In its lushly illustrated parody of women’s travel and travel writing, Harper’s New Monthly Magazine invites its readers to laugh at heroine Impulsia Gushington’s pretensions to independence, self-sufficiency, and world travel. The September 1863 feature titled “An Unprotected Female in the East” mocks Impulsia’s travel mishaps as she journeys from Alexandria to Cairo and in the process is abandoned by her travel companion, robbed by locals of everything except her undergarments and hoopskirt, fleeced by fellow travelers and servants, charmed by dubious suitors, and deceived by fake relatives. At her first Eastern port of call, Impulsia is the stereotypical picture of a middle-class tourist, surrounded by mountains of luggage, dressed for the heat in full skirt and long cloak, and carrying a tiny dog as an inappropriate travel accessory. Her conspicuous consumption of tourism matches her clichéd musings on the liberating effects of travel. Later in her story, as she enjoys the romance of her first camel ride, Impulsia gushes: “My camel proved to be gentle, easy, and docile . . . The lovely scene, the balmy air, the sense of freedom, the relief from hateful associations, all combined to soothe and calm my spirit . . . I compared the flat conventionalities of civilized existence with the piquant charm of my present situation.” The camel, despite its gentleness, provides her with a chance to imagine herself as the daring heroine of her own epic travel narrative, a welcome respite from her “flat” everyday experience of domestic comfort. “The sense of freedom” she feels relaxes her
“spirit” rather than inspiring further adventure; it is clear that her tour and her newfound freedom are only temporary and that she will return to “civilized existence” refreshed but unchanged by her travels.¹

Impulsia’s camel has other ideas, however, and his sudden speed bounces her out of her travel daydreams:

Good gracious! What spirit of evil had taken possession of my gentle camel? I found myself bounding over the sandy plain at a pace which threatened dislocation of all my members!

It was in vain that I grasped the horn of the saddle (which is the principal security of one’s seat on a camel) with a mad desperation that only served to fatigue my arms: these tremendous bounds lifted me out of the seat . . . My serviceable little hat flew like a rocket

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¹ Figure 1. Impulsia Gushington’s runaway camel ride. Lady Dufferin, “An Unprotected Female in the East.” Harper’s New Monthly Magazine No. 160, Vol. 27 (September 1863): 445 (Courtesy of the Watkinson Library, Trinity College).
from my head; my parasol mounted like a balloon . . . On and on we rushed; the scared cranes screamed above my head; the sand seemed all on fire beneath my camel’s feet; the low hills fleetied by like dreams; the wind deafened me by its rush and roar against my ears . . . I found myself (when conscious) bruised indeed and shaken, but sound and whole in limb, upon a heap of drifted sand. (443–44)

The accompanying illustration is meant to amplify Impulsia’s florid prose and the joke (see figure 1); it also emphasizes the parody’s underlying message about women’s travel. The mobility and autonomy to which women gain access through travel challenge status quo gender norms, particularly for white, middle-class women. Harper’s and its audience, larger American society, attempt to neutralize the threat by discouraging other would-be Impulsias. Readers are meant to learn that her impulsive decision to travel has endangered not only her finances but also her reputation—and the camel ride increases the stakes by risking her life. Her middle-class femininity is what is truly at stake as the markers of her social status—her fashionable hat and parasol—literally fly away while she careens across the desert. With her hair and shawl flying behind and her parasol already gone, Impulsia is undone, left with no protection against the desert sun and no husband, father, or brother to rescue her. In the next scene her dress is stolen, a final punishment for her enjoyment of “the sense of freedom.”

Although slowed by the Civil War, the travel writing and tourism of white, middle-class women steadily increased from midcentury and would only grow after the 1863 publication of the Harper’s parody. The rising popularity of not only tourism but also women’s published travel writing provides the fodder for Harper’s—the audience needs to recognize the subject of the parody for the joke to work. The vivid Harper’s portrait amplifies the stereotype, not merely repeating it but reinforcing it as well. The ultimate effect of this popular representation, then, is the erasure of other models of earlier female travelers—be they workers, activists, or journalists—such as those found in the pioneering journeys and outspoken social commentary of the women studied here. The black and white women travel writers featured in Traveling Economies present an alternative vision of women’s mobility, autonomy, and competence that at the time was far more threatening to gender, race, and class norms than the female tourists Harper’s mocks. Recovering their travels and their writing invites us to rethink where and how women went and what they wrote in antebellum America.
Economies of Travel

In fact, it is the very act of traveling, whether by camel or by today’s corporate ladder, that often reveals the continuing constraints women face. Assumptions about gender, race, and class that are often masked or invisible for women who do not openly transgress social boundaries are laid bare in the lives and writings of traveling women. Nineteenth-century women’s travel writing reveals the social structures designed to keep women in their place, while simultaneously dismantling those hierarchies in their lives and texts.

Women who did not travel already blurred the boundaries between public and private in their own neighborhoods, where they worked for pay, formed literary societies and temperance leagues, or even wrote for local newspapers. Traveling served to raise the stakes, as each town along the stagecoach route was confronted with the reality of a mobile, independent woman traveler and with the prospect of the town’s own mothers, sisters, and wives climbing on board to join her. The transgressions that could be tolerated on the local level were much more threatening on a potentially national and transnational scale. The reactions of railroad companies or other travelers to the presence of women and African-Americans reinforced cultural, social, and political ideas about their proper place. Segregated railroad cars and steamship cabins institutionalized cultural anxiety about free black citizenship and worked to limit the circulation of black bodies and labor. Unwanted chivalrous attention from concerned fellow passengers thinly disguised an intention to monitor women’s movement and conveyed the cultural consensus that they were unfit for independence and self-determination, much less the rigors of travel. However, black and white women could and did travel and lay claim to agency by moving beyond these confining definitions of womanhood, blackness, and class.

Travel can be a term so broad and all-encompassing as to be rendered almost meaningless. At times including the European tour of the wealthy socialite, the desperate running of the fugitive slave, and the forced migration of the Trail of Tears, definitions of travel fundamentally express movement, mobility from place to geographical place, regardless of whether the mobility was forced or chosen. Traveling Economies focuses on travel between the extremes of wealthy tourism and forced removal in order to examine travel that is often overlooked—the elected journeys of women who traveled for work. Work for these travelers
encompassed a wide range of economic, social, and political activities. “Ragged-edge travel” is my designation for these work-motivated trips that made use of rapidly improving transportation technologies, but at bargain rates without the benefits of chaperones, first-class accommodations, or guided tours. Ragged-edge travelers undertook their journeys to support themselves, to serve their communities, to enter national and international political debates, to criticize social and political institutions, and to demonstrate their own and their gender’s and race’s fitness for the rigors of public life. Analyzing how—and, even more important, why—they went opens up new routes to understanding the diversity of women’s experience in the nineteenth century.

Travel can be a difficult, uncomfortable, alienating, and frightening experience, for contemporary women and for their historical predecessors. It is tempting to romanticize what we imagine today as the glamour and boldness of their pioneering journeys. However, *Traveling Economies* approaches nineteenth-century women’s travels from a critical perspective that does not simplistically equate travel with agency. Rather, travel is a strategy that works with a series of other attempts to at least survive and at best subvert and reconstruct systems of power that depend on women’s exploitation and stasis.

Women authors’ discussions of the multiple and complex motivations behind their decisions to travel point us to a more-complicated theory of women’s travel. Travel becomes not just an occasion to confront social systems, but to record their effects on women’s lives and to mark a course for women who might follow. Analyzing what I will call the Economies of Travel—women travel authors’ evaluation of the risks and rewards of travel, the subsequent freedom and danger they experienced, and finally the strategies of writing and publication they employed—interrogates the meaning of women’s mobility for travelers and for the larger culture. Getting themselves to St. Petersburg, the free soil of Toronto, the new world with its new democracy and possibilities for women, or even to the top of Pikes Peak involved confronting danger women travelers could imagine, such as exploding steamship engines and “colored cabins.” However, there were also dangers they did not conceive of, such as sinkholes and beatings. While women tried to evaluate the virulence of these threats before they left, the realities of threats at home often trumped the imagined dangers of traveling. The threat of capture and enslavement sanctioned by the Fugitive Slave Law, or the impossibility of surviving on a schoolteacher’s salary, or the
insufferable control of a guardian rendered home an unsafe space for these traveling women, making the risk of travel an appealing option or a last desperate resort. Outcomes could be good or bad, but women’s narratives of their journeys ultimately reveal the social power structures that made them consider leaving in the first place, and that continued to operate as they traveled.

*Traveling Economies* begins by analyzing how women travel authors’ discussions of race, class, and gender as well as their representations of their own unconventional travels reveal both the inhospitable social and economic climate for white and black ragged-edge women in the northeastern United States and the potential liberation and danger associated with the alternative of travel. Chapter 1 compares the travel texts of Amy Morris Bradley and Nancy Prince to analyze how two very different women navigate early-nineteenth-century economies of travel. Broadening the initial focus on the material motivations and conditions of women’s journeys, *Traveling Economies* then explores the communities and constituencies that women travelers claim to represent and advocate for through the pages of their travel texts, ultimately claiming authority to articulate a vision for a nation they can call home. Chapters 2 and 3 focus on Anne Royall and Mary Ann Shadd Cary, who both endeavor to redefine home, nation, and citizen in their journalistic travel texts. Traveling female social critics are often not welcome in the places they visit; chapter 4 of this study examines the hostile responses generated by one woman traveler, Frances Wright, and the way the society she challenged reinscribed her into existing ideologies of race, class, and gender. Finally, chapter 5 considers the contexts of publication for ragged-edge women’s travel narratives, specifically Julia Archibald Holmes and the *Sibyl*, and investigates how travel texts and women travelers circulated in antebellum culture and provided an alternative model of femininity that reached a wide and diverse audience.

