

Chapter I

Introduction: Travel and the Pan-African Imagination

The father of Anglo-Saxon racial ideology, Count Arthur de Gobineau, inscribed pan-Aryanism into the European intellectual landscape during the nineteenth century. His classical books entitled *An Essay on the Inequality of Human Races* (1853-1855) and *The Moral and Intellectual Diversity of Races with Particular Reference to their Respective Influences in the Civil and Political History of Mankind* (1856)¹ constructed a racialized and hierarchical conception of the world that dominated scientific and popular thought for over a hundred years. Partially vanquished with the defeat of fascism during the Second World War, as the legitimating discourse for South African apartheid they extended their influence until the closing years of the twentieth century. As Gobineau famously stated:

... the racial question overshadows all other problems of history [I]t holds the key to them all, and ... the inequality of the races from whose fusion a people is formed is enough to explain the whole course of its destiny Recognizing that both strong and weak races exist, I preferred to examine the former, to analyse [sic] their qualities, and especially to follow them back to their origins [E]verything great, noble, and fruitful in the works of man on this earth, in

¹ Arthur comte de Gobineau, *The Inequality of Human Races*, Translated by Adrian Collins, Introduction by Oscar Levy (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1915; Arthur comte de Gobineau, *The Moral and Intellectual Diversity of Races with Particular Reference to their Respective Influences in the Civil and Political History of Mankind* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1856). According to Levy, "This book, written as early as 1853, is no doubt a youthful and somewhat bewildering performance, but it gives us the basis of Gobineau's creed, his belief in Race and Aristocracy as the first condition of civilization, his disbelief in the influence of environment, his distrust in the efficacy of religion and morality. The latter kind of scepticism [sic] brings him into relationship with [Friedrich] Nietzsche, who has even accentuated Count Gobineau's suspicions and who has branded our morality as Slave-Morality, and consequently as harmful to good government. What a Europe without Masters, but with plenty of Half-masters and Slaves, was driving at, Gobineau foresaw as well as Nietzsche." Levy, "Introduction to Gobineau's 'Inequality of Human Races,'" in Gobineau, *The Inequality of Human Races*, viii.

science, art, and civilization, derives from a single starting-point, is the development of a single germ and the result of a single thought; it belongs to one family alone, the different branches of which have reigned in all the civilized countries of the universe.²

He goes on to note that “[t]he negroid variety is the lowest, and stands at the foot of the ladder” of hierarchical human taxonomy while “[t]he yellow race is the exact opposite of this type” and “commits none of the strange excesses so common among negroes.” “White peoples,” according to Gobineau, “are gifted with reflective energy, or rather with an energetic intelligence.”³His concluding inscription is classic racial ideology:

Almost the whole of the Continent of Europe is inhabited at the present by groups of which the basis is white, but in which the non-Aryan elements are the most numerous. There is no true civilization, among the European peoples, where the Aryan branch is not predominant [N]o negro race is seen as the initiator of a civilization. Only when it is mixed with some other can it even be initiated into one Similarly, no spontaneous civilization is to be found among the yellow races; and when the Aryan blood is exhausted stagnation supervenes.⁴

Throughout the nineteenth and much of the twentieth centuries, divergent members of the African diaspora, from British, American, and Caribbean anti-racists to early pan-Africanists, had to confront Gobineau's dehumanizing arguments – and repudiate them. To understand the origins of both pan-Africanism and black nationalism, therefore, we must go back to their origins in the mid-nineteenth century Victorian Era and its interweaving of racism and evangelical Christianity.

² Gobineau, *The Inequality of Human Races*, xiv-xv.

³ Gobineau, *Ibid*, 205-207.

⁴ Gobineau, *Ibid*, 212. Gobineau noted, “Such are the three constituent elements of the human race. I call them secondary types, as I think myself obliged to omit all discussion of the Adamite man. From the combination, by intermarriage, of the varieties of these types come the tertiary groups. The quaternary formations are produced by the union of one of these tertiary types, or the pure-blooded tribe, with another group taken from one of the two foreign species It would be unjust to assert that every mixture is bad and harmful. If the three great types had remained as strictly separate, the supremacy would no doubt have always been in the hands of the finest of the white races, and the yellow and black varieties would have crawled for ever at the feet of the lowest of the whites. Such a state is so far ideal, since it has never been beheld in history; and we can imagine it only by recognizing the undisputed superiority of those groups of the white races which have remained the purest.” Gobineau, *Ibid*, 207-208.

Creatures of the Atlantic

The historic origins of black nationalism and pan-Africanism were inextricably bound to conservative religious notions of racial ideology at the same time that they were in conversation with scientific racism and white supremacist doctrines. The central argument of this study revolves around the centrality of Islam and Christianity in the making of a conservative, racialized black nationalism. It examines the origins of black nationalism and pan-Africanism in the black Atlantic world with a particular focus on the role gender played in the construction of black subjectivity and the pan-African imagination during the nineteenth century. “Negro: Travel and the Pan-African Imagination during the Nineteenth Century” engages the ongoing conversation about the role of religious resources in the formation of the black Atlantic intellectual landscape. It examines the use of these resources by three Atlantic figures that travelled the overlapping circuits of the Atlantic world and how each responded to the dynamics of the Atlantic slave trade. Denmark Vesey, Alexander Crummell, and Edward Blyden played radically different roles upon the Atlantic's revolving stage. Vesey conservatively utilized religious resources to clandestinely plot a violent uprising against slavery in the United States while Crummell and Blyden engaged in conservative religious engagements with the colonial library both in the United States and Africa. At the same time, this dissertation also engages critically with African American historiography and the Pan-African movement and especially twentieth-century black intellectuals' engagement with black nationalism and pan-Africanism.

“Negro: Travel and the Pan-African Imagination during the Nineteenth Century” focuses on the writings of an African Caribbean, Edward Blyden. Blyden, a native of

Saint Thomas (Virgin Islands) and considered one of the first, or founding, “fathers” of both pan-Africanism and African nationalism⁵, was a particularly complex diasporic intellectual. Traveling first to the United States in the pre-Civil War period, then to Africa and Britain at the height of the European imperial venture – and Christian missionary efforts – Blyden served as a conduit between the West (the United States and Britain) and both a traditional religious and a Muslim Africa. He saw his role as one of mediating (critiquing/translating) these divergent voices and ideologies with the object of constituting a “modern,” pan-African subject. Clearly gender played a key role in his vision – as it did in the varied voices and ideologies he sought to weave into a new pan-African whole. Blyden’s relation to traditional Christianity and its hierarchical visions of both gender and race was complex and often sorely vexed. Both traditional African concepts of an “authentic” masculinity and Muslim constructions of masculinity intrigued him, and he worked to integrate them into a new vision of a progressive Christian African, one that differed dramatically from visions of masculinity advanced by conventional Christian missionary and colonial administrators. His extensive travels through Africa convinced Blyden that Christian missionaries’ belief systems and modes of conversion often had a deleterious effect on Africans’ character and sense of self. He was particularly critical of the effect conversion to Christianity had upon Africans’ self-image and identity. Conversion to Islam, he felt, had a far less deleterious effect, Muslim Africans being far more manly than Christian converts. Nevertheless Blyden viewed Islam as an intermediary stage in the African Christian’s redemption of the continent for Africans. We will explore Blyden’s vexed relation to Islam and Christianity by examining

⁵ Benjamin Quarles, Review of *Blyden of Africa: An Account of the Life and Labors of Edward Wilmot Blyden, LL.D., as Recorded in Letters and in Print* by Edith Holden, *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 52, No. 4 (October 1967), 308.

his concept of “Africa for the Africans,”⁶ the keystone of an emerging pan-African vision, a vision which marked Blyden, in Robert W. July's words, “a leading early African nationalist and the most articulate exponent of the philosophy of African nationalism.”⁷

Blyden traveled across a great expanse of the English-speaking world. He was a self-taught linguist and social critic. He lived most of his professional life in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and other regions of the West African hinterland. He taught himself the Arabic language during his travels to Muslim communities in West, Central, and North Africa. Blyden had a notable career.⁸ Several honorary academic degrees were conferred upon him during his lifetime, including the Doctor of Laws (LL.D.) degree. He serviced in a variety of capacities, including Presbyterian pastor; Principal of Alexander High School in Monrovia, Liberia; President of Liberia College; Liberian Commissioner to the General Assembly of the American Presbyterian Church; Liberian Secretary of State for the Interior; Liberian Minister at London; Director of Muhammadan Education in Sierra Leone; Ambassador of the Republic of Liberia to the Court of Saint James of the United Kingdom; True Whig Party Presidential Candidate for the Liberian presidency; Minister to the Interior for the Foreign Office of the Commonwealth of Sierra Leone; Official Correspondent and Occasional Lecturer for the American Negro Academy; and Vice-President of the American Society for Colonizing Free People of Colour in the United States (American Colonization Society). He eventually declared himself to be a “Minister of Truth.” His large number of published works has been acclaimed a major contribution

⁶ Edward Wilmot Blyden, “Africa for the Africans,” *African Repository* (Washington: January 1872).

⁷ Runoko Rashidi, “History Notes: Africa for Africans! by E.W. Blyden,” *The Global African Presence*, <http://www.cwo.com/~lucumi/africans.html> (Runoko Rashidi: 1998), Posted/Revised September 10, 2005, Accessed October 21, 2009; Robert W. July, “Nineteenth-Century Negritude: Edward W. Blyden,” *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (1964), 74.

⁸ “Dr. Edward Wilmot Blyden: Negro Educator and Diplomat Had Notable Career in Liberia,” Obituary, *The New York Times* (February 9, 1912).

to the development of a philosophy of education for black people. His magnum opus, *African Life and Customs*, published in 1908, narrowly surpasses his classic *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race*. The latter text was published in 1887, with a corrected version published in 1888, and it is still in-print to the present day.

This dissertation has two major objectives. It explores the Atlantic as a productive theater or space where modernity, racialized dominance, and racialized resistance took form. I stress the importance of placing the three aforementioned figures – Vesey, Crummell, and Blyden – within an Atlantic context and as diasporic figures. This framework permits us to focus on process – the ways racism was created within the Atlantic by Europeans faced with difference and seeking to legitimate an exploitative labor system upon which Western prosperity rested. It permits us to understand the ways concepts of civilization/Christianity, modernity, and progress were produced. The diasporic perspective permits us to position these three figures between Africa and the West – as talking to minimally three audiences: white Western racists, such as Gobineau; fellow black diasporic figures in the West; and Africans. This approach is different from a traditional diasporic approaches which focus on a dream of Africa, a longing to return to Africa. Conceiving of the Atlantic as transcending national boundaries permits us to reconceptualize the diaspora similarly as a space and as experiences that exist outside of, but in intense conversation with, both Africa and the white Atlantic world of Europe and the Americas.

Vesey, Crummell, and Blyden were archetypical diasporic figures. I seek new approaches to the study of these three men. Certainly Blyden is not a U.S. figure though he is often linked not only to Denmark Vesey and Alexander Crummell, but also to

Martin R. Delaney and other specifically U.S. pan-Africanists. Blyden lived most of his life in Africa, but he was a product of the Atlantic, not of Africa. Through Blyden especially I seek to reposition the origins of pan-Africanism and Black Power outside of the confines of the geopolitical U.S., to reposition it within a refigured diasporic/Atlantic space.

The second major objective of this dissertation is to examine the religious/Victorian origins of Black Power and pan-Africanism as a product of the intense dialogue within the diaspora between western concepts of modernity, progress, and civilization and the insistence on a rational, progressive, manly Africa. Again, Blyden's origins, his rejection of the U.S., and his discovery of Africa through his travel narratives engage and refute Western travel narratives. He travelled to Africa and remained there, contrary to Crummell who returned to the U.S. after living over a decade in Africa. Vesey was possibly born in Africa and may have travelled there before residing in the U.S. All three men produced their own versions of history in order to refute Europeans writing fictions about Africa and the African diaspora. They struggled to answer white Western racists' aspirations by re-presenting Africa as a noble continent and Negroes as competent, energetic people worthy of a place in the civilized, modern world.

The diasporic dilemma, which will later become the dilemma of the post-colonial African intellectual, is how to refute Western denigrations of Africa, Africans, and diasporic peoples at the same time as diasporic and post-colonial African intellectuals embrace Western concepts of civilization, modernity, and progress, concepts that constitute Africa, Africans, and the diaspora as their constituting negative Others. They had to fuse a Western vision of civilization and modernity with an insistence on Africa as

both noble and different from the West. This is the conundrum that Vesey, Crummell, and Blyden struggled with – the source of their conservatism and simultaneously of their radical forms of resistance, including sympathy to Islam and a passionate defense of Africa. In many ways, this is the subject of this dissertation: how these men dealt with this conundrum and how their travels in Africa and the Atlantic gave them perspectives to become increasingly critical of the Christianizing mission.

Through concrete case studies (Vesey, Crummell, and Blyden) I explore the nineteenth-century or Victorian diaspora from its origins in the post-Revolutionary Era through the Victorian and into the Edwardian Era. Diasporic figures are located precisely at the center of the Atlantic world – in many ways dissociated from both Africa and Western Europe/U.S. The further into the nineteenth century one goes, the more removed the diaspora is from Africa. Africa becomes a mythic place of loss and desire—an object to be missionized by diasporic Christians. Creatures of the Atlantic, of the diasporic experience and not of Africa, diasporic subjects talk to both the West and to Africa (this is less true of Vesey than of Crummell and Blyden). This study seeks to map the process of how this occurred, the ways different discourses simultaneously meld and war with one another in the formation of the resisting subject. Dynamic processes and ongoing changes are critical concepts employed throughout this dissertation. I explore the balancing act of diasporic subjects and how that act changes over time. In the case of the centerpiece of my analysis, I explore how Blyden became increasingly familiar with and at home in Africa.

African Power: The Conservative Origins of Black Power Ideology

In his study of “Edward Wilmot Blyden and the Concept of African Personality” M. Yu Frenkel argued that the title of the newspaper that Blyden published in Sierra Leone on April 17, 1872, “[t]he *Negro*[,] may in a certain sense be regarded as one of the first expressions of Pan-Africanism. [Edward Wilmot] Blyden took the word 'Negro', previously a derogatory term, and made it the symbol of unity. This is how he explained the title of the newspaper:

It has been called the "Negro" (if any explanation is necessary) because it is intended to represent and defend the interest of that peculiar type of humanity known as the Negro with all its affiliated and collected branches whether on this continent or elsewhere. "West African" was considered definite enough, but too exclusive for the comprehensive intention entertained by the promoters of the scheme--viz: to recognize and greet the brotherhood of the race wherever found.⁹

Blyden considered the title of the newspaper as "approved by all thinking members of the race in West Africa, in the West Indies, and in the United States." There is one extant issue of the *Negro*, and it focuses only on local news. Frenkel concluded that "Blyden's claims to its being a Pan-African mouthpiece are therefore symbolic rather than realistic; though the concept of Pan-Africanism as such was not yet formulated, the underlying ideas were already in the air."¹⁰

In his capacity as a “Pan-African mouthpiece,” Blyden formulated the underlying ideas of black power ideology. In his standard speech as Liberian Emigration Commissioner, “The Call of Providence to the Descendants of Africa in America,” first published 1862 in his first book, *Liberia's Offering: Addresses, Sermons, Etc.*, Blyden stated:

⁹ M. Yu Frenkel, “Edward Blyden and the Concept of African Personality,” *African Affairs*, Volume 73, Number 292 (July 1974), 277-289.

¹⁰ Frenkel, *Ibid.*

We need some African power, some great center of the race where our physical, pecuniary [financial, fiscal, economic] and intellectual strength may be collected.¹¹

While the ideology of Black Power was at best nascent in Blyden's writings, clearly, as early as 1862, Blyden had begun to give voice to its underlying concerns. Blyden was of the conviction that

His [the Negro's] subordinate position everywhere in Christian countries has made him believe that what his foreign teachers think is the only proper thing to think and that what they say is the only right thing to say. He is, therefore, untrue to the natural direction of his powers, and attempts to soar into an atmosphere not native to his wing.¹²

While Blyden was celebrated during the 1960s as “a leading African nationalist,” today the specific “scope, range, and power of his doctrines” are not well known.¹³ Even in the epicenters of learning and culture, there is not a large appreciation of the African-centered work of Blyden. Indeed, there is very little about the personal life of Blyden that will change the thinking and behavior of persons of African descent in the twenty-first century. He was what Simon Gikandi calls an African Victorian¹⁴ for most of his life a Presbyterian missionary, though in the early twentieth century he did transform himself into an African “minister of truth”. His writing is saturated with conservative Victorian/Edwardian assumptions. Yet Blyden is more than a conventional Victorian figure. He visits Africa, traveling there, observing and writing about his observations, and insisting on a vision of Africa that becomes increasingly critical of Christianity. An

¹¹ Edward Wilmot Blyden, “The Call of Providence to the Descendants of Africa in America,” in *Black Spokesman: Selected Published Writings of Edward Wilmot Blyden*, Edited by Hollis R. Lynch (London: Cass, 1971), 30.

¹² Edward Wilmot Blyden, *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race*, 40.

¹³ Robert W. July, “Nineteenth-Century Negritude,” 74.

¹⁴ Adelaide M. Cromwell, *An African Victorian Feminist: The Life and Times of Adelaide Smith Casely Hayford* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1982); Simon Gikandi, *Maps of Englishness: Writing Identity in the Culture of Colonialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

exploration of his balancing act and how that act changes over time as he becomes increasingly familiar and at home in Africa reveals the indisputable fact that a scholarly presentation of the theoretical language of Blydenic prescriptions on the African and racial questions between 1832 and 1912 is of much greater importance than another biographical chronicle of his life. The question of unfolding the African to himself, the question of the study of the African from a perspective which reveals his truest nature and idiosyncrasies, the question of informing foreigners of just who and what was an African were all questions which formed the foundation of the intellectual production of Edward Wilmot Blyden.¹⁵

The efforts of intellectuals and activists of African descent to construct an edifice of influence, centers and practices of productive measures in the interests of African development, were a central feature of Black Power politics in the African diaspora and in Africa during and after its long nineteenth-century emergence. Advocates of “protonatinionalist emigrationism,” according to the historian Jeffrey O.G. Ogbar, author of *Black Power: Radical Politics and African American Identity*¹⁶ were the central precursors of the emergence of a coherent, cogent intellectual tradition of pan-Africanism. Black Power, or black nationalism, was central to the religious, entrepreneurial, and political strategies of conservative African and African American intellectuals during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Intellectuals like Blyden and Crummell relied on Biblical and scriptural knowledge, ancient and medieval metaphysical conceptualizations of reality designed to conserve religious traditions. This form of conservatism constituted one of the central

¹⁵ Edward W. Blyden, *African Life and Customs*.

¹⁶ Jeffrey O.G. Ogbar, *Black Power: Radical Politics and African American Identity* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2004), 4.

elements of black nationalism and pan-Africanism. Black nationalism, or Black Power, strategies of social activism took place in a variety of institutions and settings, but most especially in churches and schools. And what two institutions have played a more significant role in the conservative organization of black communities across the Americas and on the African continent than religious institutions and educational structures? Blyden preached that

[f]rom the lessons he everyday receives, the Negro unconsciously imbibes the conviction that to be a great man, he must be like the white man. He is not brought up—however he may desire it—to be the companion, the equal, the comrade of the white man, but his imitator, his ape, his parasite. To be himself in a country where everything ridicules him, is to be nothing—less, worse than nothing. To be as [much] like the white man as possible—to copy his outward appearance, his peculiarities, his manners, the arrangement of his toilet, that is the aim of the Christian Negro—that is his aspiration. The only virtues which under such circumstances he develops are, of course, parasitical ones. Every intelligent Negro, in the lands of his exile, must feel that he walks upon the face of God’s earth a physical and moral incongruity.¹⁷

The tools of the European and Asian worlds were considered by pan-Africanists to be open to all human hands. After all, the historical consciousnesses of Denmark Vesey, Alexander Crummell, Martin R. Delaney, Henry McNeal Turner, Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, and other nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century black intellectuals and activists reveal an understanding of the interconnections between European civilization and development and its relationship to African enslavement, displacement, colonization, and underdevelopment. These men knew that the economic and social conditions of Africa and the African diaspora were the direct result of the historical developments associated with African slavery, capitalism, colonialism, industrialization, and imperialism—developments that were ongoing since

¹⁷ Edward W. Blyden, *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race*, 41.

the Portuguese first gained a foot hold in the sub-Saharan gold trade. According to Blyden,

[t]he Christian Negro has hitherto, as I have tried to show throughout this volume, rarely been trained that he has anything to say which foreigners will care to hear...The faulty estimate which he himself entertains of the true field for his energies is not corrected by his guides, who familiar with and strong on their own ground, can conceive of no other...It is difficult for the European to put himself in the place of the Christian Negro. But it is evident that there can be hopes for the future improvement of the African only as he finds out his work and destiny and, as a consequence, learns to trust his own judgment.¹⁸

These observations no longer address our twenty-first century concerns. They are words from the grave of a man whose physical remains are, by his own choice, on the African continent. Perhaps this is solely due to his decision to move to Africa, for he saw his voyage as a journey of return to his ancestral home. Perhaps the real truth of the matter is that after Blyden was not admitted to Rutgers Seminary, the only realistic option that was offered to someone of his caliber was emigration to Liberia. Thoughts of going to Alexander High School in Monrovia had to ring eerily in his ears considering the legacies of Alexander Hamilton and James Monroe, thoughts of squished hopes of democratic reform and slave emancipations being put violently down by the United States' Founding Fathers. But Blyden embraced the task of learning about himself as an African. He had traveled to the United States in order to secure an education. Rejected there, he refused to remain in a place in which his spirit and body would not be allowed to develop to his full potential. The prospect of attending a black missionary institution, especially after being rejected from a white one due to his race, must have been attractive to him. The option of moving to Africa must have come as salvation for the wounded, young, aspiring black man in the Americas.

¹⁸ Edward W. Blyden, *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race*, ii.

Blyden, however, was always of the belief that some African Americans – black Southerners – were more sympathetic to his calls to leave the hall of damnation behind. The decision to abandon family, friends, and foes in the Western Hemisphere was one that Blyden contended would be easier for black Southerners, for it was one of sheer common sense. Black Southerners were less prone to be completely blinded by the hypocrisy of the American Dream due to their religious traditions, their numbers, and the brutality of American slavery and caste distinctions. It seemed that only black preachers could convince black Southerners to believe in or reject the American Dream. Consequently, it is not realistic to expect that the philosophy of a black nationalist and pan-Africanist of the temperament of Blyden will be well known today. Perhaps it is precisely because the modern world is so anti-African that the emergence of pan-Africanism within its very borders and peripheries is more symptomatic of the disease of anti-Africanism than we have been led to believe.

Blyden's study and appreciation of religious influences in African history – particularly his appreciation of Islam and Islam's centrality in Africa – was central to the construction of the basis of black leadership in West Africa, Europe, and the Americas. His writings had a significant impact on the principal architects of pan-Africanism, Garveyism, the Negritude Movement, the Harlem Renaissance, African and Latin American independence movements, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Black Power Movement. It is notable that at the end of his life, Blyden had come to view Christianity, and perhaps more significantly, Islam, as foreign religions and ideologies for “all Africans.” Yet he never became an opponent, however, of black religious and ideological

establishments. Indeed, his life's work is still cherished in social circles in West Africa, the Caribbean, Europe, Asia, and the Americas by all races, creeds, and orientations.

Gobineau was emblematic of the discourses that Blyden was in conversation with, the discursive world that he, in fact, was engaged in struggle against. Racism is a diasporic construction, a white Atlantic construction that black intellectuals had to encounter and argue with. The Atlantic world was (and is) not just a geographical space. It is a theater, a stage, a site of productivity.¹⁹ Racialized ethnicity was really produced in West Africa and was exported to the Americas as a key component of the Atlantic slave trade.²⁰ Blyden and other Atlantic figures had to respond to this white Atlantic world as well as to Africa, producing both conservative and radical trajectories. His radicalism can be traced in his move to Africa and his openness to Islam, while his conservatism was reflective of his entrapment in the discourses of the white Atlantic world and with European constructions of modernity and civilization. He simultaneously sought to reconstruct Africa and claim civilization for Africa. The Atlantic world and the experiences of the African diaspora were sites where modernity first took form and modern racism was created, spaces of production that embraced modernity and race.²¹ This dissertation uses the Atlantic and diaspora concepts to re-conceptualize pan-Africanism and Black Power. It moves beyond the notion of nation to embrace a conceptualization of the black Atlantic world as a floating, porous area/arena. The Atlantic vision is a new vision of *process*. This dissertation engages this process by

¹⁹ Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

²⁰ Alexander X. Byrd, *Captives and Voyagers: Black Migrants Across the Eighteenth-Century British Atlantic World* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008).

²¹ Stephen Palime, *Wizards and Scientists: Explorations in Afro-Cuban Modernity and Tradition* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

analyzing Blyden and other figures from the perspective of the Atlantic theater. By re-positioning Blyden and other Atlantic figures in the circum-Atlantic theater in which they lived, we gain a richer understanding of how he and others became diasporic figures.

Earlier studies of Blyden were from an African American(ist) perspective. Rather than concluding that Blyden's poverty, sickness, and political powerlessness at the end of his life is key to understanding his rejection of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam and his overall intellectual development and contributions, as Edward E. Curtis IV explicitly contends and as Sherman Jackson implies in their respective studies of Islamic thought among African Americans in the United States²², this study takes a different approach to understanding the roots of black conservative nationalism and pan-Africanism. Both Curtis and Jackson build their arguments about Blyden from the trajectory established by Blyden biographer Hollis R. Lynch.²³ Lynch focused mostly on the role of Judaism and Christianity in the intellectual development and estrangement of Blyden, with Islam serving as a backdrop to his interrogation of the role of religious resources available to Blyden. The role that conservative religious notions of racial ideology played in the historical origins of black nationalism and pan-Africanism is central to this project that delineates the origins of black nationalism and pan-Africanism in the black Atlantic world. Blyden's theoretical formulations in *African Life and Customs*²⁴ (1908) provided a synthesis of so-called "Abrahamic universalism"/"Abrahamic harmony" (Curtis' terms) from an African, indigenous, black perspective. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – foreign

²² Edward E. Curtis IV, *Islam and Black America: Identity, Liberation, and Difference in African-American Islamic Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002); Sherman A. Jackson, *Islam and the Blackamerican: Looking Toward the Third Resurrection* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

²³ Hollis R. Lynch, "Edward Wilmot Blyden: Pioneer West African Nationalist," *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (1965), 373-388; Hollis R. Lynch, *Edward Wilmot Blyden: Pan-Negro Patriot, 1832-1912* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967).

²⁴ Edward W. Blyden, *African Life and Customs* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1994).

creeds to Africa, according to Blyden – certainly contributed to the development of African (racial) nationalism: but these religious creeds had reached their limits in Africa in the mind of Blyden.

An analysis of the significance of Blyden in the development of African and African American Christian and Islamic leaders, then, is a quite deterministic one. The role that Blyden played in the development of black Christian and Muslim identities in the Atlantic world is clearly an important one. But it is critical to disentangle the significant history of black conservative nationalism from studies that focus solely on Judaism, Christianity, and Islam as separate entities. This study focusing on the importance of Blyden in the construction of black subjectivity and the pan-African imagination during the nineteenth century is an intervention on the conversation about the role of religious resources in the formation of the black Atlantic intellectual landscape. It is also a critical engagement with African American historiography.

Travel and the Pan-African Imagination

With the mid-nineteenth century, interest in Africa shifted from a concern with the evils – or legitimacy – of slavery to questions relevant to the colonization of the “black continent”, and Africans' ability to govern themselves and participate in a sophisticated capitalist world economy. The conversation, that is, shifted from African Americans' right to freedom to one about Africans' claim to modernity. Blyden's writings reflect this shift, as he insisted on “the status and dignity of the black race and to establishing, or as he might have said, ‘re-establishing’” Africans' right to self governance.²⁵ Blyden's ultimate efforts were to *reconstruct* the image of Africans in their own eyes, transforming negative

²⁵ Robert W. July, “Nineteenth-Century Negritude,” 74.

perceptions of African peoples into positive ones. This was the only effective method he saw of refuting the onslaught of negative portrayals of Negro capacity and history.

Notions of “race”, it seems, are inseparable from any discussion of the inhabitants of Africa. The “idea of Africa”²⁶ is almost always coded as “Negro/black”. Yet, scholars have informed us since the mid-twentieth century that racial configurations have always been based on ideological positions and that ideologies are rooted in time and place.²⁷ The space of racialization, then, is an imaginary one, a cognitive agreement on the legitimacy of certain forms of knowledge. Historically, modern African modes of self-writing²⁸ deal with biological notions of race. They deal with the negotiation of the fictions and realities of everyday life for the “African” figure. Most African writers did not have the option of pretending that the world did not see them as being representatives of the Negro group of the human family.

The role of international and multicultural acculturation is of central importance in the making of modern African and diasporic intellectuals. These intellectuals consciously conglomerate various ethnic groups into a family, called Africans. Yet, the distinction “African” is a foreign term for those who inhabit the continent²⁹ Ethnicity is central to group identification within Africa. They think of themselves as different ethnicities. For the West, however, Negroes, because they are indigenous to the continent, are Africans. Their Negro identity also indicates their inferior status in the global human family.

²⁶ V.Y. Mudimbe, *The Idea of Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

²⁷ Winthrop Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Towards the Negro, 1550-1812* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968).

²⁸ Achille Mbembe, “African Modes of Self-Writing”, *Public Culture*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (Winter 2002), 239-273.

²⁹ Mudimbe, *The Idea of Africa*, xi, 26. This meaning, according to Mudimbe, “in this sense is the equivalent of the classical Greek *Libya*.”

Even anti-Africanism in America among African Americans relies on this invention, this foreign term of identification. The radical implications that emerge after recognition of the constructed nature of many of the ingredients that are a part of human constructions of identity are a part of the praxis underlying this study in intellectual history. This approach can also lead to a greater understanding of the protean nature of theories of universality. The idea that all Negroes are African seems to be both true and false depending on the context in African and African American histories. This is the number one rule to remember in an evaluation of black nationalism and pan-Africanism. Together, black nationalism and pan-Africanism reveal a tremendous flaw in the ideologies of African and African American nationalists who continue to consider Africans to be objects within a category they did not play a role in creating.

This and the following chapters seek to establish the relationship between configurations of race and representations of Africa in the creative imagination of African and African American intellectuals during the long nineteenth century. The question of the relationship between self and collective identification and audience response is of particular importance to my analysis. The central characteristic of African and African American intellectual production was that it was infused with the idea of “race” and that these intellectuals were “black”. This modern human construction was a central element in the gradual manifestation of the racial imagination in the New World and West Africa. Negro intellectuals largely addressed “foreign” audiences, and, as already noted, race, a conceptual category that dominated European and U.S. thought, was not native to Africa. African intellectuals in dialogue with Europeans had to engage a conceptual system that was alien to the people it purported to describe. This resulted in a fundamentally

alienating self-reflexive mode, yet it was through this mode that African and African American intellectuals discursively manipulated contextual systems of knowledge and social networks and created specific and significant projects for the regeneration of Africa and its diaspora.

Chapter II, “Acculturation and Resistance: The Origins of Pan-Africanism in the Black Atlantic World,” – and the chapters following – pivots around the idea of travel and the movement of diasporic black activists and intellectuals around the Atlantic world. It focuses on the critical role that social and cultural adaptations played within contexts in which intellectual leaders, though not always situated in the most powerful positions and situations, worked to articulate a course of action for the effective educational development of the modern African.³⁰ Mobility and conservative religious notions of racial ideology were a central dimension of the history that is uncovered in a study of the 1822 conspiracy to revolt against slavery by enslaved black people in Charleston, South Carolina, under the leadership of Denmark Vesey. Vesey’s life was one in which he travelled across a wide range of the black Atlantic world. His personal experiences in white and black churches and his clandestine acquisition of information about the international world played a central role in his contribution to the development of pan-Africanism. When children, women, and men of African descent in the Atlantic world were exposed to opportunities for acculturation of western modalities, their assimilation of western modernity did not entail erasure of their indigenous and creative subjectivity. Assimilation here refers to their ability and capacity to adapt to, resist, and/or negotiate power dynamics in the early Atlantic sphere in their own interests. Exposure to, and

³⁰ Donna J. Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,” in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*. (London: Free Association Books, 1991).

domestication of, racialized European and American norms and conventions, such as linguistic, social, and cultural phenomena, facilitated the cultivation of conservative black nationalism with the potential of radical outcomes *and*, as the following chapters demonstrate, conservative forms of resistance and adaptation to modern life and engagement with the politics of the Atlantic world, the African diaspora, and Africa.

Chapter III, “Sojourning after Truth,” discusses Blyden's travels in Africa. Blyden's pan-Africanism was that of a diasporic figure who traveled to Africa, studied it, and wrote about it extensively. It traces what he saw as traditional, as modern, as noble, as primitive, as essentially African. This chapter explores the tug between modernity and tradition and Blyden's efforts in making modernity African without making Africans into Europeans. One of the centrally important aspects of Blyden's life is that he traveled to Africa, explored Africa, and then settled there. His “discovery” of Africa, what he learned there, how he changed, and what he reported are critical dimensions of the importance of mobility in the history of pan-Africanism and black nationalism.

Chapter IV, “‘We need some African Power’: Edward Wilmot Blyden and the Conservative Origins of Black Power Ideology, 1832-1912,” explores the religious ideas of this conservative yet revolutionary figure. It argues that Blyden was one of the first conservative African intellectuals to articulate black power ideology as a philosophy of education and agency inside and outside of the African continent. It places his thought within an international framework, establishing the critical and influential role that Blyden's thinking and actions had within the context of overlapping configurations of European and American imperialism. African and African American aspirations to man the leadership positions of emergent nationalistic institutional spaces, such as schools,

missionary societies, churches, and colonization societies, crystallized within these often over-looked structures of West African and African American intellectual cultures. In contradistinction to popular and presentist assumptions about the Marxist-Leninist character of the radical variant of black power ideology that was popularized by Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Toure) and the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense during the 1960s³¹, the archeology of the actual phrase “black power” can be traced to Blyden's writings during the mid-nineteenth century.

Chapter V, “Conclusion: Anglo-Africans and Negro-Saxons Writing the History of Black Nationalism,” then examines the roots of the racial imagination of African American Victorians and African Victorians on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean during the long nineteenth century. A pre-twentieth-century class of conservative, bourgeois intellectual leaders, such as Alexander Crummell, emerged within the Atlantic world. They established themselves as the principal cultural ambassadors of the African world in a manner that was strikingly different from the twentieth-century tradition that grew out of the 1960s.

Travel and the practices of diaspora³² led to the generation of an ever more complex and dynamic Atlantic world and of a fluid and adaptive diasporic imaginaire for those intellectuals who were forced to operate within and against a racially framed universe. The vexing social position and symbolic figure of “the African” was central to the dilemmas facing the racialized imagination of my three diasporic figures and those attempting to claim modernity and self-esteem for the African subject.

³¹ Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (New York: Random House, 1967); Huey P. Newton, “War Against the Panthers: A Study of Repression in America” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Santa Cruz, 1980).

³² Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2003).

Chapter II

Acculturation and Resistance: The Origins of Pan-Africanism in the Black Atlantic World

ac-cul-tur-a-tion *n.* 1. The modification of the culture of a group or an individual as a result of contact with a different culture. 2. The process by which the culture of a particular society is instilled in a human being from infancy onward. — **ac-cul'tur-a-tion-al** *adj.* — **ac-cul'tur-a'tive** *adj.*³³

Sociologist E. Franklin Frazier and anthropologist Melville J. Herskovits engaged in an intellectual conversation during the early mid-twentieth-century that continues to provide a preliminary basis for the study of persons of African descent in North America, Central America, the Greater Caribbean, South America, West Africa, and Western Europe. Many scholars regard the vitality of this ongoing academic discussion of Africanisms to be a remarkable feat for two social scientists to generate. In many respects, this explosive debate remains unresolved among students of the western African diaspora. As defined by the British social theorist Paul Gilroy, the black Atlantic world is a creative, dynamic space wherein constant “intercultural and transnational formation” of social identifications and political interrelationships have been imagined and practiced since the initial stages of the Columbian exchange³⁴ in 1492. Further considerations of the fragmented history of the black African presence and historical legacy in the Atlantic

³³ *The American Heritage College Dictionary*, Third Edition (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1993), 9.

³⁴ James L. Roark, Michael P. Johnson, Patricia Cline Cohen, Sarah Stage, Alan Lawson, and Susan H. Hartmann, *The American Promise: A History of the United States, Volume I: To 1877* Third Edition (Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2005), 44 and G-1.

World reveal a long history of amalgam.³⁵

The central importance of scholarly investigations of African, African-European, and African-American³⁶ populations is that these studies led to a re-consideration of just what was/is African, European, or American about persons of “black” racial descent in the western hemisphere. Both Frazier's and Herskovits's ideas on this ever-changing and awkward subject were frequently considered to be oppositional viewpoints in social science literature, with the latter summarized as arguing positively for the recognition of “Africanisms” – or the prevalence of black cultural traditions that can be directly traced to West Africa – and the former interpreted as providing a sharp counter-argument to cultural Afrocentrism through his identification of the “Americanness” of African-American subjects in North America. Yet, the findings of both of these scholars were much more in agreement in their respective reasoning than we have been led to believe, especially in regards to the present lack of a consensus on the continued significance of their analyses of the intercultural transformation and international acculturation of black Atlantic cultures. We found that Herskovits's and Frazier's findings on cultural mixture were essentially reflections of the same logic when we considered the epistemological framework, or “intellectual climate”³⁷, of these two scholars' contextual studies and modes of analyses of identity and subjectivity. Frazier's studies centered on the Americanness of the Negro in the United States, and Herskovits's findings within this (and

³⁵ Paul Gilroy, Paul, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993) and Sidney Lemelle and Robin D. G. Kelley, Editors, *Imagining Home: Nationalism in the African Diaspora* (London: Verso, 1994).

³⁶ My use of “African-American” employs a transnational imagination of black Atlantic cultures in the western Atlantic world, encompassing North American, Central American, Greater Caribbean, and South American geographical spaces.

³⁷ Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus: and Other Tales*, Justin O'Brien, Translator. *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1955; 1942).

similar) contexts were in many respects strikingly similar to those produced by Frazier.³⁸

This conversation sparked the present investigation of a key moment in the intellectual history of pan-Africanism and the relationship between the continental African and the African in America prior to the rise of Garveyism. But even upon identification of Africanisms in America, one is prompted to inquire about their relative significance in everyday life. Fleshing out the cognitive relationship between the international acculturation of African people and their modes of adaptation and/or resistance to captivity and political domination in Africa and America is the primary object of this study. Through an examination of the key elements that constituted the ideological and discursive foundations of individual and organizational actions, this chapter specifically assesses the role of international acculturation and the character of radical and conservative forms of adaptation and/or resistance³⁹ during a specific episode of confrontation and negotiation with the interests of the ruling elite within an institutional apparatus that supported industrial slavery and racial capitalism in the

³⁸ Edward Wilmot Blyden held that the Americanness of Negroes in the United States of America was in remarkable contradistinction to the prevalence of Africanity found in other regions of the black Atlantic world. See Frazier's *The Negro Family in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939) and Herskovit's *The Myth of the Negro Past* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1941). Various scholars have commented upon this and the numerous subsequent debates following this generative conversation regarding the sociology and anthropology of persons of African descent in the Atlantic World. Sidney Mintz and Richard Price's *The Birth of African-American Culture: An Anthropological Perspective* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1976; 1992) offers a great overview of this debate, as well a respected analysis of the black presence in the New World. For an interesting, but by no means definitive, assessment of Frazier's and Herkovits's similar, as well as divergent, interpretations regarding the prevalence, manifestation, and expression of Africanisms in North America, and how Africanisms relate to African-American religiosity, see Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *Black Messiahs and Uncle Toms: Social and Literary Manipulations of a Religious Myth*. Revised Edition (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994, Second Printing; 1993 Revised Edition copyright; 1982) especially chapter 2, 23-29.

³⁹ I am indebted to Julius S. Scott for initially introducing the idea of examining the relationship between acculturation and resistance during discussions that occurred in his graduate course, "Origins of the Black Atlantic," at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, during the Fall 2000 academic term. See Gerald W. Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion: Slave Resistance in Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972); Michael Mullin, *Africa in America: Slave Acculturation and Resistance in the American South and the British Caribbean, 1736-1831*, Blacks in the New World Series, August Meier and John H. Bracey, Editors (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1992).

Atlantic world. Ironically, revolts and conspiracies were noted as the “most spectacular” examples of black resistance to white domination. But as the cases of Denmark Vesey and other originators of black-led movements demonstrate, the cosmopolitan leader of the foiled slave insurrection in Charleston, South Carolina (1822) was an important example of the dynamic relationship between internationalism and political imagination. Vesey was the subject of various scholarly and popular pens. He was also a fascinating case of the heroic futility of fighting with the master's tools instead of creating his own.

The Case of Denmark Vesey

What thrust Denmark Vesey to our attention for an historical examination of the relationship between acculturation and resistance? Surely Vesey's mere leadership and participation in the Charleston conspiracy was not the primary cause of his prominence in the historical record. Perhaps the main reason that Vesey was not ignored in the history of African-American resistance was that his unsuccessful plot was regarded as one of the most extensive and culturally inclusive plans of rebellion among the enslaved in United States history. Who, then, was this careful conspirator named Denmark Vesey? What role did his personal identity play in his responses to interconnected systems of governance that principally rested upon the exploitation of enslaved laborers?⁴⁰ An understanding of the personal characteristics of this historical figure is vitally important in order to adequately grasp the full measure of the larger implications of the 1822 incident, especially in regards to past scholars' concentrated attention to the significance of

⁴⁰ For a wonderful synthesis of the history of various slaveholding “societies” within North America, see Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998); Jane Landers, *Black Society in Spanish Florida*, Blacks in the New World series, August Meier, Editor (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1999) serves as an excellent addition to historical understandings of North American slavery and the construction of racial identities.

acculturation and resistance among black Atlantic cultures. I examine the manner in which various scholars have indirectly and directly analyzed the role of social, political, and cultural transformation in one particular instance of cosmopolitanism and radical activism. The origins of pan-Africanism can be traced to the catalysts for cultural mixing that still takes place in the Black Atlantic world that was identified by Gilroy. In particular, Black men like Denmark Vesey were the central facilitators of the flowering of pan-Africanism in the black Atlantic theater. A reconsideration of past scholars' analysis of the 1822 incident leads us to a much clearer understanding of the significance of international acculturation between and among persons of African descent during this early stage in the "transformation of African [and African-American] identities".⁴¹ Understanding the dynamic salience of the diverse ethnic and cultural identities of those who were reported to have been involved in the Vesey plot, and the investigation of acculturation in past scholarly treatments of conspirators' vocations within urban, rural, coastal, and plantation – cosmopolitan settings – are both essential interpretative and methodological approaches to this particular accounting for this evolving mixture of social adaptability. Charleston, South Carolina, the fourth largest city in North America by 1770, was one of the major hubs of the Atlantic world during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Did acclimation to this coastal enclave play any significant role in the Vesey conspiracy? By paying closer attention to past scholars' analyses of acculturation and resistance in South Carolina and within the Vesey plot, a new and clearer picture emerges – one in which future scholars are forced to adequately deal with the complexity and dynamics of pan-Africanism in the Atlantic world.

⁴¹ Michael A. Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

Several scholars have commented upon the roles of acculturation and resistance within the Vesey conspiracy. The works of historians who offer the most groundbreaking insights on this subject were primarily utilized by the present author; contained within these representative works was a utilization and criticism of other scholars' studies that were not directly consulted by the original authors. A few studies that were not directly related to the Vesey plot, but proved to be relevant to our discussion of acculturation and resistance, are occasionally cited in this account. As will be demonstrated below, the scope of the commentary regarding this plot ranged from contemporaneous and sensational accounts to rigorous and imaginative studies conducted during the late twentieth-century and the early twenty-first century. These sources allow us to gauge subjective aspects of the lived experiences of conspirators and how acculturation more or less played a critical role in their opting to engage in a plan that, according to most historians of the 1822 conspiracy, was destined to fail.⁴² Indeed, no revolt of enslaved people in the long history of black "rebellion" in North America was "successful." The simple fact is that this and all other attempts by African-Americans to violently and decisively break the yoke of white supremacy in North America failed. Of course, the non-success of any given revolt did not mitigate the historical significance of these foiled occurrences; there is much to discern from them. Thus begins our journey into the world of Denmark Vesey.⁴³

⁴² The historian Doug Egerton contends differently, as we will see below.

⁴³ All information contributing to this study's biographical sketch/synthesis of Vesey and the 1822 plot is derived from the work of past biographers. Citations denoting differing scholarly opinions will be cited accordingly. All other information on which scholars appear to agree regarding aspects of Vesey's and others' lives and historical evidence is not denoted by respective citations in the text or footnotes. The most authoritative studies of Vesey and the 1822 plot are: James Hamilton, *An Account of the Late Intended Insurrection among a Portion of the Blacks in This City* (Charleston, 1822); Lionel Kennedy and Thomas Parker, *An Official Report of the Trials of the Sundry Negroes Charged with an Attempt to Raise an Insurrection in the State of South Carolina* (Charleston, 1822); Thomas Wentworth Higginson,

The World of Denmark Vesey

Denmark Vesey is believed to have been born in 1767. He was also referred to in some instances as Telemache⁴⁴, which may have been his name during an early period of his life. Historians have not reached a consensus regarding the specific nature and designation of Vesey's early name. It was generally conceded that Vesey was originally named Telemache by his enslaver, Captain Joseph Vesey, and his crew and that the name eventually evolved into Telmak and Denmark. Very little is known about Vesey's life prior to 1781. Scholars have speculated that he was either born in West Africa and was later shipped to the Danish colony of St. Thomas (West Indies) during the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, or that he was born to enslaved parents on the island. If Vesey was born in Africa, his birth most likely occurred close to the Gulf of Guinea (Gold Coast) or "elsewhere in Atlantic Africa". Moreover, the most recent study on Vesey maintains that he was "most likely" born on St. Thomas while the same author considers other scholars' claims that Vesey was born in Africa as "certainly ... possible".⁴⁵ St. Thomas at the time

Travelers and Outlaws: Episodes in American History (Lee and Shepard: Boston, 1889) Reprinted for Vanguard Society of America by The John Henry and Mary Louisa Dunn Bryant Foundation (Los Angeles, 1962); John M. Lofton, *Insurrection in South Carolina: The Turbulent World of Denmark Vesey* (Yellow Springs, Ohio: The Antioch Press, 1964), Republished (with relatively no changes) as *Denmark Vesey: The Slave Plot that Lit a Fuse to Fort Sumter* (Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 1983); Sterling Stuckey, "Remembering Denmark Vesey—Agitator or Insurrectionist?" *Negro Digest* 15 (February 1966), 28-41; Robert S. Starobin, *Denmark Vesey: The Slave Conspiracy of 1822* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1970); David Robertson, *Denmark Vesey* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1999); *Designs against Charleston: The Trial Record of the Denmark Vesey Slave Conspiracy of 1822*, Edited with an introduction by Edward A. Pearson (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Doug Egerton, *He Shall Go Out Free: The Lives of Denmark Vesey*, American Profiles Series, Norman K. Risjord, Editor (Madison, Wisconsin: Madison House Publishers, 1999).

⁴⁴ Pearson, *Designs against Charleston*, 23-24; Egerton, *He Shall Go Out Free*, 21. Pearson asserts that a crew of sailors began to refer to the young boy (or "pet") by this nomenclature during shipment to St. Domingue, whereas Egerton contends that he was named Telemache upon his return to the Captain for "epileptic fits." See both authors' discussions of the character Telemachus from Homer's *Iliad* as a possible inspiration for the crew's naming of the boy. Pearson also cites the eighteenth-century novel, *The Adventures of Telemachus, the Son of Ulysses*, by Tobias Smollett as a possible source. Further discussion of Vesey's name will take place below.

⁴⁵ Lofton, *Insurrection in South Carolina*, 10-11, n.1, 241; Pearson, *Designs against Charleston*, 20-21.

was a slave-trading and sugar and cotton producing colony. The colony experienced relatively great prosperity in part because of Danish neutrality during European wars and subsequent imperial contests for power in the Caribbean. There was also a large gap in the number of black and white residents on St. Thomas. By 1775 over ninety-percent of the total population of the island was black. Many blacks remained on the slave-trading island for only brief periods.⁴⁶

The historian Doug Egerton provides an interesting analysis of what could have likely characterized Vesey's time on St. Thomas. He contends that the young boy's exposure to various African social and cultural practices should be seriously considered as a part of understanding Vesey's early life. Considered along with John Lofton's observation that enslaved persons who were not traded away from St. Thomas were forced to work in the sugar and cotton fields and to produce their own sustenance on small land allotments, Egerton's suggestive argument that Vesey was exposed to dynamic and creative Africanized ways of life, modes of being that were constantly (re)created and viable on St. Thomas, is well argued. According to Egerton:

The boy lived with either his parents or his fictive kinsmen in a "village" of fifty to sixty huts. Just as the slave families on St. Thomas reflected an African heritage, the living arrangements were a rough recreation of a West African compound ... In most cases, a family of four slaves lived in each hut.⁴⁷

The fact that most of the enslaved people held at St. Thomas (permanently or to be

Lofton and Egerton point out that Herbert Aptheker's assertion that Vesey was born in Africa was unsupported by the evidence that he (Aptheker) used to support his claim. See Egerton, *He Shall Go Out Free*, 3-4. For two interesting discussions of the intricacies of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade within West Africa, see Boubacar Barry, *Senegambia and the Atlantic Slave Trade*, translated by Ayi Kwei Armah (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) and John K. Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800* Second Edition, Studies in Comparative World History Series, Michael Adas et al, Editors (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

⁴⁶ See Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1944; 1994) 39-40 and especially chapters 2 and 3.

⁴⁷ Egerton, *He Shall Go Out Free*, 7-11; Lofton, *Insurrection in South Carolina*, 11.

transported to another Atlantic locale) were directly from Africa, in addition to the “highly creative” abilities of early black Atlantic creoles, lends considerable weight to Egerton’s suggestion that an Africanized field of acculturation had a significant, undergirding impact on Vesey’s personal development. Egerton’s (and Lofton’s) observations contributed greatly to our scant knowledge of the specific clues of Vesey’s life on St. Thomas.⁴⁸ To be sure, the brutal conditions on sugar-producing colonies afforded very little opportunities for the cultivation of purely autochthonous “African” communities. Scholars such as Melville Herskovits, Sterling Stuckey, and John K. Thornton have all pointed out the fact that even within systems of seemingly total domination, the fragments of African antecedents within early African and African-American Atlantic communities were identifiable and operative. These studies also revealed how African antecedents played critical roles in the lives of early African people in the Americas.⁴⁹ Thus, it is probable that when Captain John Vesey, a Bermuda islander slave-trader, acquired 390 enslaved people in 1781 from St. Thomas for shipment to the French island of St. Domingue (Cape Francois) aboard the *Rebecca* – the shipment that included a young slave boy, soon to become permanently known as Denmark – many of these enslaved peoples, including Vesey, were literally “Africa[ns] in America.”⁵⁰

During the voyage from St. Thomas to St. Dominigue, the captain and his officers were reportedly impressed with the fourteen-year-old boy's appearance and intelligence. They took a peculiar liking to young Denmark and dressed him up as their "pet".

⁴⁸ Mintz’s and Price’s discussion of the transformation of Africans into African-Americans is especially informative. See *Birth of African-American Culture*, 52-60.

⁴⁹ Herskovits, *Myth of the Negro Past*; Sterling Stuckey, *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Thornton, *Africa and Africans*.

⁵⁰ Mullin, *Africa in America*.

Although the duration of Denmark Vesey's time on St. Dominigue was only three or less months, one historian suggested that Vesey "may have been introduced to voodoo ... [and] recognized the importance of supernatural forces and ritual for forging a sense of collectivity, enjoining people to silence" as a means of resistance. In addition, he may have at least been cognizant of the island's maroon communities. These suggestions were asserted in light of an absence of evidence supportive of claims of Vesey's exposure to voodoo ceremonies or maroons. Yet, it is clear that life on St. Dominigue was very different from life on St. Thomas, perhaps far less "Africanized" on the former island in terms of "creative familial reconstructions" in comparison to the latter island, as was suggested by Egerton.⁵¹ After a brief time on the island, the young boy was returned to Captain John Vesey as "unsound and subject to epileptic fits." Interestingly, there is a possibility that Vesey's alleged illness may very well have been feigned in an effort to subvert local law. As stated by Egerton:

... [T]he unusually bright boy found ... [a] way to escape Saint Dominigue. Due perhaps to his growing facility with the French language, he somehow managed to understand that local law required all newly-imported slaves to be free of affliction or disease. Should the human product prove defective, local buyers had the right to return their purchase to the seller.⁵²

During the fall season that preceded Joseph Vesey's return to the island with a fresh load of enslaved people on April 23, 1782, Vesey, presumably for the first time, began to exhibit "fits." Consider, however hesitantly, Lofton's assertion that Vesey's time on St. Domingue, under the harsh treatment of labor that was typically attributed to the sugar plantation, contributed to his heightened awareness of the stunningly holistic brutality of

⁵¹ Pearson, *Designs against Charleston*, 25-26; Egerton, *He Shall Go Out Free*, 18. See also Joan Dayan, *Haiti, History, and the Gods* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Richard Price, Editor, *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas*. Third Edition. (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1996).

⁵² Egerton, *Ibid.*, 20.

enslavement, which, in effect, sowed “the seeds of revolution” in him.⁵³ Upon Vesey’s return to Joseph Vesey, “the epileptic fits ceased as quickly as they had begun,” and, thereupon, young Denmark served as Captain Vesey’s personal servant and accompanied him on several slaving voyages across the Atlantic Ocean.⁵⁴

One of the most interesting and important aspects of Vesey’s life occurred during his time at sea aboard the slaver, *Prospect*. It was at sea that Vesey is presumed to have acquired additional linguistic capacities (English and possibly Spanish) and the ability to read, which he coupled with his apparent knowledge of French (from St. Domingue) and “black Dutch” (from St. Thomas).⁵⁵ Atlantic historians, including W. Jeffrey Bolster, Julius S. Scott, and Ira Berlin, provided valuable information regarding seamen, international political consciousness, and “Atlantic creoles”. While most scholars agree that Vesey accompanied Captain Joseph Vesey on Caribbean slaving voyages, Vesey may have even crisscrossed the Atlantic Ocean. Pearson states that as late as 1789 Vesey “possibly accompanied his master ... on the captain’s last Atlantic voyages,” which included trips to “London, Ostend, Rotterdam, and Hamburg.” There was a possibility that Vesey traveled to the African coast aboard the *Prospect*, witnessing (perhaps again) the horrors of the Middle Passage.⁵⁶

⁵³ Lofton, *Insurrection in South Carolina*, 54-74. A hesitant consideration of Lofton’s argument should be made regarding Vesey’s experience in St. Domingue as “sowing the seeds of revolution” in light of other scholars’ analyses of the Vesey plot in 1822 as a “revolutionary”, “insurrectionist”, and/or “agitator.”

⁵⁴ Egerton, *He Shall Go Out Free*, 20. See also Wilma King, *Stolen Childhood: Slave Youth in Nineteenth-Century America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995) and Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

⁵⁵ Pearson, *Designs against Charleston*, 31-32; Egerton, *Ibid.*, 6. Historians of Vesey frequently refer to his alleged knowledge of several languages. Pearson also adds Gullah, and suggests that the “creole spoken on Saint Thomas” was similar to the language that Egerton claimed that Vesey probably spoke, “black Dutch,” as opposed to “pure Dutch.”

⁵⁶ W. Jeffrey Bolster, *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); Julius S. Scott, “Crisscrossing Empires: Ships, Sailors, and Resistance in the

The Middle Passage was a birth canal, launching a prolonged struggle between slaveholder and enslaved over rights of definition ... But the Middle Passage was also a death canal, baptismal waters of a different kind ... The experience would leave an indelible impression upon the African's soul, long remembered by sons and daughters. It is the memory of ultimate rupture, a classic expulsion from the garden.⁵⁷

If uncertainty remains about Vesey's travel across the Atlantic, there is a consensus that he witnessed the transport of other Africans across parts of the Greater Caribbean and possibly to North America, affording him the opportunity to reflect on his own former position as a captive African in transport to a new land. Vesey's position as an enslaved person aboard the *Prospect*, without a doubt, presented him with a major psychological contradiction. Yet, as Bolster, Scott, and Berlin inform us about the dynamic social, cultural, and political mobility that was afforded by the Atlantic network for black seamen, it is very likely that Vesey acquired an enhanced understanding of how the Atlantic world economy actually worked. More importantly, Vesey capitalized on these opportunities to interact with other Black seamen and to learn tactics to negotiate individual freedom, not only through an acquisition of manual skill but also through a gathering of vital political information. According to Bolster,

Sailors thus became for black people in the Atlantic world what newspapers and the royal mail were for white elites: a mode of communications integrating local communities into the larger community of color, even as they revealed regional and local differences ... Other sailors appropriated ships as conduits for political dissent ...⁵⁸

In 1783 the Captain resettled in Charleston, South Carolina, as a "land-based" slave-

Lesser Antilles in the Eighteenth Century," in *The Lesser Antilles in the Age of European Expansion*, Robert L. Paquette and Stanley Engerman, Editors (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996); Ira Berlin, "From Creole to African: Atlantic Creoles and the Origins of African-American Society in Mainland North America," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Series, Vol. LIII, No. 2, April 1966, 251-89; Person, *Ibid.*, 37; Egerton, *Ibid.*, 21-25; Lofton, *Insurrection in South Carolina*, 19-25. If Vesey was born along the western African coast, he would have already experienced the Middle Passage (to St. Thomas) as a child.

⁵⁷ Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, 13-14.

⁵⁸ Bolster, *Black Jacks*, 39-40.

trader and, eventually, as a ship merchandiser. Vesey's association with the sea remained, then, a constant element in his life even upon his permanent relocation to Charleston: his contact with seamen presumably did not cease in North America, and his world was not confined to African-American populations in the United States of America. Due to the Captain's new vocation, Vesey's exposure to sales of enslaved people also continued while he lived in Charleston. In an insightful study of a New Orleans slave-market and its significance in the world known as the antebellum South, the historian Walter Johnson explains that the art of "making slaves" out of black bodies was indeed a brutal psychological practice. Vesey's enslaved position was in obvious contradistinction to that of his slave-trading enslaver, and this proximity to slaveholding classes necessarily presented him with increased opportunities to personally witness the daily activities of the slave-market and, perhaps yet again, the "soul murder" of more than a few black people.⁵⁹

Denmark Vesey remained Captain John Vesey's property in post-Revolutionary War era Charleston (formerly Charles Towne) until 1800. Charleston at this time was one of the five largest cities in the United States, and she was the center of the South Carolinian slavocracy. As one of the major maritime hubs of commercial trafficking in enslaved people and other products in the South, the cosmopolitan city regularly received large and diverse shipments of enslaved persons of African descent.⁶⁰ Both Charleston and her surrounding indigo and rice plantations were home to Africans from various

⁵⁹ Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside of the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), especially chapter 4; see also Nell Irvin Painter, "Soul Murder and Slavery: Toward a More-Fully Loaded Cost Accounting" in Linda K. Kerber et al, Editors, *U.S. History as Women's History: New Feminist Essays* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995). Painter's provocative discussion focuses on the disproportionate number of enslaved people who succumbed in mind, body, and spirit to the brutal horrors of enslavement.

⁶⁰ Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*, chapter 6.

regions of western and western-central Africa and from the Greater Caribbean. The historian Michael A. Gomez argued that many of the enslaved people whom were located in South Carolina were, at the very least, nominally practicing Muslims whom hailed from Senegambia and Sierra Leone; both of these West African regions were noted and demanded for their inhabitants' acquaintance with agricultural skills that were valued by planters. About thirty-percent of the Africans imported to North America came from these regions of considerable Muslim populations and Islamic influence.⁶¹ Independent historian David M. Robertson's analysis and complication of Islam in North America as it relates to Vesey is worth noting. According to Robertson:

... Denmark Vesey almost certainly knew or observed fellow blacks who continued to practice Islam in their bondage ... [W]hether he confessed Islam ... was carried to the grave ... [I]t is chronologically and geographically possible that ... Vesey met and talked with the most extraordinary Muslim slave in South Carolina history ... known as Omar Ibn Said.⁶²

While the above quote is certainly speculative, Robertson went on to assert that the planned date of Vesey's revolt coincided with "Islamic numerology." Robertson argued that the number that was played by Vesey, 1884, for the winning lottery ticket that he purchased in early October 1799 numerically coincided with "the word (*h*)*ad-d(i)th*, one of the sayings of the Prophet [Muhammad] repeated after performing obedience to Allah."⁶³

⁶¹ Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, 66-69.

⁶² Robertson, David, *Denmark Vesey*, 37-40. Omar Ibn Said escaped from South Carolina in 1810. Robertson speculates that Vesey may have "met surreptitiously" with Said during his (Vesey's) possible engagement of working "both as a slave and as a free carpenter" in an area that was under development near the plantation Said was located on.

⁶³ Robertson, *Ibid.*, 40; Pearson, *Designs against Charleston*, 62. Robertson also explored the Islamic significance of the number fourteen and Vesey's planned date of revolt. He also linked Vesey's abstinence from alcohol, his possible practice of polygamy, and his efforts to emancipate enslaved people from bondage as possibly stemming from his adherence to Islamic tenets. Pearson contended that Islam had no effect on Vesey's thought. Egerton suggested that Vesey may not have been simultaneously married to multiple wives. Vesey's planned date of revolt also coincided with other

By January 1800 Denmark had purchased his freedom for \$600 from a \$1,500 prize in the East Bay Lottery and had become a carpenter. Joining a community of about 1,000 free blacks that was located in an area with a much larger slaveholding population, Denmark Vesey's quasi-free experience of everyday life in Charleston was presumably similar to that of other so-called free blacks. Described as “occupying a sort of limbo between slavery and real freedom,” Charleston’s free blacks negotiated a racialized world in which they were allowed to capitalize on certain measures of social and economic mobility, such as owning property and forming social organizations. Disenfranchisement, subjection to taxes, the burden of frequently proving their status to practically any white person, and other restrictions, however, inhibited the proliferation of practices of freedom that could equal those freedoms that were enjoyed by white Charlestonians.⁶⁴

It is possible that Vesey may have chosen his former enslaver’s surname after his emancipation in similar fashion to other freed blacks, not so much out of personal affinity for Joseph Vesey, but as a maneuver to garnish white customers' loyalties that were based on the well-respected business name of Joseph Vesey. This was an especially plausible mode of social and cultural negotiation when we consider that small free black populations across the South could not serve as viable self-supporting markets for southern free black entrepreneurs, as opposed to the case of free blacks in northern urban centers. Vesey may have also purchased an “apprenticeship with an established craftsman” and gained the necessary skill to become a carpenter, which Charleston newspaper advertisements for “Negro Carpenters” displayed a high demand for. There is no evidence that Vesey was a carpenter before his freedom or that he was hired out as one

notable events, which will be addressed below.

⁶⁴ Lofton, *Insurrection in South Carolina*, 86-95.

while he was enslaved. “Carpentry was simply the most common expertise for unskilled young men to enter,” according to Egerton.⁶⁵

Vesey was reported to have had several⁶⁶ wives during his life, some, if not all, of whom were enslaved women. It is believed that he never fathered free children due to the inherited enslaved status of children through their mothers in accordance to South Carolina law.⁶⁷ It is noteworthy that Vesey's most recent biographer questioned his possible practice of polygamy. Egerton noted that while there is no substantial evidence that proves that Vesey practiced polygamy, he (Vesey) was likely to have been familiar with such forms of marital relationships from the time of his experience in either western Africa or on St. Thomas (or both) and have practiced accordingly in Charleston. However, due to his long life, a life that “far exceeded the average life expectancy for black males in antebellum America,” Vesey had “more than enough time to sequentially marry two or three women.” Egerton brings to light information alluding to the possibility that Vesey's several wives may have been, in fact, only reflections of contemporaneous demonization of Vesey as a “haughty and capricious ... Eastern Bashaw” by biased Charleston officials as recorded in extant sources.⁶⁸ What is clear is that his wives were enslaved, and Denmark was, in effect, tied to the enslaved community not solely based on his race and name. His emotional sentiment and imagination were also interlaced factors.

Several critical events in Atlantic history occurred during the period immediately

⁶⁵ Egerton, *He Shall Go Out Free*, 76-77, 83-87.

⁶⁶ Egerton points out that Lofton's assertion that Vesey had as many as “seven” wives was the result of a misprinting in the *Official Report*. Egerton, *Ibid.*, n.7, 79; Lofton, *Insurrection in South Carolina*, 76.

⁶⁷ Alton Hornsby, Jr., *Chronology of African-American History: From 1492 to the Present* (Detroit: Gale Research, 1997).

⁶⁸ Egerton, *Ibid.*, 79-82; Hamilton, *An Account* (Charleston, 1822), 17, as quoted by Egerton.

prior to Vesey's freedom and subsequent commencement of recruiting co-conspirators around the winter of 1821-1822 which were directly or indirectly related to Denmark Vesey and the 1822 incident. The French Revolution (1789-1799) had an enormous impact on Western political and social life, particularly in South Carolina where the republican currents sparked by the movement resulted in a proliferation of several pro-French societies. In 1791 the inhabitants of St. Dominigue initiated efforts to overthrow the white power structure, which resulted in an independent Haiti in 1804. An influx of white colonists from the island into the United States, some 500 in Charleston, followed the momentous event. The sentiment caused by the French and Haitian Revolutions was reflective of a larger liberalization trend in western civilization, or support for the "rights of man" on the one hand, and the potential of black resistance to enslavement, on the other. Both were dangerous currents when they fell upon free black or enslaved ears. It is certainly likely that this sentiment was known and felt by many black inhabitants of Charleston. It is also very probable that much of this information was acquired from news that was disseminated by black seamen and by Charleston's traditional newspapers and among white citizens. News from abroad was very much a part of the talk of this cosmopolitan space. With the presence of pro-French societies in Charleston, not to mention Captain John Vesey's possible involvement in these radical organizations, it is equally plausible that radicalism also either served as an impetus for the creation of dreams of freedom among Denmark and other blacks or further revealed the inconsistency of white Charlestonians' proclamations of universal liberty. Clearly, the Haitian Revolution is thought to have served as an inspiration to Denmark Vesey and his plan to organize a revolt in Charleston some twenty-one years later. Other key radical

events that occurred during this generative interval of Vesey's social life included conspiracies in 1800 (Gabriel Prosser in Virginia) and 1816 (Camden, South Carolina). Charleston's four-year interval of reopened trans-Atlantic commercial trade in enslaved people (January 1804 – January 1808) directly from Africa was also another important instance of international acculturation prior to 1822, with nearly forty-thousand Africans being imported into the state during this period.⁶⁹

In early 1817, over 4,000 black Methodists in Charleston were led by Reverend Morris Brown and others in a disaffection from Bethel Methodist Church in response to the announced plans of white church officials of their intention of constructing a hearse house on the site of a black cemetery. They formed an independent African Church in Charleston in 1818 as part of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) confederation that was formed by Richard Allen and Absalom Jones on April 9, 1816, in Philadelphia. Denmark Vesey, formerly a member of the predominantly white Second Presbyterian Church, became a member of the Hempstead branch of the church that was located in a predominantly black neighborhood and which operated as one of two AME church branches in the city of Charleston. The impetus for Vesey's affiliation with Second Presbyterian Church is unclear, but it is highly likely that his choice stemmed from a combination of his contempt for, and non-acceptance by, Charleston's "Brown Fellowship Society," a mulatto caste whose members attended Episcopal churches; he may have been reluctant to attend Methodist services. His opting to join the city's AME church more than likely resulted from his attraction to the congregation's Black leadership and, perhaps, to its all-black membership. What is clear is that the church

⁶⁹ Egerton, *Ibid.*, 96. Lofton also pointed out the large number of enslaved people imported into Charleston during the interstate trade with Northern states (as many as 30,000 estimated in 1816). Lofton, *Insurrection in South Carolina*, 107.

