

Cultural Heritage and Mobility from a Multisensory Perspective

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First published 2025

ISBN: 978-1-032-71374-8 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-032-71380-9 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-1-032-71378-6 (ebk)

Chapter 4 **Multisensory Experience of the Middle Passage in Alex Haley's Roots**

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DOI: 10.4324/9781032713786-5

This chapter was funded by the Jagiellonian University.



4 Multisensory Experience of the Middle Passage in Alex Haley's *Roots*

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Introduction

In this chapter, I contribute to the interdisciplinary fields of mobility studies, sensory studies and heritage studies, with a particular focus on the concept of difficult heritage. Drawing from the works of Cresswell (2006) and Urry (2007) in mobility studies, as well as Howes (ed., 2005) in multisensory studies, and engaging with the discourse on difficult heritage as explored by scholars such as Owsianowska and Banaszekiewicz (2015), I propose a comprehensive framework to understand movement not just as a spatial or temporal shift, but as a deeply embodied experience where the senses are continually engaged and reconfigured.

Building on this foundation, my analysis is conducted from the perspective of literary studies, recognising that heritage is also a form of discourse integral to culture (Smith 2006, 4), and is expressed through various media. Therefore, the analysis of literature portraying heritage is both significant and warranted. The text analysed in this chapter: Alex Haley's *Roots* (1976) has had a substantial impact on the American understanding of the transatlantic slave trade and will be studied employing the concept of "multisensory mobility". Multisensory mobility is understood here as an interpretive approach that views movement as an intricately embodied experience, where the continual engagement and reconfiguration of the senses critically inform our understanding of the physical, emotional and psychological aspects of historical journeys, particularly in relation to traumatic events. It intersects with heritage studies by examining how the past, particularly its more challenging aspects, continues to impact and shape present experiences and perceptions. The integration of all these fields offers a nuanced approach to understanding the complexities of historical experiences such as the Middle Passage, situating them within a broader context of cultural memory and inherited legacies.

The transatlantic slave trade, being the largest forced migration in human history (Carpi and Owusu, 2022, 88), presents a complex landscape for analysis. When the first autobiographical accounts of Africans enslaved in the Americas were published, the Middle Passage experience was rarely conveyed.

DOI: 10.4324/9781032713786-5

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Wendy Harding points out that the experience of the Middle Passage is “resistant to storytelling” – too traumatic to write about it, unsuited for the narrative form and easier to express in poetry (Harding, 2005). This perspective aligns with Maria Tumarkin’s exploration of the heritage of trauma, where places and people are deeply marked by pain and loss, transforming their stories into “traumascapes” that hold profound psychological significance (Tumarkin, 2005). Similarly, Dominick LaCapra’s concept of the unspeakable nature of genocide trauma highlights the inherent difficulty in narratively representing such extreme experiences, necessitating approaches that go beyond conventional storytelling to capture the depth and complexity of these traumas (LaCapra, 2001).

In her *Time* magazine interview, Toni Morrison remarked on the American desire to repress the memory of slavery, stating that it is “something that the characters don’t want to remember, I don’t want to remember, black people don’t want to remember, white people don’t want to remember” (Morrison Angelo, 1989). This observation underscores the collective trauma and desire to distance oneself from such a harrowing past, aligning with the concept of difficult heritage as proposed by Owsianowska and Banaszekiewicz, who suggest “difficult heritage” refers to a legacy that, as humanity, as a specific group and as individuals, we would prefer not to inherit from our ancestors and erase from memory.

It is an inheritance with which no one willingly identifies, yet it imposes an inalienable duty on the living to manifest it in the present and preserve it for the future. This obligation serves as a tribute to the victims and a warning for subsequent generations.