Before I embark, I want to use the remainder of this introduction to explain the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of *Traveling Economies*. Briefly surveying the field of scholarship on women’s travel writing, I will summarize how it has been studied and how *Traveling Economies* expands and complicates current scholarly conversations on the subject. I have divided the following discussion into rubrics labeled Economies of Gender, Race, Class, Publication, and Nation, but the inadequacy of those categories is immediately apparent: Where do we put conversations about black women’s insistence on their proper
femininity? Does a discussion of acceptable jobs for white, middle-class women fit under “gender” or “class”? Does the chivalry that white women enjoy work to separate white and black women as effectively as segregated train cars? The overlap and overflow argues in support of one of the primary goals of this study, the production of nuanced and complicated comparisons of the writing and experience of white and black women. Careful comparisons do more than recover neglected women’s texts and biographies; they offer more-complex pictures of a nineteenth-century world consumed with anxiety about race and gender. And while Traveling Economies explores the cultural contexts that resonate throughout women’s texts, the analysis focuses on how those influences impact the literary strategies women travel writers employ. Thinking about how those texts reached their audience and who read women’s travel writing connects the figure of the woman traveler back to cultural ideas about new roles for women.

Economies of Gender: Negotiating Femininity at Home and Abroad

Once they opted to go, whether their traveling outfit consisted of petticoats or bloomers, the travelers in this study brought their female bodies and the additional baggage of gender expectations with them. Constructions of gender in the early nineteenth century or today cannot be packed in their own discrete suitcase, neatly separated from constructions of race and class and sexuality. Rather, gender, race, class, and sexuality interacted and intersected in complex ways, and required female travelers constantly to negotiate shifting social expectations, changing statuses of privilege and discrimination. The unseemliness of wandering the street begging for charity or loudly expressing political opinions could deny a traveler the benefits of white, middle-class femininity. While white women could lose status because they traveled and wrote, some black women travelers experienced greater freedom and mobility because their skin color automatically excluded them from the rigid expectations of feminine behavior and limitations to solely domestic space that often afflicted white women.

Feminist body theory, with its insights into the ways in which cultural norms of gender, race, and class are projected onto the bodies of women
and minorities, offers a useful lens through which to read women travelers’ literal and textual negotiations of social ideologies. Theorist Susan Bordo describes how a social gaze leveled at women’s bodies effectively monitors, controls, and limits women within a patriarchal system, an experience that the authors in Traveling Economies repeatedly represent. Social scrutiny regulates women’s behavior by identifying and isolating evidence of difference from the norm of the wealthy, white, masculine body. For both white and black women travelers of the nineteenth century, their bodies were not expected to be moving around, autonomous, partaking of the power and prerogatives of mobile, powerful, independent white male bodies. In a nineteenth-century world where urbanization and industrialization replaced neighborhood networks of kin and friendship, increasing reliance on visual cues of status fed the explosion of freak shows. Such visual entertainment, disability-studies theorist Rosemarie Garland Thomson argues, taught audiences about difference, race, gender, and national identity. I argue that the same gaze that eager audiences leveled at displays of bearded ladies and African “savages” was also directed at the unexpected figure of the female traveler, with her disruption of emerging constructions of femininity and domesticity. Women travelers negotiated the social scrutiny that registered what theorists Jennifer Terry and Jacqueline Urla term their “embodied deviance” and worked both to deflect negative responses to their unorthodox behavior and unexpected presence and to revise the cultural meanings written on their bodies. At moments emphasizing their proper femininity, women travelers also performed “unfemininity,” my term for their representation of their own strength, intelligence, and travel savvy that effectively revised cultural ideas about what women could do.

The rhetorical violence generated by Frances Wright’s travel and public participation (which I will discuss in chapter 4) illustrates the very gendered terms that often framed criticism of women travelers. Wright was infamous as an early feminist, abolitionist, public lecturer, and advocate of free love, as well as a published travel writer. Her public life and travels made her a target for critics who had less-progressive ideas about women’s political and social participation or who opposed her programs of gender, labor, or abolition reform. Portrayed in a popular cartoon as a quacking, nagging goose or decried as the “Red Harlot of Infidelity,” Wright’s trespass into the public realm of
politics, speaking, and writing violated many critics’ ideas of appropriate femininity. Descriptions of Wright’s “great masculine person” take the criticism a step further, literally inscribing her social deviance onto her body to emphasize the extent of her inappropriate behavior, ideas, and mobility.⁶

Scholars previously explored nineteenth-century gender roles using the framework of separate spheres (women relegated exclusively to domestic rather than public life); however, subsequent critical approaches demonstrate the limits and inadequacy of separate-spheres formulations of women’s experience, instead arguing for more-complex understandings of the ways in which women participated in public life. Women travelers present a particularly salient counterexample confirming that the strict confinement of women only to the home may have never accurately represented the actual experience of women, instead functioning primarily, but nevertheless powerfully, on the level of rhetoric and ideology. The wide-ranging travels of the diverse group of women discussed here, as well as the crucial fact of their travel publications, suggest the range of models of mobility and autonomy available to women to counteract the ideological mandates of separate spheres. Thus, thinking about traveling women invites us to modify our understandings of women’s experience in the last century to consider the constant and complex negotiations individual women entered into between gendered expectations and the lived reality of their participation in private and public.⁷

