

“We’re Out Here”: Black Identity and Digital Resistance in Instagram Travelogues

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Throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Black individuals and communities have used the media available to them to articulate the phenomenon of Black travel. Following the path set when Victor Hugo Green’s first edition of The Negro Motorist Green Book was first published in 1936, today’s Black social media influencers and consumers continue to assert Black travel movements in the digital realm, creating arresting imagery that asserts their presence in a multi-million-dollar industry that largely ignores Black leisure travel. This article examines how two popular Black travel influencers, Jessica Nabongo and Oneika Raymond, use the social networking site Instagram to challenge erroneous beliefs about Black travel in a cultural paradigm where Black people are frequently disregarded in domestic and global travel markets. These influencers affirm and defend their place in the travel-sphere, exposing how racial politics inform the travel industry’s continued ignoring of Black travelers. The article argues that these Black travel activists and their Instagram content, chiefly photographs, combat what I call the ‘white travel imaginary’, facilitates the survival of Black representation in the travel-sphere, and provide new means for exploring how Blackness signifies and is interpreted, and how racist erasure is contested in online spaces.

Introduction

On January 9, 2018, travel influencer Jessica Nabongo took to her Instagram account @thecatchmeifyoucan to inform her nearly 22,000 followers that Four Seasons Hotels had denied her request for a complimentary stay in their resort in St. Kitts and Nevis. Nabongo, a frequent traveler who operates the travel agency Global Jet Black, often partners with travel brands, especially hotels, resorts, and hotel chains, to provide advice and services to her clients and growing social media network. The reason she was denied the complimentary stay sparked social media conversations about racism in the travel industry. In a January 5th email to Nabongo, the Nevis hotel’s management team stated that her “demographic was not in line with [their] brand” (Nabongo, 2018). A later email, also posted on Instagram, stated that while the management team believed her “photography is beautiful and may speak to the aspirational traveler” it was “not reaching a luxury brand clientele which is in line with our brand” (2018).

Nabongo, her Instagram followers, and others in her digital media orbit (including her nearly 1,300 Twitter followers at the time) responded with a swift #noseasons. They perceived the Four Seasons response to be the snub of a woman who, by December of 2017, had traveled to 106 countries¹. By the time of the seeming slight, Nabongo had been featured in *Bloomberg* and *Conde Nast Traveler*, in addition to owning and operating a boutique travel firm focusing on encouraging African diaspora tourism. Not only did Nabongo’s orbit consider the Four Seasons response as the marginalization of a woman who has been an outspoken critic of the lack of diversity in the travel industry, including travel media, it was also perceived to be a rebuff of Black travelers in general, a consumer group the hotel brand did not seem to associate with luxury. The conversation around Nabongo’s experience resulted in nearly 500 Instagram comments within two days.

Nabongo’s digital battle with the Four Seasons represents the travel industry’s abject lack of recognition of Black global travel, as well as the view of some in the industry that Black people and luxury are not synonymous terms. Within days of Nabongo’s Instagram posts about the Four Seasons, award winning blogger and Travel Channel digital host Oneika Raymond used her Instagram account to discuss her effort to highlight the phenomenon of Black travel. She powerfully stated (with well-placed emoti-cons), “Black □ people □ do □ travel! Contrary to popular belief (and mainstream travel media,

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which rarely features us)" (Oneikatraveller, 2018a). This post is one of many that tackles the inherent whiteness of the travel industry and travel media. Though she does not reveal instances of brand discrimination, Raymond frequently reveals her brushes with racism, especially while traveling with her white German husband. Both Raymond and Nabongo seek to change and expose the largely white face of "mainstream travel", thereby illuminating the efforts of Black travelers taking planes, trains, and automobiles every year to explore the globe.