(Owsianowska Banaszekiewicz 2015, 11)

This framework is crucial in order to understand the physical, emotional and psychological journeys of the enslaved, emphasising the intricate interplay between movement and sensory perception. Based on the literary accounts of the Middle Passage within the context of “difficult heritage” (Logan and Reeves, 2009; Macdonald, 2009; Owsianowska Banaszekiewicz 2015), it is hypothesised that these representations significantly influence the contemporary understanding and theorisation of racial/cultural identity, transgenerational trauma and memory restoration in modern-day America. Saidiya Hartman emphasises the importance of sensory experiences in understanding the trauma of the Middle Passage (Hartman 2007), while Stacy Morgan points to the Middle Passage experience as the substrate of emerging black culture (Morgan 1997). This point of view seems particularly interesting in the context of the earlier assumptions of sociologists, who portrayed slavery primarily as a destructive, deculturalising force (Morgan 1997, 1). In my approach, the collective journey on a slave ship during the Middle Passage represents a profound intersection of mobility and multisensory experience. As the enslaved Africans traversed the Atlantic Ocean, they were

not merely in motion, they were immersed in sensory stimuli: the stifling confines of the ship's hold, the cacophony of unfamiliar languages and the omnipresent stench of human suffering.

Using ideas from the growing areas of mobility studies and research on how we experience things through our senses, I coined the term "multisensory mobility". Mobility studies, as explored by Cresswell (2006) and Urry (2007), investigate the movement of people, goods and information across different spaces and contexts, focusing on how such movements shape social and cultural dynamics. This field examines the implications of mobility on identity, power relations and spatial organisation. In the same way, multisensory studies, as discussed by Howes (2005), delve into how human experiences are shaped through our senses. This field explores how sensory perception influences and is influenced by social and cultural practices, understanding that our sensory experiences are not just biological but are deeply embedded in and shaped by cultural contexts. Incorporating these concepts, "multisensory mobility" offers a comprehensive framework that considers movement as an embodied experience, where sensory engagement and cultural contexts interplay, especially relevant in understanding the multifaceted experiences of the Middle Passage. "Multisensory mobility" is conceptualised as an integrative framework that transcends mere physical displacement, embodying a comprehensive sensory experience that interweaves the tactile, auditory, olfactory, gustatory and visual aspects. This approach facilitates a deeper understanding of the emotional, psychological and corporeal facets of historical expeditions, exemplified by the Middle Passage. It underscores the pivotal role of sensory experiences in the formation of cultural memory and identity. This paradigm extends our understanding of mobility by situating it within a sensory context, acknowledging the intricate correlation between physical movement and the subjective sensory modalities through which individuals interpret and interact with their environments. Thus, it intricately connects the tangible aspect of movement with the subjective sensory experiences that frame and elucidate cultural and historical narratives, offering a nuanced perspective on the interplay between sensory perception, movement and cultural memory.

Historically, in the field of literature, narratives from post-emancipation, particularly during the 18th and 19th centuries, were often politically charged and sponsored by white benefactors. Authors, aware of their audience, used their writings as pleas for freedom, leveraging literacy as evidence of their humanity, often omitting the most traumatic experiences to avoid offending slaveholders. Although from the 1950s, paralleling movements such as Black Power, the historiography of the Black experience in African American literature started to centre on lived experiences, there were still many things unsaid about the past up until Alex Haley's *Roots* (1976), the first book that detailed the experience of the journey through the Atlantic Ocean the enslaved Africans endured.

My proposed "multisensory mobility" framework seeks to understand their movement not just as a spatial or temporal shift, but as a deeply embodied experience where the senses are continually engaged and reconfigured. In the

context of the Middle Passage, “multisensory mobilities” offers a lens through which we can more holistically grasp the physical, emotional and psychological journeys of the enslaved, emphasising the intricate interplay between movement and sensory perception.

In this chapter, I contribute to the discussion of slavery as a lived experience, as advanced recently by the works of Tiya Miles, who highlights the need to recognise each enslaved person as an individual with their own name, family and aspirations, addressing the challenge of archival gaps in their histories (Miles, 2010, 2015, 2021). It is also found in the research done by Jennifer L. Morgan (Morgan, 2021), who examines the experiences of enslaved African women, discussing how trade, race and commodification in the Black Atlantic were intertwined with their lives, and how these women were central to the development of racial capitalism. By analysing the vivid, sensory descriptions of Middle Passage, so strongly present in contemporary American culture, through Alex Haley’s *Roots*, this chapter aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of slavery as a complex and personal experience. Communicating the difficult heritage of slavery through the imaginaries of pain and suffering serves not only as seeking recognition but is a factor stimulating empathy and encouraging activism among people from communities still struggling with the implications of a shared colonial past.

Context and Methodology

Alex Haley’s *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* (1976), and its subsequent TV adaptation (1977), have played significant roles in shaping American perceptions of slavery and the African American experience, especially regarding the Middle Passage. *Roots* was groundbreaking in its detailed portrayal of the lineage of the main character, Kunta Kinte, from his capture in Africa to his descendants’ lives in America. The book was an instant success, selling over a million copies within its first year and winning a special Pulitzer Prize in 1977. The TV adaptation, following the success of the book, was a cultural phenomenon, with an estimated 130 million viewers tuning in for the last of its eight episodes. This widespread readership and audience, combined with the visceral portrayal of the Middle Passage, played a significant role in reshaping American perceptions of the transatlantic slave trade.

The portrayal of the Middle Passage in *Roots* can be connected to Alison Landsberg’s concept of “prosthetic memory” (Landsberg 2004). The book, through its vivid and impactful narrative, allowed viewers, regardless of their racial or ethnic background, to develop a form of prosthetic memory. By witnessing the dramatised experiences of Kunta Kinte and other enslaved Africans, viewers could assimilate these historical traumas as part of their collective memory, fostering empathy and a deeper understanding of the African American experience. This aligns with Landsberg’s idea that mass media, like television, can create shared memories of events that viewers did not personally experience, thereby influencing public discourse and personal identity.

Because of its huge popularity, *Roots* has undeniably shaped American views on the transatlantic slave trade and contributed to the heritage discourse of the transatlantic slave trade. Through its vivid portrayals, it has not only educated but also evoked empathy, prompting deeper reflections on the multifaceted experiences of the enslaved. By analysing how the experience of the Middle Passage is portrayed in this text through the lens of multisensory mobility, I aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of the journey, emphasising the sensory disorientation and reconfiguration that the enslaved underwent.

Haley's *Roots* has been crucial in educating the American public about the Middle Passage and the overall experience of slavery. It brought to the forefront certain painful, often silenced aspects of American history, fostering a greater understanding and empathy towards the African American experience. The novel has contributed significantly to the discourse on race in America, highlighting the need for recognition, empathy and healing in the face of historical trauma. In the following pages I will analyse the visual, auditory, olfactory and tactile elements of selected literary descriptions of the Middle Passage, examining how they provide a more comprehensive and nuanced perspective on the social, cultural and psychological aspects of slavery and its difficult legacy within the framework of the ongoing discussion about the slavery as a lived experience.

In my analyses I examine the part of the novel that depicts the Middle Passage experience. The multisensory analysis will be focused on multisensory mobility: I will examine how multiple senses interact or converge within the chosen narratives and seek to understand their interplay with the notion of movement.

Analyses

The description of the Middle Passage ordeal in the novel takes up several chapters of the book and employs a range of sensory details to immerse the reader in the protagonist's perspective, emphasising the entanglement of movement, confinement and sensory experiences.

