



**Karina Avila** is the battalion commander of the ROTC Huskie Battalion at Northern Illinois University (NIU). As a scholar at NIU who is majoring in Rehabilitation Services, Cadet Avila is very active on campus. She is a member of Deaf Pride and holds a home health certificate in assistant nursing. Additionally, she has been the recipient of several awards, including the Cadet Scholar Award, Silver Medal Athlete Award, Bronze Medal Athlete Award, Scholastic Excellence Award, and American Legion Award. In the summer of 2014, she served as a cultural understanding and language proficiency cadet who participated on a task force OSO Beyond the Horizons service mission in Guatemala.



**Maria Colompos** serves in a leadership role in the ROTC Huskie Battalion at Northern Illinois University (NIU). She is also an NIU scholar who is double majoring in history and sociology and minoring in Military Science and Latino/Latina American Studies. Cadet Colompos is the treasurer of the Pre-law Honors Society, a member of Alpha Kappa Delta International Sociology Honors Society, and a volunteer tutor for foreign exchange students. During the summer of 2014, she was a translator and public affairs officer for a humanitarian mission in Guatemala. She has received the Beyond the Horizons Excellence Award for her outstanding translation and cultural awareness. Additionally, she has earned several scholarships and awards, including the Veterans of Foreign Wars Award, Cadet of the Month, Cadet Command Federal Scholarship, and Scholastic Excellence Award.



**Shanell Walter** serves in a leadership role in the ROTC Huskie Battalion at Northern Illinois University (NIU). Cadet Walter is majoring in sociology with a Military Science minor. She is also a member of the John Henry Clarke Honor Society, the Chi Alpha Epsilon Honor Society, the Northern Illinois University Law Society, and Deaf Pride. She has been the recipient of several awards, including the Superior Cadet Decoration Award, First-Year Scholar Award, President Barack Obama Award, Two-Time Dean's List Award, Two-Time Honors Award, National Sojourners Award, Bronze Athletic Award, Mae Thomas Award for Excellence in First-Year Composition, and National Leader Award. Her current academic leadership positions include president of Mortar Board Honor Society at NIU.

---

# HALLOWED JOURNEYS: REFLECTIONS ON GOING TO COLLEGE AND LIVING ABROAD

By **Cornelius Gilbert and Robert Schalkoff**

## Introduction

Metaphors are often used in everyday communication. For example, a group of employees are frequently referred to as “members of a team.” The United States is commonly described as a “melting pot” of diverse cultural heritages. American society has also been identified as a bowl of “mixed salad.” In a mixed salad, various elements are easily recognizable. So, too, are people in American society when subpopulations maintain their unique cultural, racial, and ethnic identifiers, including cultural dress, cuisines, and expressions.

A metaphor has been described as “a way of understanding one abstract domain in terms of another more easily understood concrete domain,”<sup>1</sup> or as Schalkoff stated, “metaphors structure thought.”<sup>2</sup> Lakoff and Johnson argued that metaphors make “capable . . . new understanding of our experience . . . [providing us with] new meaning to our pasts, to our daily activity, and to what we know and believe.”<sup>3</sup> Metaphors can be clear and powerful interpretive tools, particularly for educational purposes.

Drawing upon the power of metaphors to create new understandings and connections to our pasts, this paper explores

metaphors associated with the unique personal histories of the authors and a period in African American history known as the Great Migration. This refers to the period in which millions of African Americans moved from southern states to northern and western states. We use these metaphors to illuminate the experiences of today's African American college students as they matriculate, or *migrate*, into institutions of higher education in search of their own versions of the American Dream. This migration that takes place as part of African American college students' search for their own version of the American Dream is also framed as a "hallowed journey" metaphorically. *Hallowed* has been used as an adjective to describe a person, site, or tradition that is considered "sacred, set apart, holy, or highly respected."<sup>4</sup> Looking back, we reflect on our personal journeys as a sacred part of this process because we sojourned through different places, memories, and experiences.

### Personal Migration Stories

This paper evolved from a conversation between us about an e-mail system migration in the workplace. In the midst of joking about this relatively new use of the word *migration*, we began toying with the relevance of *migration* as a metaphor for our personal journeys to our current positions in higher education and the hallowed journeys of African American college students in higher education today.

#### Cornelius Gilbert

My migration began when I, an African American male, left home to attend the University of Wisconsin-Madison, a predominantly White institution. I was a young man coming from a home located about fourteen miles west of downtown Chicago, and this university in an unfamiliar state provided a "good recipe" for culture shock. Although the state of Wisconsin has the Green Bay Packers and the legendary professional football coach Vince Lombardi, as well as the city of Milwaukee, the place where basketball great legend Kareem Abul-Jabbar won his first NBA title, Wisconsin is probably best known as the Dairy State. For many outsiders, the state is considered a "foreign land" where cows may seem, albeit falsely, to outnumber people, and everyone wears a cheesehead.

