announced before an admiring audience at the 1980 Wayne State University symposium, ‘Tribute to the Revolutionary Legacy of African Women’: ‘It was not abject poverty that drove [her] to the struggle, but a burning desire for freedom’ on the US and world stages. This ‘burning desire’ would continue lifelong as a driving force for Moore’s involvement with new Black nationalist/Pan-Africanist arenas and movements.9

The UNIA experience was a microcosm of what women encountered as they joined, led, and worked within national organizations that aimed to achieve racial and social justice in the US and internationally. Historian Ula Taylor and others have documented that while in separate entities within the male-led UNIA organization, women conspicuously served in key leadership positions (albeit not with the same level of influence and power) in this Black-Nationalist-based global organization. There were female presidents and vice-presidents of the women’s division and heads of the Black Cross Nurses in the US and the Caribbean. Undeniably, migration and movement were key elements of the UNIA and Black liberation organizations, including the Universal African Black Cross Nurses auxiliary. Founded in 1921 by UNIA Vice President Henrietta Vinton Davis, this Black diaspora women’s grassroots organization provided healthcare services and nursing training for Blacks in Harlem and other US cities as well as to members in Belize, Nova Scotia, Panama, and Trinidad and Tobago. While compartmentalized and not necessarily progressive, Black women’s global activism, community engagement, and leadership within the UNIA was not lost on Moore or other Black US UNIA women activists. She asserted that the UNIA ‘always had a Lady President along with our President General, and everybody looked up to the women that Garvey celebrated with deepest respect.’10

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8 ‘Queen Mother Moore’, p. 51.
9 See transcript of Cheryl Townsend Gilkes interview with Moore for the Black Women Oral History (BWOH) Project at the Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University’s Schlesinger Library.
10 Taylor, The Veiled Garvey; see transcript of Cheryl Townsend Gilkes interview with Moore for the Black Women Oral History (BWOH) Project at the Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University’s Schlesinger Library.
Over time, Moore’s global interests extended beyond the UNIA to other international political movements, including the Communist Party of the USA (CP), and she was not alone. Other Black political activists were drawn to both the CP and UNIA, despite their opposing ideological positions on race and culture. In the 1930s and 1940s many Black people across the world were discouraged by the dire economic situation created by the Great Depression and the Second World War. In the US, as the Garvey movement waned and anti-Black groups were growing, the CP attracted more and more working-class US Garveyites, Africans and diasporan peoples globally into its international orbit. A plethora of Black women activists, writers, poets and playwrights, including Shirley Graham and W. E. B. Du Bois, traveled to the Soviet Union. A few permanently moved and became resident there.

In her diaspora engagements, first as a Garveyite; then in the 1930s and the 1940s, as a member of the International Labor Defense and the Communist Party, USA; and much later, in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, as she traveled across the US and to various African nations as an independent woman; Moore denounced anti-Black racism and colonial domination. In the 1930s, Moore’s communist affiliation overlapped with her grassroots campaigns for domestic workers’ and renters’ rights in New York City, and for African liberation (most notably, in opposition to Mussolini’s invasion of Ethiopia). Her outlook was based upon her public declaration that ‘the Communists were the only ones interested in my revolutionary rights.’ Most of the activists Moore traveled with made short-term visits abroad to attend and participate in Pan-African conferences and congresses. They appear not to have been as profoundly influenced by their subsequent political or cultural engagements with African liberation and Pan-African causes in in the US and abroad as Moore, who maintained the strong ideological and activist principles she had begun to develop as a young woman in Louisiana.

Working-class and poor Black women who may not have always possessed the financial means to travel globally, nor the social connections with prominent Pan-Africanist male leaders that would enable them to receive invitations to speak at pre-1950s Pan-African conventions, nonetheless, fully embraced and understood their diaspora activism on a global scale. Moore’s example demonstrates that awareness. When she left the Communist Party, Moore moved back to New Orleans and, in 1950, she joined the Sons and Daughters of Ethiopia. Seven years later, she co-founded and served as president (occasionally noted in
the organization’s literature as ‘Committee Chair’) of the Universal Association of Ethiopian Women, a small local organization that fought against the unjust execution of Black men who had been falsely charged with raping white women; it was also devoted to welfare rights and community assistance.

The peripatetic Moore traveled across the US, maintaining a global Pan-Africanist mindset all the while. When she returned to Harlem in 1964, she became president of The World Federation of African People; its goal was to establish a Black nation in the US that, according to Moore, would be ‘the only place in the US where Americans of African descent will be really free.’

Surprisingly, the place Moore selected as the site of the Federation’s separate and safe haven for Black folks was none other than the Catskill Mountains, in the southeastern region of the state of New York. She purchased land there to build an all-Black town that she envisioned would attract Black folks from around the globe.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Moore attended and spoke at numerous Black Power and African liberation meetings. In March 1968 she helped to form the all-Black Republic of New Africa, and became more fully engaged in the reparations movement. Having brought the reparations issue before the United Nations and other international human rights organizations in 1957 and again in 1959, Moore and others sought to draw broad-based attention to African and African-descended peoples’ demands for economic compensation and public reprimands for the involuntary migration, enslavement, and physical and sexual violations of Black bodies. The Reparations movement, as historian Martha Bondi rightfully proclaims, helped to ‘revive Black-led global anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist projects, and […] radically intervene[d] in the discourse of globalization.’ Rather than a revival, at least for Moore, however, it was part and parcel of a decades-long and continuous global African liberation engagement and philosophy.