The protagonist, Kunta, is frequently subjected to physical pain, from the hot iron searing his back to the lashes of the whip. The tactile experiences of being "naked, chained, shackled" and the sensation of "vomit on his chest and belly" evoke the physical discomfort and vulnerability of the enslaved during their journey. The "stinging bites" and "itching" from body lice further emphasise the physical discomfort from the constant movement of the pests on the captives' bodies. This tactile sensation is further intensified by the description of the filth and the "slick paste" that covers the planks, creating a visceral sense of the unsanitary conditions. Further, the narrative provides a description of the sensation of being doused with seawater and the subsequent scrubbing with "long-handled brushes", which further intensify the captives' physical torment. The "searing blows" from the whips and the physical pain from the "bleeding whip cuts", together with the burn on Kunta's back, are also palpably felt. All these unpleasant tactile sensations also have an

olfactory aspect – parasites, vomit, excrement all release a hard-to-bear smell. The “sickening stink” and the “stench” Kunta encounters in the ship further immerse the reader in the oppressive environment of the slave ship. Later on, the narrative subtly hints at the overpowering stench in the hold. While not explicitly detailed, the description of “urine, vomit, and feces” suggests a nauseating smell. The fact that one of the captors vomits while cleaning the hold further underscores the unbearable stench. Some brief relief comes when Kunta takes a “deep breath of sea air”, indicating a momentary escape from the foul odours below deck. In the frame of “multisensory mobility”, all those detailed descriptions of physical sensations – such as pain, the discomfort of chains and the filth – reflect a visceral mobility, as these experiences shift in intensity and form throughout the journey.

At the same time, the “nightmarish bedlam of shrieking, weeping, praying, and vomiting” creates a cacophony of human suffering. The various cries, moans and shouts, whether in Arabic, Mandinka or other languages, underscore the diversity of the captured Africans and the universality of their anguish. The next chapter begins with the “rasping sound of the deck hatch being opened,” immediately drawing attention to the limited auditory cues available to Kunta in the stifling darkness. These sounds not only indicate the passage of time, but also the movement of the white captors above deck. The auditory experiences, from the “click” of the latch to the “buzzing” of voices, serve as a constant reminder of the captives’ constrained mobility. All those auditory elements, like the varied cries and the sounds of the ship, combine to contribute to an auditory mobility that mirrors the physical journey.

Concerning visual sensations, the narrative offers glimpses of the environment, from the “pitch darkness” of the ship’s hold to the “vast dark shape” of the ship itself. The “dim yellowish flames” and the “thicket of legs and feet” provide fleeting visuals in an otherwise obscured setting, emphasising the limited visibility and disorientation experienced by the enslaved. However, despite the darkness and confinement, there are moments of visual clarity. The sight of the captors with their “long-handled hoes” and the “glow of their lights” provides a stark contrast to the darkness of the hold. The blinding “bright sunlight” and the “endlessness of rolling blue water” juxtapose the confined space below deck, offering visuals of freedom. From a multisensory mobility perspective, the most important visual descriptions are those that, though limited in the hold’s darkness, offer glimpses of movement and change, enhancing the sense of a journey.

On a sensory level, the narrative of the Middle Passage in Haley’s *Roots* is almost lacking any description of gustatory sensations. There are only hints at the taste experience, such as Kunta’s repeated vomiting, which suggests the nauseating environment and the physical revulsion it induces.

What binds these experiences together is the sense of confinement and, at the same time, movement, which permeates all the different levels of sensation. Auditory experience, hearing “groans and curses” or the “thump of a man’s head against the planks”, serves as a constant reminder of the captives’

constrained mobility and the collective suffering they endure. The visual imagery in the narrative, as seen through Kunta's perspective of the "endlessness of rolling blue water," not only provides a stark contrast to the darkness and confinement within the ship's hold but also subtly conveys the ship's movement. From the perspective of the main character and the enslaved people on the ship, this movement is contradictory. This aspect of the narrative effectively encapsulates the paradox inherent in the Middle Passage: a voyage marked by constant movement across the Atlantic, yet simultaneously defined by the enforced stillness and lack of agency within the ship (Cresswell, 2006). Kunta's repeated endeavours to escape, whether from his physical restraints or from the ship itself, further underscore the innate human longing for mobility and autonomy, a theme that is in direct opposition to the immobilising conditions of the Middle Passage (Urry, 2007). These elements of the narrative align with the broader theoretical discourse on mobility and immobility, highlighting the complex interplay between movement and stasis in human experiences (Adey, 2017). While the ship's voyage symbolises the forced displacement from their homeland, their physical movement is extremely limited, confined to cramped spaces. This contradiction underscores the captives' lack of agency and the trauma of the Middle Passage. Kunta's desperate desire for freedom and movement, contrasted with the harsh reality of his shackled, restricted existence and occasional forced movement, illustrates the broader theme of mobility and immobility, highlighting the captives' struggle against their severe constraints.

The narrative's most direct description of the ship's movement, the "slow, rocking motion," and Kunta's realisation that "this place was moving, taking them away" captures the inexorable journey of the Middle Passage. From the "strange flapping sounds overhead" to the "great, slapping cloths," the narrative emphasises the ship's journey and the captives' forced movement on deck. This movement is both literal, in the ship's journey across the Atlantic, and symbolic, representing the captives' journey from freedom to enslavement.

Yet, within these constraints, there are moments of resistance and attempts at mobility, such as Kunta's efforts to reject the food or the violent reactions of the captives to their circumstances. Kunta's repeated efforts to break free, whether from his bonds or from the ship, highlight his innate desire for agency and self-directed mobility. His "springing and lunging" and attempts to "leap overboard" emphasise the human instinct to resist confinement and seek freedom. This leads us to the connection between the human emotions felt by the protagonist and the emotional journey he is experiencing, which can also be classified as a variant of movement. The narrative captures the emotional highs and lows experienced by the captives. From the initial shock and disbelief to the growing realisation of their predicament, the emotional journey is as tumultuous as the physical one. Kunta's internal struggles, oscillating between hope, despair, rage and resignation, mirror the broader emotional mobility of the captives. Beyond the physical, the text delves deep into Kunta's psychological torment. His feelings of revulsion, rage, terror and desperation are palpable, as are his moments of reflection

and prayer. The multisensory experiences are intertwined with his emotional responses, creating a holistic portrayal of his ordeal. His oscillation between hope and despair, resistance and resignation, and clarity and disorientation reflect the psychological mobility experienced amidst the trauma. On a psychological level, Kunta's emotional journey is clear. From the urge to "spring up and run away" to the tears of "frustration" and "anger," his emotional highs and lows are vividly portrayed. The terror of the unknown, especially when the shackles are being removed and the overwhelming fear of what might come next, are deeply felt. The collective trauma is evident in the shared experiences of the captives, from their shared suffering to their communal reactions to the captor's actions. From the perspective of multisensory mobility, the emotional and psychological movements, as shown through Kunta's varying states of despair, resistance and hope, add another layer of mobility. Together, these elements create a comprehensive multisensory portrayal of the Middle Passage, emphasising both the physical journey and the internal experiences of the captives.

Although the narrative in the book is a third-person narrative, focused on the main protagonist the experience of movement, is described as a collective experience of the captured Africans, with their shared suffering and communal confinement in the ship's hold emphasising the shared experience of forced mobility. The call of one of the enslaved Africans to "Share his pain! We must be in this place as one village!" underlines the need for unity and collective resistance.

In conclusion, the text offers a multisensory portrayal of the Middle Passage experience, highlighting the physical and psychological traumas endured by the enslaved. The rich sensory details, combined with the narrative's focus on movement and confinement, serve to immerse the reader in the harrowing journey of the Middle Passage, fostering empathy and a deeper understanding of this dark chapter in history. The sense of movement is a central theme in the provided text and can be described as depicting an experience of multisensory mobility. The "stinking blackness" of the hold, the taste of the "tasteless mush," the feel of the "hard, rough planking," and the sounds of "anguished cries" and "moaning" all contribute to a sensory overload that is directly tied to the ship's journey and the captives' forced mobility. Haley creates a kind of "sensory overload" experience ranging from the tactile sensation of chains to the auditory chaos of cries and groans, which is intrinsically linked to movement. The sensory overload that Kunta experiences is a direct result of his forced journey and the ever-changing, often hostile, environments he encounters.

