

1 Everywhere below Canada

Oppressive language does more than represents violence;
it is violence; does more than represent limits of knowledge;
it limits knowledge.

Toni Morrison, Nobel Prize Lecture, 1993

A clamoring audience hustled and squeezed their way into the seats of Detroit's King Solomon Baptist Church to "hear a speaker of and on civil rights." More than two thousand people were in attendance on April 12, 1964, awaiting Malcolm X's "The Ballot or the Bullet" speech.¹ As he approached the microphone, Malcolm X fixed his black tie and black-rimmed glasses, the pleats of his cream suit swaying subtly as he began: "Mr. Moderator, Reverend [Albert] Cleage, brothers and sisters and friends, and I see some enemies." This easy latter recognition was met with applause and laughter from the audience. He continued, acknowledging directly what had become a familiar reality for Black activist communities: "In fact, I think we'd be fooling ourselves if we had an audience this large and didn't realize that there were some enemies present."

From Detroit to Jackson, Mississippi, chocolate cities across the country were emerging as battle sites in the Black Freedom struggle.² A post-pilgrimage Malcolm X, now renamed el-Hajj Malik el-Shabazz, spent 1964 traveling across Black America, articulating a diasporic Black political platform—one that linked America's urban grassroots civil rights uprisings to struggles for independence from colonial rule across the global South and on the continent of Africa.³ New civil rights legislation and

a critical election were on the horizon. As the concentration of African Americans living in cities increased, the future and fate of Black politics was becoming more linked to that of chocolate cities.

The prodigal son of Michigan race relations, Malcolm X had returned home to talk about the changes that had not come to pass. The audience that April afternoon was painfully aware of the absence of change. Frustrated that the Emancipation had come and gone and that the Great Migration had been in many ways a fool's errand, Black Detroit was living proof that escape from racism was a false promise of the so-called North. This was an audience on fire. This was an audience looking to hear and see racial diplomacy melded with the plain-talking truth telling that had distinguished Malcolm X from his peers and colleagues in the Black Freedom struggle.⁴

"If you black, you were born in jail, in the North as well as the South. Stop talking about the South," Malcolm X implored his audience. "As long as you South of the Canadian border, you South." Laughter and loud affirmations followed. He had declared an uncomfortable truth about Black life in the nation's Great Migration destinations. "The South" was everywhere that Black people called home—at least in the United States. "So we're trapped, trapped, double-trapped, triple-trapped. Any way we go, we find that we're trapped. And every kind of solution that someone comes up with is just another trap," Malcolm X said, peering out into the packed audience, his words echoing as they bounced from the church's stained glass to the ears of Black Detroit.⁵

Malcolm X's portrait of The South—an idea as much as it is a geographic location—runs contrary to dominant geographies of Black life. The accepted map of Black life in the United States is one drawn most prominently by the lines of the Great Migration, extending from the Mississippi Delta, the Georgia Piedmont, and the plains of Texas to the Midwest, Northeast, and West Coast. It imagines Black people moving en masse from the rural South directly to the urban Midwest, and East and West Coasts, remaking the landscape around them but moreover being remade by the bright lights of big city living. It is a modern narrative of progress, one in which "progress" is defined almost uniformly by increased urbanization. The Mason-Dixon Line, then, is a mythical and actual barrier between freedom and enslavement, North and South, progressive race relations and Old South mores.

Surely, the map of American life is also created by the aspirations and dreams—some realized, others not—of Black migrants. Not all Black migrants' journeys were successful or as promising as they had hoped, and migration hadn't always made Black Americans' dreams realities. As Gladys Knight and the Pips remind us in the classic "Midnight Train to Georgia," Los Angeles had "proved too much for" one migrant.⁶ "He couldn't make it," and he had opted to return to Georgia. Still, Black Americans exercised their right to get on down, moving especially from rural to urban neighborhoods. As historians of the Great Migration Isabel Wilkerson and Nicolas Lehman have shown, the idea, stories, and lived injustices of the South loomed large in Black American experience and memory, motivating a popular push out of the region.⁷

Early twentieth-century advertisements and articles frequently called for Black folks to go west and north, to finally escape to the "Promised Land" and grab a bit of the freedom they were owed. Stories of successful migration north and gainful employment opportunities were commonly splattered across the front pages of Black publications such as the *Chicago Defender*, the *Baltimore Afro-American*, and the *Philadelphia Tribune*. Thus, a dominant geographic logic of equality, rooted in notions of the North as a promised land during slavery, emerged: when Black folks move from the tainted part of the map—the South—to somewhere above the Mason-Dixon Line, their lives change decidedly for the better. This is a flawed logic, one indicative of the manufactured distinctions between "The North" and "The South" in the United States.⁸