Over her long life as an Black Nationalist activist and thinker, Moore’s solutions to centuries of Black enslavement and oppression

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12 Ibid.
ranged from the formation of independent all-Black country in the US to demands for reparations (in the amount of 200 billion dollars) for centuries of economic, political and human oppression. In 1963, she helped to establish the Reparations Committee of Descendants of US Slaves, calling for repayment of earned wages and benefits from the current American government to the subsequent generations of living Black people whose ancestors had been enslaved in the US. Recognizing the desire on the part of some African Americans to move to Africa, the Reparations Committee also demanded compensation for them as well as for those who wished to remain in the US. She advocated for prisoners’ rights and racial justice as part of her Ethiopian Women’s Association platform in the late 1950s; the organization continued in the 1960s and 1970s. Moore’s dedicated attention to the criminal justice system was not lost on Black prison populations and others who admired her for her struggles ‘all around the Black world.’ In 1973, she was invited to give a speech at the New York’s Greenhaven Correctional Facility.¹³

Throughout her political activist life, Moore viewed segregation and anti-Black racism in the US, and global colonial denomination in Africa and the Caribbean, as intertwining sites of oppression, indeed, as two sides of the same coin. In keeping with their Pan-African sentiments a number of African Americans were influenced by her, and decided to relocate to the continent of Africa — but not Moore. She moved to Philadelphia, where she enlarged her reparations movement by calling not for a ‘Back to Africa’ movement but rather for the United States to be divided into ‘separate Euro-American and African-descendent states’ and for the United States government to pay ‘reparations to the African-descendent government in the amount of five hundred trillion dollars.’¹⁴

No longer in the Catskills, Moore and her cohort of other Black nationalists worked to establish the ‘New Republic of Afrika,’ a separate nation of Black citizens that would be comprised of five Southern states: Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Georgia. The newly formed nation would be supported by reparations money. As a nod to her global vision and travels, Moore was appointed

¹³ ‘Queen Mother Moore’, p. 51.
¹⁴ See Cheryl Gilkes interview with Audley (Queen Mother) Moore, BWOH, Schlesinger Library.
the New Republic’s Minister of Foreign Relations and Culture. At its 1969 meeting in Detroit, she became the organization’s vice president.\textsuperscript{15}

Although it never materialized, the New Republic of Afrika reflected Moore’s deeply held and persistent global Pan-Africanist thinking and activism, resulting in her becoming an iconic Pan-Africanist global citizen in the US and in Africa in the 1960s and early 1970s. I was among her admirers and was honored to meet her for the first time at the Black Power Conference hosted in Atlanta, Georgia in 1970, and attended by Amiri Baraka, Louis Farrakhan and Julian Bond along with hundreds of other civil rights movement activists.

While never a major figure in feminist organizations as such, with the exception of the short-lived Sojourners for Truth and Justice, Moore lived her life as a self-determined feminist and activist within largely Black male patriarchal spaces and movements. In them, she inextricably linked Black feminism and Black liberation struggles. Clearly serving as an example that women should no longer be confined to supporter roles or to that of the occasional speaker in public or private political or leadership activities, Moore averred that Black women, whether born in the US, on the African continent, or elsewhere in its diaspora, were essential to the development of a Pan-African Alliance and to women’s global unity. Within intellectual and political contexts Moore was greatly admired, both as emblematic of Black women’s grassroots activism and in her constant movement and engagement as a ‘life-long activist’ and champion for global citizenship at home (US) and abroad in Africa or its diaspora. She often accepted invitations to be among the featured speakers at African and African-American political gatherings (some of these were women’s gatherings, but they were predominantly male), including the 1995 Million Man March.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid. In his study of the ‘Sojourners for Truth and Justice,’ a progressive Black feminists’ organization that was formed in 1951 with a social justice agenda, historian Erik McDuffie says the Sojourners fully recognized ‘the intersectional, systemic nature of African American women’s oppression and understood their struggle for dignity and freedom in global terms.’ See McDuffie, ‘A “New Freedom Movement of Negro Women”: Sojourning for Truth, Justice, and Human Rights during the Early Cold War,’ \textit{Radical History Review}, 101 (2008), 82. Also consult McDuffie \textit{Sojourning for Freedom}. Moore was not alone; as McDuffie, Carole Boyce Davies and a few other scholars have documented, there were other Black women activists whose global travel and political/cultural engagements extended from Harlem and elsewhere
Some contemporary feminists have questioned Moore’s feminist credentials, based upon her appearance at the Million Man March and her failure to publically critique and criticize Black patriarchy. This evaluation has been made despite the fact that Moore for decades brought not only the ‘Woman’s Question,’ but female engagement to diasporic groups through her life-long activism and speeches. There was little doubt that she clearly believed women should and did play critical roles in Black nation-building and Black Nationalist struggles. In addition to attending ceremonies and delivering speeches at women’s meetings in various West African nations, a consistent part of Moore’s long history of global vision and activism was her renewed attempts to establish an all-Black homeland in the US, a nation in which she would be one of many Black women (and men) leaders.

Audley E. Moore, Queen Mother Moore, a woman who migrated around the world, taking her Pan-Africanist and activist engagement across the US and back and forth across the Atlantic Ocean, was greatly admired for her courage, dedication, and commitment to African liberation and Black Nationalist causes. For that, she deserves serious scholarly attention. I join Ashley Farmer, Erik McDuffie, Carole Boyce Davies, Keisha Blain and others, all speaking out against the historical erasure of Moore. There are so many other activist women in the fine scholarship that focuses on Pan-Africanism, leftist internationalism, and migration studies; Moore belongs among that group. The New York University’s Florence workshop in 2017, from which this volume grew, provided a much-needed counter-narrative to the body of dominant male-centered movement and immigration histories and visual representations, locally and globally. This essay, like the organizers of and participants at the Florence meeting, aligns with Moore’s assertion that we, like her, ‘don’t pay those borders no mind at all’ when framing our visions of who can serve as examples for activism and political engagement.

Bibliography