As an African American male who rooted for Michael Jordan's Chicago Bulls and loyally supported the Chicago Bears, I was probably somewhat of an oddity. Wisconsin, however, proved to be a place filled with opportunity, a veritable "land of milk and honey" for me. The university offered undergraduate and graduate degrees in Black Studies, both of which I obtained. I also worked as an academic advisor at the university for a decade and received my Ph.D. there. The support I received from Wisconsin's faculty and staff were contributing factors to my achievements. In the end, going "up north" proved to be a "blessing" during my "hallowed journey." I currently serve on the graduate faculty as an assistant professor of Adult and Higher Education at Northern Illinois University.

#### Robert Schalkoff

I am a White male who migrated from the United States (where I was born, raised, and attended college) to Japan—where I am a permanent resident and professor of teacher education at a small state university. My migration was unintentional, and the result of a coincidental "rekindling of an old flame." Suitcase in hand, I found myself on a plane headed abroad—both first-time experiences. I enjoyed the first few months of what Oberg<sup>5</sup> referred to as the "honeymoon" stage of living in a new culture. I enjoyed the "vertiginous pleasure of losing an old self and growing a new one to replace it."<sup>6</sup> The end of the relationship that brought me to Japan, however, left me feeling alone and "lost at sea" with no "compass" to navigate a new language and culture.

I eventually learned Japanese and the "system" of Japan. Japanese friends and "insiders," other expatriates already familiar with Japanese culture and society, played a pivotal role. They guided me during this part of my "hallowed journey" to land a teaching job in the school system. The guidance of a Japanese mentor and earning a subsequent master's degree in language education helped me move from secondary to higher education.

I came to my present position by working seventy-hour weeks, publishing in both Japanese and English, and returning to school to pursue my doctorate. A sabbatical brought me "back home" to the United States. Currently, I am reevaluating my *migration*, accomplishments, and sacrifices as I try to make sense of life in the U.S. after such a long period of absence.

## The Great Migration

In the case of the Great Migration, two distinct periods between 1916 and 1970, the north was perceived as a “Promised Land.” When referring to the Great Migration, we are referring to the migration of African Americans in twentieth-century America, which occurred in two phases, the first happening between the years 1910, 1915, and 1934,<sup>7</sup> and the second between 1940 and 1970.<sup>8</sup> African Americans conceptualized “up north” as an idealized place where reduced racial hostility existed and the land was filled with jobs and opportunities for a new and better life. African Americans at the time likened their journeys north to “marching to Zion.” In a letter dated May 13, 1917, an individual wrote, “Dear Sir: I have been reading the Chicago Defender and seeing so many advertisements about the work in the north.”<sup>9</sup> Another individual penned, “In reading the Defenders [newspaper] want ad I noticed that there is lots of work to be had.” From these snippets, one can see why African Americans (at the time) considered the north to be a land filled with milk and honey—especially when it came to employment.

The Great Migration not only afforded African Americans with opportunities to find better jobs and better lives, it also provided new spaces for Blacks to create their own era, movement, identities, and culture. For example, Harlem, a formerly all-White New York City neighborhood, housed over 200,000 African Americans by 1920, and became the primary site for the New Negro Movement—later known as the Harlem Renaissance. The Harlem Renaissance, which spanned from 1919 to 1940, was a hallowed era in Black History that ushered in an “extraordinary production” of Black literature, art, music, and drama both in the northern cities of the U.S. and abroad.<sup>10</sup> The Harlem Renaissance is remembered for its special connection to New York City, where young Blacks came together to create a flurry of cultural activity, as evidenced by an outpouring of award-winning poetry, fiction, plays, sculptures, paintings, music, and essays.

### Metaphors from Personal Stories and Great Migration

Metaphors found in our stories and the Great Migration are listed in Table 1. These metaphors will be used to explore the journeys of African American college students today,

**Table 1**

### Metaphors in Personal Stories and Great Migration

Concepts	Gilbert	Schalkoff	Great Migration
A place different from place or birth or upbringing	“foreign land”		
A place where only good things happen	“land of milk and honey”		
Traveling even further north	“up north”		
Having good and unexpected results	“blessing”		
Beginning a new relationship with a previous girlfriend		“rekindling an ‘old flame’”	
The period of time after moving to a new environment when everything seems new and exciting		“honeymoon”	
Not knowing what to do or say in a new environment		“lost at sea”	
A clear idea of what to do and say		“compass”	
People who already know a place or system		“insiders”	
The values, mores, customs, etc. of a new place		“system”	
Place or context of origin		“roots”	
Returning to a place or context of origin		“back home”	
A place of peace, well-being, and opportunity where work and goods are plentiful			“Promised Land”
Traveling to above			“marching to Zion”