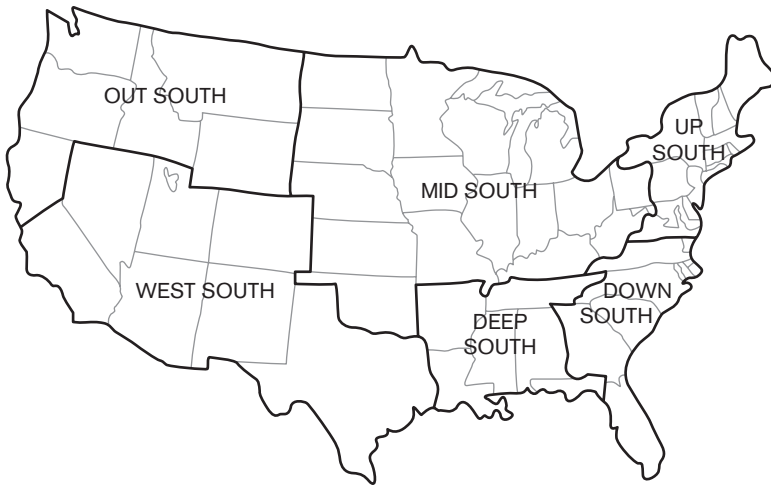
Chocolate Cities is built on a simple premise: *our current maps of Black life are wrong*. Instead of the neat if jarring linear progress of movement from the rural South to the urban North, we suggest that the history of Black life in modernity is a boomerang rather than a straight line of progress. Certainly, the deferred dreams of the Great Migration, including expanding poverty, hyperincarceration, extrajudicial and police violence, and diminishing opportunities urban Black Americans found within and outside of the geographic South, are undeniable evidence. As Malcolm X made clear in Detroit over half a century ago, the geography of the Black American experience is best understood as existing within and across varying versions of "The South"—regional areas with distinct yet overlapping and similar patterns of racism, White domination, and oppression

alongside place-inspired Black strivings, customs, and aspirations for a better and more equal society.

This book is based on two social facts about Black American life. One, Black American social life is best understood as occurring wholly in “The South”—one large territory, governed by a historically rooted and politically inscribed set of practices of racial domination, with a series of subregions; one large geography that has the characteristics popularly ascribed to the Jim Crow South: racism,⁹ residential segregation,¹⁰ disparate incarceration rates,¹¹ poverty,¹² and violence.¹³ Here the work of a range of scholars across a series of disciplines—such as Derrick Bell, Elijah Anderson, Joe Feagin, Michelle Alexander, Khalil Gibran Muhammad, Eric Foner, Darlene Clark Hine, Thomas Sugrue, and Jonathan Holloway—and their focus on the intersection of the South, history, race, and inequality are especially fruitful.¹⁴

Two, Black migrants brought and bring “The South”—Black regional customs, worldviews, and cultures—with them to their new homes in destinations across urban America. Taking cues from scholars such as Daphne Brooks, Aldon Morris, Manning Marable, Robin D.G. Kelley, Walter Rodney, Hortense Spillers, Gaye Johnson, and Mark Anthony Neal, we explore how Black southern cultural forms travel across the United States.¹⁵ “The migration brought to the city,” we learn in Alan Spear’s *Black Chicago* (1967), for example, “thousands of Negroes accustomed to the informal, demonstrative, preacher-oriented churches of the rural South.”¹⁶ Black southern migrants sought to relieve themselves of the culture of White domination in the South, but they were invested in retaining customs and cultural traditions they had come to value.¹⁷

“The South” is not just shorthand for systematic inequality and racism but also a frame for understanding and analyzing the striking similarities across Black communities and neighborhoods. Black neighborhoods, meccas, towns, communities, and urban enclaves, or chocolate cities, across the United States, highlight new ways to map and analyze geography, inequality, and the Black American experience. Chocolate cities are windows into Black migration, urbanization, rural and suburban life, and racial inequality. Informed by a variety of sources, experiences, and data, we call this new geography and framework the *chocolate maps*—a per-