“drew its leadership from free artisans like Vesey.”⁷⁰ Because Second Presbyterian, a fairly new congregation, admitted Vesey and two other blacks “to Communion for the first time,” Egerton contended that Vesey was probably introduced to the church (Second Episcopal) by his former enslaver, Joseph Vesey.

Vesey was not baptized like the other two blacks who received communion, which “indicated that the April morning was not Vesey’s initial contact with a Christian church.” According to Pearson, Vesey may have also acquired some knowledge of Christianity on St. Thomas as well as during three other periods of his life: from the island’s Moravian missionaries; on Haiti through exposure to voodoo; or while at sea.⁷¹ Michael Mullin asserted that “religion [was not] a dominant feature of Vesey’s teaching and outlook ... [but religion was] a tool[,] and its place of worship [was] convenient for conducting his style of what is now termed consciousness-raising,” which Egerton found to be “curiously suggest[ed].” Vincent Harding’s commentary on Denmark Vesey and the relationship between religious acculturation and resistance greatly contributes to any discussion of Vesey and the African Church.⁷² Before a discussion of Vesey’s significant relationship with the AME Church and a larger investigation of some of the intricacies of the plot, one other historical occurrence should be noted in the historical record.

The Congressional debate over the admission of Missouri to the Union as a free

⁷⁰ Egerton, *Ibid.*, 110.

⁷¹ Egerton, *Ibid.*, 103-09; Lofton, *Insurrection in South Carolina*, 94-95; Pearson, *Designs against Charleston*, 80. For an unrelated but extremely informative (if usual) treatment of the relationship between Moravian missionaries and persons of African descent in the Atlantic world, see Richard Price, *Alabi’s World* (Baltimore, Maryland: The John Hopkins University Press, 1990); See Joan Dayan, *Haiti, History, and the Gods*, for an analysis of the interwoven aspects of Catholicism within practices of voodoo. *Pagan Spain*, a travel narrative by Richard Nathaniel Wright, covers similar ground in non-fiction terms. See Richard Wright, *Pagan Spain* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957).

⁷² Mullin, *Africa in America*, 229; Egerton, *Ibid.*, n.2, 102; Vincent Harding, “Religion and Resistance Among Antebellum Negroes, 1800-1860,” in August Meier and Elliot Rudwick, Editors, *The Making of Black America: Essays in Negro Life and History, Volume I, The Origins of Black Americans*, Studies in American Negro Life Series, Meier, August, General Editor (New York: Atheneum, 1969), 179-97.

state or a slave state, and the ultimate issue of whether slavery would spread to western territory, provoked a national debate that resulted in the Missouri Compromise of 1820. A major stipulation of the Missouri Compromise was that Missouri was admitted to the Union as a slave state, and Maine joined the Union as a free state. This political compromise kept the national balance of power between slave and free states equal. In addition, the compromise resulted in a stalling of the question of the future of slavery, which was to be decided by settlers in the western territory. Senator Rufus King's (NY) arguments against the institution of slavery in 1819 and 1820 were reportedly influential to, or at least manipulated by, Denmark Vesey in his effort to garnish support for a uprising by enslaved people in Charleston. Scholars have speculated that Denmark Vesey acquired wind of King's arguments either from Charleston's widely circulating press and from pamphlet coverage of King.

It is generally accepted that by the winter of 1821-1822, Denmark Vesey actually commenced his personal selections of "lieutenants" or fellow co-conspirators for a black uprising in Charleston. By this time Vesey had resided in South Carolina for nearly forty years and enjoyed a little over twenty of these years as a relatively free man. Having possibly hailed from western Africa, Vesey had also witnessed life on the Danish colony of St. Thomas; toil in the sugar fields of the French territory of St. Domingue; sail across the Atlantic aboard a slaver; and work in the service of a slave-broker in South Carolina. He is noted as having acquired a reputation of respectability among black Charlestonians and even among some whites. Moreover, this respect may have entailed a combination of admiration, fear, or contempt. Robertson contended that these perceptions of Vesey stemmed from his "autocracy—his sense of his own powerful gift of leadership" or from

a possible “Muslim superiority” complex.⁷³ Lofton noted Vesey’s “domineering personality” and alleged impatience with blacks who presumably lacked a liberationist social consciousness. Vesey exhibited an ability to “sway Negroes of lesser stature.” The historian Robert Starobin recognized Vesey’s “leadership ... of black protest,” and Sterling Stuckey characterized Vesey as “[n]o ordinary man ... [and] a man possessing charismatic authority.” Egerton suggested that Vesey acquired the “awe and respect” reported by the contemporary chronicler James Hamilton from his “disciples” due to his being “a benevolent tyrant.”⁷⁴

As can be discerned from the above information, the relatively small amount that is known about Vesey’s social and subjective world provides a wealth of knowledge about his persona and life. His acculturation cannot be relegated to Charleston. Vesey’s exposure to a large portion of the Atlantic world historically contextualizes his life, even before his relocation to South Carolina, as an embodiment of the dynamic complex of the black Atlantic network. In addition, Charleston’s urban, coastal setting also proved to be a significant element in the story of Denmark Vesey. The study of Vesey’s life prior to 1821 sheds light on a number of the specific characteristics of early “African America” (if there was really such an entity). More important is the suggestion that an interpretation of Vesey’s earlier life, coupled with a close investigation of the context of the conspiracy, enables one to more fully grasp the significance of the international acculturation of Vesey and that of his co-conspirators and this collective seasoning’s relationship to resistance. A discussion of some of the specific characteristics of the 1822 conspiracy and

⁷³ Robertson, *Denmark Vesey*, 136-38.

⁷⁴ Lofton, *Insurrection in South Carolina*, 134; Starobin, *Denmark Vesey*, 3; Stuckey, “Remembering Denmark Vesey,” 37; Egerton, *He Shall Go Out Free*, 87,147; Hamilton, *An Account*, 17, as quoted by Egerton.

the identities of other major radical participants is essential to our investigation of the significance of acculturation and resistance in the Atlantic world and the development of pan-Africanism in the modern world.

Scholars generally agree that Vesey's disdain for slavery, certainly like that of countless others in the Atlantic world, stemmed from his *feelings* about his own experience in bondage. As mentioned earlier, Vesey participated in the transport of enslaved people, and he possibly experienced and witnessed the initial reactions to captivity that signified the traumatic experience of newly captured continental Africans. Again, he may have personally experienced these adjustments as a child. Vesey's children whom were born into slavery also served as a daily reminder of his precarious "half-free" status, not to mention his cognizance of Charleston's regulation of her small free black community. Charleston was indeed the jewel of a "slave society."⁷⁵ Scholars such as Michael Mullin have even gone so far as to suggest that skilled urban blacks, especially free Black men, were less inclined to partake in violent revolts. Rather, these persons opted for safer and individualistic tactics to ameliorate their positions within white-dominated settings.⁷⁶ The Denmark Vesey conspiracy is decidedly an antithetical example to this provocative and suggestive view.

As students of Vesey have all suggested, his position as a teacher and class leader in the African Church facilitated his calls for black self-determination and resistance to white supremacy. There were slight disagreements, however, within this collective argument. Sterling Stuckey described Vesey's pronouncements in the church as "radical

⁷⁵ Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*, 7-10.

⁷⁶ Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion*, chapter 3. The evidence surrounding the Denmark Vesey conspiracy serves as a counter-argument to Mullin's analysis. An analysis of acculturation and resistance in an Atlantic-based context/framework lends itself to more theoretical opportunities for cognitive creation and understanding of reality.

Christianity,” and Vincent Harding considered Vesey’s use of “religion ... in a movement that went beyond the defense of the church-oriented prerogatives to new and likely bolder concerns” as critical ingredients to his constant focus on rebellion. Both Lofton and Robertson viewed Vesey’s position in the church as one in which he could express his radical Christian thoughts against white injustice under the veil of “religious meetings ... that ... provide[d] protective coloration for unapproved talk.”⁷⁷ While Vesey did manage to utilize his position as a church leader to spread potentially dangerous information in order to persuade black members of the necessity of fighting for the overthrow of racial slavery, Egerton pointed out that past scholars’ observations of Vesey’s pronouncements as a class leader usually overlooked his specific usage of Christian ideology. In fact, Egerton suggestively noted:

Vesey turned his back on the New Testament and what he regarded as its false promise of universal brotherhood ... Vesey seceded ... from Christianity itself. In his numerous religious pronouncements, Vesey never once mentioned Jesus or a God that would have him forgive his enemies. He simply knew that the instinct of freedom was the righteous voice of *his* God.⁷⁸

Whether Vesey rejected or ever accepted Christianity remains unclear.⁷⁹ It is certain that he utilized Old Testament doctrine during religious meetings, as Egerton stated. Harding also identified Vesey’s use of the Exodus narrative of deliverance in his (Vesey’s) addresses to, and recruitment of, black church members.⁸⁰ Clearly, Vesey’s ability to manipulate religious doctrine within a racialized institutional setting for the intended

⁷⁷ Stuckey, *Slave Culture*, 48-49, as quoted in Egerton, *He Shall Go Out Free*, 113; Harding, “Religion and Resistance,” 185; Lofton, *Insurrection in South Carolina*, 132-33; Robertson, *Denmark Vesey*, 9.

⁷⁸ Egerton, *Ibid*, 113-14 (original emphasis). It is clear that both radical and conservative variants of Christianity and Islam reflect practices of black power ideology that predate the 1960s and 1970s modern Civil Rights and Black Power movements.

⁷⁹ The religious foundation of Edward Wilmot Blyden also remains a mystery.

⁸⁰ For a discussion of the significance of the story of Exodus within nineteenth-century African-American religious leadership, see Eddie Glaude, *Exodus! Religion, Race, and Nation in Early Nineteenth-Century Black America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

purposes of his plan to violently confront systematic slavery stemmed from his knowledge and diligent reading of the Bible and, as Robertson noted, the Qur'an.⁸¹

Vesey's recruitment efforts were not limited to the AME church setting, however. Due to the mobility that was afforded to him by Charleston's urban setting and especially because of his status as a free man, Vesey was able to travel throughout the city and the surrounding areas. His occupation as a carpenter also enabled him to establish regular contact with other skilled blacks – whom were to serve as critical mediums of information about, and suppliers of, the necessities of revolt, as we can discern from Vesey's careful selection of fellow leaders and followers. Indeed, Vesey's apparent knowledge of the goings and comings of key black figures in and around Charleston is striking to perceptive readers of the testimonies recorded from the trial manuscripts; presumably, much of this knowledge was acquired over an extended period of time. Pearson commented that Vesey “fashioned a ‘hidden transcript’—a term used by anthropologist James Scott to describe the backstage discourse and subversive practices formulated by subordinate groups.” This observation concisely summarized the complex manner in which Vesey actually gained the support of his principal sub-leaders. As one scholar rather simply stated, Vesey chose well.⁸² He selected a nearly airtight band of conspirators in and around the city of Charleston.

Vesey is believed to have gained several conspirators around December 1821. Two of the principal leaders were enslaved persons who were the property of the recently elected South Carolina Governor, Thomas Bennett. Ned and Rolla Bennett were both

⁸¹ Robertson, *Denmark Vesey*, 37-38, 47.

⁸² Pearson, *Designs against Charleston*, 11; Lofton, *Insurrection in South Carolina*, 134. See also James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1990) and James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1985).

members of the African Church, and Ned, like Vesey, served as a class leader. These men resided about two blocks from Vesey's home. They were both noted as being "trusted slaves." Monday Gell, an African-born harness maker who arrived in South Carolina during the state's reopening to the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, was allowed to hire himself out by his enslaver. Gell also resided in his own rented residence. He is known to have even "run a business on Market Street in the heart of Charleston."⁸³ A literate member of the AME Church, the trusted enslaved man used his Market Street shop as a meeting locale for Vesey and other conspirators and was to lead an Igbo band in the revolt. Egerton observed that Gell remained in contact with these African men whom ventured from the nearby plantations to barter goods during Charleston's market Sundays.⁸⁴ Gell's shop was also to serve as a repository for weapons.

Mingo Harth, an African-born domestic enslaved man and member of the AME Church, is reported to have been a principal recruiter of Methodists and other blacks whom were employed "at the lumberyard owned by his master." One scholar suggested that Harth, a "Mandingo," was to organize an ethnic company for the revolt.⁸⁵ Peter Poyas, a literate class leader at the African Church, was a ship carpenter and has been regarded by scholars as an instrumental planner in the securing of weapons and the revolt's execution. Poyas's contact with other skilled blacks along the docks at South Bay Street allowed him to gain waterfront followers as well as pertinent information from seamen. "Gullah" Jack Prichard, an African-born ship caulker and recognized "conjurer" among blacks in and around Charleston, rounds out the list of Vesey's principal co-conspirators. Gullah Jack's pivotal role was to garnish the support of the "Gullah

⁸³ Egerton, *He Shall Go Out Free*, 71.

⁸⁴ Egerton, *Ibid.*, 133.

⁸⁵ Robertson, *Denmark Vesey*, 159; Egerton, *Ibid.*, 133, 230.

contingent[,...] the Congolese-Angolan and/or Gola members of the slave community in the Charleston area and their descendants.”⁸⁶

Upon recruiting these sub-leaders, Vesey held several meetings at his home and other safe locales and then began to plan an actual revolt. As stated in the trial manuscripts, his plans included gathering and selecting followers; securing and producing weaponry; and setting a date for the revolt. In May 1822, July 14th was chosen as the date of the revolt, reportedly the darkest night of the month. Due to the date's being the second Sunday of the month, Vesey perceived it to be a strategic time since many whites would likely be on vacation outside of Charleston. In addition, a large number of blacks would be in the city as part of the regularly occurring market Sunday.⁸⁷ Both of these regularities would be effective in the arousal of little or no suspicion of additional black numbers in the city. Some scholars suggest that Vesey may have selected the July 14th date because of additional reasons. This date is also the anniversary of the storming of the Bastille, a momentous event in the French Revolution; this is also the day that was celebrated in Massachusetts by freed blacks commemorating emancipation. Vesey, reportedly aware of these national and international events, may have been aware of the symbolic significance of this historical information. Considering his probable practice and knowledge of Islam, Vesey's selection of the specific date for the revolt may have been a mystical part his plan to deliver blacks from physical and spiritual bondage.

According to Robertson:

[T]he number fourteen [is] representative of the Prophet's [Muhammad's] name ... [and] the date of July 14, 1822, reckoned by the Islamic lunar calendar, marked the last two months of that Islamic year, Dhu al-Qa'dah and Dhu al-Hijah ... The latter month, Dhu al-Hijah, takes its name from the *Hijrah* in the Koran

⁸⁶ Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, 3.

⁸⁷ Lofton, *Insurrection in South Carolina*, 140.

[sic], meaning “to migrate, withdraw, or to make an exodus.”⁸⁸

As most scholars identified flight to Haiti as the most desperate option that may have been a part of Vesey’s original plan, Egerton argued that an exodus was central to the planning of Charleston’s “African Moses” who would lead his people to “the promised land of Haiti.” He also contended that Vesey “sought to escape it” by sea, in similar fashion to those at Stono who attempted flight to Spanish Florida in 1739 rather than fight a futile battle to destroy the antebellum South.⁸⁹ Other scholars continue to hold ironic views similar to the suggestion that the Vesey conspiracy was an “attempt to destroy the very foundations of the American slaveocracy.”⁹⁰

Historians agree that the plot entailed a plan designed for the successful seizure of a Charleston arsenal and guardhouse, as well as the taking of a United States arsenal; the killing of the governor; and utilization of rural enslaved people to assist in the burning of Charleston as part of a general slaughter of all whites and non-supportive blacks. Vesey and his followers hoped that the revolutionary spark that was to be initiated at Charleston would incite enslaved people in the surrounding areas to join and, according to Lofton, “converge on the city” and create an “impregnable stronghold.” Vesey’s plan to sail to Haiti is viewed by most scholars as a desperate option. He was reported to have forwarded correspondence to Haitian President Jean-Pierre Boyer through the recruitment of a black seaman en-route to the island. In addition, Vesey’s knowledge of Boyer’s advertisements in North American newspapers for the emigration of skilled free blacks to

⁸⁸ Robertson, *Denmark Vesey*, 38.

⁸⁹ Egerton, *Ibid.*, 126-53.

⁹⁰ Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, 1; Egerton, *He Shall Go Out Free*, 127, see especially chapter 6. Egerton viewed this aspect of Vesey’s plot as “all the more unusual” when considering Eugene Genovese’s observation that “slaves increasingly aimed not at secession from the dominant society but at joining it on equal terms” during the late eighteenth through the early nineteenth centuries. See Eugene Genovese, *From Rebellion to Revolution: Afro-American Slave Revolts and the Making of the Modern World* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), xix-xx, as quoted by Egerton.

Haiti apparently contributed to the projected anchoring role of the former French island within the plot. Haiti held a sacred place in the hearts of many blacks due to its being an independent nation that emerged from a violent overthrow of colonial slavery. Interestingly, Vesey and his followers – aware of the lax security of Charleston’s arsenals and banks, in addition to the added security of a significantly large number of skilled black support along the city’s waterfront – may have planned to partake in urban warfare only long enough to depart to Haiti.⁹¹

On May 25th, the attempt of one of Vesey's followers to recruit another conspirator resulted in the reporting of the planned revolt to Charleston authorities on May 30th by an enslaved person whom was unwilling to revolt and keep quite. Denmark Vesey, upon learning of the plot's betrayal, desperately changed the date of the revolt to June 16th, about a month before the initial date. Vesey appeared to have been hell-bent on destroying the city's slave-holding apparatus. This date was also discovered on June 14th after an enslaved-spy allegedly implicated the African Church as being a vital center of organization for the plot and June 16th as the revised planned date of revolt. By June 15th Charleston officials had deployed military units to suppress the revolt, followed by the arrests of Vesey's followers, "slave trials," Vesey's own capture on June 22nd, and a series of vicious executions of the would-be participants in the revolt, executions that continued until August 9th. Vesey was executed July 2, 1822. A total of thirty-five blacks were executed following the foiled revolt. Thirty-seven blacks were ordered to leave the United States; two blacks died while in custody; three blacks were whipped but found not guilty and released; and four whites were convicted, imprisoned and fined. Some 135 individuals were arrested in relation to the plot, which has been estimated to include as

⁹¹ Lofton, *Insurrection in South Carolina*, 142; Egerton, *Ibid.*, 130, 136-53.

many as 9,000 participants. The Vesey conspiracy resulted in more court ordered executions than any other conspiracy by enslaved people in the history of the antebellum South.⁹²

A closer look at those implicated in, or executed because of, the 1822 conspiracy reveals an impressive number of skilled blacks and members of the African Church. Nineteen of the accused were reportedly both skilled laborers and members of the church, and only one was acquitted. Eleven of these men were hanged; one was exiled to Liberia; and the remaining men were transported to locations outside of Charleston. Thirty-five of the persons summoned by the court were recorded as being members of the African Church. According to Gomez, the Vesey conspiracy can be viewed as an effort, however unsuccessful, to reconcile ethnic and spiritual differences between persons of African descent for collective purposes.⁹³ It is likely, then, that several of the non-reported AME church members involved in the plot were adherents of various cultural and religious practices that were the result of acculturation: or what scholars have referred to as retentions, or the synthesis of African traditions in the New World. Indeed, the individuals whom we are sure were not largely African Church members, the Gullah group located outside of Charleston, were not highly representative in the list of Blacks who fell victim to the city's vicious reprisals.⁹⁴

⁹² See Egerton, *Ibid.*, 200, 239-32; Pearson provides an exhaustive biography of conspirators and witnesses involved in the trials following the conspiracy's discovery. See, Pearson, *Designs against Charleston*, 297-313; Robertson also provides biographical sketches of those executed in 1822. See Robertson, *Denmark Vesey*, 155-65.

⁹³ Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, 1-4. Gomez's discussion of Vesey's partial recognition of the necessity of the "deemphasis of African ethnic ties" in organizing a revolt is especially illuminating.

⁹⁴ A discussion of the events immediately following the 1822 conspiracy's discovery and trials is not included within the present author's investigation of the significance of acculturation and resistance in the Vesey conspiracy. The Negro Seamen Act of 1822; further persecution of the African Church; and increased restrictions on Charleston's free black and skilled communities occurred after 1822. For in-depth treatments of these events, see the works of Vesey's several biographers listed in footnote 17 of

The world of Denmark Vesey was a complex one and yielded an abundant amount of information for various investigators.⁹⁵ For example, a consideration of his intersections with advocates of black nationalism (for instance, his possible contact with David Walker) and pan-Africanism (his association with Morris Brown's church in Charleston) provides a window of opportunity for new studies of the role of acculturation and resistance. The suggestion that Vesey was a “man of the black Atlantic” rings especially true. Vesey was an “Atlantic creole” – as well as many of his followers – and his life serves as a strong counter-argument to scholarly characterizations of skilled, highly acculturated blacks who peacefully negotiated their positions within white-dominated environments. Vesey and his principal sub-leaders were all very familiar with the intricacies of urban Charleston from their experiences of interacting with whites and locating and creating spaces for their own respective and collective agendas. Michael Mullin’s observation that skilled blacks, with varying degrees of mobility, regarded “flight” away from enslavers as the most viable way of enjoying freedom, ironically, informs and supports the present author’s analysis of the case of Denmark Vesey. That is, Vesey’s mobility resulted from his ability to adapt and negotiate in a non-suspicious

this study. Peason’s *Designs against Charleston* is by far the most exhaustive compilation of documents related to Vesey and the 1822 plot. Egerton’s *He Shall Go Out Free* is arguably the most comprehensive treatment of this subject to date.

⁹⁵ For example, Richard C. Wade argued that the Vesey conspiracy was blown out of proportion by contemporaries as a show of Southern force, and by subsequent historians who attempted to relate the 1822 plot to larger portrayals of Black resistance. See Wade, “The Vesey Plot: A Reconsideration,” *Journal of Southern History*, XXX (May, 1964), 148-61. Sterling Stuckey made an interesting observation regarding Wade’s analysis of the critical absence of physical evidence (i.e., weaponry, lists of followers, etc.). Stuckey argued that the sheer fact that no physical evidence was found, in addition to the relative silence of Vesey and his principal sub-leaders, was demonstration of extensive planning and that the extent of this planning was due to Vesey’s and others’ acculturation. See also See Trevor Burnard, “Good-bye Equiano, the African,” *Recent Themes in the History of Africa and the Atlantic World*, Edited by Donald A. Yerxa (Columbia: South Carolina, 2008), 101, 103; Michael Johnson, “Denmark Vesey and His Co-Conspirators,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., 58 (2001): 915-976; and Michael Johnson, “The Making of a Slave Conspiracy, part 2,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., 59 (2002): 166, 177-78, as cited in Burnard, “Goodbye Equiano, the African,” 105.

manner to the Atlantic world that he lived in. The acculturation of Denmark Vesey and his principal co-conspirators – their evolving familiarity with the intricacies of the ways of life in the Americas – brought them closer to European-Americans, and, more importantly, enhanced their abilities and willingness to confront a new world. This was clearly exhibited in the case of Vesey and in other characters throughout the black Atlantic world.

Chapter III

Sojourning after Truth

The writer was refused admittance to a literary institution in the United States, on the ground that the faculty had failed to realize their expectations in one or two colored persons whom they had educated. The inductive reasoning here employed was, of course, most conclusive. *Some* colored persons abuse their education, therefore *all* colored persons should be excluded from institutions of learning. The minor proposition is made to contain the major. Excellent logic!

Edward Wilmot Blyden,
“A Vindication of the African Race;
Being a Brief Examination of the Arguments in Favor of African Inferiority”⁹⁶

Traveling to and living in Africa had a significant impact on the life of Edward Wilmot Blyden. His development as a leading spokesman for pan-African nationalism during the long nineteenth century was directly tied to the spaces that he moved through and lived within. His positioning in Africa was the dominant factor that distinguishes him from the majority of Atlantic figures who were the progenitors of black nationalism and pan-Africanism. His observations about Africa were not those of the typical foreign traveler to Africa because Blyden never returned to live in the Americas. He sojourned to Africa in 1850 in search of an education, a search which gradually evolved into a persistent search for truth about Africa and Africans. His initial travel to, and early years in, Africa were reflective of his development as a missionary-trained intellectual. He began his life as a public intellectual through the channels of the American Colonization Society as a missionizing Christian, a role that evolved during the span of his lifetime

⁹⁶ Edward Wilmot Blyden, “A Vindication of the African Race; Being a Brief Examination of the Arguments in Favor of African Inferiority,” *Being Addresses, Sermons, Etc.* (New York: John A Gray, 1862), 53 (original emphasis). This essay was first published in Liberia in August, 1857.

into one that was both increasingly critical of Christianity and open to both Islam and traditional (indigenous) African ways of life. Blyden's changing role as a leading pan-African nationalist culminated in his embrace of the social, religious, and cultural traditions of native Africans, a remarkable change from his earlier dismissal of African "heathenism." His travels demonstrated the balancing act of becoming increasingly familiar and at home in Africa. The processes through which he and other diasporic figures in the Atlantic world became members of the African diaspora indicate that people of African descent did not simply become African diasporic figures by virtue of solely being racialized subjects in the Atlantic world.⁹⁷ He became increasingly at home in Africa during the second half of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, a shift that was in marked contradistinction to New World proponents of black nationalism and pan-Africanism.

His travels in Africa reveal an evolution of three trajectories that were marked by, and can be traced in, his writings. In *Liberia's Offering: Being Addresses, Sermons, Etc.* (1862) we encounter an Africa enshrouded in savagism and in desperate need of conversion to civilization and Christianity. With the publication of *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race* in 1887/1888, his re-presentation of Africa entailed criticism of the Christianizing mission in Africa, an openness to African modes of being and an openness to Islam as a civilizing force in Africa. By 1908, his *African Life and Customs* demonstrated a learned appreciation of traditional African cultures. The sociological arguments in this text were different from his earlier advocacy of the civilizing mission.

⁹⁷ Kevin K. Gaines, *American Africans in Ghana: Black Expatriates and the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 28. Gaines made an important observation on the importance of "endow[ing] the abstract notion of diaspora with the specificity of political projects, lived experience, and emancipatory hopes."

Blyden had become convinced that Africans had created their own ways of life that suited them best in their own environments as other races had done. He argued that African epistemologies were the only viable options for pan-African nationalism, including traditional African arrangements of society, government, and religion, such as polygamy, age-set structuring of social rank, and ancestral pantheism as the spiritual foundation for African redemption.

African/Power/Knowledge

The entanglement of power, knowledge, and identity formation is a recurring theme in the Atlantic theater. Atlantic subjectivities are multifarious. In his classic analysis of the production of power and knowledge in the modern Western world, *The History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault examined the subtext of the evolving discourses about the nature of the human body that emerged between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. As a part of his focus on bio-power (“technology of sex”), Foucault recognized the significant role that the politics of representations of the body played in the historic shaping of lived experiences. He argued that Western modernity was ushered in with a heightened ecclesiastical discourse on human normality that evolved within the dominant religious discourses of the Catholic Church's confessional before becoming the focus of scientific research and the governance of the state. What resulted from the formative stages of Western modernity was not a liberalization of conceptualizations about the body (in his analysis, sexualities), but an intellectual and social landscape that was saturated with an “imperialism that compels everyone to transform their sexuality (or body) into a perpetual discourse.”⁹⁸ The classification and control of modern human bodies in the

⁹⁸ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Volume 1*. Translated by Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1990; 1978) 33, 90.

modern Western world rested within and through individuals. Setting the stage for future historians of Western and non-Western modernities, Foucault's historical analysis of the entanglement of power and knowledge provides an epistemological starting point for this chapter on Edward Blyden and his travels in Africa and other parts of the the Atlantic world. Similar to the historian Kevin Gaines's analysis of how twentieth-century "anticolonial struggle and pan-African nationalism ... provided the basis for a global culture of black modernity linking colonies with metropolitan centers, forging a new sense of a unified black world out of once-disparate diasporas," I focus on Blyden's travels in Africa and how his vision of black nationalism and pan-Africanism related to African modernity during the nineteenth century.⁹⁹

African Atlantic constructions of identity emerged under the gaze and yoke of modern Western domination, beginning during the fifteenth century at the dawn of Portuguese explorations along the West African coast and exploding during the forced transportation Africans across the Atlantic ocean. The dispersal of various early black communities throughout the Atlantic World eventually evolved into a world of hybrids, collectively and individually. Both Africans who were in contact with Europeans along the Atlantic coastline of Africa and descendants of Africa in the Americas were simultaneously cultural reflections of Africa, Europe and the Americas. Stuart Hall's observation that identity is of "political significance" and his insistence that scholarly considerations of constructions of identity in the Atlantic world take into account historical context – and racism – is a critical one that I couple with my usage of Foucaultian analysis of power, knowledge, and identity formation in the margins. Hall criticized Foucault's disdain for psychoanalysis, suggesting that dominant power relations

⁹⁹ Gaines, *American Africans in Ghana*, 29.

only become “normative” upon “subjective self-constitution.”¹⁰⁰ This chapter tests Hall's criticism by tracing how Blyden's intellectual formation and travels in Africa and across the Atlantic world developed in the context of nineteenth-century racism. Foucault argued that “racism in its modern, ‘biologizing,’ statist form” is most poignant “at the level of the body.”¹⁰¹ The history of racism is intimately tied to the overlapping cultures constitutive of the Atlantic world, a mutable world that is virtually coeval with modernity.¹⁰²

The history of the formation and dynamics of the Atlantic world entailed the convergence and fragmentation of varying international factors. It is clear that the complexity of the Atlantic world is reflective of the porous evolution of the Atlantic space, a theater in which many cultures met on land and on sea, a vivid example being the interlinked world that was forged between Atlantic sailors, pirates, and enslaved persons – hydrarchy – captured in David Rediker's and Peter Linebaugh's *The Many-Headed Hydra*. Their study elucidated “the major themes of early Atlantic history,” themes that circulate around, and surface in, my study of Blyden's travels to Africa: the emergence of capitalism and colonialism; the age of Empire; the displacement of various peoples; exploitation; cooperation; and resistance.¹⁰³ There is much to be learned from considerations of the multi-textured world that was produced from imperial contests for power in the Atlantic world, especially when we investigate its specific parts “from below.” None of the fragments of this protean world of categories of difference can be

¹⁰⁰ Stuart Hall, “Introduction: Who Needs Identity?” in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay, Editors (Newbury Park, California: Sage Publications, 1996), 13, 16.

¹⁰¹ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 149.

¹⁰² Stephen Palmié, *Wizards and Scientists: Explorations in Afro-Cuban Modernity and Tradition* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

¹⁰³ David Rediker and Peter Linebaugh, *The Many Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), 14.

considered to have been separate from, or outside of, the interlaced relations of power in the Atlantic world.¹⁰⁴

More important than the simple integration of the Other into existing grand narratives of Atlantic modernity, or a cataloguing of counter-cultural resistance to a normative Western subject,¹⁰⁵ I seek to uncover an important dimension of Atlantic history that remains obscure due to the pervasive erasures that were a legacy of the formative years of the Atlantic world. Resurrecting the significant transnational imagination of Edward Blyden and reversing the historical suppression of “unthinkable” histories – a discursive act which upsets the logic of the established orders’ official histories to the extent that it constitutes evidence that the production of knowledge never takes place outside of power relations/grids – this chapter uncovers silences in the history of black nationalism and pan-Africanism in the Atlantic world. My focus on Blyden’s travels in Africa and the Atlantic world, as well as his identity formation in the margins – and in Africa in particular – centers around power, intentionality, and outcome. How does an analysis of this missionary to Africa alter our grasp of the role of missionaries in imperial projects? Are appropriations of texts written and, arguably, created out of imperialism concessions, transformations, or transcendences—conservative yet revolutionary acts?

As we have seen in the previous chapter on Denmark Vesey, the center or metropole is always in dialogue with the periphery or colony in the history of the Atlantic world. The complexity of the Atlantic world – its poricity – was manifested by diasporic

¹⁰⁴ Edward Braithwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770-1820* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971); Gayatri Spivak, “Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism,” *Cultural Inquiry*, Vol. 12, No. 1, “Race,” Writing and Difference (Autumn 1985), 243-261.

¹⁰⁵ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

figures who were the principal architects of pan-African nationalism. The roots of black nationalism and pan-Africanism, two intertwined projects, emerged during the late eighteenth century and the long nineteenth century. Prior to the twentieth century, advocacy of black nationalism and pan-Africanism by Atlantic figures centered on the “uplift”¹⁰⁶ of Africans and people of African descent. The Atlantic world was the space where the intellectual origins of black nationalism and pan-Africanism took form, the theater in which proclamations or writings expressing the necessity of black self-government or self-determination in a series of overlapping geopolitical spaces circulated and attained powerful influence, leading to the emergence of cultural nationalism and the championing of the race during the twentieth century. Its earliest advocates participated in protean, hegemonic discourses about Christianity and civilization.¹⁰⁷ The intellectual discourses of black nationalists and pan-Africanists about Africa and the Negro was, in a word, ambivalent.

Wavering between the national/class aspects of national liberation, nationalism and integrating comes from ambivalence ... Ambivalence is the mixed or conflicting feelings about the oppressor and comes from the desire to be like the power or dominant symbols. The ambivalence occurs between intra (in) -group emotion directed toward self or group and extra (out) -group emotion directed toward the oppressor.¹⁰⁸

C.L.R. James reminds us in *A History of Pan-African Revolt* that the origins of black nationalism and pan-Africanism can be traced to subjects “on the ground,” those figures who suffered, resisted, and struggled within interrelated structures of power and mutual

¹⁰⁶ Kevin K. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

¹⁰⁷ Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850-1925* (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1978).

¹⁰⁸ Muhammad Ahmad, “The Black Intelligentsia,” *Black Social and Political Thought: Selected Writings Volume Two*, (San Diego: University Readers, 2009), 7-8.

dependency.¹⁰⁹ No productions of knowledge in human history have ever existed outside of configurations of power. It is equally true that every individual in history was “positioned” in addition to being inherently possessed of “agency” or the inevitable choice of acquiescence or resistance to operations of power, even if victimized by oppression.¹¹⁰ What were the ways in which black nationalists and pan-Africanists like Blyden manipulated mechanisms of dominance or even effectively undermined them? His travels to Africa and throughout the Atlantic world as an emissary for the Republic of Liberia and his writings from Africa were central dimensions of his role as a founding father of black nationalism and pan-Africanism.¹¹¹

Travel Writing/Writing Traveler

Travel writing is one of the most revealing literary genres. The narratives of travelers are self-reflexive modes of historical writing and reading about the world and has played a critical role in African and African American intellectual life.¹¹² The importance of travel is fused to our analysis of Blyden's journey across the Atlantic world and especially in Africa. It is important to note, here, that his deep religious convictions – which will be the focus of the chapter following this one – played a significant role in Blyden's intellectual formation and development. The religiosity of his intellectual production and contribution to the origins of black nationalism and pan-Africanism were

¹⁰⁹ C.L.R. James, *A History of Pan-African Revolt* (Washington: Drum and Spear Press, 1969). This text originally was published as *A History of Negro Revolt* (New York: Haskell House, 1938).

¹¹⁰ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage, 1995;1975.); Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Walter Johnson, *Soul By Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).

¹¹¹ “Edward Wilmot Blyden: Father of Pan Africanism,” *Awareness Times* (Freetown: Sierra Leone, August 3, 2006).

¹¹² Anita Louise Harris, “Pan African Narratives: Sites of Resistance in the Black Diaspora” (Louisiana State University, Ph.D. dissertation, 2004). See also Bernard Binlin Dadie, *An African in Paris*. Translated by Karen C. Hatch (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994; 1959) and Reginald McKnight, *He Sleeps* (New York: Picador USA, 2001).

interlaced with his international travels. His travels were, in fact, the crucial elements which added a revolutionary dimension to his otherwise conservative usage of the religious dogmatism and racial ideology of the Victorian Atlantic world. His writings are distinct from those of most African and American American writers of travel and pan-African narratives. From the very beginning of his career, his writings were “actuated more by a desire to contribute something to the credit of the African race, to which he entirely belongs, and of the Republic of Liberia, with which, *from choice*, after twelve years residence, he is fully identified.”¹¹³ Yet his writings about Liberia and Africa are most frequently about himself, his emerging pan-African identity. Travels into the interior of Liberia and other parts of Africa led to his production of narratives that he somewhat unselfconsciously saw as having “nothing of the interest connected with travels or descriptive scenery. They are chiefly essays prepared for special occasions, expressive of the Author's views of the rights, duties, and hopes of the African race.”¹¹⁴

In many respects, Blyden's racial religiosity stemmed directly from his early life and travels in the Caribbean, South America, and the United States before he sojourned to Liberia in his late teens. He described his upbringing as one that “was blest with the care of pious parents” who were free and literate. “To the influence of my excellent and devoted mother ... can I trace whatever literary tastes and religious aspirations I possess.” Blyden was born on one of the Danish West Indian islands, St. Thomas, on August 3, 1832. In 1842, when he was about ten years old, Blyden accompanied his mother and father to Porto Cabello Venezuela, where they remained for two years before returning to St. Thomas in 1844. It was in Venezuela that Blyden claims to have learned the Spanish

¹¹³ Edward Wilmot Blyden, *Liberia's Offering: Being Addresses, Sermons, Etc.* (New York: John A. Gray, Printer, Stereotype, and Binder, 1862), i (emphasis added).

¹¹⁴ Blyden, *Liberia's Offering*, i.

language. He also witnessed a new dimension of the overlapping systems of anti-black racism in the Atlantic world.¹¹⁵

Upon his family's return to St Thomas, Blyden became a precocious student of a Bible-class under the instruction of Rev. John P. Knox, pastor of the Reformed Dutch Church on the island. Blyden attended school in the morning and worked as an apprentice in the tailoring business for five years. Knox is credited by Blyden as providing the most important spark to his conversion to Christianity and preparation for the ministry. The return of Rev. Knox's wife to the United States in 1850 prompted him to encourage Blyden to accompany Mrs. Knox to the United States in order to gain admission to Rutgers Theological College in New Jersey. Rutgers, however, refused Blyden admission. Blyden was well aware of the reason for his rejection.(see epigraph). For Blyden, his first visit to the United States led him to conceive of the United States as a place in which he faced “deep-seated prejudice against my race, exercising so controlling an influence in the institutions of learning, that admission to them was almost impossible. Discouraged by the difficulties in my path, I proposed to return to St. Thomas, and abandon the hope of an education.” Blyden attributed his change of heart and his decision to emigrate to Liberia to Mrs. Knox, whose “letter so full of interest in my welfare ... and so urgent that I should still strive to become fitted for usefulness in the Christian ministry ... and render my life useful to Africa” convinced him that he could be a credit to his race by assisting in the efforts that were taking place in the newly established Christian republic in West Africa. His decision to travel to Africa was one that reveals a severing of his direct connections with the everyday life of the western side of the Atlantic world. Emigration was a life-changing choice for the young Blyden, one in which he “relinquished my

¹¹⁵ Blyden, *Ibid.*, i.

purpose of returning to my parents” by accepting “the offer of the New-York Colonization Society to furnish me a passage to Liberia, in hopes to enjoy the advantages of the Alexander High School, then beginning its noble work, at Monrovia, the capital of the Republic.”¹¹⁶

Blyden sailed from Baltimore, Maryland, on December 21, 1850, “to the continent of my fathers and my race, reaching Monrovia, January 26, 1851.” He arrived in Liberia “an entire stranger, without a single letter of introduction” just over five months after his eighteenth birthday. Shortly after arriving in Liberia, he was enrolled as a student at Alexander High School, a missionary institution under the charge Rev. David A. Wilson and the Presbyterian Missionary Board. His course of instruction was a classical one, wherein he studied Latin, Greek, geography, and mathematics. Due to his desire to “read the entire Scriptures in the original languages, especially those passages of the Old Testament which have reference to the African race,” he undertook the study of the Hebrew language on his own, as it was not “embraced in the course of studies at Alexander High School.” After three years of study, Blyden was placed in charge of some of the classes at the school when Rev. Wilson returned to the United States from West Africa due to health problems. Blyden's acumen was quickly noticed by government officials in Liberia during his “first efforts at teaching,” and it was not long before he was appointed Editor of *The Liberian Herald*, the country's official newspaper, by Liberian President Joseph Jenkins Roberts. Blyden worked as the editor of the paper for one year.

Blyden continued to assist Rev. Wilson at Alexander High School after Wilson returned to Liberia from the United States. Upon Wilson's retirement in 1858, Blyden was placed in full charge of Alexander High School. During the same year, he also attained

¹¹⁶ Blyden, *Ibid.*, ii.

his goal of becoming a minister: “Ever looking forward to the ministry, I was *finally*, after the usual examinations, licensed and ordained by the Presbytery of West-Africa, in the year 1858.” Rev. Blyden continued to teach at Alexander High School until he was elected Professor of Greek and Latin at Liberia College in 1861. Upon being appointed Professor of Greek and Latin at the newly established Liberia College, Blyden's career as an intellectual force in the cause of African nationalism and pan-Africanism attained a solid foundation.

Blyden traveled to England, Scotland, Canada, and the United States in the early part of 1861 in order to “recruit my impaired health.” He also made “personal acquaintance” with intellectuals leaders in England, such as Lord Henry P. Brougham, Right Honorable William E. Gladstone, and Rev. Henry Melvill (Principal of East-India College), in addition to having “the honor of being presented to the United Presbyterian Synod, then in session in Edinburgh, at the same time that Rev. Dr. George B. Cheever of New-York City was introduced.” During the previous year, the Presbytery of West-Africa had elected Blyden as Commissioner to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, but he was unable to attend their meeting in Philadelphia in May 1861 due to being in England. Blyden noted that he would have enjoyed “the privilege of being the first black representative from Africa in that distinguished body.” Upon returning to Liberia in the autumn of 1861, Blyden was “induced to accept the appointment from the Government, as Commissioner to the descendants of Africa in the United States and the West-Indies, to give information of Liberia, and invite them to a home in that country.”¹¹⁷

He attributed his successful journey to Africa and his professional

¹¹⁷ Blyden, *Ibid.* ii-iv (original emphasis).

accomplishments to God, constructing himself as being taken by “Providence ... from an obscure condition, in a distant island ... to my present condition, without any special merit of my own.” His visit to St. Thomas to see his mother in October 1862, after having lived in West Africa for twelve years, attracted the attention of the *St. Thomas Tidende* and *The New-York Colonization Journal*, which highlighted his frequent speaking engagements before crowded audiences in the Dutch Church at St Thomas. According to a brief notice in the *St. Thomas Tidende*:

We learn that on the evening of the twenty-second instant, a deputation of gentlemen waited on Rev. Edward W. Blyden, at his residence, and presented him, on behalf of a large number of his fellow-townsmen, a very valuable testimonial, accompanied with a beautifully written address, expressive of the great pleasure which his visit to his native land has generally afforded, and of the warm appreciation felt by his countrymen of his efforts in the sacred cause of Africa's evangelization and regeneration. We trust that the presence in our town of the revered gentleman may act as a stimulus upon his former associates and acquaintances, urging them to attempt great things for the outraged land with whose interests he has identified himself, and which is now attracting so largely the attention of the civilized world. It is gratifying to us to know that our little Island has furnished one to take a part in the great work of opening up Africa to civilization, to which savans [sic] and philanthropists are hastening from Europe and America to devote themselves.”¹¹⁸

The *New-York Colonization Journal* also noted,

A society was formed called the 'St. Thomas Liberia Association,' composed of the most prominent men of the island, who at once raised a fund and forwarded to the United States fifty dollars, to purchase maps, books, and periodicals concerning Liberia.¹¹⁹

Blyden's process of Africanization was directly related to his personal experiences of living in Africa. He viewed his corporeal relationship to indigenous Africa as being one of acclimation not only to climate, but as the experience of acculturation for a returning exile. He viewed all people of African descent who lived outside of Africa as

¹¹⁸ “Testimonial to Rev. E. W. Blyden,” *St. Thomas Tidende*, citation from Blyden, *Ibid.* iv-v.

¹¹⁹ “Honored at His Home,” *New-York Colonization Journal*, citation from Blyden, *Ibid.*, v.

being in exile from Africa, the land of their ancestors. He was unabashedly an African patriot, even in his persistent utilization of Christian doctrines. His intellectual references were always in dialogue with dominant forms of racial ideology, but from an African perspective, one in which the African race was at the center of his analysis. He was not interested in propagating a bastardized version of African Christianity or a Eurocentric form of African ideology, one that was derived solely from non-African sources as opposed to being in dialogue with them.

My heart is in Liberia, and longs for the welfare of Africa. An African nationality is the great desire of my soul. I believe nationality to be an ordinance of nature; and no people can rise to an influential position among the nations without a distinct and efficient nationality. Cosmopolitanism has never effected any thing, and never will, perhaps till the millennium. God has 'made of one blood all nations of men,' but he has also 'determined the bounds of their habitation.'"¹²⁰

For the young, still deeply Christian missionary to Africa, it was clear that race, which he equated with nationality, was an ordinance of nature, an element that was intrinsic to each branch of humanity. This was a belief that was a main ingredient in his evolving philosophy of pan-African nationalism during his long life in Africa. Existence for the descendent of Africa outside of the African continent was an existence that was riddled with daily acts of dehumanization. He believed that the attainment of full humanity for the Negro was only realizable on the African continent. Blyden persistently argued that the recognition of the humanity of Negroes could never occur in the United States or elsewhere in the Atlantic world outside of Africa. “The moment a colored man from America lands in Liberia, he finds the galling chains of caste falling from his soul, and he can stand erect, and feel and realize that he is indeed a man.” He noted that the “seeming egotism” of his narratives were, in fact, “inseparable from the very nature of

¹²⁰ Blyden, *Ibid.*, v. Blyden's scriptural reference is taken from Acts 17:26.

the opposition.” His discursive “Offering” from Liberia was both a politically charged, conservative yet revolutionary discourse, as well as symptomatic of the milieu in which he lived and wrote. Africa possessed a “wider field of labor” for Blyden. Liberia was a site in the Atlantic world where he could enjoy “no greater privileges than I enjoy in that country.” It was in Liberia that he decided that his life's work was to “build up a Nationality in Africa.”¹²¹

Physiognomical Character

Have you, O ye children of Africa! no tear to shed, no sympathy to bestow, no effort to put forth for your grey-haired parent in sorrow and affliction; for your brethren who have not, as you have, enjoyed the blessings of civilization and Christianity? Are you ashamed of Africa because she has been plundered and rifled by wicked men? Do you turn your backs upon your mother because she is not high among the nations? Are you neglecting her with the hope of elevating yourselves in this country? Oh! remember that Europeans can not carry on the work so much needed in that land This all-important work is yours.¹²²

Speaking in New York City on July 21, 1861, at the Presbyterian Church on Seventh Avenue, Blyden, a twenty-nine year old Professor of Greek and Latin from Liberia College, offered an Ethiopianist manifesto¹²³ of his own in an effort to garnish support for the Republic of Liberia. He published the New York sermon in living in Liberia. West Africans were then the intended audience, meaning the sermon had at least two audiences – the original New York audience and the readers of the *Offering*. Blyden utilized Psalm 68:31 from the Old Testament of the Bible in order to frame his arguments about the African presence in the Bible and the significance of Africa in human history. In the epigraph of the printed version of his discourse, which was the opening of his public

¹²¹ Blyden, *Ibid.*, v-vi.

¹²² Edward Wilmot Blyden, “Hope for Africa: A Discourse,” *Liberia's Offering*, 26.

¹²³ Robert Alexander Young, “The Ethiopian Manifesto: Issued in Defense of the Black Man's Rights in the Scale of Universal Freedom” (New York: 1829). Republished in *The Ideological Origins of Black Nationalism*, Sterling Stuckey, Editor (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972).

address in New York, Blyden made a critical choice in making a partial reference to the scriptural reference. Ethiopianism had a wide cultural currency among African and African American intellectuals during the nineteenth century and after.¹²⁴ Blyden's initial use of the biblical reference to Ethiopia was a deliberate, discursive tactic, revealing a tug between visions of modernity and tradition in his thinking. His conservatism is vividly revealed through his reliance on metaphysical knowledge, knowledge that served as the foundation of the monotheistic religious traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, all of which make universalistic claims. Indeed, at this time, Blyden believed that the Gospels were universal in applicability.¹²⁵

He quoted the section of the verse that emphasized the divine deliverance of Ethiopia instead of the salvation of Egyptian exiles/captives: "Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God." According to Blyden,

.... there are promises and types which have special reference to Africa. 'Behold Philistia and Tyre, with Ethiopia; this man was born there. The labor of Egypt, and merchandise of Ethiopia and of the Sabeans, men of stature, shall come over unto thee, and they shall be thine.' And the words of the text: 'Princes shall come out of Egypt. Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God.' No one that remembers the reference in the Scripture to the skin of the Ethiopian, will doubt that these prophecies belong to the negro [sic].¹²⁶

Blyden's front-loading of Ethiopia in this discourse, which formed the first chapter of his first published book, is a significant indicator of his advocacy of black nationalism and pan-Africanism even as a young minister and professor in Liberia. During this early stage

¹²⁴ On "Ethiopianism" see Wilson Jeremiah Moses, "The Poetics of Ethiopianism: W.E.B. Du Bois and Literary Black Nationalism," *American Literature*, Vol. 47, No. 3 (November 1975), 411-426 and Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *Black Messiahs and Uncle Toms: Social and Literary Manipulations of a Religious Myth* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1982).

¹²⁵ Blyden, "Hope for Africa," 9.

¹²⁶ Edward Wilmot Blyden, "Hope for Africa," 9-10. See also Isaiah 45:14 regarding Philistia, Tyre, Ethiopia, Egypt, and the Sabeans.

of his life, Blyden was already, in the words of Hollis Lynch, a “Pan-Negro Patriot.”¹²⁷ His missionary education at Alexander High School in Liberia was one in which, in addition to his regular instruction in Greek, Latin, geography, mathematics, and Protestantism, he took up the study of the Hebrew language on his own.¹²⁸ His studies of the Hebrew tongue were critical to his emphasis on Ethiopia:

We have endeavored carefully to examine this glorious and oft-cited passage in the original Hebrew; and it has occurred to us that the passage might have been literally rendered: “Ethiopia shall *suddenly* stretch out her hands unto God.” The idea contained in the verb *taritz*, rendered, “*shall soon stretch out*,” does not seem to refer to the *time* as to the *manner* of the action predicted. The first meaning of the verb is *to run*; so it is rendered in Psalm 119:32, “I will *run* in the way of thy commandments;” and in Jeremiah 23:31, “I have not sent these prophets, yet they *ran*,” etc. In the Hiphil form, the form which occurs in the text, the verb means *to cause to run*; or to lead on hastily, to do a thing quickly before the occurrence of any obstacle; hence, *suddenly*. [Heinrich Friedrich Wilhelm] Gesenius, the distinguished German philologist, translates the passage: Ethiopia shall let her hands make haste to God.

If, then, the idea is that Ethiopia shall *suddenly* be redeemed, is there not furnished a rebuke to those who, because Africa has lain so long in darkness and gloom, and because of the unpromising aspect of her present moral condition, give themselves up to despair, and fancy that there will never be the inauguration of better times?¹²⁹

His analysis of “the original Hebrew” text was a critical dimension of his engagement with the dominant intellectual culture of the mid-nineteenth century and his praxis as an ordained minister. The literary sources that he read were deeply entrenched in the Eurocentric colonial library, which represented Africa as being backwards while stipulating that Africa was in need of conversion from barbarism to civilization and Christianity. In his analysis of the colonial library, V.Y. Mudimbe made the important observation that “missionary discourses on Africans were powerful. They were both signs

¹²⁷ Hollis R. Lynch, *Edward Wilmot Blyden: Pan-Negro Patriot, 1832-1912* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967).

¹²⁸ Edward Wilmot Blyden, “Biographical Sketch,” *Liberia's Offering*, iii.

¹²⁹ Edward Wilmot Blyden, “Hope for Africa,” 22 (original emphasis).

and symbols of a cultural model.”¹³⁰

It is certain that Blyden held the dominant Western view that Africa was enshrouded in darkness, lacking both civilization and Christianity, the main markers of civilized life in the Victorian Atlantic world. In his critique of the dynamic world that was generated from European and African contact during the ages of European exploration and the Atlantic slave trade, Blyden's views of Africa were reflective of the milieu in which he lived, particularly his envisioning of the status of Africans within the century's hegemonic conceptualization of the stages of civilization and cultural development. Blyden noted, for instance, that “[o]nly a few, very few, have regarded Africa as a land inhabited by human beings, children of the same common Father, travelers to the same judgment-seat of Christ, and heirs of the same awful immortality.”¹³¹ Yet he never denied what he viewed to be the “abject condition” of Africa.¹³² “Men talk selfishly and scornfully of the long-continued barbarism and degradation of Africa, as if civilization were indigenous to any country,” Blyden mused, for he noted that the “existence, and vitality, and growth [of] the arts and sciences” was not tied to one geopolitical space: “civilization and respectability” did not arise “by its own unaided efforts, by some powerful inward impulse.” Blyden's theory of civilization was a more cosmic view of human history and development, one whose ultimate vision refuted cultural significance grounded on “race or blood, in color or hair” God's words were directed toward all men. “Knowledge, which lies at the basis of all human progress, came from heaven. It

¹³⁰ V. Y. Mudimbe, “African Gnosis: Philosophy and the Order of Knowledge: An Introduction,” *African Studies Review*, Vol. 28, No. 2/3 (June/September: 1985), 151.

¹³¹ Blyden, *Ibid.*, 7.

¹³² Blyden, *Ibid.*, 12.

must be acquired; it is not innate.”¹³³ Cultivation of the mind, like soil, was central to Blyden's belief that civilization was divinely and universally transmitted through human mediums. He considered it to be his mission as a civilized representative of Africa to “accelerate the day when 'Ethiopia shall stretch out her hands unto God,” a mission which was central to his pan-African nationalism in Liberia and abroad. “Civilization is handed from one people to another, its great fountain and source being the great God of the universe.” The ancestors of the inhabitants of England and Germany, for example, “were once in abject degradation,” contrary to their current positions in world affairs. In dialogue with racist intellectuals like Arthur de Gobineau (see Chapter I), Blyden claimed, “There are many tribes in whose veins courses the renowned Caucasian blood, sunk to-day in a degradation as deep, and in ignorance as profound as any tribe in Africa.” Pointing out that “a high state of civilization” was not universal among Caucasians, such as European peasants in southern Europe, he observed that the same geographical spaces that “contained within themselves all the learning and wisdom that existed in the world” – Turkey, Greece, Italy, Spain, and Portugal were among his examples – “have sadly degenerated” from their classical splendor. They were now “comparatively insignificant.” The reason that “their Caucasian nature ... did not urge them onward to higher attainments [and] keep them in the same leading positions among the nations” was due to changes in “moral circumstances.”

The moral circumstances of the people are changed. The circumstances that have surrounded them for centuries have been of a character to retard their progress Men, are to a certain extent, the creatures of the circumstances in which they live. Very often, what they achieve depends less upon their personal qualities than upon surrounding influences. The African forms no exception to this rule.¹³⁴

¹³³ Blyden, *Ibid.*, 12-13.

¹³⁴ Blyden, *Ibid.*, 7, 13-15 (original emphasis).

The notion that human beings were reflections of their environments, “creatures of the circumstances in which they live,” was a bedrock and universal truth for Blyden, applicable to Africans as well as other races. This specific notion of universalism allowed him the ideological space to weave the backward African into the tapestry of modern civilization.

Blyden contended that a myriad of “regular and thoroughly organized efforts ... have been put forth to keep back the African” and to inhibit Africans’ “progress in civilization, in literature, and in science.” These obstacles were the main ingredients in a history of physical violence that accompanied enslavement and trafficking in Africans, as well as the psychic violence resulting from the proliferation of religious myths and travelers’ tales about savage Africans. “The wrongs of the African can fill the darkest pages of history,” a history that included “physical annoyances, and diabolical tortures, and debasing usages, ... but also ... those deeper wrongs whose tendency has been to dwarf the soul, to emasculate the mind.” The internal damage inflicted on Africans and people of African descent, according to Blyden, was of a perverse nature that was more damaging than “painfully intense” violence to the outside of the black body.

There are a thousand little evils which can never be expressed. There is a sorrow of the heart, with which the stranger can not intermeddle. There are secret agonies known only to God, which are far more acute than any external tortures ... [T]hose inflictions which tend to contract and destroy the mind; those cruelties which benumb the sensibility of the soul, those influences which chill and arrest the currency of the heart’s affections—these are the awful instruments of real suffering and degradation; and these have been made to operate upon the African.¹³⁵

Blyden viewed the dispersal of Africans across the Atlantic Ocean as part of “a Divine plan,” one that he paralleled with the Old Testament Israelites in Egypt. Africans in the

¹³⁵ Blyden, *Ibid.*, 17-18.

New World – “the house of their bitter pilgrimage” – were exposed to saving graces of Christianity, and Blyden viewed Liberia as the center from which their influence would radiate to their “benighted brethren.” The introduction of Christianity and civilization “among untold millions of unevangelized and barbarous men” was already being accomplished by “fifteen thousand civilized and Christianized Africans” whose “residence on that coast of only thirty years has already brought to pass important and salutary revolutions in the condition of that portion of Africa,” including ending the slave-trade along the coast of Liberia.¹³⁶ According to Blyden, just forty years prior, when the first African American emigrants settled at Cape Mesurado, the land that they inhabited was one in which a tropical climate, slave-trading, and hostile tribes presented seemingly insurmountable odds for the settlers. Liberia, then, was held up by Blyden as the center of Christianity and civilization in West Africa due as much to its “moral work,” its “triumphs of Christianity over heathenism,” as to its continuous “triumph of physical agencies over the face of nature” in term of infrastructure. All of these elements, Blyden insisted, were “entitled to ... respect.”¹³⁷ Colonization and nationalization, for Blyden, were anti-slavery as well as modernizing forces in West Africa.¹³⁸

For Blyden, the missionary school was especially considered to be a modernizing force in Africa. He considered the African continent to be a missionizing field that was much more open to conversion than Asia. Asia was home to long-revered, “formidable superstition,” whereas Africa presented no traditions of “ancient and venerable systems of belief.” Blyden stated,

¹³⁶ Blyden, *Ibid.*, 18-19.

¹³⁷ Blyden, *Ibid.*, 20-21.

¹³⁸ Lamin Sanneh, *Abolitionists Abroad: American Blacks and the Making of Modern West Africa* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

Though the [indigenous] people acknowledge the existence of good and bad spirits, they have no system of religion protected by the sanction of a hoary antiquity If the men who are skeptical as to the rapid evangelization and civilization of Africa could only catch the hum of the missionary schools scattered in various portions of the land; could they hear the earnest appeals of leading men among various tribes for Christianity and its teachings; could they hear, as we hear, who live on that barbarous coast, the murmurings of the fountains of the great deep of ignorance and superstition, which are breaking up all around us; could they hear the noise, which we hear, of the rattling of dry bones strewed over the immense valley, they would cease to doubt.¹³⁹

The urgency of his appeals to people of African descent who lived outside of Africa to travel to Africa and play a role in pan-African nationalism in Liberia were stepped in Christian eschatology. “You were brought away by the permission of Providence, doubtless, that you might be prepared and fitted to return and instruct your brethren.” He warned his audience in New York not to turn away from Africa “with the selfish hope of elevating yourselves in this country,” a country in which “there will be no real prosperity among Africans in this land, no proper respect shown them by the dominant race, so long as they persist, as a mass, in ignoring the claims of Africa upon them.” African American efforts for “self-elevation here which shall leave Africa out of the question, will be as 'sowing in the wind.’”¹⁴⁰

For they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind: it hath no stalk [or, standing corn]: the bud shall yield no meal: if so be it yield, the strangers [or, foreigners)] shall shallow it up.¹⁴¹

Blyden felt that the attention of enterprising and intelligent diasporic Africans needed to be turned in the direction of the African continent.

Blyden was a formidable opponent of the idea of African inferiority. His engagement with the colonial library was not confined to religious texts. His critical

¹³⁹ Blyden, *Ibid.*, 24-25.

¹⁴⁰ Blyden, *Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁴¹ See Hosea 8:7.

readings of interdisciplinary literature, such as “[g]eographies or books of ethnography,” that formed the foundation of scientific racism during the nineteenth century served as a subtext to most of his writings, and he was versatile in his deconstruction of the logic upholding doctrines about the flawed nature of “[t]he physiognomical character of the African race” and the “phrenological inferiority of the race to other races, at least to the Anglo-Saxon race.” The “popular opinion” embedded in racist texts invariably reflected the same epistemological core, or logic, according to Blyden. “They give the *highest* type to the European and the *lowest* type of the negro [sic]” in their formulations of human taxonomy. Such a jaded logic could be used to prove the inferiority of any type of human being according to Blyden, as he was convinced that the condition of any human being was a reflection of his environmental circumstances and his social ranking. He observed that enslaved Africans, for example, were less beautiful than, and inferior to, free Africans.

In visiting the native towns interior to Liberia, we have seen, though on a small scale, striking illustrations of this fact. Among the inhabitants of those towns, we could invariably distinguish the free man from the slave. There was about the former a dignity of appearance, an openness of countenance, an independence of air, a firmness of step, which indicated the absence of oppression; while in the latter there was a depression of countenance, a general deformity of appearance, and an awkwardness of gait which seemed to say: “That man is a slave.” And it is, for the most part, among the latter class of persons that the slave-trade has found its victims, it being rarely the case that free persons are sold to slave-traders. This will partly account for the deformity of appearance of the Africans in the Western hemisphere.¹⁴²

The conundrum faced by the originators of pan-African nationalism was clearly revealed by Blyden's usage of dominant forms of knowledge as the foundation upon which he attached arguments in favor of African inferiority. To prove his points about “African

¹⁴² Blyden, “Vindication of the African Race: Being a Brief Examination of the Arguments in Favor of African Inferiority,” *Liberia's Offering*, 55-58.

physiognomy,” he referenced scholarship that was reflective of the dominant order of knowledge. He operated on the slippery slope of utilizing the same racist intellectual resources that he was determined to use to overturn negative portraits of Africans. For example, Blyden noted that the anthropological analysis of

Dr. [James Cowles] Prichard, [who in] his researches into the *Physical History of Man*, relates on the authority of Dr. S.S. Smith, of the negroes [sic] settled in the Southern districts of the United States of America, that the field-slaves who live on the plantations, and retain pretty nearly the rude manners of their African progenitors, preserve, in the third generation, much of their original structure, though their features are not so strongly marked as those of imported slaves. But the domestic servants of the same race, who are treated with lenity, and whose condition is little different from that of the lower classes of white people, in the third generation have the nose raised, the mouth and lips of moderate size, the eyes lively and sparkling, and often the whole composition of the features extremely agreeable.* (* [Richard] Watson's *Theological Dictionary*)¹⁴³

He argued that it is was their historic circumstances – the dynamics of their surroundings – that formed the basis of whatever forms of inferiority that were exhibited by Africans and that could be detected by critical, trained objective lenses. Any form of constraint on the human subject, Blyden mused, resulted in degradation and deformity, a point that he supported by his selective usage of the words of European intellectuals who were considered to be the leading English poets of the modern age. “The words of [William] Cowper are universally and incontrovertibly true:

— All constraint,
Except what wisdom lays on evil men,
Is evil; hurts the faculties; impedes
Their progress in the road of science; blinds
The eyesight of discovery; and begets
In those who suffer it, a sordid mind,
Bestial, a meager intellect, unfit

¹⁴³ Blyden, *Ibid.*, 55, 57-58. See also James Cowles Prichard, *Researches into the Physical History of Man*, Edited with an Introductory Essay by George W. Stocking, Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), originally published in 1813. Prichard's work was an important anthropological study in English before Darwinian science, wherein he defended the biblical origins of humanity and monogenesis, suggesting that the the first humans were black/dark-skinned.

To be the tenant of man's noble form.

He skillfully utilized the words of William Shakespeare in his examination of arguments in favor of African inferiority in order to bolster his own arguments on the universal nature of humanity:

MISLIKE me not for my complexion,
The shadowed livery of the burnished sun,
To whom I am a neighbor, and near bred;
Bring me the fairest creature northern born,
Where Phoebus' fire scarce thaws the icicles,
And let us make incisions ...
To prove whose blood is reddest, his or mine.¹⁴⁴

Claims of the universality of humanity were used by Blyden to combat dominant observations of the servile nature of the Negro. This sort of claim by a bishop who had noted “a degree of deference shown to white men that is not shown to the colored” in Liberia was interpreted by Blyden to be disingenuous.

Cases are not wanting of colored persons fleeing from American bondage to Liberia, who, meeting a few difficulties, and unused to the task of self-reliance, wish to return and live their former life of ease and freedom from care. Some do return, and bear back evil reports of this good land. These cases are not surprising; they are illustrations of the invariable effects of slavery. Nor is it to be wondered at that even in Liberia, an African government, free, sovereign, and independent, there should be, as Bishop Scott alleges, “a degree of deference shown to white men that is not shown to colored.” This will be the case of every African community for a long time, even after the entire abolition of slavery in the Western world. This reverence of the oppressed for the oppressor, as we have ... seen in the case of the Israelites, is not easily shaken off.

It was the duty “the intelligent among the African race” to combat manifestations of African servility.¹⁴⁵ In fact, the major objectives that Blyden pursued during his formative years in Liberia between 1850, when he first traveled to West Africa, and 1872, when he published a chronicle of his travels to Jerusalem in *From West Africa to Palestine*,

¹⁴⁴ Blyden, *Ibid.*, 30, 58-60.

¹⁴⁵ Blyden, *Ibid.*, 60-61.

revolved around his efforts to point out “that it is the force of circumstances, induced ... by our iniquities, that keeps us down.” Liberia, in the eyes of Blyden, was a “practical demonstration” against racism, not a complaint or protesting appeal based solely on “moral sensibilities.” It constituted proof of African capacity for manhood, statecraft, virtue, enterprise, civilization, morality, and piety. “We must *prove* to our oppressors that we are men, possessed of like susceptibilities with themselves.”¹⁴⁶

This was the only way that the truth which Blyden was seeking in Africa could be found, the demonstration of proof in the face of dominant racist constructions of power and knowledge during the mid-nineteenth century, power and knowledge. Blyden was convinced that arguments in support of African inferiority were malicious attempts to assassinate the character of Africans.