Even as these women’s experiences of gender are complicated and multiple, their textual representations of gender add still another layer of complexity. As they do in their lives, women travel authors negotiate gender expectations constantly in their texts. On one page they may be critiquing women’s subordination and relegation to domesticity in their narratives, only to assert their proper femininity and claim the privileges of appropriate womanhood (protection, authority, audience acceptance) on another page. Black women authors both analyze the devastating effects of stereotypes that dehumanize, degrade, segregate, and disempower black women and represent themselves as fitting within standards of white femininity to gain reader sympathy despite their “transgressive” behavior (be it traveling or writing). Gender becomes something women authors both negotiate and strategically deploy in service to their representation of themselves and their travels.
Economies of Race:
Black Women and the Risks of Travel

Race is also negotiated and represented in women travelers’ lives and texts, regardless of whether the travelers are black or white. White women are often discussed only in terms of their race privilege, the benefits accorded to them on the basis of their white skin. However, whiteness could often bring with it restrictions in the form of heightened expectations of appropriately feminine behavior and reprisal for unladylike traveling and writing. Whiteness frequently constituted another set of baggage women travelers had to carry, a marker that was at once invisible (because all women were presumed to be white) and yet able to be used against women perceived to be breaking the rules. However, some women travelers embraced their whiteness, deploying it strategically in their texts, drawing on stereotypes of racial difference to build a case for their transgressive presence. At moments when their own traveling, writing, speaking, or public behavior was unfeminine, they sometimes represent racially different women in a negative way to divert attention from themselves or to justify their behavior. Interestingly, black women travel writers also use this strategy in their texts, deflecting readers’ attention from their transgressive writing and traveling by contrasting their appropriately feminine behavior with the morally suspect behavior of the white women they include in their narratives.

Although black women travel writers sometimes employ racial difference in these ways, race also operates very differently in their texts. As mentioned earlier, traveling black women directly challenge nineteenth-century and even present-day definitions of black experience. The institution and ideologies of chattel slavery declaimed that black people were unfit for freedom, and even the nominally “free” North reacted with discrimination and racism when confronted with the reality of free blacks in competition for scarce jobs in their communities. Twenty-first-century scholarly attention focusing on nineteenth-century black travel narratives has so far helped to recover the broad range of free black experience and to insert the histories of free blacks into our syllabi, our textbooks, and our collective cultural memory. Scholars and historians have appropriately analyzed the central role that travel plays in slave narratives, primarily as the defining journey from slavery to freedom. However, critical analysis of narratives of elected travel by free blacks (whether or not that travel was in some sense forced by the
hostile economic and social conditions of the free North) illuminates the continuum of black experiences in America—from the confinement of slavery to the mobility and autonomy of traveling black activists and writers. Moreover, as Farah Griffin and Cheryl Fish have demonstrated with their anthology, A Stranger in the Village: Two Centuries of African-American Travel Writing, black authors have consistently contributed to the American travel genre. The recent special issue of BMa: The Sonia Sanchez Literary Review titled “Black Travel Writing” claims to be “the first book-length collection of fully-fledged scholarly articles on black travel writing ever to have been published,” and includes Jennifer Young’s analysis of Phillis Wheatley’s travel poems, Kenneth Speirs’s discussion of black cowboy Nat Love, and Kimberly Blockett’s reading of itinerant preacher Zilpha Elaw’s “moving subjectivities,” as well as my own analysis of Mary Ann Shadd Cary. Attention to black travel writing acknowledges black contributions to the travel genre and widens our understandings of larger black literary traditions, complicating critical approaches that exclusively figure slave narratives as the primary form of African-American nineteenth-century cultural expression.⁸

Even as black travel writing challenges our understandings of nineteenth-century black experience, free blackness presents a representational and experiential problem for black travelers and travel writers. Critic Cheryl Fish’s formulation of the “unofficial criminal status of free blackness” illuminates the disapproval and out-of-placeness that free black women travelers experienced even before they started on their journeys. Although they were never enslaved, free black women were classified with slaves due to the evidence written on their skin and were subject not only to racism but also to the threat of being captured and sold into slavery.⁹

Nancy Prince’s experience of returning by ship from Jamaica to New England (discussed in chapter 1) provides a compelling example of the extreme danger facing black women travelers. While her ship docks unexpectedly at New Orleans for repairs, Prince is threatened, taunted, and forced to remain on board because a crowd of white Southerners promises to take her to jail and then to the auction block should she step onto slave territory. Danger does not lie in wait only on the pier, however. Prince later discovers that her fellow passengers, in particular a white couple from Massachusetts, have conspired to capture and beat her. Although Prince uses a number of successful strategies in response to these incidents in both her life and her text,
her story nonetheless demonstrates the extremity of the threat black women travelers face whether they travel through slave territory or through the “free North.”

Heightened scrutiny and threat could attend black women traveling; however, *Traveling Economies* interrogates black and white women’s travel experiences by asking, could black women’s lower status also have facilitated travel? Are there parallels between the scrutiny that “colored tourists” underwent and the social control experienced by white women who violated expectations of feminine behavior? How are formulations of women’s autonomy and independence based solely on white women’s experience complicated by studying black women travelers’ negotiation of racism as well as sexism?

