

Competing Ideals: How Commerce, Christianity, and Civilization
Shaped Nationhood in Nineteenth-Century Liberia

By

Shawn J. Mosher

Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty of the

Graduate School of Vanderbilt University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

History

December 15, 2018

Nashville, Tennessee

Approved:

Richard Blackett, Ph.D.

Dennis Dickerson, Ph.D.

Moses Ochonu, Ph.D.

Lucius Outlaw, Ph.D.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation has taken me on an interesting path, a sojourn marked by wonderment, puzzlement, and at times sheer terror. Throughout it all, the one constant has been my advisor, Professor Richard Blackett, who waded through reams of bad drafts and swam through gallons of red ink to get me where I am now. His guidance, patience, and offbeat humor were lifelines for me when I was struggling to make sense of the research material—or life in general. I am also indebted to other outstanding faculty at Vanderbilt, including Professor Dennis Dickerson for stressing to me the religious aspects of civil rights and Professor Lucius Outlaw for his razor-sharp thinking on racial essentialism.

During my archival trips, I received stellar service, though especially from the curatorial staff at The Archives of the Episcopal Church. Their level of support never wavered in my three separate trips there. They created a special microfilm reel and even helped me decipher a nearly illegible handwritten letter.

It has been said that we see further by standing on the shoulders of giants. That figure for me has been Dr. Jim Eckman, and I shall be eternally grateful for his wise counsel during a time of need.

Finally, I would like to thank my parents for teaching me the most important lessons. Mom's unconditional love and Dad's selfless sacrifice continue to remind me that though the life of the mind is important, the habits of the heart are paramount to finishing well.

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INTRODUCTION

The founding of the Republic of Liberia in 1847 was a crowning achievement for African Americans. Forty-three years after Haiti's independence, Liberia became only the second nation governed exclusively by freed blacks. In nineteenth-century terms, it was "a Negro nationality" on equal diplomatic footing as such international powers as France, Great Britain, and the United States.

Liberia rose from inauspicious beginnings. Beginning in the 1820s an eclectic collection of African Americans emigrated from the United States back to their ancestral homeland of Africa. Without official government sponsorship, they established a tiny outpost in West Africa. Being descendants of African slaves shipped to North America, the emigrants had to rebuild their lives in an unfamiliar land, one that they knew only from secondhand stories passed down from generation to generation. The early years as a colony were brutal. Death, disease, financial hardship, sociocultural ruptures, and warfare with natives conspired to limit the number of emigrants to Liberia. They also faced opposition from blacks in America, who feared leaving would weaken the abolitionist movement while bolstering white arguments that free blacks did not belong in the United States. Despite the dearth of domestic and governmental support, emigrants received much needed financial assistance from a private philanthropic organization, the American Colonization Society. Through the generosity of white colonizationists, black colonists were able to get on their feet, figuratively and literally, during their first year in Africa. Prominent Liberian leaders would credit the economic aid as crucial to their early existence as a colony.

In time, Liberia's colonists felt the need to direct their own future. The stated goal had always been to create a land of liberty for African Americans, who suffered from discrimination

and enslavement in antebellum America. Part of building a Negro nationality meant self-governance, and Liberians were determined to rule themselves. With the blessing of the American Colonization Society, they began to assert their authority in several areas: in politics, economics, education, and religion. In 1841 Joseph Jenkins Roberts became the first black colonial governor. Liberian merchants built shipping networks, whose trade deals reached six figures by decade's end. In 1862 Liberians celebrated the opening of the country's first institution of higher education in the capital of Monrovia. And black missionaries pioneered native schools and churches at the frontier edges, leading to the appointment of Samuel Ferguson as the first black Episcopalian missionary bishop in 1884.

Liberia's national progress, however, was anything but a straight line. Boundary disputes with France's and Great Britain's African colonies created diplomatic crises that threatened to explode into open warfare (and certain defeat) for Liberia. Squeezed by the territorial demands of these two traditional powers, Liberia had to thread the needle between autonomy and subservience. Furthermore, Liberia experienced testy relations with the indigenous populations within its borders. From the start of emigration, African Americans had proclaimed one of their priorities to be evangelizing "heathen" natives, who lacked the salvific benefits of the Christian gospel. But competition for land and resources marred prospects for a mutually advantageous relationship. Many aborigines viewed Liberians as faithless intruders whose actions failed to live up to their lofty ideals. The challenge for Liberia was in figuring how to motivate, incorporate, or intimidate natives into a cohesive alliance. Finally, Liberia had to address the internal factions in its own community. Divisions arose over differences between class, color, and cultural orientation (whether to be Western-leaning or African-focused). Affecting all these relationships was the need to keep white colonizationist benefactors happy. Although no longer the

acknowledged head after 1847, the ACS still exerted influence by virtue of its continued bankrolling of Liberian leaders and institutions. Despite Liberia's independence, white colonizationists were important stakeholders who had to be consulted and appeased.

The question for Liberia was how to unite and subsume these disparate parties under a single identity while fending off international competitors. Without the largesse of another country like the United States, Liberia owned little economic clout with which to impress and influence. What it did have, though, was the progressive promise of three instrumental ideas—that of commerce, civilization, and Christianity. Commerce, specifically the notion of free trade, would woo people with the potential of financial prosperity through unfettered access to new markets. This possibility was especially attractive to natives, whose economies were generally more subsistent and localized than what their Liberian counterparts envisioned for themselves. Civilization was an elastic concept that encompassed the tangible results that would derive from education, government, and values formation. Education provided literacy and mathematics, both vital to conducting business with Western traders. Government, or agreeing to representative republicanism, would give participants a voice in how their affairs were conducted and defended, at least in theory. Security from enemies was the primary reason to adhere oneself to the government in Monrovia, and it resulted in the formation of both the country and “civilized settlements” of native allies. Christianity was the last spoke in the wheel of progress and represented not just the gospel of Christ but also an entire value system derivative of the way African Americans practiced Western religion in the nineteenth century.

This dissertation examines how Liberians utilized commerce, civilization, and Christianity in their attempt to build a national identity in the first five decades after independence.

CHAPTER 1

“Africa for the African race, and black men to rule them”: Conceptualizing Emigration in the Mid-Nineteenth Century

The emigration of African Americans to Liberia served as a forum in which to work out definitions of citizenship. Paul Gilroy provides a useful starting point in thinking about the issue when he outlines three phases of the “Black Radical Tradition.”¹ The struggle for emancipation (e.g. antislavery), rights (e.g. political action), and an autonomous space (e.g. “nationality” separatism)—these boundaries delineate the traditional concerns of slaves, free blacks, and emigrationists. The fight for “rights” raises a pertinent question: how did African Americans conceive equality? Rebecca Scott argues that in Cuba and the postbellum South, suffrage acted as the psychological hallmark of citizenship.² This idea of equality as being primarily political is interesting, insofar as an emphasis on suffrage was downplayed in the rationale of leading emigrationists—Martin Delany, Edward Blyden, and Alexander Crummell—who desired to leave the United States during the nineteenth century. To be sure, this trio criticized their inability to participate in the political process, but they differed in their main reasons for leaving, particularly in their abstract formulations for emigration. Delany rooted his reasons in Masonic doctrine, Blyden relied on his belief in racial instincts, and Alexander Crummell structured his case around hierarchal “civilizationism.”

¹ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 122.

² Rebecca J. Scott, *Degrees of Freedom: Louisiana and Cuba after Slavery* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press/Harvard University Press, 2005), 189-207.

C. L. R. James attributes material concerns as the primary motivation for domestic migration during World War I.³ Subsequent historians, most notably Edwin Redkey, have reached a similar conclusion in studying the emigration movement during the last three decades of the nineteenth century, namely that material concerns drove these emigrationists more than any real commitment to a mystical nationhood.⁴ No doubt economic deprivation pushed the group Michele Mitchell describes as the “working poor” to clamor for another alternative to the American South with its sharecropping and crop lien systems.⁵ The crumbling of Reconstruction prompted a flurry of urgent missives to the American Colonization Society from impoverished black laborers desperate to escape crushing debt and lethal violence. Yet though dreaming of improving their material lot, members of the “working poor” also presented a host of other reasons for yearning to flee the country. By wishing to go to his “nativ land,” Jeremiah Jenkins intimates his lost sense of belonging, in that he regards himself as an outsider and alien outside of Africa, a place he had almost surely never visited.⁶ Likewise, in describing Africa as “Heaven” and “Home,” John Wilkins implies that he currently dwelled in hell, a sojourning saint tormented by those considerably less worthy than he.⁷ The letters in the American Colonization

³ C. L. R. James, *A History of Pan-African Revolt* [1938/1969] (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr Publishing Co., 1995), 97.

⁴ See Edwin S. Redkey, *Black Exodus: Black Nationalist and Back-to-Africa Movements, 1890–1920* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1969), 5.

⁵ Michele Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny after Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), xx.

⁶ Jeremiah Jenkins to Lardner Gibbon, 1 August 1879, American Colonization Society Papers, roll 119, quoted in Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 333.

⁷ John Wilkins to [William Coppinger?], 12 November 1877, American Colonization Society Papers, roll 116B, quoted in Claude A. Clegg, III, *The Price of Liberty: African Americans and the Making of Liberia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 258.

Papers, then, find a more ambiguous materialism and less nuanced and cohesive political nationalism being recited, if at all.

Leading emigrationists also grounded their beliefs in the sacred and mystical, whether Freemasonry or nationality, providentialism or civilizationism. While they advertised political and material benefits of emigrating, they also laid spiritual and philosophical plumb lines that outlined what an alternative homeland would look like and encompass. If anything, identity was—to borrow Stephanie Smallwood’s term—multivalent, as variegated and competing interests shaped emigrationists’ desire to leave.⁸

Yet the journey across the Atlantic tended to alter lofty pre-migration ideas of identity and belonging. Once in their ancestral homeland, emigrants, as James Sidbury puts it, “became American in Liberia.”⁹ They often defaulted to Western values and ideas, familiar to them but foreign to their native neighbors. In recent years, the role of emigrationists, particularly their missionaries, has grown controversial, as historians have pilloried them for harboring elitist and imperialist sentiment. For example, William Montgomery accuses emigrationists like Henry M. Turner of deploying the same Social Darwinian thought that whites utilized to justify imperialism in Africa.¹⁰ James Campbell raises this very point in arguing that “Turner managed to recapitulate virtually the entire catalogue of rationalizations for contemporary European imperialism.”¹¹ From this perspective, black missionaries were imperialists who preyed upon

⁸ Stephanie Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 115.

⁹ James Sidbury, *Becoming African in America: Race and Nation in the Early Black Atlantic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 181.

¹⁰ William E. Montgomery, *Under Their Own Vine and Fig Tree: The African-American Church in the South, 1865–1900* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993), 209.

¹¹ James T. Campbell, *Middle Passages: African American Journeys to Africa, 1787–2005* (New York: Penguin Press, 2006), 123.

unsuspecting natives by imposing commercial and cultural hegemony over their “benighted” charges. At first glance, black emigrationists deserve moral opprobrium for advancing a self-serving and complicit “civilizing mission” that endorsed exploitation under the mantras of progress and moral perfectionism.

Yet John Thornton, Linda Heywood, and James Sweet offer a necessary corrective. Room exists for “Africanized” Christianity that neither exploits nor colonizes. Thornton and Heywood show that Christianity could serve as a key cultural bond that remained malleable enough for the Kongolese to construct new communal identities. Religious conversion stood not as a simple transfer of European Catholicism but as an active appropriation of religious symbols and meanings that gave only a cursory nod to European ecclesiastical hierarchy. Sometimes, religious organization could run counter to its intended design. For instance, Laurent Dubois illustrates the potential for black Catholic confraternities to subvert white colonialists’ original intentions for them.¹² According to Wilson Moses, later African nationalists and Pan-Africanists came to favor Christian redemptionism as an effective vehicle for promoting continental and transnational unity.¹³ And as Campbell notes in his earlier work *Songs of Zion*, Africans latched onto the idea of a transnational movement dedicated to fighting against white power and oppression.¹⁴ These observations are not to suggest that “heathenism” did not stand as a surrogate for African inferiority and hence as a pretext for rationalizing African dependence upon African Americans. What it does, however, is compel historians to distinguish between

¹² Laurent Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens: Revolution and Slave Emancipation in the French Caribbean, 1787–1804* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 88.

¹³ Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *Creative Conflict in African American Thought: Frederick Douglass, Alexander Crummell, Booker T. Washington, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Marcus Garvey* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 101.

¹⁴ James T. Campbell, *Songs of Zion: The African Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States and South Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 157.

legitimate and illegitimate usage of African and African American Christianity on an international mission field. If Africans appropriated Christianity in the Kongo or in Brazil, they also appropriated it when black Americans exported it to Liberia.

Finally, one must grapple with bidirectionality (or tridirectionality) inherent in the Atlantic Diaspora. This is especially true of Blyden, a native West Indian who spent time in the United States before splitting time between British Sierra Leone and Liberia. Blyden is a fascinating case study of diasporic identity, especially because he admonishes that “the duty of every man, of every race is to contend for its individuality—to keep and develop it. If you are not yourself, if you surrender your personality, you have nothing left to give the world.”¹⁵ Yet how does this individuality operate in a diasporic setting? In later years, Blyden roots one’s individuality and personality in racial instinctualism or biologism, lauding Africa as the superior locale in which individuality can thrive. This raises the question whether Blyden has given up on the promising potential that diasporic migration and interchange can bring. What has happened to Michel Trouillot’s “self-proclaimed hybrids,” a class to which Blyden surely belongs?¹⁶ Is Blyden reacting to a European management of geography by privileging a new spatial relocalization centered in Africa? To wit, does he draw that “single line that links past, present, and future, and yet insists on their distinctiveness,” when he writes that “[t]he original races of the Eastern hemisphere have existed from the beginning and no one of them can be exterminated, as degenerate offsprings of them have been in America”?¹⁷ Blyden appears to be calling for a

¹⁵ Edward Blyden, “Study and Race,” lecture to Young Men’s Literary Association of Sierra Leone, 19 May 1893, in *Sierra Leone Times*, 27 May 1893, reprinted in Edward Blyden, *Black Spokesman: Selected Published Writings of Edward Wilmot Blyden*, edited by Hollis R. Lynch (London: Frank Cass, 1971), 201.

¹⁶ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Global Transformations: Anthropology and the Modern World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 33.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 38; Blyden, “Study and Race,” reprinted in Lynch, *Black Spokesman*, 203.

“reversion” to a “pure collective faith” that eschews approximation.¹⁸ But what of Blyden’s inherent creolization, both physical and intellectual? This he seems to ignore, as well as his tendency to force a singular, artificial African mentalité.¹⁹ The latter is reminiscent of the colonial project, but it need not be labeled imperialistic—akin to Montgomery’s denunciation of African American missionaries. By recognizing the contingent nature of creating a diasporan identity, one can discern Stuart Hall’s articulation or counterhegemonic process at work in Blyden’s essentializing project.²⁰

It is not enough to resort to an either-or paradigm when studying African American emigrationists, because they straddled an intersection of intellectual traditions and spatial locations created through the overlapping migrations of a diasporic people. Historians have often written an oppositional history of Liberia, pitting emigrant against native. And to a large degree, they are accurate. But exchanges were not all hostile, and neither actor operated in a cultural or philosophical vacuum. Americo-Liberians inherited specific notions of freedom and identity that shaped their dealings with their aborigine brethren. Natives took those ideas and molded them according to their tastes. And in the process, both groups came to change each other through assimilation, opposition, and (mis)appropriation.

Nineteenth-century black emigrationists were influenced, positively and negatively, by white colonizationists in America. To gain historical perspective requires some knowledge of two major obstacles facing emigrationist proponents, namely the American Colonization Society

¹⁸ See Edouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, trans. J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989), 15-16.

¹⁹ See Joseph C. Miller, “Retention, Reinvention, and Remembering: Restoring Identities through Enslavement in Africa and under Slavery in Brazil,” in José C. Curto and Paul E. Lovejoy, eds., *Enslaving Connections: Changing Cultures of Africa and Brazil during the Era of Slavery* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books/Prometheus Books, 2004), 84-87.

²⁰ For more, see Tiffany Ruby Patterson and Robin D. G. Kelley, “Unfinished Migrations: Reflections on the African Diaspora and the Making of the Modern World,” *African Studies Review* 43, no. 1 (April 2000): 19-20.

and the prolific abolitionist Frederick Douglass. The first stood as a racist organization dedicated to the expulsion of free blacks from America, while the second loomed as the charismatic newspaper editor determined on keeping the race together in order to wage the battle for *American* equality.

The American Colonization Society grew out of the unresolved problem of slavery left over from the nation's founding. At the time of revolution, 20 percent of Americans were slaves, yet ideology and economics forced a fundamental reexamination of the practice. Natural rights, Christian egalitarianism, and commercial urbanization led some people to call for blacks' emancipation and relocation. Deporting blacks was not a new idea, as Thomas Paine backed a resettlement plan beyond the Alleghenies in the 1770s, while Samuel Hopkins urged sending slaves to Africa. Moreover, a small number of free blacks in New England—notably Massachusetts and Rhode Island—petitioned for public funds to migrate to Africa. Colonization gained one of its most prominent advocates when in 1787, Thomas Jefferson penned *Notes on the State of Virginia*, in which he warned that slavery was divisive, inefficient, socially dangerous, and morally wrong. Yet fearing “miscegenation” and a potential race war, he shied away from unconditional abolition and instead recommended a ban on the slave trade, a halt to slavery's westward expansion, and gradual emancipation through colonization. A year later, James Madison stated his support for an African colony that might prod manumissions. Their ideas went nowhere, however, as an indifferent North and a hostile South scuttled their proposals. Fear proved more of a spur than reason, especially when Gabriel's 1800 slave conspiracy prompted the Virginia legislature to send a secret missive to President Jefferson, which requested the formation of a penal colony for rebellious slaves. Although nothing came of

the request, bandying about the idea demonstrated that black colonization remained near the forefront during the first quarter century of the nation's existence.²¹

African colonization gained traction in the early decades of the 1800s with the organization of the American Colonization Society. In 1773 Congregationalist minister Robert Finley conceived the plan to send a band of free Negroes to Africa in order to Christianize the "Dark Continent," and his efforts led to the eventual formation of the American Colonization Society, or ACS. Founded in 1816, the society sought to resettle free blacks in Africa, a goal that attracted broad initial support from politicians and early abolitionists, who saw it as a way to allay fears about the social dangers of emancipating slaves. Furthermore, moderate southerners supported the proposal as a way to reduce the number of free blacks in their midst.

Wary of this second bloc within the ACS, African Americans were much more reluctant to embrace the society's aims. Many felt that forced emigration was tantamount to exile, recollecting the idea had been tried once before, when in 1787 English philanthropists had forcibly transported 350 American slaves to Sierra Leone, an expensive and mismanaged experiment that had ended in utter failure. Yet Paul Cuffe, a sea merchant of African and Native American descent, revived interest in African colonization almost single-handedly when he lobbied free blacks and Congress for help in colonizing Sierra Leone. In 1816 he managed to transport thirty-eight black Americans to the British colony, but after authorities threatened to seize his ship, he was forced to flee the settlement. When he died a year later from illness, the ACS picked up the colonization mantle.

²¹ For more on colonizationist ideology during this period, see David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Emancipation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014); Nicholas Guyatt, *Bind Us Apart: How Enlightened Americans Invented Racial Segregation* (New York: Basic Books, 2016).

Throughout its history, the society served both conservative and radical interests. During the 1820s temperate politicians endorsed the colonization effort because they hoped that relocating free blacks could avert civil war, slave insurrection, or racial equality demands. Consequently, the ACS offered a respectable compromise, one that maintained the status quo while tempering misgivings about slavery's evil, as an African colony would serve as the beachhead for Christian missions and American democracy. Older colonizationists, then, favored gradual emancipation, which comported well with the judicious tenor of the early 1800s. But for younger abolitionists, the society acted as a halfway institution. While its literature introduced them to antislavery viewpoints, its gradualist approach also incensed them to the point of rebellion. Once a supporter of colonization, William Lloyd Garrison denounced the society for conspiring against human rights. His followers called for immediate emancipation, a mantra which many black Americans echoed.

Garrison's protégé, Frederick Douglass, became *the* nationally recognized black spokesperson on the basis of his fiery speeches, influential newspaper, and bestselling autobiography. When he came out against colonization, each of the three emigrationists had to grapple with his arguments, both in their private reflections and public writings.

On the surface, Douglass did not differ much from the standard emigrationist line that blacks be allowed to depart as they saw fit. Douglass may have disapproved of leaving, but he never abrogated a person's right to do so. He further found the missionary endeavor to be a worthy and acceptable work, because it extended African American influence while enlarging their reputation worldwide. Mass emigration as a federal or state policy, however, Douglass

opposed on practical and ideological grounds.²² First, departing America's shores meant abandoning southern slaves to their fate.²³ The black abolitionist denounced those free blacks who would break fraternity with their enslaved kin, fearing that their exit would hemorrhage the antislavery movement. Second, an exodus undercut Douglass's assertion that blacks and whites could get along together.²⁴ If anything, he feared that emigration would stoke white suspicions that black Americans were mere sojourners and that black nationalists were irritating interlopers. Although most emigrationist leaders expected many blacks to remain in America, Douglass feared that by establishing an external nation-state, emigrationists would inadvertently create permanent instability between the races, an uneasy truce readily broken when the balance of power shifted. Put another way, he foresaw emigration as making integration all the more difficult to implement.

Douglass's prescribed assimilation was not simply cultural but also biological. He explicated his position most clearly in 1886, when he wrote: "My strongest conviction as to the future of the Negro therefore is, that he will not be expatriated nor annihilated, nor will he forever remain a separate and distinct race from the people around him but that he will be absorbed, assimilated, and will only appear finally . . . in the features of a blended race."²⁵ With

²² Douglass was neither the first nor the only African American to oppose emigration. In 1817 more than three thousand African Americans at Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia adopted resolutions denouncing the aims of the ACS. They viewed colonization as a nefarious scheme to bolster slavery by deporting free blacks from the United States. Their objections were echoed by other African Americans that same year in Virginia and Washington, DC.

²³ Frederick Douglass, "Colonization," *North Star*, 26 January 1849, in Philip S. Foner, ed., *Frederick Douglass: Selected Speeches and Writings*, abridged and adapted by Yuval Taylor (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1999), 126.

²⁴ Frederick Douglass, "The Destiny of Colored Americans," *North Star*, 16 November 1849, in Foner, *Frederick Douglass*, 149.

²⁵ Frederick Douglass, "The Future of the Colored Race," *North American Review*, May 1866, reprinted in Philip S. Foner, ed., *The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass*, vol. 4: *Reconstruction and After* (New York: International Publishers, 1955), 195.

an estimated 25 percent of the Negro population a product of mixture, Douglass foresaw the “inevitable” rise of an “intermediate race,” which would tighten the cords of “human brotherhood.”²⁶ He punctuated personal commitment to this principle with his 1884 marriage to his second wife Helen Pitts, a white woman.²⁷ His biological assimilationism left him open to the criticism that he was not black enough—which Douglass himself seemed to affirm when he remarked, “I thank God for making me a man simply, but Delany always thanks Him for making him a black man.”²⁸ Douglass’s seeming nonchalance led to the later charge that he harbored shame over his skin color,²⁹ and at first glance, critics appeared to have a solid case because in 1889 Douglass went on record with his impolitic scoff that “the whole assumption of race pride is ridiculous.”³⁰ But the jibe was at odds with his many efforts to concretize black identity in the 1850s. One biographer has linked Douglass’s fluctuating race consciousness to his intermittent patrimonial search, asserting, “As the issue of race pride became less central to his own identity, Douglass correspondingly perceived it as less significant for collective black liberation.”³¹ Although Douglass had obsessed about discovering the identity of his (suspected) white paternal

²⁶ Ibid.; Frederick Douglass, “The Future of the Negro,” *North American Review*, May 1884, reprinted in Foner, *Life and Writings*, 4:412.

²⁷ And if Maria Diedrich is correct, extramarital affairs further attest to Douglass’s disregard for sexual conventions against interracial relations. See Maria Diedrich, *Love Across Color Lines: Otilie Assing and Frederick Douglass* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1999).

²⁸ Frederick Douglass, “Dr. M. R. Delany,” *Douglass’ Monthly*, August 1862, quoted in Robert S. Levine, *Martin Delany, Frederick Douglass, and the Politics of Representative Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 6.

²⁹ E.g., Benjamin T. Tanner, “Our Weakness,” *Christian Recorder*, 26 November 1870.

³⁰ Frederick Douglass, “The Nation’s Problem,” speech to the Bethel Literary and Historical Society, Washington, DC, 16 April 1889, in Howard Brotz, ed., *African-American Social and Political Thought, 1850–1920* (New York: Basic Books, 1966; reprint, New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1992), 317.

³¹ Waldo E. Martin, Jr., *The Mind of Frederick Douglass* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 97.

father in the 1840s, by the 1880s he resigned himself to the reality of never knowing the truth.³² Accordingly, he downplayed the importance of racial origins, which he considered superfluous to achievement.

Concerning the place of origins, Douglass was willing to extend Christian charity to Africa; but he rejected outright the emphasis on sympathy, which he associated with pity, an enticing but ultimately enervating sentiment. He had stated as much in his second autobiography, when he wrote, “A man without force is without the essential dignity of humanity. Human nature is so constituted that it cannot honor a helpless man, although it can pity him; and even that it cannot do long, if signs of power do not arise.”³³ Douglass had written this in context of his fight with Edward Covey, a notorious “slave breaker” whom Douglass had resisted as a sixteen-year old slave. The experience does much to explain why the mature Douglass found emigration distasteful: it was kowtowing to the majoritarian bully by fleeing the site of manly resistance. Just as the biblical character Jacob had wrestled with an angel at Peniel, Douglass had struggled with Covey in a climactic battle for identity and supremacy.³⁴ Through the soul-testing trial, Jacob had been promoted to Israel, father of the Jewish nation-state; and Douglass envisioned a similar scenario in which through clutching white America and refusing to let go, blacks could wring recognition and reward from their rival. Nationhood could be theirs, Douglass thought, just as it was for the resolute patriarch in Scripture, but the key for attainment resided in a stout, forceful bid for rights in the presence of the oppressor.

³² *Contra*, William S. McFeely, *Frederick Douglass* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1991), 13-14, who argued that Douglass maintained a lifelong desire to learn his father’s identity.

³³ Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, in *The Frederick Douglass Papers*, Series Two: Autobiographical Writings, Volume 2: *My Bondage and My Freedom*, edited by John W. Blassingame, John R. McKivigan, and Peter P. Hinks (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 141.

³⁴ See Donald B. Gibson, “Christianity and Individualism: (Re-)Creation and Reality in Frederick Douglass’s Representation of Self,” *African American Review* 26, no. 4 (Winter 1992): 594-95. Gibson conjectured that Douglass patterned his Covey account after Jacob in Genesis mythology.

This was the social and intellectual milieu in which emigrationists found themselves. Unlike white proponents and black opponents of colonization, they wished to leave the country on the grounds that doing so was good for blacks. Although they differed in their stated rationale for leaving—giving such reasons as hope for autonomy, pride in their heritage, or despair of ever overcoming white bigotry—they shared a mutual problem: how to overcome the debilitating effects of color prejudice.

Martin Delany

Although Martin Delany never emigrated to Liberia, he was an important contemporary of those who did. His debates with fellow emigrationists helped shape their outlooks and arguments. Over his lifetime Delany aspired at first to emigrate within North America, moved briefly to Canada, flirted momentarily with the Caribbean, orchestrated a drive to Africa, before finally returning to Central America as an ideal emigration site. Therefore, his speeches, writings, and travel had direct bearing on the emigration movement to Africa.

Born to a free mother and an enslaved father in 1812, Martin Robison Delany spent his earliest years in Virginia, where he grew up learning the importance of black resistance when his father went to jail for fighting his master. Meanwhile, Delany's grandmother fed the boy a steady diet of stories about his grandfather, an African prince who resisted his enslavement in America. After being convicted of teaching her children to read, Delany's mother uprooted the family for Pennsylvania. Even then, Delany continued his education under a pastor's tutelage because northern laws barred him from attending public school.

Determined to study medicine, he left at age twenty-four for Pittsburgh to study with a local doctor, arriving in the city in the wake of Nat Turner's failed rebellion. In response, many northern cities began passing restrictive black laws, curtailing the freedoms of free black

residents. A resolute Delany—intent on preserving the rights and reputation of blacks—threw himself into free black organizations like the Abstinence Society, Philanthropic Society, and a vigilante committee. But by the late 1830s he had soured on the North to the point of embarking on an 1839 trip to Texas in order to investigate the feasibility of emigrating there; he passed safely through the South only to have U.S. annexation of Texas douse his hopes. Back in Pittsburgh, Delany launched a shoestring newspaper, the *Mystery*, in which his outspokenness landed him in court on a libel charge. Despite a record fine, the militant editor persisted in his sharp attacks against slave catchers. His uncompromising stance soon attracted the attention of Frederick Douglass, who promptly hired him away from the *Mystery* for Douglass's own upstart publication, *The North Star*. From 1847 to 1849 Delany served as correspondent and coeditor, whose name appeared on the masthead with Douglass's. According to biographer Victor Ullman, Delany's alliance with Douglass marked a high point in his belief in American democracy.³⁵ For two years Delany toured the country, preaching moral suasion to the masses. Yet his rhetoric was growing more radical, as he endorsed more black autonomy, and Douglass soon felt the need to distance himself publicly from Delany's views. In 1849 Douglass published a notice announcing the mutual split of the two editors.

Delany had already grown disillusioned by then. Other black abolitionists, he felt, had muted the need for independent black initiative in their hopes of currying favor with white philanthropists. Besides, white abolitionists could not deliver on their grandiose promises, he sniped. Passage of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act shattered what was left of Delany's confidence in white-led reform. Self-determinism presented the best avenue for blacks. With this as a partial motive, he applied to medical school, aiming to follow in James McCune Smith's footsteps. In

³⁵ Victor Ullman, *Martin R. Delany: The Beginnings of Black Nationalism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), 81.

1850 he won admittance into Harvard Medical School on the basis of stellar recommendations from seventeen white doctors. Yet his presence triggered a wave of campus racism, leading the faculty to bar him from returning for his second semester. Ullman described the expulsion as “the worst blow Delany had ever received,” while historian Floyd Miller attributed Delany’s alienation directly to this event.³⁶ Indubitably, it helped cement Delany’s conviction that he would never get a fair shake in the United States. No longer would he put full faith in America as the land of opportunity.

During the 1850s Delany grew more involved in the emigration movement. In 1851 he attended the North American Convention of Emigrationists in Toronto, upon the invitation of Henry Bibb, where Delany approved of the call of fellow emigrationist, James T. Holly, for a separate association free from white control. A year later, Delany published *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States*. In his pamphlet, Delany surveyed the condition of African Americans in their adopted homeland: white America deprived them not only of political rights but also human rights; meanwhile, its prejudice created a disparity between whites and blacks, who could not possibly hope to reach the same accomplishments. Blacks’ innate inferiority represented a myth perpetuated to rationalize slavery, Delany chafed, while whites’ alleged superiority served as an excuse to prevent equal opportunity. White supremacy also fueled the colonization movement, which belied a slaveholders’ plot to remove free blacks from the country. Considering the ACS to be a front for slaveholders, Delany accused it of being unchristian and misanthropic and of failing to recognize that America also belonged to blacks, who had a claim to citizenship by birthright and natural law. Moreover, white Americans owed their financial and cultural standing to unpaid black

³⁶ Ibid., 121; Floyd J. Miller, *The Search for a Black Nationality: Black Emigration and Colonization, 1787–1863* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975), 124.

labor. As Delany charged, the Fugitive Slave Act proved that white America had placed its laws and institutions above God's law. Therefore, he concluded that emigration was essential for any future elevation of blacks.

In the decade after their split, Douglass and Delany vied for leadership within the African American community. First, they quarreled over the contribution of whites to the movement, with Douglass and Harriet Beecher Stowe desiring to build a black vocational school staffed by white teachers and administrators. Delany found the proposal absurd: how could blacks develop self-reliance when they put whites in charge? Furthermore, he distrusted Stowe because she supported the American Colonization Society. While Delany favored emigration, he had no desire to affiliate with the hated ACS. Second, the two men organized competing black conventions. Douglass fired the first shot, with his 1853 Rochester conference rejecting colonization outright. The following year, however, Delany drew even, when emigrationists converged on Cleveland, Ohio, to plan an exit strategy. Delany's keynote address, entitled "Political Destiny of the Colored Race on the American Continent," helped solidify his reputation as one of the nation's leading black emigrationists, with James Holly regarding it as a "watershed" in his friend's life because Delany pledged himself thereafter to black nationalism.³⁷

The practical outworking of the conference resulted in three planned expeditions to explore emigration sites in Africa, Haiti, and Central America. Moving his base to Ontario, Canada, Delany began to plan a scouting trip to Africa. His singlemindedness led him to rebuff John Brown when he solicited Delany in 1858 for aid in establishing a black state within the U.S. South. In Delany's estimation, Brown stood for the wrong skin color and the wrong continent.

³⁷ James T. Holly, in *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, 25 November 1853, quoted in Cyril E. Griffith, *The African Dream: Martin R. Delany and the Emergence of Pan-African Thought* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1975), 30.

He further disapproved of Presbyterian minister Henry Highland Garnet's African Civilization Society, which was sending out a Yoruba reconnaissance team underwritten by white colonizationists. With Liberia already in ACS hands, Delany knew he had to hasten his own trip before colonizationists could claim central Africa, too. On 24 May 1859 the black nationalist steamed out of New York for Africa.

Initially Delany's visit appeared to be a success. Prominent Liberians feted him in Monrovia, including Blyden and Crummell, with the latter even hosting him a month as he recovered from fever. Blyden, then an exuberant twenty-six year old newspaper editor, gushed that Delany stood poised as a black Moses on the verge of leading his people out of bondage.³⁸ Delany reaped another honor when an African chieftain deeded land for him to settle. His crowning achievement came when he hammered out a treaty with the king of Abbeokuta, who permitted the settlement of African Americans in exchange for their technical and agricultural expertise. Afterward, a jubilant Delany headed to Britain in order to secure loans and investments for his envisioned venture.

At the end of 1860 Delany returned to the United States, where he found himself in high demand as a lecturer on Africa. He made the circuit rounds, preaching his fervent message of "Africa for Africans." Even his former rival Douglass hailed him as "the intensest embodiment of black Nationality to be met with outside the valley of the Niger."³⁹ But Delany's outspokenness irritated Holly, particularly when the former disparaged James Redpath's headship of the Haiti's emigration bureau. That the Haitian government would appoint a white man over black immigration, in Delany's eyes, smacked of callous disregard for black equality.

³⁸ Edward Blyden editorial, *Liberia Herald*, 1859, quoted in Dorothy Sterling, *The Making of an Afro-American: Martin Robison Delany, 1812-1885* (New York: Doubleday, 1971), 191.

³⁹ Frederick Douglass editorial, *Douglass' Monthly*, August 1862, in Ullman, *Martin R. Delany*, 249.

Loyal to his adopted country, Holly bristled at this aspersion, accusing Delany of conspiring with slaveholders in order to malign Haitian immigration. Yet for all his perceived tactlessness, Delany raised a valid question: namely whether blacks should place themselves under the fostering care of benevolent whites, particularly when such paternalism might stunt the development and elevation of an indigenous black leadership class.

Henry Highland Garnet joined the fray when he accused Delany of inconsistency, pointing out that Delany had gone on record in approving John Brown's leadership. Delany and Garnet had an uneven relationship over the years, clashing on emigration strategy and especially reliance on white aid. Born in 1815 Garnet escaped slavery as a boy when his family fled Maryland. Two childhood events helped shape his growing defiance toward whites. When Garnet was fourteen, slave catchers seized his sister, prompting him to buy a knife to defend his family. Five years later, as a classmate of Crummell's at Noyes Academy, he discharged a shotgun in self-defense against a white mob that threatened the schoolboys' lives. In his mid-twenties, Garnet assumed a leading role in the black convention movement, spearheading the drive for African American suffrage in New York. And in 1840 Garnet helped establish the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society when he became dissatisfied with Garrison's apolitical approach to abolitionism. Garnet's rise to national prominence came in 1843 when he delivered a controversial speech before the National Convention of Colored Citizens in Buffalo, New York, in which he called on southern slaves to stage insurrections against their masters. Slaves had nothing to lose and everything to gain, he argued. Not only was resistance a moral duty, it was also the only way for the oppressed to secure their liberty.⁴⁰ In the early 1850s

⁴⁰ Garnet's biographical information drawn from Alexander Crummell, *The Eulogy of Henry Highland Garnet, D.D. Presbyterian Minister, Later Minister to Republic of Liberia* (Washington, D.C.: n.p., 1882); "The Rev. Henry Highland Garnet," *Belfast Newsletter*, 12 February 1851, in "The Rev. Henry Highland Garnet Biog,

Garnet followed the precedent set by Douglass, Crummell, and other African Americans in lecturing throughout Great Britain, lobbying for an economic boycott of slave-manufactured goods. After a three-year missionary stint in Jamaica, he returned to America as an advocate of overseas emigration, an increasingly popular position in light of passage of the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850. In 1858 Garnet founded the African Civilization Society, with its goal being African Americans' voluntary colonization to Africa. Through the society, Garnet desired to (1) destroy slavery and the slave trade, (2) end prejudice through black economic gains, (3) introduce Christianity to Africa, (4) establish an alternate cotton industry to undermine the southern economy, and (5) erect an independent state that promoted black nationalism. Delany balked initially at joining the society, concerned about Garnet's propensity to accept white monies and oversight.⁴¹ But in 1861 Delany joined the society after he succeeded in amending the society's constitution with his own language: henceforth, "the basis of the Society, and ulterior objects in encouraging emigration shall be—Self-reliance and Self-government, on the principle of an African Nationality, the African race being the ruling element of the nation, controlling and directing their own affairs."⁴² Thus Delany converted the society into an autonomous and Afrocentric organization, moving it away from Garnet's original vision of a biracial society that promoted emigration to not only Africa but also the Western Hemisphere.

February 12, 1851" folder, Garnet British Isles Clippings File, Black Abolitionist Papers Archives, Detroit, Michigan; reprint, "Henry Highland Garnet," *Christian News*, 13 November 1851, in "Henry Highland Garnet Biog., 1851, November 13" folder, Garnet British Isles Clippings File, Black Abolitionist Papers Archives, Detroit, Michigan; Henry Garnet to Asa Dodge Smith, 4 May 1870, in "Garnet, Henry Highland to Rev. Asa D. Smith, 1870, May 4" folder, Garnet American Clippings File, Black Abolitionist Papers Archives, Detroit, Michigan; Henry Highland Garnet, "Address to the Slaves of the United States of America," delivered before the National Convention of Colored Citizens, Buffalo, New York, 16 August 1843, in *The Black Abolitionist Papers*, vol. 3: *The United States, 1830–1846*, edited by C. Peter Ripley (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 403-12.

⁴¹ Theodore Bourne, "African Civilization Society" Rhodes House pamphlet, 1859, in "N.Y. African Civilization Society, 1859" folder, Garnet British Isles clippings file, Black Abolitionist Papers Archive, Detroit, Michigan.

⁴² African Civilization Society constitution, Art. II, in *Weekly Anglo-African*, n.d., quoted in Ullman, *Martin R. Delany*, 264.

Events in the United States interrupted and postponed Delany's African scheme. He shifted his priorities to supporting Republicans and recruiting black troops during the U.S. Civil War. After the war, he labored in the Freedman's Bureau, dispensing aid to participants in the Port Royal experiment on Sea Island, South Carolina.⁴³ Delany grew involved in Reconstruction politics, even holding a trial judgeship for a time. But rampant corruption gradually soured Delany on the Republican Party, and the Democratic takeover ultimately convinced him of the futility of staying in the United States.

In 1878 a dispirited Delany contacted the American Colonization Society to inquire about passage to Liberia for one of his Carolinian constituents. He predicted that "going will be but the precursor of many more leaving the South for Africa, my beloved fatherland, who ought to leave for their own good and that of posterity."⁴⁴ The year before, Delany had joined the board of the Liberian Exodus Joint Steam Ship Company, a nonprofit stock company hoping to raise money to purchase a ship in which to transport emigrants to Liberia. On 21 April 1878, the *Azor* left the Charleston port with a shipload of emigrants bound for Monrovia. Unfortunately for Delany, the maiden voyage proved to be the last for the ill-fated venture, as a crooked ship captain helped bankrupt the company and impound the ship. In his waning years, Delany found himself impoverished and begging for a civil servant job, which would "enable me to . . . go at once to Africa, the field of my destined labor."⁴⁵ Despite his humbled financial state, the black nationalist still retained enough racial pride to tweak noses at the Emancipation Proclamation's

⁴³ See Willie Lee Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction: The Port Royal Experiment* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1964).

⁴⁴ Martin Delany correspondence to William Coppinger, 16 January 1878, Hilton Head, South Carolina, quoted in Ullman, *Martin R. Delany*, 500.

⁴⁵ Martin Delany correspondence to William Coppinger, August 1880, quoted in Sterling, *The Making of an Afro-American*, 509.

twentieth-year anniversary celebration in Washington, DC, where he toasted the Republic of Liberia before a banquet attended by the nation's highest dignitaries. Delany never did reach his desired destination, dying quietly two years later in Ohio at the age of seventy-three.

Although his colonizing enthusiasm oscillated over his lifetime, many of his core emigrationist beliefs can be found in his Masonic activities. In 1853 he addressed St. Cyprian Lodge, No. 13, of Free and Accepted Ancient York Masons—to whom he outlined his seminal views on race and prejudice. At the local level Delany was protesting U.S. Masons' decision to withhold recognition of his lodge because of its "colored" membership. Confronted with American prejudice, Delany made an international appeal for legitimacy and recognition of his Pittsburgh Masonic lodge, arguing that black Masons had the right to organize into a fraternal order based on an older tradition, that of British Masons' bestowal of a fraternal warrant to a black lodge in 1784. As such, he refused to acknowledge degrees of membership—black Masons were either full members or nothing.⁴⁶

The 1853 speech and subsequent pamphlet, *The Origin and Objects of Ancient Freemasonry*, evinced Delany's historical and theological thought.⁴⁷ As a black man, he claimed equal, if not superior, right to be a Mason because Masonry first took root in Egypt and Ethiopia. Moreover, Delany asserted that (1) Egyptians recognized humanity as being created in God's

⁴⁶ On a deeper level, he was refuting pseudoscientific ideas that gained currency a year later in Josiah Nott and George Gliddon's *Types of Mankind*, a physiognomic textbook that denied (1) biological equality between races and (2) black origins of Egyptian civilization. See Josiah C. Nott and George R. Gliddon, *Types of Mankind: ; or, Ethnological Researches, Based upon the Ancient Monuments, Paintings, Sculptures, and Crania of Races, and upon Their Natural, Geographical, Philological, and Biblical History* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo, 1854; reprint, Miami: Mnemosyne Publishing Co., 1969); see also Samuel G. Morton, *Crania Ægyptiaca* (Philadelphia: J. Pennington, 1844).

⁴⁷ Martin Delany, "The Origin and Objects of Ancient Freemasonry," address delivered before St. Cyprian Lodge, No. 13, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 24 June 1853, printed in Martin Delany, *The Origin and Objects of Ancient Freemasonry: Its Introduction into the United States, and Legitimacy among Colored Men* (Pittsburgh: W. S. Haven, 1853), reprinted in Martin Robison Delany, *Martin R. Delany: A Documentary Reader*, edited by Robert S. Levine (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2003), 50-67.

image and (2) Ethiopians adduced a Trinitarian existence long before Jews or Christians reached the same conclusions. Because Africans had laid the intellectual groundwork for Masonry before its formal organization under the Hebrew monarch Solomon, whose temple construction marked official recognition of the group, Delany contended that to deny African Americans the privileges of Masonry was to deprive them of their African heritage. From a dispensational standpoint, Delany divided history into three discrete periods: the eras of Adam, Noah, and Solomon distinguished respectively by fallen innocence, adventurous manhood, and temple building—a pattern that he would apply to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in advocating black nationalism as fulfillment of the last two historical stages. From an anthropological perspective, he affirmed the unity of humankind. Without it, he warned that “our efforts, whether as Men or Masons, must fail—utterly fail” because “a house divided against itself, cannot stand.”⁴⁸ In this case, Masonry—and later the body politic—would collapse unless it recognized all its members, whether black or white. And on a doctrinal level, Delany averred that in keeping with God’s image, man was by nature a triad of the moral, physical, and intellectual. These three spheres, then, became the future fronts in which Delany pushed for equality—in religion, politics, and education.

To the three realms, Delany later added a fourth dimension—the economic. He envisioned “colored men laboring side by side with white,” a working alliance that would give them “a knowledge [of] *how to live in this world*.”⁴⁹ Hence he urged “colored people [to] cease their servile occupations, and get into business, respectable occupations, and thereby cease to be

⁴⁸ Mark 12:25; note that Delany used this famous metaphor a half decade before Abraham Lincoln did.

⁴⁹ Martin R. Delany to Frederick Douglass, Wilmington, Delaware, 30 November 1848, in *North Star*, 15 December 1848; Martin R. Delany, “Political Economy,” in *North Star*, 16 March 1849, original emphasis retained.

‘boys’ and ‘girls,’ taking their places among men and women in society.”⁵⁰ His remarks stirred controversy on two fronts, as he offended many free black women, most of whom labored as domestic workers, and as he transgressed the preachments of many black ministers, who tended to focus primarily on the spiritual needs of their congregants.

Delany’s defense of the latter exposes another skein running throughout his later emigrationism, that of Aristotelian teleology. In a similar maneuver found in his Freemasonry treatise, he delineated three divine laws governing the universe (akin to his three spheres arising out of *imago dei*): spiritual, moral, and physical laws. Otherworldliness, maintained Delany, had relevance only when dealing with spiritual matters. Where lay the problem for African Americans? “It is this, we make use of heavenly means for the attainment of earthly ends, while our oppressors make use of earthly means for the attainment of earthly ends. The *spiritual* laws, as previously suggested, only pertain to the things of heaven, and were never intended by their Great Author for any other purpose. The physical and moral laws pertain to earthly ends, and by them only can all things temporal be effected.”⁵¹ Thus whites “induce colored people to depend upon faith and prayer” while they are busy “DOING,” using physical means to attain monetary ends.⁵² For this world, Delany insisted on procuring wealth, which would better the conditions in the here and now.

Delany would use both the historical and teleological arguments in advancing emigration. On the one hand, it represented the pinnacle of the three historical eras, the temple period under Solomon in which the Israelite kingdom reached its apex. On the other hand, it constituted the

⁵⁰ Martin R. Delany, “Domestic Economy,” in *North Star*, 23 March 1849.

⁵¹ Martin R. Delany, “Domestic Economy: III,” in *North Star*, 20 April 1849, original emphasis retained.

⁵² Martin R. Delany, “Domestic Economy: II,” in *North Star*, 13 April 1849; Martin R. Delany, “Domestic Economy,” in *North Star*, 23 March 1849, original emphasis retained.

natural fulfillment of physical ends by creating the conditions necessary to prosper socially, politically, and materially.

Delany's governing political manifesto came in 1852 with publication of *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States*. Setbacks abounded during the years leading up to his exposition: the Fugitive Slave Law obviously angered and frightened him; Harvard expelled him based solely on his skin color; the U.S. Patent Office refused to grant him a patent for a personal invention because he was black and hence not an eligible citizen; and he had just begun to formulate objections to Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, leading to a bruising debate with Douglass. In the midst of these disappointments, he attended his first conference devoted to emigration. A year later he was ready to circulate his brand of emigration to free blacks in the United States.

Delany was not alone in his disillusionment, as Blyden left for Liberia after finding doors closed to seminary and as Holly departed for Canada after despairing of achieving equality in America. Three months after Delany's landmark piece, the ever optimistic Douglass blistered the nation with his "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?" address.⁵³ Therefore, Delany's manifesto not only articulated his own disenchantment but also captured the desperation of fellow blacks.

In *Condition* Delany detailed his understanding of sociological relations. He believed that sympathy played as strong a role as self-interest in determining who enslaved whom. Sympathy—that natural feeling of pity or compassion—came about when one group identified with another group's plight. This sentiment occurred, Delany contended, only when the two

⁵³ See Frederick Douglass, "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?" address delivered at Corinthian Hall in Rochester, New York, 5 July 1852; in Frederick Douglass, *The Oxford Frederick Douglass Reader*, edited by William L. Andrews (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 109-30.

groups shared a common identity, or at least the perception of having one. On the macro level, a nation subjected other nations with which it neither sympathized nor self-identified, because they were both foreign and Other. In Delany's mind, nations that failed to stand for independence and self-governance found themselves on the losing end, as stronger nations regarded the absence of such traits as being signs of alienness and weakness. In short, nations preyed upon those whom they disrespected. For Delany the phenomenon extended to minority groups, which he regarded as "nations within nations," most prominent being the Israelites in Egypt, the Irish in the U.K., or the black population in America.⁵⁴ National minorities, then, needed to earn the respect of the majority in order to elicit sympathy and recognition of their equality. African Americans, in driving for self-initiative and self-rule, would demonstrate sameness, attenuate difference, and elevate their national standing.

Delany knew that American blacks faced imposing hurdles in their present circumstances, because the country deprived them of freedom and rights—did so out of self-interest and disdain, not bound by the strictures of sympathy. As Delany perceived, the nation withheld political rights because it regarded blacks as incapable of self-governance and thus ineligible for identification and assimilation into the body politic. How then could African Americans realize self-government? The answer for Delany rested in controlling territory; if blacks could gain neither rights nor land in America, he surmised they would have to look elsewhere. Even if blacks were accorded legal citizenship, he did not foresee sympathy forthcoming or power structures rearranged. African Americans were still at the mercy of self-interested whites, still open to exploitation by the rapacious majority. They needed a new country, a new nation-state where they could wield political and economic authority.

⁵⁴ Martin R. Delany, *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States* (Philadelphia: Martin R. Delany, 1852), in Levine, *Martin R. Delany*, 190.

Like Holly, Blyden, and Crummell, Delany did not advocate wholesale migration of the race to another land. In the appendix, he called for “enlightened freemen” to travel to Africa.⁵⁵ This limited proposal arose from frustration he felt at the apathy he encountered among his people, too “degraded” and “servile” to leave. But a beachhead in Africa, he hoped, would testify to the race’s potential and would reify black independence. The stalwart few would represent the interests of the many, envisioned Delany, by exerting international pressure and by directly petitioning the U.S. government on behalf of its black residents.

In one sense, Delany had given up on the hope implicit in *Origin and Objects of Ancient Freemasonry*. He had surrendered the dream of a biracial country in which each race would contribute to the building of a united house. Yet in another sense, though events had shattered his naïveté, he still adhered to the logic of his earlier thinking. For Delany, emigration meant a move toward adventurous manhood and established nationality by promising continued growth of the moral, physical, and intellectual in a new land, by fulfilling his race’s teleological development toward full manhood and global brotherhood in the fraternity of nations.⁵⁶ It was *doing* in the best sense: creating autonomy, prosperity, and a legacy for people of color. And in time—for Delany probably not until his 1859 trip to Liberia—it signaled a return to a glorious African past, as embodied by the ancient empires in Egypt and Ethiopia.

⁵⁵ Martin R. Delany, appendix to “The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States,” in Brotz, *African-American Social and Political Thought*, 98-99.

⁵⁶ Nationhood represented merely an expansion of Delany’s earlier commitment to Masonic fraternity: “Nations are but great families; each individual, citizen, or inhabitant, constitutes the members who compose that family.” Martin R. Delany, “Political Economy,” in *North Star*, 16 March 1849.

A month after publication, Garrison published a prompt review of *Condition*, in which he lamented Delany's "tone of despondency, and an exhibition of the spirit of caste."⁵⁷ A week later, Delany responded with a succinct letter that tried to justify pessimism and separation, retorting,

I am not in favor of caste, nor a separation of the brotherhood of mankind, and would as willingly live among white men as black, if I had an *equal possession and enjoyment* of privileges; but shall never be reconciled to live among them, subservient to their will—existing by mere *sufferance*, as we, the colored people, do in this country. . . . If there were any probability of this [exercise and enjoyment of rights], I should be willing to remain in the country, fighting and struggling on, the good fight of faith. But I must admit, that I have no hopes in this country—no confidence in the American people—with a *few* excellent exceptions—therefore, I have written as I have done. Heathenism and Liberty, before Christianity and Slavery.⁵⁸

Delany's shift toward separatism was not sudden, as a half decade earlier, he had voiced his mistrust of the political process. Skeptical of the Liberty Party, he had warned that "our friends, if they desire our co-operation or approbation, must not forget or neglect our interest. This is imperative. We have been duped and cajoled now quite sufficient."⁵⁹ Likewise, he had wondered whether the slogan of the Free Soil Party was actually "Free Soil, Free Territory, Free Speech, and Free *White* Men."⁶⁰ In light of empty political promises, he had recommended that "we must,

⁵⁷ William Garrison, "New Publications," *Liberator* 22, no. 19 (7 May 1852): 74, APS Online. Garrison's attentiveness to Delany's tract contrasted sharply with Douglass's virtual silence on it, thereafter eliciting Delany's wrath. See M. R. Delany, "Letter to Frederick Douglass," 10 July 1852, in *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, 23 July 1852, p. 3, reprinted in C. Peter Ripley, ed., *The Black Abolitionist Papers*, vol. 4: *The United States, 1847–1858* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 126-28.

⁵⁸ M. R. Delany letter to the editor, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 14 May 1852, "Letter from Dr. Delany," *Liberator* 22, no. 21 (21 May 1852): 83, APS Online, original emphasis retained; cf. Delany, *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States*, in Levine, *Martin R. Delany*, 207.

⁵⁹ Martin R. Delany to Frederick Douglass, Sandusky, Ohio, 1 July 1848 [misdated 1 June 1848], in *North Star*, 14 July 1848.

⁶⁰ Martin R. Delany, "Sound the Alarm," *North Star*, 12 January 1849, original emphasis retained.

in fact, become our own representatives in presenting our own claims, and making known our own wrongs.”⁶¹

His chief problem with politics was that it gave the veneer, though not the veracity, of national unity. Put differently, it violated his doctrine of human oneness, his tenet of sympathy.

What bound a nation together in Delany’s mind? For him,

Patriotism consists not in a mere professed love of country, the place of one’s birth—an endearment to the scenery, however delightful and interesting, of such country; nor simply the laws and political policy by which such country is governed; but a pure and unsophisticated interest felt and manifested for man—an impartial love and desire for the promotion and elevation of every member of the body politic, their eligibility to all the rights and privileges of society.⁶²

In short, patriotism required one “to love *all men*, regarding their humanity with equal importance.”⁶³

If politics failed him, so too did religion. His preference for heathenism and liberty over Christianity and slavery—while perhaps hyperbole—illustrates his disaffection with white religion. Much like Douglass, he deplored the farce of southern Christianity.⁶⁴ Less than a decade after *Condition*, Delany published his serial novel *Blake*, whose main character vows,

⁶¹ Martin R. Delany to Frederick Douglass, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, 18 November 1848, in *North Star*, 1 December 1848.

⁶² Martin R. Delany, “True Patriotism,” *North Star*, 8 December 1848.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, original emphasis retained.

⁶⁴ See Frederick Douglass, appendix to *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself*, edited by John W. Blassingame, John R. McKivigan, and Peter P. Hinks (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 80-83; Frederick Douglass, “The Church Is the Bulwark of Slavery,” address delivered before the New England Anti-Slavery Society in Boston, Massachusetts, on 25 May 1842, reported in *Boston Courier*, 26 May 1842, in *The Frederick Douglass Papers*, edited by John W. Blassingame (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 1:18; Frederick Douglass, “The Anti-Slavery Movement, the Slave’s Only Earthly Hope,” address delivered before the American Anti-Slavery Society in New York City, New York, on 9 May 1843, reported in *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, 18 May 1843, in Blassingame, *The Frederick Douglass Papers*, 1:21; Frederick Douglass, “Southern Slavery and Northern Religion,” address delivered in Concord, New Hampshire, on 11 February 1844, reported in *Concord Herald of Freedom*, 16 February 1844, in Blassingame, *The Frederick Douglass Papers*, 1:26.

“No religion but that which brings us liberty will we know”⁶⁵ Delany’s protagonist, Henry Blake, dismisses slave religion as “the shadow without the substance” and drips with cynicism in lecturing, “You must make your religion subserve your interests, as your oppressors do theirs! They use the Scriptures to make you submit, by preaching to you the texts of ‘obedience to your masters’ and ‘standing still to see the salvation,’ and we must now begin to understand the Bible so as to make it of interest to us.”⁶⁶ Even in the North, Delany experienced racism firsthand, being heckled and even mobbed in churches during his western tour. On one of his jaunts between churches, he remarked, “Indeed, it is only in the mountains that I can fully appreciate my existence as a man in America, my own native land. It is then and there my soul is lifted up, my bosom caused to swell with emotion, and I am lost in wonder at the dignity of my own nature. I see in the works of nature around me, the wisdom and goodness of God. I contemplate them, and conscious that he has endowed me with faculties to comprehend them, I then perceive the likeness I bear to him.”⁶⁷ That he communed with God on a mountaintop and not before a church altar served as an unspoken indictment of organized religion.⁶⁸

Finally, Delany found Negro education an elusive, if not illusive, target. His western tour opened his eyes to the deficiencies of and disregard for educating blacks. In Columbus, Ohio, he railed against “black laws” that denied “colored children” from receiving education funds as provided by state law. African Americans were being taxed for schools that their children could barely hope to attend. Black students could enroll only if no whites objected, and they were

⁶⁵ Martin R. Delany, *Blake: or, The Huts of America, A Novel* [1859–62] (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), 258.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁶⁷ Martin R. Delany to Frederick Douglass, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 24 February 1849, in *North Star*, 9 March 1849.

⁶⁸ For more on Delany’s complaint with religion, see Tunde Adeleke, *Without Regard to Race: The Other Martin Robison Delany* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2003), 54-57.

diverted to dilapidated, segregated schools if their numbers reached twenty or more. “With the present prejudices of the whites,” Delany challenged, “cannot every one see that no colored children will ever be educated in the common schools of Ohio?”⁶⁹ In Philadelphia, he questioned the wisdom of having black pupils instructed by a white teacher, whose goal he suspected was to “raise them subservient to pro-slavery will.”⁷⁰ The charade of equal education, Delany complained, caused free blacks to tout the “colored school system” and “cling to Pennsylvania as to a Paradise.”⁷¹

Thus in the three spheres limned in *Origin and Objects of Ancient Freemasonry*—politics, religion, and education—Delany tested America and found her wanting. His desire to emigrate arose out of his futile attempts to concretize Masonic ideals in these three areas in order to realize the three-stage historical progress foreordained by God and natural laws. Black nationalism was his response to the absence he found of universal brotherhood between individuals, nations, and races.

Edward Blyden

Edward Wilmot Blyden emigrated to Liberia from St. Thomas, Danish West Indies. Born in 1832, the child roamed his racially integrated neighborhood, frolicking with Jewish playmates when not attending the Dutch Reformed Church. A white pastor saw his academic promise and tried to send the teenager to the United States for seminary training, but rejection by three white

⁶⁹ Martin R. Delany to Frederick Douglass, Columbus, Ohio, 15 April 1848, in *North Star*, 28 April 1848.

⁷⁰ M. R. Delany to Frederick Douglass, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 9 March 1849, quoted by Tunde Adeleke, “Martin R. Delany’s Philosophy of Education: A Neglected Aspect of African American Liberation Thought,” *Journal of Negro Education* 63, no. 2 (Spring 1994): 226.

⁷¹ Martin R. Delany, “Political Aspect of the Colored People of the United States,” report delivered to the National Board of Commissioners, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 24 August 1855, in *Provincial Freeman* 2 (13 October 1855): 97-98, reprinted in Levine, *Martin R. Delany*, 284-85.

theological institutions aborted any hopes of a ministerial career. Thereafter, Blyden landed in Monrovia in 1851 and underwent a “literary” education at the local Presbyterian school. In eight short years, he had earned ordination in the Presbyterian Church, the editorship of the *Liberia Herald*, and principalship of his former high school. Religion, literacy, and a classical education, in Blyden’s mind and experience, formed a trio of pillars for building a strong “Negro nationality.”

Blyden soon earned a reputation as a staunch defender of the American Colonization Society, whose New York branch had financed his initial trip to Monrovia. A year after arriving, he launched a public defense of Liberian settlement, in which he rebuked abolitionist Gerrit Smith for attacking the society and scolded Delany for flirting with Central American emigration. His first pamphlet, *A Voice from Bleeding Africa* (1856), asserted that “the object of Liberia was the redemption of Africa and the disenthralment and elevation of the African race.”⁷² According to Blyden, Africa offered historical and psychological advantages by (1) boasting a rich intellectual and religious heritage as the “cradle” of both Judaism and Christianity and (2) not suffering from the blight of slavery, which had crippled African Americans both mentally and culturally. Through education and evangelism, the early Blyden believed that he could rescue backward Africans and cultivate stunted African Americans; his two-prong approach would establish the “last” and “noblest” Christian empire in Africa.⁷³

Blyden’s dream received a boost when Garnet organized the African Civilization Society in America to supply Liberia with qualified African Americans; Delany’s expedition enthused

⁷² Edward W. Blyden, *A Voice from Bleeding Africa on Behalf of Her Exiled Children* (Monrovia, 1856), 27, quoted in Hollis R. Lynch, *Edward Wilmot Blyden: Pan-Negro Patriot, 1832–1912* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 18.

⁷³ Edward W. Blyden, *Liberia as She Is, and the Present Duty of Her Citizens* (Monrovia, 1857), 17, quoted in Lynch, *Edward Wilmot Blyden*, 23.

Blyden even more, especially after the two met in Monrovia at the start of Delany's continental tour. When Delany departed nineteenth months later for America, Blyden harbored high hopes that African American emigrants would soon flood Liberia. Even the American Civil War warmed him because, from his vantage, the North's victory would allow millions more to leave for their fatherland. Liberia's government caught Blyden's vision, too, leading the president to commission Blyden and Crummell as emigration agents to America. In 1861 both men boarded ships bound for the United States, intent on pressing the case for settling in Liberia. Blyden sensed that success was within his grasp.

The recruiting trip opened Blyden's eyes to the pervasive racism endured by African Americans. Officials blocked him from visiting the Capitol, while he had to obtain written permission to leave Washington, DC. Blyden decried the humiliating conditions he found, vowing that he would rather be a naked savage than a submissive colored. "A whole race in degradation!" he fumed. "The idea is horrible. If they all went and died [in Africa] it would be a noble sacrifice to liberty."⁷⁴ He spread a message similar to that of other black emigrationists: blacks would garner respect only when they erected their own nation. Blyden urged his audiences to heed the natural impulse to carve out a separate and distinct identity in their African homeland. To Blyden's chagrin, most African Americans ignored his admonitions because the Civil War had renewed their hopes of living in America as full citizens. A frustrated Blyden returned to Liberia in 1863, certain that their "struggles against caste" would end up fruitless.⁷⁵

Blyden faced his own skirmishes in 1860, as he tussled with Americo-Liberians over the location of the new Liberia College. He wanted to build the school in the interior in order to

⁷⁴ Edward W. Blyden, letter to the editor, *New York Colonization Journal*, November 1862, quoted in Lynch, *Edward Wilmot Blyden*, 28.

⁷⁵ Edward W. Blyden, *Our Origins, Danger and Duties: The Annual Address before the Mayor and Common Council of the City of Monrovia*, 26 July 1865, 36, quoted in Lynch, *Edward Wilmot Blyden*, 35.

benefit natives, but Americo-Liberians insisted it stay on the mulatto-populated coast. Bad blood continued as the two sides squabbled over immigration and school admission policies; and Blyden further poisoned relations when he aired his grievances in public, blaming “decadent mulattoes” for impeding progress.⁷⁶ The dispute climaxed when Blyden’s opponents snatched him and nearly succeeded in lynching him. Surviving the attempt on his life, Blyden would henceforth distinguish between despicable mulattoes and the noble-minded Negroes, rejecting the first as being illegitimate because “miscegenation” had deprived them of a true race instinct. Like slavery, racial intermixture had enfeebled African Americans; thus the future of the race lay with native Africans and “pure” Negroes from America.

Blyden seized the mantle of being the chief guardian of African culture. Surpassing even Crummell and Delany in African pride, Blyden hailed Islam, polygamy, and pantheism for preserving African culture. Conversely, he condemned Christianity, in its outward practice, for its disruptive influence, because “Christianity has consecrated drunkenness; it has consecrated slavery; it has consecrated war”⁷⁷ Other than Roman Catholicism—Blyden had in mind Haiti and Toussaint L’Ouverture here—Christian denominations had a deleterious effect on the Negro, leading Blyden to direct his colonization appeals increasingly to governments and secular organizations. He still associated with ministers, especially Garnet and Henry M. Turner; but he advised them to send only qualified Negroes, i.e., full-blooded blacks, and privately urged the ACS to screen out mulatto candidates.

His race essentialism led him to take some unpopular positions: lauding the U.S. Supreme Court for overturning the 1875 Civil Rights Act, approving of measures to limit

⁷⁶ Edward W. Blyden, “Mixed Races in Liberia,” *Smithsonian Institute Annual Report*, Washington, DC, 1870, 386-88, quoted in Lynch, *Edward Wilmot Blyden*, 53.

⁷⁷ Edward W. Blyden, “Mohammedanism and the Negro Race,” *Fraser’s Magazine* 12 (November 1875): 598-615, quoted in Lynch, *Edward Wilmot Blyden*, 71.

African Americans' access to higher education, and requesting that future U.S. diplomats to Liberia be white (because he distrusted black American diplomats, whose mulatto origins made their race instincts suspect).⁷⁸ On one hand, he felt that a stateside education contaminated potential emigrants; on the other hand, he hoped that societal restrictions would weaken ties to America. By migrating to Liberia, African Americans could receive an unadulterated education and realize their full potential, just as Blyden had done. If he opposed African American advancement, he did so in order to nudge his fellow Negroes toward an African alternative.

For Blyden, the colony was the “indispensable agency” for advancing commerce, evangelism, and civilization, and no organization was more effective than the American Colonization Society in populating and sustaining it.⁷⁹ In a romantic portrayal, Blyden pronounced colonizationists to be philosophical visionaries with prophetic foresight and towering moral agency, tackling the last obstacles to economic opportunity and material success. The ACS advocate urged African Americans to recognize the “glorious achievements of African Colonization” and to “look at the cause and not the instruments,” to “behold and contemplate *results*, and not form conjectures concerning *motives* and *intentions*.”⁸⁰ Those beneficial results, by Blyden’s arithmetic, numbered three: spiritual regeneration of Africa, recognition of Negro manhood, and establishment of the independent nation of Liberia.⁸¹ “I can see,” Blyden

⁷⁸ Blyden had no problem, of course, when Garnet was appointed to be U.S. minister to Liberia in 1881.

⁷⁹ Edward Blyden, “The Origin and Purpose of African Colonization,” a discourse upon the anniversary of the American Colonization Society, January 1883, in *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race*, 2d ed. (London: W. B. Whittingham, 1887), reprinted in Edward Blyden, *Black Spokesman: Selected Published Writings of Edward Wilmot Blyden*, edited by Hollis R. Lynch (London: Frank Cass, 1971), 39.

⁸⁰ Edward Blyden, *A Voice from Bleeding Africa on Behalf of Her Exiled Children* (Monrovia: G. Killian, 1856), in Lynch, *Black Spokesman*, 10, original emphasis retained.

⁸¹ Edward Blyden, “An Address before the Maine State Colonization Society,” Portland, Maine, 26 June 1862, in *New York Colonization Journal*, July 1862, reprinted in Lynch, *Black Spokesman*, 19; Edward Blyden, “The African Problem and the Method of Its Solution,” a discourse at the 73rd anniversary of the American

concluded, “no other solution of the Negro question in the United States than that proposed by the Colonization Society—viz., that of transferring these people back to Africa, and building up an African empire of respectability and power.”⁸² Liberia served as the prime model, then, for what the Negro race could become: the “germ of an African empire,” through which a people could procure “respectability, influence, and power in the world.”⁸³ Blyden feared that African Americans such as Douglass overlooked the political and compensatory promise of ACS-sponsored emigration, which represented a return to familial roots and a restoration for past wrongs.

Yet Liberia accrued personal benefits as well. Blyden advocated emigration there because the emigrant “is placed in the high attitude of an actor, that his words and deeds will now be felt by those around him. A consciousness of individual importance, which he never experienced before, comes over him” as “every sentiment which his new position inspires is on the side of independence and manliness. In a word, [h]e becomes a full man—a distinction to which he can never arrive in this country.”⁸⁴

And there lay the rub because, in the United States, African Americans found themselves blocked at every turn. Upon his first speaking tour there, Blyden compared his journey as going “southward to hell” reportedly because of “the indignities he suffers in getting there, and the

Colonization Society, Washington, DC, January 1890, in *African Repository*, July 1890, reprinted in Lynch, *Black Spokesman*, 51; Blyden, *A Voice from Bleeding Africa*, in Lynch, *Black Spokesman*, 10.

⁸² Blyden, “An Address before the Maine State Colonization Society,” reprinted in Lynch, *Black Spokesman*, 18.

⁸³ Edward Blyden, “Our Origin, Dangers and Duties,” a Liberian independence day address, Monrovia, Liberia, 26 July 1865, reprinted in Lynch, *Black Spokesman*, 79; Blyden, “An Address before the Maine State Colonization Society,” reprinted in Lynch, *Black Spokesman*, 15.

⁸⁴ Blyden, “An Address before the Maine State Colonization Society,” reprinted in Lynch, *Black Spokesman*, 12.

insults he must endure while there.”⁸⁵ Traveling to the nation’s capital, he tasted the degradation under which American blacks lived, whereupon he declared that he would rather be a native naked in the African interior than be subjected to “the prejudices of white trash.”⁸⁶

When confronted with the exhortation for the African American to continue the struggle in the United States, Blyden snorted, “What has he to fight for?”⁸⁷ African Americans “are pressed to the earth by the whites and by each other. And the moral effect of these things upon the masses is, that they give up all hope, and abandon themselves to the groveling influences of their condition.”⁸⁸ By the time prejudice in America ceased, Blyden was convinced that “the Negro will have passed away, victimized and absorbed by the Caucasian.”⁸⁹ In the spirit of Patrick Henry, he challenged, “Is it not better to die free than live to be slaves?”—recalling the similar sacrifices of America’s pioneers and revolutionaries while observing that “this is the spirit the Anglo Saxons everywhere exhibit.”⁹⁰ But Blyden also penned a relentless stream of criticism against white America, whose manifest destiny was nothing more than “the blending in material[,] political and religious work of the conglomerate forces existing in the land.”⁹¹ As the Liberian grumbled,

The Anglo-saxon mind and the African mind trained under Anglo-saxon influence, seem to be intolerant of all customs and practices which do not conform to the standard of

⁸⁵ Edward Blyden letter to the *Liberia Herald*, New York, 5 July 1862, in *New York Colonization Journal*, November 1862, reprinted in Lynch, *Black Spokesman*, 21, 23.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁸⁷ Blyden, “An Address before the Maine State Colonization Society,” reprinted in Lynch, *Black Spokesman*, 15.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁹⁰ Blyden letter to the *Liberia Herald*, reprinted in Lynch, *Black Spokesman*, 22.

⁹¹ Edward Blyden, “The Three Needs of Liberia,” lecture delivered at Lower Buchanan, Grand Bassa County, Liberia, 26 January 1908, reprinted in Lynch, *Black Spokesman*, 123.

European tastes and habits. In coming among a people hardly possessing the rudiments of civilization they attempt at once to introduce European views and practices among the people, thus interfering with and disturbing the normal operation of their native instincts⁹²

Native instincts—otherwise called natural or racial instincts by Blyden⁹³—formed a crucial linchpin in his view of race. For his part, he considered skin color a tertiary trait of race, “a superficial accident” that paled in comparison to the more determinative factors of climate and environment, which he regarded as formative in developing the mental and moral faculties of his people.⁹⁴ But forming these faculties had an inner component, as “it is a question also of instinct,” by which he meant cultural choices in one’s tastes, feelings, and preferences.⁹⁵ Blyden’s guiding rule was to “respect and preserve the harmless instincts of the people,” such as African dress, diet, and dialect.⁹⁶ For the educator, *harmless* meant anything that did not violate universal principles, whose application could morph into different forms depending on the group in question.⁹⁷ Hence he deplored African converts who insisted on imitating European missionaries in their attire to the point that a beaver hat or Wellington boots came to be seen as

⁹² Edward Blyden letter to William H. Hare, Freetown, Sierra Leone, 14 September 1872, in Archives of the Episcopal Church, RG 72: Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society/National Council—The Liberia Papers, Period B: 1868–1896, Box 33: Blyden, Prof. Edward W., 1872, Folder: Liberia Papers, Blyden, Professor Edward W., 1871–1872.

⁹³ See Edward Blyden, *African Life and Customs* (London, 1908), excerpted in Lynch, *Black Spokesman*, 176.

⁹⁴ Edward Blyden, “The African Problem and the Method of Its Solution,” a discourse at the 73rd anniversary of the American Colonization Society, Washington, DC, January 1890, in *African Repository*, July 1890, reprinted in Lynch, *Black Spokesman*, 51.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*; Edward Blyden letter to William Grant, Sierra Leone legislative council member, Freetown, Sierra Leone, 22 May 1872, reprinted in Lynch, *Black Spokesman*, 223.

⁹⁶ Edward Blyden letter to William H. Hare, Freetown, Sierra Leone, 14 September 1872, in Archives of the Episcopal Church, RG 72: Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society/National Council—The Liberia Papers, Period B: 1868–1896, Box 33: Blyden, Prof. Edward W., 1872, Folder: Liberia Papers, Blyden, Professor Edward W., 1871–1872.

⁹⁷ See Edward Blyden, *The Return of the Exiles and the West African Church* (London 1891), 33, reprinted in Lynch, *Black Spokesman*, 194.

concomitant with faith. The fallacy lay in assuming that all worship experiences were to look the same in Liberia as in England or America.

“But the duty of every man, of every race is to contend for its individuality—to keep and develop it,” Blyden admonished. “If you are not yourself, if you surrender your personality, you have nothing left to give the world.”⁹⁸ By *individuality*, he meant “any special or peculiar adaptation to the situation it occupies” that “makes a man or a nation [or a race] interesting and indispensable on certain lines of work.”⁹⁹ Consequently, he commended a sermon by Stopford Brooke for espousing the desire that “*people gr[o]w naturally into their distinctive type and place in the world.*”¹⁰⁰ In Blyden’s words, “We do not want the same thing in Africa we left in America. Progress is difference . . . it is not to suppress individuality but to develop and emphasize it.”¹⁰¹ Hence Blyden held two positions: race essentialism based on culture, and complementarianism in human history and the world community.

These stances derived from Blyden’s view of history, and they influenced his political vision and hence his emigration policy. From the historical record, Blyden divined a fourfold providential design for African Americans: (1) their enslavement had trained them for civilizing and evangelizing Africa; (2) their continued marginalization kindled their desire for a true homeland; (3) Africa’s independence signaled divine preservation from Euro-American rule and reservation for African Americans; and (4) their return to Africa marked the start of reclaiming

⁹⁸ Edward Blyden, “Study and Race,” lecture to Young Men’s Literary Association of Sierra Leone, 19 May 1893, in *Sierra Leone Times*, 27 May 1893, reprinted in Lynch, *Black Spokesman*, 201.

⁹⁹ Edward Blyden, “A Chapter in the History of Liberia,” *AME Church Review*, July 1892, reprinted in Lynch, *Black Spokesman*, 117.

¹⁰⁰ Blyden letter to William H. Hare, in Archives of the Episcopal Church, original emphasis retained.

¹⁰¹ Blyden, “The Three Needs of Liberia,” reprinted in Lynch, *Black Spokesman*, 123.

and reestablishing the fatherland.¹⁰² On one hand, Blyden staked the move as foreordained in cosmic history: like ancient Israelites, African Americans were to go and possess the promised land for themselves and for their God. On the other hand, Blyden depicted migration as a natural and necessary step in the race's historical development, predicting that "[t]he Negro exodus from America—gradual it may be, but, nevertheless, an exodus—is sure to come. It is an inevitable condition in the evolution of the Negro race."¹⁰³

Interestingly, Blyden articulated a view of history that was not linear but instead cyclical, one in which African Americans would have to repeat the same processes that Caucasians underwent in order to progress. At the start of all great civilizations, Blyden noted that their early settlers had to endure deprivation and death. Thus suffering became a key ingredient to advance, as "the Cross precedes the Crown."¹⁰⁴ And hence, "the man, then, who is not able to suffer and to die for his fellows when necessity requires it, is not fit to be a pioneer in this great work."¹⁰⁵ Now one begins to glimpse the difficulty facing Blyden: he required not just recruits but true converts who possessed unshakable racial instincts that would spur them not only to sacrifice their lives but also to perform cultural excavation that would preserve their purity and individuality. In one sense, it was easier for Blyden when they died because when dead, a person becomes an object that the living can commodify and refigure for their own cause.

¹⁰² Edward Blyden, "The Call of Providence to the Descendants of Africa in America," standard speech as Liberian emigration commissioner delivered in American eastern cities, summer of 1862, recorded in Edward Wilmot Blyden, *Liberia's Offering* (New York: John A. Gray, 1862), 67-91, reprinted in Lynch, *Black Spokesman*, 26-27.

¹⁰³ Edward Blyden, "The Negro in the United States," *AME Church Review* (January 1900): 312.

¹⁰⁴ Blyden, "Study and Race," reprinted in Lynch, *Black Spokesman*, 203.

¹⁰⁵ Blyden, "The Call of Providence to the Descendants of Africa in America," reprinted in Lynch, *Black Spokesman*, 31.

Few African Americans could live up to Blyden's ideal, and in time he ended up as an equal opportunity critic, blasting U.S. northern and southern blacks alike. "It is well, perhaps," he sighed, "that these Northern blacks have not rushed in large numbers to Liberia; they do not seem fitted to the endurance and self-denial of founding new empires, which the southern emigrants to Liberia have manifested."¹⁰⁶ And of former Southern slaves, he pined, "The body was set free, but the soul remained in bondage. Therefore, the intellectual, social and religious freedom of the American ex-slave has yet to be achieved."¹⁰⁷ As Blyden came to realize, a change in location would not automatically change one's mental condition. Thus he judged an immediate exodus to Africa to be neither desirable nor prudent: "I believe that while there are and will continue to be intense longings on the part of many in the South for Africa, and while there will be now and then small emigrations to the Fatherland, the time for anything like a general exodus is far distant—perhaps three hundred years off"¹⁰⁸

Moving away from his early exuberance of unqualified emigration, Blyden eschewed an American replica in favor of a racial restoration that boasted African—i.e. non Anglo-Saxon—methods and achievement. No doubt his opposition stemmed in part from his mistreatment by American emigrants in the 1860s; nearly a half century later, he still railed against "Americo-Liberians or Afro-Americans, that is to say, Africans with the prejudices and predilections—the bias and aspirations—of white men: with 'ideals' . . . pitifully Anglo-Saxon" and "altogether unattainable" for the political and cultural context in which black people found themselves.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ Blyden letter to the *Liberia Herald*, reprinted in Lynch, *Black Spokesman*, 22.

¹⁰⁷ Blyden, "The Three Needs of Liberia," reprinted in Lynch, *Black Spokesman*, 120.

¹⁰⁸ Edward Blyden to Booker T. Washington," 28 November 1894, in *New York Age*, 24 January 1895, reprinted in Lynch, *Black Spokesman*, 208.

¹⁰⁹ Blyden, "The Three Needs of Liberia," reprinted in Lynch, *Black Spokesman*, 120.

Although “we have tried to copy the United States,” Blyden conceded “this system has failed” because “it is not natural to man as an individual to be a republican which means all for one and one for all.”¹¹⁰ Only Africans could save Africa, because as Blyden trumpeted, “The African idea is the idea of the first Christian Church—‘One for all and all for one’ Now this model is in entire agreement with African instincts.”¹¹¹

Blyden’s disillusionment translated into ironic support for Booker T. Washington’s Atlanta Exposition speech.¹¹² Because Blyden judged the Southern Negro “not yet ready for the transition” to Africa, he contended, “The [present] interest as well as the duty of the Southern Negro, it appears to me, is to follow the practical and sensible advice by Mr. Booker T. Washington, in his now famous metaphor, ‘to drop his bucket where he is’—to use the ample, and I must add, unexampled means to put into his hands for real progress and permanent usefulness.”¹¹³ As such, Blyden ruled out political involvement—which hindered “genuine progress” by distracting African Americans from the “higher and nobler work” of spiritual and industrial amelioration¹¹⁴—because “practically the Negro is in the United States to stay, and should adjust his relations with the white people upon a basis that will ensure peace, harmony and prosperity.”¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰ Blyden, “A Chapter in the History of Liberia,” 67; Blyden, “The Three Needs of Liberia,” reprinted in Lynch, *Black Spokesman*, 121; Blyden, “A Chapter in the History of Liberia,” 64.

¹¹¹ Blyden, “The Three Needs of Liberia,” reprinted in Lynch, *Black Spokesman*, 122.

¹¹² See Booker T. Washington, “Atlanta Exposition Address,” 18 September 1895, reprinted in Brotz, *African-American Social and Political Thought*, 356-59.

¹¹³ Blyden, “The Negro in the United States,” 315.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*; Blyden to Washington,” reprinted in Lynch, *Black Spokesman*, 207.

¹¹⁵ Blyden to Washington, reprinted in Lynch, *Black Spokesman*, 208.

Blyden never gave up on his notion of racial instincts, but he did contract the pool who possessed them. American blacks still had a leadership role to play, but their number shrank from the 600,000 he had once envisioned.¹¹⁶ In his later years, Blyden adopted a racial biologism that he had earlier denounced in some colonizationists. In 1869 he exulted, “The Negro is being taught to respect himself, and soon he will think it no honour to mingle his blood with that of the Caucasian, Indian, or Mongolian.”¹¹⁷ More than two decades later, he went public with his biological essentialism, exhaling,

The great mass of the race, thank God, has not been tampered with. At least 200 millions in the vast regions east and north and south of us remain intact. The contamination has affected only a few millions in the western hemisphere and a few thousands along the margin of the continent. But no pure race has ever yet been destroyed. The original races of the Eastern hemisphere have existed from the beginning and no one of them can be exterminated, as degenerate offsprings of them have been in America¹¹⁸

These are Frederick Douglass’s premises in reverse: biological assimilationism becomes a detriment rather than an advantage, as racial homogeneity serves as the prerequisite to creating a successful nation-state. Racial intermixture creates not a new progressive race but a degenerate one riddled with “psychological possibilities and susceptibilities” inferior to the “mental idiosyncrasy of Africans.”¹¹⁹ Not with a little irony, then, does one discover that Blyden’s admirable respect for African and Islamic civilization originated in his biologically-driven contempt for those of biracial and interracial descent. In the end, Blyden’s emigrationism fell

¹¹⁶ Blyden, “The Origin and Purpose of African Colonization,” reprinted in Lynch, *Black Spokesman*, 42.

¹¹⁷ Edward Blyden to New York Colonization Society board member, Monrovia, Liberia, 6 October 1869, in Smithsonian Institute annual report (1870), 388, reprinted in Lynch, *Black Spokesman*, 189.

¹¹⁸ Blyden, “Study and Race,” reprinted in Lynch, *Black Spokesman*, 203.

¹¹⁹ Blyden, “A Chapter in the History of Liberia,” 67.

victim to his racialism, leaving him to enshrine racial standards that most African Americans, with their mixed heritage, could not possibly hope to meet.

Alexander Crummell

Of the men discussed, Alexander Crummell was born with the most advantaged birth as the eldest son of an affluent free black family in New York. As a child, young Alex rubbed shoulders with such family friends and luminaries as John Russwurm, Samuel Cornish, and Arthur Tappan. Family wealth and connections gave the boy access to a model education at the African Free School, Canal Street High School, and Oneida Institute. And as a classmate of Henry Garnet, James McCune Smith, and Samuel Ringgold Ward, Crummell circulated among a pantheon of future African American novae. Yet his childhood was not entirely idyllic, as a white mob torched his family's church in 1834 and another one destroyed his school in 1835.¹²⁰ Blessed with exceptional training and beset by racist-tinged experiences, at the tender age of nineteen he lectured as the featured speaker of the Association for the Political Improvement of the People of Color, which lobbied for full enfranchisement of black voters. He was determined to embark on an illustrious career that would fulfill his leadership potential and bring glory to his race.

Crummell's defining encounter with racism came in 1839, when he petitioned for admittance into seminary, only to be denied because of his racial background. Episcopalian bishop Benjamin Onderdonk summoned the twenty-year old before him in order to berate the upstart youth for having the impudence to apply to a white school, reducing the aspiring

¹²⁰ School incident related on p. 31; see Alex Crummell, "Eulogy on Rev. Henry Highland Garnett [sic], D.D.," in Crummell, *Africa and America*, 280-81. Please note that "Alex Crummell" and "Alexander Crummell" are the same person; hereinafter this author will use "Alex Crummell" when the original publication attributes authorship as such.

seminarian to tears.¹²¹ During the next decade, he had a run-in with Benjamin Onderdonk's brother, Henry, another Episcopal bishop who offered to recognize his clergy credentials as long as he avoided seeking official recognition in the diocese convention. Years later, W. E. B. Du Bois would immortalize the confrontation in *The Souls of Black Folk*, painting Crummell as a principled objector who gravely informed Onderdonk, "I will never enter your diocese on such terms," before turning and "pass[ing] into the Valley of the Shadow of Death."¹²² Although Du Bois's poignant recount may be idealized, it does accurately depict the obduracy Crummell encountered in his quest to become a man of letters. During the early 1840s he spent some time taking classes at Yale, though never finishing because of a probable proscription against formal admittance of African American students. Restless and ambitious, Crummell decided to obtain his academic credentials abroad in England.

Crummell would later wax nostalgic about his time in Britain as "a period of grand opportunities, of the richest privileges, of cherished remembrances and of golden light."¹²³ He disembarked in London in 1848 with a young family in tow, ostensibly to fundraise for his parish back home. Yet he had an ulterior motive, to earn a college degree from either Oxford or Cambridge, whose prestigious reputation he hoped would "shame, contempt, neutralize caste—yea even command respect and consideration."¹²⁴ In 1853 he had in hand a precious sheepskin from Cambridge, where he had matriculated for the past four years. Yet he shocked his

¹²¹ See Alex Crummell, *Jubilate: 1844–1894, The Shades and the Lights of a Fifty Years' Ministry, A Sermon at St. Luke's Church, Washington, DC, 9 December 1894* (Washington, DC: R. L. Pendleton, 1894), 5-25, reprinted in Alexander Crummell, *Destiny and Race: Selected Writings, 1840–1898*, edited by Wilson Jeremiah Moses (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), 33.

¹²² W. E. B. Du Bois, "Of Alexander Crummell," in W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 518, reprinted in W. E. B. Du Bois, *Writings* (New York: Library of America, 1986), 357-547.

¹²³ Crummell, *Jubilate*, reprinted in Moses, *Destiny and Race*, 39.

¹²⁴ Alexander Crummell to John Jay, 9 August 1848, in Jay Family Papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Room, Butler Library, Columbia University, New York, New York, quoted in Moses, *Alexander Crummell*, 59.

supporters and New York congregants when he announced his decision not to return to America because of “the earnest counsel of my medical advisor that I must seek a warm climate. It was this advice which led me to Africa.”¹²⁵ Still, the pastor scholar considered his move to be consistent with race amelioration, insisting, “My heart, from youth, was consecrated to my race and its interests; and as I was ordered to a tropical clime, I chose the land of my forefathers, and went to West Africa.”¹²⁶ After his arrival in Liberia, he defended his choice more stridently, smarting, “I claim as good a right to live in Africa as any man. I have come back to within a day’s journey of the very spot whence my own father was stolen in his boyhood and where my poor ancestors lived from time immemorial! Who has a better right to emigrate to Africa than I? However disagreeable my presence may be to any man, it is nevertheless my birthright; I claim and insist upon it, to live and labor in Liberia”¹²⁷

Crummell’s decision to emigrate derived from a combination of factors, both personal and ideological, including health, professional ambition, pecuniary concerns, evangelistic idealism, sense of heritage, and mounting respect for Liberians. “All men have the natural right to rise to any position to which talent and energy may fit them,” he averred.¹²⁸ But the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law had reinforced to Crummell the barrier to social ascent in the United States, and the 1851 founding of Liberia College beckoned him to utilize his academic gifts as an African don. From an economic vantage, the burgeoning coffee market and liberal landowning policies moved Crummell to boast “that a retirement to a farm, with ordinary activity will give

¹²⁵ Crummell, *Jubilate*, reprinted in Moses, *Destiny and Race*, 38.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 40.

¹²⁷ Alexander Crummell letter, Monrovia, Liberia, 7 May 1866, in Archives of the Episcopal Church, RG 72: Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society/National Council—The Liberia Papers, Period A: 1822–1867, Box 2, Crummell, Rev. Alexander, 1853–1867, “Liberia: Crummell, Rev. Alex, 1866” folder.

¹²⁸ Alex Crummell, “The Dignity of Labor; and Its Value to a New People,” in Crummell, *Africa and America*, 400.

any intelligent stirring man, a fortune in 10 or 15 years.”¹²⁹ With the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society scouring Episcopalian ranks for black missionaries to go to Africa, Crummell seemed a perfect candidate with his pastoral background. Finally, he had harbored an inner desire to see Africa since childhood, as “it was by listening to his [father’s] tales of African life, I became deeply interested in the land of our fathers; and early in my life resolved, at some future day, to go to Africa.”¹³⁰ Presented with the chance, the newly minted college graduate seized the prospects for a better life outside the confines of a repressive America.

Emigration made business sense, too, because as Crummell touted, by stimulating and investing in African industry, one could (1) block Euro-American inroads into Africa, (2) shed the stigma of penury and impotence, (3) indebt African society to its American kin, and (4) enrich African American investors in the process.¹³¹ He pinned his hopes particularly on coffee, which he foresaw as a major cash crop and as a civilizing agent. Thus “I regard it as one of the most hopeful incidents in Liberian life; for, as the people plant Coffee and increase their means, more comfort will prevail, and higher social and domestic ambitions will arise, civilization will advance, and churches will become self-supporting, and new missions will be originated in our

¹²⁹ Alexander Crummell letter, Monrovia, Liberia, West Africa, 8 October 1856, in Archives of the Episcopal Church, RG 72: Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society/National Council—The Liberia Papers, Period A: 1822–1867, Box 2, Crummell, Rev. Alexander, 1853–1867, “Liberia, Rev. Alexander Crummell, 1856–1859” folder, original emphasis retained.

¹³⁰ Alexander Crummell, “Africa and Her People” lecture notes, MS. C. 23, untitled manuscript, Arthur A. Schomburg Collection, New York Public Library, New York City, New York, reprinted in Moses, *Destiny and Race*, 61. Crummell expanded on this account in 1869, relating, “My father was born but 2 or 3 days[?] journey from this country, and stolen thence and carried to America, and such was the interest he excited in all his children in Africa, that long before I became a disciple, my heart was in this the fatherland; and I read everything I c[oul]d get hold of concerning Africa.” Alexander Crummell letter to Rev. L. Lavage, Caldwell and Monrovia, Liberia, West Africa, 19 May 1869, in Archives of the Episcopal Church, RG 72: Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society/National Council—The Liberia Papers, Period B: 1868–1896, Box 21 [35], Crummell, Rev. Alexander, 1868–1874, “Liberia Papers, Crummell, Rev. Alexander, 1869” folder.

¹³¹ Alexander Crummell to Charles Dunbar, Mt. Vaughan, Cape Palmas, Liberia, 1 September 1860, printed as Alexander Crummell, *The Relations and Duties of Free Colored Men in America to Africa: A Letter to Charles B. Dunbar, M.D., Esq., of New York City* (Hartford: Press of Case, Lockwood & Co., 1861), 17-18, 25.

own religious bodies.”¹³² Regarding commerce as a requisite step for the gospel, Crummell bubbled, “This interior country *is* opened for trade and barter: and then why not for the Gospel, for Missions, for Schools, for [Chris]tian training and instruction? Surely the former are not of as much importance as the latter.”¹³³ So while “I recognize the need of Trade, Agriculture, Commerce, Art, Letters and Government, as the collateral and the indispensable aids to the complete restoration of my fatherland,” Crummell deemed them to be “but *collateral* and auxiliary; not the end, and aim, and object of that divine will and providence.”¹³⁴ To accuse Crummell of succumbing to capitalist greed, then, is to miss the point that his economic arguments for emigrating were to lead to the higher ends of evangelization and civilization.

Crummell stamped his colonization efforts often with a divinely sanctioned imprint. In his sermons, the missionary pastor warned of God’s retributive destruction and restorative discipline to the wayward, extending God’s “governmental” and “universal” principle to not only individuals but also societies.¹³⁵ Hence the African American community had a choice of two paths: it could succumb to the effects of slavery and prejudice, or it could submit to divine trial in order to augur a better tomorrow. In the 1860s Crummell interpreted the latter to mean a return

¹³² Alexander Crummell letter, Caldwell and Monrovia, Liberia, West Africa, 3 April 1871, in Archives of the Episcopal Church, RG 72: Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society/National Council—The Liberia Papers, Period B: 1868–1896, Box 21 [35], Crummell, Rev. Alexander, 1868–1874, “Liberia, Rev. Alexander Crummell, 1871” folder.

¹³³ Alexander Crummell letter, Caldwell and Monrovia, Liberia, West Africa, 9 September 1870, in Archives of the Episcopal Church, RG 72: Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society/National Council—The Liberia Papers, Period B: 1868–1896, Box 21 [35], Crummell, Rev. Alexander, 1868–1874, “Liberia, Crummell, Rev. Alexander, 1870” folder, original emphasis retained.

¹³⁴ Alex Crummell, “The Regeneration of Africa,” discourse before the Pennsylvania Colonization Society, at the Church of the Epiphany, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, October 1865, in Crummell, *Africa and America*, 446, original emphasis retained.

¹³⁵ Alexander Crummell, “The Destined Superiority of the Negro,” in Alexander Crummell, *The Greatness of Christ and Other Sermons* (New York: Thomas Whittaker, 1882), 332-52, reprinted in Alexander Crummell, *Civilization and Black Progress: Selected Writings of Alexander Crummell on the South*, edited by J. R. Oldfield (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995), 46.

to Africa in order to complete God's historical plan. On one hand, emigration was "almost coeval with humanity itself," as people exhibited "a spontaneous, instinctive nature" in migrating during the earliest recorded history.¹³⁶ As Crummell asserted, "Colonization *is* history."¹³⁷ And on the other hand, emigration was also providential due to the forced exile of enslaved millions, from which "God is bringing scores and hundred of them back to this continent [of Africa], as colonists and teachers; and with them 'casts the pearl of the gospel' upon these heathen shores!"¹³⁸ Therefore, Crummell surmised that the duty of emigrants was to civilize and Christianize African natives so that they "become *citizens in a negro nationality and the creators of a free Republic* amid despotic heathenism."¹³⁹ Here one finds a political goal behind Crummell's economic and religious reasons for departing the United States.

Yet Crummell's concept of nationality differed from Delany's political state, coming closer to Blyden's idea of a distinct sphere of sociocultural influence. For Crummell, national identity depended on circumstance, position, religion, and race. Commenting on the social conditions in postwar United States, he pinpointed that "[i]t is this our actual separation from the real life of the nation, which constitutes us 'a nation within a nation:' thrown very considerably upon ourselves for many of the largest interests of life, and for nearly all our social and religious advantages."¹⁴⁰ While none of the other emigrationists would have disagreed with this statement, Crummell went further in defining *nation* by the presence of characteristics usually attributed to

¹³⁶ Alex Crummell, "Emigration, an Aid to the Evangelization of Africa," sermon to Barbadian emigrants at Trinity Church, Monrovia, Liberia, West Africa, 14 May 1863, in Crummell, *Africa and America*, 410.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 412, emphasis added.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 419.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 424, emphasis added.

¹⁴⁰ Alexander Crummell, "The Social Principle among a People and Its Bearing on Their Progress and Development," 1875 Thanksgiving Day sermon, in Crummell, *The Greatness of Christ*, 285-311, reprinted in Oldfield, *Civilization and Black Progress*, 32.

a civilization. “It was not, in a true sense, a nation,” he adjudged when first arriving in Liberia. “It has never risen above crude and simple Colonial life; for it was, at first, driven by untoward circumstances, and these not of its own creation, to assume, and before due time, exaggerated and almost crushing national functions. I found there great crudities, and sad anomalies. How could it have been otherwise? Was not Liberia the fruit, the product of slavery? Did not its illiteracy and its immorality spring directly from the plantation?”¹⁴¹ Servility, illiteracy, and immorality—all of these signaled to Crummell that Liberia had not yet met his cultural criteria for nationhood.

Throughout his years in Monrovia, the straitlaced Episcopalian harped incessantly about the degenerate condition of American emigrants, once venting,

Yet I cannot cannot [sic] write the glowing reports of the nation and of the people, and the conditions and prospects of the Republic wh[ich] many people do; and yet be a true and honest man, that is, in my own estimation of myself. There is a great work to be done here for these colonists: they come out here, whole cargoes of them, fresh from the plantations, and, with rare and individual exceptions, ignorant, benighted, besotted and filthy, both in the inner and the outer man: for . . . the life of these men, that is their inner life, is gone: crushed . . . and only the shredded wreck of humanity remains.¹⁴²

Crummell’s antipathy had less to do with circumstance and position and more to do with religion and race. In short, African American emigrants failed to uphold the moral and racial ideals integral to his notion of nationality. “The race is essentially religious,” Crummell instructed. “Even in his pagan state the *spiritual* instinct always has had the ascendancy.”¹⁴³ As a boy, he had tended to measure others by whether they had “high moral and spiritual instincts” rather than

¹⁴¹ Crummell, *Jubilate*, reprinted in Moses, *Destiny and Race*, 40.

¹⁴² Alexander Crummell letter, Monrovia, Liberia, 26 August 1854, in Archives of the Episcopal Church, RG 72: Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society/National Council—The Liberia Papers, Period A: 1822–1867, Box 1, Crummell, Rev. Alexander, 1853–1867.

¹⁴³ Crummell, *Incidents of Hope for the Negro Race in America*, reprinted in Oldfield, *Civilization and Black Progress*, 180, original emphasis retained.

by Blyden's racial instincts.¹⁴⁴ Crummell, however, did believe in racial instincts that produced moral distinctiveness—whereas Blyden's racial instincts accented cultural difference—claiming, “Every race of people has its special instincts, carries in its blood its distinctive individuality. This peculiar element is its own and exclusive possession, and is incapable of transference.”¹⁴⁵ Crummell wedded race to religion when he proposed, “It is thus, through this peculiarity, that the Negro has held on to those special moral qualities, to those high spiritual instincts which were recognized by ancient Pagan writers as qualities of the Hamitic family; and which have been noticed by discerning Christian philosophers and philanthropists in all subsequent times.”¹⁴⁶ One may wonder why all the fuss about a *religious* race, or stated differently, a *racialized* religion. Crummell obsessed over the idea because it not only informed the past but also dictated the future. He staked “the principle of race [a]s one of the most persistent of all things in the constitution of man. It is one of those structural facts in our nature which abide with a fixed, vital, and *reproductive* power.”¹⁴⁷ His procreative language hints at the importance of the family in Crummell's conceptual framework, “[f]or the basis of all human progress and of all civilization is the family,” which he regarded as more valuable than “the school, the college, the profession, suffrage, civil office.”¹⁴⁸ In his paradigm, “[i]ndeed, a race *is* a family. The principle

¹⁴⁴ Alex Crummell, “Eulogium on Henry Highland Garnet, D.D.,” delivered before the Union Literary and Historical Association, Washington, DC, 4 May 1882, in Crummell, *Africa and America*, 275.

¹⁴⁵ Alexander Crummell, “The Best Methods of Church Work among the Colored People,” *Church Magazine* 2 (June 1887): 554-62, reprinted in Oldfield, *Civilization and Black Progress*, 157.

¹⁴⁶ Crummell, *Incidents of Hope for the Negro Race in America*, reprinted in Oldfield, *Civilization and Black Progress*, 179, original emphasis retained.

¹⁴⁷ Crummell, “The Race-Problem in America,” in Crummell, *Africa and America*, 46, emphasis added.

¹⁴⁸ Crummell, “The Need of New Ideas and New Aims for a New Era,” in Crummell, *Africa and America*, 25-26.

of continuity is as masterful in races as it is in families—as it is in nations.”¹⁴⁹ Thus Crummell was a racial/religious essentialist, in that he remained steadfastly convinced that survival of the race was rooted in “those special moral qualities” intrinsic in one’s biological constitution and familial association.¹⁵⁰ Less than a year before his death, he was still bemoaning, “We have as yet no wide, stable basis of race-feeling to work upon; it has got to be created. Take the average black man in America, and you will find that he thinks that the creation of races was a superfluous act on the part of the Almighty; and that that superfluity is to be corrected in America.”¹⁵¹

No surprise, then, that Crummell reiterated Blyden’s desire for selective emigration. In 1861 he begged for fifty thousand emigrants to Liberia; in 1865 he spoke of using just a “remnant”; and by 1882 he privileged “the *few* who lift up and bear the burdens and give character to the many.”¹⁵² On the mission field, he predicted that uplift of incoming emigrants would take a half century to accomplish, and he brooded over their “corroded” affections.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁹ Crummell, “The Race-Problem in America,” in Crummell, *Africa and America*, 46, original emphasis retained; see also Alexander Crummell, “Founder’s Day at Hampton Institute, January 30th, 1896, Address by Rev. Alex. Crummell, Rector Emeritus of St. Luke’s Church, Washington, D.C.,” *Southern Workman* 25 (March 1896): 46-49, reprinted in Oldfield, *Civilization and Black Progress*, 191.

¹⁵⁰ At the same time, Crummell rejected innate inferiority, exhorting, “Do not blink at the charge of inferiority. It is not a race peculiarity; and whatever its measure or extent in this country, it has been forced upon you. Do not deny it, but neutralize and destroy it, not by shrieks, or agonies, or foolish pretence; but by culture, by probity, and industry.” Crummell, “The Social Principle among a People,” reprinted in Oldfield, *Civilization and Black Progress*, 38.

¹⁵¹ Alex Crummell to John W. Cromwell, Liverpool, England, 5 October 1897, in Arthur A. Schomburg Collection, New York Public Library, New York City, New York, reprinted in Moses, *Destiny and Race*, 90.

¹⁵² Although Crummell had surrendered his dreams of Liberian emigration by 1882, his words still reveal an intellectual trajectory of exclusivism that carried over from his emigration days. Alex Crummell, “A Defence of the Negro Race in America from the Assaults and Charges of Rev. J. L. Tucker, D.D., of Jackson, Mississippi,” in Crummell, *Africa and America*, 113, original emphasis retained.

¹⁵³ Crummell letter, 26 August 1854, in Archives of the Episcopal Church; Alexander Crummell to John Jay, 9 February 1849, Jay Family Papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Room, Butler Library, Columbia University, New York, New York, quoted in Moses, *Alexander Crummell*, 62; see also Crummell, *The Relations and Duties of Free Colored Men in America to Africa*, 7.

“*Who* are to be the agents to raise and elevate this people to a higher plane of being?” queried Crummell. “*They* are to be the scholars; for to transform, stimulate and uplift a people is a work of intelligence; it is a work which demands the clear induction of historical facts and their application to new circumstances,—a work which will require the most skillful resources and the wise practicality of superior men.”¹⁵⁴ Thus one uncovers the hierarchal nature of Crummell’s emigrationism: a small intelligentsia would mobilize the masses by reforming their morals, civilizing their manners, and establishing their commerce, which would result in an African nationality emerging to showcase the religious, intellectual, and political superiority of the black race. It required time, discipline, and “a superior class of men” who possessed “like sentiments, feelings, blood and ancestry.”¹⁵⁵ At its core, Crummell’s emigrationism followed Plato’s *Republic* in its vision of rule by philosopher-kings. As the Episcopalian Platonist summed, “All the improvement, the progress, the culture, the civilization of men come from somewhere above. They never come from below!”¹⁵⁶ Consequently, in pronouncing on Crummell, one finds emigration infused with collective duty but also tinged with exclusivity designed to fulfill individual aspirations. His hierarchal civilizationism, while not as exclusionary as Blyden’s racial instincts, was just as rigid, demanding adherence to moral perfectionism and autocratic rule.

¹⁵⁴ Crummell, “The Need of New Ideas and New Aims for a New Era,” in Crummell, *Africa and America*, 36, original emphasis retained.

¹⁵⁵ Crummell, *Jubilate*, reprinted in Moses, *Destiny and Race*, 54; Crummell, “The Regeneration of Africa,” in Crummell, *Africa and America*, 438.

¹⁵⁶ Alexander Crummell, “The Prime Need of the Negro Race,” *Independent* 49 (19 August 1897): 1-2, reprinted in Oldfield, *Civilization and Black Progress*, 201; for more on Platonist influences on Crummell, see Moses, *Alexander Crummell*, 71-72, 75-76.

Historiography

Emigrationists' philosophies of leadership and nationality had ramifications for relations with natives, who often found themselves assigned to the bottom rung of society. In the decades after postcolonialist critics like Frantz Fanon, historians have reevaluated emigrationists such as Delany, Blyden, and Crummell.

According to Alfred Moss, Crummell held unswerving belief in the efficacy of Western civilization, what he considered the apex of human advancement. Crummell advocated strong national identity through the promotion of commerce, culture, and Christianity—all hallmarks of the Western world. As Moss avers, Crummell's sense of duty compelled him to transfer these Western ideals to indigenous Africans, whether wanted or not. In Moss's estimation, Crummell conflated culture with civilization, expecting Africans to conform to Western culture in order to be civilized. Consequently, Crummell became "a hostile and unsympathetic surveyor" of African culture, blind to how Euro-American values could debase the socioeconomic lives of blacks.¹⁵⁷

Wilson Moses finds Crummell to be a "mass of contradictions" in trying to hold simultaneously to black nationalism, Victorian civilizationism, and Anglocentric elitism. On the one hand, Crummell opposed what Moses terms "settler-state colonialism," which favored the forcible displacement and extermination of aborigines for the benefit of Monrovia's mulatto-ruled government. Furthermore, Crummell placed a premium on Africans' morals and upbringing. He admired the physical prowess and high character of tribal natives. The Vey and Mandingoes were truly "noble savages" in their perceived innocence, intelligence, and industriousness. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Crummell valued the aborigines for their

¹⁵⁷ Alfred Moss, "Alexander Crummell: Black Nationalist and Apostle of Western Civilization," in *Black Leaders of the Nineteenth Century*, edited by Leon Litwack and August Meier (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1988), 251.

physical feats and personal integrity. On the other hand, Moses faults the “whiggish, elitist, capitalistic, and statist republicanism” embraced by nationalists such as Crummell. Although Crummell espoused benevolent rule over natives, it was rule nonetheless. His additional belief in Christian redemptionism, Moses argues, prevented Crummell from ever shaking the conviction that they were somehow “degraded.” Indigenous tribes lacked the spiritual, political, and cultural advancement that Crummell presupposed Christianity brought. If Liberia were to rise to England’s stature, it needed its inhabitants to adopt Protestant faith. The same went for language. Moses points to Crummell’s strident endorsement of the English language as another example of his Anglophilism. In championing English as the language of liberty and Christianity, he dismissed native languages as “rude” and unfit for expressing “higher” ideals. Taken together, Crummell’s notions of civilizationism and Anglophilism clashed with his Afrocentrism, Moses judges, leaving Crummell incapable of fully assimilating into Liberian society.¹⁵⁸

Tunde Adeleke disagrees with Moses’ “reductionist” assessment. More than just promoting civilizationism, Crummell legitimated imperialism. As Adeleke explains, a negative view of Africans led Crummell to disparage their culture and eventually advocate European rule. His disdain for Africans arose from belief that slavery had been a divinely-directed “fortunate fall”—that is, slavery had a salutary civilizing influence on its victims—causing him to regard African Americans as better suited for progress. This thinking was tantamount to rationalizing oppression, Adeleke charges. Crummell was an imperialist masquerading as a providentialist. Just as God had used slavery to “better” African Americans, Crummell thought colonialism could benefit Africans through the principle of diffusion: civilization would replace barbarism, as colonial governance imprinted its values on the populace. By venerating Anglo-Saxon values,

¹⁵⁸ Moses, *Creative Conflict in African American Thought*, 83-102.

he “castigated and scorned indigenous Africans.” Because natives needed strong guidance, Crummell went as far as to lobby for a European protectorate over Liberia. Crummell’s low opinion of Africans and his high regard for European civilization, Adeleke concludes, led him to justify future white domination in Africa. For Adeleke, Crummell’s black nationalism was merely European colonialism in a different guise.¹⁵⁹

Adeleke judges Delany just as harshly. Although Delany promoted self-rule, Adeleke charges that he also perpetuated the economic and cultural pretexts for imperialism. Determined that American blacks form “the ruling element,” Delany looked for a location that possessed the building blocks for erecting a black nationality: land, labor, and natural resources. He found Africa to be that place, Adeleke argues, and championed African American emigration to the continent. Despite denouncing white intrusion, Delany advocated their methods, particularly utilizing commerce to cement political power. As Adeleke construes Delany’s approach, African Americans had to become “equally imperialistic” and economically aggressive to match the Europeans. They had to colonize Africa before white financiers did. But Adeleke warns commerce was a double-edged sword that produced not only wealth but also hegemony and exploitation. Worse for Adeleke, Delany cloaked his motives in religious language, co-opting the Deuteronomic admonition for Israel to go and possess the land. “Essentially, Delany used providentialism to legitimize emigration and the accumulation and appropriation of wealth,” Adeleke accuses.¹⁶⁰ In his quest to resettle Africa, Delany compromised his longstanding

¹⁵⁹ Tunde Adeleke, *UnAfrican Americans: Nineteenth-Century Black Nationalists and the Civilizing Mission* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1998), 29, 70-91.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 55.

opposition to white financing, even going so far as to court British industrialists.¹⁶¹ His proposed alliance of British manufacturers, African American workers, and native laborers cultivating cotton in Africa, in Adeleke's mind, left indigenous Africans in the unenviable role of serving as a cheap labor force. In Delany's scheme, they were but objects to be exploited.

Delany's travels caused him to move further toward European methods. For evidence, Adeleke cites Delany's praise of missionary efforts to end such "barbaric" native practices as sleeping on the ground, eating without utensils, and appearing in various states of undress. His approval amounted to the imposition of Western values upon Africa, exposing the "imperialistic aspect of Delany's character."¹⁶² Adeleke attributes his reversal to Euro-American acculturation and the culture shock of confronting an Africa different from the one he preconceived. In spite of his impassioned nationalist pronouncements, Delany suffered from the complex duality of being an African American—thereby preventing complete identification with Africa.

Nell Irvin Painter focuses on the second aspect of Delany's identity. She depicts Delany as a thoroughgoing American who favored both elevation and elitism. By *elevation*, Painter means the acquisition of morals, culture, and robust religion. She argues that early Delany was not so much a nationalist as a proto-Zionist who thought building a nation-state would help defeat racism. Under this scenario, Delany envisioned an intelligent elite who would instruct the masses on proper methods to achieving elevation. For Painter, this conviction informed Delany's views on native Africans. Thus during his visit to Africa, he was quick to praise the missionary oversight that transformed "dirty, ragged, barefooted black boys" into "cleanly, well-dressed,

¹⁶¹ Adeleke appears to conflate Delany's actions partially with those of his fellow Niger Valley Exploring Party member, Robert Campbell. See R. J. M. Blackett, *Beating Against the Barriers: The Lives of Six Nineteenth-Century Afro-Americans* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), 139-82.

¹⁶² Adeleke, *UnAfrican Americans*, 59.

polite young gentlemen.”¹⁶³ Painter notes the inconsistency of Delany’s railing against Americo-Liberian settlers for their dependency on the white ACS all the while approving of their supremacy over black aborigines. In a sense, he was just as paternalistic as the ACS. This settler mentality Delany shared did little to distinguish him from British settlers in East Africa or Jewish settlers in Palestine, Painter contends. And had Delany’s Yorubaland plans materialized, she asserts that his commercial expansion would have exploited native land and labor. Although not denouncing Delany as an imperialist, Painter deems him a “class-bound” American whose black nationalism was as elitist as any white settler’s thinking of that day.

Paul Gilroy follows Painter in pronouncing Delany’s black nationalism as elitist. Africa needed a wholesale renovation, and Delany looked to Western civilization to effect the turnaround. He thought commercial development, intelligently led, could accomplish that end. Like others, Gilroy points out that Delany’s proposed Triple Alliance comprised English capital, black American intellect, and African labor. While benefits were to be shared mutually, leadership would be assigned unequally.

Delany’s ideals extended beyond the commercial to encompass the moral and political realms. Gilroy argues that Delany advanced an anti-mystical, racial rationalism as the future basis for his nationalizing project. He eschewed heathen superstition (and African American religion) as preventing the catholicity of a synthetic, supra-ethnic nation-state. In place of folk-cultural religiosity, he substituted an individual ethic of thrift, temperance, and hard work—all staples of black American uplift ideology. Whether by practice or principle, Delany’s nationalist vision propagated a hermetically sealed culture that fit African Americans best of all.

¹⁶³ Nell Irvin Painter, “Martin R. Delany: Elitism and Black Nationalism,” in Litwack and Meier, eds., *Black Leaders of the Nineteenth Century*, 159.

Gilroy identifies Delany as holding to ontological essentialism, one which relies on the black intellectual to pronounce on the rightness of cultural practices and to enforce their implementation among the race. Devoted to this rigid doctrine, Delany overlooked ethnic particularities embedded within his intended polity. Although Delany's goal of melding a nation-state was noble, Gilroy criticizes him for holding a romantic notion of "race" and "nation" that prioritized Delany and black Americans over the native people they meant to represent.¹⁶⁴

Robert Levine hews closely to Gilroy's interpretation. The literary critic performs a close reading of Delany's novella, *Blake; or, the Huts of America*. Written on the eve of the Civil War, the story traces the travels of a fictional slave, Henry Blake, who escapes his Mississippi owner and travels throughout the U.S. South and Cuba, fomenting insurrectionary plots among the slaves, as he steals from plantation to plantation. Moving to slaveholding Cuba, Blake aspires to lead a revolt in order to topple the government and to install a black ruling element in the country. Levine asks how Blake's revolutionary project differs from William Walker's "filibustering" in Central America.¹⁶⁵

What makes Blake—and Delany by extension—any different than Walker? Levine questions whether Blake's mission was just as imperialistic as Walker's freebooting. As Levine observes, Delany tries to legitimate Blake's coup two ways—one with reference to Blake's personal history and another in an appeal to Blake's blackness. First, Blake claims he is "the lost boy of Cuba," a native-born son who was kidnapped and sold into slavery. Second, co-conspirators can trust Blake because he is "true to [his] own color." That he is black and Cuban sets him apart, at least in Delany's mind.

¹⁶⁴ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 19-40.

¹⁶⁵ Walker was a real-life Tennessean mercenary who invaded Nicaragua in 1855 in an effort to establish a new slave territory, which he hoped the U.S. would annex much like it did Texas.

Yet Levine detects a whiff of “civilized” hierarchalism in both Blake’s Caribbean revolution and Delany’s Afrocentric black nationalism. Blake finds himself in the “fortunate” position he is in because of his enslavement in the United States, where he learns the evils of slavery and the means of liberation. He gains the intelligence and vocabulary necessary to institute freedom in his birth country. Leading up to the long-planned revolution, Blake engineers a mutiny of a Spanish slaver. The principal actors are native Krumen who commandeer the ship from their white captors. But the mutiny’s mastermind remains none other than Blake himself, the embodiment of black civilized leadership. Natives, both African and Cuban, draw on his expertise in carrying out their insurrections.

Most troubling for Levine is Blake’s colonizing tendencies. Blake depicts native Indians and blacks as a united “colored race” against white supremacy. In reality, Blake elides Amerindians, subsuming them under a black Manifest Destiny that is not theirs, one neither claimed nor shared. The foibles in Blake are ones Levine detects in Delany, whose black nationality ideal comes saddled with top-down leadership pretensions, exaggerated kinship claims, and co-opted group identities.¹⁶⁶

James Campbell proffers a novel take on Delany’s ethnocentrism, suggesting he was influenced by David Livingstone’s *Seventeen Years’ Explorations and Adventures in the Wilds of Africa* (1857) and Thomas Bowen’s *Central Africa: Adventures and Missionary Labors in Several Countries in the Interior of Africa* (1857). Both men were missionary explorers who wrote adventure tales that served as “intellectual foundations of empire, posing a stark opposition between an ‘enlightened’ West, imagined as rational, progressive, and white, and a ‘benighted’ Africa, imagined as irrational, backward, and black.” These travelogues represented an

¹⁶⁶ Levine, *Martin Delany, Frederick Douglass, and the Politics of Representative Identity*, 190-212.

inspiration for Delany, who would go on to style his Yorubaland visit as scientific exploration. His *Official Report of the Niger Valley Exploring Party* also echoed a common theme. To quote Campbell: “Of all the ideas about landscape embedded in Western travel writing, none played a more central role in the construction of colonial authority than the idea of improvement.” Delany used the term more than twenty times in the report, revealing his conviction that Africa was a reclamation project which only cultivated black Westerners could conduct. To Campbell, Delany demonstrated little concern for indigenous culture in his zeal to remake Africa through commerce, industry, and civilization. And when he penned, “Africa for the African race, and black men to rule them,” Delany had little room for indigenous people, except as those to be ruled.¹⁶⁷

Unlike either Delany or Crummell, Edward Blyden is more palatable to historians because of his progressive views on African religion and culture. His main biographer, Hollis Lynch, labels Blyden a “Pan-Negro patriot” who was “the most learned and articulate champion of Africa” during his lifetime. Early on, Blyden held a conservative outlook that comported with traditional Euro-American views. As Lynch notes, in the 1850s Blyden portrayed Africa as the “Dark Continent” whose “barbarous tribes” needed “civilized and enlightened influences.” Its inhabitants needed emancipation, redemption, and elevation by means of “Christian civilization.” As early as the 1860s, Blyden depicted the civilizing project as a race between blacks and Europeans, with the stated motivation being not colonial partition but humanitarian regeneration.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁷ Campbell, *Middle Passages*, 77, 90.

¹⁶⁸ Lynch, *Edward Wilmot Blyden*, vii, 5-6, 18, 23.

Consequently, Blyden was a staunch proponent of territorial expansion. As Secretary of State in 1864, he dismissed African chieftains' opposition to Liberia's territorial claims as being fueled by "mercenary motives." He wrote the British Foreign Office to justify Liberia's jurisdiction. He based its legitimacy on two reasons: (1) Liberians had a special relationship with aborigines on account of their fraternal, kinship ties and (2) Liberians extended "intelligent rule" over the natives by "civilizing them to Christian law."¹⁶⁹

Three decades later, Blyden had reimagined the civilized African. Blyden disassociated the European further from "him"—the prototypical African was almost invariably male for Blyden—casting him as the antithesis of the truculent, hedonistic white man. Blyden's African was *spiritually* civilized in his "perfect state," which Blyden construed to be pastoral agriculture (itself reminiscent of Thomas Jefferson's agrarian republicanism). Lynch identifies Blyden as reassembling the idyllic construct of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's noble savage and Fyodor Dostoyevsky's rural Slav in propagating an untainted, bucolic vision of Africa. While natives could benefit from western "culture," the process was to be additive rather than assimilative. In other words, white civilization could enrich Africans—if properly filtered and adapted. In the 1850s and 1860s Blyden assigned that role to African Americans, who had returned to their ancestral homeland with the requisite education and acculturation to carry out the job.¹⁷⁰

After Blyden's near lynching in 1871, he veered away from a strict Liberian nationalism and shifted toward what Lynch terms "cultural nationalism." It was during this time that Blyden truly became Lynch's so-called "Pan-Negro patriot." Blyden argued for preserving African customs and traditions while decrying forced Europeanization that impugned and obliterated

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 44.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 62.

their perpetuation. As discussed previously, he became a vocal critic of Christian missions, much of which he regarded as a ham-fisted attempt to straitjacket natives—both religiously and culturally. He rejected John Locke’s *tabula rasa* when applied to Africans; their practices were neither meaningless nor meritless. Blyden defended polygamy, pantheism, and Mohammedanism in print, igniting controversy among western readers. Lynch points out that Blyden still esteemed Christianity as the highest form of religion, but this valuation came with a caveat. Blyden judged religious belief based on its efficacy to advance cultural nationalism. Did it affirm indigenous values, and did it further pan-Negro aims? If so, Blyden was apt to subsume it under his particular brand of patriotism.

Perhaps Blyden’s most polarizing position, in retrospect, was his advocacy of a European protectorate for West Africa. In 1872, under the auspices of a Freetown-funded expedition, he appealed for a British protectorate over the natives in Sierra Leone on the grounds that they were “besotted pagans” whose trade and traits were “incompatible with human progress.”¹⁷¹ As his trust in Americo-Liberians faltered, his enthusiasm for European oversight mushroomed. Lynch chides Blyden for his blind support of Leopold II’s Belgian involvement in the Congo, but by the 1890s Blyden’s calls for European intervention had become an unwavering article of faith, however naïve and misguided. Adeleke also rebukes Blyden for his contradictory commitment to African civilization and European “occupation.”¹⁷² For all of Blyden’s commendable views on Africans, his position on Euro-American superintendence represents a blemish on his otherwise sterling record of defending native interests.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 92.

¹⁷² Adeleke, *UnAfrican Americans*, 28.

Claude Clegg argues Americo-Liberians practiced paternalism at best and outright exploitation at worst. He criticizes their treatment of recaptives, whom the government viewed as a cheap labor force and safety buffer against hostile natives.¹⁷³ Liberia settled many recaptives in the dangerous territory adjacent to tribal lands, where it expected recaptives to join settlers in quelling any native rebellions. Granted neither political rights nor economic independence, recaptives found themselves in a murky intermediate status, one which Clegg asserts Americo-Liberians used to create “networks of dependence.” Additionally, scores of captive children ended up living in Americo-Liberian households, ostensibly to speed the assimilation process. In exchange for food, shelter, and domestic service, they were to receive a Western education and future entry into Liberia’s sociopolitical society. But some Liberians took advantage of their position to mistreat their wards through harsh discipline, inadequate provisions, or a denied education. This arrangement—be it called adoption, pawning, apprenticeship, domestic servanthood, or household slavery—proved to be an uneven experience for these children who were at the mercy of their trustees, some of whom treated their charges as little more than unfree labor. These dependency networks also extended to natives, who also sent hundreds of their children to live with Americo-Liberians. Sadly the practice was rarely a fair trade.

More fundamentally, Clegg criticizes the larger issue of Americo-Liberian chauvinism. Monrovia came to assume “the arrogance of a conqueror” whose presupposed superiority led to an unhealthy and artificial dualism. *Liberians* were republican citizens who brought culture, civilization, and the Gospel to the continent; whereas *Africans* were heathen savages who wallowed in witchcraft, superstition, and backward ignorance. Given this perceived binary,

¹⁷³ Recaptives were formerly captured Africans whom Western navies had rescued and resettled in Liberia. Because most recaptives had come from the Congo River region, they were also known as Congoes. Monrovia often grouped whole communities of recaptives in their own separate towns like Harper and Robertsport. Recaptives were always a minority in Liberia. In 1843 they numbered 287 and approximately 1,100 in 1847. In 1860 Liberia absorbed over four thousand recaptives, the largest contingent of recaptives it had received up to that point.

Liberians felt justified in defining Africans as outsiders, which Clegg views as a precursor to the European-style “colonialism” Liberia imposed on natives by the end of the nineteenth century.¹⁷⁴

David Brion Davis is more sympathetic. Although he faults Americo-Liberians for their shortcomings, he finds extenuating circumstances explain some of those failings. Davis concedes Americo-Liberians were just as ethnocentric as the English settlers who colonized North America in the eighteenth century. Yet the first group carried the additional burden of proving to the world that blacks could achieve the same lofty accomplishments as whites. Liberia was seen as a social experiment in Negro ability, much like post-revolutionary Haiti had been a test case for free labor.¹⁷⁵ Many colonizationists, including some who were slaveholders, expected emigrants to acquit themselves by demonstrating the ability to erect and maintain a civilized society—especially now that they were free from the toxicity of American slavery and racism. A successful showing, it was thought, would exonerate the black race by confirming “radical environmentalism,” the theory that humans could change swiftly and suddenly when thrust into new surroundings. In short, a beacon nation would disprove a benighted state.

Thusly charged with vindicating their race by serving as “a city on a hill,” Americo-Liberians were wary of “counter-conversion,” or assimilating into the native population. This psychic wedge was only one of many missteps. Davis characterizes Americo-Liberians as being naïve about the native reception to colonization. Privatized land, territorial cession, political jurisdiction—all these colonial practices clashed with existing native structures in place. Even the emigrants’ well-intentioned emphasis on “legitimate” trade such as rice, camwood, and palm oil did little to tamp down the slave trade. It merely shifted the site: Africans were no longer

¹⁷⁴ Clegg, *The Price of Liberty*, 77-112.

¹⁷⁵ See Seymour Drescher, *The Mighty Experiment: Free Labor versus Slavery in British Emancipation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

needed as trafficked exports but as domestic slaves. The West African colonies of Sierra Leone and Liberia were, as Davis describes, “building an entrance ramp on the road to imperialism.” Examples of subjugation were not difficult to locate. Like Clegg, Davis cites Americo-Liberians’ abusive practice of “pawning,” or borrowing a native for a period of household service. These wardships were intended to acculturate Africans to western lifestyles, but reports filtered back to the U.S. of some Liberians treating their wards as chattel slaves.

Despite these abuses, Davis contends that criticism like Adeleke’s obscures the symbolic significance of Americo-Liberians, who founded a constitutional republic that fended off British and French incursions while establishing small domestic industries in rice, sugar, and coffee. He admonishes contemporaries not to judge Liberia too harshly because, from the outset, it was constrained by white, Western standards of progress. In light of early Americans’ own colonial failures, Davis complains: “It is clearly unrealistic to judge the Americo-Liberians’ treatment of aborigines by higher standards than those applied to white colonists from the sixteenth to the twentieth century.”¹⁷⁶ After all, as he observes, white consumer demand for Liberian goods was the main reason for Liberia’s forced labor. Davis does not acquit Liberians of wrongdoing, but neither does he indict them for a common, historical blind spot suffered by whites and blacks alike.

Lamin Sanneh goes the furthest in absolving Liberians of blame. In his study, Liberians ran into chiefly opposition for a perfectly justifiable reason: they were attempting to promote antislavery in West Africa, a region rife with slave traders. Unable to persuade native chiefs to give up the lucrative slave trade, Liberians resorted to antistructure, a competing social order that would challenge chiefs’ authority and prerogatives. Similar to Victor Turner’s idea of

¹⁷⁶ David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Emancipation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014), 119.

communitas, antistructure involved the formation of a new community based on outsiders and social outcasts, who would subscribe to antislavery principles. Seen from this light, Delany's separatist activities were paving the road not to economic imperialism but to an independent economy required to sustain future migration of American blacks to the fatherland—tangible proof that they were destined for something more than slavery. Crummell's religious proselytizing was a vehicle for social equality and collective amelioration. And Blyden's call for Western colonial rule was a forward-thinking scheme to expose Africans to the technological superiority possessed by Europeans. As Sanneh argues, what seems oppressive and imperialistic needs the contextual gloss of antislavery. Civilization rhetoric, he insists, was actually progressive when one sees it as promoting antistructure in the cause of antislavery. To build a free society, Liberians needed to tear down the old order of chieftain-backed slavery. In short, they needed to build an alternate power structure, a new world order that inverted the antihumanitarian impulses of surrounding slave-trading societies. Hence they resorted to hierarchal claims that sanctioned Western middle-class values over and against native cultural norms. For Sanneh, Crummell's and Blyden's appeals for European guardianships—viewed by many scholars as precursors to imperialism—were logical requests given that people then associated colonialism with antislavery because of the pioneering efforts of Western powers in abolishing the slave trade. Sanneh acknowledges that Liberians' black nationalist ideology comes across as speculative, romantic, and even airy. Yet he contends Liberians like Blyden and Crummell never had a real chance to implement their vision because the American government betrayed them: it “equivocated when antislavery required public responsibility [i.e. financing] for

colonization,” leaving them “an insecure group of ‘alien residents,’ on a free reservation, forced to live by their wits.”¹⁷⁷

In one of the latest works, James Ciment swings back to the dominant viewpoint, tagging the Americo-Liberian ruling elite as “corrupt, callow, and callous.” Although infused with noble ideals, they resorted to pragmatic survival in the face of African opposition and European aggression, Ciment contends. He observes that Americoes did a remarkable job of replicating Southern society and its master class. They pursued capital, kept de facto slaves, maintained African mistresses, disenfranchised natives and lower-class citizens, and enforced rigid class distinctions. At the same time, Ciment marvels at Americoes’ ability to plant and nurture a budding republic, one that embraced political freedom, economic opportunity, and equality under the law. The problem resided in their reflex to reserve these privileges only for themselves. In danger of being overrun by hostile natives and dismembered by European imperialists, Americoes sacrificed their high principles for expedient policies that preserved their physical and national existence. As a result, Americoes were “in Africa but not of it.” Ultimately their stratified society proved untenable, Ciment laments, leading to their overthrow and ruin in the next century.¹⁷⁸

Eric Burin touches on settler-native relations in passing. He adopts a sanguine viewpoint of Liberia’s interaction with indigenous tribes. Although aborigines lacked constitutional protections, Burin notes that Liberians affirmed the potential for their “savage” neighbors to transition to civilization and presumably citizenship, at least in theory. He quotes Diane Skipwith, a longtime settler, who believed literacy would help natives overcome superstitious

¹⁷⁷ Lamin Sanneh, *Abolitionists Abroad: American Blacks and the Making of Modern West Africa* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 248, 236.

¹⁷⁸ James Ciment, *Another America: The Story of Liberia and the Former Slaves Who Ruled It* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2013), xvii, xx.

barbarism. But Burin concludes that Americo-Liberians rarely tried to integrate communities, nor did Africans embrace their attempts.¹⁷⁹

For all their shortcomings, Americo-Liberians were not so different from their contemporaries. According to Wilson Moses, chauvinism and civilizationism were hallmarks of most black nationalists' thought in the nineteenth century.¹⁸⁰ The idea of progress was foundational to racial uplift, an ideology to which most African Americans subscribed. Although focused on the twentieth century, Kevin Gaines's work on the subject is instructive. Gaines argues that African Americans adopted uplift ideology as a strategic means of coping with their disadvantaged state. Espoused primarily by black elites, uplift preachments centered on self-help, social virtue, wealth accumulation, gendered hierarchy and, above all, racial solidarity. Many blacks saw uplift as a way to refute racial biologism and its contention that perceived social and intellectual differences between races were fixed in nature. As Gaines avers, uplift ideology promoted an evolutionary view of cultural assimilation, that African Americans could integrate into society and the body politic by raising the status of family and civilization. Although commendable in its focus, black uplift had a gaping chasm, namely that collective advancement did not necessarily guarantee individual equality within the race.¹⁸¹

The weakness of uplift lay in its very method. Uplift depended on self-improvement, which presupposed an agreed-upon standard for amelioration. For most black elites, the measure was bourgeois respectability, which borrowed heavily from Victorian norms. On one hand, a

¹⁷⁹ See Eric Burin, *Slavery and the Peculiar Solution: A History of the American Colonization Society* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005).

¹⁸⁰ Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850–1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 20.

¹⁸¹ Kevin Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 1-17.

common *Weltbild* is essential to creating a collective sense of unity and historical destiny. On the other hand, *bourgeois* respectability entails class differentiation by its very definition. It is a middle-class ideology that demands individual adherence and social conformity for its members and beneficiaries, who are often one and the same. In Liberia it served as a gateway to settler society and its attendant accoutrements like citizenship, enfranchisement, and access to capital. For West African natives, uplift became less a ramp to assimilation and more a rampart against integration. If Americo-Liberians were the bourgeois agents of civilization—and many viewed themselves as such—aborigines were “the native problem,” akin to the so-called “Negro problem” in the United States. From this vantage, natives were to blame for their own “degraded” status and needed only to raise themselves to the moral and social standards held by their “better kin.” The task of living up to Victorian standards, however, required the repudiation of many cherished African beliefs and customs. Because most natives rejected the wholesale devaluation of their culture, many Americo-Liberians refused to treat them as equals. They were permanent problems, to be excluded from the national polity until they capitulated or were pacified.

Yet it would be wrong to regard black nationalists as categorically inimical to native interests. As Moses notes, black nationalists did feel the duty to uplift the continent as a first step in improving the lives of black people everywhere. But without a heavy influx of capital, Liberians had precious little with which to entice their neighbors.

In short, Liberia had limited options in how it could attract others into its fold. Samuel Huntington outlines four types of national identity: ideological, bifurcated, exclusivist, and

cultural.¹⁸² *Ideological* here is identification with a political creed, be it a federal compact, national constitution, or declaration of rights. *Bifurcated* is accommodation for dual allegiances in terms of language and culture. *Exclusivist* is repression or expulsion of specific racial, ethnic, and cultural groups from the body politic. And *cultural* is devotion to the values, heritage, and language of a group, usually that of the majority. Based on the previous discussion, Liberia in the nineteenth century was neither bifurcated nor exclusivist. While cultural intermediaries existed, historically the Monrovia government frowned on bifurcation among its citizenry, regarding dual allegiances as subversive. And although some Liberians probably preferred total exclusion, Monrovia had neither the numbers nor the armaments to expunge all the tribes from its claimed territory. The ideological made more sense, even if on a pragmatic level. The government sent out emissaries over the years to woo tribes with promises of security, free trade, and political representation. But Liberia lacked the clout, capital, or political will to make good on its word, and tribal chieftains were often disappointed or disgruntled with the empty pledges given them. Almost by default, Liberians were left to tout their cultural identity, which was itself nebulous and nettlesome.

Religion, social practice, and the culture of capitalism came to be seen as the *sine quibus non* of national identity. Christianity, civilizationism, and capitalist ideology were the building blocks as well as the bait. To be Liberian in the nineteenth century looked totally foreign in the new homeland and yet thoroughly familiar in the old. Juxtaposing New World values and Old World aspirations, Americo-Liberians set about making their mark—for themselves and for their race.

¹⁸² Samuel P. Huntington, *Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), 19-20.

CHAPTER 2

“Surely we are here to take our native brethren by the hand, and teach them how to live”: The Early Vision for the New Republic

Joseph Jenkins Roberts delivered his first official presidential speech on 3 January 1848, in which providentialism was a prominent theme throughout. In his oration to the citizenry, he regaled his audience with the story of the nation’s founders, a tale of a besieged band of patriots who succeeded against all odds. Having come to Africa in pursuit of civil and religious liberty, this “mere handful of isolated christian pilgrims” found themselves “surrounded by savage and warlike tribes bent upon their ruin and total annihilation.”¹ Roberts likened the settlers to David before Goliath, armed with only a staff and sling, prepared to do battle for God and each other. The president credited stout manliness and divine providence for their deliverance from a “powerful adversary.” This oft-repeated origin story moved from lore to canon. The enemy was always nameless and faceless aborigines who threatened the existential survival of Liberia. By defeating this superior force, colonists had passed their “important trial” and prove themselves worthy of deliverance and self-governance. This is what Nicholas Guyatt terms “judicial providentialism,” where God rewards a people based on their virtue.² Deity had spared Liberians, but only because they had shown themselves deserving. And natives had played an integral role in the story by acting as the antagonists and forming the crucible from which Liberians emerged victorious.

¹ Joseph Jenkins Roberts, “First Inaugural, 3 January 1848,” *African Repository* 24 (1848): 120-26.

² Nicholas Guyatt, *Providence and the Invention of the United States, 1607–1876* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 6.

Yet Roberts articulated grander ambitions. The 1847 independence of Liberia was more than the establishment of a new nation. It was the culmination of a long journey to freedom. Like Israelites from the Exodus, colored men had traveled from “the house of bondage” to “the land of liberty and promise.” It was, to borrow Roberts’s words, “political redemption,” one that would extend “God’s moral government of the earth.” Here is historical providentialism on display, the belief that God uses specific nations to improve the world and accomplish His cosmic plan.³ The will of Heaven was for all mankind to be free, and Liberia represented fulfillment of that universal intent. Interesting to note, though, is that the divine test for Liberia was emancipation, not equality. While equal rights arguments for natives would come later, Roberts’s 1848 address is notable for their omission.

Progress is inherent in providentialism, and Roberts had clear ideas on this front. He is worth quoting at length because his view formed the basis for governmental policy over the next decades. For Roberts, progress involved proselytizing.

And, as the political happiness or wretchedness of ourselves and our children, and of generations yet unborn, is in our hands, nay more, *the redemption of Africa from the deep degradation, superstition, and idolatry in which she has so long been involved, it becomes us to lay our shoulders to the wheel, and manfully resist every obstacle which may oppose our progress in the great work which lies before us. The Gospel, fellow citizens, is yet to be preached to vast numbers inhabiting this dark continent, and I have the highest reason to believe, that it was one of the great objects of the Almighty in establishing these colonies, that they might be the means of introducing civilization and religion among the barbarous nations of this country; and to what work more noble could our powers be applied, than that of bringing up from darkness, debasement, and misery, our fellow-men, and shedding abroad over them the light of science and christianity.*⁴

³ Masculine gender reflects Roberts’s consistent pronominal references to God as “He.”

⁴ Roberts, “First Inaugural,” original emphasis retained.

In a sense, political redemption subsumed *euangelion*.⁵ Just as many Liberians had been redeemed from physical bondage, the native populace could be saved from spiritual and cultural bondage. Although Roberts trumpeted religion and civilization, in practice the emphasis on the second eclipsed the first.

What is striking is how high Roberts elevates the stakes. According to Liberia's first father, the so-called barbarity of natives was the perceived obstacle that opposed *our* [read *national*] progress. Political stability and commercial success depended on bringing natives into the fold, ostensibly on Liberia's terms. In his first speech as president, he portrayed the venture as one's sacred duty, one that came with a dire prediction. If Liberians failed to fulfill their duties—a paramount one being to incorporate natives—Roberts warned of a future return to chains as bondsmen and bywords among the nations of the world. However rhetorical his jeremiad, Roberts is espousing judicial providentialism in order to further historical providentialism. His is a form of national providentialism, the idea that Liberia is chosen, correlative, and covenantally obligated. That is, Liberia is designated by God to advance universal freedom as the new Israel and must spread God's blessings to others or be ruined.

President Roberts's Republicanism

Along with a deep sense of providentialism, Roberts cherished republican ideology. He was a staunch proponent of republican government, and he never tired of espousing its merits in his official presidential speeches. Over the years he outlined four pillars of republicanism: (1) majority consent, (2) legal compliance, (3) moral adherence, and (4) social altruism. According to Roberts, these principles were vital for a stable society and national prosperity. His political

⁵ *Euangelion* is Greek for *Gospel* or "Good News."

philosophy further shaped his perception and policy toward natives, leading him to adopt a firm, uncompromising stance in his government's dealings with them.

Roberts was a fervent believer in the protection of individual rights. Two days after his inauguration, Roberts spoke to the legislature in his first annual State of the Nation address. He devoted the first part of his speech to a discourse on the building of a political society. Individuals possessed alienable and inalienable rights for Roberts. On the one hand, inalienable rights were fixed in nature, and no legitimate state could deprive its citizens of these fundamental rights.⁶ On the other hand, alienable rights were fluid, and persons could surrender them to the state for the commonweal. These more ephemeral rights included customs, manners, occupations, modes of thinking, and *Volksgeist* (i.e. genius of a people). Roberts believed that Liberia, with its republican form of government, could protect inalienable rights. He explicitly rejected Jean-Jacques Rousseau's state of nature, arguing that history and philosophy had prepared Liberians for this moment of self-governance.

Roberts's defense of republicanism rests on his faith in majority rule, the first column in his political structure. He defined *tyranny* as law enacted by a minority. Predictably he opposed it, because it violated his contractual notion of consent—which demands the good of the whole or, in this case, the majority. A society can have only one supreme authority and, for Roberts, minority rule represents a competing power that will undermine republican government altogether. It is imperative that every community member conform to the majority's will in matters pertaining to alienable rights. By voluntarily leaving a state of nature and entering into a free society, citizens are morally obligated to subordinate their individual interests to the collective good.

⁶ At other times, Roberts referred to them as inviolate or natural rights.

Under this arrangement, little if any room exists for minority rights. Roberts understands rights quite narrowly by modern standards. As much as he reveres inalienable rights, he restricts them to a few basic ones such as individual liberty, freedom of religion, and security of person and property. Everything else is open for debate and subject to majoritarianism.

Roberts affirmed equal rights so long as it referred to inalienable rights. Moreover, as he expressed it, good governmental policy was one in which “equal justice has been done to every *citizen* of the Republic.”⁷ It was a members-only ordinance in 1848, and natives fell outside that domain. As shown earlier, Roberts did not abandon them completely. It was Liberians’ duty to bring them into the fold through evangelism and civilizationism. Yet the onus fell upon natives to leave their state of nature and eschew alienable rights like culture and tradition. The exchange was neither fair nor realistic but, in Roberts’s mind, it was legally justifiable, philosophically tenable, and divinely approbatory.

Another dynamic is at work, though. Seen through the lens of solidarity, Roberts’s stance becomes more fathomable. Philosopher Tommie Shelby has outlined five characteristics of group solidarity: identification with the group, special concern, shared values or goals, loyalty, and mutual trust.⁸ To some degree, Roberts’s approach combines all five elements.

Roberts is admittedly ethnocentric in that he prioritizes Americo-Liberians over against their native neighbors. Sociologist Oliver Cox argues ethnocentrism is social feeling that draws a

⁷ Joseph Jenkins Roberts, “Annual Message to the Legislature,” 5 January 1848, in D. Elwood Dunn, ed., *The Annual Messages of the Presidents of Liberia, 1848–2010: State of the Nation Addresses to the National Legislature, from Joseph Jenkins Roberts to Ellen Johnson Sirleaf*, vol. 1 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co., 2011), 28, emphasis added.

⁸ Tommie Shelby, *We Who Are Dark: The Philosophical Foundations of Black Solidarity* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press/Harvard University Press, 2005), 68-70.

group into community.⁹ Taken *prima facie*, it is not itself pejorative. We-ness does not necessarily devalue Otherness. Furthermore, the minority can be just as ethnocentric as the majority. Cox differentiates ethnocentrism from cultural intolerance, the disapproval toward any group refusing to conform to societal norms.¹⁰ Even here, while deprecatory, it is not automatically deplorable. Coercive regulation and enforcement are integral to any sociological formation.¹¹

To censure Roberts for religious and cultural proselytizing is problematic, too. In *The Racial Contract*, Charles Mills decries a polity that uses ideological conditioning to enforce its racial (or ethnic in this context) composition.¹² Yet as Lucius Outlaw argues, sociocultural conditioning is the primary means by which to reproduce a group and achieve a sense of immortality. In other words, group survival depends on natal norms, which includes ideology. This indoctrination is at the heart of ethnicization.¹³ And it is intimately connected to nationalism, in which “we speak of ‘nationalism’ as the complex of thought and action (ideology and social movement) that a people articulate and practice on behalf of their own freedom and

⁹ Oliver C. Cox, *Caste, Class, and Race: A Study in Social Dynamics* (New York: Monthly Review, 1959), 321.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ See Randall Kennedy, *Sellout: The Politics of Racial Betrayal* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2008), 84, where he writes, “But ostracism, or at least the potential for ostracism, is also part of the unavoidable cost of collective action and group maintenance.”

¹² See Charles W. Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 87-89.

¹³ Outlaw defines *ethnicization* as the biological, sociocultural, and historical processes by which populations and their subgroups are formed and maintained. See Lucius T. Outlaw Jr., *On Race and Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 17-18, 5.

distinctiveness.”¹⁴ As surveyed in the last chapter, black nationalism in the nineteenth-century involved black uplift and its attendant ethos and values.

The problem surfaces when nationalists, or any group for that matter, assign invidious value to racial or cultural traits that are otherwise benign. Personal attire, dietary habits, living accommodations, musical and literary taste, along with other minutia became the *sine quibus non* of civilized identity. *Africanness*—be it names, traditions, or lifestyle—was odious by virtue of the totalization of western culture. Unlike white racialists, Roberts avoided invidious biological essentialism; but he and many Liberians created fixed, objectifying identities that victimized natives through natal alienation and psychosocial/cultural violence.

Legal compliance stood as the second pillar of Roberts’s republicanism. His continual rows with foreign traders underscore the importance he placed on this principle. In 1842 then-Lieutenant Governor Roberts had objected to a British trader’s claim of sovereignty in a southern territory claimed by Liberia. Property rights were subordinate to political considerations, Roberts insisted. This palm oil dealer, Captain Spence, claimed to have purchased Bassa Cove prior to the natives’ sale of the land to Monrovia. Hence, he refused to recognize Liberia’s authority because it conflicted with his ownership claim. Roberts adopted a two-prong argument. First, he elevated governmental authority above private property rights. Spence’s property title amounted to a land lease, the governor argued. Spence’s rights allowed him to enjoy a limited set of benefits deriving from land tenure. As a tenant, he could build on the property and make use of it as he saw fit. But he was still subject to the sovereign power of the state. His “right of soil” did not supersede government’s management. Just because he held land, he was not a power unto

¹⁴ Lucius T. Outlaw Jr., *Critical Social Theory in the Interests of Black Folks* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005), 53. Outlaw defines “thought complexes” as the nonsystematic collections of political, economic, social, and cultural values.” *Ibid.*, 43.

himself. Second, Roberts attacked the property dispute as a covert bid for rival political power. Roberts saw the quarrel as undermining the very existence of his commonwealth. He resorted to a wedge argument. If outside traders could remain “above the law” and “beyond our judicial control,” they could introduce “foreign merchandise”—that is, rum—capable of spreading vice and immorality among the populace. Liquor would destroy peace and order and could “annihilate” the government. And if traders could import unregulated alcohol, they could reintroduce slave trafficking next. Governmental oversight protected the public from the potential tyranny arising from an individual’s or cartel’s *carte blanche*. Roberts applied the same principles to tribes. In ceding land to Monrovia, they also relinquished judicial control. They were subject to Liberia’s laws, including taxation and trade regulation.¹⁵

But such notions as private property, perpetuity agreements, and contract representation were completely alien to most natives. In his 1856 history of the region, J. Leighton Wilson observed that tribes regarded land as a communal resource. For the Grebo, all property was considered “common stock” that no one person or family could expropriate or divest. Likewise, the Kru possessed “no idea of the appropriation of land by individuals except for temporary purposes.”¹⁶ Any sale to outsiders was never regarded as permanent; it was a limited lease intended for a specific purpose like building a farm or factory. So in his argument against the British trader Spence, Roberts borrowed a native understanding of property sale: Spence was not the permanent landowner and therefore not the final arbiter in taxation disputes. But Roberts was committing equivocation, a semantical ruse that privileged Liberians, because he claimed his

¹⁵ Paragraph quotes from J. J. Roberts to the Members of the Legislature of the Commonwealth of Liberia, 4 April 1842, Monrovia, Liberia, in *Liberia Herald*, 29 April 1842.

¹⁶ J. Leighton Wilson, *Western Africa: Its History, Condition, and Prospects* (London: Sampson Low, 1856), 138.

government's treaties with tribes gave it judicial preeminence in territorial and tax matters.

Wilson is incisive here, by distinguishing between occupancy and ownership:

The people, by common consent, may sell any portion of it [land] to a stranger . . . but in their minds this transaction, even when subjected to the formality of a written contract, amounts to little more than a general consent to the stranger living among them and enjoying all the rights of citizenship; and with the expectation that the land will revert to themselves, as a matter of course, should he die or leave their country. In some cases, when they have transferred a portion or the whole of their territory to a foreign jurisdiction, it is not probable that they have had a correct apprehension of the nature of the transaction, whatever pains may have been taken to make them understand it; and they never do comprehend it fully until the contract is carried into execution, in connection with their own observation and experience.¹⁷

Liberia added territory piecemeal because it had to negotiate with separate chieftains and tribal families. But in native practice, individual action rarely superseded communal deliberation. Even chiefs had to have their tribe's backing for a land deal to be recognized. For example, the Kru made collective decisions by assembling all the men and holding a discussion. They resolved matters organically, without a formal vote or electoral procedure. Even with a king, they were "a pure democracy" in praxis, though Wilson conceded that the Western term failed to capture the process in full. In any case, Roberts was no fan of democracy, calling it a "wretched" product of an "ignorant community" that could only lead to anarchy. It was a threat to "the purity of our republican institutions," he asserted, and it must be blunted through village education.¹⁸ Liberian leaders portrayed themselves as sincere in their negotiations for territory, and tribes as fully cognizant of those terms. In some cases, however, it is clear that fundamental differences in how Liberians and natives conceived key concepts set the stage for future exploitation and wars. Tribes learned about rights and representation, but they often paid dearly for that education.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ J. J. Roberts to the Members of the Legislative Council, 9 January 1843, Monrovia, Liberia, in *Liberia Herald*, 21 February 1843.

A major flaw in Roberts is his denial of self-determinism for natives. If they were a people who acknowledged Monrovia's authority, he might refer to them as "a nation inside the country." But if they sought formal ties and recognition from "foreign powers," Roberts denounced them as "savage tribes occupying territories in the dominions of civilized nations." Autonomous action was a prerogative afforded to the civilized alone.¹⁹

In a savvy maneuver, Roberts connected land acquisition to antislavery efforts. In his second public address as president, he boasted, "We have extinguished the native title to all the lands lying between Grand Cape Mount, and the northwest boundary line of 'Maryland in Liberia.'" A couple holdout tribes were willing to sell their land, he reported, if Liberia would grant them protection from hostile neighboring tribes. The only resistance came from slavers, who lobbied hard for chiefs to reverse their decision. Roberts depicted obstructionism as a futile attempt to hold back the progressive tide of antislavery. As he framed it, supporting geographical expansion was the same as striking a mortal blow against human enslavement.²⁰

Roberts defended Liberia's recent military expeditions against natives as humanitarian. In assuming a peacekeeping role, the country was suppressing the "horrors of African warfare." It was a considerable financial sacrifice on Monrovia's end to have "interposed its authority." But what else could Roberts do but respond to native appeals and "settle these difficulties"? It was the "just" thing to do. In hindsight, martial intervention planted the kernel for future complaints that Monrovia stoked unrest by continually meddling and taking sides in native disputes. But in 1848 the benefits were obvious to Roberts. Despite his altruistic rhetoric, solidifying territorial

¹⁹ Roberts, "Annual Message to the Legislature," 5 January 1848, in Dunn, *The Annual Messages of the Presidents of Liberia*, 1:30.

²⁰ Ibid.

claims and repelling foreign interference were unstated aims in his warring against nearby tribes.²¹

Roberts saw war as a wholesome evil capable of producing good results. He pointed to Greece as an example of a people whose continual warfare roused them to greatness: “Their prosperity, their power, their splendor grew from the all-animating spirit of war.”²² Roberts denied desiring war, but he defended its practice in cases of national security.

There are some among us, I know, who tremble at every occurrence that in any degree threatens to interrupt the even course of our political affairs. They fear that it may put an inevitable stop to the further progress of the government, and ruin irretrievably our future happiness, and deprive us of those civil and religious blessings which the early veterans in the cause of freedom here, and ourselves have called forth from this savage land. . . . It is true patriotism, boldly to front every difficulty;-and with a determined purpose overcome every obstacle which may oppose our progress; then we shall defend our natural and national rights, with dignity and success.²³

His justifications for going to war are enlightening. Roberts held to the doctrine of preemption in the name of prevention. That is, he was willing to declare war on surrounding tribes if they impinged on basic rights (like life and property) or impeded national progress (like political jurisdiction). Notice that the litmus for warfare no longer required an existential threat. In the late 1840s and early 1850s Liberia did not face a crisis for survival like it had in the 1820s. Survival was not the pressing concern; supremacy was. From a military standpoint, traders were more nuisance than menace. But because they often came from European nations, they represented a threat to Liberia’s autonomy if the mother country intervened on their behalf. Repeatedly throughout his speeches, Roberts would question the intentions of foreign powers, particularly France and England, and whether they would respect the laws and sovereignty of Liberia. While

²¹ Ibid, 1:31.

²² J. J. Roberts, “Annual Message to the Legislature,” 3 December 1850, in Dunn, *The Annual Messages of the Presidents of Liberia*, 1:44.

²³ Ibid.

traders were a potential external liability, Roberts treated natives as an internal, existential threat in the sense they endangered Americo-Liberians' way of life. Because national rights, religious blessings, and future happiness—ephemeral qualities to be sure—hung in the balance, war was a necessary evil to ensure survival of the salubrious.

Militia expeditions were common occurrences at midcentury. A major offensive ensued in March 1848 against an alliance of native tribes in central Liberia. With the benefit of French naval cannons, a Liberian militia routed the Spanish-backed rebels. In his 1849 annual address, President Roberts proclaimed resounding success. The victory, he crowed, “demonstrates that men, animated by an ardent zeal for the sacred cause of liberty and humanity—and trusting in the Divine support, are capable of the most glorious achievements.” That Liberians had earned their providentially sanctioned manliness at the expense of indigenous lives, for Roberts, was of little consequence. The dispatched aborigines had been Spanish lackeys, “ruthless and inhuman slave dealer[s]” guilty of “diabolical avarice.” The battle had further consolidated Liberia’s dominance, and Roberts was pleased to announce it had now amassed over three hundred miles of uninterrupted coastline. The lone holdout was the Kru tribe, who wanted to maintain their littoral toehold for sea trading. War with the Kru was less than a decade away but, at the time, Roberts was optimistic he could continue to accumulate land, preferably by negotiation but by force if necessary. The Kru’s neighbors, the Grebo, were just as disruptive. Already a chieftain had attacked a couple settlements in Grand Bassa, and other area chiefs were stockpiling rifles and gunpowder. Roberts called for an economic embargo and a military expedition against the tribes in order to destroy their trading factories. He urged a strong response in order to suppress

rebellion and act as an effective “antiwar” deterrent.²⁴ Regular outbreaks of revolt and repression would cycle over the next several decades, making Liberia’s bid to establish its legal and territorial jurisdiction a continual battle. As Roberts discovered, ordinance did more to control troublesome tribes than did ordinances.²⁵

In addition to majority rights and legal compliance, moral adherence constituted the third pillar for republicanism. Righteousness required a shepherd, and Roberts saw Christianity as capable of fulfilling the role. In line with civic virtue theorists of his era,²⁶ Roberts had no compunction about the state promoting Christian religion, so long as it avoided establishmentarianism:

While I am no advocate for a union of church and state, I am also no sympathizer with those political theorists who maintain that it is not the province of civil government to interpose in matters pertaining to morality or religion. Civil government is ordained by God, and for His glory; and, as righteousness exalteth a nation, it is the duty of the civil authority . . . to repress vice, immorality and profaneness, and whatever else is manifestly injurious and disturbing to the good order of Society and dishonourable to God.²⁷

The reformation of questionable native practices, then, was a civic duty and moral obligation. Until heathen tribes were acculturated and “Liberianized,” they disrupted civil order and impeded national progress. Homogeneity would yield headway. “When we shall have firmly established our civil institutions upon the inflexible principles of justice, morality and religion,”

²⁴ Roberts’s war strategy relied as much on shock-and-awe “military displays” as it did on actual fighting. See J. J. Roberts, “Annual Message to the Legislature,” 3 December 1851, in Dunn, *The Annual Messages of the Presidents of Liberia*, 1:63.

²⁵ Paragraph quotes from Roberts, “Annual Message to the Legislature,” 14 December 1849, in Dunn, *The Annual Messages of the Presidents of Liberia*, 1:37-38.

²⁶ See Gordon Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776–1787* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

²⁷ J. J. Roberts, “Fifth Inaugural, January 1, 1872,” *African Repository* 48 (1872): 98-113.

Roberts predicted, “no power on earth can successfully hinder us in the progress of national greatness.”²⁸

He had tied political and commercial advancement to Christianity’s spread from the early 1840s onward. He argued the settling of “christian colonies” would convert “heathen and barbarous” natives, suppress the entrenched slave trade, establish jurisdiction over tenuously held territory, and protect against “improper interference” from unsavory traders and foreign powers.²⁹ By stamping out the slave trade, he was removing foreign interests from the region and thereby eliminating real existential threats from within Liberia’s borders. In some respects, Roberts viewed the diffusion of missionary work as a pacification program of sorts. If he could achieve buy-in from surrounding tribes by reorienting their spiritual and civic values, he could turn them against traders he deemed to be enemies of the state.³⁰

In a bid to win the hearts and minds of natives, Roberts called for more aborigine schools, ones that would specialize in teaching husbandry, agriculture, and of course Christian living. “This is an important work,” he admonished, “the work of civilization—and ‘civilization and religion must go hand in hand;’-the plough and the Bible must go together.” By “changing the manners and customs of the natives,” Liberians could nurture piety and political stability, which Roberts predicted would lead to a happy, productive blend of peoples.³¹

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ J. J. Roberts to the Members of the Legislative Council, 9 January 1843, n.p. [probably Monrovia, Liberia], in *Liberia Herald*, 21 February 1843.

³⁰ Elsewhere, Roberts spoke of these men in the strongest terms. They poisoned aborigines with “pernicious teachings,” tampered with the harmony of citizens, inculcated “a spirit of insubordination” among chieftains, and harbored “an implacable hatred against everything Liberian.” J. J. Roberts, Third Inaugural Address to the National Legislature, 3 December 1851, Monrovia, Liberia, printed in J. J. Roberts, “Third Inaugural,” *African Repository* 28 (1852): 134-39.

³¹ Roberts, “Annual Message to the Legislature,” 14 December 1849, in Dunn, *The Annual Messages of the Presidents of Liberia*, 1:40.

President Benson's Manifest Destiny

The next president, Stephen Benson, was much more conciliatory in his public proclamations. He praised aborigines for their societal organization, political governance, and dutiful observance of their own laws and customs. In an interesting twist, he heralded them as forming the kernel of a great nation—save for their participation in the abhorrent slave trade. Their peddling of captured Africans had corrupted them, and it had subverted their social and domestic institutions. His commentary is an inversion of the criticism leveled against Americo-Liberians, many of whom Anglo-Americans deemed corrupted by their “debased” experiences as former slaves. Yet to Benson, the remedy for effacement was the same as the colonizationists’: civilization and Christianity would serve as locks within a canal, raising aborigines to the same “*perfect level*” as Liberians, whereafter they would flow together in a merged channel of politics, religion, and enlightened society.³² United as one people, Liberian and aborigine would steer a great country.

Furthermore, Benson saw religion and letters as buoys capable of delimiting the nation. His wish was that they be constitutive of the singular identity he hoped for Liberians, citizen and native alike. Shared language and moral sentiments comported with Johann Gottfried von Herder's conception of a nation being defined linguistically and culturally (rather than racially).³³ Like Roberts, Benson admonished his fellow Liberians to educate and evangelize their native neighbors. While his concern for “backward” brethren may be commendable, it could also be undesirable due to its inherent intrusiveness. “If I have special responsibilities to

³² Stephen Allen Benson, First Inaugural Address, 7 January 1856, Monrovia, Liberia, in *African Repository* 32 (1856): 200-207, original emphasis retained.

³³ For a concise summary of Herder's views, including his political philosophy, see Michael Forster, “Johann Gottfried von Herder,” revised September 27, 2007, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, last modified summer 2015, edited by Edward N. Zalta, accessed October 1, 2015, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2015/entries/herder/>.

my co-nationals,” philosopher Ross Poole observes, “it is also the case that I have a special involvement in what they do.”³⁴ Because Benson viewed aborigines as future consorts in nation building, his concern for their welfare surpassed a mere duty to proselytize; it made him a vested partner in ensuring their moral fitness.

Like most Americo-Liberians, Benson had ingrained in him the idea of racial exoneration: “We must show by our morals, our intelligence, our energy and patriotism,—a word, by our progress in the general pursuits of civilized life, that we are reasonably advancing to an honorable national maturity.” As much as Benson desired unity with natives, he also needed them for another purpose. Progress requires a benchmark, and in this case, heathen Africans were the base measurement. In her essay on whiteness and literary imagination, Toni Morrison writes: “Africanism is the vehicle by which the American self knows itself as not enslaved, but free; not repulsive, but desirable; not helpless, but licensed and powerful; not history-less, but historical; not damned, but innocent; not a blind accident of evolution, but a progressive fulfillment of destiny.”³⁵ Like white Americans, Americo-Liberians demonstrated the depth of their growth by their spiritual/intellectual/political distance from Africans. In Benson’s recount of Liberia’s founding: “patriotic pioneers” had achieved final victory “on this sacred hill” by defeating “a ruthless savage foe” and thwarting “their diabolical efforts of extermination.” Here is Africanism deployed as inhuman savagery, which serves as the staging ground for Liberians’ quintessential identity as a people. Facing ignominious extinction, they

³⁴ Ross Poole, “National Identity and Citizenship,” in Linda Martín Alcoff and Eduardo Mendieta, eds., *Identities: Race, Class, Gender, and Nationality* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 273, original emphasis retained.

³⁵ Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 52.

vanquish their barbarous foe and preserve civilization for both their descendants and their adopted homeland.³⁶

Roberts had steeped his origin story in providentialism and, while Benson also acknowledged divine will, he emphasized Liberia's manifest destiny even more. The founding patriots represented only one period in a succession of eras, a "*triumphant march*" that advanced "*the blessings of civilized and religious life.*" The victory in 1822 preceded the 1847 Bill of Rights, which antedated the 1861 forcible removal of the slave trade from the region. The next step was the "leavening" of the entire republic, "every part and particle" to borrow Benson's wording. The separatism of the 1820s was to give way to the assimilationism of the 1860s. It was containment through inclusion, and Benson desired inclusion beyond the domestic. Membership into the Western world depended on a nation's degree of perceived development. "Progress in the general pursuits of civilized life" would provide the requisite growth, Benson hoped, for entrance into the international community.³⁷

It would be unfair to characterize Benson's call for evangelism and civilizationism as disingenuous. However, it is at times an example of ethical solipsism, the tendency to hold the interests, projects, and values of one group as the main ones or the only ones worthy of significance.³⁸ Case in point: Benson argued that evidence for civilization could be found in Liberians' engaging in commercial development, particularly in exploiting the environment through logging, mining, and expanded farming. "Stately forests extending to our far interior" must be "levelled"; and "the heart of the earth" should "be torn up . . . in quest of its rich

³⁶ Benson quotations in paragraph from Stephen Allen Benson, Fourth Inaugural Address, 6 January 1862, Monrovia, Liberia, in *African Repository* 37 (1862): 97-102.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, original emphasis retained.

³⁸ See Shannon Sullivan, *Revealing Whiteness: The Unconscious Habits of Racial Privilege* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 163.

materials.”³⁹ For Benson, the pursuit of individual riches was concomitant with creating “a great and permanent prosperity” for Liberia. But doing so clashed with native interests. The national economy rested largely on the export of goods obtained from the interior trade. Natives supplied the bulk of ivory, camwood, and palm oil; and Benson was anxious to wean Liberians from their dependence on the trade. He feared it could jeopardize national prosperity and independence, especially if natives boycotted or bypassed Americo-Liberians during times of hostility.⁴⁰ As seen previously during the Roberts administration, territorial cession deprived natives of rights. Because Benson viewed Liberia as *terra incognita*, they lost timber and mineral rights, too.

President Warner’s Commercial Nationalism

Daniel Warner, the third president, devoted his attention to the flagging economy. By 1864 the U.S. Civil War had dried up monetary donations to Liberia, and Warner preached retrenchment. In contrast to the naked ambition of past presidents, Warner attempted to rein in outsized expectations. He scolded the legislature for spending too much in apportioning 11 percent of tax revenues for its own operations. By creating new governmental offices and by increasing their own salaries, representatives were shortchanging native education, forcing several mission schools to shutter their doors. Liberia was not America, he lectured, and could not afford to emulate its bureaucracy or expenditures. At the same time, he called for government subsidies to farmers, the bone-and-sinew of the country. They furthered national independence by being the breadbasket for the rest of the citizens. In exchange for federal assistance, though, farmers were to follow “a proper division of labor.” Warner wanted to

³⁹ Benson, Fourth Inaugural Address, *African Repository*.

⁴⁰ See Stephen Allen Benson, Second Inaugural Address, 4 January 1858, Monrovia, Liberia, in *African Repository* 34 (1858):261-68.

establish a quota system for farmers: a set number would raise cattle for consumption, while a fixed percentage would grow only coffee, cotton, vegetables, or sugar cane. Moreover, he wished to extend job quotas to other occupations. Although not proposing a formal command economy, he did believe a more centrally planned economy would aid Liberia in achieving self-sufficiency in its finances and domestic industries.⁴¹

Along those lines, he voiced impatience at the glacial pace in assimilating the surrounding tribes, who he felt did not fully appreciate the benefits before them. “I think the time has come when greater efforts be put forth by the Government to teach them our fraternal connection with them, and the nature of the feeling which should subsist between us.” In his opinion, the state needed to take a direct role in the civilizing project for political and commercial reasons. Warner wanted to build a mighty African nationality, with Liberia the most powerful and prosperous republic on the continent. To achieve that, he needed to meld a cohesive workforce and to open unfettered access to interior trade. “As long as we maintain a distance from them [tribes],” he warned, “it will be impossible to civilize them, and jealousy and war will always, as they have hitherto done, form the middle wall between us.” But natives were already accusing Warner of building walls, not tearing them down. Recent passage of a port-of-entry law had inflamed several seaboard tribes, who had been passed over for seaports. They charged Monrovia with economic interference and political favoritism, gripes with which even some Liberian citizens concurred. Pointing to the U.S. Civil War, Warner warned that rift in opinion could only lead to disunion. He advised Liberians to trust in God and put away “trifling differences.” If cutting off a hand or plucking out an eye would ensure Liberia’s success,

⁴¹ Daniel Bashiel Warner, First Inaugural Address, 4 January 1864, in *African Repository* 40 (1864), 98-109.

however, Warner expressed his willingness to see it accomplished, a not-so-subtle hint that opponents risked retribution for their insubordination.⁴²

Civilization for Warner was a “mode of *living* and *working*.” The bottom line was of utmost importance, and he was determined Liberians meet it both physically and fiscally. Continuous improvement remained his encompassing theme: “Let our motto be onward.” He reproached anyone who shirked manual labor or who failed to employ their physical abilities. “Each month, week—nay, each day of our time should produce and add something of material wealth to the country.” Warner championed commercial advancement because in 1866 the political scene was a mess. He warned against the “dangerous gangrene” of party jealousy and discord; and he fretted that unchecked “party-spirit” would hinder national growth and improvement, leading to eventual disunion and disintegration. “[T]he discordant spirit of politics must be changed into that of peaceful and moralizing husbandry,” he advocated. In a decade of disagreement, Warner pinned hope on economic development to allay concern and deflect criticism.⁴³

President Payne’s Civic Nationalism

Warner’s successor, James Spriggs Payne, echoed alarm over the political strife between the Republican Party and the True Whig Party.⁴⁴ He cited Abraham Lincoln’s assassination as

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Warner quotations in paragraph from Daniel Bashiel Warner, *Second Inaugural Address to His Fellow Citizens* (Monrovia: Government Printing Office, 1866), original emphasis retained.

⁴⁴ The Republican Party refers here to the former Administration Party. It changed its name to the True Liberian Party in 1850, because its proponents wanted to distinguish their true *Liberian* roots, as opposed to the recent arrival of those in the True Whig Party. The True Liberian Party dominated politics for the first two decades after independence. The first four presidents were Republican or one of its antecedents: Roberts, Benson, Warner, and Payne (though Warner would later switch allegiance to the True Whig Party). Most of its party members derived from the American Chesapeake region and emigrated to Liberia in the first decades of its colonial existence.* In

the logical end of “ultra party spirit,” which had no place in republican government. Liberia needed to exhibit unity because, as Payne characterized, it was a lonely Christian outpost in danger of being overwhelmed politically and culturally by surrounding heathen empires, which imperiled the “purity” of its institutions. Concerning natives, Payne was Warner with a harder edge:

*The position we occupy, as a Christian government on this coast, imposes a system of duty upon us in relation to that section of our population which is in a heathen condition. Holding the opinion that it is time that the Republic should more directly extend its influence, its immunities, and responsibilities to them, the impressions made upon our aboriginal population should teach them obedience, order, and respect for the authority of the Republic, thus preparing them for a full participation in the rights of citizenship.*⁴⁵

The world was watching Liberia in its infancy, Payne warned, and it needed to do everything in its power to preserve its identity and prepare its indigenes. The duality is jarring: natives were both potential corrupters and prospective converts. To meet the threat and assimilate the target required an end to Americo-Liberian sectionalism. In order to extinguish the danger, Payne preached civic virtue—particularly righteous resolve and pure motives—but he translated them

1867 the True Liberian Party became the Republican Party, which emphasized the republican ideology of its members. It controlled the executive office for the first twenty-three years of Liberia’s nationhood.

Farmers, many of whom immigrated in the 1850s and 1860s, founded the True Whig Party in 1869 in Clay-Ashland. Most of the early residents were former Kentuckians, who named their town in honor of Henry Clay, who lived in Ashland, Kentucky. Clay-Ashland emerged as an early contender to Monrovia, and Crummell and Blyden clashed with Roberts in their bid to move Monrovia-based Liberia College to Clay-Ashland. In addition to being largely agricultural, the town housed a strong temperance movement.

The True Whig Party (TWP) was created by remnants of the Anti-Administration Party. Its party slogan was “Deeds Not Words,” and it served as the main opposition party to the Republican Party. The TWP criticized Republicans for being mulatto elites who ignored the sociopolitical interests of farmers, natives, and captives. Edward Roye, Edward Blyden, and Alexander Crummell were prominent members during its early years. Despite the overthrow of its first elected president, Edward Roye, the TWP would control Liberian politics for nearly a century afterward.

* In the 1843 census, nearly 75 percent of Liberia’s immigrants were from Virginia, Maryland, and North Carolina. By 1860 a full 33 percent of all immigrants were from Virginia. Marie Tyler-McGraw, *An African Republic: Black and White Virginians in the Making of Liberia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 128.

⁴⁵ James Spriggs Payne, *First Inaugural Address to His Fellow Citizens of the Republic of Liberia* (Monrovia: Government Printing Office, 1868), original emphasis retained.

in expressly political terms. Holding elevated sentiments within a Christian civilization, for the president, meant practicing restrained moderation and abstention from “erroneous ideas of political freedom.”⁴⁶ With the U.S. Civil War still fresh in the minds of many, Payne wished to project an image of political unity, civilized sobriety, and strong deterrence to the outside world.

President Roye’s Economic Nationalism

Payne had reason to worry about divisiveness, because his successor presided over one of the most acrimonious and turbulent times in nineteenth-century Liberia. Edward Roye was the first “outsider” president, heralding from the Republican Party. His political base was located in Clay-Ashland, and he interwove the theme of overcoming poverty into his inaugural address. “Servile antecedents” had impoverished the Negro, who had been robbed of the fruits of his labor in America. But he was now free in Liberia, and his prospects rested on his character and ability. Pursuit of riches was the next step, Roye advised. Prosperity was proof of the Negro’s potential. Repairing the race’s reputation, Roye concluded, required affluence. He argued that “if we remain poor in a country rich by nature in the profusion of its production, it must be a great dishonor.” Exoneration demanded wealth acquisition beyond the few or exceptional. Roye embodied what the race could accomplish. He was the richest person in Liberia, a self-made tycoon who had accumulated a small flotilla of ships that traded up and down the coast. But his personal success needed to extend to others. Individual achievement necessitated group amelioration. In a veiled shot at the True Whig Party, Roye eschewed amassing “riches and

⁴⁶ Ibid.

honors” in favor of aiding the “poor and ignominious masses around [us].” Here Roye was referring to the surrounding natives. What would help them most? In one word, *civilization*.⁴⁷

Roye repeated the Fortunate Fall Thesis in stating that slavery had benefitted Liberians, who now returned “as the missionaries of a Christian civilization.” More than any other president before him, Roye linked Liberia’s mission with African redemption: “I believe that the object of our residence on this coast is to bear some humble part in bringing about the fulfillment of that cheering prophecy, that Ethiopia shall stretch forth her hands unto God.” But for Roye, prophetic fulfillment meant profitable development⁴⁸:

*I believe that the erection of a railroad will have wonderful influence in the civilization and elevation of the native tribes. The barriers of heathenism and superstition will disappear before the railroad and its concomitants, as frost, snow, and ice dissolve before a summer’s sun. This is one of the most efficient means by which God’s promise made concerning Africa is, in my opinion, to be fulfilled.*⁴⁹

Roye is advocating entrepreneurial activity in order to recruit natives into the national fold. Thus he proposes financing such public improvements as schools and roads, and he lobbies for services like a railroad. Liberians would benefit, too. Internal development is an extension of free-labor principles, where the common denominator is acquiring wealth by increasing the value of land through technical improvements.⁵⁰ In this case, building a railroad facilitates capital

⁴⁷ Paragraph quotations from Edward James Roye, Inaugural Address, 3 January 1870, Monrovia, Liberia, in *African Repository* 46 (1870), reprinted in Dunn, *The Annual Messages of the Presidents of Liberia*, 1:77-78.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 1:78, 76.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 1:80, original emphasis retained.

⁵⁰ See Gavin Wright, *Old South, New South: Revolutions in the Southern Economy Since the Civil War* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), 20; see also Gavin Wright, *Slavery and American Economic Development* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), 58-60.

flows to the coast while expanding the spatial and economic control of Liberia into the hinterland.⁵¹

Natives would agree to this arrangement, Roye believed, in exchange for market participation. The capitalist-minded statesman believed the profit motive would stir the “natural instincts” within natives, not the racialized cultural choices of Blyden’s natural instincts but the individualized self-interest inherent in Adam Smith. Roye predicted that in their desire for economic gain, natives “will readily consent to do all the manual labor in the construction of railroads, for comparatively small pay, kind usage, and enough to eat.” The railroad’s completion would transform the natives into “the best of customers,” which in turn would attract foreign capitalists to “build up Liberia” to order to “illumine” the rest of Africa.⁵²

Thus, Roye aimed “to produce general content and happiness in the country, by improving the condition of the masses.” Amelioration would come through a rise in market commodities—namely, the outflow of exports, the inflow of imports, and the introduction of specie. By bringing these innovations to indigenes, Liberia would create “the incentive of self-interest,” which would bind the nation, spur immigration, and woo foreign investors.⁵³

Roye rejected a bifurcated society in which Liberia’s leaders ignored the wellbeing of the native majority. He underscored his vision of the good society with the poignant words: “Surely we are here to take our native brethren by the hand, and teach them how to live, until there shall grow up on this continent a Negro community, prosperous, educated, civilized, and Christian,

⁵¹ Sierra Leone would use railroad development in the early twentieth century as rationale to seize adjacent Liberian territory in order to “safeguard” its railroad line.

⁵² Paragraph quotations from Roye, Inaugural Address, in Dunn, *The Annual Messages of the Presidents of Liberia*, 1:81.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 1:83-84.

whose voice shall be heard and respected in Europe, Asia, and America.”⁵⁴ His pressing problem, however, was chronic underinvestment. He needed a way to expand the economy without deepening the deficit. He cautioned against the dangers of debt, warning that if left unchecked, it could result in national bankruptcy.⁵⁵ Because the chief source of revenue was custom duties, the economy depended on augmenting consumption. To do this required improvement of the native and shipment of commodities into the interior. Developing character and commerce was Roye’s strategy for quickening the spirit of cooperation between Liberian and native.

Roye was always going to have an uphill battle in realizing his economic dream. As will be seen in the next chapter, political jealousy, geopolitical intrigue, and imprudent financial policy drove a stake through Roye’s railroad plan. The need for manpower, logistical planning, and capital investment far surpassed the resources Liberia could muster. Furthermore, the role for natives was idealized and outsized. Yes, Ethiopia could find redemption but, under Roye’s scheme, it required her people to do all the heavy lifting. Roye called Liberia a “garden-spot” that could become “a paradise by labor, and by the application of the arts and sciences.”⁵⁶ No matter how progressive Roye billed himself, the truth remained that natives would have to supply the manual labor, while Americo-Liberians provided the expertise. Roye was replicating Crummell’s hierarchal emigrationism in the workplace. It was an unfair labor division, and few natives were eager to buy in as customers.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 1:84-85.

⁵⁵ It was an ironic warning in light of the financial troubles that transpired during his administration. See the next chapter for more details.

⁵⁶ Roye, Inaugural Address, in Dunn, *The Annual Messages of the Presidents of Liberia*, 1:78-79.

President Payne's Patriotic Rejoinder

James Payne, who served a second presidential term in the midseventies, acts as a fitting bookend to Roberts. In the years following Roye, Payne sounded alarm over Liberia's precarious financial condition. Economic mismanagement under Roye's administration had emptied the treasury and engendered "a crisis." Emboldened natives were out for revenge after Liberia had driven out their slave trade. A "heathen confederation" of rebellious Greboes had organized to challenge Liberia's authority and threaten its security. As the next chapter will discuss, educated Greboes had spearheaded the alliance in an effort to negotiate their imbalance of power with Monrovia. Roye had moved too fast, too soon in partnering with natives, believed Payne, who trumpeted a Liberia-first policy, one which prioritized the needs of citizens above those of aborigines. He complained that mission schools "exclude[d]" Liberian children and devoted more attention to "heathen brethren." "[T]hey are becoming rapidly intelligent," he fretted, "with no corresponding increase of good feeling towards the civilized." He juxtaposed this indigenous deficiency with a call for citizens to combine "all the energy, love of country and mental ability" in service of the country. Why were Liberians obligated to do so? It was because "the country [was] allotted to us by Divine Providence and bequeathed us by the brave and good men who preceded us."⁵⁷

What intrigues is Payne's reason for alarm: that natives lack "good feeling towards the civilized." Aborigines have neither the proper sentiment nor the correct object in view. In short, they do not possess the requisite "love of country," Payne complains. Political theorist Maurizio Viroli differentiates patriotism from nationalism this way: patriotism sustains commitment to the idea of the republic while nationalism promotes adherence to cultural, ethnic, or religious

⁵⁷ James Payne, Second Inaugural Address, 3 January 1876, in Dunn, *The Annual Messages of the Presidents of Liberia*, 1:111, 116, 112, 114, original emphasis retained.

homogeneity.⁵⁸ Payne is espousing the latter. His “love of country” is nationalistic because it “preaches the necessity of defending the country’s culture and history as values to be retrieved and defended in their entirety, as goods to be cherished because of their distinctiveness and particularity, because they are ours.”⁵⁹ Heritage and holy duty dictate Liberians oppose natives on the grounds that they are not “us.” Even though indigenes have Westernized education, they do not have the affective virtues or cultural and spiritual rootedness. “The alien feeling” and “mistrust of the mother county” are divisive counterpoints that “Providence admonishes us . . . to correct.”⁶⁰ Payne’s subjective standard of sentiment is a slippery target and a near impossible bar to surmount. It testifies to why assimilation was so difficult for the majority of natives to earn or even yearn to accomplish. But it also exposes the narrow and nonreciprocal nature of Payne’s affective feeling.

Martin Delany serves as a counterweight here. From the last chapter, one will remember that Delany defined patriotism as “love for *all men*,” characterized by impartiality and equal eligibility.⁶¹ His patriotism is unalloyed concern for fellow humanity, marked by purity and an absence of sophistry. Payne’s love of country it is not. Moreover, Payne lacks Delany’s sympathy, or compassionate identification with another group’s misery. Just as in America, a (self-defined) majority both delimits and disdains the native “minority.” Yet Payne’s maneuver unmasks the defects in Delany’s emigration thought, as well. How does a minority earn the majority’s sympathy? For Payne, the answer is political loyalty and cultural conformity.

⁵⁸ Maurizio Viroli, *For Love of Country: An Essay on Patriotism and Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 169.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 165.

⁶⁰ Payne, Second Inaugural Address, in Dunn, *The Annual Messages of the Presidents of Liberia*, 1:113.

⁶¹ Martin R. Delany, “True Patriotism,” *North Star*, 8 December 1848, original emphasis retained.

Delany's answer is self-governance but, as one will recall from *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States*, the basis for it is in controlling territory. That is precisely what is in dispute as Greboes and Liberians fought to evict one another from towns and farms. It is difficult for Liberians to have sympathy, when the conduit to it is also the source besetting it. Ensnared safely in the U.S., Delany had the liberty to be both expansive and magnanimous, a luxury Payne did not feel he could afford.

The president was the reaper intent on cutting down Grebo rebels with a sharpened scythe. Roye's "garden-spot" cooperative had yielded a field of tares, and it was time to winnow the harvest. For Payne, it started by uprooting native education, which had "sown the seed of discord, alienation, disunion and insubordination, which begins to bring forth its bitter fruit and which a gracious Providence admonishes us to destroy!"⁶² Education should be accessible to "all citizens, recaptives and civilized Africans included."⁶³ Schooling was a privilege, then, granted only to Liberians and the like-minded.⁶⁴

Payne slips into hyperbole but with strategic deliberateness. Liberia had to crush the confederation, he counseled, or risk the spread of "insubordination." The threat was not merely political but also existential, because the Greboes' alleged objective was "repossession of the territory at the cost of exterminating the entire civilized population." As he declared: "It is a war against civilization and Christianity." But in the background lies Payne's worry that "[t]he right of the government to other territory will be questioned." Native unification posed a threat as a rival political structure that could tempt France to intervene on behalf of the breakaway Greboes.

⁶² Payne, Second Inaugural Address, in Dunn, *The Annual Messages of the Presidents of Liberia*, 1:113.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 116, original emphasis retained.

⁶⁴ See the chapter on Liberia College, where this issue became the center of heated debate and caused the eventual dismissal of Professors Alexander Crummell and Edward Blyden.

Publically the president took pains to stress his actions were solely in pursuit of justice and “to maintain a Christian state amidst the grossest barbarism.” He positioned the government as the chief guardian of religion and culture: it had protected the property of mission societies in Maryland County, ransomed a missionary hostage from the clutches of “a gang of savages,” and defended civilized settlements from repeated attack. In Payne’s estimation, Greboes were both hateful and ungrateful. Above all, they were outside the bounds of civilization. Payne employed harsh, separatist language in an attempt to preclude civilized Europeans from entering a political and military pact with natives. Never mind that notable confederates had been educated at a Protestant Episcopal school. By not “identifying themselves with us” politically and sentimentally, they had proven themselves both traitorous and treacherous. Payne’s bellicosity reverted back to the adversarial language Roberts had employed in his 1847 inaugural address. Like the first president, Payne was attempting to rally the nation against an external threat. But this time, the olive branch he extended to natives was reed-thin. Disband the confederation or risk effacement. To Liberians, his message was just as clear: Band together or face extinction. Presidential rhetoric had come full circle; it was once again nationalism with a bunker mentality.⁶⁵

To be fair, Liberia was not governing in a political vacuum. As mentioned earlier, the Spence trader affair exposed the difficulty Liberia faced in getting other nations to respect its autonomy and authority. International contempt, particularly from France and Britain, imperiled Liberia’s geographical boundaries.⁶⁶ The refusal of other countries to recognize its territorial

⁶⁵ Paragraph quotations from Payne, Second Inaugural Address, in Dunn, *The Annual Messages of the Presidents of Liberia*, 1:115, 111-13.

⁶⁶ See the subsequent chapter for more on the boundary disputes that threatened Liberia’s territorial integrity.

claims or obey its commercial laws forced Liberia to reexamine its status as a colony of the American Colonization Society.

American Colonizationists' Idealism

The ACS had grand plans for Liberia. Just as colonizationists had multiple reasons for supporting emigration to Africa, they articulated different expectations for what they hoped Liberia would achieve. On the tactical level, they appraised the colony as a guarantor against the expansion of the slave trade. On the logistical side, they treated Liberia as a safe haven for the recovered slaves known as recaptives. For the humanitarian dimension, they envisioned the settlements as forming a Christian beachhead to propagate the Gospel. On the business end, they viewed emigrants as a source for raw goods and a market for American commodities. Perhaps the chief reason for aiding colonization in Liberia, however, was the white aspiration for black uplift.

Historian Nicholas Guyatt has argued that most white colonizationists believed in the principle of Negro degradation, the idea that “[s]lavery had stripped blacks of skills and industry, perhaps even of virtue.”⁶⁷ For those blacks lucky enough to be free, pervasive white prejudice still took a psychological toll, hindering them from reaching their moral, mental, and vocational potential. On one hand, colonizationists could affirm Negro equality and ability, because inferiority was the extrinsic product of slavery and not an intrinsic defect. Remove slavery, and the deficiencies would disappear, colonizationists posited. On the other hand, the vexing question was how deeply the degradation ran. Should America abolish slavery, the result would still not be an equal society, whites feared, because blacks’ development had been stunted for

⁶⁷ Nicholas Guyatt, *Bind Us Apart: How Enlightened Americans Invented Racial Segregation* (New York: Basic Books, 2016), 21.

generations. Removal to a far-off land would serve both races best, colonizationists decided. It would protect whites from the specter of reprisal or racial amalgamation, and it would give African Americans the time and space to grow into their potential.

Paired with the idea of degradation is the notion of redemption. Colonizationist Leonard Bacon articulated this faith in an exilic, salvific transfiguration across the Atlantic. While in American chains, blacks were degraded to such a degree that Bacon viewed them as embodying original sin itself. Just as sin separated humanity from God, slavery “alienated its victims from their fellows and brethren by promoting deception, self-indulgence, envy, and violence.”⁶⁸ And the somatic nature of sin, for Bacon, ensured that free blacks continued to suffer under social death. The soteriological solution was dying to sin and being raised to life anew. Transporting blacks to Liberia produced a similar rebirth. No longer were they under the death penalty for existing under both the dominion of enslavement and the deprivation of equality. They had experienced internal transformation with a new birth in a new land. Not only had they escaped the sinful clutches of oppression, African Americans emigrants had the opportunity to be ambassadors for spiritual, cultural, and political redemption. They could grace an entire continent with the good news—be it the gospel of commerce, civilization, or Christianity.

This was the intellectual and theological climate from which Americo-Liberians emerged to live as free citizens. Many felt obligated to live up to the ideals of their colonizationist benefactors. But then reality hit in the form of border disputes, revenue debates, trade disagreements, county rivalries, and wars with neighbors. As historian David Brion Davis assesses: “Liberia’s mission was so abstract and grandiose that it almost precluded serious

⁶⁸ David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Emancipation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014), 153.

discussion of capital investment, technological assistance, labor skills, and markets.”⁶⁹ This statement certainly applied to Liberia’s worsening relationship with Great Britain, whose Sierra Leone merchants rebuffed Monrovia’s repeated attempts to regulate tribal trade within Liberian borders.

Liberia’s Path toward Independence

Consequently in 1845, Governor Joseph Jenkins Roberts engaged in a six-month correspondence with the ACS Board of Managers on the topic of independence. Britain objected to Liberia’s policies as illegitimate because Liberia was acting with the imprimatur of “sovereign and independent states,” when it was merely “a private enterprize” of traders belonging to a nongovernmental organization, the ACS, which had no diplomatic standing in the community of nations.⁷⁰ Roberts clarified the relationship between Liberia and the ACS. The society had purchased the original land from natives and held the title in trust for Liberians, who had formed their own government and body politic. According to Roberts, the ACS acted in a consulting role by appointing “an officer . . . to aid them in the administration of government.”⁷¹ The Liberian legislature initiated bills, passed laws, and submitted them to the ACS for approval. Although the Board of Managers could recommend legislative measures, it could not impose them on Liberians, who retained the right of adoption and enforcement. Roberts argued that the community had been governing itself for over two decades. Furthermore, he pointed out that foreign traders had not hesitated to avail themselves of Liberian tribunals for redress, rather than

⁶⁹ Ibid., 108.

⁷⁰ Joseph Jenkins Roberts, “Address to the Legislative Council,” *Liberia Herald* (24 January 1845), reprinted in *African Repository* 21 (1845): 129.

⁷¹ Joseph Jenkins Roberts, Address to the Eighth Session of the Legislative Council, 5 January 1846, in *African Repository* 22 (1846): 161.

to petition an outside body. Any governing assistance the ACS provided was technical and advisory in nature. He did acknowledge financial reliance on the society, though. “[T]he dependence of these colonies upon the American Colonization Society,” Roberts insisted, “can only be viewed as a pecuniary, and not a political dependence.”⁷² Twenty-five years after Liberia’s founding, the ACS continued to be an important contributor to Liberia’s national economy by donating thousands of dollars in financial aid for new emigrants and annual salaries for missionaries and teachers. A critic like Martin Delany saw this as a fundamental weakness. As he lectured, “Always bear in mind, that the fundamental principle of every nation is *self-reliance*, with the *ability to create their own ways and means*; without this, there is no capacity for *self-government*.”⁷³ As seen in the last chapter, Delany affirmed self-reliance and self-government as the basis for African nationality. Roberts would have concurred on the second point, and he was clearly working to effect the first. But praxis and principle do not always meet, and the governor estimated Liberia was losing tens of thousands of dollars annually in lost tax revenue. He stated that “her ports and harbors [were being] violated, and her commerce destroyed with impunity.”⁷⁴ Emigrants had always needed infusions of capital from their colonizationist sponsors, and Roberts was not about to renounce ACS aid on the basis of Delany’s ethereal principles.

What Roberts was willing to do, however, was dissolve the formal association between the ACS and Liberia. In exchange for pecuniary aid from the ACS, Liberia had originally agreed not to enter into league with other governments. But the equation had changed when Britain and

⁷² Ibid., 162.

⁷³ Martin R. Delany, *Official Report of the Niger Valley Exploring Party* (1861; reprint, Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2004), 273, original emphasis retained.

⁷⁴ Roberts, Address to the Eighth Session of the Legislative Council, *African Repository*, 161.

France deemed Liberia's affiliation with the ACS as insufficient grounds for demarcating borders and instituting trade regulations. Liberia needed other countries to regard it as a co-equal and, after ACS approval and a public referendum, it declared its independence on 26 July 1847.

Yet the transition to sovereignty was not without controversy. The curated picture of a united front against savages and slavers had been a mirage, ever since Liberia's national inception. The drafting of the 1847 Liberian Constitution told a far different story, one rife with political rivalry and territorial squabbles.



Figure 1. Map of original Liberia.

Eleven men from the three charter counties of Sinoe, Montserrado, and Grand Bassa gathered together in Monrovia during the summer of 1847 in order to draft a national

constitution.⁷⁵ Six delegates came from northern Montserrado, four from central Grand Bassa, and one from southern Sinoe. A twelfth man, a nonvoting delegate, acted as the convention secretary. From the outset, the northern Montserrado delegation set the agenda. Composed primarily of merchants, the contingent from Monrovia lobbied hard for national sovereignty.

Independence was not a foregone conclusion. The Grand Bassa delegates voiced their desire to preserve the Commonwealth and maintain the existing patron-client relationship with the American Colonization Society. They wished to retain the status quo because they feared an oligarchy of traders from Monrovia would wield inordinate political influence in a new government. Bassa Cove had been founded a dozen years after Monrovia, about fifty miles down the coast. Unlike Monrovia, manumitted slaves from Virginia and Georgia had settled Bassa Cove in 1834 under the auspices of the Young Men's Colonization Society of Pennsylvania and the Colonization Society of the City of New York, who mandated the emigrants remain farmers, curb slavers, observe temperance, and avoid warfare against native Africans.⁷⁶ As former slaves, they lacked the immediate capital and connections to enter the mercantile trade, accenting class and vocational differences with their northern compatriots. They further resented the intrusion of Monrovia into their colonial affairs, and they bristled when it tried to claim jurisdiction over Bassa Cove in 1836. Bassans pointed out they had their own constitution and bylaws, and they refused to recognize any authority beyond that of their parent societies. Another sticking point was Bassa Cove's "doctrine of non-resistance." Congruent with the wishes of the Pennsylvania

⁷⁵ For short background summaries of each delegate, see James Wesley Smith, *Sojourners in Search of Freedom: The Settlement of Liberia by Black Americans* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1987), 194-96.

⁷⁶ Because of financial constraints, the ACS had turned operations over to the two societies. The bulk of emigrants came from Aylett Hawes, a wealthy planter, physician, and state delegate in Virginia. Upon his death, he stipulated over a hundred slaves be freed on the condition they emigrate to Liberia. Because they had been trained as farmers, artisans, and seamstresses on a southern plantation, the societies saw them forming the ideal basis for an agricultural settlement in Liberia. See Archibald Alexander, *A History of Colonization of the Western Coast of Africa* (Philadelphia: William S. Martien, 1846), 445-55.

Colonizationist Society, Bassa Cove declined to send military aid to other settler colonies when asked. And with its total abstinence policy—which contrasted sharply with Monrovia’s tipping houses—natives soon learned to look elsewhere for their rum. Taken together, Bassans’ agrarian roots, “pacifist” tendencies, and temperance stance instilled in them a sense of moral superiority that at times could infuriate Monrovia. The “political jealousies” of the 1830s still smoldered at the 1847 Constitutional Convention.⁷⁷

Richard Murray, the lone Sinoe County representative, was much more inclined to support the Montserrado delegates.⁷⁸ His support was understandable. Sinoe County was further down the southern coast than even Grand Bassa. It was more isolated than the other two counties, being bracketed by the Kru and Grebo, two powerful tribes whose intractability led to sporadic wars throughout the next half century. Sinoe had gotten its start in 1836 when the Mississippi State Colonization Society bought territory, aptly titled Mississippi in Africa, in order to sluice away its manumitted slaves. In the mid-thirties James Green—an affluent judge from Natchez, Mississippi—emancipated twenty-six of his slaves, leaving them \$25,000 to settle in their ancestral homeland.⁷⁹ Along with another forty-five emigrants, Green’s ex-slaves founded a settlement at the mouth of Sinoe River, which they named Greenville in their benefactor’s honor. The town was roughly 150 miles south of Monrovia and 100 miles from Grand Bassa. Because of its remoteness and uncleared vegetation, Sinoe County had difficulty attracting and retaining residents. The colonization society had sent emigrants to Mississippi in

⁷⁷ Paragraph quotations taken from Charles Henry Huberich, *The Political and Legislative History of Liberia*, vol. 1 (New York: Central Book Co., 1947), 590-91.

⁷⁸ Jacob Prout, the convention secretary, was the other man from Sinoe County; however, as stated earlier, he was not a voting delegate.

⁷⁹ Claude A. Clegg, III, *The Price of Liberty: African Americans and the Making of Liberia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 146.

Africa in order “to confer on Africa the blessings of knowledge, civilization and christianity.”⁸⁰

But ironically, many emigrants deserted Sinoe precisely because the county lacked those qualities. So in spite of their independent charter, Sinoens jumped at the opportunity to join the Commonwealth of Liberia in 1842, hoping for an influx of trade and settlers. With its main settlement of Greenville under eighty residents and its parent society now defunct, Sinoe County needed as much aid as it could get. The “unfrequent and irregular communication” with other counties, most assuredly, prompted Murray to seek a tighter union at the 1847 convention.⁸¹ If Monrovia dictated the terms, then so be it, because Sinoe’s future survival was at stake.⁸²

Delegates from Montserrado County, where Monrovia was located, appealed to racial pride in face of Grand Bassa’s loyalist opposition. Reminiscent of a young Martin Delany, Beverly Wilson championed black self-sufficiency. He huffed that the Liberian people could make their own constitution without the assistance of white people. Consequently, he refused to acknowledge the services of Simon Greenleaf, a white colonizationist and Harvard Law professor who had sent a proposed draft of what eventually became the 1847 Liberian constitution. Wilson was an ardent nationalist who had emigrated from Norfolk, Virginia, in the 1830s. A freeman, he had made his livelihood as a carpenter and Methodist minister. Upon moving his family to Liberia, he established a mission outpost and school up the St. Paul River, about twenty miles inland from Monrovia. Few people had the temerity to question his patriotism. In 1837 he had mounted a vigorous defense of Liberia in the United States, and in

⁸⁰ Franklin L. Riley, *A Contribution to the History of the Colonization Movement in Mississippi*, 408-411, excerpted in Huberich, *The Political and Legislative History of Liberia*, 1:602.

⁸¹ Ninth Annual Report of the Executive Committee of the Mississippi Colonization Society, 12 December 1838, Natchez, Mississippi, in Huberich, *The Political and Legislative History of Liberia*, 1:608.

⁸² For more on the history of Mississippi in Africa, see also Alan Huffman, *Mississippi in Africa: The Saga of the Slaves of Prospect Hill Plantation and Their Legacy in Liberia Today* (New York: Gotham Books, 2004).

1840 he lost his eldest in battle when “savage” natives reportedly opened fire on his son under a white banner of truce.⁸³ His eloquence and sacrifice cemented his reputation as a fellow countryman beyond reproach.⁸⁴

Hilary Teage, the author of Liberia’s Declaration of Independence, joined Wilson in rejecting any role for the ACS in the new political arrangement, urging everyone to refrain from mentioning the ACS again. After all, delegates had congregated to compose a constitution “for the people of Liberia, in their own country, *on their own land*.”⁸⁵ Teage was a native Virginian who had emigrated to Africa as a teenager. Although trained to be a Baptist missionary, he abandoned the call in favor of a more lucrative occupation. He grew to become a prominent merchant in the palm oil trade and used his profits to purchase the *Liberia Herald* newspaper from John Russwurm. In 1835 Teage parlayed his increased visibility into a political appointment as colonial secretary. At only thirty-three years of age, the editor-cum-politician emerged as a star on the rise. His writing skills and political ambitions landed him the task of penning his country’s independence declaration.

Teage’s document was an important milestone in Liberia’s asserting its autonomous statehood. Pursuant to English jurist Robert Phillimore’s 1854 definition, Charles Huberich

⁸³ See appendix in Sarah J. Hale, ed., *Liberia; or, Mr. Petyon’s Experiments* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1853).

⁸⁴ Well, almost beyond reproach. The U.S. Government Agent for Recaptured Africans, James Lugenbeel, expressed thorough disgust for Wilson’s “grandiloquence, and nonsensical egotism” on display at the convention. And he all but accused Wilson of plagiarism for taking credit for Greenleaf’s constitutional draft: “Such declarations are really sickening, coming as they do from so ignorant a man [a]fter the reading of this remarkable *original* (!) production . . .” Extracts from Dr. J. W. Lugenbeel’s Journal, printed in Huberich, *The Political and Legislative History of Liberia*, 1:825, 823, original emphasis retained. It should be mentioned that Lugenbeel’s notes are the only surviving account of the convention. The official journal minutes were destroyed accidentally before being published; and a secondary account was lost at sea while on its way for publication in England. Finally, reports circulated that Dessaline T. Harris was writing a contemporaneous commentary on the constitution (which may have shed more insight into its creation), but no one has yet located a known extant copy of the work, if it indeed made its way to publication at all.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 825, original emphasis retained.

described the state as “a people permanently occupying a fixed territory, bound together by common laws, habits, and customs into one body politic, exercising, through the medium of an organized Government, independent sovereignty and control over all persons and things within its boundaries, capable of making war and peace, and of entering into all International relations with the other communities of the globe.”⁸⁶ Liberia was a state, then, if it met five criteria: (1) defined territory; (2) permanent occupancy; (3) common law based on established legal custom; (4) common cultural denominators such as religion, language, and a shared lived experience; and (5) a structured government regularly exercising (a) internal authority within its borders and (b) external sovereignty through war declarations, land annexation, or treaty agreements.

Meeting these qualifications was crucial for Liberia, because France and Great Britain rejected its claim of satisfying the first and last conditions. Because it was a protectorate of the American Colonization Society, by extension Liberia lacked the “international character” to settle trade or land disputes with them.⁸⁷ Or so these European nations contended. They were sovereign powers; Liberia was not. Therefore, they were bound to recognize neither Liberia’s territorial claims nor its commercial taxation of their vessels or imported goods.

J. J. Roberts disagreed with this assessment, though he did not find it surprising. Liberia would have to endure a period of obscurity and opposition before it could ascend in stature. Roberts laid forth a roadmap that said as much. Like Edward Blyden, Roberts subscribed to a cyclical view of history. “All empires had to struggle in the feebleness of infancy,” he lectured,

⁸⁶ Sir Robert Phillimore, *Commentaries upon International Law*, 3rd ed. (London: Butterworths, 1879), 1:81-82, quoted in Huberich, *The Political and Legislative History of Liberia*, 1:228. Please note that though Huberich is quoting the 1879 edition of *Commentaries*, the 1854 first edition of *Commentaries* has the exact same wording.

⁸⁷ Huberich, *The Political and Legislative History of Liberia*, 1:232.

“and by degrees attain their zenith.”⁸⁸ According to Roberts, Liberia was well on the road to eminence. He compared it to Rome and the British Isles, in that the process was the same: early weakness followed by accumulated power, which was succeeded by extended territory culminating in universal respect. Land expansion, then, was a necessary step to national significance and international prominence. It lay on the path to glory and greatness.

Of course, this begged the question of whether native tribes possessed sovereignty over ceded land. In short, did they themselves constitute states? By Phillimore’s definition, they did. Liberia claimed title of its land based on treaty agreements with local kings starting in 1822. The issue turns to one of derivative sovereignty. That is, were these kings duly authorized under native law to cede sovereignty to Americo-Liberians? This question becomes especially relevant to those aborigines for which territorial sovereignty rested in the collectivity of the tribes. If land title belonged to the tribe as a whole, their king or representative could not divest the land without their consent. Otherwise, any derivative title and sovereignty transfer would be void. Alternatively, Liberia had the option of claiming sovereignty based on the principle of *terra nullius*. Derived from Latin, the term literally means “nobody’s land.” If land is abandoned or prior sovereignty relinquished, the land becomes open to acquisition through simple occupation.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ J. J. Roberts, 1852 Inaugural Address to the National Legislature, 3 December 1851, Monrovia, Liberia, printed in J. J. Roberts, “Third Inaugural,” *African Repository* 28 (1852): 134-39. Roberts delivered his address early because he was slated to visit the United States during his scheduled inauguration in January 1852. See J. J. Roberts to William McLain, 26 January 1852, Monrovia, Liberia, in *African Repository* 28 (May 1852): 134-41.

⁸⁹ See Bruce Buchan and Mary Heath, “Savagery and Civilization: From Terra Nullius to the ‘Tide of History,’” *Ethnicities* 6, no. 1 (2006): 5-26.

Territorial transaction was only one part of a larger divide for Roberts. As he saw it, the “African problem” was the incapacity of the race to rule themselves.⁹⁰ Thus government was central to his vision for Africa’s future. For Roberts, the contribution of Liberia to the continent was “restoring to Africa a government, a name, and the blessings of civilization and Christianity.”⁹¹ The fledgling nation represented liberation from the slave trade, spiritual bondage, and savage barbarism. But without government, the other benefits could not happen. A strong, forceful government was paramount because it secured freedom, protected rights, and promoted moral living (itself seen as a safeguard of republican government). In Roberts’s words: “I am impressed with the belief that God has destined this *republic* to be the centre of attraction to her scattered children, who for ages have bent under the galling yoke of oppression in almost every quarter of the globe, and that He will gradually bring them into the enjoyment of perfect freedom in the bosom of Liberia.”⁹² Here Roberts invokes the imagery of New Israel, the covenant nation through which God would bless all the nations of the earth. But Roberts’s “nation language” also carries political overtones. It represents a move away from earlier emigrationists’ appeal to common racial and cultural reasons for returning to their ancestral homeland.⁹³ Instead, Roberts iterates a pragmatic black solidarity focused on the furtherance of

⁹⁰ Designation of an “African problem” is itself problematic, because it leaves the propagator vulnerable to the charge of ethnic/racial chauvinism. Just as Lincoln (and countless others) misconceived the “Negro problem” by assuming white control, Roberts commits a similar fallacy by presuming Americo leadership in solving the “African problem.” See Nathan Irvin Huggins, “The Afro-American, National Character and Community: Toward a New Synthesis,” in Nathan Irvin Huggins, *Revelations: American History, American Myths*, edited by Brenda Smith Huggins (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 38; Paul D. Escott, “*What Shall We Do with the Negro?*” *Lincoln, White Racism, and Civil War America* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009), 226.

⁹¹ Roberts, “Third Inaugural,” 134-39, original emphasis retained.

⁹² *Ibid.*, emphasis added.

⁹³ Per Wilson Moses, this ideological rationale for such would include such mystical elements as ethnic chauvinism, romantic racialism, and Ethiopian providentialism—all of which he subsumed under the category of mystical black nationalism. See Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850–1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 15-50.

state power. He envisions black publics coming together to address a common problem, the need for civilized rule in an unruly land. Governmental authority was his proposed solution.⁹⁴

President Roberts's Republicanism: Part II

In Roberts's second stint as president in the 1870s, he clarified what he meant by a republican government. It was one in which "the supreme power of the state resides in the people" and whose representatives "conduct national affairs in a manner conducive to the common benefit, and the preservation of the rights and liberties of the people."

Integral to republicanism were proper respect for and submission to authority. Roberts delineated that "by republicanism we mean not a state of licentiousness; nor as subversive of order, nor a defiance of legal authority. We must convince mankind that we understand by a republic, a well ordered government endue[d] with energy to fulfill all its intentions, to act with effect upon all delinquents, and to bring to punishment all offenders against the laws of the state."

As seen throughout this chapter, Americo-Liberians had a complicated relationship with their native neighbors. On one hand, Roberts proclaimed they shared "a peculiar relation to us, and must be civilized, and the work is ours." Whatever happened, he resolved they would not share the same fate as North American Indians, who were "swept into oblivion." Why not? Roberts—not above articulating Moses's mystical black nationalism when it suited his purposes—argued Americoes and Africans were of the same nature, one blood, and so they were brethren and fellow citizens. Left unspoken is the irony of using abolitionist language of equality

⁹⁴ See Eddie S. Glaude, Jr., *Exodus! Religion, Race, and Nation in Early Nineteenth-Century Black America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 10-16; Robert Gooding-Williams, *Look, A Negro! Philosophical Essays on Race, Culture, and Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 110-112.

while erecting what was, some could charge, a nascent *herrenvolk* republic.⁹⁵ Yet full installation was still decades in the making, and one may argue that Roberts's insistence on equality precluded a deleterious distancing that devolved into state-sanctioned apartheid.⁹⁶ Natives were just as capable of uplift as were African Americans, Roberts resolved. Of course, the catch was that only "the best informed and more intelligent" of them realized their "degraded" state and the need for change.⁹⁷ If it was not *herrenvolk* republicanism, it teetered on black bourgeois nationalism.⁹⁸

The solution for restive tribes was Monrovia's passage of appropriate laws and regulations, which Roberts was confident would remove intertribal differences and, of course, cohere people to Liberia. Government was to assume a parental role, being "kind and mild, but firm and absolute." Infighting was akin to family discord, an evil that threatened to hinder progress for years to come. Liberia faced intertribal conflict in both the north and south. The Vai and Gola skirmished in the north, while the Grebo drew arms in the south.

One of the main impediments came from "bad foreigners" who corrupted natives' morals and retarded their civilization. Roberts was referring to "unprincipled" traders who trafficked in slaves or rum. But the label also applied to any merchant who refused to pay duties to Monrovia. By 1850 Laurie Hamilton and one Captain Murray insisted their dealings with the Kru were not subject to Liberian taxation. They refused to dock at approved ports of entry, carried out direct

⁹⁵ See Paul Goodman, *Of One Blood: Abolitionism and the Origins of Racial Equality* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

⁹⁶ Contra Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black Is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 26, 30, who argues that hard racial ascription helped fuel black antiracism and domestic colonialism in the United States.

⁹⁷ Paragraph quotes from Roberts, "Annual Message to the Legislature," 3 December 1850, in Dunn, *The Annual Messages of the Presidents of Liberia*, 1:46-47.

⁹⁸ See Moses, *Golden Age of Black Nationalism*, 29-31.

trade with the Kru, and ignored the requirement that they purchase special government licenses in order to trade. Roberts accused them of flouting international law, encouraging native insubordination, and inciting their insurrection. They were really harming natives by depriving Monrovia of funds it needed to underwrite education and civilization (i.e. infrastructure, mainly roads) among the various tribes.

Corruption of natives was a familiar theme in Liberians' arguments against foreign interference. What is interesting in Roberts's speech is that he extends corruption beyond the moral realm of insobriety and insubordination to encompass the sin of un(der)development. Natives could not reach their full commercial potential in their dealings with shady European traders, Roberts insinuated. As exporters of true democratic capitalism, Liberians held the purported keys to future economic success for the region.

Liberian traders and explorers were at the vanguard in perpetuating this idea. Political leaders in Monrovia appreciated these intrepid men because they served multiple functions, most of which were perceived as beneficial to the country. First, they collected knowledge about the land and peoples surrounding the largely littoral-bound citizenry. Second, they often acted as official emissaries for the government, delivering treaty and trade requests to tribal chiefs. Third, they popularized Liberia to the West with their diligent travel journals, which both piqued and sated the curiosity of prospective emigrants and the general public about the so-called Dark Continent. Fourth and perhaps most importantly, they helped establish a basis for Liberia's future territorial claims. Missionaries like Alexander Crummell could serve a complementary role by extending soft power through instituting churches, establishing schools in the villages, and preaching against such evils as polygamy, animism, and the slave trade.

Opposition to slave trafficking was one of the earliest sources of friction between Liberia and surrounding tribes. The constitution devoted an entire section on the penalties for being involved in the slave trade. Any citizen or resident caught transporting slaves risked losing his livelihood and freedom. The government had the right to seize his vessels, levy a \$1,000 fine, and incarcerate the offender up to five years. All Liberia-commissioned ships had the legal right and duty to board, inspect, and impound vessels found to be carrying slaves.

Deterrence morphed into rounds of ever-tightening trade restrictions. Under the pretext of enforcing the ban on slavery, the government required domestic and international shippers to supply ship manifests and submit to inspections by revenue collectors. Under the additional auspices of discouraging the sale of rum, Roberts proposed the introduction of trade licenses for anyone who wanted to exchange goods with natives. Any citizen or other person in Liberia who traded on behalf of a foreign entity would need to purchase the license and also pay an annual tax of twelve to sixteen dollars. Yet not everyone was eligible for this status. The government vowed to sanction only those traders who were of “good character” and who would “promote the designs of the Government.” Unregistered “smugglers” risked forfeiture of goods, fourfold fines, and potential jail time. Anyone who resisted a customs officer’s authority would find himself slapped with a minimum fine of fifty dollars.

Roberts viewed trade regulation as complementing missionary propagation. Monies generated from the licenses, he envisioned, would fund education of natives, while safeguarding them from “corrupting foreigners” and their “ardent spirits.” Furthermore, he predicted that the

natives would be amenable to the plan because of the anticipated benefits, namely “civilization” and the prevention of wars (which alcohol presumably fueled).⁹⁹

What undercut Roberts’s credibility was the charge of Liberians’ exploiting natives, which critics alleged amounted to little more than slavery. A prominent detractor, William Nesbit, blasted Liberians for their reliance on so-called “apprentices.” The apprenticeship model had started with good intentions but had experienced its share of abuses. Many interior tribes had viewed the original practice as a beneficial way for their children to gain a western education. The youth would live and work with Liberians in exchange for literacy and vocational training. But without firm rules in place, some Americoes found ways to exploit the system by loosely defining what constituted a trade or basic education. Despite the shameful abuses and embarrassing comparisons to chattel slavery, Liberians supported the continued maintenance of the apprenticeship system.

In hindsight, the apprenticeship model led to serious societal problems. Historian Caree Banton sees it as contributing to the color politics of the twentieth century. In the case of Congoes—former Africans who Western navies liberated from slavers—Liberians discriminated against the darker-colored recaptives, declining to parcel out land to the Africans who relocated to the country. In the words of Banton, recaptives were seen as “uncultured and were thus a socially disruptive element for a Liberian society aiming to project black humanity and civility to the broader white world.”¹⁰⁰ Banton argues that Liberians acculturated recaptives through the labor discipline inherent in field apprenticeship. It was American Southern-style sharecropping

⁹⁹ J. J. Roberts, “Message of President Roberts: To the Honorable the [sic] Senate and House of Representatives,” *Liberia Herald*, reprinted in *The African Repository* 26:7 (July 1850): 200.

¹⁰⁰ Caree A. Banton, “‘More Auspicious Shores’: Post-Emancipation Barbadian Emigrants in Pursuit of Freedom, Citizenship, and Nationhood in Liberia, 1834–1912,” PhD diss. (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University, 2013), 186.

under the guise of benevolent civilizationism. Along with the economic inequities of tenancy, recaptives enjoyed none of the same legal rights of their wealthier Americo-Liberians. Without land ownership, recaptives had to settle for a *de facto* second-class citizenship.

Yet it is hard to castigate mid-century Americo-Liberians as colonizers on par with their European counterparts. That is not to deny that Americoes caused real suffering, material deprivation, and lasting enmity among its neighbors. Perhaps it is a matter of scale. In comparison to natives, the number of Liberians was miniscule. In 1847 citizens numbered a little over three thousand, with almost two thousand living in the vicinity of Monrovia. In the other two counties outside Montserrado lived a paltry eight hundred Americoes. Their numbers paled when placed beside the two million natives residing within the borders claimed by Liberia. Oppression on a national scale was neither visible nor inevitable in the nineteenth century. But in Liberia's political and economic policies, one discerns the seeds for inequality planted. Every president of Liberia until Edward James Roye rejected economic autonomy and self-determination for indigenous peoples. On one level, one can understand their reluctance as an act of self-interest in Liberia's ongoing struggle for survival. Desperate to stave off European advances and intent on staking their claim to nationhood, many Liberians closed ranks and pursued nationalist aims that solidified their international position and accrued wealth and power for their elite. The attendant exceptionalism espoused by Liberia's early leaders spawned entitlement among its citizenry and stirred resentment among those touted as their African kin—a societal gulf that continued into the twentieth century and beyond.

CHAPTER 3

“I was in no humor for cant about kindred; I wanted my money”:
The Lessons and Limits of Commerce in the Liberian Republic

Benjamin Anderson was a trader and explorer during the 1860s and 1870s. He was renowned at home and abroad for his fearless forays into the dense hinterlands of Liberia. But in March 1868, he was having difficulty convincing King Bessa to let him and his expedition leave Bessa’s Mandingo town. The tribal chief kept delaying Anderson’s departure and exacting payment of goods for Anderson’s continued stay. When the Liberian trader offered money to win his release, Bessa laughed and told Anderson his money “no got feet this time.” Anderson railed against Bessa’s men for stealing his goods, intimidating his porters, and inhibiting his travel into the interior. He complained that the “barbarians” were abusing and humiliating him because the Liberian government at Monrovia failed to exert sufficient control over them. And he vowed to return with troops and burn the village down. But Bessa was unmoved. He accused the outsiders of disturbing the peace, interfering with his slave trade, and “endangering” the lives of his people. The Mandingo and Liberian were at loggerheads over who would dictate the trade, travel, and territory inside the country. The tense standoff was illustrative of the uneasy relations between natives and Liberians throughout their history. Commercial success was something that both sides wanted. But as Liberia came into its own as a nation, it faced mandates that could often conflict: unify the people while staying solvent; grow prosperity for Liberians while extending it to millions of natives unfamiliar with capitalism; and exercise flexible financial governance while projecting developmental sturdiness to the outside world. Rhetoric and reality collided, forcing Liberians to make pecuniary choices that were less and less in natives’ best interests. To borrow King Bessa’s phrase, Liberia found that commerce—as a unifying,

mobilizing force—“no got feet” and lost traction in quelling the internal dissensions that appeared over the second half of the nineteenth century.¹

It had not always been this way. Early on, Liberians had hoped to use commerce as the first pillar with which to anchor the republic. It was the engine necessary to fuel the economy, fund the government, and develop the country. But internal rivalries and external pressure conspired to keep Liberia’s commercial advancement at a standstill. What Liberians hoped would unify the nation was the source of contention because it pitted trader against farmer, Americo against native, and Liberian against European. The desire to expand Liberia’s commercial footprint led to charges of elitism, exploitation, and colonialism.

Paul Cuffe’s Pioneering Vision

The dream of Liberia as an economic and commercial power had been there from the beginning. Commerce had been a key motivation since the birth of the colonization movement in the U.S. Paul Cuffe was the embodiment of this vision. Born in 1759 to an Amerindian and free black who had bought his own freedom, Cuffe grew up in Massachusetts before leaving home to embark on a whaling expedition at age sixteen. With sailing now in his veins, he built a ship and began to trade up and down the eastern seaboard. He used to run the British blockade during the Revolutionary War in order to supply Quaker communities. After the war had concluded, the ambitious sailor assumed captaincy of his own whaling schooner. He soon parlayed his profits into building more ships until he had amassed a small fortune and established a shipping empire. With sizable interests to protect, Cuffe petitioned for tax relief in 1780 on the basis that he was

¹ Paragraph quotations from Benjamin Anderson, *Narrative of a Journey to Musardu, the Capital of the Western Mandingoes* (New York: S. W. Green, 1870), reprinted in *African-American Exploration in West Africa: Four Nineteenth-Century Diaries*, edited by James Fairhead, Tim Geysbeek, Svend E. Holsoe, and Melissa Leach (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 169.

being taxed without representation (since blacks were prohibited from suffrage). Denied relief or representation, he refused to pay property and poll taxes, which landed him a short stint in jail. In 1808 Cuffe converted to Quakerism and met fellow Friend, James Pemberton, who encouraged Cuffe to view Africa as a potential site for evangelism and settlement. Pemberton connected him with the African Institution of London, a philanthropic society dedicated to the British colony of Sierra Leone.

In 1811 Cuffe sailed for Freetown, the chief town in Sierra Leone. His maiden voyage to Africa was indicative of his Christian commercialism, as he brought beef, Bibles, and other goods to the continent. During his visit, he explored the possibility of establishing a whaling fishery in the coastal waters surrounding the colony. Shuttling between London and Freetown, he lobbied for commercial shipping rights, even establishing the Friendly Society of Sierra Leone, whose aims were to promote unfettered trade between the colony and motherland. Bureaucratic red tape and diplomatic tensions between Britain and the United States ultimately scuttled his attempts, but Cuffe had found in Africa what he had been seeking: a location ripe for Christianity and rife with commercial opportunities. Returning to the U.S., Cuffe immediately began to organize emigration societies in Philadelphia and New York. In Baltimore, he reached out to Daniel Coker, then a teacher in an all-negro school. His efforts resulted in the formation of African Institutions devoted to the cause of black emigration to Africa.

Unfortunately for Cuffe, the War of 1812 intervened to halt his momentum. With England and the U.S. at war, he found his emigration efforts stymied. In 1814 he introduced a memorial to the U.S. Congress asking that it lift the commercial embargo so he could transport African-American emigrants to Africa, where they could “promote habits of industry, sobriety,

and frugality, among the natives of that country.”² Although the Senate approved his bill, his effort fell short in the House by seven votes. Nor was the English government any more sympathetic, refusing to offer protection should he visit Sierra Leone. Undeterred, Cuffe transported thirty-eight emigrants to Sierra Leone in 1816, where he exchanged his tobacco cargo for camwood.

More than other emigrationists or colonizationists, Cuffe saw African settlement as the chance for African Americans to build a transatlantic trading empire between Africa, England, and the U.S. Cuffe died in 1817—an inopportune time for the emigrationist cause. Had he lived, he may have had the stature and credentials to sway some prominent opponents of colonization. His vision for building a viable commercial stronghold in Africa would live on, though the argument was never as compelling nor as paradigmatic as with Cuffe.

Other colonizationists attempted to carry the banner of business. Rather than tout black uplift as Cuffe had, they often resorted to self-serving rhetoric. Thus transplanted African Americans would be “a frugal, active, industrious people” who would supply the U.S. with such tropical products as rice, corn, cotton, sugar, and coffee while serving as a new market for “our spare manufactures, and our spare productions.”³ If framed as “a question of dollars and cents,” Liberia offered “infinite benefits” compared to the speculative gold rush in California.⁴ Another colonizationist urged the U.S. to recognize Liberia for its trade potential. He pointed to London’s acknowledgement of Liberia’s nationhood. More than philanthropy motivated England. Driving British diplomacy was “her great national characteristic—*trade*, TRADE, TRADE. This is what

² *Annals of Congress*, 13th cong., 2nd sess., 861-63, as quoted in Floyd J. Miller, *The Search for a Black Nationality: Black Colonization and Emigration, 1787–1863* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975), 38.

³ Robert G. Scott, “Addresses Delivered at the Annual Meeting,” *The African Repository* 26:2 (February 1850): 44.

⁴ *Ibid.*

the Anglo-Saxon conquers by and conquers for.” Yes, Liberia was as “small as a *musquito* [sic]” but if England paid attention to its “hum,” so too should the United States. Trade and the right to make money, he argued, were complementary reasons to recognize Liberia’s independence.⁵ The secretary and treasurer for the American Colonization Society, William Coppinger, also wrote an editorial in the *Christian Observer* in which he sounded the alarm over the growing English trade monopoly in Africa. England was gaining an advantage by exporting each year over £5,000,000 of goods to Africa and importing more than £800,000. Liberia alone was purchasing \$120,000 of English goods per annum, and it was exporting nearly the same dollar amount. As Coppinger concluded, American trade to Africa was paramount: “Ours are emphatically a commercial people, and to enable them to enter into competition with the English traders, demands the earliest and most serious attention.”⁶

Emigrationist Martin Delany was another vocal supporter of Negro industriousness. A fierce critic of the American Colonization Society, he still agreed on the need for African Americans to hone their commercial skills. He raised the need for “educational and business qualifications” for colored people.⁷ In *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States*, he extolled Africans for their industry, husbandry, and artisanship. Interior Africans rivaled the West in masonry, architecture, and civil engineering, Delany claimed. Their aptitude for work, then, had made them superior candidates to replace Amerindians in New World mines and fields. As Delany advanced, white Americans grew

⁵ Rev. Bethune, “Addresses Delivered at the Annual Meeting,” *The African Repository* 26:2 (February 1850): 44, original emphasis retained.

⁶ Wm. C., “African Commerce and Manufactures,” *Christian Observer*, reprinted in *The African Repository* 26:6 (June 1850):175.

⁷ Martin R. Delany, *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States* (1852; reprint, Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2004), 69.

wealthy off the ability of imported Africans to cultivate and harvest rice, hemp, cotton, indigo, and tobacco. Thus enslaved Africans were “the bone and sinews of the country.”⁸ In subsequent chapters Delany presented the case for the financial and commercial contributions of African Americans—all of whom remained disenfranchised and unable to change their sociopolitical condition. Oppression had made staying in the U.S. untenable. Delany cited the Jewish exodus from Egypt and the Puritan separation from Britain as prime examples of successful migrations to a new land. The time had come for American colored people to make the same move, he contended. And one of the first places Delany considered was Liberia.

Emigrationists’ Dueling Literature

Delany loved the idea of an independent Liberia, but he decried its utter reliance on U.S. colonizationists for funding and diplomatic guidance. Were Liberia not “a mere dependency of Southern slaveholders, and American Colonizationists,” he would consider it an ideal emigrant destination, especially because of its extensive educational opportunities.⁹ But its continued obsequiousness led Delany to deride its government as a mockery and its president a parody of power. The eastern coast of Africa held far greater promise, Delany concluded, because of its commercial potential. Mineral wealth, intersecting trade routes, and future railroad prospects would “make [the location] the GREAT THOROUGHFARE for all the trade with the East Indies and Eastern Coast of Africa, and the Continent of America.”¹⁰ Thus in 1852 Delany dismissed Liberia for its lack of political backbone and commercial development.

⁸ Ibid., 89.

⁹ Ibid., 186.

¹⁰ Ibid., 225, original emphasis retained.

In part to rebut Delany, the ACS sent Daniel H. Peterson the following year to report on Liberia. In 1854 Peterson published *The Looking-Glass: Being a True Report and Narrative of the Life, Travels, and Labors of the Rev. Daniel H. Peterson*, a largely glowing tract in favor of Liberian emigration. He recited a litany of common complaints against living in the U.S., including the inability of free colored people to find employment because of prejudice. In contrast, he depicted Liberia as an open door: “In that country is a field large enough for the employment of all your talents in every way and shape, either moral, religious, civil or military. There no door will be shut against you, but all is as free as the air of heaven.”¹¹ Repudiating Delany’s charge of an unhealthy climate, Peterson declared Monrovia to be “perfectly healthy.”¹² Moreover, because the city sat on a vast bed of iron ore, he observed that enterprising emigrants could reap “a fortune in a few years from minerals and the natural productions of the earth.”¹³ Farmers could prosper there, too, because of the natural fertility of the soil. Whereas Delany had called African slaves as “the bone and sinew” of the U.S., Peterson heralded free farmers as “the bone of sinew” of Liberia.¹⁴ Such artisans as bakers, butchers, tailors, carpenters, and blacksmiths—he predicted—would accrue financial gain in short order.

Furthermore, Peterson hinted that emigrants could soon take advantage of an educated, native labor force. As he lectured: “The only way to redeem Africa is to settle it as soon as possible. Take hold of the land, cultivate it, and in employing the natives, cultivate their minds at

¹¹ Daniel H. Peterson, *The Looking-Glass: Being a True Report and Narrative of the Life, Travels, and Labors of the Rev. Daniel H. Peterson* (New York: Wright, 1854), reprinted in *Liberian Dreams: Back-to-Africa Narratives from the 1850s*, edited by Wilson Jeremiah Moses (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 37.

¹² *Ibid.*, 47.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 48.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 51.

the same time that the land is rendered fruitful.”¹⁵ Here he meant more than Christian evangelism, having just praised one missionary for teaching his native pupils such trade skills as tailoring, smithing, and carpentry.

Delany did not waste time in countering Peterson. In his 1855 introduction to William Nesbit’s *Four Months in Africa*, Delany disparaged Liberia as “that miserable hovel of emancipated and superannuated slaves, and deceived colored freemen, controlled by the intrigues of a conclave of upstart colored hirelings of the slave power in the United States.”¹⁶ In a sense, “true Liberians” were still “the servants and slaves of the whites” by aping their former masters in wicked and unprincipled practices.¹⁷ For evidence, Delany aspersed missionaries for their “injurious” involvement in trading rum, cheating natives, and “probably dealing in slaves.”¹⁸ Delany warned that such missionary endeavors would soon be followed by military operations to overthrow the country.

William Nesbit’s account was no less condemnatory. In *Four Months in Liberia*, he proceeded to launch an *ad hominem* attack against Monrovia’s residents for being religious hypocrites, exploitive traders, and *de facto* slave masters. Their dealings with the natives, Nesbit decided, were most unchristian due to their unfair trade practices in exchanging cheap rum and trinkets for camwood and palm oil. For all the talk of black independence and economic growth, Liberians were dangerously dependent on native crops and labor to sustain their unearned lifestyles.

¹⁵ Ibid., 60.

¹⁶ Martin R. Delany, “Introduction,” in William Nesbit, *Four Months in Liberia: or American Colonization Exposed* (Pittsburgh: J. T. Shryock, 1855), reprinted in Moses, ed., *Liberian Dreams*, 83.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., 84.

If Monrovia was inferior to the meanest village in the U.S., outside the capital Nesbit found conditions hopelessly primitive. Mud huts, uncleared farmland, and unnavigable rivers made living and traveling conditions deplorable. Nesbit scoffed at the alleged state of agricultural advance: “There positively is not, nor never [sic] has been a plow, a horse, or a yoke of oxen, used in all the country. No man there has now or ever had, five acres of land cleared and in cultivation, and I am one of those who believe that it is impossible to clear the land, owing to the dense and rapid growth of the bush.”¹⁹ Most Liberians were too busy engaging in unethical trading to bother investing in agricultural or resource development, he lamented.

Samuel Williams took exception to Nesbit’s broadside in his 1857 *Four Years in Liberia*. Written as a direct response to Nesbit’s defamatory charges, the book sought to set the record straight on Liberia. Characterizing Nesbit a dishonest malcontent, Williams refuted the majority of Nesbit’s allegations.

Williams conceded, however, that Nesbit was not altogether incorrect in some of his assessments. Too many colonists were money-driven and took advantage of native naïveté. More Liberians were traders than necessary, and agriculture suffered as a result. Manumitted slaves from U.S. southern states had not yet learned the value of industry and had adopted “southern habits” of owning servants to wait on them. And some immigrants mistreated their servants. All these deficiencies Williams readily acknowledged.

But the Liberian apologist was quick to dispute the notion of an undeveloped land. Productive farming was beginning to take hold. Coffee farms and sugar plantations were sprouting along the St. Paul River. Rice, cassava, and fish were harvested in abundance near the Junk River. Settlers outside Monrovia had cleared and planted tracts of farmland up to twenty

¹⁹ Nesbit, *Four Months in Liberia*, reprinted in Moses, ed., *Liberian Dreams*, 95.

acres. Furthermore, the Liberian government was making inroads with the neighboring aborigines, instituting free trade regulations and mediating intertribal disputes. Williams likened Liberia to ancient Carthage, which would one day impart its laws, religion, and civilization to the continent. Outreach to the natives “depend[ed] wholly upon Liberia’s prosperity” and Williams would brook no libel from “a most inveterate hater of colonization.”²⁰

Four Years in Liberia exuded credibility because Williams had traveled to the interior, whereas Nesbit had not. Williams’s account sparked a trend toward exploration into the African hinterland. Part of this movement stemmed from growing curiosity of prospective emigrants and the general public about the African continent. Yet another reason lay in Liberia’s concern to establish a basis for its territorial claims. With British Sierra Leone to the northwest and French Africa to the southeast, Monrovia was keen to lay legal claim to interior lands before Europeans did. Explorers sometimes doubled as quasi-diplomats. They were paid government agents and often carried Liberian flags to present to chieftains with whom they entered into friendship treaties.

The Economic Role of Missionaries

Some travelers were missionaries, like Alexander Crummell, who visited villages in hopes of preaching the gospel, instituting churches, or establishing schools. With an eye to supplementing his missionary income, Crummell was cognizant of potential revenue streams. As soon as he arrived in Liberia in 1853, he began to describe the natural resources and native industries. He identified gold, cotton, timber, ivory, and palm oil as viable exports. He noted with approval about the numerous looms and large markets in the interior. And he was quick to

²⁰ Samuel Williams, *Four Years in Liberia: A Sketch of the Life of the Rev. Samuel Williams* (Philadelphia: King & Baird, 1857), reprinted in Moses, ed., *Liberian Dreams*, 166, 177.

assess the “capability” of various tribes.²¹ Hence, the Kru were skilled sailors, the Mandingo intelligent traders, the Grebo able blacksmiths, and the Vai industrious farmers and weavers. These were foundational abilities on which he could build up the “future prospects of civilization.”²²

Civilization had commercial import. For Crummell, Edward Blyden, and other Liberians, the interior represented a sphere of development, a space for settlement, and a populace ripe for recruitment. Immigrants knew that internal development required external trade. That is, they needed interior goods to exchange with foreign shippers for supplies and income. Profits could then be used to build roads, trade depots, and more settlements. The interior also represented the promise of geographical expansion. A move inland provided more room for additional immigrants and opened up fertile land for them to farm. And especially for Blyden and Crummell, the interior held hundreds of thousands of native inhabitants who, if assimilated through “civilization,” would unite African and Americo-Liberian into one nationality.

Commerce was critical to this integration. John and Jean Comaroff write of the dual conversion that western missionaries brought to the mission field. Conversion embodied not just doctrinal assent but also commercial assimilation. It required becoming part of the “sacred economy” of a civilized society. As the Comaroffs put it:

Economy here was a part of a sacred order that described the production of value and virtue in the world; an order in which individual exertion and righteousness gave shape to civil society and earned divine credit. In the mission field, this vision had pragmatic

²¹ Alexander Crummell, “Africa and Her People”: Lecture Notes,” transcribed from Ms. C. 23, Schomburg Collection, New York Public Library, reprinted in *Destiny and Race: Selected Writings, 1840–1898*, edited by Wilson Jeremiah Moses (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), 66.

²² *Ibid.*, 67.

implications: converting heathens required changing their sense of worth—and their mode of producing it—so that they might lay up treasures on earth and in heaven.²³

In short, missionaries had to show the “heathen” that they were both sinner and consumer. As Crummell stated, it was about getting “their habits, civilized necessities, and acquired wants [to] assimilate to ours.”²⁴ God’s kingdom and Liberian citizenship depended on it. And for the pecuniary proselytizer, “assimilation involved the regulation, education, and labor discipline associated with civilization.”²⁵ Liberian explorers were adept at spotting the third.

The Commercial Role of Explorers

In the latter half of the fifties, both James Sims and George Seymour traveled extensively throughout the interior. Born a free black in 1832, Sims emigrated at age twenty from Virginia to Liberia, where he was a grocer who dealt in foodstuffs. In 1858 he embarked on a ten-month, privately funded expedition into the interior, looking to engage in the lucrative ivory trade. Seymour was also a free black who arrived from Connecticut in 1841 at age twenty-two. He owned a blacksmith shop, raised cotton and coffee, and operated a short-lived saw mill. He undertook two trips into the interior, the first in 1855 ostensibly to find camwood for his new mill. The second trip had the government’s imprimatur, and he traversed the interior for eight months. An official Commissioner of Interior Roads and Exploration, Seymour was to map out paths, rivers, and villages while listing natural resources and native industries he observed along

²³ John L. Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier*, vol. 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 168.

²⁴ Alexander Crummell, “The Progress and Prospects of the Republic of Liberia,” 9 May 1861, New York City, New York, in Moses, ed., *Destiny and Race*, 171.

²⁵ “Introduction” in Fairhead, Geysbeek, Holsoe, and Leach, eds., *African-American Exploration in West Africa: Four Nineteenth-Century Diaries*, 28.

his journeys. He also had the right to negotiate treaties, establish trade links, and purchase territory as the opportunities arose.

Sims traveled more than 150 miles into the interior, visiting villages located within a ten-mile vicinity of the St. Paul River. Because he brought gifts for local chieftains, he was largely well received. Sims would judge the degree of “civilization” based on villagers’ housing, industry, and agricultural output. The “higher order” people were those who were honest, peaceful, respectful, hardworking, and adhered to a regular schedule.²⁶ He singled out one tribe in particular, the Mandingoes, for being “decidedly . . . superior” because they respected industry and private property by criminalizing theft and indolence.²⁷ Nor did it hurt that they lived on fertile land with a vast camwood forest nearby. A neighboring tribe was known for their woven cloth, but Sims felt that having a nearby Liberian settlement would encourage them to eschew cloth weaving in favor of raising more cotton to sell to the Liberians.

Sims believed that the prospects of free trade would spur interior aborigines to welcome the Americo-Liberian expansion of settlements onto their territories. The problem rested in a band of tribes that resided between the coast and interior. They interdicted free passage of goods to the coast, and they forced native merchants to give up their goods on pain of enslavement. These Mohammedan bandits were “roguish, thieving knaves” for preventing interior tribesmen from trading with Liberians.²⁸ In Sims’s estimate, they robbed other natives and kept coastal

²⁶ James L. Sims, *Scenes in the Interior of Liberia: Being a Tour through the Countries of the Dey, Goulah, Pessah, Barlain, Kpellay, Suloany and King Boatswain’s Tribes in 1858*, reprinted in Fairhead, Geysbeek, Holsoe, and Leach, eds., *African-American Exploration in West Africa: Four Nineteenth-Century Diaries*, 108.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 122.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 121.

immigrants from “vast riches.”²⁹ The interior would undoubtedly fete Liberians, he thought, if they smashed the blockade.

Sims proffered another irresistible advantage. Liberians had the additional appeal of possessing education, which interior tribes were keen to master. Sims found himself often mobbed by eager natives. As he revealed, “the great secret was simply this—I was a ‘white man’—white because I was a ‘Merica man’—‘Merica man, because I Sarvy [learn] book,’ and every body who ‘Sarvy book,’ except the Mandingoes, are ‘white.’”³⁰ In other words, natives respected Sims because they regarded him a white American who knew how to read. If they could learn to speak and read English, the hope was that they could acquire the ability to trade with Americo-Liberians and Westerners for material goods and armaments enjoyed by their Mohammedan enemies.

Seymour’s published travel diary accomplished much the same purpose as Sims’s work. It was designed to showcase the benefits of moving into the interior, assimilating native populations, and supporting the U.S. colonization movement. Seymour adopted a more direct land route in his travels, starting fifty miles south of Monrovia and trekking close to two hundred miles into the African heartland.

Seymour took the liberty of naming landmarks along his travels, especially at locations he thought would be ideal for settling. So he christened an expansive plain with native cotton fields “Benson’s View,” which he thought “a most delightful location for an American settlement” because of its plentiful timber, granite, and brick clay. Palm trees covered “Mount Roberts” with navigable rivers nearby. Palm trees, rice paddies, and iron ore deposits dotted

²⁹ Ibid., 118.

³⁰ Ibid., 95.

“Mount Nancy,” so named for the Liberian first lady. And he deemed “Mount Stephen”—titled after President Stephen Benson—a good place for Liberia’s capital, with its wagon roads and accessible waterways. If naming implies ownership or control, Seymour was quick to claim geography for his fledgling nation.³¹

Although natives already inhabited these places, Seymour felt it “the duty of the Liberian Government to extend her influence beyond the limits of her own territory.”³² In “occupy[ing] the religious desolations of Africa,” Liberians would educate the heathen, check the slave trade, and effect moral and mental improvement.³³ These contributions would create native demand for increased Liberian involvement, he surmised. In a revealing moment, the government commissioner logged: “I will venture the remark, that the civilized world cannot add to the happiness of these people *unless they advance mentally*; for they have all the *common* wants of life in abundance.”³⁴ Interdependence required inculcating a consumer mindset within the blissfully oblivious native. It may not have necessarily been Seymour’s intent to foster an exploitable dependency. Rather, for these explorers, their faith in commerce was unwavering. It could civilize and sanctify the “benighted” African. Capitalist enterprise was the road to civility and productivity, and they believed that following it would curb sloth and slavery. Trade was seen as the antidote to personal and societal unfreedom. It was also a move to commodity acquisition: Liberians would obtain staples and profit to fuel their national economy, while

³¹ Historian Claude Clegg argues that (re)naming amounted to geographical and political appropriation. See Claude A. Clegg III, *The Price of Liberty: African Americans and the Making of Liberia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 99-100.

³² George L. Seymour, *Extracts from the Journal of the Journey of George L. Seymour to the Interior of Liberia, 1858*, reprinted in Fairhead, Geysbeek, Holsoe, and Leach, eds., *African-American Exploration in West Africa: Four Nineteenth-Century Diaries*, 131.

³³ *Ibid.*, 125.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 141, emphasis added.

natives would procure religion, education, and domestic goods to transform their insular lives. As Seymour recognized, commercialism needed civilizationism to proceed first.

Martin Delany's Reassessment and James Skipwith's Predicament

Across the Atlantic, Delany was having second thoughts about Liberia. In the same year that Sims's and Seymour's travel narratives were published, the black nationalist assumed leadership of an exploratory expedition to Africa. A series of Negro conventions in the U.S. during the 1850s had spurred interest in further exploring Africa as a viable site for emigration. The trip took Delany to Liberia, Abeokuta, and Yorubaland. He signed "treaties" in Abeokuta, which granted him land for African American immigrants to settle and farm.

Upon his arrival in Liberia, Delany grew more circumspect and nuanced in his criticism. Able to see the country firsthand, he tempered his tone. The republic was in a state of improvement, he decided, after reviewing its industries and infrastructure. Farms were growing crops of rice, coffee, ginger, pepper, and sugar cane. And they were buying ivory, camwood, and palm oil for export. Agriculture still lagged, though, for want of horses. And public improvements were deficient, to put it charitably. Liberia boasted no wharves, paved streets, or municipal roads save one. There were no notable edifices or marketplaces in Monrovia, which was little more than a rude, rundown town.

And therein lay the problem. Liberia had neither the capital investment nor the gross national product to invest heavily in internal improvements. It took some modest steps: loaning farmers up to five dollars for each cultivated acre, paying the expense of importing limited farm animals and machinery, funding the initial startup costs of a sugar mill. Yet to quote immigrant James Skipwith in the fifties: "[T]hir is...But very little Cash the President says that the Govement will in a few mounts Be out of det and at which time we hope to Be a happy

Nathinon.”³⁵ Until then, individuals were on their own. The dearth of roads hampered the ability of frontier settlers in getting their goods to market. Skipwith complained that hauling foodstuffs forty miles ate up any potential profits: “the Prophanes is that is made is nothing so you see that the People comes to this Country Poor & thay remaine Poor.”³⁶ And no one found it cost-effective to move Skipwith’s cotton until he could produce it in higher quantities.³⁷ Delany could criticize the underdeveloped state of agriculture, but aside from weather and price fluctuations, farmers faced enormous obstacles just in delivering their goods.

Liberia’s Growing Class Stratification

Skipwith’s hope for “a happy Nathinon,” moreover, glossed over growing rifts in Liberian society. By the midforties, an informal caste system had emerged. At the top were the elite, affluent Americoes who had emigrated in the 1820s as free blacks from the United States. They had enough capital and education to establish themselves in business, usually as entrepreneurial traders. Because racial intermixture with American whites had dotted their lineage, many of the elite were lighter in complexion. Next in line were the rest of the African American emigrants, who had come from more modest economic backgrounds. These would have included artisans, farmers, and common laborers. Roughly half of them had been former slaves, whom their Southern owners had emancipated for the express purpose of their emigrating to Liberia. Most of the manumitted were illiterate and unskilled in professions other than fieldwork or domestic service. Recaptives, known as Congoes, formed the third social caste.

³⁵ James P. Skipwith to John Hartwell Cocke, Monrovia, Liberia, 12 November 1858, in *“Dear Master”*: *Letters of a Slave Family*, edited by Randall M. Miller (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978), 128.

³⁶ J. P. Skipwith to Cocke, Monrovia, Liberia, 10 July 1860, in *“Dear Master”*, 134.

³⁷ See J. Skipwith to Cocke, Monrovia, Liberia, 11 February 1859, in *“Dear Master”*, 129.

They had once been captives destined for transatlantic enslavement but had been rescued from bondage and returned to coastal Liberia. An amalgamation of Africans from different tribes, they had stayed in the country because it was a legal haven from the surrounding slave trade. Americoes were quick to ally themselves with the recaptives—or at least profess allegiance to their Congo “kin”—seeing them as a potential workforce and also as a buffer against the natives, especially the powerful Vai in the north.³⁸ Finally, the lowest caste was the natives, who constituted the largest population in Liberia, around two million. Ostensibly the beneficiaries of Americoes’ Christian and civilized largesse, the indigenous were, in many emigrants’ eyes, more rivals than recipients. They competed for land and resources with the settlers; and their social norms clashed with the democratic, capitalist, and Western Christian values that Americoes propounded.

During a forty-five year span from 1822 to 1867, Liberian society broke down roughly as follows: freeborn African Americans made up 31 percent of the population; emancipated slaves 37 percent; recaptives 30 percent; West Indians 2 percent.³⁹ These figures did not account for natives, who Liberian citizens regarded as outsiders. In theory, natives had the potential to integrate into society and become citizens; but Monrovia required three years of employment and proof of a “civilized life.” Citizenship commanded a high bar, and few natives realized the pecuniary benefits, given such stringent demands. In the mid-nineteenth century, upward mobility for the native was little more than an abstract proposition.

³⁸ Recaptives were an important, military option for Liberians. In its war with the De in the 1830s Monrovia made the habit of sending recaptive troops into battle as the first wave of any assault. To quote Claude Clegg: “This mutual hostility, no doubt, served the purposes of Monrovia, which had so readily deployed the recaptives first during every battle. It facilitated the colonial administration’s efforts to control both populations and discouraged alliances between the two.” Clegg, *The Price of Liberty*, 109.

³⁹ Merran Fraenkel, *Tribe and Class in Monrovia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 6.

Many Liberians would have disagreed with this judgment. They often pointed to the practice of apprenticeships as an avenue for social advancement. Any boy under twenty-one or girl under eighteen was eligible for indentured service. Many interior tribes viewed the practice as a beneficial way for their children to gain a western education, which settlers were obligated to provide to their hired help. Hence an influx of aborigine youth came to live in Liberian households as domestic apprentices.

The Problem with Apprenticeships

Yet strings were attached. Natives could be assimilated, but often with a heavy hand. Youth could not live in a Liberian home (i.e. Monrovia) unless indentured for a term of service. They faced a fine between one and five dollars if they were improperly clothed. Male apprentices between sixteen and sixty could be drafted into mandatory public works projects at the behest of government commissioners.⁴⁰ The courts had the ability to hire out apprenticed children to any interested party, so long as the “master or mistress” promised to teach them literacy and a skilled trade.

Crummell viewed integration as absolutely crucial to society. Apprentices—those natives and Congoes trained in Liberian schools and families—doubled the civilized population, he argued. Although they constituted “the *lower crust* of our civilized population,” he contended that they formed “an important and valuable accession to our population.”⁴¹ So while apprentices were muddsill, they were still foundational to building up civilization.

⁴⁰ See “An Act Regulating the Residence of Native Africans within this Republic,” Art. I, §§1-3, in *The Statute Laws of the Republic of Liberia Passed by the Legislature from 1848 to 1879* (Monrovia: T. W. Howard, 1879), 169-70.

⁴¹ Crummell, “The Progress and Prospects of the Republic of Liberia,” 9 May 1861, New York City, New York, in Moses, ed., *Destiny and Race*, 171-72, original emphasis retained.

But some in the master class found ways to exploit the system. Because abuse persisted, the constitution created a special court to hear apprentices' complaints about inadequate housing, insufficient food, or immoderate discipline. The provision stipulated a minimum clothing allowance so that apprentices could embrace "the principles, and . . . the habits of, civilized life."⁴² Apprentices were registering their discontent by running away. Desertions were so common, the courts had to provide explicit recourse for "masters" to recover their help—a fugitive slave decree of sorts.

This apprenticeship underbelly was why disapproval was so damning. Liberia faced critics on both sides of the Atlantic. In 1851 Frederick Forbes, an officer in the British navy, blistered the apprentice system, which he equated to slavery:

For in Liberia there is as much, if not more, domestic slavery—that is the buying and selling of God's image—as in the parent states of America, over which flaunts the flag of Liberty[.] It is difficult to see the necessity or the justice of the negro who escapes from slavery on one side, crossing the Atlantic to enslave his sable prototype on the other, yet such is the case: and so long as it lasts, notwithstanding the attractive reports that emanate from this new republic, it cannot be held as an example of future good, but, if possible, should be remodelled, even if at the expense of internal revolution, or even total annihilation. I doubt if many benevolent Christians in this country are aware, that the model republic is, in reality, a new name and form for slavery in enslaved Africa, and, until the system is altered, totally undeserving of the high support and liberal charity it receives from the benevolence of Englishmen.⁴³

Forbes described African apprentices as "pawns" who were every bit as enslaved as the U.S. negro, facing the same household duties and punishments.⁴⁴ The officer went so far as naming

⁴² Liberia Const., art. XII, §3.

⁴³ Frederick E. Forbes, *Dahomey and the Dahomans: Being the Journals of Two Missions to the King of Dahomey, and Residence at His Capital, in the Years 1849 and 1850*, 2 vols. (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1851), 148.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 149.

particular Monrovia residents who he judged slave masters.⁴⁵ Colonization supporters defended Liberia against the charges. They pointed to the numerous slave factories closed and captives freed. All wars with natives arose out of the desire to exterminate the slave trade, they insisted. Additionally, they noted that apprenticeships were both legal and beneficial, with African children being placed under the care of “respectable” persons until adulthood, whereupon they could enjoy the “privileges of citizenship” and the “blessings of freedom.”⁴⁶ Forbes’s critics cast him as both reckless and irresponsible in his criticism of the free republic.⁴⁷

Four years later William Nesbit published a similar critique in the prior-mentioned *Four Months in Africa*. Whereas Forbes had the weight of rank on his side, Nesbit had the credential of race as his advantage. A prominent African American from Pennsylvania, Nesbit would go on to serve as state president for the National Equal Rights League, which lobbied successfully for passage of the Fourteenth Amendment in the United States. In the 1850s Nesbit displayed the same intrepid willingness to blast Liberia over inequality. He berated settlers for replicating the U.S. slavery model by purchasing native children for domestic and manual labor. These so-called apprentices were often malnourished and underclothed during their employment, Nesbit claimed. They were made to live separately in rude huts called “negro quarters” and would frequently run back to the bush out of hunger or desperation. “I would a thousand times rather be a slave in the

⁴⁵ See “The Fourteenth Annual Meeting of the Aborigines’ Protection Society,” *The Colonial Intelligencer; or, Aborigines’ Friend*, no. 39 (July 1851): 258, compiled in *The Colonial Intelligencer; or, Aborigines’ Friend, 1850–1851*, vol. 3 (London: William M. Watts, 1850–1851), 258.

⁴⁶ Elisha Whittlesey, Matthew St. C. Clarke, Harvey Lindsly, Joseph A. Bradley, A. O. Dayton, J. S. Bacon, William Gunton, Exe. Com. of Amer. Col. So’y, “Liberia and Slavery: Refutation of the Charge of Lieutenant Forbes, of the British Navy,” *The African Repository* 27, 6 (June 1851): 179.

⁴⁷ Forbes responded to his critics by clarifying that his domestic slavery charge covered two classes: (1) aborigine slavery by which tribes subjugated their enemies and (2) the Americo-Liberian practice of “taking servants, helps, apprentices, or Pawns (choose the expression), obliging them to labour, [in exchange for] clothing, feeding, and instructing them.” It was not a fair trade for Forbes, who would see the withholding of wages to be exploitive. *The Colonial Intelligencer* (July 1851): 258.

United States,” he declared, “than in Liberia.”⁴⁸ The abuse of child apprentices betrays the ugly truth: many Liberians looked upon natives as an exploitable source for cheap, if not virtually free, labor.

Liberians were quick to commodify other underprivileged groups, as well. Vagrant, orphaned, and illegitimate children faced the bleak prospect of long-term, involuntary service. Monrovia passed laws that restricted Kru trading and mandated impressment for any natives living in the town, if they were not suitably employed by another citizen. Forced servitude also extended to the poor. Because concern arose over “idlers” who “wander about from one settlement to the other,” legislators authorized construction of a series of 1,200 square-foot “County Poor Houses” to hold the impoverished.⁴⁹ Male “inmates” were remanded to work on a county farm, and crop proceeds deposited into the national treasury. Female “residents” were supplied with looms and sewing needles, and they were given wool and cotton quotas to meet. Everyone in the “labor asylums” was inspected quarterly as to “their improvement in morals, education, and mechanical arts.”⁵⁰ Here amelioration corresponded to productivity. As Crummell argued, the measure of a person was whether the laborer produced. If so, he or she was deemed virtuous.⁵¹

Recaptives were another troubling example of apprenticeships being misused. When the British and American navies returned captives to Liberia, citizens immediately pressed male

⁴⁸ Paragraph quotes from Nesbit, *Four Months in Liberia*, reprinted in Moses, ed., *Liberian Dreams*, 104.

⁴⁹ “An Act for the Relief and Employment of the Poor,” §§3-4, 8, in *The Statute Laws of the Republic of Liberia Passed by the Legislature from 1848 to 1879* (Monrovia: T. W. Howard, 1879), 174-75.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ See Alexander Crummell, “The Dignity of Labour, and Its Value to a New People,” in J. R. Oldfield, ed., *Civilization and Black Progress: Selected Writings of Alexander Crummell on the South* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995), 72.

recaptives into apprenticeships, seven years in length for men or until age twenty-one for boys. Congoes were no longer slaves, but neither were they free. Liberation had devolved into forced labor, all in the name of antislavery.

Outside of Monrovia, apprentices often performed fieldwork. Located several miles north of Monrovia and along the St. Paul River, the towns of Caldwell, Millsburg, and New Georgia took up agriculture and formed what became known as the “Upper Settlements.”⁵² Many farm owners staffed their fields with native or recaptive laborers, who planted and harvested the crops much like African Americans had done in the U.S. South. With an endless supply of workers, planters could afford to pay minimal wages for manual labor.

The widespread use of field apprentices touches on another tension in Liberian society. For all the public rhetoric about the need for agricultural production, it was a tough sell for Americo-Liberians in the early years. Farming still retained the stigma of slavery in the U.S. South.⁵³ Most of the earliest settlers were educated and hearkened from cities. Even many manumitted slaves aspired to advance beyond the fieldwork they had just left in America. Those few who wished to farm faced daunting obstacles. Nearly every emigrant caught malaria the first year and required at least a month to “acclimate” and recover their health. Swamps, jungles, or rocky terrain required farmers first to drain or clear the land, which was backbreaking work by hand. Horses and oxen required astronomical capital to import, and they usually died soon after arriving because of disease-ridden flies. The rainy season, which could dump more than 180 inches from April to October, also disrupted crop planting and stymied agrarians used to farming

⁵² Fraenkel, *Tribe and Class in Monrovia*, 12.

⁵³ For more on Liberians’ attitudes toward agriculture, see J. Gus Liebenow, *Liberia: The Evolution of Privilege* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1969), 12-14; J. Gus Liebenow, *Liberia: The Quest for Democracy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 21-22.

in a more temperate climate. They also had to adapt to raising different crops like rice, yams, coffee, cassava, and palm products. Once they progressed beyond subsistence farming, they had to worry about getting their crops to market. As mentioned before, without the necessary infrastructure of roads and canals, farmers could find transporting goods to be logistically difficult and cost prohibitive.

Economic Disparities within Liberian Society

In Liberia's stratified society, merchants, ministers, and teachers stood at the apex. Merchants could triple their profits by bartering with natives and selling to EuroAmericans. The top half dozen traders were collectively worth around \$100,000 in the 1840s.⁵⁴ In addition to amassing land and wealth, traders accumulated political power. Of the first five presidents, three were prominent merchants. Ministers and teachers were coveted positions, too, because American colonizationist societies underwrote their salaries. Even after national independence, these societies were still important contributors to Liberia's economy. Although no longer on the scale as during Liberia's colonial days, colonizationist monies continued to pay the salaries of up to ten thousand people a year. Thirteen years after independence, Blyden estimated that colonizationist funding accounted for annual stipends of fifty to seventy dollars per person.⁵⁵ Freed from financial subsistence, ministers and teachers could often assume government roles because of their steady income and educational qualifications.

⁵⁴ Katherine Harris, *African and American Values: Liberia and West Africa* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1985), 66.

⁵⁵ Edward Blyden to John L. Wilson, 4 August 1860, in Hollis R. Lynch, ed., *Selected Letters of Edward Wilmot Blyden* (Millwood, NY: KTO Press, 1978), 35-43.

Delany saw ACS funding as a basic weakness, lecturing: "Always bear in mind, that the fundamental principle of every nation is *self-reliance*, with the *ability to create their own ways and means*; without this, there is no capacity for *self-government*." Martin R. Delany, *Official Report of the Niger Valley Exploring Party* (1861; reprint, Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2004), 273, original emphasis retained.

Farmers were less fortunate. They could not always count on Monrovia's merchant class to share common class interests. For example, traders worked to enlarge their exports of ivory, camwood, and palm oil, which brought them in conflict with tribes competing in the same lucrative trade. This contest could turn hostile, endangering the lives of Liberians in more remote locations like Bassa. Many farmers felt that Monrovia prioritized their trading interests over agricultural pursuits, even though it survived on the crops Bassans raised. And a cultural gap existed between freewheeling Monrovia and more conservative Bassa Cove. The Pennsylvania State Colonization Society, reinforced by strong Quaker temperance sentiment, had founded the Grand Bassa settlement. Not surprisingly, residents frowned on Monrovia's taverns, as well as traders who plied natives freely with rum. Bassans were reluctant therefore to seek independence from the ACS, because they feared financial domination, military neglect, and moral decay by Monrovia's trading oligarchy.

In a fascinating corollary, regional differences derived not simply from class disparity but also from the rising autonomy of colonizationist societies in the United States. The American Colonization Society had financed the original settlement of Monrovia in the 1820s, but its state auxiliaries expanded Liberia's reach in the following decade. The Pennsylvania and New York State Colonization Societies founded a joint settlement down the coast at Bassa Cove in 1834, while the Mississippi State Colonization Society underwrote a town named Greenville in 1836 further south in the Sinoe region.⁵⁶ Meanwhile, the Maryland State Colonization Society negotiated the payment of \$1,000 worth of goods for twenty-square miles of land near Cavalla River in 1834, which became the primary settlement of Harper. These subsidiary societies took the lead in establishing their own settlements in Africa because of an important development in

⁵⁶ For more on Mississippi in Africa, see Jo Mary Sullivan, "Settlers in Sinoe County, Liberia, and Their Relations with the Kru, c. 1835–1920" (Boston, PhD diss., 1978).

the colonization movement during the 1830s. The failed 1831 Nat Turner insurrection created a new urgency to prevent the growth of free black and manumitted populations in Maryland and Virginia. State legislatures began to earmark government appropriations in order to subsidize deportation schemes spearheaded by local societies, who no longer needed to rely on the guidance and benevolence of the ACS. Even better, they found they could receive more money if they funded African colonies directly themselves. The Maryland legislature designated \$20,000 for colonization and stipulated that any manumitted slaves after 1831 had to emigrate to Africa or leave the state. Philosophical differences cropped up, too. State colonizationists decided to go their own way after the parent ACS refused to affirm their stated goal of gradual emancipation. Because Maryland retained a high Negro population—with 38 percent of its total population being black and 23 percent of those being free blacks (or put another way, 9 percent of the total population were free blacks)—Maryland colonizationists were determined to reduce the black populace through manumission and deportation. The majority of colonists the Maryland Colonization Society shipped to Maryland in Liberia were artisans or agricultural laborers, many newly freed who arrived in Africa with less education and fewer assets than their Monrovia counterparts.⁵⁷ In 1846 the society organized the Liberia Packet, a joint stock trading company to promote trade between the United States and Maryland County. But the scant fleet and lack of capital investment offered little competition to the Monrovia traders up north. White Marylanders were willing to pay to get rid of their “Negro problem” but, as a whole, they could not be bothered to invest in the emigrants’ future once blacks were gone. In contrast, the ACS, Massachusetts Colonization Society, and New York State Colonization Society continued to sponsor well-known Liberians like Blyden and Crummell well into the 1870s. Thus one can

⁵⁷ For more details, see Harris, *African and American Values*, 37-46.

argue that though the emigrants in southeast Liberia benefitted from a burst of funding, the monetary influx was short-lived and never compared to the sustained colonizationist money pouring into Monrovia. Over time, the swelling economic disparity guaranteed financial and political subservience to the capital and its ruling oligarchy.

“The Native Problem”

Another statistical inequality affected all Liberians, regardless of class: disproportionate population numbers. In its publications to the West, Liberians touted their newfound country as home to black rule, which it was. Yet compared to natives, the number of Liberians was miniscule. In the year of independence, 1847, the country boasted only 3,300 citizens.⁵⁸ Over 60 percent lived in and near the capital city of Monrovia. Subtract 500 assimilated African natives and only around eight hundred Americo-Liberian settlers populated the rest of the country outside the capital vicinity.⁵⁹ In contrast, Blyden estimated in 1860 that two million African natives resided in the borders claimed by Liberia.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Estimates vary depending on the source and which groups it tallies. Blyden states 3,300; Walter Walker counts 4,500; and scholar Nnadmi Azikiwe pegs the number at 1,200. Blyden’s number excludes 800 assimilated natives, while Walker includes all “civilized” individuals. Azikiwe limits his number to Americo-Liberians, but his figure expands to 4,600 when including educated Africans, Congoes, and immigrants from Sierra Leone. Thus the number ranges from 4,100 to 4,600 when considering all Americo-Liberians and western-thinking allies. See Nnadmi Azikiwe, *Liberia in World Politics* (London: A. H. Stockwell, 1934; reprint, Westport, CT: Negro University Press, 1970), 59, 65.

⁵⁹ This number excludes 1,200 Americo-Liberians living in Maryland in Liberia, which was outside Liberia’s formal borders in 1847.

⁶⁰ Edward W. Blyden to John L. Wilson, 4 August 1860, in Lynch, *Selected Letters of Edward Wilmot Blyden*, 40. Blyden’s native population estimate is significantly higher than the 150,000 figure arrived at by others. It appears as though he is delimiting Liberia’s borders to include the hinterland, which is a logical deduction given his repeated emphasis on incorporating the interior. It is hard to ascertain precise population numbers, because Liberia’s political borders were in dispute well into the twentieth century. See also population table on p. 29.

Of the two million, the littoral tribes—the Vai, De, Bassans, Kru, and Grebo with which were the tribes that Liberians had regular contact—numbered approximately 750,000 to 800,000. The rest resided in the hinterland, which was largely inaccessible to all but the most intrepid Liberian explorer.

Despite their numbers, the surrounding tribes were collectively disunited. They had arrived in West Africa separately and without the need to unify against a common enemy. Three waves of coastal migrants settled Western Africa in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The fall of the Mali Empire and overpopulation of the savanna pushed migration westward from the interior. Portuguese sailors visited coastal villages in 1461 and made regular trading stops thereafter. They exchanged gold, ivory, and slaves for such goods as glass, brass, iron tools, and clothing. The Dyula were the first tribe to take advantage of this new economy. They built a string of settlements and trading posts from the coast to the interior. They converted surrounding people to Islam, including the Vai, who came to inhabit what eventually became northeastern Liberia. Until the seventeenth century, the De and Vai dominated the coastal trade before the Mende and Temne of Sierra Leone ascended in political and economic might. In the eighteenth century Boporo was the seat of power, where six tribes, including the Vai and De, formed a trade confederation about sixty miles northeast of Cape Mesurado. Further down the coast resided the Bassa, Kru, and Grebo tribes, whose main occupation was agriculture. The Kru became skilled sailors, however, and served as seamen on European ships sailing up and down the coast. By the nineteenth century, these peoples had lived in the region for 200-250 years and had formed longstanding trading partnerships with various European merchants.⁶¹

The arrival of and relative unconcern over African American emigrants in the first half of the nineteenth century had to do with the relative commercial insignificance of the region. The great trading centers for Europeans lay to the north in Sierra Leone and the south in French Africa. As a result, the American imports had comparatively little opposition except from scattered native tribes who lacked the political unity and economic clout to eject the newcomers.

⁶¹ Material taken from Yekutiel Gershoni, *Black Colonialism: The Americo-Liberian Scramble for the Hinterland* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1985), 1-6.

Some tribes even welcomed the immigrants in the belief they would stimulate trade with the United States.

Response to Americo-Liberians varied by tribe and sometimes differed by factions within a tribe. During the nineteenth century, five major tribes resided on the coast: the De, Vai, Kru, Bassa, and Grebo. The De were the smallest and weakest of the tribes. When the Americo-Liberians arrived in 1819, King Peter was the reigning De ruler who ceded Cape Mesurado to the American emigrants, who promptly built their capital Monrovia on the site. The site had been an infrequent trading post for European traders, including the Portuguese, who had given the cape its name. The English had lightly explored the area in the fourteenth century, setting up a temporary outpost on the cape. But the Portuguese were the first Europeans to map the coast in depth in the fifteenth century. They gained such a monopoly on the pepper trade that the cape region became known as the “Pepper Coast” and “Grain Coast” (due to the abundance of pepper grains⁶²). In a bid to break Portugal’s control of the pepper trade, the Dutch and English began to send their own ships to West Africa in the sixteenth century. In addition to pepper, traders found aborigines willing to barter gold and ivory, so much so that the area also became known as the Gold Coast and Ivory Coast. Yet Cape Mesurado was gaining another moniker, too—the Slave Coast. By the seventeenth century, Mesurado was trafficking in slaves, as the Karou tribe sold captives to the Dutch, French, and English. A permanent European colony never materialized at the Cape Mount, in part because Dutch and English traders made the mistake of trying to cut out the middlemen by capturing slaves for themselves. As a consequence, the littoral tribes were unified in opposing a perpetual European presence on African soil. They would tolerate trading outposts but not lasting settlements. Eventually the English coalesced to the north at Freetown,

⁶² Harry Johnston, *Liberia*, vol. 1 (London: Hutchinson, 1906), 43-44.

and the French adhered further to the south along the Ivory Coast. But no Westernized people established roots in the Cape Mount region until African Americans did so in the early nineteenth century. Their African heritage, small numbers, and privately sponsored enterprise raised little fears among the De, who initially hoped to boost trade as the emigrants trickled in.

The Vai were predominantly Muslim and powerful enough that Monrovia rarely transgressed their autonomous rule. Compared to other tribes, Vai were highly literate and boasted their own written alphabet. They were mainly farmers and affluent enough to draw upon other tribes to work their land. Blyden had a special affinity for the Vai, seeing their religion as a bulwark against EuroAmerican cultural assimilation. Even though mostly Muslim, Vai came into Liberians' gradual orbit, when they allied with their Western counterparts against neighboring tribes. Their attacks against Sierra Leoneans aggravated Liberians, because Freetown would then demand indemnity of Monrovia. But for most of the nineteenth century, Liberia exercised token authority in its northwestern territory, because the Vai had the numbers and armaments to humble it in a military engagement.

The Bassa resided in central Liberia and were one of the poorest and least assimilated groups at mid-century. Yet in time, Liberians absorbed them into the republic, looking for an effective counterbalance against the unruly Kru and belligerent Grebo.

The Kru were the largest of the littoral tribes and occupied the central coast of Liberia. They were renowned for their seafaring prowess and served as short-term sea hands on many European vessels trading up and down the continental coast. The Kru men would often sign up for voyages in order to earn enough money to purchase a wife; repeat trips allowed them the ability to acquire more wives. In Liberia the Kru did the majority of loading and unloading of ship cargo. Because the country lacked any natural deep-water ports, the Kru navigated canoes to

the anchored ships and convey the goods to and from land. It could be treacherous work depending on the tide and rocky terrain. But the Kru were skilled oarsmen and built a reputation for safe, reliable transport. Their expertise and first contact with European traders made them not only a valuable commodity to Europeans but also a fierce competitor to Liberians. Monrovia needed to finance its government, and it turned to trade in order to raise revenue through import duties, port taxes, and ship licensing fees. The Kru would often circumvent and defeat these tax schemes, leaving Liberians frustrated and underfunded. J. J. Roberts estimated Liberia lost \$100,000 alone in lost tax revenue. The goal, then, was to impose Monrovia's legislative and commercial will on the Kru traders.

The Grebo lived in the southeast and remained recalcitrant toward Liberia throughout much of the nineteenth century, with much of their animus stemming from what they perceived to be unfair trade practices by Liberians. Greboes had bartered regularly with European traders long before Americo-Liberians had arrived. But the proscription by Marylanders—who became Liberians after annexation in 1857—against slave trading and their imposition of custom duties on legitimate trade threatened to ruin the economic livelihood of many Greboes. Early on, settlers had tried to exert soft power through the Episcopalian mission school, which trained youth from important Grebo families at its compound. But eventually the Grebo withdrew their offspring and attacked the mission station at Cavalla, alarmed that their children were being indoctrinated to give up traditional tribal values. A frontier war was settlers' worst nightmare, and they took the draconian measure of burning the main Grebo town and exiling its inhabitants in a move reminiscent of the Native American Trail of Tears. The Grebo continued to war against Liberian rule, even inviting the English to come free them from their oppressors. The

continual strife did have a silver lining for Monrovia, however, because security concerns caused Maryland in Liberia to join Liberia ten years after its 1847 independence.

In time, all these tribes fell under Liberia’s increasing sway. In the late 1830s, around 28,000 natives had come into Liberia’s political orbit through trade, friendship, and security agreements. By 1847 that number had swelled to more than 40,000, as Governor Roberts embarked on an aggressive drive for territorial expansion, in an effort to stave off English and French colonial ambitions. Liberia had absorbed much of the land that had originally belonged to the De, Vai, Kru, and Bassa tribes; it measured 12,830 square miles, roughly the size of the U.S. state of Maryland. It had extended its original width only about five miles eastward, but it had doubled its length, from an original 140 miles to 285 miles of coastline. Liberian contemporary, Walter Walker, estimated roughly 4,500 “civilized” persons at independence.⁶³ The demographics broke down as follows⁶⁴:

Group	Population
Unassimilated natives	c. 40,000
Educated natives	2,000
Americo-Liberians	1,200
African recaptives	1,100
Immigrants from Sierra Leone and Cape Verde Island	300

Table 1. Demographics of Liberia in 1847.

Excluding recaptives, educated natives, and non-American immigrants, Americo-Liberians numbered less than 3 percent of the total population. Roughly 90 percent of the population was unassimilated aborigines who lived within the country’s boundaries. Roberts extended Liberia’s coastline by another 400 miles during his first four years as president. Continual expansion

⁶³ Azikiwe, *Liberia in World Politics*, 65.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 59.

resulted in nearly 150,000 natives under Liberia's domain during the mid-1860s.⁶⁵ A glance at the numbers shows that in fewer than twenty years, Liberia quintupled its native population. The emigrant populace had itself quadrupled since independence, but it still stood at only about eight thousand people.⁶⁶ And this posed continual headaches.

Liberia ended up overextending its authority in its bid to outrace Britain and France for territory and influence. Natives were none too pleased by Liberia's perceived power grab. The single greatest source of contention was the 1865 Port-of-Entry Act, which restricted overseas trade to six ports, all which were located in Liberian enclaves. Conversely, it prohibited unloading cargo at traditional trading depots in native villages. Aborigines had been exchanging goods with Europeans for generations, long before Americo-Liberians had arrived. The Kru were eventually forced to disband entire towns after the law strangled their economic livelihood. Mass unemployment meant that many Krumen had to seek jobs in Grand Bassa instead. Furthermore, legislation created a head tax, which required every laborer who worked outside the country, mainly Kru males, to pay a tax in order to leave and work elsewhere. Thus Liberia's law treated noncompliant natives as illegal smugglers and tax dodgers, and it deprived them of trade and profit they had enjoyed for generations.

The Allures of Trade

Since colonial days, Liberians had taken up trading with startling speed. It was lucrative and, compared to the eighteenth century, required minimal capital to get started in the business with the advent of steamships and cheaper transportation costs. As Martin Lynn has explicated,

⁶⁵ Charles Morrow Wilson, *Liberia: Black Africa in Microcosm* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 73.

⁶⁶ James Ciment, *Another America: The Story of Liberia and the Former Slaves Who Ruled It* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2013), 122.

West African broking networks depended on having access to both European traders and inland producers.⁶⁷ Brokers' power rested in their ability to prevent contact between the seafaring traders and the interior markets. As coastal brokers, Liberian merchants needed to control the transport, labor, and credit of the native suppliers. Americo-Liberians obtained trust (i.e. credit) in the form of such trade goods as salt, rum, tobacco, textiles, and firearms. These constituted the “dashes” or gifts that explorers like Sims and Seymour used to gain ivory and camwood, which they would then sell to European traders for a profit. This explains, too, why Liberians were anxious to break the ring of surrounding tribes preventing access to interior suppliers. Unfettered transportation would benefit natives and settlers alike—so long as the goods came first to the Liberians rather than the European traders. As expected, the merchant oligopoly in Monrovia—composed primarily of mulatto Americo-Liberians—gained sway and leveraged their influence to pass commercial legislation that upheld their market dominance.

Immigrant traders had established a beachhead as soon as colonists arrived in the 1820s. U.S. colonizationists' desire to establish “legitimate” trade to offset the then-proliferate slave trade lent impetus for colonists to do just that. With the ACS obligated to supply new colonists for six months, its agents found it cheaper to trade with natives for staples than have them shipped from the U.S. But from the outset, colonists had attempted to control the trade by fixing prices, designating ports of entry for foreign traders, instituting embargoes against recalcitrant tribes, and even warring with natives who impeded interior trade.

Trading could net spectacular profits. In the late forties Liberian merchants were making up to 300 percent profit dealing in palm oil. By 1853 Liberia's commercial fleet numbered twenty vessels shuttling goods along the coast. Ten years after independence, the Monrovia

⁶⁷ See Martin Lynn, *Commerce and Economic Change in West Africa: The Palm Oil Trade in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 60-67.

government had grown dependent on maritime trade, deriving two-thirds of its revenue through taxing it. Liberia's first two presidents, Joseph Roberts and Stephen Benson, gained their initial livelihood as merchants. The proliferation of smaller vessels allowed Liberians to spread their reach into the interior. And with it came taxes.⁶⁸

Imposition of tariffs made sense on a macro level. It would raise revenues vital for operating a government and funding domestic improvements. And by restricting trade internally, it would help mold diverse tribes and settlers into one "citizenry" by forcing them to exchange commodities with each other. By limiting trade with "foreigners," tariffs would be building a national identity through an increase in equal exchange between "fellow" Liberians. At least that was the hope.

In reality, it was delusory to think tribes would give up their prior trading relationships with "foreigners" (primarily French and English with a few being German) voluntarily. Many natives saw Liberian protectionism as punitive. All the talk about championing free trade had been for naught.

From its inception, Liberia had adopted a paternalistic stance towards its indigent neighbors. In fact, its founders had written it into the national constitution. Hence it was "a cherished object of this government" to encourage the agricultural advancement of native tribes through the appointment of officials to instruct and oversee the agrarian progress in each county.⁶⁹ Liberian emphasis on agriculture stemmed not just from the desire for internal development but also from the belief that commodity farming would form a commercial bulwark against the persistent slave trade.

⁶⁸ Statistics from Dwight N. Syfert, "The Liberian Coastal Trade, 1822–1900," *Journal of African History* 18, no. 2 (1977): 224-26.

⁶⁹ 1847 Constitution of the Republic of Liberia, Art. V, §15.

Liberia's citizens and supporters sought to parlay opposition to slavery into tangible territorial gains. One ambitious colonizationist scheme proposed purchasing the "Slave Trading Coast" of West Africa—all four thousand miles of it. Spending a half million dollars to buy the land, the plan reasoned, was cheaper than doling out three hundred thousand dollars a year to maintain U.S. naval patrols off the African coast.⁷⁰ Of course, colonizationists envisioned utilizing the coast to establish trading ports and strategic forts, which would presumably draw natives to settle and come under civilized rule.⁷¹ President Roberts wished for exactly that. The 1849 defeat and decline of Gallinas, a major slave depot, enabled the president to lobby Britain successfully for funds to purchase the territory from local chieftains.⁷² As he expressed in one letter, his goal had been "to extinguish the native title to all the territories" along the western coast.⁷³ In 1847 on his first tour of Britain as Liberia's newly elected president, Roberts used antislavery as justification for territorial expansion. He told an influential audience of clerics, diplomats, and philanthropists that the only way to stop the Cuban slavers operating in West Africa was for Liberia to buy native land and impose the rule of law on the region. He priced the purchase at £2,000, which the group immediately raised for him. He ended up purchasing Gallinas for a purchase price of \$9,500. While the stated purpose for buying Gallinas was to

⁷⁰ Maintaining the U.S. African Squadron was estimated at \$384,500 a year, to be more precise. See "Expense and Health of the African Squadron," *The African Repository* 26:4 (April 1850): 125.

⁷¹ John Miller, "Evidence before the English Parliament in Favor of Liberia," *The African Repository* 26:3 (March 1850): 80.

⁷² See J. J. Roberts, "Message of President Roberts: To the Honorable the [sic] Senate and House of Representatives," *Liberia Herald*, reprinted in *The African Repository* 26:7 (July 1850): 200; see also David Eltis, *Economic Growth and the Ending of the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 167. A British fleet attacked and razed slave factories at Gallinas in February 1849; a subsequent naval blockade prevented the slave trade from flourishing again. See "Purchase of Gallinas," *The African Repository* 26:8 (August 1850): 249.

⁷³ J. J. Roberts to J. W. Lugenbeel, Monrovia, 24 April 1847, reprinted in "Extract: From a Letter from Pres. Roberts to Dr. Lugenbeel," *The African Repository* 26:7 (July 1850): 215. The territory in question was that from Monrovia to Sierra Leone, so Roberts's motivation was likely to acquire the land before Freetown could.

prevent the reemergence of the slave trade, Roberts listed the secondary reason of opening up trade in camwood, ivory, and palm oil; and he added the tertiary reason of settling the land with knowledgeable Liberians who could train natives in the art of husbandry.⁷⁴

Many tribes also engaged in legitimate trade that had nothing to do with slaves. For them, free trade had already been in place long before Liberian independence. Trade relied on ship captains or company agents negotiating with individual chieftains, who would build a “factory,” or a thatch hut for the captain to leave one of his men to live and trade with the natives. The captain would visit other coastal villages, planting factories at each stop. Once he had amassed enough of these trade depots, he would make rounds, collecting all the produce his man had managed to trade for during his time away. The captain would also leave more goods to be traded. These products often included rum, wine, beads, pipes, tobacco, soap, candles, perfume, beef, pork, flour, and wares made out of brass, glass, or pottery.

But assertion of Liberia’s sovereignty disrupted traditional trading practices. Foreign ships were restricted to designated ports of entry, where their cargo would be declared and taxed accordingly.⁷⁵ The customs collector charged import fees, issued trade permits, and approved the proposed destinations for shipped goods. The constitution specifically forbade harbor trade, thereby banning traditional native trade in which Kru would row canoes laden with goods to ships anchored off the coast. Import tariffs ranged from 6 to 8 percent, and anchorage and lighthouse fees applied to foreign ships.

⁷⁴ J. J. Roberts to William McLain, Monrovia, 17 May 1850, printed in “Purchase of Gallinas,” *The African Repository*, 249.

⁷⁵ The initial six ports were Robertsport, Monrovia, Marshall, Buchanan/Edina, Greenville, and Harper.

Schooling Natives in the Art of Christian Materialism

Roberts hoped to utilize tax profits to fund native schools, but indigenous education had unforeseen ramifications for both natives and Liberians. For tribes like the Grebo, Christian missionaries had a direct impact on indigenous economies, and not always in a way that natives wished. Education of native girls was one source of friction. Natives wanted Western education for their children, seeing it as vital to their future commercial success. But this desire often clashed with Christian notions of civilization. Missionaries disagreed with natives particularly over how to raise girls. For example, most Grebo women contributed to the economy by performing manual labor in their tribe's rice paddies. But missionaries taught their female pupils how to cook, sew, and keep house. The "proper" sphere for women, they admonished, was the home—and not just any home. The ideal, civilized household was a monogamous marriage between one man and one woman. Because many girls were betrothed and married off at young ages to polygamous husbands, missionaries had to pay dowry-like sums just to teach native girls. Despite receiving compensation, parents would often withdraw their daughters to work the fields or get married—activities integral to their economic livelihood and social standing.⁷⁶ As a consequence, missionaries began to require their charges to stay in living quarters adjacent to the mission station. From an economic standpoint, they were protecting their financial investment in these children by controlling and ensuring access to them. But the move carried unintended costs. The children were segregated from their families and tribe. They practiced different customs by wearing Western clothes, living in houses, eating with utensils, sitting at a dinner table with chairs, and imbibing values sometimes at odds with their home culture. None of these

⁷⁶ For some tribes, labor contribution was a communal obligation. The Kpelle, for example, operated work collectives, known as *kuus*, in which a pool of households would rotate performing labor-intensive jobs like fieldwork. See Liebenow, *Liberia: The Evolution of Privilege*, 41.

practices itself was necessarily egregious. But missionaries reified Western customs, creating an equivalence between civilization and its attendant accoutrements. Unintentionally, they created a dangerous dependence, in which their students now relied on them for the goods—i.e. food, clothes, furniture, and houses—that would affirm their civilized status.

Political scientist Nnadmí Azikiwe criticizes Liberians for failing to address “the aboriginal problem” because they “failed to recognize the political acumen and the social and *material* cultures of the African tribes which inhabit these regions [of Liberia].”⁷⁷ He attributes the “oversight” to “Christian zealousness.”⁷⁸ How did missionary zeal end up deploring African materiality and promoting Western materialism? Christian emphasis on modesty and propriety meant that converts had to conform to Western standards for attire. Despite the tropical climate, men sported suitcoats and women wore dresses. Never mind the practicality of native garb; it was unacceptable because it was deemed “unrefined” or “uncivilized.” Likewise, proper decorum dictated eating with utensils while dining at a table and sitting on four-legged chairs. Because sanitary practices had to accompany a pure, regenerate life, the broom became the tangible tool with which to combat the sin of grime. Not only was cleanliness next to godliness; it manifested godliness itself. In capitalist parlance, missionaries had created demand for a new market of consumer goods—suits, dresses, brooms, cutlery, and furniture—which had hitherto been unnecessary and undesired. This development further alienated native parents, who were already wary of the religious proscriptions against polygamy, witchdoctors, and sassywood trials.

Missionaries also introduced their understudies to a cash economy. They would reward them with coins for attending church or for special holidays like Christmas; students could

⁷⁷ Azikiwe, *Liberia in World Politics*, 63, emphasis added.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

exchange the currency for goods at the store in Cavalla.⁷⁹ And once they graduated from the school, they could use their learned skills (e.g. laundering, domestic service, masonry, or blacksmithing) in the mission station's employ and receive wages.

If missionaries were well-intentioned, other Liberian citizens were less sanguine. Many viewed skilled, educated natives as potential competitors who could deprive them of jobs. On a macro level, Liberia did not yet have a strong manufacturing sector that could absorb an artisanal and industrial labor force of natives. Outside of porters, domestics, and plantation workers, Liberians had little need for native labor. On a micro level, then, the reason that alumni of mission schools remained dependent on the mission station was because they could not find work at Harper or other Liberian towns, where clerical and accounting positions were either taken or withheld from natives. Graduates learned that their education had limited value, when they were continually denied employment opportunities in Liberian towns. And if educated natives aspired to pursue such advanced vocations as law or medicine, their access to higher education was shut off. Although mission schools offered rudimentary language training in English, they taught mostly theology and the humanities. Legal studies, natural sciences, and

⁷⁹ This is exactly what Governor Russwurm designed currency to do when it was introduced: "The direct tendency of the currency is to draw all business to the Society's store." Money was, to borrow Russwurm's term, an "inducement." John Russwurm to the ACS Board, n.d., quoted in G. S. Stockwell, *The Republic of Liberia: Its Geography, Climate, Soil, and Productions, with a History of Its Early Settlement* (New York: A. S. Barnes, 1868), 174.

An interesting aside is that paper currency was reportedly popular with natives because they no longer had to share the profits with their neighbors. Under the barter system, they had received physical goods in exchange, which they were obligated to share with family and friends. But since they could not tear a physical banknote, they could keep their profit in full. Stockwell, *The Republic of Liberia*, 174; contra, "Currencies," in D. Elwood Dunn, Amos J. Beyan, and Carl Patrick Burrowes, *Historical Dictionary of Liberia*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2001), 94, which claims that currency was unpopular and short-lived, due to natives' reluctance and the physical degradation of the notes themselves.

higher-order mathematics were taught at only one place in the country, Liberia College in Monrovia, which remained closed to natives in spite of Blyden's best attempts.⁸⁰

Civilized converts ended up founding their own settlements with their own segregated businesses and institutions. For instance, the Episcopalians built St. James Episcopal Church at Hoffman for natives, rather than incorporate them into St. Mark's Episcopal Church at Harper. What Monrovia had not anticipated was that these separate towns became seedbeds for civil unrest and political dissent. The 1873 Grebo unification effort exemplifies the rising clout of educated natives, whose socioeconomic marginalization led them to challenge Liberia's political hegemony.

Despite public rhetoric about an amalgamated nation of Americo and aborigine, Liberians benefited from a divided native populace. They accentuated intertribal rifts when they sided with one group over the other. Sometimes the alliance spilled over into armed conflict. Internecine warfare could endanger trade and private property, but it also presented Liberia the opportunity to act as intermediary or aid the winning side. Either outcome positioned Liberia to dictate peace terms favorable to its own interests. Throughout the nineteenth century, Liberians fought at least eight major engagements, both with and against natives.

Internal strife between the Grebo during the midfifties illustrates how Liberians effected favorable results for themselves. The Grebo people composed two distinct halves: the Grebo who lived on the coast and the Half- or Bush-Grebo, who inhabited the forest region about thirty-five miles inland. Within the Grebo, there was a subdivision between the Kudemowe and Nyomowe clans, who were so named because of the respective bodies of water by which they settled. The

⁸⁰ See Martin Lowenkopf, *Politics in Liberia: The Conservative Road to Development* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1976), 41.

mission school at Cape Palmas drew from both sides in forming its student body. Graduates became known as “educated Greboes” and came to constitute a third distinct group of Greboes.

In 1856 Marylanders sided with the Kudemowe when the Nyomwe tried to drive the Kudemowe from Cape Palmas. The Marylanders helped burn eight Nyomwe towns and created about six thousand refugees fleeing the destruction. Like the Kru had done in 1851, the Nyomwe appealed to the British for help against the Marylanders. Although they failed to gain Britain’s support, the Nyomwe launched a successful counterattack, cutting off Marylanders from their farms and food supply. When the Nyomwe threatened to overrun Harper, the governor had no choice but to implore Monrovia for military assistance. A Liberian expeditionary force and a U.S. Navy gunboat arrived in time to prevent the wholesale massacre of Harper. The coalition crushed the Nyomwe offensive and forced them to seek a peace deal. Harper agreed to “buy” the land that it had just torched. Acquiring the land had been Harper’s intent all along, and it bought the land on the condition that the Nyomwe leave the area. This negotiating tactic was a favorite strategy of President Roberts, who called it “peacemaking with backbone.”⁸¹ He would call up a militia, travel to the village whose inhabitants had committed the alleged offense, and demand retreat or restitution. The sides would then convene a palaver in which they would hammer out a peace or “friendship” treaty. The plan worked according to script for the Marylanders in 1856. Furthermore, the near defeat convinced Marylanders to cast aside their independence and join the Republic of Liberia in 1857 as a full-fledged county.

Conflict did not end in the subsequent decades. The rising need for more land led to further provocations between the two sides. The Marylanders—now Liberians—exploited the feud between the Grebo by siding with the Kudemowe against their Nyomwe rivals. Rather

⁸¹ Wilson, *Liberia*, 69.

than risk open warfare with the deposed Nyomowe, the settlers supported the Kudemowe in a war against the Bapo, a tribe closely allied to the Nyomowe. A proxy war ensued until the educated Greboes stepped in and convinced both clans to form a new Grebo confederacy called the “Grebo Reunited Kingdom,” the one which President James Payne had so vociferously opposed.

The Grebo Bid for Socioeconomic Equality

The 1873 confederation was a major breakthrough for the Grebo, but it also alarmed Liberia. Although trained by Episcopalian missionaries, educated Greboes found themselves relegated to second-class status by Liberians, who denied them citizenship, political representation, and government appointments. The educated Greboes had already organized their own separate settlement at Hoffman, but they wanted full integration into Liberian society and the ability to live in Harper, the main town in Maryland County. They saw their best means for doing so was in reviving Grebo unification and leveraging it until Liberia acceded to their wishes. During a five-month war spanning from 1875 to 1876, they handed Liberians a major defeat at the Battle of Benleu when more than five thousand warriors overwhelmed a thousand Liberian militiamen. In a move reminiscent of Roberts’s backbone stratagem, the Grebo forced Monrovia to the negotiating table, where President Payne allowed the United States to mediate a truce. U.S. naval captain Alexander Semmes brokered an agreement between Liberia and an alliance of nine chieftains. The Grebo leaders agreed to disband their confederation and surrender their artillery in exchange for citizenship. The treaty declared Greboes to be full “Liberians” and hence entitled them to equal rights in trade, commerce, and land ownership. But the terms benefited the educated Grebo more than the traditional Grebo, who failed to receive the same economic and professional opportunities. When the Kudemowe rebelled against paying

custom duties a decade later, the educated Greboes sided with Liberians and extinguished the revolt. They suppressed Grebo raids on settlers' coffee plantations and discouraged support for the Grebo-backed Reform Party, which promised to reduce the tax burden on Greboes. At the turn of the century, educated Greboes had succeeded in assimilating into Liberian society. Prominent members served as legislators, military officers, and educators. Their involvement further expanded "civilized" settlements, with three major towns erected in Maryland County's hinterland. But integration had come at a price: it fractured tribal unity and left traditional Greboes feeling politically abandoned and economically deprived. Liberia had succeeded finally in bringing natives into the societal fold, though it took a war and military defeat to compel Liberians to treat natives equally. On their end, educated natives had exercised diplomatic and military ingenuity in pressing their case for inclusion. Unfortunately, integration ended up replicating a caste system in Grebo society. The socioeconomic class benefits reaped by educated Greboes, predictably, ruptured their fidelity to their fellow kin and perpetuated the trade and tax inequities for the majority of "uncivilized" Greboes.

Liberia's Fight for Economic Sovereignty

While natives struggled with maintaining an insurgency, Liberians worried about insolvency. Economic concerns had largely driven Liberia to declare its national independence. As touched upon in the last chapter, Liberia made little headway during the forties in getting outside nations to respect its commercial policies. Its 6 percent customs tax ignited a commercial and diplomatic crisis. British merchants refused to recognize the colony's right to levy duties. The British and Sierra Leonean governments encouraged their traders to ignore the tax, dismissing the ability of "private persons" to act as a legitimate governing authority. In other words, they rejected Monrovia's authority to impose international tariffs on the grounds that

Liberia was merely the outgrowth of a private organization, the ACS, rather than a sovereign nation. When English traders continued to flout Liberia's trade regulations, in 1845 Liberia impounded the *Little Ben*, anchored at Bassa, for failing to pay any harbor dues. The commonwealth sold the cargo in lieu of payment. A Sierra Leonean owned the ship, however, and his plight reached the ears of the British, who had one of their gunboat captains seize and sell the *John Seyes*, a trading vessel belonging to Stephen Benson (a prominent Liberian merchant who became the nation's second president in 1856).⁸² The British justified their seizure on the dubious charge that Benson was using the *John Seyes* to smuggle slaves to the United States.⁸³ For its part, the U.S. inquired about the reason for why Britain had confiscated the *John Seyes*. London replied that Liberia was "a mere commercial experiment of a philanthropic society" and not a sovereign government.⁸⁴ Other than its official query, the United States did little else to intervene. It was unwilling to claim Liberia as its colony and thereby give Americoos a semblance of international protection.⁸⁵ Meanwhile, Roberts was not standing still. He sought to blunt London by buying as much land as he could from littoral tribes, particularly from the Kru. And in 1846 he initiated formal separation talks with the ACS, which agreed that

⁸² Alternately spelled *John Seys*.

⁸³ This was also tied into the question whether Liberia was a free and independent state. At the time of impoundment, the *John Seyes* was flying a Liberian flag, which the British navy refused to recognize as a legal entity. Hence, the ship was considered unlawfully registered and was alleged to be a slave-runner craft. For a contemporary recount of the seizure, see Joseph Jenkins Roberts to the Legislative Council, 5 January 1846, reprinted in *African Repository* 22 (1846): 155-68.

⁸⁴ Azikiwe, *Liberia in World Politics*, 59.

⁸⁵ The U.S. Secretary of State defended, though, Liberia's right of existence to the British ambassador: "It is due to her Majesty's Government that I should inform you that this government regards it as occupying a peculiar position, as possessing peculiar claims to the friendly consideration of all Christian powers; that this government will, at all times, be prepared to interpose its good offices to prevent any encroachment by the colony upon any just right of any nation; and that it would be very unwilling to see it despoiled of its territory rightfully acquired, or improperly restrained in the exercise of its necessary rights and powers as an independent settlement." Mr. [Abel] Upshur to Mr. [Sir Henry] Fox, quoted in Roland P. Falkner, "The United States and Liberia," *American Journal of International Law* 4, no. 3 (July 1910): 537.

its patronage was hindering Liberia in taking the next step to nationhood and international recognition.

In 1846 the commonwealth held a referendum on the question of “total sovereignty.” Of the 1,157 people who cast ballots, 69 percent voted in favor of separating from the ACS and declaring Liberia an independent nation.⁸⁶ After agreeing to part ways with the ACS, Liberians issued a formal declaration of independence, which was penned as much for the outside world as for themselves. Every people has a right to form a government, the document argued, and though Liberians had once delegated that authority to the ACS upon their infancy, they had taken back that authority once they had reached political maturity. Americo-Liberians were the *de facto* government and had been ever since the ACS had decreased its active administration of the colony in order to test their worthiness to self-govern. Americoes had acquitted themselves without blemish, and they were now ready to assume the rights and powers of being a sovereign, independent state. They had all the hallmarks of a capable politic. Their Western institutions—i.e. the courts, schools, and church—promoted the rule of law, enlightened learning, and worship of the true Creator. The African benefited from two reforms they had introduced: Christianity and abolition. In response to the charge Liberia were nothing more than “a mere commercial experiment,” they insisted their motives were pure: “Liberia is not the offspring of grasping ambition, nor the tool of avaricious speculation. No desire for territorial aggrandizement brought us to these shores; nor do we believe so sordid a motive entered into the high consideration of those who aided us in providing this asylum. Liberia is an asylum from the most grinding

⁸⁶ Wilson, *Liberia*, 56.

oppression.”⁸⁷ In other words, Liberia had no exploitive, acquisitive designs but only noble, moral ones.

Liberia succeeded in earning diplomatic recognition. After Great Britain recognized Liberia’s nationality the following year, other countries promptly followed suit:

Nation	Year
Great Britain	1848
France	1849
Hanseatic League	1849
Haiti	1849
Norway	1849
Sweden	1849
Portugal	1849
Brazil	1849
Sardinia	1849
Austria	1849
Denmark	1855
Maryland-in-Liberia	1856
Belgium	1858
United States	1862
Italy	1862
Netherlands	1862
North German Confederation	1867
Spain	1894

Table 2. Nations recognizing Liberia’s independence.

Britain and France even bestowed small military vessels to the new republic as diplomatic gifts upon their independence. But the United States refused to recognize the fledgling state, worried about having to receive black diplomats officially in Washington, DC. Not until 1862 in the middle of the U.S. Civil War did President Abraham Lincoln acknowledge Liberia’s nationhood.

⁸⁷ Liberian Declaration of Independence, in Charles Henry Huberich, *The Political and Legislative History of Liberia*, vol. 1 (New York: Central Book Co., 1947), 830.

Roberts was quick to capitalize on the diplomatic progress. With the *Lark*, the schooner Britain had gifted to Liberia, Roberts organized an 1848 military operation against Spanish slave traders. He had three simultaneous objectives: (1) oust the Spaniards from operating on Liberian soil; (2) win cooperation and backing from the U.S. and England; and (3) solidify control of southeastern natives. A multinational naval force—the Liberian *Lark*, a U.S. corvette, and a British frigate—transported 200 Liberians to Cess Valley in southeastern Liberia, where they besieged and bombarded the Spanish fort until it surrendered. The victory freed 3,500 slaves and was a publicity coup for Roberts. He cemented Liberia’s antislavery reputation, undercut a European competitor, weakened native ties to “foreigners,” and demonstrated Liberia’s utility to Great Britain and the United States. It was abolitionism as both a cause and cudgel. And Roberts had wielded it masterly.

Unfortunately for Liberia, neither recognition nor partnership guaranteed continuing respect. Foreign merchants still widely flouted the tariff laws and ignored cargo taxes when they visited the Liberian coast. During the forties, fifties, and sixties, legislators passed various port-of-entry acts, which they hoped would increase enforcement by funneling all ships into designated ports where custom officials would inspect all goods entering the country. The Supreme Court had even added teeth to the legislation by handing down a thousand-dollar fine to an English trader for repeated violations of its revenue laws. One trader in particular, John Harris, caused diplomatic nightmares for Liberia. In 1860 Monrovia accused him of trafficking slaves in northwestern Liberia and impounded his ships.⁸⁸ It was a bold move, because twenty

⁸⁸ It is unclear whether Harris was actually engaged in the slave trade. Although he was based in northwest Liberia—an area notorious for slave trading—he was also involved in “legitimate” trade with natives down to Cape Mount, which was clearly in Liberia’s domain. He refused to pay Liberian taxes, which was enough to incur Monrovia’s displeasure. Liberians could have been invented the slaver charge, much as London had done in its earlier fiction that Stephen Benson was active in the slave trade.

years earlier Monrovia had seized the aforementioned *Little Ben* from a Sierra Leonean trader, only to see Britain confiscate Stephen Benson's *John Seyes* in retaliation. Harris did more than just smuggle goods, though. He also waged a covert campaign to incite neighboring Vai to rebel against the Liberian government. Thus in the eyes of Monrovia, he was an alleged slaver, tax cheat, and a foreign saboteur.

Harris's subversive activities were not the first time Liberians suspected Britain or Sierra Leone of planting a commercial trader in order to undermine their government. Less than a decade before in 1851, the Kru from Trade Town had attacked Liberian citizens at Bassa Cove. The Kru leader had entreated the British consul in Monrovia to join in the fight: "I write this to let you know that this Country is not belong to Americans, and I will not sell it. I have this Country from my Fore Father, and when I die, I wish to left to my sons. I want all English to come here and make trade with my people. Please Sir try all the best to do for me and my Country."⁸⁹ The king's appeal had bolstered Liberians' suspicion that William Lawrence, the resident British trade representative stationed at Trade Town and a Freetown native no less, was a provocateur bent on inciting the Kru to overthrow Liberian rule. Monrovia managed to suppress the revolt, and Lawrence only escaped prosecution after the British agreed to censure his actions.

But Harris was stationed further north, in land adjacent to Sierra Leone. He had the implicit backing of Freetown officials, who wished to destabilize the Gallinas region, which both Sierra Leone and Liberia claimed as their own. If Freetown could demonstrate Liberia's inability to control the population, it could make the case to annex Gallinas. Harris served as a useful

⁸⁹ King Bowyah to A. W. Hanson, 31 October 1851, F.O. 47/4, quoted in Tom W. Shick, *Behold the Promised Land: A History of Afro-American Settler Society in Nineteenth-Century Liberia* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1980), 107.

agent in exposing Monrovia's impotence. Unable to convince the Vai to undermine Monrovia's authority, he decided to provoke them by encouraging Gallinas natives to attack their Vai neighbors. Monrovia raised a militia to defend the Vai, and the retreating Gallinas ended up pillaging one of Harris's factories. Harris had the audacity to file a claim for damages, accusing Liberia of instigating the destruction of his property. He claimed an absurd £6,000 in damages, but an American naval arbitrator reduced his award to only £300.⁹⁰ Yet Harris succeeded in the larger aim of gaining a decision in Freetown's favor. The British declared the Gallinas region to be a Sierra Leonean protectorate due to Monrovia's inability to maintain order and, in their words, "effective occupation."⁹¹ This "principle of effectivity" was a new, evolving standard for establishing recognized control of territory, which the later 1884–1885 Berlin Conference would codify. As James Ciment explains: "To prevent a government from simply planting its flag and claiming ownership, the attendees at the conference agreed that a nation had to set up a colonial administration, establish an economic presence, make some effort at treaties with native chiefs, and deploy a police force adequate to pacify the natives before it could claim the land as its own."⁹² President Payne had anticipated the need for bureaucratic oversight when he established the Interior Department in 1869. And Liberia possessed a lengthy history of trade and treaties with tribes near its northwest border. But what it did not have was the military might to either pacify truculent tribes or prevent foreign traders from circumventing its laws. Liberia faced a no-win situation. If it fought British traders directly, it risked a military conflict with Sierra Leone

⁹⁰ Or the American equivalent of \$1,500 at the time.

⁹¹ Azikiwe, *Liberia in World Politics*, 103.

⁹² James Ciment, *Another America: The Story of Liberia and the Former Slaves Who Ruled It* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2013), 125.

(and the British navy which would indubitably come to their colony's aid). But if Liberia did nothing, the Vai would denounce Monrovia's inaction and renounce its authority altogether.

In 1870 Colonial Secretary Lord Granville proposed a border settlement to President Edward Roye, one which would have established the Moa River as the northern border for Liberia.⁹³ Agreeing to the revised border meant surrendering claim to Sherbro—and its one hundred miles of coastline—but the deal would have fixed the border and ended Sierra Leone's public interference and traders' open defiance. Roye agreed to these terms, but his death in 1871 left the issue unresolved. As Roye's successor, Roberts rejected the bilateral compromise.⁹⁴ In hindsight, it represented a rare blunder for Roberts, but in the 1870s he would have faced public backlash had he been seen as caving in to British demands.

Liberia had real reason to worry about its control over natives, because it knew European powers would sense weakness and pounce. In 1878 Liberia's worst fears were realized when Sierra Leone used Liberia's ineffectual rule as pretext to seize the Gallinas region from the republic. The colonial governor declared the region a British protectorate and demanded Monrovia indemnify Freetown for its pacification efforts. It was sophistry for Sierra Leone to claim the territory as its own and then insist Liberia reimburse it for security. But casuistry aside, the governor was utilizing one more means to erode Liberian sovereignty and delegitimize its authority.

A double standard continued to penalize Monrovia. A number of merchants would try to skirt port fees by bartering directly with natives. But if a foreign vessel shipwrecked in the

⁹³ The Moa River was also known as the Sulima River, named after the settlement located at the mouth of the river.

⁹⁴ Technically, Vice President James Skivring Smith finished the last two months of Roye's presidential term before retiring to Bassa. Roberts won the next election and served as President once more, from 1872 to 1876.

process, aborigines had no compunction about looting the ship or robbing its passengers. When this “pillaging” happened, traders were quick to press Monrovia for restitution. If the government refused to pay their losses, they appealed to their home government in order to force Liberia’s compliance.⁹⁵ In 1882 the British sent four warships to Monrovia and demanded it relinquish claim to all territory west of the Mano River, because it could not control the indigenous population.⁹⁶ London’s ultimatum was more avaricious than Lord Granville’s earlier proposal, because it extended Sierra Leone’s claim eastward beyond the Moe River to the Mano River.⁹⁷ Under the threat of military action, President Anthony Gardner acquiesced, and Monrovia eventually signed a treaty in 1885 agreeing to the forced annexation. At the stroke of a pen, Liberia surrendered fifty million acres of the country’s most fertile farmland and lost 20 percent of its territory, including 150 miles of coastline.

⁹⁵ The ability to shift responsibility for financial losses onto Monrovia was one reason why the British Foreign Office under Lord Palmerston was keen to recognize Liberia’s independence in the late 1840s. See Shick, *Behold the Promised Land*, 104.

⁹⁶ A similar incident had occurred in 1879 when a German man-of-war visited Monrovia after the Kru had plundered a shipwrecked German steamship and stripped the survivors of their possessions and even clothing. Monrovia was too broke to pay the claim and agreed to pay indemnities only upon threat of bombardment. See Johnston, *Liberia*, 1:270-72.

⁹⁷ Despite the naked land grab, Britain was committed to preserving Liberia’s independence for self-serving ends: Liberia acted as a physical buffer and political check on France’s colonial expansion. Plus, Britain was loathe to absorb a country infected by “republican ideas.” William Fergusson to Hilary Teage, Sierra Leone, 6 October 1841, enclosed in letter of William Fergusson to Lord John Russell, Sierra Leone, 8 October 1841, Svend Holsoe Collection, Archive of Traditional Music, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, quoted in Marie Tyler-McGraw, *An African Republic: Black and White Virginians in the Making of Liberia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 165. Britain had earlier rebuffed President Thomas Jefferson when he proposed a joint resettlement of freedmen in Sierra Leone. Their rationale had been, in part, because of the intractability of black loyalists in Sierra Leone, whose rebellious natures they attributed to their time in colonial America. See Nicholas Guyatt, *Bind Us Apart: How Enlightened Americans Invented Racial Segregation* (New York: Basic Books, 2016), 254-55.

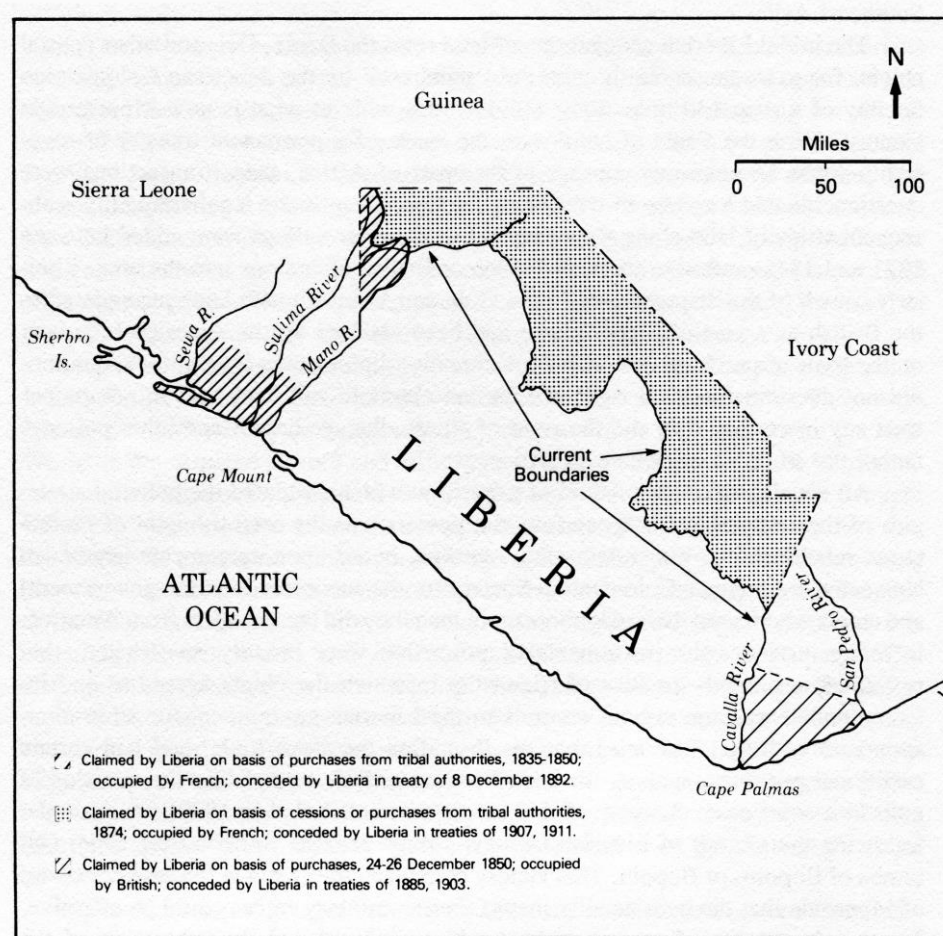


Figure 2. Extent of Liberia’s Territorial Claims.⁹⁸

France sensed feebleness and, in the same year, it outrageously claimed ownership of the coast as far as Cape Mount, citing old purchase agreements between tribal leaders and French traders. It was a transparent negotiating ploy, and France ended up “settling” for a sixty-mile stretch of coast east of the Cavalla River. Monrovia had little choice but to cede the fecund chunk to the French. Subsequent land disputes would erupt between the two countries, and France followed Britain’s strategy of arguing that it was annexing Liberian territory because of Liberia’s ineffectual occupation and control of hinterland natives. France poached large swaths

⁹⁸ Liebenow, *Liberia: The Quest for Democracy*, 26.

of Liberia's hinterland, reducing Liberia's claimed territory by 40 percent. At the turn of the century, Liberia had lost about 75 percent of the land it had (nominally) controlled in the midsixties. With the lost territory vanished vast farmland, timber tracts, mineral wealth, fishing rights, and an untapped workforce of over a half-million people. In total, Britain and France siphoned off half of Liberia's native population, around 600,000 aborigines.⁹⁹

Financial debt played a hand in weakening Liberia's international standing, too. Difficulties in collecting duties had led Monrovia to reassess its revenue stream. Taxing external trade could float the government, but it failed to generate sufficient income in order to develop the country. As a result, the government began to consider ways to increase trade with the interior. President James Payne authorized exploratory expeditions into the hinterland. During the late 1860s, in his hunt for gold mines in the interior, Benjamin Anderson had reached the Mandingo capital and formed a friendship treaty with the powerful warlord Ibramhama Sissi, who pledged to join Liberia and oppose slavery.¹⁰⁰ He was an influential ally, and Payne wanted to move swiftly to solidify the partnership. Because of waterfalls, Liberia had no coastal river navigable more than twenty miles inland. Without the capital investment of a mother country, Liberia studied the feasibility of building roads into the interior in order to facilitate trade with the Mandingo. Payne thought that increased trade could pay for road construction. But Monrovia had neither the equipment nor needed investment to capitalize on the commercial relationship. It needed a mammoth loan, and in 1870 Payne's successor, President Edward Roye, approved a £100,000 loan (i.e. \$500,000) from British bankers, ostensibly to construct roads and a railroad line into the hinterland.

⁹⁹ Wilson, *Liberia*, 105.

¹⁰⁰ Anderson, *Narrative of a Journey to Musardu, the Capital of the Western Mandingoes*, reprinted in Fairhead, Geysbeek, Holsoe, and Leach, eds., *African-American Exploration in West Africa*, 210-17.

Alas, Roye had agreed to a bad loan. First, it was a discount loan. The terms stipulated that 30 percent of the loan amount be withheld as prepayment of interest, which was set at 7 percent. Second, it was a short-term loan. Liberia had a deadline of just fifteen years in which to repay the entire loan balance of £100,000. Third, Liberia agreed to a lien on its future customs revenue. If it failed to pay the full loan on time, the bank would garnish government revenues until the loan was paid off. After deducting fees, Liberia would be receiving only £70,000 while being required to pay back £132,600. And if it failed to pay back the loan on time, a very real possibility, it threatened to bankrupt the government and to trigger its collapse along with the public services it provided. Critics accused Roye of bypassing the legislature and receiving a personal kickback. Why else would he approve such a disadvantageous loan? they challenged. Roye did nothing to allay these fears when he returned to Monrovia and declared he would stay on as president for another two years—all without an election. According to the Constitution, a presidential term ran for two years, which many Liberians considered to be woefully short. But when Roye attempted belatedly to ram a constitutional amendment through the legislature, people worried he was about to stage a *coup d'état*. They were put on alert and, when Roye's supporters attempted an armed takeover of a Monrovia bank, his opponents repelled them and jailed Roye in advance of a trial. Details get murky here, because Roye allegedly escaped and drowned while attempting to reach an English steamboat anchored offshore. Purportedly he was so weighted down with stolen loan money, he drowned after his canoe capsized. Other accounts claim that he was secretly executed and the disparaging tale invented to blame him for his own death.¹⁰¹ In any case, Roye's demise was intertwined with Liberia's commercial ambitions, and it had financial ramifications for the debtor nation. Only an estimated 20 to 27 percent of the loan

¹⁰¹ For example, see Wilson, *Liberia*, 77.

amount ever reached Liberia, whether from graft or usurious loan terms.¹⁰² Yet Liberia was still on the hook for the whole £132,600. It defaulted on payments in 1874, and not until the late 1890s did Liberia agree to indemnify the British on a reduced loan of £80,000 at 4 percent interest. Even here, Liberia took more than £53,000 in losses, in light of the actual monies the Liberian Treasury had received. Liberia's commercial development may have been paved with good intentions but it was also pocked with fiscal mismanagement and nonexistent oversight.

Despite the imprudent loan, at the end of the 1870s Liberia faced a still balmy future. It carried a favorable trade balance, exporting \$3 million of goods annually while importing just a \$1 million in return.¹⁰³ Taxes and tariffs generated \$80,000 a year in revenue, which was enough to keep the government solvent and international loans serviced (excepting the controversial Roye loan).

On the surface, Liberia still faced challenges. With its high debt, it could afford to plow only 10 percent of its revenue into "public works." As might be expected, new roads into the interior never materialized in the nineteenth century because of cost and corruption.¹⁰⁴ The dearth of roads, especially during the rainy season, hampered transport throughout Liberia. Traversing Liberia took as long as two months by foot because of the formidable terrain, dense foliage, and unnavigable rivers. Despite the transportation trials, the first couple decades after independence had seen agriculture in Montserrado County flourish. Planters raised cash crops of rice, sugar, cotton, and coffee for export. National commercial shipping matched pace, with

¹⁰² James L. Sibley and Diedrich Westermann, *Liberia—Old and New: A Study of Its Social and Economic Background with Possibilities of Development* (New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co., 1928), 91; Johnston, *Liberia*, 1:262.

¹⁰³ Wilson, *Liberia*, 82.

¹⁰⁴ At the outbreak of World War I, there was still only one road that led into the interior; in contrast, Sierra Leone was laying railroad track in the 1890s.

Monrovia shipbuilders constructing more than fifty sailing vessels by 1870. France, England, and Germany were the main markets for Liberian goods.

But then the bottom dropped out, as the burgeoning trade withered in the 1880s. First, Europe introduced steamships, which were a reliable, low-cost alternative to wind-powered craft. This innovation allowed smaller British and French traders to compete without having to finance and build their own vessels. And as expected, European shipping companies gave preference to their nationals. Second, new international competitors rose to challenge Liberians' agricultural dominance. Brazil started exporting coffee, while European countries began raising sugar beets. Synthetic dyes were undermining the need for Liberia's camwood. These developments sank Liberia's coffee, sugar, and forestry industries. By the turn of the century, coffee exports had halved and camwood prices had decreased by 75 percent. These market drops devastated Liberia's shipping industry. The trading fleet fell from over one hundred vessels in 1870 to only three by the turn of the century.¹⁰⁵ The downturn also had long-term ramifications for Liberia's relations with natives. Trading partnerships and labor contracts dissolved. Americoos lacked the necessary capital to develop the interior and improve the indigenous tribes' material wellbeing. Many ambitious Americoos shifted their professional aspirations from commerce to government, which became the exclusive domain of Americoos and shut out political advancement for natives.

As universally acknowledged, Liberia had every incentive it needed to integrate natives into the national economy. They required the cooperation of indigenes in order to (1) create a united front against British and French intrusion; (2) supply urban populations with essential food staples; (3) develop the native economies in order to increase trade and raise government

¹⁰⁵ Harris, *African and American Values*, 72.

revenues; and (4) provide Liberia's agricultural sector with cheap, unskilled labor. But operating within the Liberian economy required the aborigine to accept some radical innovations—concepts like individual industry, gender roles regarding labor, private ownership of property, internal taxation and external tariffs, and fealty to a remote, unfamiliar authority in Monrovia. Moreover, commercial compliance did not guarantee political inclusion for natives. Only under sustained pressure in the 1870s and 1880s did Liberia begin to seat token aborigine representatives in its legislature.

Actual societal integration was a difficult achievement to realize in the nineteenth century. Economist George Brown deems the cultural and institutional differences between Liberians and natives to be so “alien,” it was as if “two Liberias appeared inside the sovereign and geographic boundaries of the one country.”¹⁰⁶ Anthropologist Mary Moran does not go as far as Brown, but she identifies two impediments to Liberians' assimilating natives: class and group endogamy.¹⁰⁷ First, she argues that Liberians were less open to indigenous people because the early colonists—who became future powerbrokers in the republic—were middleclass, business-minded immigrants who already had concrete notions of civilization from living in American urban centers. She contrasts Liberians to Sierra Leoneans, whose most successful settlers were black Nova Scotians, who had fled with British troops to Canada following the Revolutionary War. Because most of these former slaves had worked in South Carolina's low country and Virginia's piedmont and tidewater, they had prior exposure to West African culture filtered through U.S. Southern plantation society. Therefore, they were more receptive, she reasons, to indigenous culture once they set foot in Africa. Second, she avers that the absence of white

¹⁰⁶ George Brown, *The Economic History of Liberia* (Washington, DC: Associated Publishers, 1941), 20.

¹⁰⁷ Mary H. Moran, *Civilized Women: Gender and Prestige in Southeastern Liberia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 58-59.

colonial racism led Liberians to intermarry within their own social group, rather than commit to intercultural marriages with natives, in order to preserve political and commercial hegemony. Put another way, without white external barriers—like American Jim Crow segregation or South African apartheid—Liberians did not feel the need to find common cause with the African masses.¹⁰⁸ To that list, one can add corrosive labor relations, unfavorable tax schemes, imbalanced trade controls, inequitable representation in government, and the fierce competition to add or protect land rights at all costs. Liberians and indigenes found economic cooperation nearly impossible in the absence of trust, goodwill, and generative wealth.

Benjamin Anderson from the chapter's beginning serves as a microcosm of Liberia's strained relationship with its native population. Failed diplomacy, financial tensions, and mutual mistrust characterized Anderson's dealings with King Bessa. The Mandingoes eventually convened a council in which all parties hoped to resolve the tense standoff. In Anderson's words:

In this council, the Mandingoes reminded me that, as the Liberians and the Mandingoes were one and the same people, I ought not to act with too great a severity; but I was not inclined to make common stock of my goods on account of that identity, and in a very impatient and unreasonable manner I gave them to understand that all their relationship to me depended solely on the restoration of my goods. If they failed in that, I was prepared to ignore all ties. I was in no humor for cant about kindred; I wanted my money¹⁰⁹

In the end, Anderson got his goods back through a combination of bluster, bullying, and shrewd bargaining. He finally managed to persuade a rival Mandingo chief to strong-arm Bessa into

¹⁰⁸ Moran is mostly correct, though her second point needs more nuance. Most Liberian men were not open polygamists, but some Liberian men were sequential monogamists. They would abandon their "civilized" wives and take up residence with a native woman, who became an informal "wife" (though occasionally, the roles would be reversed, with the wife running off with her native paramour). These men risked being put on trial for adultery, but sequential monogamy became a more common practice starting in the late nineteenth century. The men would often financially assist and educate progeny resulting from these extralegal unions. Over time these children would blend into Liberian society. Hence, intercultural, sexual liaisons became a conduit toward assimilation, though no reputable Liberian would have sanctioned this social phenomenon known as *placage*, especially in the early years of the republic. For more on *placage*, see Shick, *Behold the Promised Land*, 13-14, 100; in reference to the case of polyandry, see *Ibid.*, 93.

¹⁰⁹ Anderson, *Narrative of a Journey to Musardu*, reprinted in Fairhead, Geysbeek, Holsoe, and Leach, eds., *African-American Exploration in West Africa: Four Nineteenth-Century Diaries*, 172.

returning the loot. In exchange, Anderson promised Liberia would build him a school so that his people could learn to conduct business through reading, writing, and arithmetic. It was a promise that Liberia could neither keep nor capitalize upon for another century. It was failure born out of class rivalry, sociocultural bias, political ineptitude, international pressure, and financial instability. But more importantly, it was a missed opportunity that spoke to the severe limitations constraining Liberians in the decades following their national freedom.

CHAPTER 4

“I shall be very glad if any man whether white, black, red, yellow, or even green
is sent out to . . . release me from my present position of President”:
Bitter Drama and Broken Dreams at Liberia College

Professor Martin Freeman faced a dilemma. After the brilliant but mercurial Edward Blyden had been fired as president of Liberia College, the turmoil threatened to shut down the school permanently. Freeman accepted the job reluctantly; but by 1887 failing health, crumbling infrastructure, and dwindling enrollment left him despondent. In desperation, Freeman penned an emotional letter to American colonizationists. He reassured them he was not about to abandon his post, but he begged them to appoint a replacement, regardless of color. He confessed that “it has been suggested that ‘*a white man be sent out to take charge of the work of the College*’. In regard to this rumor permit me to say that I shall be very glad if any man whether white, black, red, yellow, or even green is sent out to relieve me and release me from my present position of President *pro tem*.”¹ This was an immense capitulation on Freeman’s part, because Liberians had fought for decades to maintain control of the institution’s leadership. Yet after operating for twenty-five years, Liberia College teetered on collapse as a result of conflicting visions, professional rivalries, and a cutthroat debate over whether to educate natives.

Higher education had always been a controversial topic in the early republic. Unlike at the primary or secondary levels, a college education was a limited resource accessible to only a select few, since only one institution of higher education existed in the entire country, at Monrovia. The existence of a single college was due to several reasons: the Liberian government could afford to fund only one institution; just a handful of men in the country qualified to teach

¹ M. H. Freeman to J. C. Braman, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 10 September 1887, in “M.S. N-1777, Jun-Dec 1887” folder, Box 10, Fol. 12, Massachusetts Historical Society, original emphasis retained.

at the collegiate level; and matriculation required students to have demonstrated secondary-education success, secured scholarship aid, and possessed enough internal fortitude to withstand subpar learning conditions and the temptation to drop out for marriage or business opportunities. The scarcity of collegiate education makes it an ideal focus for this chapter, which examines how higher education became an ideological battleground for the nation's leaders in deciding the direction and beneficiaries of Liberia's future. This chapter examines Liberia College in particular because of the social and political implications it had in the broader debate over the country's future.

Everyone affirmed the importance of establishing a college, but leaders disagreed on its mission and target audience. Since the days of colonization, one of the central tenets was that education would bring civilization to the ignorant masses. No one disputed this article of faith. The devil is in the details, of course, and problematic questions arose that Liberians answered differently. Should education stand outside the larger culture as a figurative "beacon on a hill," or should it permeate culture as "leaven" within society? Should it create and preserve a civic identity primarily for Americoos, or should it forge a new continental consciousness by seeking a distinctively African identity? Should education aspire to teach the highest intellectual disciplines, or should it meet the practical needs of industrial or vocational training? And to what degree could white benefactors dictate the terms of that education? These were pertinent questions that required concrete answers in order to establish an overarching mission and purpose for schooling in Liberia.

Unfortunately, educators failed to reach a consensus on how to direct higher education in the country. Nowhere was this breakdown more evident than Liberia College, the flagship institution of higher education. The school was rife with dysfunction and mismanagement from

its inception. It was also a microcosm of the larger debates Liberians were having about their identity, relations with their neighbors, and their place in the world.

Edward Blyden is a good starting point in discussing the civilizing role of education. He was a central figure in the start of Liberia College, being one of its inaugural professors. He had a tumultuous academic career: a gifted scholar who was a forerunner of today's multiculturalism but also a hardheaded administrator who clashed with nearly all his colleagues. His ouster from the college presidency, although justified at the time, left the school directionless and more prone to the whims of its white colonizationist sponsors. To appreciate his contributions and understand his shortcomings, however, require some background on Liberia College's founding.

Auspicious Beginning

With much fanfare, Liberia College held its inauguration ceremonies on January 23, 1862.² Built at a cost of \$20,000, the three-story school building sat on twenty acres of land, perched high on Cape Mesurado overlooking the capital city of Monrovia.³ Liberia's flagship college carried the dreams of an entire nation, which hoped the modest academy would grow into the Harvard of Liberia, if not all of Africa. Furthermore, supporters expected the school would help prepare Americo-Liberians for governance and natives for "civilization."

As an original faculty member, Edward Wilmot Blyden stood prepared to do just that. