

RACE IN THE TRAVEL INDUSTRY: THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

By: Caroline Stratos

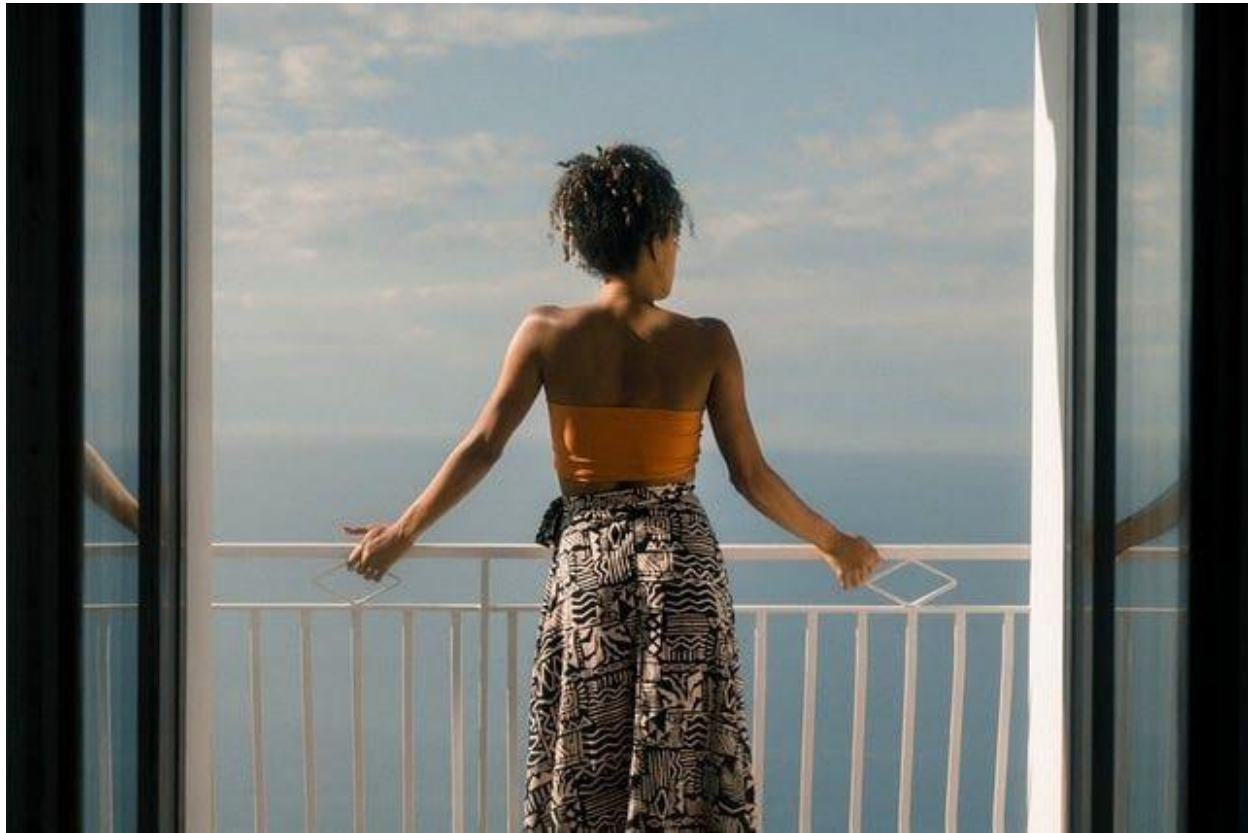


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Racism in America runs deep, and the wounds are very much still fresh as we have a long way to go to support African-Americans and other POC in our country to where they feel proud and safe to be an American. Especially after the horrendous events that took place this summer, where George Floyd joined the countless Black Americans who have been killed by the hands of law enforcement, the time is more crucial than ever to lift up these Black voices that have been suppressed for so painfully long. As a personal note to the reader, I hope that this story serves as a reminder to continue to lift up Black and Brown voices and never let them get lost in the mix. Our country depends on these conversations to help protect our citizens who are, first and foremost, our brothers and sisters.