In light of the above, the passage can indeed be described as a portrayal of multisensory mobility. The narrative captures the complexities of movement during the Middle Passage, intertwining physical, emotional and sensory experiences to offer a holistic depiction of this traumatic journey. This being said, we have to note that this depiction is limited by the literary form chosen by the author. *Roots* is narrated by a third-person, limited omniscient narrator (which later shifts to a first-person perspective, revealing that he is a descendant of Kunta Kinte telling his own family's story). This perspective strikes a balance

between objectivity and subjectivity, allowing insight into the character's inner world while still maintaining a narrative distance. This distance puts a limit on the depth of multisensory that can be evoked in the narrative, which could be further amplified in each sensory aspect, providing an even more immersive and comprehensive account of the Middle Passage experience.

Discussion

In examining the depiction of the Middle Passage within American literature, Alex Haley's *Roots* stands out for its significant impact. Haley's conventional form of storytelling in *Roots* offers a vivid and detailed illustration of the Middle Passage and its effects on the characters. This narrative approach has not only transformed American society's understanding of the Black diaspora, slavery and the transatlantic slave trade, but has also played a crucial role in restoring dignity to African Americans by reshaping the discourse around these critical historical events.

Later, with the miniseries, the American audience saw the horror of the Middle Passage for the first time in a film and the impact of this portrayal was invaluable. Critics praised the thorough research conducted in Africa for the book, noting that Alex Haley "himself tried to relive the horrors of the Middle Passage," resulting in a depiction that was "vivid but never histrionic" (Ellison 1977, 106). Helen Taylor (1995, 48) highlights the series' wide appeal, noting its success as a "crossover" feature attracting both urban black and majority white audiences, as well as its accolade of 145 awards, including nine Emmys. Matthew F. Delmont (2016) emphasises the significance of the Middle Passage scene in *Roots*, portraying the stark transition from freedom in Africa to enslavement in the New World. He notes that *Roots* is not a typical immigrant story; it confronts the horrors of the Middle Passage, previously rarely depicted in films and never on television. The production process and casting choices further underscore the commitment to authentically depicting this traumatic journey.

The notion of "multisensory mobility", as applied to the Middle Passage portrayed in *Roots*, encapsulates more than the physical movement of enslaved Africans across the Atlantic; it includes the sensory experiences that accompanied this journey. This framework helps us understand the Middle Passage as an embodied experience where the traumatic conditions aboard slave ships: cramped spaces, overwhelming smells and cacophonous sounds were not mere background elements but integral parts of the traumatic journey. These sensory experiences, so vividly depicted in *Roots*, play a crucial role in shaping contemporary perceptions of slavery's heritage. By focusing on these elements, Haley's narrative elevates the Middle Passage from a historical event to a lived, sensory experience, bridging the gap between past and present understandings of slavery.

Roots and its depiction of the Middle Passage contribute to the discourse on the difficult heritage of slavery. This novel, by presenting the visceral realities of the slave experience, forces a confrontation with a past that many

would prefer to forget. The multisensory portrayal in *Roots* not only brings the horrors of slavery closer to contemporary readers but also plays a pivotal role in shaping the identity of descendants of enslaved Africans. Through these sensory descriptions, individuals are able to connect with their ancestors' experiences, understanding them not just as historical facts but as embodied, deeply personal narratives that continue to resonate in the present.

