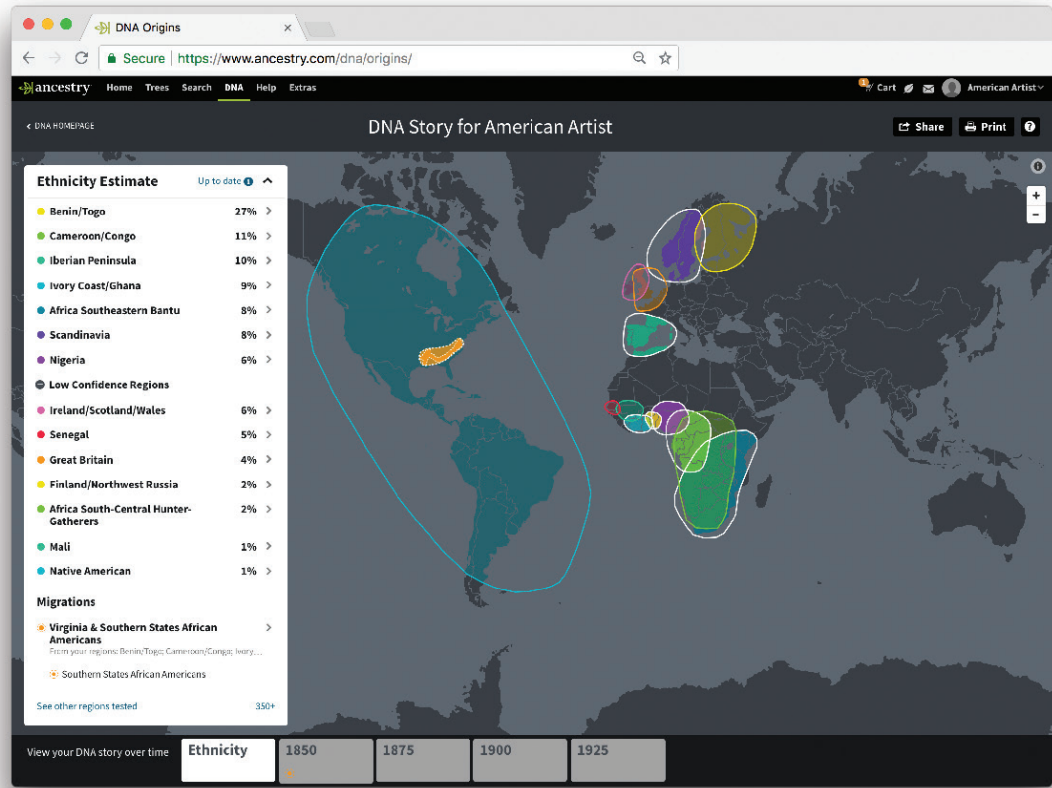


I got to Nora’s in the late afternoon. She was staying in an old house, the owner is deceased. He was a sculptor, with a kiln in the backyard and a large ceramic deity in the basement. Nora and her partner Joel were doing groundwork to begin an artist residency and I was crashing. It’s serendipitous that they were going to be in town at the same time I was. I learned this a few weeks before as they were leaving New York. I had told everyone I knew why I was going cos they found it refreshing to hear I was doing something wholesome in days like *these*. Nora and I got dinner that night and I took a photo of the blackletter D on the machinic door of the restaurant. I liked Detroit. The sprawl of it was like LA, where I’m from, but we never had industry like that out there. The industrial relics in Detroit could be traded for people in LA.

While I was there Nora and I each got an email from Paul saying that this would be the final *Printed Web*, and asking if we’d like to participate.



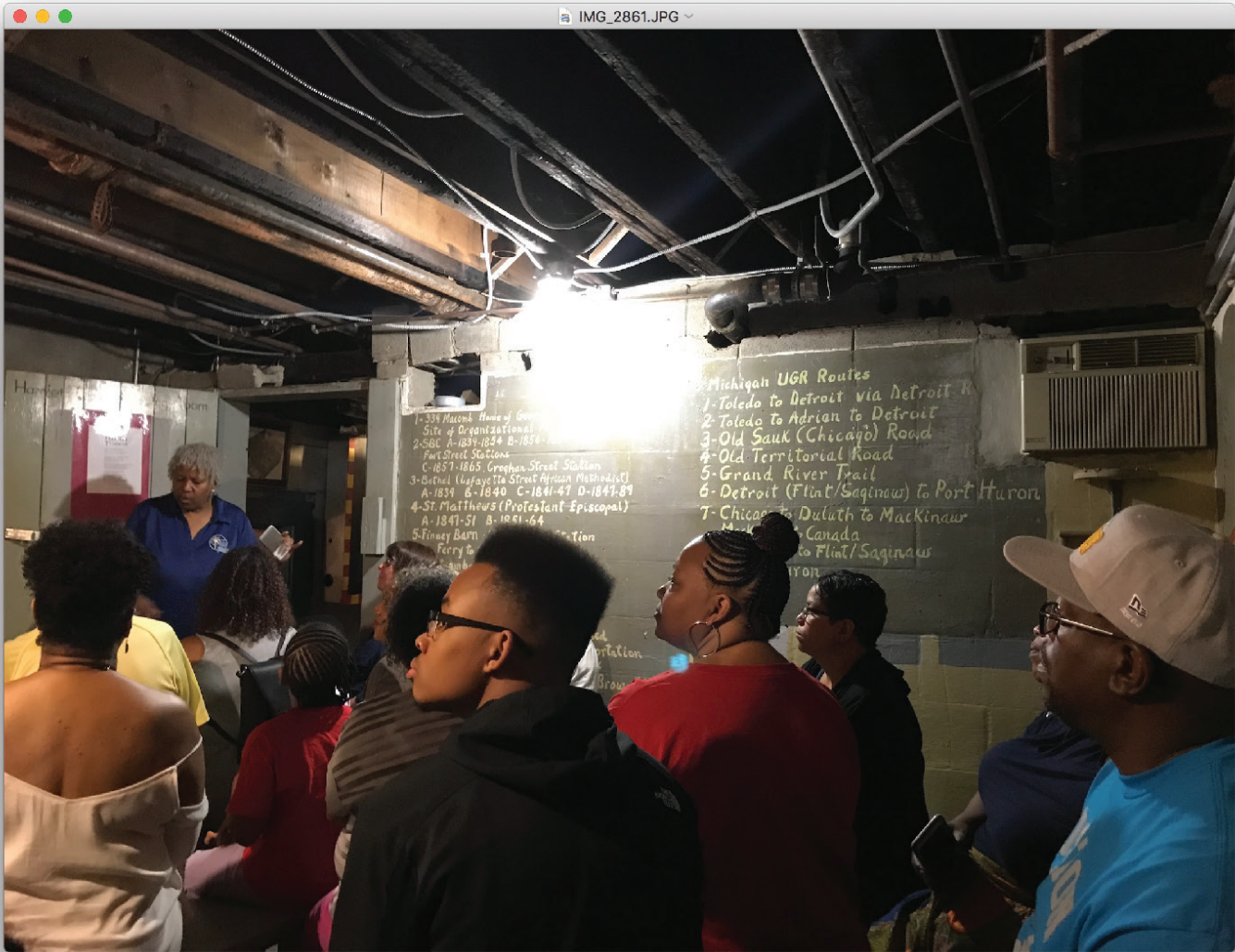
On the second night I drove to Troy, to a hotel where my family was staying. I met them at the hotel restaurant which was reserved, or just empty, and they greeted me. My cousin Andromedia was hosting the 10th Annual Coleman Family Reunion. Coleman was never my name, or the name of anyone else at the reunion, in case you’re wondering. Most of my family members that were present were women, which made me feel comfortable. David and Donna were there from California, and their grandkids—Rasheada’s kids—were there too. Mimi and her son Blade came from Indiana. I met Andromedia’s daughter Charanne and her kids for the first time, and Everil for the first time too. My aunts Hermenia and Gail came in a pair, they’re real sweet. Hermenia is the blonde one—not naturally. She knows how to text, and will ask for a verbal “read” receipt. Gail uses a walker now. She was a teacher for a long time, I’m reminded by the patience she has when she talks to me. I should

ask them about their experience migrating from Tennessee to California and what my dad was like before I was around, but I never do. Andromedia is calm and collected, she can tell me any part of our story that I want to know and is pretty good with email. These three are the recordkeepers.