### Economies of Class: Women on the Ragged Edge of Middle-Class Status

While these women travelers found opportunities to negotiate the cultural terms of gender and race on their travels and in their texts, issues of class and economics proved less flexible. Travel and tourism in nineteenth-century America were primarily the province of wealthy white men and, by extension, their wives and daughters. By midcentury a new industry was developing to safely chaperone elite women and their marriageable daughters to exotic locations chosen to entertain and to provide the finishing touches to a girl’s qualifications as a would-be society wife. Critic Mary Suzanne Schriber documents the astronomic rise in popularity of touring companies designed to allow young women to travel without compromising their marriageability (read their sexual purity). Schriber’s excellent scholarship explains how the practice of travel and travel writing by elite white women reveals the ideological and economic institutions that dominated American travel in the second half of the century and the various ways that women interacted with those social constructs and with the travel genre to tell their stories.

The women presented here, however, did not have consistent access to the social and economic resources or to the widespread convenience of the postbellum tourist industry available to many of the elite women Schriber analyzes. For women like Anne Royall, Amy Morris Bradley, or
Nancy Prince, class is a source of tension and anxiety on their journeys and in their travel writing. While elite women were able to cushion the dangers and inconveniences of travel through the privileges that accompanied higher social standing and wealth—private sleeping berths, porters, chaperones, and guides—women without privileges and resources struggled to support and protect themselves. By representing that struggle, the authors featured in *Traveling Economies* protest the economic and social injustice they experience. If the later institution of tourism is a celebration of middle-class values and wealth and, therefore, middle-class power, earlier narratives of women working and traveling threaten to spoil the party. However, tourism effectively contained the protest and resistance of nonelite women’s travel writing by redefining travel as the exclusive province of the wealthy and deluging the reading public with boring, repetitive travel books describing essentially the same trip. The cumulative effect buried the narratives and biographies of working traveling women under a mountain of tourist writing and erased earlier women travelers from the cultural imagination.

Class is of course not reducible to wealth. Rather, class status depends on a range of factors, including education, respectability, family standing, marriage, access to leisure, and also the particularities of specific communities and locations, local social mores, and urban versus rural locations, among other factors. Ragged-edge women travelers attempt to compensate for their lack of wealth by stressing their other middle-class virtues, be they education, relations to genteel if impoverished families, or appropriately feminine comportment (even though they are traveling, they dress in long skirts, are polite and unassuming, and/or do not converse with strange men). Even as white and black women travelers try to deploy class in these ways, their narratives reveal the precariousness of their social position, which is highlighted by frequent experiences of sudden downward social mobility or sustained battles for the mere rudiments of economic security. Discussions of strategies to get bargain rates at inns or on stagecoaches, of being relegated to the steerage section of ships, and of the favorable economic prospects for blacks emigrating to Canada all point to these travelers’ negotiations of class and economics on their journeys and in their narratives. Further, ragged-edge authors emphasize the economic barriers operating against women’s full social participation at home and propose travel, as opposed to the more-traditional economic solution of marriage, as a possible alternative.
Women travel writers do not represent class and economics as factors encountered solely in their interactions with the marketplace and public sphere, however. As critic Amy Schrager Lang points out in her interrogation of the nineteenth-century syntax of class, the emblem of middle-class experience and values is the properly managed home, attended by the properly feminine woman. Lang further argues that in domestic fiction the middle-class home is a “place in which the effects of class are so thoroughly mediated by an alternative paradigm of gender, the object of which is to produce a condition of classlessness, as to disappear from view.” Women travel writers, rather than obscuring the class ramifications of middle-class domesticity, often represent their own economic dispossession in terms of lack of access to safe, secure domestic space. Contesting what I term “exclusive domesticity,” women travel authors argue that their exclusion from hearths and homes of their own is not the result of their deficient femininity, but of the increasingly rigid requirements of middle-class status that single women cannot meet in the few occupations open to them, and that virtually require white skin and a wealthy husband. Thus, women’s travel writing offers an important counter to representations found in domestic fiction, as their texts highlight the operations of class and economics in the production of “home” rather than obscuring class behind gender.

The private diary of Amy Morris Bradley (analyzed in chapter 1) vividly illustrates these economic and social pressures facing unmarried women, and the potential solution that travel offered to women struggling to support themselves. After working for ten years as a schoolteacher, Bradley has one dollar to her name, along with impaired and worsening health. In a last desperate effort to avoid relying on her friends and family for economic support, she decides to travel to Costa Rica as a governess for a wealthy family. Despite her dismal financial situation, Bradley considers herself a proper middle-class woman, and when her employers treat her “like a servant,” she quits and strikes out on her own in Costa Rica without friends, family, or a working knowledge of Spanish. Bradley’s story certainly highlights her bravery and initiative, but, more important, her diary showcases the impact of gender and class expectations on individual nonelite women. Bradley explores fully the limited job opportunities open to unmarried middle-class white women—from teaching to piecework sewing and serving as a housekeeper for her father and brother. None of these options, though, provides her with economic security; travel, on the other hand, provides possibilities beyond rigidly prescribed appropriate work for women.
However, as her story suggests, the possibilities accessed through travel also carry significant risks to her health, safety, and social status.\textsuperscript{15}

Numerous scholars discussing women’s travel texts argue that a gendered division of labor exists in travel writing and that analysis erases the particularity and specificity of texts like Bradley’s. Contrasting women authors’ concerns with fashion, domestic arrangements, social events, and other personal aspects of travel with the political focus of many travel texts written by wealthy white men, critic Marion Tinling, in her study *Women into the Unknown* (1989), characterizes women’s travel texts as primarily interested in “the rhythm of daily life—birth, marriage, child-rearing, death, and household economy. These matters, so much a part of everywoman’s life, are basic and universal, enduring through all political changes.” Catherine Stevenson in *Victorian Women Travel Writers in Africa* (1982) and Jane Robinson in her survey, *Wayward Women: A Guide to Women Travelers* (1990), similarly argue that women travel writers eschew the political discourse found in men’s texts in favor of focusing on the personal and relational aspects of travel. *Traveling Economies* instead examines how women contest and are excluded from the domestic prerogatives that Tinling claims for “everywoman.”\textsuperscript{16}

Ragged-edge women find themselves excluded from the comforts of both domesticity and tourism. Schriber’s *Writing Home* focuses on the operations of capitalism in the development of sanctioned women’s tourism; however, that sanction is reserved for women firmly ensconced in the privileges of the middle and upper classes. Mary Louise Pratt’s *Imperial Eyes* examines how the economics and scientific discourse of colonialism authorize travel by white male explorers and select elite women, but her focus does not extend beyond women travelers who “occupy a world of servants and servitude where their class and race privilege [is] presupposed, and meals, baths, blankets, and lamps appear from nowhere.” Karen Kilcup’s recent study of the travel diary of Lorenza Stevens Berbineau, a servant woman traveling with her wealthy employers, addresses issues of class embedded in traveling. Kilcup’s focus on a working-class travel author importantly broadens formulations of who was traveling and producing travel texts (whether public or private) in the nineteenth century. But instead of delineating class in terms of rich and poor, wealthy tourists and the servants who accompanied them, as Kilcup does, *Traveling Economies* focuses on an even wider range of class experiences, highlighting the complexity and multiplicity of class experiences had by American women and the
variety of strategies they use to represent those experiences. Criticism of black travel writing by authors such as Cheryl Fish and Sandra Gunning offers a compelling analysis of the economic factors operating in some black women’s decisions to travel and to produce travel texts; my analysis of the relationship between travel and the black middle class builds upon their discussions and offers a comparative view of nonelite white and black women’s texts and lives.17

Economies of Publication: Diverse Authors, Diverse Audiences

Just as the act of traveling could contest the maintenance of class hierarchies for ragged-edge travelers, so too could their travel publications make space in the literary marketplace and expand the travel genre beyond its traditional parameters. Travel writing in its most traditional form was a published book-length description of the journey of a white wealthy male either abroad to a foreign country (or series of foreign locations) or to the unexplored frontier of his own country. Eric J. Leed’s The Mind of the Traveller (1991) highlights the continuing view of travel and travel writing as a masculine enterprise, which he contends constitutes “a method of extending the male persona in time and space, as conqueror, crusader, explorer, merchant-adventurer, naturalist, anthropologist.” “Travel,” he maintains, “has been the medium of traditional male immortality.” Male travelers, be they conquerors or merchant-adventurers, record “this feat in bricks, books, and stories,” claiming not only the prerogative of travel but also the authority of travel writer, according to Leed.18

Not merely male-produced, but claiming a kind of masculine rationality and objectivity, travel writing often presents factual information on terrain, population, agriculture, natural resources, and government, as well as technological information on modes and means of transportation (evaluating, for instance, new rail routes or new steamship lines). However, this fact-oriented reporting is interspersed with personal reflection: meditations in response to scenery, anecdotes collected from fellow travelers, or reflections on interactions with local residents and their alien culture, food, or habits. The result is finally a mixture of genres—autobiography, journalism, short fiction, essay—that allows travel authors a tremendous amount of freedom in both subject matter
and style. It is travel writing’s quality of being a “literary carpetbag,” Schriber claims, that facilitated the mass entry of women authors into the genre in the mid-nineteenth century as they marketed their feminine focus on the domestic aspects of other cultures (in contrast to the politically oriented content of men’s narratives) that nonetheless could fit within the wide-ranging expectations audiences brought to travel writing.\footnote{19}

The women studied in Traveling Economies both fit within the parameters of travel writing—by describing their trips on steamships, stagecoaches, and even on foot; by including detailed information on geography, government, and natural resources and on the “feminine” concerns of fashion, culture, and society; and by claiming that their opinions on all these matters are worth reading—and exceed those expectations in form and content. While some of these authors did publish book-length (and even serial book-length) travel narratives, Traveling Economies argues that we gain a fuller understanding of ragged-edge women’s participation in the genre when we recognize self-published emigrant’s guides, serially published travel letters and travel editorials appearing in newspapers, and private travel writing in diaries and personal letters as contributions to the genre. Including a wide array of travel-writing formats shows the cultural obsession with travel writing and the ways women accessed the popular genre without necessarily having financial or cultural capital to enter the formal literary marketplace. The content of their narratives—stories of unconventional and unexpected women travelers—is not the only source of innovation in their texts. These women in fact changed the travel genre to make it fit their stories and their strategies of representing themselves.

For instance, Julia Archibald Holmes’s account of her journey to the top of Pikes Peak in 1858 (discussed in chapter 5) demonstrates ragged-edge travel writers’ generic innovations and the interesting and complex contexts of publication that were involved in linking women travel writers with their reading audiences. Acknowledged as the first woman to reach the summit of Pikes Peak, Holmes made her journey wearing bloomers as a protest of conventional women’s fashions and wrote about her adventures for an early feminist dress-reform periodical, the Sibyl. Revising travel-genre formulations, Holmes uses travel writing to promote an explicitly feminist agenda and to represent herself as a dedicated Woman’s Rights and dress-reform activist. She replaces the male adventurer with not just a female traveler but a radically feminist traveler who uses her text to promote her political agenda. While
Holmes includes descriptions of scenery, she also includes a detailed account of her plan for women’s physical fitness that will make them better travelers and, ultimately, better citizens. She includes, instead of anecdotes shared by fellow travelers, an account of her spirited debate about the merits of dress reform with the only other woman member of the wagon train. The *Sibyl* published Holmes’s travel writing as an important supporting plank of their feminist agenda linking dress reform to increased autonomy and mobility for women and eventually to the legislated guarantee of Woman’s Rights and suffrage. Holmes and the *Sibyl* established a mutually beneficial relationship; Holmes gained an audience of like-minded women reformers through the circulation of the *Sibyl*, and the *Sibyl* gained an exemplar of what women who put the magazine’s feminist theories into practice could accomplish. By looking at travel writing published in periodicals like the *Sibyl*, we can gain insight into the unexpectedly wide and varied readership for women’s travel writing in the early nineteenth century, and thus into the spread of alternative models of femininity and travel writing circulating in the popular imagination.\(^{20}\)

### Economies of Nation

As the example of Holmes’s feminist travel writing suggests, the women travel writers in this study were actively engaged with the hot-button issues and debates of antebellum America. Unlike later-century women travel writers who touch only tangentially on political issues, the women in this study foreground discussions of politics and social reform, showing how public debates intersect with the lives of women both individually and collectively. Critic Mary Mason, for example, argues that travel texts by black women “establish a radical and political tradition for Afro-American women’s autobiography” that claims space “at the center of public discourse.” Mason’s groundbreaking work on black women’s travel writing can also be extended to the nonelite white women included in this study to suggest black and white women’s insistence on using travel and travel writing to gain authority in public and political policy making.\(^ {21}\) Ultimately, ragged-edge travelers practice an unconventional form of nation-building that insists on critiquing the practice of the nation and exposing its limitations and contradictions rather than uncritically advocating expansion.

As Amy Kaplan has demonstrated, conservative discourses of
domesticity and femininity promoted by women like Catherine Beecher and Sarah Josepha Hale, rather than following their own logic and remaining solidly within the domestic sphere, in fact engage, promote, and reflect the contradictions and conflicts of U.S. empire.\(^2\) The ragged-edge travelers studied here advance nation-building (and even U.S. empire) in a very different way, eschewing the focus on the appropriately feminine domestic sphere and instead claiming authority (usually by virtue of their wide-ranging travels) to criticize the political, social, and economic policies and practices of the nation. Their support of the United States is contingent upon their ability and authority to make and publish their criticisms; only then do they endorse the spread of a reformed and truly democratic nation.

Anne Royall (discussed in chapter 2) uses the authority she gains as a traveler to compare and criticize developing social service programs in cities throughout the urban Northeast and Mid-Atlantic in the pages of her *Sketches of History, Life, and Manners in the United States* (1826).\(^2\) Her tours evaluate the practice of government on the local level, which she takes as ultimately reflecting the goals, practices, and administration of the larger nation. Her investigation focuses on the central question, how will the nation treat its most vulnerable citizens—women and the poor? Since she moved from her impoverished childhood on the Alabama frontier to Eastern cities and eventually settled in Washington DC, Royall’s travels reverse the course of manifest destiny, moving from the frontier back to the foundations of national government to call her readers and her nation to return to the principles on which the country was founded. She advocates a careful reassessment of the nation before it claims new territory and moves still further from its democratic goals. Opinions like Royall’s were most often unwelcome; her subsequent trial as a common scold was a thinly veiled attempt to censor her, and the threatened punishment of the ducking stool is blatant evidence of the violent consequences ragged-edge women faced for their constructive criticism of the nation.

As they cross borders and expand current transnational theories that focus predominantly on male and immigrant populations, ragged-edge travelers invite us to think of the U.S. in global as well as national terms. Nancy Prince, who traveled to Russia in search of employment when racism kept her from practicing a skilled trade as a seamstress and on her return gave travel lectures and published a travel account, is a case in point. Ragged-edge travelers like Prince crossed borders in search of new global markets for their labor and then turned a double
profit on that labor by producing texts of their travels and entering yet another marketplace (this time, literary). Foregrounding women’s participation in the global marketplace and their attempted control of both their labor and their bodies follows Mae M. Ngai’s recent call for a transnational approach to American Studies that emphasizes action, agency, and mobility in those previously perceived only as pawns of transnational capital: “A focus on the transnational, with its emphasis on multiple sites and exchange, can potentially transform the figure of the ‘other’ from a representational construct to a social actor.” Ngai highlights both movement (between multiple locations or nations) and the notion of exchange, including “contact, translation, exchange, negotiation, conflict and other dynamics,” as opposed to the one-way extraction of labor, as potential sources of agency. Traveling Economies applies Ngai’s insight to illuminate the possibilities travel offers for self-determination and self-assertion. Potential agency certainly lured ragged-edge women to travel; often the transnational practice of border crossing allowed them to operate as American citizens abroad in ways that they were not allowed at home.

These women authors did not just cross borders, but they pushed them outward, inviting us to reconsider the early-nineteenth-century United States in hemispheric terms. Mary Ann Shadd Cary advocates for Canadian emigration for African-Americans because of Canada’s geographical proximity to the U.S. and because she views it as following the model of U.S. democracy. But whereas in Shadd Cary’s view the U.S. denied promised civil rights, Canada instead delivered on those same rights. Prince explores the possibilities of black emigration to Jamaica, similarly searching for a New World home for African-Americans. Holmes with her Western journey pushes the United States across the continent and toward a vision of manifest destiny as the spread of radical feminism. Perhaps the most salient example, however, is Mary Seacole, a self-described Jamaican-born mulatta and author of Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands (1857), who serves as a transnational touchstone throughout Traveling Economies (analysis of her narrative appears in multiple chapters). Her description of traveling in the anglophone Caribbean and in Central America highlights her position of compromised citizenship as a black colonial subject and her aggressive attempts to distance herself from the American slaves she encounters (her narrative illuminates the practice of fugitive slaves escaping south into Central America to enjoy some success and even high social standing). Ultimately traveling to the Crimean and becom-
ing a nurse and “heroine” to the British troops there, Seacole uses her global mobility to assert agency and identity. For all these women, a broader conception of America as linked to its neighbors in the hemisphere puts the national issues they address in a larger frame and foregrounds their self-conscious entry onto a world stage.

A global frame for African-Americans involves addressing the continuing effects of diaspora, and the black ragged-edge travelers discussed in Traveling Economies negotiate black identity and black nationalism in their lives and texts. In their recent essay, “Unfinished Migrations: Reflections on the African Diaspora and the Making of the Modern World,” Tiffany Ruby Patterson and Robin D. G. Kelley argue for an understanding of diaspora as “a process,” the notion of process highlighting mobility and cultural construction: “As a process it is constantly being remade through movement, migration, and travel, as well as imagined through thought, cultural production, and political struggle” (20). Traveling Economies argues that black travel writing provides exceptionally fertile ground for the study of diaspora as process by enacting mobility and imagining what that mobility means through the cultural production of texts.

Mary Ann Shadd Cary’s black travel writing (discussed in chapter 3) can be read in terms of diaspora as process. Traveling to Canada to evaluate the possibilities for black emigration in the wake of the Fugitive Slave Law, Shadd Cary uses her firsthand knowledge to claim authority in the high-stakes national and international debates on the future of African-Americans. Touring black Canadian settlements and evaluating them in the pages of the newspaper she founds and edits, the Provincial Freeman, Shadd Cary promotes emigration and discusses the specific threats and problems facing existing Canadian black communities. Her travel writing illustrates the complicated process of finding a national home for African-Americans and insists on building communities despite the risks. The result is not only a new practice of travel writing but also a new version of black nationalism focused on the creation and maintenance of local black communities.

Traveling Economies focuses on the period 1820–1860, not because this marks the start of American women’s travel writing (important predecessors such as Sarah Kemble Knight and Elizabeth Ashbridge were writing significantly earlier), but because this era marks the entrance of women into major public reform movements, best-selling literary success, and significant participation in travel and tourism. The 1820s and 1830s produced women activists and public speakers such as the
Grimke sisters, Maria Stewart, and Frances Wright (discussed in chapter 4), while the 1840s saw the marked rise in women’s abolition and feminist activism. The passage of the Fugitive Slave Law in 1850 legislatively curtailed the mobility of free blacks, even while the decade began the rise of white, middle-class women’s unprecedented access to and participation in tourism. The Civil War provides a logical endpoint to the investigation of Traveling Economies, as it briefly slowed both the practice of women’s travel and the production of travel texts, which rebounded and proliferated in the postbellum era.

Making sense of the upheaval of industrialization, urbanization, Woman’s Rights, and abolition, women’s early-nineteenth-century travel writing provided readers with a means to understand their rapidly changing world. As these women’s bodies and their texts circulated through antebellum culture, they performed what critic Paul Lauter terms “cultural work,” a process through which texts “construct the frameworks, fashion the metaphors, create the very language by which people comprehend their experiences and think about their world.”

The female traveler and her travel text constituted just such frameworks and metaphors, which made and challenged the epistemologies of early-nineteenth-century America. The alternative visions of gender, race, and class found in these women’s narratives suggest the wide scope of and diverse participation in public and private debates about national identity and citizenship. The figure of the female traveler, emerging as she does so early in the century, suggests a competing vision of women’s possibilities beyond hearth and home significantly predating the formal Woman’s Rights movement. Whether challenging or reinforcing the status quo of middle-class wealth and power, the proliferation and popularity of women’s travel texts invite us to rethink twenty-first-century formulations of how nineteenth-century Americans thought about their world.