This study examines how Nabongo and Raymond use the social networking site Instagram to challenge erroneous beliefs about Black travel in a cultural paradigm where Black people are routinely dismissed in domestic and global travel markets. These influencers use Instagram to affirm and defend their place in the travel-sphere, exposing the quotidian nature of racial politics that inform the travel industry's refusal to notice or acknowledge Black travelers. Studying Black digital travelogues presents, especially in the relatively new realm of Instagram research, an opportunity to explore Instagram consumers and consumption practices and its place within the contemporary socio-cultural and socio-political environment. Through photograph posts – their primary type of content – on the Instagram platform, Nabongo and Raymond reveal the ways racial assumptions affect life for Black people, even the seemingly innocuous processes of vacationing. They tackle what I call the 'white travel imaginary', a physical, ontological, and epistemological spreadable media fantasy that routinely erases Black travel and continuously reinforces the erroneous notion that the world-wide travel industry, including travel media, is an inherently white enterprise. Employing critical technocultural discourse analysis (CTDA) as a methodological tool to explore how cultural and racial ideologies circulate within digital spaces, this study ultimately argues that these Black travelers and photo posts within Instagram provide new means for exploring Black digital resistance, articulating how Blackness signifies and is interpreted in the digisphere, and examining how racial stereotypes are contested in online spaces, particularly social networking sites (SNSs).

The White Travel Imaginary, Place Myths, and Invisible Blackness

Racial assumptions about Black immobility that lack socio-historical, cultural, and political nuance is largely to blame for the avoidance of Black travelers. Whiteness is the standard within the travel industry, including travel media. Ben Groundwater (2017) poignantly notes in a blog post, "All those smiley, happy bloggers and influencers...they're incredibly privileged. They're selling a dream, but the ability to live that dream has nothing to do with their hard work or brave decision-making. It's the good fortune of the incredibly privileged". Groundwater's primary question "Is the travel community 'too white'?" is a non-question for many Black travelers. Farai Chideya (2014) notes that racial stereotypes contribute to travel brands steering "clear of targeting African-American travelers". A late 2017 DigitasLBI and Harris Poll survey found that there are nearly five million Black travelers in the United States; 94-percent of them had taken a trip in the last two years and 76-percent had traveled in the six months prior to the study (Haddad, 2017). Additionally, 72-percent of respondents noted that they are more likely to book with brands that acknowledge their racial/ethnic identity (Haddad, 2017). Thus, Black travel influencers are educating the industry about Black travelers. Not only are these influencers and companies offering advice for potential and seasoned travelers and in many cases organizing affordable opportunities to visit different locations for those with limited budgets, these travel companies are among an expanding cadre of individuals and organizations creating online and offline networks of Black travelers using SNSs to document global migration.

The founder of *Nomadness Travel Tribe* Evita Robinson contends that "...the same travel industry that this community loves, that it has built businesses and relationships within, and kicked down doors for, has in many respects ignored us. This is the living truth for travelers of color" (2018). This ignoring of travelers of color fosters what I call the 'white travel imaginary'. The Instagram accounts they establish and their content are designed to oppose racism against Black travelers and combat the erasure of Black people who regularly travel. Thus, theorizing the white travel imaginary affords the scaffolding upon which scholars interested in studying how systems of (bio)power and representation manipulate an

industry not immediately associated with sustained racial and sociocultural critique. Though the white travel imaginary is an abject racist illusion, members of the travel industry and travel media actively maintain it, transforming it into a magic eraser working hard to keep the desktop, laptop, tablet, mobile phone, and even the television and film screens devoted to travel narratives as white as possible. To explicate the rhetorical machinations of the white travel imaginary and its role in proliferating neocolonialism one visual at a time, I first apply basic concepts from George Lipsitz's (2011) theory of the "white spatial imaginary". The white spatial imaginary consists of physical spaces grounded in exclusivity and emerges from both the embodied identities of white people "inscribed in the physical contours of places where [they] live, work, and play" (2011, p. 28). According to Lipsitz, the white spatial imaginary structures feelings as well as social institutions...idealizes "pure" and homogenous spaces, controlled environments, and predictable patterns of design and behavior. It seeks to hide social problems rather than solve them. The white spatial imaginary promotes the quest for individual escape rather than encouraging democratic deliberations about the social problems and contradictory social relations that affect us all (2011). While this theory centers mainly on the racialization or whitewashing of urban and suburban spaces, it suitably enables tools for exposing how the travel industry is situated in whiteness.

Travel is considered a means by which white actors play, often in spaces where they are mostly surrounded by other white travelers. The white travel imaginary "promotes the quest for individual escape" (Lipsitz, 2011, p. 29) rather than challenging the sociocultural and racial problems inherent within the travel industry. It works to define travel, especially global travel, as a homogenous and even pure space of whiteness. It is physical; it consists of nations, cities, and tourist sites in Africa, Europe, Asia, Latin and South America, the Middle East, as well as other spaces where travel media glossily positions images of happy and cultured white sojourners. It is ontological; it focuses on the travel identities and experiences of white travelers to the relegation or outright exclusion of others. It is epistemological; it centers the expertise of white jetsetters who do not recognize their own or the industry's inherent bias and perpetuates the belief that traveling the world is mainly, if not solely, for white bodies with the cultural, economic, and social capital to do so.

Additionally, the white travel imaginary is technological; in fact, it can be considered a technology in two distinct ways, as a practice and as artifacts which enable the practice. As a practice, the white travel imaginary consists of systems, schemas, and processes used in the production of goods, services, ideas, etc., to accomplish specific sets of objectives, typically the promotion of locations, activities, and people engaging in travel. As artifacts, the white travel imaginary is a collection of devices, machines, and digital and/or physical objects, such as television, print media, the Internet, SNSs, and photography used to promote locations, activities, and people engaging in travel.

The physical, ontological, epistemological, and technological constructs of the white travel imaginary allow for assessment of the hegemonic "place images" or "place myths" often attached to a variety of locations and people in the white travel imaginary. As Rob Shields (1991) notes, place images are the "varied discrete meanings associated with real places or regions regardless of their character in reality" (p. 60). Shields asserts that place images are the result of stereotyping or the over-simplification of a place or group of places within a region. Consequently, a collection of place images forms a place myth. While "opposed groups may succeed in generating antithetical place myths" related to class and cultural expression, the antithetical sets of place images within a place myth are often:

...taken up in hegemonic discourses and re-worked by commercial advertising and propaganda...which reinforces certain images just by repeating them and assimilating them to what is considered desirable while discouraging others. While some elements of spatiality – such as gesture, or attitudes about the appropriateness of sites to particular uses – might be correlated with ethnicity, age, gender, and socio-economic classes, spatialization must, to some extent, cross class, ethnic and even 'cultural' lines in the form of basic perceptions and orientations to the world if there is to be a maintenance of a basic sociability between these groups (1991, p. 61-62).

In other words, resistance to certain place myths is frequently a futile undertaking because social progression and sociability are dependent upon the role place myths perform in a society's understanding of different spaces *and the people who travel to those spaces*. While various marginalized groups and

individuals – like the travel influencers studied here – may actively oppose the hegemonic obfuscation of their travel identities, pervasive messaging routinely renders their resistance moot and props up the proverbial narratives of the place images and place myths, and the discourses of those who routinely travel to these places as was the case in Nabongo's incident with the Four Seasons in St. Kitts and Nevis. As such, the white travel imaginary is what Jenkins, Ford, and Green (2003) would call spreadable media, a phenomenon which exists within a participatory culture where users are not passive consumers of media, including themselves. Jenkins et al. note that consumers and the media they use symbiotically interact "within larger communities and networks, which allow [users] to spread content well beyond their immediate geographic proximity" (p. 2). Ultimately, the white travel imaginary consists of global locations, travel brands, various companies, and people working with artifacts – namely photographs – inside travel media ecosystems that ideologically fuse travel with whiteness.

Travel writer Elizabeth Aldrich (2017) has likened travel media whiteness to colonization, stating, "...why are white people and people from the Global North the loudest voice and most prominent authority on brown countries and cultures from the Global South?...We need to decolonize travel writing and travel culture, and we need to do it now". Strikingly, Aldrich and Groundwater are white travel writers probing their privilege to ask poignant questions of fellow white travelers. Groundwater says, "...most Instagrammers and bloggers – the faces that travel brands like to attach themselves to – are white and privileged. There's little chance of this changing" (2017). The Black influencers studied here would disagree. As Raymond has stated, "I want to literally and figuratively help change the face of 'mainstream travel', so that black people know that they, too, can go out and travel the world for leisure, education, and to 'find themselves'...Diversity and representation matter and I'm intent on showing that WE'RE OUT HERE" (Oneikatraveller, 2018a). Ultimately, SNSs like Instagram offer space in the digi-sphere where the visual narratives within Black travelogues contradict the white travel imaginary. Resistance within Nabongo and Raymond's Instagram travelogues is unambiguous; their accounts become active spreadable media designed to defy the whiteness of the media within the white travel imaginary.

Instagram and Black Travel Networks

In a post dated December 30, 2018, Raymond stands before the African Renaissance Monument in Dakar, Senegal; her red dress is in stark contrast to the earthy brown and green colors in the statues of a woman, child, and man. The caption states, "How many African nations can you name that *aren't* Egypt, Morocco, South Africa, Kenya, or Tanzania? Such a rich continent of 54 countries and yet we tend to visit/talk about the same ones over and over" (Oneikatraveller, 2018f). Raymond's post and caption are a subtle indictment of two phenomenon: the travel industry's intentional disregard of the African continent and travelers' continued ignoring of the African continent. She goes on to state, "Africa is not the problem our perception of it is. The only way to change the single story of the African continent is by seeing it and experiencing it differently" (2018f). This post is a prime example of how the travel influencers studied here employ the Instagram interface to defy ideologies and spark conversations about a place that has been consistently overlooked in the travel-sphere. Thus, Instagram and the visual narratives it supports become apparatuses of resistance and re-education, a digital space for contesting images, ideas, and myths about a place.

Currently boasting over one billion plus monthly active posts, over 500 million daily active posts, and over 400 million daily Stories activities (Instagram, 2019), Instagram is one of the most popular social networking platforms in the world. Despite its popularity, the quantity of research on Instagram is limited when compared to studies of other social networking sites like Twitter and Facebook (Laestadius, 2017). Research exploring racial representation on Instagram is in its nascent stage, though some has analyzed self-representation (Curtis, 2015; Tanksley, 2016); hip hop identity (Mosley, Abreu, Ruderman, & Crowell, 2017); and, Black and Latinx athletes and representation (Chawanksy, 2016; Hull, Kim, & Stilwell, 2018). Scholars, like Nakamura (2002, 2007), Dinerstein (2006), and Everett (2009) have asserted that access to and the utilization of technology, particularly the Internet, has long been associated with whiteness, power, and privilege. Dinerstein argues:

Technological progress has long structured Euro-American identity...Here is the techno-cultural matrix: progress, religion, whiteness, modernity, masculinity, the future. This matrix reproduces an assumed superiority over societies perceived as static, primitive, passive, Communist, terrorist, or fundamentalist (p. 571).

Black travelers' identity assertions within the digital realm are evolving processes of self-formation and meaning-making, designed to topple the matrix often associated with technological progress and prowess. Thus, attention should be paid to the visual manifestations of race and Blackness on Instagram. Visual narratives are told with each Instagram post and are potentially layered and loaded with multiple meanings. Instagram allows for critical discourse *and* visual analysis within a platform that also permits a cultural-technocultural study of race and racial ideologies.

It is for this reason that the relatively new mode of digital media analysis critical technocultural discourse analysis (CTDA) is an apt methodological tool for studying the intersection of Blackness and Instagram. CTDA allows for the examination of "the interactions between technology, cultural ideology, and technology practice" inside a critical cultural framework that looks not only at the signs and symbols in the information and communication technology, but also examines those within the socio-cultural discourse of the examined group (Brock, 2018, p. 1014). Uniquely, CTDA provides researchers the tools to combine qualitative methodology with the cultural theory best suited for studying the represented group and technology. Visual analysis, technocultural analysis, and critical race theory along with theories of racialized space and representation are combined here to analyze the phenomenon of Black travel influencers' Instagram use. The Instagram interface allows users to signify their identities and interests in several ways, from the user's profile photo or logo to their profile bio and the photos, videos, memes, gifs, captions, and hashtags posted in their main account feed, geotagging, live broadcasting, the Stories feature (which allows users to post content that disappears within 24 hours), and the recently released IGTV feature (designed to act and feel like YouTube). Therefore, a CTDA approach to studying Black travel influencers' Instagram efforts to oppose effacement in the digital realm include analysis of: 1) the Instagram interface, its design and features, and how subscribers use the technology within the platform to craft, distribute, and/or reproduce unique narratives; 2) digital practices of users, or how Instagram subscribers employ the platform to articulate their identities; and, 3) the ideologies the technology personifies, reifies, and/or negates through user participation and interaction.

For example, analysis of the December 30, 2018 @oneikatraveller post mentioned above using CTDA would include: 1) how Raymond used the Instagram interface to posit a message; 2) how she used Instagram to craft her identity as a traveler (and travel influencer) and communicate with other travelers in the platform; and, 3) the ideologies she negates and the responses to that negation from other Instagram users. Therefore, a CTDA approach to studying the phenomenon that Nabongo and Raymond represent, would articulate that the photograph of Raymond before the African Renaissance Museum wearing a color associated in pan-Africanism as the blood that unites all people of African descent and the redemption and liberation that comes with shedding blood for a cause (McGuire, Harvey, & Universal Negro Improvement Association, 1921) is her way of connecting herself (a Canadian of Jamaican origin who currently lives in the United States) to her African heritage. The photo and the message within the caption serve to separate Raymond from travelers who have not or do not explore the richness of the African continent and its nations beyond those that are visited or talked about "over and over." Intrinsically, the photo, caption, 4,211 likes, and 316 comments question and dismiss the logic (ideology) that the African continent has nothing to offer beyond the five nations mentioned in the post. CTDA's multilayered methodological approach suitably captures technology, performance, and understandings within a kinetic data set that refuses simplistic explications of digital interfaces and their connection to the dogmas within various modes of marginalization and oppression.

Thus, for this CTDA focused study, I concentrated on content from @thecatchmeifyoucan and @oneikatraveller with two interrelated questions: How do Nabongo and Raymond use Instagram to combat the lack of Black travelers in the travel industry/travel media, thereby challenging the white travel imaginary and its place myths? How does the Instagram platform enable Black travelers' resistance

narratives to emerge? Overall, @oneikatraveller has 81,800 followers and 2,029 posts included in the account while @thecatchmeifyoucan possesses 123,000 followers with 2,421 posts (as of August 31, 2019). To study how the above accounts/influencers use Instagram platform features to assert Black travel, I examined 1) types of media posted – photographs, videos, memes, other images (N=4,450); 2) captions and hashtags included with the media; and, 3) user participation through likes, comments, and sharing posts with other users. These three spheres of analysis explicate CTDA's primary modes of unpacking techno-cultural routines and praxes: interface = media posted; practice = captions and hashtags; and, ideology = participation.

Cursory analysis of the accounts revealed that the influencers primarily post photographs. Therefore, I chose to focus the analysis on photos; captions and hashtags; and, likes and comments for the photos. This led to a total of 4,199 photo posts with 2,261 included in @thecatchmeifyoucan and 1,938 in @oneikatraveller. I randomly selected 100 photo posts, 50 from each account, posted between January 2017 and December 2018, a period when the influencers began receiving increased mainstream press attention. This attention included Raymond's hiring as a *Travel Channel* digital host and Nabongo's announcement that she is endeavoring to become the first Black woman to visit all 195 United Nations recognized nations. CTDA's three spheres of analysis enabled twelve distinct categories for coding to emerge. Interface analysis rendered five categories: selfies, portraits of the influencer, landscape images, cityscape photos, and food and drink photos. User practice analysis engendered four categories: captions about racism and travel, captions encouraging Black travel, hashtags signifying race and travel, and inspirational travel hashtags. Analysis of how ideologies are decoded in posts rendered three categories: number of likes, number of comments, and comments content. Posts were analyzed to determine how the photos, captions, hashtags, and comments within the posts signified race, Black mobility, and resistance. Primarily, the goal of the analysis was to determine how these Black traveler accounts/influencers manipulate Instagram's platform to self-define their travel experiences.

Land/Cityscape Shots and Portraits: The Power of the Interface

Of the elements examined within @thecatchmeifyoucan and @oneikatraveller, the photographs the influencers consistently use work hardest to combat the white travel imaginary and its incumbent place myths. Three prominent types of photos emerge upon close inspection of 100 sample posts: portraits of the influencer, landscapes, and cityscapes. Here, portraits of the influencer (N=62) are considered photographs of the influencer posing in various global locations. Landscape and cityscape photos are images of natural areas, city streets, people, architecture, and monuments that do not feature the influencer. They are combined here (N=28) because their epistemological and ontological function within the accounts are essentially the same, to show a location, its culture, and its people from the influencers' unique points of view, thereby rebelling against place myths about who actively spends time in a place.

Table 1. Portraits and Landscapes/Cityscapes Across Accounts

Account (as of 8/31/19)	Total Number of Posts	Total Number of Portraits	Total Number of Land & Cityscape Posts	Portraits in Random Sample	Land & Cityscape Posts in Random Sample
@oneikatraveller	1,938	833	563	30	16
@thecatchmeifyoucan	2,154	1,167	244	32	12

It would be simple to assert that these photographs are little more than Instagram humble brags or pretensions; however, recent research on Instagram, self-presentation, and narcissism (Matley, 2018; Sheldon and Bryant, 2016) notes that SNSs can be "sites of self-presentation and identity negotiation" (Papacharissi, 2011, p. 304) with interfaces that enable the crafting and promotion of identity, including (but not limited to) boastful and arrogant behavior. However, Matley argues that positive self-disclosure

is “presented as mere information-sharing, but which is positively connoted in a particular community” (p. 31). Thus, a more nuanced interpretation of Nabongo’s and Raymond’s online activities must consider how the influencer’s Instagram epistemology emphasizes the combative nature of their movements and desire to breakdown myths associated with places and who travels to those places. By posting portraits in different global locations, Nabongo and Raymond offer a positive visual proclamation about inclusion and visibility. Their posts highlight that travel, both global and domestic, can be acts of self-love and self-expression within an industry that does not often acknowledge Black presence, thereby challenging the white travel imaginary and its place myths. Their photos of themselves in specific travel moments offer stories of exposure, exchange, and gaining lived experience their followers can also receive. The photos’ social capital supports digital bonding (Putnam, 2000) between these influencers, their content, and their consumers, essentially providing “emotional kinship, trust, and social support” (Phua, Jin, and Kim, 2017, p. 116) rooted in the desire to strategically convey the cultural muscle of Black global movements. The vital messages the photos send is “We’re out here and you can be or are out here too.”

Land/cityscape photographs and influencer portraits convey these ideas through active opposition to place myths. With this content, the accounts/influencers tackle the stereotypes or falsehoods within place myths, share their own ideas about a place, and offer information based on what they have learned during their travel experiences. For example, Raymond stated in a June 2018 post about Mexico City, “Personally, I think the idea that Mexico is dangerous is very overexaggerated and overblown, especially when you live in the US, where gun violence is a near-daily occurrence □” (Oneikatraveller, 2018d). Nabongo noted in 2018 about Uzbekistan, a Central Asian travel site firmly rooted in the white travel imaginary not consistently associated with desired travel destinations, “The patterns and textures of Uzbekistan are sublime. Whether it is the ceramics, fabrics, traditional clothing, or domes of some of the most beautiful mosques [I] have ever seen” (TheCatchMeIfYouCan, 2018b). The influencers do not utilize these photos as pretty pictures to gawk at and/or envy. Land/cityscape shots and portraits resist the fallacy of incorrect narratives about a place, provide new narratives through the influencers’ points of view, and spurn ideas about Black travel immobility. Most importantly, the photos and the locations within them flout the white travel imaginary, asserting Black presence in various places to flip the abject racial ideology script. Landscape and cityscape photos, influencer portraits, and the captions that accompany the photographs and portraits are active defiance to pejorative and absent narratives about Black travelers. As such, they disrupt the place myths within the epistemological white travel imaginary and dislocate the physical white travel imaginary.

Captioning and Hashtagging Resistance: The Ontologies of Digital Practices

Captions and hashtags for the media posted in the accounts are another tool Nabongo and Raymond employ to resist the white travel imaginary. The social capital and positive self-disclosure within photos, captions, and hashtags increase the influencers’ likability and even make them relatable to Instagram audiences. Specifically, captions and hashtags share information about the location, the influencers, and their experiences, ultimately revealing the ontologies of their traveling selves to those perusing the accounts. Notably, Nabongo and Raymond use the platform to discuss the politics of anti-Blackness and the ways of being those politics create around the world. In early 2018, the influencers openly discussed their experiences in Haiti, using their Instagram captions to denounce Donald Trump’s racism and xenophobia rooted in place myths. Nabongo stated, “Just luxuriating in one of my favorite shithole countries” and included the hashtags #catchmeinhaiti and #catchmeinashithole (TheCatchMeIfYouCan, 2018a). Similarly, Raymond noted:

Mention Haiti to most people and they’ll likely conjure up images of strife and devastation. But while the island nation’s had its troubles, it’s so much more than the single story of suffering the media is quick to promote...read my five reasons you should make Haiti your next vacay destination (ignorant remarks from a certain world leader notwithstanding). (Oneikatraveller, 2018c)

Using their platforms to discuss immigration geopolitics, Nabongo and Raymond stress an issue not immediately associated with tourism. Not only do they defend their travel to Haiti, they assert why others should not buy place myths associated with the nation and ultimately eliminate it from their list of travel destinations. Consequently, these posts assert myriad ways of gazing upon and studying how cultural expressions manifest and proliferate in contemporary society. In this way, Nabongo and Raymond not only highlight racism in global geopolitics, but also the ways racist place myths can impact how travelers perceive certain global locales. Nabongo's hashtag, #catchmeinashithole, is another powerful signifier; her account name @thecatchmeifyoucan speaks to her frequent transnational movements and her desire for Instagram users to 'catch' or watch her visit different places. Catching Nabongo in Haiti means exploring all the ways the nation is not a shit hole and a way to contest what Raymond contends is the "single story of suffering the media is quick to promote" (Oneikatraveller, 2018c). The hashtag is "not simply a confluence of text, hypertext, symbols," (Conley, 2017, p. 23) and random meanings; it is a commanding statement about how racist dialogues about travel sites with majority Black populations flourish and prevent travelers from considering them as leisure destinations. As such, #catchmeinashithole in Nabongo's post about Trump's Haiti comments fiercely defies the ontological white travel imaginary, striking perceptions that keep it afloat.

The Command of the Like: Spreading Ideologies

Perception is also an important consideration for Nabongo and Raymond as their accounts can generate high user participation through likes, comments, or reposting. Nabongo's encounter with the Four Seasons in 2018 generated over 500 comments within two days. Comments facilitate discussions between different users and with the influencer. Despite researchers' claims that Instagram is not a platform that fosters reciprocal interpersonal relationships (Sheldon and Bryant, 2016; Jackson and Luchner, 2017), Nabongo and Raymond often ask questions in their captions to spark conversations about racial identity, racism, and travel. Users are not shy about responding to the influencers or to other users. Raymond's post about Haiti garnered 92 comments; 17 of which are part of conversations she had with followers. One follower thanked the influencer for featuring her parent's homeland, saying "I haven't been back since 2001. Can't wait to e-visit Haiti through your site" (Oneikatraveller, 2018c). As Raymond's caption suggests, a place like Haiti is not readily included within the white travel imaginary. However, Raymond and Nabongo reclaim and proclaim that the "shithole" country is a viable and desirable vacation destination. Their posts clouded pervasive ideologies about Haiti, disordering the white travel imaginary physically, ontologically, and epistemologically both with their content and the sheer number of likes and comments they received.

Connectivity and resistance through 'likes' are the most common forms of participation across the accounts. Raymond's Haiti post has received 2,908 likes. Nabongo's Haiti post has received 3,116 likes. On average, @thecatchmeifyoucan and @oneikatraveller posts can receive likes in the thousands (as the above posts attest). Just as it would be facile to assert that the posts 'show off' or 'humble brag,' it would be equally glib to assume that most of those who actively peruse the accounts passively click the heart within the platform based solely on the media content (photo, meme, video, etc.). Quite often, they are engaging with the total post (media, caption, comments) before liking the post. Clicking the heart to like a post within Instagram is a way of acknowledging, agreeing with, and appreciating users' content. Nabongo and Raymond's followers are Instagram users who are "shaping, sharing, reframing, and remixing" (Jenkins et al., 2013, p. 2) their personal media product(ion)s on a platform that allows them to publicly speak about the issues that affect their movements.

Raymond often posts about traveling with her white German husband and how his privilege makes him ignorant of traveling while Black. One post poignantly articulates how she is perceived differently in airports, stores and restaurants, etc., compared with her husband. She laments, "He's treated with respect, and even reverence, in situations where I myself have elicited insolence, ignorance, and/or suspicion...I sometimes hold my tongue for fear of being stereotyped as 'the angry black woman'" (Oneikatraveller, 2018e). Since September 2018, this post has garnered 4,181 likes and 242 comments in which users either agree with Raymond's statements or thank her for sharing an experience like their

own. One follower noted, “I’m also extra polite in places where there are little to no black travellers for fear of being accused, but as we travel more, we’ll normalise it around the □ that black people travel too” (2018e). In this context, liking and commenting on a post is a way of showing solidarity; digitally ‘snapping,’ clapping, or nodding to concur with the post; and, informing the influencer that their content has touched them. Liking and commenting can also be a means, especially within the Black travel communities these influencers have created all working toward toppling the white travel imaginary, to say “Your journey is my journey. We’re definitely out here...with you!”

Conclusion

In January or February 2018, Nabongo removed the Instagram feud with Four Seasons hotel and resort chain from her @thecatchmeifyoucan account. No further mention of the incident is present on the platform. It is difficult to speculate as to why Nabongo deleted the exchange from Instagram, however a retelling of the incident can be found on *Medium.com*. What is clear from Nabongo’s experience and her relaying of it in *Medium.com* and Instagram is that her response to the slight was *not* the knee jerk reaction of someone who did not get her way; it was a method for exposing conspicuous racism within the white travel imaginary. As Nabongo stated in a post that was taken down, “We have got to...tell these brands that we won’t stand for them making us invisible,” (2018). Nabongo’s Instagram protest resulted in an apology from the Four Seasons corporate office. Though it states that the brand did not support the choice of words the Nevis employee used to describe Nabongo’s followers and recognizes “that there is much more that we can do to ensure that we are better representing our diverse guest base,” Nabongo made clear that the issue had not been resolved (2018). She responded, “...I am interested to know what your plans are for ensuring better representation of your diverse customer base, specifically on social channels” (2018). As mentioned, these posts had disappeared from Instagram by early March 2018, but the story of her Four Seasons experience on *Medium.com* has received 3,300 ‘claps’ (likes).

Consequently, Jessica Nabongo and Oneika Raymond have dedicated their young careers to calling out Black traveler erasure. The privileging of white travelers contributes to maintaining the white travel imaginary in social networking sites. As Elizabeth Aldrich (2017) states, the “travel industry is sorely lacking dialogue, self-awareness, and critique. It is lacking in diversity, in inclusivity, and in fucks given”. Essentially, Aldrich chastises those who are not self-reflexive and whose privilege affords them the multiple opportunities not to consider the sociocultural issues and history of racism that infect global leisure migration. She eventually began to boycott travel bloggers until there is more diversity within the industry. This travel influencers’ stance was bold and draws attention to what Nabongo and Raymond are seeking to upend, a homogenous travel sphere that fails to recognize the presence of Black travelers. Raymond has stated “when travel media is flooded with more visible minorities from different walks of life, we normalize [people of color] in the travel space” (2017). She and Nabongo are marshalling in a new age of Black travel media and representation. Digital spaces, namely Instagram, have become sites of resisting racist assumptions about Black travel and a way to reach current and aspirational travelers who are consistently dismissed or ignored altogether.

Accordingly, Instagram is a powerful tool for Black travel influencers to change the largely white face of the travel world, especially Internet and SNS based travel media. Nabongo’s SNS use to ‘school’ the Four Seasons about the presence of Black travelers seeking to explore different locations and (luxury or other) brands around the world was resistance within an industry that may not be immediately associated with sustained social remonstrance. Ultimately, Nabongo and Raymond using Instagram to assert their presence within the global travel industry has enabled them to create and maintain precise methods of representation embedded in digi-cultural and socio-cultural structures that have routinely negated Black presence within an increasingly technocultural society. These influencers know the photo sharing platform is a means to inject a Black cultural frame into travel media that can upset the white travel imaginary. Thus, Instagram is a means for talking back and signifying Blackness to a white travel imaginary that has yet to recognize that “we’re out here.”

Notes

1. As of October 2019, Nabongo has visited all 195 United Nations recognized nations, making her the first Black woman to do so.

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