If an ignorant man be calumniated, and that calumny be founded upon facts of Theology, Science, or Philosophy, branches of learning with which he is, of course, utterly unacquainted, it will not be surprising if that man, even with the facts of his own consciousness before him, contradictory of such calumny, should believe it, and shape his course of conduct in accordance with its *dicta*. So has it been, generally speaking, with the African race.¹⁴⁷

Distortions about Africa and Africans became more and more clear to him as his ideas about Africa increased during his intellectual maturation in Africa.

In an address at the inauguration of Liberia College (1862) in Monrovia, which was printed in and disseminated by *Liberia's Offering*, Blyden placed a strong emphasis on classical learning and the universal beneficence of the liberal arts in an African context, a context that he held to be the “ancestral home” of the Negro race. The study of language, mathematics, physical science, jurisprudence and international law, and intellectual and moral philosophy were to be coupled with “a *practical* education in

¹⁴⁶ Blyden, *Ibid.*, 62-64 (original emphasis).

¹⁴⁷ Blyden, *Ibid.*, 61 (original emphasis).

Liberia.”

What is a practical education? It is not simply preparing a person specially for any one sphere of life. It aims at practical results of a more important character—at imparting not simply skill in keeping accounts—in pleading at the bar—in surveying the land—in navigating a vessel—but skill in exercising the intellect accurately and readily, upon any subject brought before it. The skill secured by a college education, is skill in the use of the mind.¹⁴⁸

Lauding the benefits of classical learning and its accompanying disciplining of the mind, he cast Liberia as “an experiment ... on these benighted shores ... in which are involved, to a great extent, the interests of Africa and the African race.” “Africa's redemption,” in short, was predicated upon the acquisition of knowledge and the act of putting this knowledge into use for the benefit of Africans. This would facilitate a modernization of Africa. Blyden saw Africa as uninspiring from a historical point of view. The injection of new energy into Africa was of paramount importance to him. For Africa and the African race, there were “no pleasing antecedents—nothing in the past to inspire us.” The history of Africa, according to Blyden at this point in his life, was not a glorious past. “All behind us is dark, and gloomy, and repulsive.” He believed that Africans must re-make and re-present themselves in the modern age of scientific racism and that they must prove their “brotherhood with the enlightened world.” They must debunk caricatures of African physiognomy. The latter was a topic with which he was concerned for the rest of his life.

It is, after all, the mind and heart which prove the unity of the human races. The inward resemblance is far more forcible than outward disparities. We should not content ourselves with simply declaiming about our equality with the advanced races. Let our reply to the slanders of our enemies be a practical one. It is evident that it is only those who do not know us, except under the most unfavorable circumstances, who speak disparagingly of us.¹⁴⁹

Liberia College, to Blyden, stood as a shining model of a modern Africa. He made the

¹⁴⁸ Edward Wilmot Blyden, “Inaugural Address at the Inauguration of Liberia College at Monrovia,” *Liberia's Offering*, 95, 100-101.

¹⁴⁹ Blyden, *Ibid.*, 118, 120-121.

curious note of its founding as the “first College in West-Africa,”¹⁵⁰ although Fourah Bay College was in operation at Freetown, Sierra Leone. Sierra Leone was then a British colony and became independent in 1961. Perhaps, since it was under British domination, Blyden did not consider it to be an authentic West African institution of higher learning.

Blyden certainly saw himself and his colleagues as a manifestation of his own arguments – corporeal proof – about the capacity of the Negro for civilization. His eulogy for Superintendent of the Missions of the Southern Baptist Convention in West Africa and Chief-Justice of the Republic of Liberia, Rev. John Day, is an example of his conceptualization of Negro personifications of proof of civilization. Speaking to Liberian citizens in Providence Baptist Church in Monrovia on the evening of March 2, 1859, Blyden pointed out that Rev. Day, an African American emigrant to Liberia, had sacrificed comfort and wealth in the United states when he and his family sailed to the colony of Liberia in December, 1830. Rev. Day's wife and four children died in Liberia shortly after their arrival. The patriotic Rev. Day, according to Blyden, was undeterred by his misfortunes.

[H]e abandoned himself to gloomy abstractions and melancholy reveries. This led to the supposition that there was some unhingement of his mental organization. But notwithstanding his deep afflictions he never murmured; was never disposed to abandon the field which he had chosen for the labors of his life ... His ardent and cherished desire was to labor for the evangelization of his heathen brethren in this land.¹⁵¹

Christianity, civilization, progress, and modernity would always be critical components of Blyden's pan-African nationalism. Yet the longer he lived in Africa the more he became critical of missionizing Christianity in Africa and more open to Islam as a viable civilizing force. A record of his three-month (1866) “voyage from Liberia to the

¹⁵⁰ Blyden, *Ibid.*, 122.

¹⁵¹ Blyden, *Ibid.*, 131-134.

Holy Land, copied from a journal regularly kept for the information of friends at home”¹⁵² marked a convergence of all of these influences in his life. By the time *From West Africa to Palestine* was published in 1873, Blyden had become a world traveler, having visited various portions of West Africa and its hinterland as well as North Africa and Asia. On his sojourn to southwest Asia (the “Holy Land” in his words), Blyden travelled northward along the West African coast to England before disembarking to North Africa. Part of his narrative presented his readers with a vivid account of the cosmopolitan world of African Atlantic enclaves located at Sierra Leone and Gambia. His observations in West Africa and in Egypt, in particular, were reflective of his evolving pan-African nationalism.

During his time aboard steamers that navigated maritime West Africa and during layovers at coastal docks and mission stations, Blyden's eyes were caught by the specter of the “native” and the influences of the Atlantic world economy upon indigenous Africans. While he was quick to point out the negative aspects of the lifestyles of European trading agents along the coast, particularly those who were alcoholics or who lived in isolation from Africans, Blyden made favorable observations of what he saw as the modernizing impulses that Christians had implemented in West Africa. He seemed to be especially thrilled to point out the example of “M.P. Horton, Esq., a native in affluent circumstances, then residing at Bendo, but since dead.”

The example he set to the surrounding natives of continuous and persevering industry, and the influence he indirectly exerted upon them, by employing them in the various operations connected with his farm, had a wonderful power in promoting a healthful civilization among them ... It would be an immensely useful thing, in various ways, if the numerous mission stations on the coast could

¹⁵² Edward Wilmot Blyden, *From West Africa to Palestine* (Freetown, Sierra Leone: T. J. Sawyer Publishers, 1873), 5.

connect such a system of operations with their other most important work.¹⁵³

Blyden felt that missionaries in Africa should replicate this sort of faith and industry that was propagated by Horton instead of their sole focus on converting African souls to Christianity. He adamantly scolded the prospective emergence of a missionary-educated class of Africans who were not adept in practical vocations. Blyden was impressed by those missionaries who combined “a system of handicraft with their operations.” He supported those missionary institutions whose work was such

that when their pupils leave them they are not thrown out helpless beings, with nothing but a smattering of book knowledge, at the mercy of their own uncivilized relatives and acquaintances—who envy and sometimes persecute them—and the butt of the ridicule of unthinking foreigners, who point to them as illustrations of the injurious influence of Christian missions upon the native African.¹⁵⁴

His interview with two “native chieftains belonging to a powerful ruling family” shed light on the mutable dynamics in West Africa that Blyden was so adept at detecting, and, indeed, he exhibited a skillful methodology of demonstrating African intellectual excellence among what he viewed to be civilized native Africans.

At Bendo I had the pleasure of an interview with two of the brothers Tucker, native chieftains belonging to a powerful ruling family in that section of the country. They spoke English almost perfectly, having little of the native accent. I heard the elder of the two give a very intelligent exposition to some of the European traders, of a certain law which they had just enacted for the regulation of trade in their portion of the country, and of which the foreign traders were disposed to complain.

Blyden stated that he understood the law that was implemented by the natives to be one that regulated the extent of European trade, forbidding traders from going beyond a certain point along a river—a kind of Port of Entry law. One of the traders suggested—doubtless without any foundation, but by way of menace—that the law would bring some

¹⁵³ Blyden, *Ibid.*, 14-15, 18-20.

¹⁵⁴ Blyden, *Ibid.*, 20.

trouble upon the country from the English Government.”

'What trouble,' relied Charles Tucker, with great dignity and firmness of demeanor, 'what trouble can the English Government bring upon our country in consequence of this law? Is not the country ours, and have we not a right to make such laws as we think best for our own preservation and protection? *All I have to say is, it is the will of the people, the law of the land.*' With this last outburst of patriotic eloquence, which seemed to be a poser, the debate ceased.¹⁵⁵

If only patriotic eloquence was so easily successful for the native African. Blyden, of course, was aware of the difficulties facing African sovereignty that stemmed from encroachments by European interests. His concerted pan-African efforts were designed, in fact, to attack the racist representations of Africans that supported European colonizing plans. While in Sierra Leone, Blyden noted that “a pure native element” composed of intellectuals such as “Bishop [Samuel Ajayi] Crowther and Rev. J.C. Taylor, of the Niger, Rev. J. Quaker, of Freetown, Rev. G. Nichol, of Gambia, and Rev. T. Maxwell, of Cape Coast” paved the way for Africa's redemption, men who were “connected with the enterprise of carrying the spiritual warfare into Africa.” All of these men were associated with the Church Missionary Society.¹⁵⁶

Although Blyden wrote that he encountered and overheard racist remarks from some of the passengers en route to Europe aboard the various vessels in which he sailed, one of his chance encounters was with “a young gentleman in feeble health” who was a graduate of Trinity College (Cambridge) who had boarded from Madeira. The young man had noticed that Blyden held in his possession “a volume of [William Gifford] Palgrave's *Arabia*,” which he asked Blyden permission to peruse. Blyden soon found out that the unnamed gentleman “had a considerable knowledge of the Arabic language, from the

¹⁵⁵ Blyden, *Ibid.*, 22-23.

¹⁵⁶ Blyden, *Ibid.*, 24-25. See also Robert W. July, *The Origins of Modern African Thought: Its Development in West Africa during the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London: Faber, 1968).

ease with which he read and criticised [sic] the Arabic quotation on Palgrave's titlepage [sic].” Since Blyden was also seeking to enhance his grasp of the Arabic language during his voyage to Jerusalem, he conversed with the gentleman until they reached Liverpool.

I showed my friend some Arabic manuscripts, written by natives of West Africa, which I had brought from the coast. He seemed to have no difficulty reading them. One, which he found somewhat obscure, we tried to read it together with the aid of a defective lexicon, but with very unsatisfactory results. He requested me to allow him to take the manuscripts home with him, and give them a little more attention, promising to forward them to London to my address. Without hesitation, I entrusted them to him when we parted at Liverpool.

After Blyden had been in London eleven days, he received his only copies of the manuscripts that he owned, along with “very elaborate translations and learned criticism of all the manuscripts ... [I]t may possibly interest some to see the criticism of an African manuscript by a Cambridge scholar.”¹⁵⁷ Blyden included a portion of this correspondence from his Cambridge-educated friend in his narrative, which included “learned notes and references, and verbal analyses, which would be interesting only to the student of Arabic,” as well as an invitation from the gentlemen for Blyden to travel to Liverpool.¹⁵⁸ Blyden, to his own regret, was unable to accept the invitation to visit the young man before he departed from London via train for Southampton in order to sail to Alexandria, though they continued to “correspond on subjects pertaining to Arabic literature in West Africa.”¹⁵⁹

While in England, Blyden had opportunities to visit sessions of the House of Lords, “by the invitation of Lord [Henry P.] Brougham,” and the House of Commons, by “a card to admit me to the stranger's gallery” that was “received from the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. [William E.] Gladstone.” Both of these opportunities were cherished

¹⁵⁷ Blyden, *Ibid.*, 37-39.

¹⁵⁸ Blyden, *Ibid.*, 39.

¹⁵⁹ Blyden, *Ibid.*, 42, 64.

by Blyden as memorable experiences. He next ventured to St. James Hall, Piccadilly, to hear Charles Dickens “read 'for the last time,' as it was announced in the papers, during the season” before a crowded house.¹⁶⁰ Before departing from London, Blyden attended a meeting of the royal Geographical Society at Burlington House, where “Mr. S.W. Baker read an account of his explorations of the Nile tributaries in Abyssinia, undertaken previous to his expedition to the Nile sources.”

I was somewhat surprised and very much grieved to hear him throw out, quite unnecessarily, disparaging remarks on the negro [sic]. It is difficult to appreciate the tastes of the Burtons and Hunts of Anthropological notoriety, and now of Mr. Baker, in their continual thrusts at the negro [sic] ... The negro [sic] is brought forward for persecution and misrepresentation on all occasions, and without occasion. The feeling against him in these men has been so long and carefully fostered that it has become exaggerated, morbid beyond control, and altogether unchecked by any regard for accuracy or truth.¹⁶¹

While sailing to Alexandria, Blyden made note of his conversations with European passengers who exhibited scant knowledge of African geography and topography. “They were mostly men under the influence of one all-pervading idea—bent upon the acquisition of gold, upon gaining military honours, or winning civil promotions—and care not one jot for anything that interested me.”¹⁶² Blyden resolved to spend most of his time “in my cabin, reading and writing” in order not to interact with the crowd of passengers that included several who “would occasionally indulge in coarse allusions to the negro [sic] passenger.” Blyden stated that he was

a presumed inferior separating himself from those with whom he was obliged to eat and sleep, acknowledging no companionship, allowing no familiarities, and having no one with whom he could share his emotions, whether pleasurable or otherwise. I say *presumed* inferior, because these Anglo-Saxons, as a matter of course, looked upon me as an inferior, *colore cutis* [colored complexion/skin]. But I was less offended at this, as I noticed that some of them

¹⁶⁰ Blyden, *Ibid.*, 46-59.

¹⁶¹ Blyden, *Ibid.*, 61-63.

¹⁶² Blyden, *Ibid.*, 69.

never spoke of the natives of India—who are only dark-skinned Caucasians [sic]—except as the “niggers”—the same term of contempt which they have imported to the new world, and apply so generally to the African, and for which there is no equivalent among the French, Spanish, or Dutch, who have also colonised [sic] extensively among the darker races of men.¹⁶³

Blyden noted that before the the end of his voyage to Alexandria, he eventually made acquaintance with some of the passengers, some of whom borrowed “books and information on some of the most elementary subjects.” He also stated “that in all my travels I invariably found in passengers or fellow-travellers [sic] of the gentle sex kindly and sympathetic treatment,” buttressing his manly train of thought, again, with the English poet Cowper:

Fleecy locks and dark complexion
Cannot forfeit nature's claim;
Skins may differ, but affection
Dwells in white and black the same.¹⁶⁴

Quickly passing Gibraltar and briefly landing on Malta while en route to Alexandria, he visited a monastery on the island. It was at this monastery that Blyden came to the conclusion that these sort of esoteric practices of “inactive seclusion” were quite impracticable for the regeneration of the African world.¹⁶⁵ His ideas were becoming increasingly more global. His pan-African nationalism was evolving into a worldview that reached even farther in content and form than the philosophy of pan-African nationalism that he had advocated during his younger years as a mission teacher, editor, professor, and emissary to the Americas on behalf of Liberia.

Landing at Alexandria, Blyden encountered diversity and multiculturalism on a scale unlike anything he had witnessed in West Africa. He entered a world composed of

¹⁶³ Blyden, *Ibid.*, 75-76 (original emphasis).

¹⁶⁴ Blyden, *Ibid.*, 78.

¹⁶⁵ Blyden, *Ibid.*, 88.

“Negroes, Arabs, Turks, donkeys, [and] camels,” as well as linguistic multiplicity that encompassed Arabic, English, and various local dialects. He was equally impressed by the ability to travel by train to Cairo in five hours.¹⁶⁶ During his railway travels, Blyden complained of the widespread practice of smoking tobacco. “In Egypt everybody smokes.” He then stated,

Mr. Palgrave tells us that among the Wahabites, Mohammedan purists in Arabia, such is the heinousness of the sin of smoking, in the views of the religious chiefs, that any man, however elevated his position, is punished with a severe beating with rods if found guilty of it ... I wished a thousand times during that railway ride that the Wahabites had extended their vigorous laws and practices on the subject of tobacco into Egypt before my arrival here.¹⁶⁷

Blyden's journey to the pyramids was highlight of his travels in Egypt, and it was the most memorable aspect of his narrative, for it is within this context that he forcefully establishes his argument that ancient Egyptian civilization was a Negro civilization, a culture that had, in fact, “sent civilization into Greece.”

While standing in the central hall of the pyramid [Cheops] I thought of the lines of [Hilary] Teage, the Liberian Poet, when urging his countrymen to noble deeds—
“From pyramids hall,
From Karnac's sculptured wall,
From Thebes they loudly call—
Retake your fame.”

This, thought I, is the work of my African progenitors. Teage was right; they had fame, and their descendants should strive, by nobler deeds, to “retake” it. Feelings came over me far different from those which I have felt when looking at the mighty works of European genius. I felt that I had a peculiar “heritage in the Great Pyramid” ... The blood seemed to flow faster through my veins. I seemed to hear the echo of those illustrious Africans.¹⁶⁸

Blyden felt that with the demise of “slave-holding in Protestant countries” and the continued deconstruction of racist ideology, recognition of the significant role of Africans

¹⁶⁶ Blyden, *Ibid.*, 90-92.

¹⁶⁷ Blyden, *Ibid.*, 92-93.

¹⁶⁸ Blyden, *Ibid.*, 99, 104-105. See also Cheikh Anta Diop, *The African Origins of Civilization: Myth or Reality?* Translated by Mercer Cook (New York: Lawrence Hill, 1974).

in ancient history by Egyptologists could be a revolutionizing force in the modern age.

Now ... that the necessity no longer exists for stripping [Africans] of the attributes of their manhood, it is to be hoped that a large-hearted philosophy and an honest interpretation of the facts of history, sacred and secular, will do them the justice to admit their participation in, if not origination of, the great works of ancient civilization.¹⁶⁹

Before entering the Great Pyramid of Cheops, Blyden made note of the fact that there were names of visitors engraved on the walls of the central hall inside of the pyramid from centuries ago. These names were “comparatively few” since most visitors to the pyramid, he contended, did not venture inside of them.¹⁷⁰ Upon exiting the pyramid, Blyden made a discursive decision:

I felt that my perilous adventure had given me the right of inscribing my name among the hundreds which I saw engraved over and on each side of the entrance, bearing dates as early as the sixteenth century. Borrowing, or rather hiring, for I paid him a shilling for the use of it, an engraving knife from one of the Arabs, I engraved, not far from a name dated 1685, the word LIBERIA, with my name and the date—July 11th, 1866—immediately under it. There is a tolerable degree of certainty, therefore, that the name at least of that little Republic will go down to posterity.¹⁷¹

Blyden then ventured by donkey to the Pyramid of Chephren, which is adjacent to the Sphinx. Blyden was convinced that the facial features of the Sphinx were Negro characteristics. He found this colossal structure to be both “a most impressive spectacle” and, crucially, a primary source that revealed the race of its civilized builders. According to Blyden,

[H]er features are decidedly of the African or Negro type, with “expanded nostrils.” If, then, the Sphinx was placed here—looking out in majestic and mysterious silence over the empty plain where once stood the great city of Memphis in all its pride and glory, as an “emblematic representation of the king”—is not the inference clear as to the peculiar type or race to which that

¹⁶⁹ Blyden, *Ibid.*, 106.

¹⁷⁰ Blyden, *Ibid.*, 101.

¹⁷¹ Blyden, *Ibid.*, 112.

king belonged?¹⁷²

His visits to the pyramids of Cheops and Chephren led Blyden to question the assumptions of “modern utilitarians” who held the modern age to be superior to both antiquity and the future in all respects, particularly concerning themselves with their own age as the supreme object of importance. He pointed out that these structures had stood erect for centuries, withstanding both “the ravages of time” and definitive interpretations of their original purposes. He asked,

What are Atlantic telegraphs to these incomprehensible and time-defying edifices, whose authors did not invest their own times with such transcendent importance as to lose all reverence for the past, and all care and forethought for the future?¹⁷³

Returning to Cairo, Blyden observed that “this thoroughly oriental city” was one in which he encountered “[p]ersons of all races and nations ... in their peculiar costumes.” Visiting the Mosque of Ali, Blyden made note of Islamic practices of worship. He also visited “Joseph's Well” and the mosque of Sultan Hassan, “described by some travellers [sic] as, architecturally, the finest in Cairo.” Blyden, however, was more impressed with the Mosque of Ali in comparison with “the old dilapidated structure of Sultan Hassan.” He then departed from Cairo by train to Alexandria in order to sail to the Holy Land.

[W]ithout enjoying the pleasure of giving the parting *salaam* to the affable consul-general [in Alexandria] I now bade adieu to the land of Egypt—land of my “fathers' sepulchres”—feeling more than repaid for any discomforts or privations suffered on the voyage.¹⁷⁴

His travels in Africa that were recorded in *From West Africa to Palestine* marked a change in Blyden's pan-African nationalism, which now was more open to Islam. The remainder of his narrative focuses on his travels in the Holy Land; in Jerusalem he gave

¹⁷² Blyden, *Ibid.*, 113-114.

¹⁷³ Blyden, *Ibid.*, 116-122.

¹⁷⁴ Blyden, *Ibid.*, 123-129.

“a lecture in the English Chapel on Mount Zion, on the Religious and Political Condition and Prospects of West Africa, to a very large European audience” which he only made mention of without providing details.¹⁷⁵ Noteworthy is the fact that his next major collection of writings, *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race*, contained more than his analysis of the role of Christianity and Islam in Africa. It also contained his views on colonization in Africa and his increasingly sophisticated ethnographic observations about Africans.

It is important to note that Blyden's analysis of the cultural landscape in Jerusalem was essentially his effort to make an objective analysis of the three Abrahamic traditions in the context of their origins, a context from which he persistently pointed out the cultural basis of the practices of the followers of these religions that operated on the world stage as if they were religious traditions that were already systematically defined/conserved by historicity. These were crucial observations for Blyden to make considering that his pan-African nationalism was becoming increasingly critical of missionizing Christianity and that he was becoming more open to Islam as a civilizing force in West Africa. At the dawn of European colonization of the African continent, his writings revealed that the truth about the mutability of universalistic claims, a mutability that was becoming more and more clear to him. He was determined to establish the capacity of Africans for civilization through comparisons to races who were now aggressively seeking to settle in Africa.

Colonizing Africa

The idea of colonization was the central, underlying theme that Blyden espoused in *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race*, a collection of essays focusing largely on

¹⁷⁵ Blyden, *Ibid.*, 187.

religion in West Africa that he published in 1887 and republished in 1888. However, in one of the essays that was included in the volume, Blyden laid out his framework on “The Origin and Purpose of African Colonization,” which was originally an address that he delivered at the Presbyterian Church on New York Avenue in Washington, D.C., on Sunday, January 14, 1883, at the sixty-sixth anniversary of the American Colonization Society. At this time, he was President of Liberia of College. Blyden actually wrote the text in the home of Frederick Douglass at Uniontown while he was a guest of Douglass's for several days. He intimated that Douglass, who was a fierce opponent of colonization when he was at the height of his powers, had changed with the times: “the giants of former years—the Wards and Garnets and Douglasses—can never be surpassed or even reproduced. They were the peculiar product of their times.”¹⁷⁶ “The Origin and Purposes of African Colonization” simultaneously reveals the interlinking of Atlantic figures in the African diaspora at the same time as it details Blyden's travels in Africa during the late nineteenth century.

Blyden made it clear that he viewed the work of the American Colonization Society in a favorable light, and he noted that the original aims of the society were exceeded in the short time of its influence in West Africa.

In pursuance of its legitimate object, its labors have been fruitful ... It has not only established a colony, but it has performed most effective missionary work; it has suppressed the slave trade along six hundred miles of coast; it has improved the conditions of the blacks as no other means has; and it is abolishing domestic slavery among the Aborigines of that continent.¹⁷⁷

It is important to note Blyden's capitalization Negro, a discursive practice that was

¹⁷⁶ Edward Wilmot Blyden, LL.D., *The Origin and Purpose of African Colonization: Being the Annual Discourse Delivered at the Sixty-Sixth Anniversary of the American Colonization Society* (Washington: American Colonization Society, 1883), 15-16. Republished in Edward Wilmot Blyden, *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race* (Baltimore: Black Classics Press, 1993; 1887; 1888).

¹⁷⁷ Blyden, *Ibid.*, 6.

contrary to his spelling of the word in his earlier texts. Capitalizing the word “Negro” reflected a recognition of full humanity, a tactic which highlighted the “conception of the status and functions of the Negro ... by ... using a capital letter in writing the word that described the race.” This revised, more robust form of pan-African nationalism was one that he saw as also reflecting “the power of race instincts.”

The law of God for each race is written on the tablets of their hearts, and no theories will ever obliterate the deep impression or neutralize its influence upon their action; and in the process of their growth they will find or force a way for themselves. Those who are working with or for the race, therefore, should seriously consider in any great movement in their behalf, the steps which the proper representatives deem it wise to take.¹⁷⁸

He considered the American Colonization Society to be instrumental in the modernization processes that were taking place in Africa, “an instrument of opening a field for the energies of those of the Africans who desired to go and avail themselves of the operations ... offered” in Liberia. Liberia was a site of struggle against barbarism in Africa and the Atlantic world. It was an enterprise for the strong; he argued that the challenge of civilizing native Africans was a formidable one for anyone, and especially for the original African American emigrants to West Africa.

If, when those colonists landed on those shores, inexperienced and uneducated ex-slaves as they were, they had to contend with simple barbarism or the absence of civilization, their task would have been comparatively easy. But, they had to deal with tribes demoralized by ages of intercourse with the most abandoned of foreigners—slave traders and pirates, who had taken up their abode at various points of the coast, and had carried on for generations, without interruption, their work of disintegration and destruction. When, therefore, the colonists found themselves in possession of a few miles of territory, they very soon perceived that they had more to do than simply to clear up the land, build and cultivate. They saw that they had to contend not with the simple prejudices of the Aborigines but with the results of the unhallowed intercourse of European adventurers.¹⁷⁹

Blyden felt that the legacy of European contact with Africa had left Africans demoralized

¹⁷⁸ Blyden, *Ibid.*, 7, 9-10.

¹⁷⁹ Blyden, *Ibid.*, 10-11.

to a greater extent than they were before the arrival of Europeans. The efforts of Atlantic figures from the African diaspora to build a state in Liberia and expel slavery from its vicinity, though successful, had not rid them of the depressing influence of “these demons in human form.”¹⁸⁰

In his description of the state-building plans of the Republic of Liberia, which had become independent in 1847, Blyden's representations of Africans had a striking resemblance to the expansionist views of the typical imperial colonizer during the late nineteenth century:

The special work which at this moment claims the attention of the Republic is to push the settlements beyond the sea-board to the elevated and salubrious regions of the interior, and to incorporate the Aborigines, as fast as practicable, into the Republic. Native chiefs are summoned to the Legislature from the different counties and take part in the deliberations, but as yet only those Aborigines who conform to the laws of the Republic as to the tenure of land, are allowed to exercise the elective franchise. All the other questions which press upon independent nations, questions of education, of finance, of commerce, of agriculture, are receiving the careful attention of the people. They feel the importance of making provisions by judicious laws and by proper executive, legislative, and judicial management, for the preservation and growth of the State.¹⁸¹

In terms of educational matters, Blyden looked forward to the admittance of native Africans as students to Liberia College, noting that “[i]nfluential chiefs on the coast and in the interior are also anxious to send their sons” to the institution. He looked forward to the formation of a truly West African university, a day when “we shall ... have young men from the powerful tribes in our vicinity—Mandingoes, Foulahs, Veys, Bassas, Kroos, Greboes.” Finances remained a “hopeful” issue for the small republic, and Blyden was supportive of the gradual development of a domestic economy based on agriculture as opposed to “the opening of gold mines.” He viewed the natural resources of the republic

¹⁸⁰ Blyden, *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁸¹ Blyden, *Ibid.*, 11.

as being potentially valuable trade commodities for European industry, which would serve as a market for Liberian palm oil, cam-wood, ivory, rubber, gold-dust, hides, beeswax, and gum copal. Liberian coffee, according to Blyden, was also proving to be a successful item of trade in the national economy, “supplying the coffee planters of Ceylon and Brazil with a new and superior kind of coffee for their agricultural industry.” He saw Liberia, “the youngest sister of the great international family,” as a “single channel of wholesome influence” in Africa.¹⁸²

A sea of influence has been created, to which rivulets and large streams are attracted from the distant interior; and up those streams, for a considerable distance, a tide of regeneration continually flows. Far beyond the range of the recognized limits of Liberia, hundreds of miles away from the coast, I have witnessed the effects of American civilization; not only in the articles of American manufacturers which I have been surprised to see in those remote districts, but in the intelligible use of the English language, which I have encountered in the far inland regions, all going out from Liberia ... So the influence of Liberia, insignificant as it may seem, is the increasing source of beauty and fertility, of civilization and progress, to West and Central Africa.¹⁸³

And Blyden believed that there were more prospective emigrants in the United States “craving for the fatherland among the Negro population” who could continue in this enterprise. “But nothing is clear to those who know anything of race instincts and tendencies than that this craving is a permanent and irrepressible impulse.”¹⁸⁴ Blyden buttressed this claim with a reference that had appeared in the press ten days before his own address, an article that was penned by Bishop Henry McNeal Turner of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Turner stated in a newspaper article:

There never was a time when the colored people were more concerned about Africa in every respect, than at present. In some portions of the country it is the topic of conversation, and if a line of steamers were started from New Orleans, Mobile, Savannah or Charleston, they would be crowded to density every trip they

¹⁸² Blyden, *Ibid.*, 12-13, 15.

¹⁸³ Blyden, *Ibid.*, 14-15.

¹⁸⁴ Blyden, *Ibid.*, 16-17.

made to Africa. There is a general unrest and a wholesale dissatisfaction among our people in a number of sections of the country to my certain knowledge, and they sigh for conveniences to and from the Continent of Africa. Something has to be done, matters cannot go on as at present, and the remedy is thought by tens of thousands to be a NEGRO NATIONALITY. This much the history of the world establishes, that races either fossilized, oppressed or degraded, must emigrate before any material change takes place in their civil, intellectual or moral status; otherwise extinction is the consequence.¹⁸⁵

Blyden constructed Africans as the potential “metaphysical and spiritual” agrarian custodians of the world, complementing the “Northern races” who would serve as the urbanized scientific leaders of humanity. Blyden wrote that he had experienced spiritual states in Africa that could not be replicated in the Western world.

In the solitudes of the African forests, where the din of western civilization has never been heard, I have realized the sayings of the poet that the “Groves were Gods first temples.” I have felt that I stood in the presence of the Almighty; and the trees and the birds and the sky and the air have whispered to me of the great work yet to be achieved on that continent. I trod lightly through those forests, for I felt there was “a spirit in the woods.” And I could understand how it came to pass that the great prophets of a race—the great reformers who have organized states and elevated peoples, received their inspiration on mountains, in caves, in grottoes.¹⁸⁶

Blyden felt that the “development of the Negro on African soil” was critical to the regeneration of the race. The “feminine” character of the African race would balance the “harsh and stern fibre of the Caucasian races,” each branch of humanity playing a crucial, complementary role in the cultivation of universal civilization. The African in his native setting, according to Blyden, would “grow freely, naturally, unfolding his powers in a completely healthy progress.”¹⁸⁷

His interpretive approach to Africans was becoming increasingly sociological. Early in his 1883 address, Blyden stated what was the foundation of his arguments in

¹⁸⁵ Henry McNeal Turner quote from *Christian Recorder* (January 4, 1883), cited in Blyden, *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁸⁶ Blyden, *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁸⁷ Blyden, *Ibid.*, 20.

support of colonization in Africa and what would become the basis of his praxis at the turn of the century. His analysis and representation of Africans had become more scientific than his former approaches that were saturated by missionizing Christianity.

[M]en are now constructing the science of history, the science of language, the science of religion, the science of society, formulating dogmas to set aside dogma, and consoling themselves that they are moving to a higher level and solving the problems of the ages Among the conclusions to which study and research are conducting philosophers, none is clearer than this—that each of the races of mankind has a specific character and a specific work. The science of Sociology is the science of race.¹⁸⁸

In *African Life and Customs*, his usage of scientific racial ideology took a form that shifted from a monotheistic advocacy of pan-African nationalism to an Africanized, pantheistic pan-Africanism, one that would have a significant impact on the later development of Du Boisian Afrocentrism in the early twentieth century and cultural Afrocentrism of the mid-twentieth century and beyond.¹⁸⁹

Finding Truth in African Life and Customs

Writing at the beginning of the twentieth century, Blyden's representations of “pure” Africans in *African Life and Customs*, those whom he considered to be untouched by Europeans or foreigners, is in stark contrast to all of his earlier works. In his small text, Africans are no longer divested of their humanity or their cultural, social, political, and religious vitality. His gaze was no longer that of the missionary combating what he deemed to be the indiscriminate Europeanization of Africans. Now, Blyden's worldview was one in which it was clear that he embraced Africa as it existed and not the Africa of the colonial library. He had become at home in Africa. In his socioeconomic analysis of Africa as a whole, Blyden relied upon the observations that he had gathered from his

¹⁸⁸ Blyden, *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁸⁹ Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *Afrotopia: The Roots of African American Popular History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

travels in West Africa and especially from his journeys into the African interior. He presented Africans as having successfully devised their own ways of life that had been encroached upon and misunderstood by Europeans. He noted that the family structure formed the basic unit of African society and that polygamy was the basis of the African family. He also argued that African social and economic relations were based on the cooperation of everyone in society. The central element that permeated all aspects of African life and which held African societies together was religion. Blyden was adamant to drive home the fact that monotheism did not define African worship and that there was no separation of the sacred and secular in Africa.

The African Religion is a matter that affects all classes of the people—men, women, and children. As a Pagan, the women assist in the functions of Religion, which are the foundations of the State. They visit the scared groves. The Bundo [female initiation society] and Porroh [males initiation society] rites act conjointly with the State in training the youths of both sexes to morality and patriotism. As in other matters, the Religion is communistic. When this system is recklessly and indiscriminately interfered with, the result is what we are witnessing everywhere in West Africa[:] ... dislocations, degeneracy, death.¹⁹⁰

Africa had its own ancient traditions, traditions that Blyden, as we have seen, had earlier claimed that Africans did not possess. His reference to “Gold Coast Native Institutions,” a work by one of his disciples, Joseph Ephraim Casely Hayford, revealed Blyden's morphed understanding and representation of Africans:

... [F]ervent is their belief in the hereafter. To them man never dies Now, when the missionary comes along, simple soul that he is, and gives the would-be converted native the comprehensive command to give up all fetish as a thing abominable in the sight of God, his reason reels, and the foundations of his faith are, for the first time, shaken. But he soon finds himself on *terra firma*, and when he remembers the lessons of his youth and considers that, after all, the missionary may be wrong in a matter that affects the vital interests of the life beyond, he remains for ever afterwards only a Christian worshipper in form, if he

¹⁹⁰ Edward Wilmot Blyden, *African Life and Customs* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1993; 1908), 73. See also John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, Second Revised and Enlarged Edition (Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1999; 1969).

does not openly revolt. Where he remains a formal worshipper, it does not necessarily follow that he is a hypocrite. The fact is that he likes the music and the ceremonials of the Christian Church, and would fain continue to enjoy them, while at heart he remains true to the faith of his fathers.”¹⁹¹

“Spiritualism,” according to Blyden, was central to African epistemologies. “Everywhere in Pagan Africa there is this intercourse.” He further suggested, “Spiritualism is penetrating the higher circles of Society.”¹⁹² By this time, Blyden viewed Christianity from a spiritualist standpoint, arguing that the Christianity that was practiced in the Atlantic world was not the doctrine promulgated by Jesus. His dismissal of Christianity did not entail a rejection of the message of Jesus himself. Blyden's approach was now defined by an African primordialism that incorporated, or assimilated, the Gospels.

I am sure that Christianity, as conceived and modified in Europe and America, with its oppressive hierarchy, its caste prejudices and limitations, its pecuniary burdens and exactions, its injurious intermeddling in the harmless and useful customs of alien peoples, is not the Christianity of Christ. But I am sure, also, that the Christianity of Christ is no cunningly devised fable ... I am sure that its spirit will ultimately prevail in the proceedings of men; that the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. I am sure [about the spiritualism of] Jesus, upon whom is the spirit of the Lord I am sure, also, that all counterfeits, however bright or real they look, must vanish as the truth appears ... Treading the footsteps of our immortal countryman [Simon of Cyrene, Libya], we must bear the Cross after Jesus. We must strip him of the useless, distorting and obstructive habiliments by which he has been invested by the materialising [sic] sons of Japhet. Let Him be lifted up as he really is that He may be seen, pure and simple, by the African, and he will draw all men unto Him.¹⁹³

Blyden was convinced during the latter years of his life and travels in Africa and the Atlantic world that racial distinctions determined the existence of all human beings. His was not a hierarchical envisioning of humanity. But he fervently believed that races developed along distinct lines and that the efforts of Christian missionaries had an

¹⁹¹ Blyden, *Ibid.*, 73.

¹⁹² Blyden, *Ibid.*, 71-72.

¹⁹³ Blyden, *Ibid.*, 82-83; Blyden, “Hope for Africa,” 10-11. See Matthew 27:32, Mark 15:21, and Luke 23:26.

especially deleterious effect upon the development of Africans. He felt that an appreciation of native laws, customs, and societies was the best approach to pan-Africanism in the twentieth century. Technological advances in transportation such as the steamship and the railway; the pressures of the industrializing Atlantic market economy; increases in the number of books and newspapers available to natives; increasing literacy in the English language among natives; and the increasing number of natives who travelled to Europe in order to “see things for themselves” had led to monumental changes in Africa. Africans were becoming increasingly aware of the imperfections of the Western world. Blyden stated,

It is difficult to get our philanthropic friends to understand that as a rule, the training they have been giving to the Negro with the very best intention is not the best for him ... They honestly give us their best and wonder that their best does not produce the best results: but their best on their line is not as good as our best on our own line The missionary work as pursued at the present day is not the same as that pursued fifty or a hundred years ago ... In former days the missionary had what may be called a *tabula vasa*—an open and uncontested field. What he told the people remained in their mind as absolute truth, based, not only on the Word of God, but coming from a country where the people had reached the perfection almost of angels, and therefore he had a right as one of those who had “already attained” to be the guide of others. But all this is changed now ... [W]ithout a thorough revision of the missionary methods, adapting them to changed conditions, missionary work in West Africa will become more and more impossible.¹⁹⁴

Blyden's ideological formulations in *African Life and Customs* stemmed not only from his travels, but also in conjunction with his evolving autobiography as a minister of Christianity and later as a self-proclaimed “Minister of Truth”¹⁹⁵ upon resigning from the Presbyterian Church in September 1886.

Religion with the African in his pure state concerns all classes of the people ... [H]e approaches God by all the various means which He has created. They believe

¹⁹⁴ Blyden, *Ibid.*, 66-68.

¹⁹⁵ Jennifer Ryan, “Edward Wilmot Blyden: A Biographical Outline,” *Edward Wilmot Blyden Virtual Museum*, http://www.columbia.edu/~hcb8/EWB_Museum/Chrono_bio.html

that the diving powers inhabit stones, trees, springs, and animals; and we find traces of this kind of worship in the Bible and in the early history of the Greeks. We find, for example, a sacred stone at Bethel called the House of God. There is a sacred oracular tree at a place called Sichem (Gen. xii. 6). Then there are the sacred wells at Kedesh and at Beersheba, to which people went to find God. In earliest times amongst the Greeks the image of a god was nothing but a mere stone which served to represent the deity and to which offerings were brought. This was the primary origin of altars. The example of stone worship may be seen any day in the Timne country. It is true, as [Reginald] Heber says, that—

The heathen in his blindness

Bows down to wood and stone.

But he does not look to the stone for help. He recognises [sic] within and beyond that stone the Spirit of his Creator.

The self-reflexive writings of Blyden were a precursor to “African modes of self-writing”¹⁹⁶ that emerged among colonial and postcolonial African intellectuals during the twentieth century, a mode of writing that breathed new life into African struggles for independence and truth. The next chapter explores Blyden's conservative yet revolutionary religious ideas and the role that he played as an originator of black power ideology during the long nineteenth century.

¹⁹⁶ Achille Mbembe, “African Modes of Self-Writing,” *Public Culture*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (2002), 239-273.

Chapter IV

“We need some African power”:

Edward Wilmot Blyden and the Conservative Origins of Black Power Ideology, 1832-1912

Black power represents one of the most enduring and controversial stories of racial tumult, social protest, and political upheaval of our time, complete with a cast of tragic and heroic historical characters: Black Muslims, FBI agents, Martin Luther King Jr., Black Panthers, Carmichael, Lyndon B. Johnson, the New Left, and Fidel Castro all play major and minor parts in the era this movement helped define. Black power's reach was global, spanning continents and crossing oceans, yet its iconic personalities and organizations (some of whom were key civil-rights activists) remain shadowy, almost forgotten figures in spite of their vital role in shaping still-raging debates about race, war, and democracy.¹⁹⁷

And Je'-sus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? *there* is none good but one, *that is*, God.

The Holy Bible, King James Version, Mark 10:18

So Jesus said to him, “Why do you call Me good? No one *is* good but One, *that is*, God...”

The MacArthur Study Bible, The Holy Bible, New King James Version, Mark 10:18

Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone...”

The New Oxford Annotated Bible, Augmented Third Edition, with the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, Mark 10:18

Edward Wilmot Blyden was not the only conservative intellectual to advocate black power ideology. African independence and the impact of western imperialism were central to the racial imagination of Richard Wright (1908-1960) as explicated in his volume about his journey from Paris to West Africa. The 1954 publication, *Black Power:*

¹⁹⁷ Peniel E. Joseph, “Black Power’s Powerful Legacy,” *The Chronicle Review* (7/21/06).

A Record of Reactions in a Land of Pathos, “a first-person, subjective narrative on the life and conditions of the Colony and Ashanti areas of the Gold Coast” by the Mississippi-born writer was reflective of a self-reflexive definition of Black Power, one that details his experience of directly confronting Africa. According to Wright:

The historical material in this book is drawn exclusively from bourgeois sources, if that is of any comfort to anybody. The interpretations of facts, their coloring and presentation, are my own, and, for whatever it is worth, I take full responsibility for them. And I think that time will bear me out.¹⁹⁸

The central characteristic of Africa that Wright finds, the fact that inspires him to wonder at the nakedness of humanity, is the relationship of people to history. Wright called for the creation of a modern African religion, a *secular* religion; he insisted on the *militarization* of African life *now*. He urged Kwame Nkrumah not to engage in a trans-historical project: there was absolutely no rational reason to project the suffering of the present into an uncertain future. Africans would have to become as “hard” as other races if they wanted to fully emancipate themselves from colonialism. They would have to engage in black power politics in order to direct and control their destinies. It is not my intention to prove that the practice of black power was a legitimate orientation and foundation for weary modernists or inexperienced post-modernists. I am not of the opinion that sentimental apologies are necessary elements to the study of the objective facts of history. The elasticity of written and spoken ideas has seldom been considered a problem among intellectuals in Africa and the Africa diaspora. Precise articulation of the historical forces that shaped the course of episodes in African history was a strategy that Blyden cultivated during his intellectual, scholarly, professional, and political development as an agent of social and cultural change in world history.

¹⁹⁸ Richard Wright, *Black Power: A Record of Reactions in a Land of Pathos* (New York: Harper, 1954), xiv.

The fact that an intellectual like Blyden believed in a religious tradition in which he seemed to, at times, almost plead for white people to accept the reality of Negro humanity is ridiculous from a post-modern perspective. This means that, here, at least, I do not exhibit a respect for time, place, or space according to some historians. I am projecting my own views onto our understanding of a man of the past. It seems only fair that someone of my era confront the thinking of one of the greatest cases of Africanism—or credible knowledge about Africa.

The central reality for Blyden was his race. He wanted to discursively construct black people as human to a white audience. He sought to convince himself that the Negro was more than an animal. That he saw himself as different from the majority of black people was due to the fact that he saw himself as a civilized man, and civilization was universal even in African expression, *whereas gross provincialism denoted barbarism*.

The modernist structure of feeling found in contemporary rejections of the scholarly observations of post-modernist philosopher Anthony Appiah by African-centered teachers and students can also be mapped in the rejection of paganism by Blyden and other intellectuals in Africa and the African diaspora. Blyden never emancipated himself from monotheistic myths; he rejected the philosophical and mystical systems of an enormous portion of the human species, and of African peoples. It seems that historians, including the erudite Trinidadian intellectual historian Hollis R. Lynch and other intellectual and cultural historians, have been squeamish about taking notice of the significant implications of Blydenic philosophy. He and the overwhelming majority of pan-Africanists were monotheistic advocates, revealing the central paradox of African and African-American collectivist leadership and organization: the centrality of

religiosity to human stagnation of the mind and body. Religious racialism freezes the mind and body.¹⁹⁹

Just what does a study of the stagnation of the mind and body reveal? In the case of nineteenth and twentieth century advocates of the political origins of the Black Power Movement during the 1960s and 1970s, it was a case of conservatism, a conservative reliance on ancient and medieval religious traditions and rituals. Most pan-Africanists believed in a god or gods. The religious character of Africans has occupied the minds of intellectuals since antiquity.²⁰⁰ What was so fascinating about the modern order of African religion was that Africans themselves propagated its propagandistic caricatures.

Richard Wright wrote about the realities that the modern African faced in the mid-twentieth century, and he saw religious traditions as being the principal impediments to African modernization. His book is certainly not one that is usually associated with the Black Power Movement. Perhaps his conservative view proved to be too much of an ironically radical and modern form for his contemporaries to appreciate or swallow.

Blyden wrote about the realities that the modern African faced in the mid-to-late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and he saw heathenish paganism as being the principal impediment to African civilization. His works are certainly not those that are usually associated with the Black Power Movement. Perhaps his conservative view proved to be too much of an ironically radical and modern form for his contemporaries to appreciate or to swallow.

¹⁹⁹ Corey D. B. Walker, "Modernity in Black: Du Bois and the (Re)Construction of Black Identity in *The Souls of Black Folk*, *Philosophia Africana: Analysis of Philosophy and Issues in Africa and the Diaspora*, Volume 7, Number 1 (March 2004): 89-93.

²⁰⁰ The attention given to the ancient depictions and observations of Kush, Ethiopia, and Meroe in the works of Pianki, Herodotus, and Diodorus Siculus, for example, by contemporary Afrocentric scholars draws from this tradition.

Richard Wright stressed the importance of staying on top of theory. Do not allow theory be on top of you was Wright's urgent message to writers on the African question. Blyden lived, worked, and traveled among the indigenous populations of western and central Africa. He was far more familiar with African life and customs than other African Victorians.

That the highest minds in the world were the principle sources of information for Blyden is an indisputable part of the historical record. Blyden was also an avid traveler, both internationally and locally. His crisscrossing the Atlantic Ocean and his journeys across continental Europe, Africa and the Middle East were the subject of analysis of transnational social relations by the social theorist Paul Gilroy. Gilroy sees the international and national border crossings of black people in the modern era as being a central component of the counter-cultural activities of black Atlantic cultures in the New and Old worlds.²⁰¹ My readings of Blyden's public and private correspondences reveal that he was a curious intellectual, for he visited various portions of the coastal and interior regions of West and Central Africa, Latin America, and North America, achieving a short-lived fame in the Southeastern region of the United States during and immediately following his "tour of the South" in the late-nineteenth century. The American South was a region that he consistently viewed as producing the most sympathetic African American supporters of African nationalism. Blyden suggested that the cultural traditions created among southern African Americans, whom were the majority of African Americans in the entire nation between 1832-1912, and the brutality of white supremacy, ensured that

²⁰¹ Paul Gilroy, "Route Work: The Black Atlantic and the Politics of Exile," in Ian Chambers and Lidia Curti, Editors. *The Post-Colonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons* (New York: Routledge, 1996, 17-29 and *The Black Atlantic*. See also Paul Johnson, *Intellectuals* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1988).

the cultivation of support from southern African Americans for Liberia, a black African independent republic, would be far more successful than in others regions of the U.S. Non-Southern African-Americans were in smaller numbers and concentrated in cities in which they sought to integrate themselves into the body politic. The difference between independence and integration into a white controlled and administered nation was a central object of analysis in Blyden's studies of African and African American history and politics.

The politics under consideration are intellectual politics. According to the intellectual historian Paul Johnson, the modern definition of an intellectual is s/he whom considered her or his cognitive production to be of benefit to her or his contemporaries. Modern intellectuals gave advice, provided counsel, and disseminated information that was considered to be important to the overall usefulness to and happiness of the human race.

The Pan-African Imagination

[F]irst class science functions with aesthetic standards as well as with logical and empirical standards. These standards are not defensible by the positivist or the Marxist or the symbolic interactionist philosophers of science....[I]f we embed the examples of excellence in our minds, as concrete manifestations of aesthetic principles we want to respect in our own work, and use them as touchstones to filter out that part we throw away and that part we keep, we may very well manage to work at a level higher than we teach. For we work by the standards embedded in the touchstone, standards we cannot formulate but can perceive if we use a paired comparison—is this piece as good as [a classic one]?²⁰²

This chapter is an historical account of a significant intellectual. This approach implies a value judgment, and rightly so, as it seems that significant intellectual contributions are not valued in contemporary global culture, especially contributions from black male

²⁰² Arthur Stinchcombe, quoted in Howard S. Becker, *Writing for Social Scientists*. With a chapter by Pamela Richards (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 138.

authors from previous centuries. The approach reveals as much about the present historian as it brings to light the philosophy of the man whose writings and speeches form the principal objects of this investigation. Even today, the cultural opinion that black men were historically incapable of functioning as universal intellectuals is a conceptual problem that is directly related to the persistent belief that it is ridiculous to *write* an intellectual, genealogical narrative of African peoples. Africans inhabit geopolitical spaces where oral, tribal traditions were believed by early anthropologists to be the principle means for the conservation of historical knowledge about the fragmented black world from an African perspective. The Hegelian edict wielded enormous power, as *people of black African descent were not seen as innovators.*²⁰³

In conversation with this sort of thinking, I seek to transfer the reader directly into the discursive world of a modern ideology that lacked any objective, empirical²⁰⁴ unifying principle. In order to objectively approach this matter by means of the scientific method, I consider the overlapping intellectual and scholarly productions that were related to the anthropocentric stereotypes associated with bodies composed of dark skin, full lips, broad noses, high cheek bones, “wooly” or coarse hair—these factors did not translate into an ideological basis for a new black power ideology. But they did constitute the historical tapestry related to the most significant elements in the thinking of Edward Wilmot Blyden and the intellectual climate in which he lived, worked, and died.

We continue to observe much more in humanity than phenotypes and other physical features, characteristics, and peculiarities. The task of rethinking black power

²⁰³ Manthia Diawara argues against the stifling perpetuation of “traditions” in the modern Africa and the African diaspora. Diawara, Manthia, *In Search of Africa* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998).

²⁰⁴ Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House*.

ideology is obviously a selective process. The primary focus of this chapter centers on the salience of analyzing the micro-historical dynamics of pan-Africanism as it was embedded in black power theory and practice. Self-reflexive publications, serial articles, speeches, and letters constitute the primary historical documents that are utilized in this chapter on the conservative origins of black power ideology.

The academic significance of eminent studies of the Pan-African Movement is contrasted with a paucity of practices of knowledge production and what pan-African activism historically entailed. What were the presuppositions of the pan-African imagination during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries? Pan-African writings betrayed a self-reflexive mode of writing. This psychological feature of pan-Africanism was often taken for granted by scholars as opposed to more popular authors. The historian Wilson J. Moses observed that many of the foundational texts of a related modern ideology, Afrocentrism, were from the pens of unacknowledged white authors.²⁰⁵ The emergence of pan-Africanism, on the other hand, did not reflect a tendency of self-denial, a failure to acknowledge the employment of foreign instruments for the purposes of African civilization and modernization. On the surface, the Americo-centric and Eurocentric leanings of some pan-African intellectuals reveal a similar reliance on discursive sources from non-black authors as do Afrocentric ones. The pan-African intellectual, on the other hand, was historically a person of African descent who chose to write about *other* black persons of African descent *as a conscious Negro writing about Negroes*. Whatever the cultural opinions were about this bias did not mitigate the fact that most black intellectuals historically described their ambivalent relationships with other blacks as

²⁰⁵ Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *Afrotopia and Creative Conflict in African American Thought: Frederick Douglas, Alexander Crummell, W.E.B. Du Bois, Booker T. Washington, and Marcus Garvey* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

being critical to the development of their own modes of self-examination.

The most vivid examples of this fundamental principle of pan-African writing were embedded in travel narratives. This literary genre was a central choice of elocution for pan-African writers since the advent of publication of works in European languages by black authors.²⁰⁶ Questions still arise about the representation of not only ourselves in our writings, but also how we choose to construct any specific aspect of the pan-African world in our self-examinations. How will I really know if what I write about African peoples will be understood in a manner in which I intend? Questions along these lines of thinking constrained the pan-African writer in his self-reflexive mode. The specter of the misrepresentation of the individual continues to haunt most of us. The intellectual history of pan-Africanism lacks the easy association between theory and practice, cause and effect, which traditional objects of social science allow us to dissect. Thus, it is not our intention to produce a picture of the linear development and impact of these types of ideological writings. Indeed, is it possible to persuasively construct an accurate trans-historical story? The “fragments” of history *are* the sources that we are left to work with in order to contribute a significant component to the pan-African library. This chapter analyzes snapshots in pan-African history that we intend to guide the reader's imagination about the roots of black power ideology and black African history.

The intellectual whose writings form the object of this study was a black man whose work was selected for this doctoral dissertation because of the significance that his

²⁰⁶ Phillis Wheatley, (1761-1784), *Poems on Various Subjects Religious and Moral* (London: 1773); *The Letters of Ignatius Sancho* (1729-1780), Edited by Paul Edwards and Polly Rewt (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994); Quobna Ottobah Cugoano (1757?-1801?), *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species, Humbly Submitted to the Inhabitants of Great Britain, by Ottobah Cugoano, a Native of Africa* (London: 1787); and *Equiano's Travels: The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa the African, Written by Himself, first published in 1789* (London), Edited by Paul Edwards (Long Grove, Illinois: Waveland Press, Inc., 1996).

writings about and from international settings played in the formative years of pan-Africanism. The recent conversation about the “invention” and “idea” of Africa falls under the rubric of this study.²⁰⁷ The speeches and writings of this significant ancestor played a creative role in the perpetuation of the contemporary memory of him as an *individual*. A traditional African religious and philosophical understanding of the immortality²⁰⁸ of this man cannot deny the significance of his literary constructions of himself and other Africans. The essays in the volume *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race* and other writings continue to function as “touchstones” (see above) in the modernization of Africa and the African diaspora. The essays in the celebrated volume can be read as constituting the central texts in the construction of the literary imagination of the black world. The impact of his books, essays, and speeches varied across time and space. Blyden, for instance, was not a popular figure in North America. Yet he was lionized in West Africa, the Caribbean, and Europe. Two other figures shared a similar but not identical fate. William Edward Burghardt Du Bois was considered the preeminent African-American thinker of his time even though he chose to live his last days as an expatriate in West Africa. Richard Wright was perhaps the most contradictory figure of African-American letters, and his stature as one of the first American-born writers to earn his living solely from the practice of the literary craft did not prevent him from living as an expatriate in Western Europe. This chapter advances the thesis that travel writings revealed the most significant details about the logic of the pan-African imagination and the origins of black power ideology.

What happens when a black writer decides to travel to another region of the world

²⁰⁷ V.Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa and The Idea of Africa*.

²⁰⁸ John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (New York: Praeger, 1969). Mbiti examined the concept of immortality as a real element in traditional African life.

and create a narrative about other black people for a foreign audience? What are the underlying motives behind such a project? The inherently controversial act of trying to speak for others was one of the principle reasons that travel narratives served as important sources for creative writing by black intellectuals like Blyden. The simple fact is that travel writing has always been creative writing, in the commonsense meaning of “creative” writing. Blyden operated from a creative foundation. He sought to articulate a significant image of the universal African in the face of draconian economic, political, social, and cultural forms of domination by Europeans and Americans. The most feasible way for him to test the empirical value of his ideological theories was for him to study, visit, and write about local situations in which he was not an indigenous member. This much was fairly simple. The same intellectual traversed spaces where local African and African-American populations perceived him as an outsider. By the latter term we emphasize the fact that Blyden considered himself as having a peculiar relationship to the peoples whom he sought to construct in literature. After all, his audiences were indisputably largely foreign to the human subjects whom were the objects of analyses in his recordings. It was from the literary observations of black intellectuals that white readers learned anything at all about the most important details about Africa and the African diaspora from a non-white point of reference.

Blyden was described as an arrogant man by some of his contemporaries, and it certainly took a superior degree of individual confidence for him to choose to follow through with the publication of his narratives in the first place. The construction of literature in the western world was largely associated with white male thinkers. Many of his readers did not read the works of black authors unless they had special interests in

topics that concerned black intellectuals. This study attempts to break with the modern employment of the pan-African imagination. Pan-Africanism is not a popular tradition today due to the fact that the intellectual capital that pan-Africanism afforded was historically tied to the black elite. It was from bourgeois circles that the masters of pan-Africanism operated and functioned as interpreters of black folk to foreign audiences as well as to one another.²⁰⁹

Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race is a volume of miscellaneous articles that were first published as a volume in 1887. It is a collection that contemporary historians, philosophers, and other scholars and laymen refer to when they want to cite a typical example of African nationalistic and pan-Africanistic literature from the period encompassing the late-nineteenth century rise of European imperialism on the African continent. The plastic title of the collection of essays was an articulation of the complexity and development of the pan-African imagination. Blyden pointed out to his readers that he believed that the Christian and Islamic creeds were not indigenous black African conceptions of God. His writings and speeches contained the central paradigm that we find in pan-African and black power projects subsequent to his own. When we turn to the contents of the volume, the controversial nature of the writings become sharp to a significant degree. This largely self-taught man of letters had a lot to say about the history of the Negro and his relation to the world. His words actually led to him becoming an icon among the West African elite.

Blyden believed that Africa was in need of Salvation. It was important for him to keep this belief in the forefront of his readers' minds. He clearly believed in what can be

²⁰⁹ Abner Cohen, *The Politics of Elite Culture: Explorations in the Dramaturgy of Power in a Modern African Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981).

referred to as the seen and unseen worlds, a world that was visible to the naked eye and a world that was invisible to humans. For most of his life, Blyden was a minister, resigning late in his life from his post as an Presbyterian priest to become a self-professed “Minister of Truth.” He believed in the ever-presence of God in the daily activities of the world.

Even in his sociological study, *African Life and Customs* (1908), a series of articles that originally appeared in *The Sierra Leone Weekly News*, Blyden professed: “So you can change the Theology of a people, but you cannot change their Religion.” This particular belief he held to be directly in line with the traditional “African Religion” that he came into contact during his travels in Western, Central and North Africa and which he imagined as being the sustaining Force for Africans for centuries.²¹⁰ Blyden wrote and spoke about a racial conception of God that he considered to be applicable to the times during which he lived. The importance of his belief in the providential hand of God in the historical and contemporaneous condition of Africa and the African diaspora must be kept in mind when engaging *any* of the ideas of Blyden.

He was also aware that his readers and listeners believed that Africa was in need of Salvation. Blyden participated in a conversation in which he sought to capitalize on the most important stakes upon which the conversation was then taking place. It was certainly clear to Blyden that the expansion of European and American powers into the African *interior* from their previous coastal enclaves was to be accompanied by Christian missionaries. Missionary activities were a significant element in the colonization of the African continent and African peoples across the Atlantic world. Muslim marabouts (i.e., hermits, monks, or missionaries) were already present on the continent, and, according to

²¹⁰ Edward Wilmot Blyden, *African Life and Customs* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1994; 1908), 73.

Blyden, along with their strong presence was their formidable job in modernizing the pagan African. The fact that most of these ambassadors of Islam were Negro Muslims who were not subservient to their Arab teachers was the most important fact that he pointed out for his Western, Christian readers and listeners to ponder and understand. His major intervention in this protean conversation about the future of Africa was that he presented the fundamental question that was at the heart of the structure of feeling about Africa between 1832 and 1912: *the question of African education*. Who was to serve as the primary instructor of Christianity and Western modernity to Africans in the Americas and on the continent? Blyden placed emphasis on his belief that Africans were fully capable of educating themselves under the right conditions. His strategy was to develop a case for the urgency of examining the objectives and effects of educational systems and socio-cultural environments. Would a generation of professionals emerge among indigenous Africans? Blyden thought that if Africans had access to the same material and spiritual instruments of social and cultural organization as Westerners and Arabs, Africans could and would solve their own problems. As for the black African Muslims, Blyden observed that the application of an Islamic superstructure in African communities did not replace a permanent indigenous substructure.²¹¹ In other words, his writings informed the European and American reader of the historical relationship between the West, the Middle East, and Africa. The Middle East was an important element for his discursive strategy because it was the locale considered, from a monotheistic perspective, to be the starting point of the enlightenment of humanity. He sought to convince elite audiences of the universal necessity of teaching Africans how to survive in the modern world without

²¹¹ Edward Wilmot Blyden, "Mohammedanism and the Negro Race," *Fraser's Magazine* (November 1875), reprinted in *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race*, 11-12.

these same foreign elites serving as their primary instructors in civilization. The Africanization of the elite would be a by-product of these exchanges.

We often hear of only the “negative” elements of Blyden's thinking. And just what are these negative things that have garnished the attention of historians, philosophers, and others? Some scholars still find it hard to believe, for instance, that a black intellectual would refer to other black people as “pagan,” “barbaric,” “superstitious,” “ignorant,” et cetera. Tunde Adeleke, a Nigerian historian, was amazed, or appalled, at the fact that nineteenth-century black nationalists and pan-Africanists were prejudiced cultural elitists. At least that is what we gather from positions that posit preeminence or popularity as being more significant than substance.²¹²

“The Call of Providence to the Descendants of Africa in America”: Reasons for an Appeal to Racial Pride and Spiritual Development

Blyden was born at St. Thomas, Virgin Islands, then a Danish colony, and was also a short-time resident of Venezuela and the United States before emigrating to West Africa. His thoughts about the United States, in general, and his views regarding African-American “repatriation” (“return”) to Africa, in particular, reveal a *pan-African* discourse. Blyden may strike some readers as an atypical subject for a study of the conservative origins of black power ideology for a number of reasons. But if we consider the fact that black North Americans and Blyden, too, – and not just his and others’ “Pan-Negro Patriot(ic)” abstractions – were material products of the greater African diaspora²¹³, then our approaches, and, hence, responses to, Blyden’s intellectual production are necessarily complicated. His numerous published and posthumously published writings rendered

²¹² Tunde Adeleke, *UnAfrican Americans*.

²¹³ Pier Larson, *History and Memory in the Age of Enslavement: Becoming Marina in Highland Madagascar, 1770-1822* (Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Heinemann, 2000).

clear that he was one of the more significant progenitors of African nationalism, pan-Africanism, and black power ideology (as well as *Negritude* and Afrocentrism). His virtual absence within the present-day popular imagination in North America certainly limits our understanding of several aspects of his genius. Blyden's conceptualization of Africa and her descendants – the African or Negro race – are especially worthy of historical study. Grasping the significance of Blydenic philosophy requires at the very least an appreciation of historical time and space—that is, a serious consideration of contemporaneous understandings of local situations.

A little over a decade had passed since Blyden was denied admission to the Rutgers Theological Seminary in 1850 due to racial discrimination. He delivered “The Call of Providence [God]” in the United States as an ambassador of the Republic of Liberia and on behalf of the former colony's efforts to encourage further emigration to West Africa. Established in 1822 under the auspices of the American Society for Colonizing Free People of Colour of the United States, common known as the American Colonization Society (ACS), and independent in 1847, Liberia – the nation itself as well as the idea of African colonization – was a controversial issue among abolitionist organizations and free black communities since its inception. The main debate centered on whether emigration schemes would lead to the removal of the small number of free blacks in the United States, in effect diminishing all corporeal claims for the legitimacy of black citizenship and civil rights. With the prospect of only an enslaved black mass remaining in the United States, it was quite reasonable that anti-emigrationists tended to view African colonization as a concession to the slavocracy. Slavery, then, would become a permanent institution according to colonial logic. Its peculiar characteristics would even

dissolve, for the menacing presence of free blacks, according to slavery's defenders, would not expose the contradictions of the southern paternalistic order. Their atypical, quasi-free brothers and sisters would no longer distract enslaved black people, who were considered to be dangerous social agents without proper surveillance.²¹⁴

But racialism and racism were not limited to plantations in North America. Racialism and racism were not identical but indeed interrelated concepts. By the mid-nineteenth-century, both concepts were pervasive in, but not limited to, the United States and were always present within what has described by the French historian Michel Foucault as the ever-presence of power. Foucault argued that power relations have always been intrinsic to human societies. In his analysis of the history of sexuality, the notion of an increased repression of sexual discourse and visibility during the Victorian period was replaced with examples of growing societal complicity with social and cultural technologies of power. Though certainly not initiated from solely below, the perpetuation of the *function* and *control* of sexualities and bodies rested within and through individuals.²¹⁵

Racial identities and histories were literally constructed through “reading bodies.” Vivid examples of this practice of reading bodies can be mapped from a consideration of the social roles of slave-traders and slaveholders, groups acknowledged as pivotal to the maintenance of the southern and western slavocracy. According to the historian Walter Johnson, a non-mechanistic “technology of slaves” – the continuance of antebellum

²¹⁴ The scholarship on the slavery and emancipation eras of United States history is voluminous and far too extensive to cite here. On the historiography of slavery and emancipation, see Thomas Holt, “African-American History” in *The New American History: Revised and Expanded Edition*, Edited for the American Historical Association by Eric Foner (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997), 313-18; George M. Fredrickson, “The Skeleton in the Closet,” *The New York Review of Books* Volume 47, Number 17, 61-6 (November 2, 2000); August Meier and Elliot Rudwick, *Black History and the Historical Profession*, especially chapter 4.

²¹⁵ Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality*.

slavery – “depended upon ... property to ... keep themselves constant over time.”²¹⁶ In short, the American society that Blyden encountered was one in which:

... there [was] no binary and all-encompassing opposition between rulers and the ruled at the root of power relations ... the manifold relationships of force that take shape and come into play in the machinery of production, in families, limited groups, and institutions, are the basis for wide-ranging effects of cleavage that run through the social body as a whole.²¹⁷

After an unsuccessful application for admission in 1850 to Rutgers Theological Seminary solely due to racial proscriptions, Blyden resided in the United States for only seven months before emigrating to Liberia at the age of seventeen, largely in response to the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 previously referred to. Noted by both of his major biographers to have devoted the rest of his life to the “race,” Blyden’s racial chauvinism cannot be divorced from the utter oppression experienced by the Negro as well as contextual racist conceptualizations of humanity.²¹⁸ In a summer 1862 address delivered in Washington, District of Columbia, Portland, Maine, and other New England cities, Blyden chastised African-Americans who presumably were either unconcerned or unaware of their “special duty to their forefathers.”

Among the descendants of Africa in this country the persuasion seems to prevail ... that they owe no special duty to the land of their forefathers ... (M)any of the descendants of Africa ... speak disparagingly of their country ... and would turn indignantly upon any who bid them go up and take possession of the land of their fathers ... It is theirs to betake themselves to injured Africa, and bless those outraged shores, and quiet those distracted families with the blessings of Christianity and civilization.²¹⁹

Critical to Blyden’s thoughts about African-American repatriation to the land of their

²¹⁶ Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside of the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999), 135, 204; Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 149.

²¹⁷ Foucault, *Ibid.*, 94.

²¹⁸ Thomas W. Livingston, *Education and Race*; Lynch, *Edward Wilmot Blyden*.

²¹⁹ Edward Wilmot Blyden, “The Call of Providence to the Descendants of Africa in America,” *Liberia’s Offering* (New York, 1862), reprinted in Moses, *Classical Black Nationalism*, 188-208.

forefathers was his conceptualization of race.

During the same summer, in one of his extensive private correspondence to British Chancellor of the Exchequer, William Edwin Gladstone, Blyden wrote from New York City:

I am very glad of the position which England maintains with reference to this (American Civil) war. It has not yet assumed a moral aspect; it is purely political – the leading men excepting such noble spirits as Mr. (Charles) Sumner – having no idea of freeing the slaves. They are desirous of restoring the Union on its former basis. The oppression seems to be intensifying.

He went on to further note that during his visit to the U.S., he witnessed Negro-captives in the U.S. capital, which was in full compliance with the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act. He was also personally subject to denied entrance to a session of the United States House of Representatives – and had to have a white man confirm that he was a free-person. Ambassador Blyden, “a citizen of Liberia,” went on to note in his letter to Gladstone that “Both sections of the country are negro-hating and negro-crushing – intending and doing justice to five millions oppressed people among them only as they are driven to it by European sentiment. And I think that your speech though denounced has had some driving influence.”²²⁰ Blyden’s letter to Gladstone is highly informative. It revealed evidence of a pan-Africanistic cognizance of overlapping colonial and imperial situations in the Atlantic world. Blyden's correspondence with the British scholar and social reformer was also reflective of what the historian Phillip S. Zachernuk highlights as the ways in which colonial “African (diasporic) thinkers responded not only with their own resources but also with the resources of the modern Atlantic world.”²²¹

²²⁰ Edward Wilmot Blyden, Letter to William Edwin Gladstone, June 16, 1862, *Gladstone Papers*, The British Library, Manuscripts Collection, London, United Kingdom, 1860-1976.

²²¹ Philip Serge Zachernuk. *Colonial Subjects: An African Intelligentsia and Atlanta Ideas* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000), 1.

A contemporary, colleague, and peer of Blyden, Alexander Crummell, lamented, “Alas! (F)or us, all along through this reign of terror, our afflicted people have been at sea! We have no coherence of race, we have had no unity of policy! We have shewn (*sic*) no resistance to outrage! We have no organized maintenance of our rights!”²²² Blyden perceived the concept of race as entailing individuals with similar or shared organic, historical experiences. Man’s divine duty was to partake in the grand march toward perfection or civilization: this teleological element was of primary concern for both Crummell and Blyden. Inextricably bound to Man’s duty was a belief in the divine purpose of the Negro. Crummell stated in an 1861 address:

For without a doubt, the black man, in the land of his thralldom, has been in the school of suffering; yea, tried in the fiery furnace, that being tried, he might secure therefrom the strength, the character, the ability which might fit him for a civilizer and a teacher. Not for death, as the Indian, for destruction, as the Sandwich islander, has the Negro been placed in juxtaposition with the Caucasian; but rather that he might seize upon civilization.²²³

And acquiring civilization did not simply mean that blacks were to agitate for equality. Indeed, it could not, for, according to Blyden, “Providence (God) is obviously calling the black man of this country (Liberia),” which was one of the two mediums through which God communicated to humanity. God had not sent a Moses to lead His people out of the land of oppression, but Blyden was convinced that He had “loudly spoken” to the Negro.

The messages were clear: Had not the brutal extraction of millions of Negroes from Africa resulted in “a training fitting them for the work of civilizing and evangelizing the lands from whence they were torn?” Like the laboring “Jews in Egypt” who longed

²²² Alexander Crummell, “The Discipline of Freedom,” Crummell, *Destiny and Race: Selected Writings, 1840-1898* edited with an introduction by Wilson Jeremiah Moses (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), 246.

²²³ Alexander Crummell, “The Progress of Civilization along the West Coast of Africa,” in Moses, *Classical Black Nationalism*, 185.

for refuge abroad, was it not clear that American Negroes were fully able to endure the “process of acclimation” to Africa, and, hence, return, for they had been physically “preserv[ed] by God?” How else could one explain the fact that Africa, “notwithstanding the known wealth of the resources of the land,” had been kept in “reserve” from the “boastful civilization of Europe, and the effete and barbarous institutions of Asia(?) We call it, then, a Providential interposition” (divine intervention).²²⁴ This sort of pervasive and protean “discourse of civilization,”²²⁵ according to the historian Gail Bederman, was a complex of discourses that Blyden and other intellectuals both relied upon and discursively maneuvered around.

In November 1875 Blyden contributed “Mohammedanism and the Negro Race” to *Fraser’s Magazine*, and in May of the following year, he contributed “Christianity and the Negro Race” to the same prominent journal.²²⁶ These two essays were powerful examples of Blyden’s maneuvers in an ideological and social world that was dominated by a Western epistemological framework. It is important to note that Blyden relied not only on the European and American colonial archives, but also upon Islamic contributions composed in English to these libraries, such as Syed Ahmed Khan Bahador’s “A Series of Essays on the Life of Mohammed” (1870), which was reviewed in the *British Quarterly Review*, January 1872, and Syed Ameer Ali Moulvi’s *A Critical Examination of the Life and Teachings of Mohammed* (1873).²²⁷ The prominent theme of

²²⁴ Blyden, “The Call of Providence,” 192-93.

²²⁵ Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*.

²²⁶ Both articles appeared in *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race*.

²²⁷ Guarav Desai’s “five caveats—the constitution of the colonial library as essentially open; the reading of discourses as actions rather than reflections; a revised notion of subjectivity and agency; the central rather than marginal character of African texts in the colonial library; and the importance of gender as the often unspoken category of analysis” have been critical to my readings of Blyden’s essays. See Desai, *Subject to Colonialism: African Self-Fashioning and the Colonial Library* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2001), 8.

Blyden's texts was *the dialectic between the method of the dissemination of the monotheistic traditions of Christianity and Islam – two universalistic creeds – and their relationship to the Negro race.*

Blyden was of the opinion that Christianity was of a greater cultural ranking than Islam in terms of civility, and this view was certainly in accordance with dominant hierarchical conceptions of civilization.²²⁸ He believed that the majority of persons of African descent lacked true civilization and were in desperate need of transformative missionary conversion. However, Blyden considered neither Christian nor Islamic creeds as fully African in origin; he contended that the most effective civilizing mission would have to be one in which racial difference — and *not* racial hierarchy²²⁹ — was taken into account. Effective conversion entailed negotiations with what Blyden perceived as distinct racial characteristics among races, or what he determined to be racial “instincts.” He shared a widely held disdain for what has come to be described as folk culture – be it slave religion and culture or indigenous African religious and cultural traditions. This was a characteristic of most nineteenth-century intellectuals.²³⁰ Indeed, for Blyden, cultural and religious negotiations were not to be accomplished by “a degrading compromise with the Pagan superstitions, but by shaping many of its traditional customs to suit *the milder and more conciliatory disposition of the Negro.*” Furthermore, Christian missionaries could learn a lot from the history of the dissemination of Islam in West and Central Africa, for according to Blyden:

²²⁸ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978).

²²⁹ Blyden rejected the notion of a hierarchy of races, or “absolute or essential superiority ... (or) inferiority” among “*distinct but equal*” races. See Blyden, “Africa and Africans,” *Fraser’s Magazine*, Reprinted in Blyden, *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race*, 277 (original emphasis).

²³⁰ This observation has been made by Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism*; Moses, *Classical Black Nationalism*; Stuckey, *The Ideological Origins of Black Nationalism*; Stuckey, *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America*; et al.

African local institutions were not destroyed by the Arab influence introduced. *They only assumed new forms, and adapted themselves to the new teachings.* In all thriving Mohammedan communities, in West and Central Africa, it may be noticed that the Arab superstructure has been superimposed on a permanent indigenous substructure; so that what really took place, when the Arab met the Negro in his own home, was a healthy amalgamation, and not an absorption or undue repression.²³¹

According to Islamic tradition (haddith):

It is narrated on the authority of (Abdullah) son of Umar (may Allah be pleased with them) that the Holy Prophet (may the peace of Allah be upon him) said: (The superstructure of Al-Islam is raised on five pillars), i.e., the oneness of Allah, the establishment of prayer, payment of Zakat [charity], the fast of Ramadan [the month of revelation], Pilgrimage (to Mecca). A person said (to Abdullah b. Umar the narrator): which of the two precedes the other – Pilgrimage or fasts of Ramadan? Upon this he (the narrator replied): No (it is not the Pilgrimage first) but the fasts of Ramadan precede the Pilgrimage (Kita Al-Iman, The Book of Faith).

Blyden exhibited a profound, if occasionally imperfect, understanding of particularly West African Islamic modes of being and empirical characteristics in an African setting. Hollis Lynch provided a necessary complication of Blyden's, at times, romantic depiction of the spread of Islam in West Africa during the nineteenth and previous centuries.²³² Blyden's effort to exploit the universalistic and civilizing aspects of Islam was in dialogue with a religious discourse that a "Pan-Negro Patriot" could not ignore, as Lynch pointed out. Just as the Christian Bible was central to establishing an earthly spiritual kingdom for its believers, Blyden viewed the Muslim Qur'an, with its overlapping egalitarian, international principles, as paving the way for an African unity.

The Koran (*sic*) is, in its measure, an important educator. It exerts among a primitive people a wonderful influence. It has furnished to the adherents of its teachings in Africa *a ground of union* which has contributed vastly to their progress. Hausas, Foulahs, Mandingoes, Soosoos, Akus, can all *read the same*

²³¹ Blyden, "Mohammedanism and the Negro Race," 11-12 (emphases added). See also *Kita Al-Iman (The Book of Faith)*.

²³² Hollis Lynch, *Edward Wilmot Blyden*, 67-69; David Robinson, *Muslim Societies in African History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

*books and mingle in worship together, and there is to all one common authority and one ultimate umpirage.*²³³

The potentially unifying qualities of Islam, for Blyden, were a critical dimension of his discursive ideological agency – both as a champion of the “race” and in his biting indictments of the Western world's unwillingness to become seriously acquainted with the East. And not only did Blyden combat Western biases against Islam.²³⁴ He also forwarded that Islam was a far more successful enterprise among Africans because of three factors, factors with we consider as key elements to investigating the form and content of conservative black power politics. The following three points constituted a part of his original theoretical practice of “decolonising the mind” as the Kenyan intellectual Ngugi wa Thiong'o powerfully reconstructed a little over a century later²³⁵:

I. “Mohammedanism and learning to the Muslim Negro were coeval ... No amount of allegiance to the Gospel relieved the Christian Negro from the degradation of wearing the chain which he received with it, or rescued him from the political and, in a measure, ecclesiastical proscription which he still undergoes in all the countries of his exile.”²³⁶

II. “Another reason for the superior manliness and *amour propre* of the Negro Mohammedans may be found in the fact that, unlike their Christian brethren, they have not been trained under the depressing influence of Aryan art.”²³⁷

III. “A third very important factor which has retarded the development of the Christian Negro may be found in the social and literary pressure which he has undergone. *It is not too much to say that the popular literature of the Christian world, since the discovery of America, or, at least for the last two hundred years, has been anti-Negro.* The Mohammedan Negro has felt nothing of the withering power of caste.”²³⁸

²³³ Blyden, “Mohammedanism and the Negro Race,” 6-7 (emphasis added).

²³⁴ Lynch notes that “the European view of Islam, except for a few Orientalists, was largely disparaging and derogatory; Islam, it was generally believed, barely represented an advance over pagan superstition.” Lynch, *Edward Wilmot Blyden*, 68.

²³⁵ Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: James Currey, 1986).

²³⁶ Blyden, “Mohammedanism and the Negro Race,” 13.

²³⁷ Blyden, *Ibid.*, 13-14.

²³⁸ Blyden, *Ibid.*, 15.

Blyden's reference to Benjamin Tucker Tanner's 1867 tract titled *An Apology for African Methodism* as evidence of the first factor was particularly revealing, as Tanner's text provided a history and defense of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church's split from white Methodists. Tanner noted that:

THE giant crime committed by the Founders of the African M. E. Church, against the prejudiced white American, and the timid black—the crime which seems unpardonable, was that they dared to organize a Church of men, men to think for themselves, men to talk for themselves, men to act for themselves.²³⁹

In regards to the second factor and the influence of Aryan art, Blyden admitted to the “great aesthetic and moral advantages that have accrued to the Caucasian race from Christian art.” He contended, however, that such “exquisite representations ... of a foreign race” only induced “a depressing influence” and a subsequent slavish, imitative behavior among Negroes.²⁴⁰ Blyden then referred to the curious example of two “thoroughly illiterate men” whom he reportedly witnessed (one of these men during a prayer-meeting in New York) appeal to God to “extend his “lily white hands,” while encouraging others to “imagine a beautiful white man with blue eyes, rosy cheeks, and flaxen hair, and *we shall be like him.*” Blyden suggested, “The Mohammedan Negro, who is unfamiliar with such representations, sees God in the great men of his country.”²⁴¹ Finally, Blyden buttressed his claims for the third factor by arguing that Islamic literature, as opposed to the works of even some liberal clergymen and “Christian caricaturists,” exhibited “nothing ... corresponding to the Negro – or ‘nigger’.” Moreover, the following citation used by Blyden was a revealing example of his concerted effort to conceptually

²³⁹ Benjamin Tucker Tanner, *An Apology for African Methodism* (Baltimore, 1867) Electronic Edition, (<http://docsouth.unc.edu/church/tanner/tanner.html>), University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Libraries, Documenting the American South, 16.

²⁴⁰ Blyden, “Mohammedanism and the Negro Race,” 14.

²⁴¹ Blyden, *Ibid.*, 14-15. Oleg Grabar Ettinhausen and Marilyn Jenkins-Madina, *Islamic Art and Architecture, 650-1250* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2001).

reconcile his defense of both Islam and African humanity. He sought to undermine, but not to completely dismiss, contemporaneous raciology and its oppressive power and apparent normality in the modern Western world:

The poet Abu Ishak Assabi, who lived in the tenth century, had a black slave named Yumma, to whom he was greatly attached, and on whom he wrote some remarkable verses, which are much quoted by Muslims. Notice the following:

The dark-skinned Yumma said to one whose colour equals the whiteness of the eye, “Why should your face boast its white complexion? Do you think that by so clear a tint it gains additional merit? Were a mole of my colour on that face it would adorn it; but one of your colour on my cheek would disfigure me.”²⁴²

Upon making such a strong argument in support of the civilizing power of Islam in West Africa, Blyden urged European and Christian readers to reconsider their flawed approach to the African. He advanced the thesis that successful missionary conversion could not result from “indiscriminate Europeanizing.” Indeed, while Blyden held that he did not share the blind missionary faith of his projected audience, he did share the hope “that there will be nothing to prevent Christianity from spreading among the Pagan tribes, and from eventually uprooting the imperfect Mohammedanism which so extensively prevails. In the meantime, we ought not to grudge the Africans the glimpses of truth which they catch from the Koran (*sic*).”²⁴³

Blyden held detractors to these sentiments to be a major source of impediment to the spread of Christianity. He noted that “before the Gospel can take root in ‘all the world,’ and become the spiritual life of ‘every creature,’” the hegemonic cultural influences of “one race – the Indo-European” – must come to an end before the

²⁴² Blyden, *Ibid.*, 16. Sherman A. Jackson identifies conceptualization of color, or race, in classical Islamic and Arab traditions that run counter to Blyden’s suggestion that Islamic history was reflective of color-blindness. See Jackson, *Islam and the Blackamerican: Looking Toward the Third Resurrection* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

²⁴³ Blyden, *Ibid.*, 22.

universality of Christianity will become manifest.²⁴⁴ While providing an historical account of various aspects of the transatlantic slave trade and the institution of slavery in the U.S. – with references to Bartolome de las Casas’s endorsement of African enslavement in lieu of indigenous inhabitants in the Americas (as well as las Casas’s “tardy, though commendable, repentance”); the Assiento contract between Britain and Spain (1713-1743) regarding shipment of slaves to Spanish possessions; John Wesley’s *Thoughts Upon Slavery* (1774); and George Bancroft’s *History of the United States* (1834-1874)²⁴⁵ – Blyden launched a consistent critique of Christianity’s dissemination and impact on Africans. In “Mohammedanism and the Negro Race,” as we saw previously, Blyden had already noted that “Christianity ... came to the Negro as a slave, or at least as a subject race in a foreign land ... In their condition as outcasts and pariahs, it directed their aspirations to a heavenly and external citizenship.”²⁴⁶ Blyden’s polemic against U.S. slavery, particularly his one-sided analysis of the dissemination of the religion and the characteristics of African American Christians (especially slaves), should be read as a discursive, ideological, and emotional attack on actual, systemic *rationalizations* of slavery.²⁴⁷ Blyden considered blacks in “Christian lands” as grossly inferior to their Muslim brethren in West Africa. Not only were black Christians the progeny of “Africans who were carried to the Western world (and who) were, as a general rule, of the lowest of the people in their own country” with “traditions” that were “carried away in the most distorted form,” but

²⁴⁴ Blyden, *Ibid.*, 26.

²⁴⁵ Blyden’s reference was to chapter twenty-four. Blyden, *Ibid.*, 28 fn.

²⁴⁶ Blyden, “Mohammedanism and the Negro Race,” 12.

²⁴⁷ For historical studies of enslaved blacks and religion, see Sterling Stuckey, *Slave Culture*; Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The “Invisible Institution” in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

It will be a long time before the intelligent Negro will be able to forget the injustice done to the moral instincts of his race, while he has access to the thrilling ‘narratives’ of such heroic and eloquent fugitives from slavery as Frederick Douglass, William Wells Brown, Henry Bibb, Roper &c.²⁴⁸

Even “intelligent,” fugitive Negroes such as Douglass, Brown, and Bibb, according to Blyden, were the products of a gross miseducation.²⁴⁹ Indeed, compared to what Blyden referenced as Negro Muslims, “The Negro in Christian lands, however learned in books, cannot be said to have such a thing as self-education.” They are never *taught* “to be the companion, the equal, the comrade of the white man.” Rather, s/he is only instructed to be “his imitator, his ape, his parasite.”²⁵⁰ Blyden’s dialectics led him to conclude that “the Muslim Negro,” in contradistinction to the average Christian Negro, “is a learner, is a disciple, not an imitator.”²⁵¹

The accuracy of Blydenic prescriptions, while at times striking, was arguably not the most intriguing or significant element of his maneuvering. His discursive self-fashioning betrayed a “blinkard”²⁵² that was commonly found among black intellectuals. Blyden was obsessed with the idea of the West and the protocols of civilizationism. A fundamental element of this spiritual ambivalence was the reconciliation of dealing with Africans as they existed and as they were imagined in dominant knowledge about Africa.

Spiritual Work²⁵³

Pan-Africanism has indisputably reflected a spiritual, authoritarian, masculine-

²⁴⁸ Blyden, “Christianity and the Negro Race,” 33, 35.

²⁴⁹ Carter Godwin Woodson, *The Mis-education of the Negro* (Washington, District of Columbia: Associated Publishers, 1933). Woodson is remembered by many as the “father” of the scientific study of African-American history, as well as being Founder of The Association for the Study of Negro Life and History and *The Journal of Negro History*.

²⁵⁰ Blyden, “Christianity and the Negro Race,” 37.

²⁵¹ Blyden, *Ibid.*, 37.

²⁵² Kobina Seyki, *The Blinkards* (London: Heinemann, 1974).

²⁵³ G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of the Spirit*. Translated by A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977; 1807).

centered content and form. This is a fact that has been established by the writings of intellectual historians.²⁵⁴ Almost a century ago saw the publication of *African Life and Customs* (1908) by Blyden. A study purportedly of the socioeconomic structure of modern African societies in West Africa, the ethnographic description of “the so-called Pagan African—the man untouched either by European or Asiatic influence”—found in *African Life and Customs* demonstrate the spiritual work of the pan-African imagination and the literary, conservative origin of black power ideology.²⁵⁵ Widely acknowledged for his activities during the formative years of Liberian nationalism and pan-Africanism, the educator, linguist, writer, and world traveler spent all of his adult years researching, teaching, and writing on what he came to refer to in his intellectual maturity as “social questions” relating specifically to the modern African. The stated preface to *African Life and Customs* was “the desire, if possible, of unfolding the African, who has received unmixed European culture, to himself, through the study of his fathers, and also the European political overlord, ruling in Africa, to arrive at a proper appreciation of conditions.”²⁵⁶ It was also the modern European subject, according to Blyden, who must endeavor to attain the object of achieving “the accurate knowledge ... of the people and country which he is attempting to exploit.”²⁵⁷ His writings were exemplars of pan-Africanistic discourses on *African modernity* in the “historical and sociological context” of Anglophone, or English-speaking, colonial and postcolonial situations.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁴ E. Frances White, *Dark Continent of Our Body*. See also Wilson Jeremiah Moses’s *Creative Conflict in African American Thought*.

²⁵⁵ Blyden, Edward Wilmot, *African Life and Customs*, 10.

²⁵⁶ Blyden, *Ibid*, 3.

²⁵⁷ Blyden, *Ibid*, 3.

²⁵⁸ F. Abiola Irele, “Pan-Africanism and African Nationalism” in *The African Experience in Literature and Ideology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981, 1990), 117-24; Robert J.C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Maiden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2001), 15-69.

The discursive form of Blyden's *African Life and Customs* and earlier writings was of particular significance. The form was one that was reflective of a propagandistic editorial framework found in newspapers across West Africa during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, intended for an educated, English-speaking audience. The series of essays in the book initially appeared in the *Sierra Leone Weekly News* and was favorably commented upon by one of Blyden's most devoted disciples, Casely Hayford.²⁵⁹ The remarkable thing about *African Life and Customs* is the concise nature of its description of family, property, social life, and law. It is an admittedly “little book,” demonstrating compatibility with the reading sensibilities of public-culture, providing details on the historical unfolding of the imagination of one “Man of Africa” in particular. According to Blyden, it was from the study of “less the objective reality than in its subjective, ideological significance – in the progressive hold which it has taken of African minds to such an extent that it has assumed a dominant place in African political consciousness and expression”²⁶⁰ that the spiritual work of the pan-African imagination achieved clarity.

Collectivist discourse, to borrow from Partha Chatterjee, was a “different discourse, yet dominated by another.”²⁶¹ According to Chatterjee, “two domains” existed within colonial and postcolonial societies: “the material and the spiritual.”²⁶² The “domain of spirituality” constituted a cultural space (e.g., religious, linguistic, et cetera) in which the discursive formulation of a particular ideological framework – indeed, an

²⁵⁹ Casely Hayford, “Barrister Hayford on the Race Question,” Appendix A. in *African Life and Customs*, 77-88.

²⁶⁰ Irele, “Pan-Africanism and African Nationalism,” 117.

²⁶¹ Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought in the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1986), 42.

²⁶² Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 6.

alternative historical narrative – was developed by colonial and postcolonial subjects. The history of nationalisms, or “imagined communities,” within African and Asian settings cannot be considered as mere reflections of collectivist patterns established within the Western world. For Chatterjee, Benedict Anderson’s analysis of nationalism suggested that even the imaginations of the colonial world were subject to colonialism. That is, Anderson’s treatment posited, for Chatterjee, that “the rest of the world have to choose their imagined communities from certain ‘modular’ forms already made available to them by Europe and the Americas.”²⁶³ However, “the most powerful as well as the most creative” aspects of nationalism were based on a “*difference* with the ‘modular’ forms propagated by the modern West.”²⁶⁴ We are presented with the suggestion that these creative projects were aimed to construct a non-Western, modern, national cultural tradition. Chatterjee argued that it was during this spiritual phase of nationalism that the most creatively explosive processes of imagination occurred and attained power among the colonized, even when the battles for political authority had yet to commence. It was also within the spiritual domain that appeals for difference from the imperial power were most pronounced among the creative classes. Yet, political struggles within the material domain, or the “domain of sovereignty,” were premised on demonstrative performances, or demands, of sameness; this affirmed the normality or “universality of the modern regime of power,” according to Chatterjee. Thus, if we rely only on the findings that emerge from a materialist approach to nationalism and other forms of collective identity, and if we consider only engagements in formal governmental politics, Chatterjee suggested that we can only logically conclude that the colonial and postcolonial world

²⁶³ Chatterjee, *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁶⁴ Chatterjee, *Ibid.*, 6.

will “only be perpetual consumers of modernity” instead of productive inventors.²⁶⁵

The contemporary intellectual conversation about collective identity remains, in a word, ambivalent. Scientific findings have effectively jettisoned all rationalizations of biologically determined social categories. “Race” is unquestionably an historical construct.²⁶⁶ One of the central themes looming within these debates at the turn-of-the-century specifically concerned the Western world’s apparent obsession with raciology.²⁶⁷ The globalization of Western modernity seems to suggest that race is an important ingredient in the moral and ethical stuff that the actual world is made of. It is certainly arguable that Western civilization exerted a strangling and intimate embrace of Africa and Africans since the fifteenth century. Chronicles of the history of modern Africa and the African diaspora frequently portray how African peoples negotiated colonial, imperial, neocolonial, and postcolonial relationships.²⁶⁸ An important site of strategic negotiation occurred within the subjective experiences of African persons. The study of the intellectual history of persons of African descent allows us to closely evaluate the more subjective intricacies of black negotiations of modern life. Investigations of social and cultural elements cannot yield similar results as a study that purports to be a study of ideas, abstract principles, and inscriptions. We submit that all interpretations of lived experiences ultimately emerge from individual subjectivities and that all minds have their own peculiarities and relations to the body.²⁶⁹ African and African-American intellectuals

²⁶⁵ Chatterjee, *Ibid.*, 5, 26.

²⁶⁶ Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*, 1-3, 358-65. Recall that, according to Berlin: “Race is not simply a social construction; it is a particular kind of social construction—a historical construction ... it cannot exist outside of time and place.”

²⁶⁷ Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*. Translated from the German by E.F.N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 1974; 1951); Paul Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2000).

²⁶⁸ Young, *Postcolonialism*.

²⁶⁹ Claudia Benthien, *Skin: On the Cultural Border Between the Self and the World*. Translated from the

reshaped dominant American, European, and Asian theories into their own respective ideologies.²⁷⁰

Conservative Black Power

As a part of our consideration of the intellectual contours that were operative in the responsive rubric of a specific thinker, the principle, guiding context in this chapter is one that takes into account how Blyden himself made sense of the history of European interaction with persons of African descent. The biographer Hollis R. Lynch, among others, described the nineteenth-century, in particular, as a period during which emerged an articulate black intellectual elite class across the Atlantic world²⁷¹, which in large part influenced subsequent discourse among anti-colonial, civil rights, and black power thinkers and activists.²⁷² The formative years of pan-Africanism also occurred during the nineteenth-century.²⁷³ Our analysis of this collectivist sentiment reveals it to be theoretically centered on the creative formulation of projects for the psychological and socioeconomic uplift of persons of African descent in relation to modernity. We are inclined to conclude that Blydenic prescriptions for African interaction with, inclusion in, and adaptation to modern modes of civilization were of more historical, social, and

German by Thomas Dunlap (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

²⁷⁰ For rigorous overviews of western civilization, its contacts and relationship to African and African diasporic thought, see Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of The Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2000; London: Zed Press, 1983) and Martin Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization, Volume 1: The Fabrication of Ancient Greece 1785-1985* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1987). Lynn Roper provides a brilliant psychoanalytic study of witches in an effort to discern individual subjectivity in early Modern Europe in *Oedipus and the Devil: Witchcraft, Sexuality, and Religion in Early Modern Europe* (London: Routledge, 1994). See also Sterling Stuckey's *Slave Culture* and Walter Johnson's *Soul by Soul*.

²⁷¹ Lynch, *Edward Wilmot Blyden*. See also Ifeoma Kiddoe Nkwankwo, *Black Cosmopolitanism: Racial Consciousness and Transnational Ideology in the Americas* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005); Moses, *Creative Conflict in African American Thought*; Zachernuk, *Colonial Subjects*.

²⁷² For compilations of primary documents of nineteenth-century black nationalistic thought, see Sterling Stuckey's *Ideological Origins of Black Nationalism* and Wilson Moses' *Classical Black Nationalism*. See also Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism* and Young, *Postcolonialism*.

²⁷³ Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism*, 15-32.

intellectual legitimacy than contemporary and future attitudes were usually willing to concede.

Noteworthy were the three decades that have passed since the burgeoning of mainstream scholarly interests in the historical development of what was frequently, and at times erroneously, referred to as black nationalism, and by extension, pan-Africanism and black power theory and practice. Much of the recent scholarship devoted to this ideological tradition was indebted to the emergence of Marxist historiography and other offshoots of the radical segments of the anti-colonial, civil rights, and black power political movements during the twentieth-century.²⁷⁴

For example, Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), Elijah Muhammad and the Nation of Islam (NOI), and other popular efforts to ameliorate the psychological and material oppression of black people in the “wilderness of America” continue to form much of the content of popular recollections, with much ado about Stokley Carmichael’s well-known advocacy of “Black Power!” in Greenwood, Mississippi. In other words, twentieth-century manifestations of black collectivism have largely shaped the ways in which we imagine racial discourse.²⁷⁵ Modern sensibilities hold an enormous sway over the popular and scholarly imaginations. Sharp distinctions were drawn between “modern” black nationalism and pan-Africanism and their remarkably “classical,” conservative, bourgeois roots. Thus, any study of the historical development of nationalistic articulations must necessarily participate in a contemporary conversation with both advocates and opponents of raciology.²⁷⁶ This scholarly

²⁷⁴ August Meier and Elliot Rudwick, *Black History and the Historical Profession*; Young, *Postcolonialism*.

²⁷⁵ Moses, *Afrotopia*.

²⁷⁶ See William L. Van Deburg, Editor, *Modern Black Nationalism: From Marcus Garvey to Louis*

engagement with a rich intellectual tradition of early conservative thought in African and African-American intellectual history can potentially lead us to a greater understanding of the historical processes of globalization.

But even when attention was given to nationalistic genealogy, the ambivalent and often contradictory nature of its civilizing discourse was largely subject to judgment instead of questioning analysis.

WE MUST RECOGNIZE that black people, whether in Durham, North Carolina; San Francisco, California; Jamaica, Trinidad, Brazil, Europe – or on the mother continent, that we are all an African people, we are Africans, there can be no question about that.

In this excerpt from a 1969 speech read in his absence at the opening convocation of Malcolm X Liberation University in Durham, North Carolina, Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Toure) stressed: “‘Come Back to Africa’ will not be just a dream, but it will be a reality.”²⁷⁷ Others who saw themselves as continuing the struggles initiated by earlier black “revolutionaries” echoed his pan-Africanistic vision. As the heightened black power sentiment during the 1960s and 1970s revived attention to its then obscure nineteenth-century ideological precursors, full considerations of the varying contradictions and conservatism of the previous century’s intellectual currents were not directly addressed within these more recent intellectual and political projects.²⁷⁸ The elitism and conservatism of Martin Delany and Henry McNeal Turner, for example, were jettisoned in efforts to retain their heroism. Masculine-centered approaches may have been solely due to the cultural and political climate of modern scholar-activists.²⁷⁹ As the

Farrakhan (New York: New York University Press, 1997).

²⁷⁷ Reprinted Stokely Carmichael, “We Are All Africans”: A Speech by Stokely Carmichael to Malcolm X Liberation University,” 65-68.

²⁷⁸ Nell Painter, “Martin R. Delany: Elitism and Black Nationalism.”

²⁷⁹ Hazel Carby, *Race Men*, 11.

historian Wilson J. Moses put it, civilization, “the idea that history could be divided into stages or phases, the idea that human society was in the process of improvement,” was central to nineteenth-century “Victorian progressivism.”²⁸⁰ Teleological and progressive conceptualizations of history were a critical part of dominant American and European social and racial thinking.²⁸¹ Nineteenth-century black intellectuals simultaneously combated, appropriated, and adapted contextual intellectual rhetoric. “Manhood and race” were central to this dominant ideology in which Anglo-Saxon Christian civilization was believed to occupy the highest stage of human evolution.²⁸²

In a chilling response to the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, Martin R. Delany lamented in 1852 that “we are slaves in the midst of freedom.” Delany was, perhaps, most well-known for his fiery demands for black citizenship and self-determination, agitating for emigration to Canada and parts of the Caribbean at one point in his career as well as serving as a Major in the Union Army during the Civil War.²⁸³ Again, as the historian Nell Irvin Painter observes,

Because the black nationalism of the 1960s and 1970s was egalitarian and democratic, ... [f]ew of [Delany’s] twentieth-century admirers realized that his nineteenth-century black nationalism was an elitist, not democratic, creed. His chosen constituency was what he called “intelligent colored men and women,” and he saw the masses as no more than a mute, docile work force to be held by their betters—their *black* betters, but their betters nonetheless.²⁸⁴

Consider also Turner’s racial pride and advocacy of what Painter, again, views as “the settler ideal”: “[W]e certainly protest against God being a white man or against God being white *at all* ... This is one of the reasons we favor African emigration, or Negro

²⁸⁰ Moses, *Golden Age*.

²⁸¹ Reginald Horseman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*; Kim Hall, *Things of Darkness*.

²⁸² Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 1-44.

²⁸³ Painter, “Martin R. Delany,” 149-173.

²⁸⁴ Painter, *Ibid.*, 170; Martin R. Delany, *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States*, 109.

naturalization.” Writing at the end of the nineteenth-century, African Methodist Episcopal Church Bishop Turner’s reflections on the history of Christianity and “race” had convinced him that “God is a Negro.”²⁸⁵ The appeals for racial pride and spiritual self-determination by Delany and Turner were clearly in dialogue with racism in the United States. Indeed, the civilizing ethos and dimensions of their stances were never fully reconciled with their race work. Emigration to Africa was never considered a popular option in the African diaspora in the western hemisphere.²⁸⁶ It was also not surprising that elite black intellectuals and activists harbored essentialist conceptions about the so-called pagan inhabitants of the African Atlantic world, nor were these sort of views unique to black intellectuals.²⁸⁷ Monotheistic conceptualizations of human progress were not frequently considered as separate from the historical imaginations of many. Theodore Draper’s focus on early black nationalist “fantasy,” then, can be coupled with Tunde Adeleke’s recent book, *UnAfrican Americans*, as adequate examples of what we consider to be the problematic historiography entangled with the study of the conservative origins of black power ideology.²⁸⁸

What is surprising about these two examples of relatively recent scholarly judgments of the intellectual precursors to twentieth-century Black Power Movement is not that they were marred by what some historians refer to as presentism or “reading back” into the narration of history from a contemporary standpoint, creating a grand historical narrative. According to Wilson Moses,

Students of literature and culture for the last twenty years have evaluated black

²⁸⁵ Henry McNeal Turner, “God is a Negro,” 154-155; Painter, *Ibid.*, 171.

²⁸⁶ Lynch, *Edward Wilmot Blyden*, 105-139; Moses, *Creative Conflict in African American Thought*, 257-258.

²⁸⁷ Jordan, Winthrop, *White Over Black*; Hall, Kim, *Things of Darkness*.

²⁸⁸ Theodore Draper, *The Rediscovery of Black Nationalism*; Tunde Adeleke, *UnAfrican Americans*.

life and art almost solely in terms of their usefulness in undermining any vestiges of Victorian civilization that survive in the larger society.

We do not share those opinions that deem new historians as being unwilling to focus on “tough-minded” black social and political thought in lieu of devoting attention to only what some have considered the “exotic quality” of literary productivity.²⁸⁹

The dominant trope of John Hope Franklin’s *From Slavery to Freedom* reflected an epistemological framework shared by scholars and laypersons alike. In the preface to the very first edition of the text (1947), Franklin states what was arguably the underlying thesis of the celebrated volume: “The history of the Negro in America is essentially the story of the nameless millions who have sought adjustment [acculturation] in a new and sometimes hostile world.”²⁹⁰ Much of the scholarly and popular understanding of African and African diasporic history reflected recognition of the myriad of struggles for social equality and assimilation into a national polity. Indeed, this understanding was certainly not wholly inaccurate. Did it explain the complexities of human experiences? For instance, how do we account for black thinkers who agitated for freedom but did not see a progressive future for African-Europeans and African-Americans in direct conjunction with white majorities?

The exiled Negro in the Western hemisphere..., in spite of slavery, in spite of the bitter prejudices, dark passions of which he has been the victim, has come under influences which have given him the elements of a nobler civilization. The seed of a spiritual, intellectual, industrial life has been planted in his bosom, which, when he is transferred to the land of his fathers, will grow up into beauty, expand into flowers, and develop into fruit which the world will be glad to welcome.²⁹¹

Are conservative articulations of this sort not important or, worse, mere fantasy? Blyden's

²⁸⁹ Wilson Moses, “The Lost World of the Negro, 1895-1919,” 66.

²⁹⁰ John Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss, Jr., *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans*, Sixth Edition (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Inc., 1988), xi-xii.

²⁹¹ Blyden, Preface to the First Edition (1887), *Christianity, Islam, and the Negro Race*, i.

theoretical findings, his contributions to the construction of an African philosophy²⁹², are central elements of our interrogation of the logic of black power politics. He was a part of the nineteenth and twentieth century advocates of a counter-cultural tradition that emerged in the Atlantic World in response to overlapping systems of interconnection – diasporas – one of the more significant examples of the central players in the historical legacy of the entanglements of racial nationalism, pan-Africanism, and black power politics.

²⁹² Robert July, *A History of the African People*, Fifth Edition (Long Grove, Illinois: Waveland Press, Incorporated, 1998), 331.

Chapter V

Conclusion: Anglo-African and Negro-Saxons Writing the History of Black Nationalism

Nationalistic rhetoric was a central theme within the social and political thought of African American and African intellectuals during the long nineteenth-century. African American and African historiographies, the Pan-African movement, and especially twentieth-century black intellectuals' engagement with black nationalism and pan-Africanism complicate our understanding of the intellectual development of Atlantic figures in the African diaspora across time and place. A black transatlantic intellectual community articulated varying responses to white domination of persons of African descent during the nineteenth-century. Black journalists and activists played a vital role in intellectual and political efforts against black enslavement in the United States and throughout the Atlantic world. Indeed, the age of emancipation captured the attention of educated Northern free blacks, further sparking their interests in challenging the United States (and Western Europe) to live up to its democratic creed.²⁹³ Scholars of early black nationalistic thought generally concede that this strain of intellectual discourse was in response to the social, political, and economic domination of blacks by whites in the New

²⁹³ For a classic treatment of the complexities of the early debates about American democracy, see Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1969) and Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "Dis-covering the subject of the 'great constitutional discussion,' 1786-1789," *The Journal of American History*, Volume 79 (December 1992), 841-73. John Hope Franklin's seminal *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans* (New York: A.A Knopf, 2000) entails an excellent overview of African-American agitation for equality in the United States.

World.²⁹⁴ Hence, any study of early black nationalists' varying manipulations of dominant discourses is inherently an analysis of power. The ideological roots of black nationalism and pan-Africanism, two intertwined political projects, emerged during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Such sentiment, in general, centered on the uplift of black Americans and all persons of African descent. Indeed, advocacy for inclusion in Western civilization was a dominant theme within pre-twentieth-century black leadership. The intellectual discourse of early black nationalists regarding Africa and the Negro race was, in a word, ambivalent, for it was always in dialogue with popular racial and white elite thought.

Wilson Moses has argued that “black chauvinism derives, ironically enough, from European racial theory. Like the concept of civilization, racial chauvinism can be traced back to the writings of [G. W. F.] Hegel, [Francois] Guizot, [Count Arthur De] Gobineau, and other continental racial theorists of the nineteenth century.”²⁹⁵ He suggests that the thoughts of several black nationalists are reflective of acceptances of race theorists' pronouncements on the “masculine” character of the Anglo-Saxon versus the “feminine” disposition of the “Negro.” But acceptances of “dominant” discourses did not mean that black nationalists failed to offer their own respective claims about the race. Black nationalists' “[r]acial chauvinism often consisted of arguing that nature had actually been kinder to the sensitive and gentle African than to the stolid, frigid European.”²⁹⁶ Eddie Glaude's findings on the racial solidarity of early black nationalists during the 1830s and 1840s differs from Moses's emphasis on black nationalists' appropriations of European

²⁹⁴ For compilations of primary documents of nineteenth-century black nationalism, see Sterling Stuckey, *Ideological Origins of Black Nationalism* and Wilson J. Moses, *Classical Black Nationalism*. See also Moses, *Golden Age of Black Nationalism*.

²⁹⁵ Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism*, 25.

²⁹⁶ Moses, *Ibid.*, 25.

racial theories. According to Glaude:

I contend that a conception of a black nation was formulated during this period that differs quite starkly from Moses'—an idea of nation not predicated on a biological conception of race (particularly since such ideas had not yet settled into common usage!). Instead, race language captured the distinctiveness of the oppressed condition of African Americans.²⁹⁷

In other words, Glaude argues that the varying expressions of racial solidarity among African-Americans stemmed from what he views as the “race language” of the (biblical) story of Exodus. Exodus “was useful and relevant because of the explanation it made available to those engaged in the struggle against slavery and racism.”²⁹⁸ It appears, I argue, that Glaude’s otherwise insightful analysis of how “nation language developed as a crucial feature of black political rhetoric during the 1840s,” as opposed to the “‘organic’ conceptions of the nation that appeared in the 1850s,” ignores a crucial feature. Moses’s focus, which is cited by Glaude, is on early black nationalist thought during the 1850s “[i]n its most secular form,” which was, indeed, reflective of European race theory.²⁹⁹

Defining black nationalism has been an object of several historians. According to Mary Frances Berry and John W. Blassingame:

Black nationalism is the belief that black people share a common culture and world view, have a common destiny, and have had a common experience: slavery, oppression, colonialism, and exploitation. Racial solidarity is perhaps the most basic form of black nationalism ... A higher and different level of consciousness is cultural nationalism, the view that all black people share a common lifestyle, aesthetic, and world view, often expressed in a distinctively black idiom in literature, art, music. Religious nationalism, a specific component of cultural nationalism, is the belief in a special black religious cosmology, including the idea that the deity is black. The highest expression and form of black nationalism is Pan-Africanism. In its broadest sense, Pan-Africanism is the belief that African peoples share a community of interests. Whether they are in Jamaica, Barbados, the United States, Uganda, Nigeria, Sweden, or Spain, blacks must unite in a common struggle for liberation. In a narrower sense, Pan-Africanism refers to the

²⁹⁷ Eddie S. Glaude, Jr., *Exodus!*, 15.

²⁹⁸ Glaude, *Ibid.*, 15.

²⁹⁹ Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism*, 25.

unity of African nations on the continent for mutual progress.³⁰⁰

According to Wilson Moses, “Classical black nationalism originated in the 1700s, reached its first peak in the 1850s, underwent a decline toward the end of the Civil War, and peaked again in the 1920s, as a result of the Garvey Movement.” John H. Bracey, Jr., August Meier, and Elliot Rudwick, in an excellent compilation of primary documents, *Black Nationalism in America*, offer a similar lineage of pre-twentieth-century black nationalistic thought. These authors identify racial solidarity, cultural nationalism, religious nationalism, economic nationalism, bourgeois reformism, revolutionary black nationalism, emigrationism, territorial separatism, and pan-Negroism (or pan-Africanism) as “varieties of black nationalism, of varying degrees of intensity.” Further,

The varieties ... are often not sharply delineated, nor are they mutually exclusive categories. Any one individual may assume any number of combinations of black nationalism ... To deal exclusively with the varieties of black nationalism in American history is not to suggest that black nationalism existed[, but] ... to correct the generally held view that integration and assimilation had an undisputed reign in the minds of black Americans.³⁰¹

As opposed to earlier treatments, recent scholarly investigations have correctly identified early black nationalists’ conservatism. Wilson Jeremiah Moses has constantly noted the conservative and elite character of nationalism during the “classical” or “golden age of black nationalism”. His work on one of the most important African American black nationalist intellectuals, Alexander Crummell, remains the most authoritative treatment of any figure within this segment of black intellectualism. As Moses’s fitting subtitle of his intellectual biography of Crummell suggests, “civilization and discontent”

³⁰⁰ Mary Frances Berry and John W. Blassingame, “Black Nationalism,” in *World History: Topical Approaches: Readings for History 112*, Giles Conwill, Michele Brown Douglas, Daniel Klenbort, and Kurt Young, Morehouse College History Department, Editors (Wyomissing, Pennsylvania: Tapestry, 2000), 277. Original publication as Chapter 11 in Mary Frances Berry and John W. Blassingame, *Long Memory: The Black Experience in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).

³⁰¹ John H. Bracey, August Meier, and Elliot Rudwick, *Black Nationalism in America*, Editors (Indianapolis, Indiana: Bobbs-Merrill Company, Incorporated, 1970), xxvi-xxx.

aptly describes the epistemological frameworks of several of the major black nationalists during the nineteenth-century. In the case of the Crummell, the Episcopalian minister's disdain for "slave religion" and culture led him to vehemently protest the Negro's subjugation to ignorant, quasi-Christian southern whites. "What the Negro needs is CIVILIZATION" lamented Crummell, a black man educated at the Queen's College (Cambridge University) who was well aware that a great number of whites, representative of all social and intellectual strata, regarded him simply, and at best, as an exception. Though he probably would have viewed such a comment as offensive to his "full-blooded African" lineage, Crummell knew that he was always considered to be a classically educated Victorian "Negro," in the worst sense.³⁰²

The Case of Alexander Crummell

One of the most prolific black intellectuals during this period, was Alexander Crummell (March 3, 1819- September 10, 1898). He is one of the most important progenitor of twentieth-century black nationalism and pan-Africanism.³⁰³ Crummell's concern with Africa was not one-dimensional. Man's divine duty to partake in the grand march toward perfection or civilization was his primary concern. Inextricably bound to Man's duty was Crummell's belief in the divine purpose of the Negro race. Race, according to Crummell, entailed those individuals with similar or shared historical experiences. To Crummell, every race had a divine role, from the Anglo-Saxon to the

³⁰² Moses, *Alexander Crummell: A Study of Civilization and Discontent* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Gregory Rigsby, *Alexander Crummell: Pioneer in Nineteenth Century Pan-African Thought* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987); J.R. Oldfield, *Alexander Crummell (1819-1898) and the Creation of an African-American Church in Liberia* (Lewiston, New York: The Edwin Mellon Press, 1990).

³⁰³ Crummell is regarded as "the greatest nineteenth-century black intellectual," for instance by Cornel West. See West, "Black Strivings in a Twilight Civilization," *The Cornel West Reader* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 1999), 109.

Indian to the Teuton.³⁰⁴ Gregory Rigsby, who provided the first scholarly, full-length biography of Crummell, notes that Crummell believed "... these peculiar abilities were divinely predetermined for the betterment of all mankind" and that the African possessed "spiritual tendency as its peculiar genius." Crummell defined the African as a "man who has black blood flowing in his veins," which Rigsby contends "was an appeal on behalf of [continental] Africa and not a scientific definition." Crummell stated in an 1861 address:

For without a doubt, the black man, in the land of his thralldom, has been in the school of suffering; yea, tried in the fiery furnace, that being tried, he might secure therefrom the strength, the character, the ability which might fit him for a civilizer and a teacher. Not for death, as the Indian, for destruction, as the Sandwich islander, has the Negro been placed in juxtaposition with the Caucasian; but rather that he might seize upon civilization.³⁰⁵

Kwame A. Appiah has also commented on the concept of race found in Crummell's *The Future of Africa*. To Appiah, Crummell's view of the continent entailed a "single guiding concept – race," which Crummell "learned in America and confirmed in England." Appiah contends that Crummell's "racialism" was also "racist." Distinguishing "extrinsic racism," or notions of difference based on "moral" qualities (or lack thereof), from "intrinsic racism," which derives from concepts of sheer racial differences regardless of "capacities," Appiah argues that the latter type of racism more or less applies to Crummell. It should be noted that extrinsic racism is characterized as "false consciousness" that can be "given up or stubbornly held on to." Extrinsic racism is essentially a "cognitive incapacity." Crummell's intrinsic racism, his notion that "race is

³⁰⁴ For an informative evaluation of this component of Crummell's philosophy, see Moses, *Afrotopia*, 96-105.

³⁰⁵ Rigsby, *Pioneer*, 64.98; Crummell, "The Progress of Civilization along the West Coast of Africa," in Moses, *Classical Black Nationalism*, 185.

family” is deemed a “moral error” by Appiah.³⁰⁶

Fellow philosopher Lewis Gordon has challenged Appiah’s description of Crummell as a “racist” by pointing out that Crummell’s notions of race were indeed sociohistorical and derived from his Christian-centered conceptualizations of history and (just as important) progress.³⁰⁷ In short, it is clear that Crummell’s Africa and Africans were those who either occupied the continent or their descendants. Obviously, these persons included the victims of “[il]legitimate commerce, ... commerce then a robber, ... marauder, ... devastator, ... thief, ... murderer!” One should note that Crummell recognized and indicted the African agents of the trans-Atlantic slave trade as well as Europeans. Clearly, then, Crummell’s view of those with physical characteristics commonly associated (then and now) with Africans also entailed a religious, sociohistorical, determinist dimension.³⁰⁸

What is important about Appiah and Gordon’s debate is that it reveals not only efforts to reveal the “imagined communities”³⁰⁹ that nationalisms frequently rest upon, as well as (in this case, differing) acknowledgments of Crummell’s European intellectual influences, but that this conversation is also reflective of our intellectual climate. After all, Appiah and Gordon are actively engaged in discussions about the utility of race as an analytical and social category.³¹⁰ Both scholars rightly point out Crummell’s

³⁰⁶ Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In My Father’s House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 13-22.

³⁰⁷ Lewis R. Gordon, *Her Majesty’s Other Children: Sketches of Racism From a Neocolonial Age* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1997), 127-28. Gordon also challenges Appiah’s apparent misinterpretation of not only Crummellian philosophy but of Paul Gilroy’s concepts of “raciality” and “raciology.” See especially chapter 6, 123-24.

³⁰⁸ Crummell, “The Progress of Civilization,” 174; Appiah, *In My Father’s House*.

³⁰⁹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

³¹⁰ *African-American Philosophers: 17 Conversations*, George Yancey, Editor (New York: Routledge, 1998), 85-199; Lewis Gordon, *Her Majesty’s Other Children and Existenia Africana: Understanding*

manipulation of racial theory as well as his Victorian progressivism. Such observations allow us to understand an important example of the European, conservative, and elite dimensions of early black nationalism. But neither argument, I think, is complete. While it is certainly true that Crummell's final verdict entailed one becoming an English-speaking Christian, Lewis Gordon's opinion that Crummell ultimately did not "care what race any one was" does not appear to be the best way to view Crummell's perception of Africa and the Negro. Crummell's ambivalence regarding Africa and his hopes for the Negro were never fully reconciled with his "civilizationism." According to Crummell:

I mean by [civilization] the clarity of the mind from the dominion of false heathen ideas, ... the conscious impress of individualism and personal responsibility, ... recognition of the body, with its desires and appetites and passions as a sacred gift, and as under the law of divine obligation, ... the honor and freedom of womanhood, allied with the duty of family development, ... the sense of social progress in society, ... entrance of new impulses in the actions and policy of the tribe or nation, ... the elevated use of material things and a higher range of common industrial activities, ... the earliest possible introduction of letters, and books, and reading, and intelligence to the man, his family, and his social circles. All this I maintain is the secondary obligation of the [Christian] missionary endeavor among heathen people.³¹¹

As can be discerned from the above citation, Crummell's religious determinism and puritanical conceptualization of humanity are definitely not representative of a cultural relativist. Again, this is not surprising when we consider his historical context. Noteworthy is the fact that by the time of Crummell's birth, civilization – "the idea that history could be divided into stages or phases, the idea that human society was in the process of improvement" – was central to European social thinking. Crummell and

Africana Existential Thought (New York: Routledge, 2000); Appiah, "Du Bois and the Illusion of Race" and "The Conservation of 'Race'" in *In My Father's House*.

³¹¹ Alexander Crummell, "Civilization as a Collateral and Indispensable Instrumentality in Planting the Christian Church in Africa" from *Addresses and Proceedings of the Congress on Africa Held under the Auspices of the Stewart Missionary Foundation for Africa ...* (Atlanta, GA: Gammon Theological Seminary, 1896), 119-24. Reprinted in Alexander Crummell, *Destiny and Race: Selected Writings, 1840-1898* edited with an introduction by Wilson Jeremiah Moses (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), 272.

several other black nationalist echoed and reshaped European racial theories into their own respective ideologies. Hence, both Gordon and Appiah fail to assess Crummell's concern with the "Destined Superiority of the Negro" which is arguably just as critical to understanding his complex epistemological framework – in which "he voiced with eloquence and force several issues that dominated Anglo-African thought and writing during the nineteenth century" – as is recognizing his significant impact on his contemporaries and later thinkers.³¹²

Crummell's Christian-centered, sociohistorical philosophy entailed a "suffering" Negro race, "tried in a fiery furnace." Africa was a backwards continent in which "darkness covers the land, and gross darkness the people." This darkness stemmed from the lack of exposure to Christianity and resulted in "great evils, ... Fetiches [sic], human sacrifices, and devil worship." Crummell lamented:

Africa has remained, during the whole of the Christian era, almost entirely unvisited by the benignant rays, and the genial influences of our Holy Faith ... [I]f we strive to penetrate the long lapse of ages, ... we meet vista upon vista of the deepest darkness, stretching out to the earliest dawn of the world's being. So far as Western Africa is concerned, there is no history. The long, long centuries of human existence, there, give us no intelligent disclosures.³¹³

It is obvious that Crummell had virtually no respect for African cultural practices. Christianity and civilization were inseparable, and the African race had yet to come into contact with and embrace civilization in its various stages. Nineteenth-century West Africa was backwards because of its historical isolation from civilization. Crummell, partially relying on the work of German historian Georg Barthold Niebuhr, believed that

³¹² Moses, *Golden Age*, 20-25; *Alexander Crummell*, 276-301. For example, Crummell and Blyden developed "their own brand of racial chauvinism" based on "theories of organic collectivism" attributed to the German, Johan Gottfried von Herder. See also Stuckey, *Ideological Origins*. Crummell influenced several black intellectuals, such as W.E.B. Du Bois, William H. Ferris, and John E. Bruce.

³¹³ Crummell, "Civilization as a Collateral," 171.

“the civilization of all races has been conditioned on contact ... There is not in history the record of a single indigenous civilization; there is nowhere, in any reliable document, the report of any people lifting themselves up out of barbarism.”³¹⁴ Prior to respective displays of civilization, all great civilizations “became cosmopolitan thieves ... stole from every quarter [and] pounced ... upon excellence wherever discovered.”³¹⁵ Interestingly, Crummell characterized Egypt’s empire as one marred by “vile and infamous” cultural practices, while acknowledging her technological superiority and impressive but “frowning pyramids.” Even more intriguing, however, is his argument that the “superior” knowledge gained by the biblical Moses was derived from the Pharaohs. From the splendor of Egypt to the “intellectual greatness” of Greece to the “LAW AND GOVERNMENT” of Rome, the Egyptians, the Jews, the Greeks, and the Romans contributed to civilization. These groups possessed their own “racial genius” according to Crummell. Wilson Moses reminds us that “this progressive view of history in which ‘the race in the aggregate [was destined] to go forward and upward,’ was pervasive in Victorian Christianity.”³¹⁶ Thus, within this grand march towards perfection, Anglo-Saxon Europe occupied the highest state of civilization that the world had yet to witness, for Christianized western Europe had effectively subdued the rest of the world in her quest for greatness. This and especially the Anglo-Saxon’s technological and intellectual achievements, expressed in the “fine harmonies and grand thoughts of the English tongue,” – the “speech of Chaucer and Shakespeare, of Milton and Wordsworth, of Bacon and Burke, of Franklin and Webster” – served as adequate confirmation to Crummell of civilization’s current stage. Taking this into consideration, the historian Tunde Adeleke’s

³¹⁴ Crummell, *Ibid.*, 172. Appiah, *In My Father’s House*, 23.

³¹⁵ Crummell, “The Destined Superiority of the Negro,” in *Destiny and Race*, 202.

³¹⁶ Moses, *Alexander Crummell*, 108-09.

suggestion that Crummell believed that the origins of civilization rested in Europe is obviously an inaccurate analysis.³¹⁷

It should now be clear that Crummell's ambivalent conceptualization of Africa and her peoples was not one of absolute contempt, nor was it, as Adeleke has suggested, reflective of a "renunciation of African cultural values." Although Crummell surely did not appreciate African customs, as Sterling Stuckey has correctly pointed out, Crummell's lack of respect in this regard was applicable to all non-Christians.³¹⁸ However problematic Crummell's ideas regarding Africa's dire need for Christian redemption, as Adeleke has rightly identified, it would be extremely incorrect to suggest that Crummell was not sincerely committed to advancing the social, economic, and political situation of Africa and persons of African descent. Crummell, then, does not seem to have been "at odds" with his concern for the Negro race, for he was a firm believer in the idea that Christianity always obliterates barbarism.³¹⁹ Appiah's contention that Crummell was "racist" is somewhat misleading, for as Rigsby strongly reminds us, Crummell's "[b]lack unity is not racism in the modern sense of that word, but merely a stage toward the final grand rendezvous when all men shall be brothers." Indeed, Crummell pointed out that one of the gravest mistakes of the Negro race was his lack of unity:

But whence arises the weakness of our Race? Alas! for us, all along through this reign of terror, our afflicted people have been at sea! We have no coherence of race, we have had no unity of policy! We have shewn no resistance to outrage! We have no organized maintenance of our rights! ... Like the leaves of the forest our poor people, in divers sections, were scattered abroad at the fierce breath of their enemies!³²⁰

³¹⁷ Moses, "Civilizing Missionary," 237; Crummell, "Our National Mistakes and the Remedy for Them," in *Destiny and Race*, 191; Tunde Adeleke, *UnAfrican Americans*, 80.

³¹⁸ Adeleke, *Ibid.*, 119.

³¹⁹ Crummell, "Indispensable Instrumentality in Planting the Christian Church in Africa," 274. According to Crummell, the relationship between civilization and Christianity is "intrinsic," rather than "causal," and "is not the result of an accident" nor "historical coincidence." Crummell, *Ibid.*, 275.

³²⁰ Crummell, "The Discipline of Freedom," 246; Appiah, *In My Father's House*, 13-17; Rigsby, *Alexander*

The story of Alexander Crummell is one that will undoubtedly remain central to any serious investigation of nineteenth-century African American social and intellectual history. Crummell's significant intellectual presence was frequently acknowledged (favorably or not) by his contemporaries as well as by later personages. Indeed, his contribution to the foundations of nineteenth century and twentieth century black nationalism is clear within the thoughts of W.E.B. Du Bois, William Ferris, and Marcus Garvey. Yet Crummell's influence on later individuals indirectly contributes to the manner in which some presentist scholars evaluate him. This means that in many cases Crummellian philosophy is rightly viewed as an antecedent, but erroneously categorized as "less progressive." Crummell lived in a world vastly different than the ones experienced by current scholars. This is not to suggest that all scholarly treatments of Crummell fail to take into account his historical context. Crummell's involvement in colonial schemes in Liberia does not solely mean that he, for instance, "... anticipated, and possibly set the stage for, the content and character of colonial education." Nor does it necessarily mean that he was simply "a champion of the wretched of the earth."³²¹ Crummell's ambivalence regarding Africa, and his hopes for the Negro, were never fully reconciled with his civilizationism. Perhaps the one of the most "severe case[s] of double-consciousness," as Kevin K. Gaines points out, can be found in one of Blyden's protégés, William H. Ferris. In his *The African Abroad, or His Evolution in Western Civilization, Tracing his Evolution under Caucasian Milieu*, Ferris stated:

This colored race is no longer a pure Negro but a mixed Caucasian and Negro race, no longer a savage but a civilized race that is fast becoming cultured ... We colored people in America create a race problem in by calling ourselves by a

Crummell, 38.

³²¹ Adeleke, *UnAfrican Americans*, 89; Rigsby, *Alexander Crummell*, 181.

name that ethnologically and psychologically suggests that what one side of our ancestors were three hundred years ago. Negrosaxon [sic] ... suggests what we actually are to-day.³²²

Rethinking Black Nationalism: An Atlantic Perspective

As stated earlier, nineteenth-century black nationalism and pan-Africanism were two intertwined projects. Black nationalists' racial chauvinism always entailed international trajectories. Even anti-emigrationists such as Frederick Douglass and his emphasis on the Americanness of the Negro expressed "no objection to the civilization and christianization of Africa ... the land of my fathers."³²³ Hence, engaging the thought of early black nationalists requires not only a familiarity with the discourse of civilization and conceptualizations of race, but it also necessitates a transnational scholarly approach. Transnational approaches to the study of persons of African descent throughout the African diaspora has a long history, especially within what is currently referred to as African American historiography. In his discussion of black historians and international approaches to history, Robin Kelley argued that "black historians, many of whom operated relatively independent of the mainstream historical profession, had already developed an international or transnational approach to history by the early part of the twentieth century."³²⁴ As part of a larger, popular trend of globalization, other scholars have taken heed to the benefits of looking past national boundaries within intellectual analyses. Among the most noteworthy of this trend has been the reemergence of transnational approaches to the study of black communities located in the Atlantic world.

³²² Kevin K. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race*, 104; William Ferris, *The African Abroad, or His Evolution in Western Civilization, Tracing his Evolution under Caucasian Milieu*. 2 volumes. (New Haven, Connecticut: Tuttle, Morehouse, and Taylor Press, 1913) 310.

³²³ Frederick Douglass, "African Colonization Society," in Moses, *Classical Black Nationalism*, 136.

³²⁴ Robin D. G. Kelley, "'But a Local Phase of a World Problem': Black History's Global Vision, 1883-1950," *The Journal of American History* Volume 86, Number 3 (December 1999) 1048 n. 5.

Paul Gilroy's award-winning *The Black Atlantic* is one of the most well-known contributions to combating provincial, national approaches to the study of diasporic figures in the Atlantic world.

An interconnected region, the Atlantic world initially developed shortly after (and ever since) the commencement of the age of European exploration and comprises of western Europe, West Africa and the Americas. Though circum-Atlantic processes were initiated from western European centers, John Thornton's *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World* augments the way that scholars think about agency and Africans as historical actors. Present understandings of the varying connections in this region have rendered clear that social, political, cultural, and national identities are constructed. That is, identities are always contingent or based upon an essentialized Other. Noteworthy, then, is Gilroy's contribution to deessentializing conceptualizations of blackness. The various cultural expressions throughout the Atlantic world (and Africa) by persons of African descent require us to constantly reconsider what it means to be black.³²⁵

But there are difficulties, perhaps inherent, with transnational scholarly approaches to blacks in the New World. Getting past these obstacles is, I think, essential to adequately recovering the significance of the African presence in the modern Western world. Several current scholarly works have not exhibited careful considerations of historical context. Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* is an example of this problematic

³²⁵ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*; John Thornton, *Africans and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World*. I should note that Thornton's work is cited for its scholarly contribution and complexity. However, Thornton views the "significant" role Africans played in the making of the Atlantic world from a somewhat contorted perspective, in that he almost minimizes the actual cause of the black Atlantic or New World – European (broadly speaking) expansionism, exploitation, domination, and the formation of a "global," self-serving market.

phenomenon. We live in an era in which scientific findings have effectively jettisoned all rationalizations of biologically defined racial categories. A central theme within current discussions of race grapples with the western world's apparent obsession with this particular ideological construction. Modernity seems to suggest that race is an important ingredient in the stuff that the modern world is made of. As I stated earlier, Gilroy has contributed to deessentializing "blackness," though he is certainly not the first to do so. Cedric Robinson's sadly ignored *Black Marxism*, virtually unacknowledged by Gilroy, is a sophisticated treatment of black diasporic radicalism in the Americas. Also, spirited contributions from various circles, most notably from black feminists and critical race theoreticians, have pushed our understandings of the lived experiences of persons of African descent to new heights. Sidney Mintz's and Richard Price's critical observations of the diverse creative abilities of persons and groups throughout the early black Atlantic world help explain the long history of various locales of black presence. Michael A. Gomez's work on the gradual move from "ethnicity to race" among Africans in the Americas also adds immensely to our understanding of the constant transformations of ethnic identities.³²⁶

Theoretical analyses of the role of identity among African and African-American communities in the Atlantic World also point to varying ways in which blacks responded to systems that rest largely upon their exploited labor.³²⁷ The transformation of diverse West African ethnic groups into racialized groups was not solely the result of sheer

³²⁶ For a great theoretical analysis of the origins of the black Atlantic, see Sidney Mintz and Richard Price, *Birth of African-American Culture*; Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*; Michael A. Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*.

³²⁷ For a wonderful synthesis of various "societies" within North America, see Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*. Jane Landers's *Black Society in Spanish Florida* serves as an excellent addition to historians' understandings of North American slavery and the various constructions of racial identities.

coercion. That is, “Africans and their descendants did not simply forget (or elect not to remember) the African background. Rather, that background played a crucial role in determining the African American identity.”³²⁸ The works of Stuart Hall, Carole Boyce Davies, and others provide excellent suggestions about the racialized and engendered character of subjects in the Atlantic world. Hall’s triad definition of black identities in the Atlantic world captures the constant social and historical processes of “becoming” and “being” experienced by Africanized, Europeanized, and Americanized black subjects. That is, black American identities are “always-already creolised – not lost beyond the Middle Passage, but ever present.”³²⁹

The main point here is not to provide a comprehensive definition of pan-African nationalism in the Atlantic world. Collaborative work, in fact, is being done from all sides of the Atlantic. Rather, I have discussed concrete cases in the historical development of black nationalism and pan-Africanism from an Atlantic perspective because this approach provides a richer portrait of the complex dynamics at play on this evolving stage than a traditional diasporic dream of Africa uncovers. The term “Africa” itself, of course, has its own genealogy in the popular and political imagination. “Re-mapping and re-naming” the “ideologies of terminologies,” as Davies convincingly argues, calls for transnational considerations of the “multiple locations” of black nationalism and pan-Africanism.³³⁰ Nineteenth-century black nationalists and pan-Africanists viewed themselves as part of a transnational black community, frequently crisscrossing the Atlantic in efforts to garnish support for the establishment of an African nation-state. It is clear that future scholarly

³²⁸ Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, 13 (emphasis added).

³²⁹ Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” in Rutherford, J., Editor, *Identity: Community, culture, difference* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), 227-37.

³³⁰ Carole Boyce Davies, *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject* (London: Routledge, 1994), 4-5.

attempts to recover their stories must exhibit a deep appreciation for spatial and temporal specificity.

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