Haley's multisensory depiction of the Middle Passage in *Roots* also contributes significantly to the cultural memory surrounding slavery. It illustrates how literature can act as a medium for transmitting collective memories, particularly those related to traumatic histories. The novel's impact extends beyond individual readers to influence the broader collective consciousness. By incorporating the concept of multisensory mobility, *Roots* allows for a more nuanced understanding of how the legacy of slavery is remembered and internalised, especially among African Americans.

Conclusions

"We are in his skin, and in his darkness, and, presently, we are shackled with him, in his terror, rage, and pain, his stink, and the stink of others, on the ship which brings him here" wrote James Baldwin (Baldwin, 1976) in his review of the book, indicating that the experience of the Middle Passage is overwhelmingly conveyed to the reader of the book, mainly due to the form of narration employed to describe it. The detailed sensory descriptions in *Roots* serve not only as a means of conveying historical reality but also as a tool for fostering empathy. By immersing readers in the sensory experiences of the Middle Passage, Haley's work encourages a deeper emotional connection to the difficult heritage of slavery. This empathy is crucial for motivating activism and addressing the ongoing implications of colonial and slave histories.

As shown using the example of *Roots*, literature can play a pivotal role in the discourse of heritage, serving as both a repository and a creator of collective memory. Through its unique ability to weave narratives that capture the complexity of human experiences, literature becomes an essential tool in shaping our understanding of the past. Alex Haley's *Roots* significantly contributes to the heritage discourse surrounding the transatlantic slave trade through its vivid storytelling. Haley's novel transcends mere historical recounting, delving into the visceral, multisensory experiences of the Middle Passage. This approach to storytelling not only fills gaps in historical knowledge but also enables readers to form a deep, empathetic connection with the past. By vividly rendering the sensory details of the slave experience, *Roots* plays a crucial role in heritage-building. It allows readers, especially descendants of enslaved Africans, to forge an embodied connection with their ancestors, transforming abstract historical events into tangible, personal narratives. Furthermore, such narratives contribute to the formation of what Alison Landsberg describes as "prosthetic memory", where individuals assimilate the historical traumas of others through engagement with cultural

texts (Landsberg 2004). This assimilation fosters a shared understanding and empathy across diverse communities, thereby influencing collective memory and identity. In essence, literature is not just a mirror reflecting the past, but a dynamic participant in shaping the heritage discourse. It engages readers in a dialogue with history, enabling them to internalise and reinterpret heritage in ways that are meaningful and relevant to contemporary society. Through the power of storytelling, literature like *Roots* thus becomes a vital instrument in preserving and transmitting the legacy of historical events, such as the transatlantic slave trade, to future generations.

In the intricate tapestry of Alex Haley's *Roots*, the concept of multisensory mobility emerges as a pivotal frame, encapsulating the lived experiences of the transatlantic slave trade. This novel transcends the traditional boundaries of historical recounting, delving into the visceral, sensory experiences of the Middle Passage. Haley's depiction is not simply a narrative of movement across the Atlantic, it is an immersive journey into the sights, sounds and smells endured by the enslaved. This approach resonates deeply with the notion of slavery as a lived experience where each individual's story is a crucial thread in the fabric of history, which not only brings the realities of the transatlantic slave trade into the present but also solidifies its place in the collective consciousness. The novel, thus, becomes a powerful vehicle for understanding and internalising the difficult heritage of slavery, bridging the gap between the past and the present, and offering a nuanced lens through which to view the legacy of this traumatic period in history.

As readers engage with these sensory narratives, they are more likely to develop a personal stake in addressing the lingering effects of these historical injustices. Alex Haley's *Roots*, through its multisensory portrayal of the Middle Passage, offers a powerful lens for understanding the difficult heritage of slavery. This novel demonstrates how sensory experiences can bridge the gap between past and present, influencing individual and collective identities. The concept of multisensory mobility, as applied to the study of literature, reveals the profound impact of sensory experiences on our perception of historical events, particularly those as traumatic and complex as the Middle Passage.

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