## African American Students

The number of African American college students increased by an estimated two million from 1993 to 2011.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the majority, 55 percent, of African Americans polled in the College Board/National Journal Next America Poll affirmed their belief that a bachelor's degree is necessary for success.<sup>12</sup> This percentage is higher than that of their White peers. Similar to their ancestors who sought a better life up north in a land perceived to be filled with milk and honey, today's African American students appear to be migrating to institutions of higher education. They, too, can be seen as marching toward Zion, or toward the Promised Land, in the form of colleges and universities and perhaps the education and/or degrees they are seeking. The education, presumably symbolized in the actual degrees, is conceivably their ticket into a middle-class lifestyle.

The excitement and electricity felt by African Americans who migrated to cities in the North are similar to the feelings new college freshmen experience about life on their own in a setting that is designed specifically for them. The honeymoon stage is filled with feelings of optimism and opportunity, along with a positive energy that emerges from this time. There is, however, a flip side to these feelings. Unfortunately, the realities of life can seldom live up to the anticipated fantasy, as witnessed in the experiences of the African Americans during the Great Migration.

African Americans who left the South in the Great Migration found "the North and West weren't the color-blind nirvanas that many Blacks imagined, [even though] Chicago and Cleveland were a far cry from Birmingham and Atlanta."<sup>13</sup> Even the comfort of familiar foods was impacted, due to the lack of time and likely availability of ingredients to cook favorite meals.<sup>14</sup> Change and transitions are not easy, especially when the changes are not as they had been idealized.<sup>15</sup>

For African Americans who leave home to attend college, particularly at predominantly White institutions, cultural shock can influence their perceptions of the college experience. Consider the case of many African American students who leave their homes and homogeneous environments and move to an environment in which very few people look like and perhaps behave like them. In their initial experiences in their new college environment, the honeymoon feeling is strong for African American students. The initial excitement of going to college and the promise that holds for students after graduation, coupled with the enthusiasm of welcome week activities, can generate some level of comfort. However, once classes begin, students may find that their new environment can be isolating, especially when an individual is the only African American student, for example.<sup>16</sup>

Feelings of autonomy, freedom, and independence are common among many traditional college students who have left home to attend college for the first time. On the other hand, today's African American collegians, like their Great Migration ancestors, must also adjust to a different lifestyle. Not only do they experience the typical adjustment difficulties of new college students—being in unfamiliar territory or foreign land with many people who do not look like them or share their culture—changes in lifestyle can lead to a unique discomfort for these students.<sup>17</sup> They may feel lost at sea or adrift without a compass to guide them.

Support services of many types may be useful in helping them stay on track. Perhaps the most valuable asset in ensuring a student feels secure in the new environment is a supportive social environment.<sup>18</sup> In programs such as the Posse Program,<sup>19</sup> which focuses on helping students of color adjust to college and college life, students' needs are anticipated and met through a structured support system. The program provides cohort-based support before and after matriculation as well as interaction with "insiders," who are students already on campus. As it did for their ancestors in the Harlem Renaissance, spending time with insiders in campus clubs, organizations, and university spaces where students can come together and discuss their identities, cultures, ideas, and experiences can not only make the transition to predominantly White institutions smoother and less stressful,<sup>20</sup> but also make way for unique cultural production and expression. Supportive insiders might play roles similar to the ones relatives and friends played in the migration of African Americans to the North and in my (Schalkoff's) experiences in Japan. They are an integral part of the students' "hallowed journeys," since insiders are resources, in that they are already familiar with the territory. They know how to negotiate predominantly White institutions and can provide a compass for newcomers trying to find their way.

### Closing Remarks

Schalkoff<sup>21</sup> informed us that metaphors can be conceptual devices; and from his observations of scholars utilizing metaphors, he argued metaphors can also be teaching devices. In this paper, we explored metaphors in relation to our own

experiences and African Americans in the Great Migration and then applied those metaphors to African Americans going to college.

For young African American students preparing for and matriculating into higher education, their hallowed journeys actually begin when they realize that before success is achieved, they may face significant challenges. Moreover, the hallowed journey does not necessarily end once African American students graduate from college. African American collegians may find themselves caught between two worlds—their home and the outside world. W. E. B. Du Bois captured this in his classic work, *The Souls of Black Folk*, by penning,

It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals in one dark body.<sup>22</sup>

In addition to seeking the counsel of insiders, African American collegians would be wise to seek out trustworthy professionals with whom they are comfortable to consult and collaborate with on strategies to help during the initial adjustment and subsequent challenges. Faculty members of color who have come before them can provide invaluable insight.<sup>23</sup> Identifying acceptable meanings of success, as well as tailoring objectives and goals to the individual, are also some possibilities for discussion between students and the professionals they consult. As many in the field already assert, crafting an action agenda for accomplishing those intentions/ambitions is also important. This way, African American college students will gain greater awareness and, hopefully, be more prepared for the peaks and valleys they will encounter on their march toward Zion or their hallowed journey to the Promised Land. Ideally, they will also be better equipped for residing in their individually conceptualized lands of milk and honey after graduation.

#### Notes:

1. Steve Bialostok, "Using Critical Metaphor Analysis to Extract Parents' Cultural Models of How their Children Learn to Read," *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies* 5, no. 2 (2008): 110.
2. Robert J. Schalkoff, "Metaphors as Used by Noted Human Resource Development (HRD) Scholars at the Pecs 2010 Conference," *Human Resource Development International* 14, no. 3 (2011): 347.
3. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 139.
4. *Random House Kernerman Webster's College Dictionary*, s.v., "hallowed," accessed July 21, 2015, <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/hallowed>.
5. Kalervo Oberg, "Culture Shock: Adjustment to New Cultural Environments," *Practical Anthropology* 7 (1960): 177–82.
6. Lawrence Durrell, *Mountolive* (London: Faber and Faber, 1958), 21.
7. Leah Platt Boustan, "Black Migration, White Flight: The Effect of Black Migration on Northern Cities and Labor Markets," *The Journal of Economic History* 67, no. 2 (2007): 484–88, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4501161>; Sara-Jane (Saje) Mathieu, "The African American Great Migration Reconsidered," *OAH Magazine of History* 23, no. 4 (2009): 19–23; "Sir I Will Thank You with All My Heart: Seven Letters from the Great Migration," *History Matters*, <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5332>.
8. Mathieu, "The African American Great Migration."
9. "Sir I Will Thank You."
10. *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, eds. Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay (London: W.W. Norton, 2004), 953.
11. "Black Educational Attainment by the Numbers," [Blackdemographics.com](http://blackdemographics.com/education-2/education/), accessed June 20, 2015, <http://blackdemographics.com/education-2/education/>.



12. Ronald Brownstein, "Why Minorities are More Optimistic about the Value of College," *National Journal*, November 7, 2013, <http://www.nationaljournal.com/next-america/education/why-minorities-are-more-optimistic-about-the-value-of-college-20131107>.
13. Celeste Headlee, "My Great Migration Story," *The Take Away*, September 15, 2010, <http://www.thetakeaway.org/story/94542-celeste-headlees-great-migration-story/>.
14. S. T. Wyatt, "The Great Migration: Goin' up Yonder," 2002, [http://cuip.uchicago.edu/~swyatt/The%20Great%20Migration/goin\\_up\\_yonder.htm](http://cuip.uchicago.edu/~swyatt/The%20Great%20Migration/goin_up_yonder.htm).
15. Wyatt, "The Great Migration"; "Sir I Will Thank You."
16. Douglas A. Guiffrida, "African American Student Organizations as Agents of Social Integration," *Journal of College Student Development* 44, no. 3 (2003): 304–319.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. "Posse Program," University of Wisconsin-Madison, accessed July 21, 2015, <http://posseprogram.wisc.edu/>.
20. K. Smith, personal communication, February 22, 2015.
21. Schalkoff.
22. W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg, 1903), 3.
23. Guiffrida, "African American Student Organizations."



**Cornelius Gilbert, Ph.D.**, is an assistant professor of Adult and Higher Education at Northern Illinois University. His research agenda includes forming a nexus between the liberal arts and student success. He teaches master's and doctoral-level students. Prior to coming to NIU, Dr. Gilbert was an academic advisor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where he primarily interfaced with undergraduates who were undecided about what career fields to pursue. Gilbert is also a member of NACADA's inaugural class for the Emerging Leaders Program.



**Robert Schalkoff** is a professor of English language education and director of the Program for the Development of Global Talent at Yamaguchi Prefectural University, Japan. He has lived in Japan for twenty-five years and has over fifteen years of experience as a pre-service teacher educator. Schalkoff has also worked extensively as an instructor and consultant in professional development for in-service teachers in Japan and internationally. His research interests include campus internationalization in higher education and continuing professional education in secondary education. He was a visiting scholar in the Department of Counseling, Adult and Higher Education at Northern Illinois University from August 2014 to March 2015. He is currently a doctoral candidate in the same program.