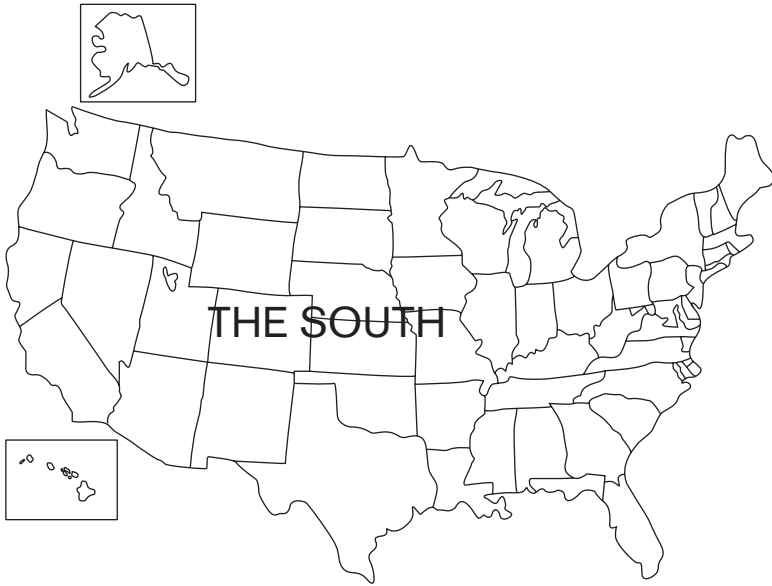


Map 1. The Black map, a race-conscious rendering of the United States.

spective that more accurately reflects the lived experiences and the future of Black life in America, and thus of the nation.¹⁸

Chocolate maps center the movement, politics, histories, and perspectives of Black Americans as consequential to patterns of change, inequality, and development throughout the twentieth century. We make use of national and regional health, educational, and economic data. Our resources also include decennial census data, Black arts and social sciences (e.g., music, literature, research, and visual arts) scholarship, news media, ethnography, and narratives and oral histories from Black Americans across the United States. Based also on the cultural and cognitive maps we collected, these Black geographies, as shown in **maps 1-3**, reflect the varying though consistent redefinition of America based on the perspectives of Black Americans.

Of all the configurations we discovered, time and again a regional restructuring of the United States like that reflected in map 1 was recurrent. Centered throughout the book here, this Black map of the United States is composed of six regions: Up South, Down South, Deep South, Mid South, Out South, and West South.¹⁹ As the map demonstrates, these regions replace traditional designations of North, South, Midwest,



Map 2. Chocolate map.

Northwest, and West as indicated in existing maps of and census data for the United States. Chocolate cities have been crucial sites through which Black Americans have shaped and been shaped by the United States—from the Seattle that begot Jimi Hendrix, to the Dallas that shaped Erykah Badu, to the Detroit that welcomed Malcolm X in April 1964, to the Birmingham from which Martin Luther King Jr. penned his most famous call to action.

X MARKS THE SPOT

By February 1965 Malcolm X was back in Harlem, expanding his newly developed Black Nationalist platform. Standing before several hundred people at the Audubon Ballroom just north of Harlem in Washington Heights, X was in the midst of a protracted and increasingly bitter departure and break away from the Nation of Islam. Having spent much of 1964 traveling from chocolate city to chocolate city with his “The Ballot or the

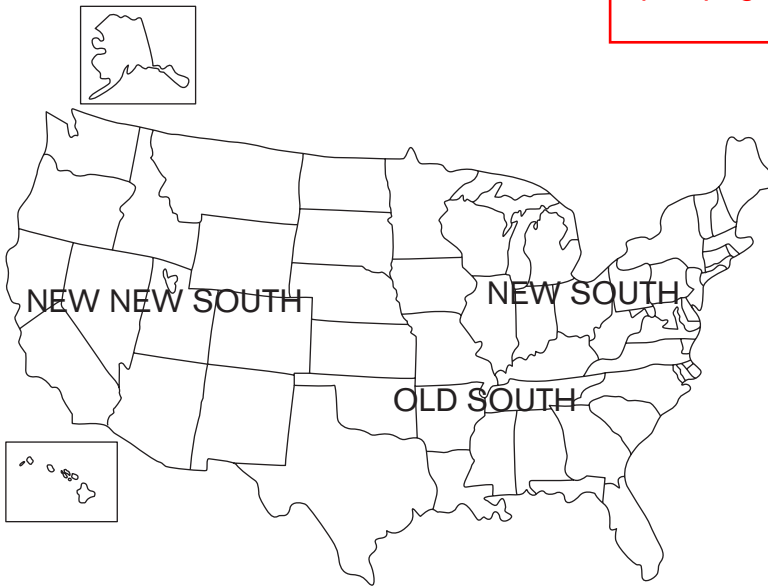
Bullet” speech in tow, X’s return to Harlem was its own sort of homecoming. Though he had lived in many places throughout his life, including Detroit and Boston, Harlem had become his chosen home.

Steeped in a rich Black history of its own, Harlem was its own kind of South, even as it lay in upper Manhattan. It was also a diasporic Black South, a multiethnic space with migrants from the Caribbean shaping the space in concert with migrants from the U.S. South, as well as with other racial and ethnic groups. On the same streets that had provided the fertile terrain on which Duke Ellington, Countee Cullen, and Madame C.J. Walker illustrated the power and beauty of Black life, Malcolm X had found refuge. Such refuge, however, had become fleeting by late 1964, as the animus surrounding his departure from the Nation of Islam increased to the point where X had become especially reliant on his own measures of self-protection, most prominently manifested in a photo published by *Ebony* magazine in September 1964. In the photograph we see Malcolm X, dressed in a suit, dark tie, and white dress shirt, peeking through the curtains with a rifle in his left hand, concerned that those who had been sending him death threats were watching and waiting for an opportunity to kill him.

Not one to shrink under the pressure of fear of death, Malcolm X continued on with his work and ensured that he had a staff that could provide added protection to him and his family. On February 19, 1965, things came to a head in the Audubon Ballroom less than a mile from his Harlem headquarters. Just as he was beginning his address, he was interrupted. “Nigger! Get your hand out of my pocket!” a man’s voice yelled from within the audience. Distracted and caught off guard by the sudden outburst, Malcolm X looked closely into the audience as his team sought to protect their leader. As suddenly as the outburst had occurred, men with guns were unloading more than twenty bullets into X’s body. Pronounced dead later that afternoon, Malcolm X was mourned the world over, but especially in his chosen chocolate city of Harlem. More than twenty-five thousand mourners wept and shared parting words at a public viewing lasting from February 23 to 26 at Harlem’s Unity Funeral Home.²⁰

Dapper Dan, the Harlem-bred influential tastemaker and stylist, was among the millions of Black people for whom the loss of Malcolm X was deeply felt. Reflecting on X’s prominent role in organizing Black resistance

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Map 3. Black map alternate.

after “a policeman got killed in the Mosque on 160th Street” in the 1960s, Dapper Dan recalled it as “the most powerful time in [his] life.” By 1968 Dapper Dan was on the cover of the newspaper *40 Acres and a Mule*, standing in front of the spot where New York State had decided to build an office complex in Harlem holding a replica of the Trojan horse. “You know what happened in Troy? They built a Trojan horse, and the soldiers snuck in and took over,” his comments forecasting the attempt by the state to surveil and change Harlem’s racial makeup. “That state building was the first major state building that they put there and as a part of the gentrification program.”²¹

Then, as now, the bind between Harlem and Blackness and Malcolm X still resonates. Currently, Harlem is a chocolate city undergoing its own melting of sorts due to the massive dispossession triggered by gentrification and White migration to urban America. Even still, interviews with a range of Harlemites reveal the enduring importance of this Black city within a city and some of the key dynamics of and within chocolate cities. As Jai Hudson, a Black woman author and fashion stylist raised in Harlem during the 1980s, proclaimed, “Harlem is culture. Harlem is music.

Harlem is Black excellence. Harlem is style. Harlem is rich. . . . Harlem is the heartbeat of N[ew] Y[ork]. The heartbeat!”²²

Echoing Hudson, prolific music producer and Harlem-raised entertainment-maestro Sean Combs (aka “Puffy” and “Diddy”) was unapologetic about his pride in the chocolate city that reared him: “Harlem influenced America in the arts; it was the home of music, soul, and fashion. . . . It is the Black Mecca. To be able to have one place touch fashion, music is a tremendous amount of power. . . . You have Black people from everywhere. . . . Harlem was the first big African American borough. You had actors, doctors, lawyers, and literary cats. . . . It was the Mecca of Black culture and still is!” Combs suggested that “the presence of Malcolm X, the Cotton Club, the Renaissance period, the Apollo performances, [and] rooftop parties” were not only features of the real and symbolic importance of the chocolate city of Harlem but also a living example of how the neighborhood demonstrated that Black people had long been place makers and city makers whose efforts changed and influence the world. When asked what Harlem meant to him, Combs was heartfelt and matter-of-fact: “Home. The essence of who I am.”²³

Harlem is one of the most diverse chocolate cities, composed of a vibrant diversity of Black people from across the African diaspora, including West Africa, the Caribbean, and South America. Janice Combs, Sean’s mother, who raised him at 145th and Lennox Avenue, recalled such Black diversity while reminiscing over her wealth of experience and time in Harlem: “When I was coming up as a kid, I always wanted to be in the parade. They used to call it the West Indian Day Parade in Harlem. It started at 110th Street and ended at 155th Street. They had different groups that they had at the time. The parade was festive, and beautiful. . . . We would sit on the sidewalk on Seventh Avenue and watch the parade go by. We sat and watched and danced as kids.” Illustrating how the range of Black people from a variety of places across the country and the globe was the essence of Harlem, Janice’s insights highlight how Black cultural diversity was and is a core feature of the chocolate city. “Harlem is my heritage,” Janice said. She expressed her deep appreciation for her hometown: “It’s my home. I love Harlem and will always love Harlem. It raised me.”²⁴

As it turns out, the chocolate city of Harlem, like many of those discussed in the chapters that follow, does not enjoy the CC future that

Parliament Funkadelic might have predicted. Still, differences in time and composition do not necessarily shake away the attachments to and power of the chocolate city for its residents and creators. Along these lines, *Chocolate Cities* offers a new way of imagining and assessing race, place, and inequality in the United States, illustrating the powerful and lasting effects and lessons of Black migration throughout the twentieth century. To animate these connected Black geographic sensibilities, chocolate maps, and chocolate cities, we revisit the life and times of well-known and everyday Black American figures, our Black Lewises and Clarks. Guided by the expeditions, observations, and stories of these Black travelers and adventurers, in the chapters ahead we come to see how place, politics, race, and history are uniquely intertwined with the enduring South.

Our exploration of the social, economic, and political life of chocolate cities begins with an exploration and explanation of chocolate maps. Using a combination of census, archival, and ethnographic data, we put chocolate maps into contemporary and historical context. We then further detail and outline the multiple Souths encompassed in this new geography of the intersections of race, place, and enduring patterns of inequality.

Chocolate Cities is divided into four parts. In Part 1 we elaborate the concept of chocolate maps, following Zora Neale Hurston, James Baldwin, and Lou Rawls as they theorized the connections and similarities between Black people across place and space. We revise typical conceptions of regional difference by focusing on the many and multiplying Souths created across the United States as Black people moved and made new places. Instead of the Midwest, Northeast, Southeast, Pacific Northwest, and Southwest, we offer Up South, Out South, West South, Mid South, Deep South, and Down South. Through chocolate maps, we show the versatility of the chocolate city. No matter the size—whether a small town, a neighborhood, or an entire city that has become synonymous with Black culture, power, and place making—every place on the map is a chocolate city.

The next sections focus on three concepts central to the chocolate cities idea: the village, the soul, and the power. The *village* reflects the intricate, tight networks and strategies Black communities developed behind the veil of segregation to survive and thrive. It emphasizes the importance of place making in the most inhospitable and unequal circumstances in the cultivation of Black power and Black resistance. The *soul* highlights the range of

cultural production that emerged from chocolate cities as a result of and in service of Black people's place-making efforts. *Chocolate Cities* is deeply invested in the voices of various culture workers who consistently describe and analyze the state of Black America, and this section travels with Aretha Franklin, Tupac Shakur, and Big Freedia to illustrate the movement of *soul* across the chocolate maps. Finally, we turn to the *power*—people power, economic power, political power—embedded in chocolate cities. We travel with Mary Ann Shadd Cary, Mary Sanders, Mos Def and W. E. B. Du Bois to examine how Black people have turned place making into political power at the local, state, national, and international level and how they have often been punished for their desire to move freely about the world. Together, these concepts form an assets-based analysis of Black life in America from the nineteenth century to the present.

We conclude with a discussion of what it means to be a chocolate city, and to see and think like a chocolate city, in the era of the multifaceted Movement for Black Lives. As Black spaces and places are continuously under siege and taken over through various state, municipal, and police practices, we ask how chocolate cities will continue to exist and thrive. We use what we know about chocolate cities and maps since Emancipation to help us understand how Black people will respond to these and other challenges in the twenty-first century. Moreover, we demonstrate that Black people, concentrated in places, have been central to the advocacy for and survival of democracy in America. Black people's exemplary creative place making is the light toward both true civilization and broad liberation.

PART I **The Map**

Blackness
is a title,
is a preoccupation,
is a commitment Blacks
are to comprehend—
and in which you are
to perceive your Glory.

...

The word Black
has geographic power,
pulls everybody in:
Blacks here—
Blacks there—
Blacks wherever they may be.

Gwendolyn Brooks, "Primer for Blacks," 1980