TRAVEL EXPERIENCES

Traveling as an African-American, or rather any POC, has its challenges to say the least. Being an African-American in the travel industry is a different beast entirely, as it is an industry dominated by white people and where racism has seeped into many of its moving parts, leaving many African-Americans to feel unwelcome and forcing them to work twice as hard to prove themselves. As Alex Temblador for [TravelPulse](#) puts it, “Racism has been built into the travel industry through a lack of equal opportunity, travel technology, poorly designed customs and immigrations systems, and ignorance about the experiences of people of color.” Thus, there are many obstacles to face when being African-American in the travel industry as the system is quite literally geared against you.

One of the people that has been able to break these boundaries and has made it her mission to normalize Black travel, especially travel amongst Black women, is Nneya Richards. Richards, a Black American travel writer, digital creator, and speaker, has made waves in the travel industry with her content that aims to better involve Black Americans into the travel narrative. Richards has a very keen sense of who she is as a traveler. “I think being a traveler of color, being born and raised in NYC, being American, that’s all part of my travel DNA. I consider myself a global citizen: I have multiple passports but my travel is definitely through the lens of my being a Black New Yorker.”

Nneya views her position in the travel industry as an opportunity. “Travel, as a commercialized industry has historically been dominated by white men. This group was telling the *world’s* story. Cultures of people of color were exotified at best and portrayed as “savages” at worst. Being a traveler of color aids me in gaining *authentic* access in spaces that my white counterparts may not have,” she tells me. Nneya not only feels like she gains authentic access to

these spaces, but she feels as though it is her duty to be an ambassador for Black women travelers in a country where the majority of the people are not POC or not Black. She had an experience volunteering in Cuba before the country opened up where she says that the Cuban people were thrilled to see people that looked like them that were American travelers. Nneya says that the only American faces these Cubans were used to seeing were white. This trip made a large impression on Nneya, as she says she was “lifted” by the empowerment that the Cubans felt after seeing her as a traveler in their country.

As Nneya notes, not all of her travels go down as smoothly as the trip she took to Cuba. A trip to Jaipur, India was a wake-up call for her when she was there to attend her friend’s wedding. Nneya tells me that India was a “perfect example” of envisioning what you think a destination will be like based on what you learn about it from the media and other people that you know who have been there and then having it be a totally different experience than what you were expecting. Nneya recalls that in Jaipur, she had a woman come up to her and start hissing. “The intense racism I felt in India was on such a visceral level that I sullied my trip,” she says. “I went back to our hotel at night asking my partner if he thought there could be an evil black Hindu god because the disgust I got was so real, by people with a similar skin color as me!” Since her time in Jaipur, Nneya has remained curious about these mixed experiences she’s had while traveling and uses it as her motivation to keep sharing these stories. “It makes me want to amplify black voices in the travel community more though,” Nneya concludes.

REPRESENTATION

Some Black travelers, like Greg Gross and Lee Litumbe, started a travel blog to help better represent the Black community and defy preconceived notions about their people and travels after having experienced it themselves. For Greg Gross, founder of the blog [*I’m Black & I*](#)

[Travel](#) and owner of Trips by Greg, the idea for his blog came to him after he came across a Black peer in 2002 that said that she never had the intention of traveling past the city limits of Natchez, Mississippi. This ignited a spark in Greg to get this blog off of the ground, and he later came up with the name of the blog after one of his wife's colleagues asked if he was white after hearing about their European travels. Besides recognizing this need for Black representation in the travel sphere, Greg was inspired by travel from a really young age. He first got the travel bug when he went aboard the Sunset Limited train from New Orleans to California at age five and has been hooked ever since. Now, Greg aims to continue his work in "inspiring more Black Americans to travel" with his blog because he claims that these people have in turn inspired him. With his blog, Greg set out to send the message that Black people can and should travel as he is starting to see that happen right in front of his eyes as the next generation is getting out there and exploring the world.

Another travel blogger by the name of [Lee Litumbe](#), writer of the blog *Spirited Pursuit*, started her blogging career after being fed up by the way that the entire African continent was depicted in Western media. As a Cameroonian-American, Litumbe saw the media portray Africa to be a place that was "poverty-ridden or primitive" without focusing on the thriving entrepreneurial atmosphere in various African cities as much or nearly at all. [Spirited Pursuit](#) was born as a tool for Litumbe to defy these stereotypes, and as she says herself, "To experience her [Africa's] endless offerings firsthand and capture her [Africa's] diverse beauty accurately."

Black travel bloggers can have a harder time with the visibility of their content due to it not being pushed in mainstream media. This is a fact that can extend beyond just the African-American population, as other POC's content can easily be overshadowed by their white counterparts. According to Black travel blogger Tomiko who has a blog called [Passports &](#)

[Grub](#): “Black travel bloggers have to work twice as hard and make sure every damn I is dotted and T is crossed because we will never be on the mainstream list of “Best Travel Blogs” that often leave out multicultural bloggers. By not including Black Travel Bloggers on these coveted “best of” list leads brands and the media to believe that Black people don’t travel, write informative articles, or draw high traffic to their travel blogs which is furthest from the truth.” Without these Black bloggers being on the widely-read “best of” lists, this further pushes the narrative that Black people do not travel as much as white people or nearly at all which is a very misleading idea to put out. This doesn’t necessarily mean that African-Americans blog any less than white people. According to a study conducted by UC Berkeley, [African-Americans blog nearly twice as much as whites](#). There is cause to examine just why this is, however some believe that blogs are a favorable outlet for African-Americans who have been pushed out of [mainstream news media](#). That being said, the problem is not whether or not there’s enough Black travel bloggers in the media world but whether their content is being put on display for the masses.

The visibility of the content of Black bloggers and journalists is not only evident to the bloggers and journalists themselves, but also to the people that they enlist to work on their behalf. [Jennifer Johnson](#), the vice president of Zapwater Communications, is easy to note that there is a clear disparity in the number of Black journalists on the mastheads of major publications and that “...public relations representatives have to advocate even more so on behalf of Black media outlets to convince clients of their value.” Black travel bloggers have an uphill battle when it comes to making sure that their content is not lost amidst all of the white travel bloggers on the internet, who already have an advantage when it comes to making sure that their name is out there in more ways than just their blog.

Travel lifestyle brands that are created by Black travelers face struggles in their own industry. Evita Robinson, owner of the travel lifestyle brand NOMADNESS Travel Tribe, thinks that the industry turns a blind eye to Black travelers of color who produce this type of content. Through NOMADNESS, [Robinson has created a community](#) that now consists of thousands of travelers of color that have hosted many group trips and brand ambassadors along the way. She says that ultimately, the travel industry that her community has grown attached to has “in many respects ignored us.” From this, Black people in the travel media space are constantly fighting these racial biases that infiltrate their own industry while simultaneously trying to grow their travel community as much as they can. They aren’t offered a lot of support by the travel industry, therefore they take it upon themselves to be their own support system.

There’s preconceived notions about African-American travel agents even though their representation as travel agents is small. According to [DataUSA](#), out of a workforce of about 66,500 travel agents, only 6.8% are Black. This number is dangerously low compared to the overwhelming number of white travel agents amounting to 78%. Even though African-Americans make up a small percentage of the travel agent workforce, they still are very much present and committed to helping their clients design their dream trips. [Antoine Wilson](#) shares her motivation for being in this industry, saying: “...it’s been my mission and goal to not only be a travel agent but to inspire others within my community to see the world and how beautiful it is.” The fact that there is less African-American representation in the travel industry itself inevitably creates more room for preconceived notions to arise about their place in the industry from an outsider's perspective. Some people see the lack of diversity as a sign that these African-American travel agents don’t even exist at all. [Tiffany Layne](#), founder of LaVon Travel & Lifestyle, had an all-too-real experience with this. Layne once had a legal professional come

up to her and say that she didn't know that people like her existed, as if the idea of an African-American luxury travel agent was a completely foreign concept. Besides the fact that people like the one Layne encountered are in some ways devaluing African-Americans as travel agents, this ignorance might also point to the belief of some of these people that African-Americans aren't on the same level as their white counterparts. Perhaps they can't imagine African-Americans in the luxury travel space, which is a place that is majority white to begin with.

More African-American travel agents are needed to meet consumer demand and cater to the growing African-American travel market. Considering the fact that the value of the market for African-American travelers is [\\$63 billion](#), there currently isn't enough African-American representation in this profession that would really be able to make travel more inclusive for these people. [Jemica Archer](#), a travel agent for TruBlue Travels, says that making room for more African-American travel agents is needed and would be beneficial to the industry at large. She notes that Black travel agents can potentially "create more niches for clients seeking to learn more about the black diaspora in different destinations."

DISCRIMINATION AND RACISM

Right from the onset, African-Americans can be subjected to discrimination just from the way that their name sounds when booking travel accommodations. [A Harvard University](#) study found the vacation rental company named Airbnb to have discriminated against Black people as it showed that "travelers with names that sounded Black were 16 percent less likely to get an Airbnb booking in selected cities than travelers with white-sounding names." There is evidence in these findings to support the fact that Airbnb was discriminatory in treating their Black prospective customers who were in need of their travel service. Since these findings, [Airbnb has](#)

[addressed this specific issue](#) and has established a non-discrimination policy and an optional feature that prevents Airbnb hosts from being able to view information about potential guests. Through forming policies like these, travel companies like Airbnb can have a better handle on the treatment of their customers and be able to prevent this type of discrimination from happening within their travel bookings. This is just one example of how discrimination can happen at the smallest possible level when booking travel, which points to how pervasive discrimination against African-Americans is when looking at aspects of a whole, that being the travel industry.

African-Americans not only face discrimination in the process of booking their travel, but also on the flights and journeys they take to get to their destination. In a survey conducted by the marketing firm [Digitas](#) on Black millennial travelers, “Twenty-four percent said they’ve experienced discrimination when booking within the last two years, and 29 percent have encountered it while traveling.” If we’re looking at numbers, this equates to almost a fourth of the Black millennials in this survey that said that they’ve experienced discrimination when booking their travel. Even more than that have had instances where they have personally been discriminated against when heading to their destination. These numbers are staggering, and they don’t even account for other age groups who might have experienced this discrimination as well. In fact, in 2017, the [NAACP](#) had to issue a formal statement warning African-American passengers about incidents of “racial insensitivity and possible racial bias” on American Airlines flights. One of these incidents involved an African-American woman’s seating assignment being changed to the coach section despite the fact that she booked first-class tickets for herself and the person she was traveling with beforehand. Not only was the African-American woman’s seating changed, but her white travel companion’s seat wasn’t. The [NAACP](#) issues travel advisories like

these when there is cause for concern for Black Americans. Ultimately, the [NAACP](#) ruled that “booking and boarding flights on American Airlines could subject them [to] disrespectful, discriminatory or unsafe conditions.”

In a more recent incident from earlier this year concerning the discrimination of African-Americans aboard flights, American Airlines [was under fire once again](#) after a Black passenger by the name of Elgin Banks was discriminated against after a flight attendant told him that he would have to wait until the plane boarded before he could change seats. Banks proceeded to wait until the plane was done boarding and then he asked the flight attendant if he could move closer to the front of the plane. It was alleged that the flight attendant told Banks to lower his voice and sit down, after which the flight attendant decided to call security on Banks. Two of the plaintiffs of the case, which happened to be five passengers who were told to deplane after Banks had been taken off of the aircraft, cited that Banks in fact did not raise his voice. Additionally, the Black plaintiffs were not offered hotel vouchers, as: “According to the [affidavit of Natalie Epstein](#), the White plaintiff in the case, only she and one other White passenger who had objected to Banks' removal received hotel vouchers.” In this case, it is clear that the Black passengers aboard this American Airlines flight were discriminated against in multiple instances, as Elgin Banks was treated unfairly by one of the flight attendants and the Black plaintiffs in the case did not receive hotel vouchers. [Ice Cube](#) even responded to the incident, claiming in a tweet that: “Black people are having more and more problems with American Airlines. They need to fix their attitude before I fly them again.”

TRAVEL PATTERNS

When deciding where to travel, African-Americans sometimes pick their destinations based on the fact that they have historically been safe havens for their people. In her blog post

[“10 African American Friendly Destinations”](#) Nneya Richards outlines places around the world that she’s traveled to that she believes do a good job at receiving African-American travelers and where African-Americans may be less likely to experience racism. She lists destinations such as Havana, London, Tel-Aviv, and Japan. She provides historical reasoning for why one destination is particularly welcoming to Black travelers, that being Paris, France, as she says “From Josephine Baker to James Baldwin, there is a *long* history of black Americans seeing France as an escape from the racism in the United States. Dating back to the early 1700’s, wealthy French colonists sent their mixed-race sons and their black or mixed-race mistresses to Paris to be educated, at a time when it was illegal in most of the U.S. for black people to even learn to read. The *gens de couleur*, as they were called, made up a middle class of sorts in many French colonies, such as New Orleans and Haiti.” While Paris generally does a decent job at welcoming in African-Americans with open arms, Nneya notes that the French obviously aren’t totally off the hook as their racial issues come out in the wash some way or another. Overall, Richards says: “There’s a strange invisible line, and elevated distinction if you will, that you experience as a black *American* in Paris that I’d definitely encourage you to explore.”

In the U.S., Idlewild, Michigan served as a popular safe haven amongst African-American travelers during the Jim Crow era. Once nicknamed “The Black Eden,” Idlewild teemed with African-American entertainers, writers, business people, and more who came to enjoy a summer holiday away from the racial tension in the South. Names such as W.E.B Du Bois and Aretha Franklin graced Idlewild by their presence during this time of being a sight for sore eyes for weary African-American travelers. Other resort towns like Highland Beach in Maryland and [American Beach](#) in Jacksonville welcomed Black travelers when many other parts of the country would not. In 1936, American Beach was the only beach in the state of

Florida that provided safe accommodations for Black travelers wanting to stay overnight somewhere. That being said, African-Americans have always had a good gauge as to where they would be safer from discrimination based on places that have been historically welcoming to them. Although it definitely helped that African-Americans had a publication to aid them called [“The Negro Traveler’s Green Book.”](#) This book, published from 1936 to 1964 by a man by the name of Victor H. Green, served as a guide for African-Americans and their travel, informing them of safe places to stop during their cross-country roadtrips. In all, African-Americans seek out these pockets of the country or the world to find comfort in a group of people or a community that has accepted them with open arms.

African-Americans seek out historic attractions, perhaps to learn about their own history in the U.S. According to [Mandala Research Firm](#), “African-Americans and Latinos are more likely than the general American population to seek out historic attractions.” This is hardly a coincidence considering the vast number of sites where these minorities have their roots. A [study](#) conducted on visitor responses to the Historic Kingsley Plantation on Fort George Island in Jacksonville, Florida found that: “Black/ African Americans were more interested in programs, exhibits, and the story of the people who lived at the plantation, and were most likely to feel sadness while at the site. They were also least likely to find it easy to imagine the site as a working plantation. Black/African Americans were more likely to have more interaction with park staff (89 percent), rank the slave quarters as most important of the historic buildings, and visit for educational reasons.” Thus, African-Americans were intent on visiting this plantation to learn about their ancestors and to connect with them on a more intimate level through learning the history of this site. The history of slavery in the U.S. is deeply ingrained into many sites around the U.S. which leaves more room for African-Americans to visit these places where their

ancestors were enslaved so that they are able to educate themselves about and pay reverence to their stories.

Considering the fact that the [National Register of Historic Places](#) has catalogued about 100,000 significant U.S. historical sites, only a mere two percent reflect the influence that Black Americans have had on the country. Even though this is a very small percentage of “significant” U.S. historic sites, there are still more than two thousand sites that comprise this list where African-Americans can explore their history from coast to coast. Perhaps something can be said about how U.S. sites are deemed as more significant than others and what this can reveal about certain racial biases at play.

All of this being said, the general trend is that African-Americans seek out sites where they can better connect to the past. With a history that is heavy with loss and suffering, African-Americans want to connect with their enslaved ancestors through their travels to help keep their memory alive for generations to come. [Marissa Wilson](#) from Travel Noire encapsulates this idea by noting that: “Overall, black travelers are interested in going to destinations they are curious about; where they feel a sense of connection, an opportunity to be challenged, and have the chance to step outside their comfort zone and be transformed.”

Group travel is more popular among African-Americans than other racial groups. In fact, it is [twice as popular among African-Americans than whites](#). This statistic can perhaps be indicative of high volumes of African-American participation in various professional groups and clubs, and maybe even the sense that African-Americans find comfort in numbers. Elaine Lee, travel journalist and creator of the site [Ugogurl.com](#), fondly remembers a trip that she took with the National Black Ski Association to Utah. She says that she was “pleasantly surprised” by the reaction that the local people had to her group, noting that the Utahans definitely welcomed the

business that this group generated during their stay. Of course, in this case the Utahans were not the only people that benefited from the National Black Ski Association's stay. The members themselves were able to travel and be exposed to new places that they might not have had the chance to go to if they weren't a part of this group.

OUTSIDE FACTORS

Travel isn't high on the spending priority list for many African-Americans as a result of their economically disadvantaged position in society. African-Americans face economic inequality as one of the many forms of discrimination that they endure throughout their everyday lives. To put this idea into perspective, "[African-Americans are paid less than white Americans](#) for the same jobs and lag significantly behind when it comes to accumulating wealth." Due to being treated unfairly in an economic sense and having a harder time creating financial stability, many African-Americans are forced to put their money towards more urgent expenses than spending money on travel which is an expense that is typically purchased by disposable income. Being economically disadvantaged is possibly one of the limitations of traveling for African-Americans. It's not a question of whether or not these people want to travel, it's rather a question of whether or not they have the means to do so. In a study done on 1,700 African-American travelers by the [market research firm Mandala Research](#), 25% of respondents said that their personal travel barrier is not being able to afford it. This means that a fourth of the respondents from this poll mentioned that the reason why they don't travel is because of various socioeconomic factors holding them back. It's easy to see how whites have a leg up in travel, because as a race they hold an advantage in being able to more easily generate wealth and use it for travel expenses than African-Americans. [Tykesha Burton](#) understands the struggle to travel as an African-American all too well. Burton, the founder of a [website](#) that aims to curate travel

ideas for Black families, views travel in terms of one's hierarchy of needs. She says that as an African-American, she is focusing on fulfilling the basic physiological needs first and foremost. Burton further explains her economic situation, revealing that: "I didn't inherit a home; I didn't have my college paid for. I owe \$80,000 in college debt. I have to work 40 hours. I could find a remote job, but that's not where I am yet." Burton's story reflects the privilege that she's lacked as an African-American to be able to put extra money towards traveling for pleasure, as she's faced various financial setbacks that are a result of the long history of economic inequality that's been inflicted upon her own race. The same can't be said for her white counterparts, who are likely better off financially due to the color of their skin and as a result might have a better likelihood of having the means to travel.

MARKETING

If you've ever picked up a travel brochure, you've probably seen a white family looking cheerful as they ride bikes down the boardwalk or take a walk by the pristine blue ocean. Have you ever taken a moment to reflect on the families who aren't present? White people have long been the target audience of travel advertising, and as a result Black people have been made to feel like they aren't as welcome to visit the places that are being advertised. These Black Americans have constantly searched for people that look like them in these marketing materials, only to be dismayed by the white faces staring back.

To start off, travel marketing materials tend to target non-Black and Brown, affluent individuals. As [Marissa Wilson](#), general manager of Travel Noire notes: "If you look at major campaigns or advertisements for travel -- especially luxury travel -- you don't see brown faces. That causes an issue because, psychologically, it makes those people feel like this isn't made for them. Like they're not supposed to be traveling. We wanted to infiltrate that narrative and flip it

on its head." Luxury travel is especially skewed towards white people in this area, because it shows a narrative that only caters to what society typically deems as the "most affluent" individuals. Racial and financial discrimination are prevalent in these marketing materials, which only appeals to a niche group of individuals in a very exclusive way. [Black travel blogger and mother Monet Hambrick](#) notes this lack of Black and Brown faces in these advertisements by saying: "If you search for 'traveler' or 'family travel' in Google images, you will notice that families that look like mine are missing." This is an observation that Hambrick and a lot of other people share, as Karen Akpan, another travel blogger and founder of [Black Kids Do Travel](#) recognizes, as her son once confronted her and said: "We travel to all these places, but I'm not seeing other kids that look like me. Where are all the brown people?"

There's a disparity between the African-American representation in a population and how often they are represented in travel advertising. According to the travel website [Travel Noire](#), African-Americans "make up more than 12 percent of the population and account for 6 percent of travel spending." Even though this is a significant amount of the population, African-Americans are shown in travel advertisements at a disproportionate level, hovering around less than three percent of all advertising in the travel space. This reinforces the idea that travel advertising is heavily catering towards an affluent, white demographic and is not reflecting the diversity of society. African-Americans are left to feel excluded as far as this advertising, instead of being encouraged to get out there and travel which would in turn support these travel companies as African-Americans comprise a significant portion of the travel market. According to [Shalene Dudley](#), owner of Latitude Concierge Travels, a solution to this problem is to make these advertisements more "inclusive" and "genuine" so that all consumers are able to feel welcome and safe.

Companies may put up this “façade” of diversity through their marketing materials. This is the opposite problem as the one where African-Americans aren’t represented nearly enough, as in this way African-Americans as a population are used as a way for companies to put this idea forth that they don’t neglect diversity through their advertising. Even though these companies aren’t actually committed to showcasing the diversity of the population and regularly incorporating African-Americans into their marketing materials, they still want to seem like they are committed just for show. These companies know that many eyes are on what they produce, and that they need to make it seem like they value diversity even though they don’t reflect these same values in other parts of their company. [Ian Conyers](#), a former Michigan senator has personal experience seeing these tailored marketing materials on business trips in his twenties. He says that he saw various marketing campaigns throughout his trips that served as a “veiled nod to diversity.” This “façade” of diversity extends to mission trips as well, where majority white travelers take pictures with Black people, putting forth this white savior narrative. Ultimately, some travel companies are putting on a performance with their marketing materials and are exploiting African-Americans instead of naturally letting their voices shine. In all, *Here* editor [Tiana Attride](#) sums up what needs to happen to start showcasing Black people as the travelers and not as the token of diversity. She says: “For the majority-white leaders in the travel industry—who readily claim their love of cultural enrichment, but who regularly fail to include multicultural voices—their own inherent racism will be an uncomfortable truth to confront.”

African-American cultural travelers tend to spend the highest out of all African-American travelers. These [cultural travelers](#) spend an average of \$2,078 per trip compared to the \$1,435 spent by all African-American travelers. The draw for culture is definitely a motivating factor in African-American travel, as there are plenty of sites that are rich in their history. One example of

a site that attracts African-American cultural travelers is the [Gullah Geechee region](#). A study done on this region found that the recognition of the culture of this region was greatest with African-Americans among other groups. It's clear that cultural experiences resonate with African-Americans, as they are familiar with these heritage sites and the people that gave them life, that being their ancestors. Additionally, in the same study, fifty percent of African-Americans were found to have heavily considered the importance of Black heritage when choosing where to travel. This African-American cultural travel market is indicative of a yearning for African-Americans to connect with the past and learn about their heritage through their travels. Especially having a history that is heavy with marginalization, slavery, and generational trauma, African-Americans feel a deep connection to those that came before them.

African-American travel spending is on an upwards trend. [Since the Green Book Black Travelers Guide was published in 1966](#), the frequency of African-American travel has increased. So much so, that in 2001, the African-American travel market was found to be the fastest growing segment of people in the travel industry. The expansion of the African-American travel market means that African-Americans are becoming more inclined to travel, which is certainly a very positive trajectory for this group of people. As far as spending goes, African-Americans travelers spent [\\$63 billion](#) in 2018, a \$15 billion jump from that spent in 2010. These figures go to show just how large the travel market is becoming for African-Americans, and how much value they add to the revenue generated by travel companies and other travel services. Additionally, these numbers reflect an increase that surpasses the inflation rate, something that is extremely beneficial for the health of the economy and the travel industry as a whole.

African-Americans are cognizant of the racial equity of travel companies and they are more likely to book with the ones that align most with their values. According to a study

conducted by the [marketing company Digitas](#), 72% of Black millennial travelers were more likely to book with a brand that acknowledges their racial identity and even a higher percentage were more likely to actually visit a destination that tends to be more inclusive and welcoming. Since the focus on racial equity in companies has become heightened in recent years, African-Americans and other POC are hyper aware of what values these travel companies strive towards and therefore are able to make more informed decisions about whether or not to give them their business.

One of the frustrations that African-Americans have concerning travel companies and their role in racial equity is the lack of investing in Black communities. [Kellee Edwards](#), a Black pilot and TV show host for the Travel Channel says that in order for these companies to show their allyship, she encourages them to put their money where their mouth is. “You’re making money off of the world,” she says. “The world is diverse. How dare you not reflect that in your company and your work. How dare you profit off of the world and not want to contribute to it in a meaningful way.” One way that travel companies can take this crucial step is to hire more Black and Brown people. As travel writer [Alex Temblador](#) puts it, “Urge your recruiters and hiring managers to look for diverse candidates, at historically black colleges and through groups that uplift people of color.” Investing in Black communities is especially important now, amidst the times of a global pandemic, as economic disparities are brought to the forefront and African-Americans are disproportionately affected by the current crisis. According to the [McKinsey Global Institute](#), 39 percent of jobs held by African-Americans are vulnerable due to the COVID-19 pandemic compared to 34 percent of jobs held by whites. That being said, it is crucial for travel companies to support Black communities and be more equitable in their practice by creating more job opportunities and room for growth for African-Americans in their

business. If this type of action isn't taken by industries like these, the difficulty in developing economic growth for African-Americans will only be exacerbated.

There are many different ways for travel companies to be more inclusive and committed to racial equity, one of which is expanding African-American representation across every part of the company. According to [Al Hutchinson](#), President & CEO of Visit Baltimore, part of this representation needs to be evident in the company's board. He says that: "Boards need to represent the communities they serve with special emphasis given to underserved communities. Additionally, organizations should review their strategic plans, mission statements and core values to make sure there is a commitment to social justice and the eradication of racism." The values of the company are deeply rooted into its fabric, which makes it the perfect starting point to providing a working environment that is committed to inclusivity and diversity in all facets. Increasing African-American representation amongst employees is crucial as well, as a diverse team allows for diverse messaging. There is a catch to this diverse messaging however, as some companies can use it to make it seem like they are committed to racial equity, when in actuality this equity is not reflected in their company. [Martinique Lewis](#), a Diversity in Travel consultant, cautions companies against using words like "diversity" and "inclusion" to simply put up a front. She hopes that these words will instead be "calls to action" and will encourage companies to work on these issues internally. [Louisville Tourism](#), the marketing agency that encourages tourism in the city of Louisville, is a good example of a company working towards better racial equity and representation. Not only has the company actively engaged in conversations surrounding racial inclusivity, but they have also launched several initiatives to help locate and then eradicate problems concerning a lack of diversity. Louisville Tourism does this by "...conducting a thorough review of practices regarding diversity in hiring, employee education,

as well as developing ways to work with a more inclusive variety of vendors.” Staying up-to-date with business practices better allows for a company to see if there are problem areas that they need to work on or address. Lastly, another path to greater representation of African-Americans is through diversifying marketing collateral. [Louisville Tourism](#) has already taken this step by scrutinizing the diversity representation in both print and digital marketing for the city, and bringing in an outside firm for review to “gain impartial input.” Everyone wants to see people that they can relate to and also people that look like them represented in advertisements. By diversifying marketing collateral, this can certainly be achieved and it is possibly one of the best avenues to turn this into a reality.

Throughout all of this, the unfortunate reality is that the travel industry is no different than any other industry or institution in our country in that it has a lot of work to do in making its atmosphere more inclusive towards, protective of, and welcoming to African-Americans. Many African-Americans have faced and still face these unfortunate obstacles in their own industry to make their way in the travel world, and many have come out not only stronger but enablers of change. Take Nneya Richards, for example, who wants to show other Black women that they too can travel and get out there in the world through her content. The next generation of African-American travelers need to know that they belong in this space just as much as their white counterparts, and that they have the ability to mold the industry into anything they want it to be. But, before all of that happens, great change needs to happen at every single level of the industry to give these future leaders the space, respect, and resources that they deserve and are entitled to. The fight for racial justice should continue to fuel our work towards a more just and equitable world. Nneya’s motto for her travel blog [‘NA Perfect World](#) is “Only through cultural exchange can we bridge these gaps and understandings. We’re all ambassadors.” Let’s hope that

the travel industry will better support ambassadors like Nneya, because the future of travel certainly depends on them.