Andromedia and my aunts are real big into the online heritage thing and they’ve been building our family tree for a while. It’s wild cos half of the people in that room were unknown to the rest of my family a few years back. About four years ago there was a close match to my dad in the Ancestry family tree that his sisters suspected was accurate, so they made him send in his DNA. Before he got the results back he saw a picture of David’s face and knew it was his brother. Donna had also been in touch with my aunts cos David, her husband, never knew who his father

site marker and figured then that family reunions are an industry just like everything else. Other people have them but Black people own family reunions. Can you own restoration? After emancipation many Black people went North, some never to be heard from again. Donna said for a second time that someone in her family came up to Detroit a century ago but her family never heard back. It sounded normal so I didn’t hear it the first time she said it. I caught a glimpse of the larger project against us. “Maybe I can find a record of him while I’m up here,” she said.

We went to Second Baptist Church, the oldest Black church in the midwest. It’s a historical site but Andromedia attends service there. We met a Black woman with silver



hair and a blue tour outfit who told us about the Underground Railroad. The history was elaborate and she explained it in detail. She told us how the first church got burned to the ground. She told us how the street got its name, and how the capital of Liberia was named after pastor Monroe. The Underground Railroad was neither underground nor a railroad. It was an operation to undermine the state. The boldness of white abolitionists makes me wonder what happened to the integrity of white people in days like *these*.

In the basement of the church is Croghan station. We could only go in a few people at a time so we walked through a little museum on the first floor of the church while we waited.

They had portraits of every pastor they’ve had, including the one leaving now after 30 years. One of the men pictured had a last name similar to my old one, just one letter different, so I figured we’re related. There were hand-lettered descriptions across every wall leading down to the station.

“—A Network
of
Slaves
Escaping
from
the
South
to
the
North,”

read the stairwell. *A Network?* I got into the station and there were paintings there too—a map and a list of stations from Michigan City to Detroit. My cousin Charanne meticulously documented the presence of my family which filled half of the small room. The way she photographed us like sections of a panorama felt autonomous to me. The photos she took were instantly online.

That night we had dinner at the hotel. It was the culmination of the weekend so some of my family dressed up a little bit. Some still wore the bright red tees of the reunion. I wore the same black hoodie from the morning because I wasn’t staying at the hotel and the red shirt I got was far too small. As I pulled apart some bread to butter it, I heard Andromedia at the other end of the table, describing how I got my family name. In 1843 a man gave my great-great-great-grandmother Elvira to his daughter. “What’s his name, Johnson?” she said, “he gave her to his daughter and when his daughter got married, that’s how she got the name.” It was all very casual. Andromedia said she had the deed to prove it.

I came back to Ancestry in my mind. I struggled with my family’s commitment to it yet I was eager to submit myself: to a grand narrative, to the artificial restoration of Black genealogy, to the analog labor of my aunts. I gave over my DNA a couple years before my dad died. I wanted to join the mesh. Now I’m really in it. The way Ancestry works you’re in it long before that. But if you want to see anything you have to pay. It’s clear to me how this will be abused. There is no separation between private business and the state, the knowledge of one is of the other. We give ourselves over for benign reasons, like familial restoration, or an online discount. I’m reminded of the time I gave fake websites my Facebook data to tell me a fun fact about my personality. Now that they know exactly who you are they can target your ads better, they can turn you away at the border for where you’re really from without having to rely on your appearance. It already happened to one guy. Information is the easiest resource to lose. I’m reminded of primi-

tive accumulation and housing laws post-emancipation. Imagine the same thing but with data.

When I returned home to New York I was greeted by my inbox, “Dear aa, here’s an invite to my tree.” The family tree Andromedia built on Ancestry is wide and sprawling because the earliest people on it had ten kids at a time. The spread of the silhouette reminded me of diagrams I’ve seen of *the hold*. Frank Wilderson said one condition of social death (Blackness) is natal alienation. It’s impossible to know exactly where I came from, until now. We gave ourselves over to an equation to piece us back together. As if we have anything to give it that it doesn’t already own. *A Network of Slaves Escaping* ... compulsory unknowing. I feel that I’m less critical than I should be because I want to know where I came from, and I want other people to know too. What is their business putting us back together like that? *A Network?* I can’t help but see the link between the app economy and settler colonialism. As I scrolled across the hold I saw thumbnails of my ancestors. I clicked my great-great-grandfather Henry’s portrait and it expanded, he would have never thought this possible. That’s the first time I ever saw him.

* Hartman, Saidiya V. 1997. *Scenes of subjection: terror, slavery, and self-making in nineteenth-century America*. New York: Oxford University Press.

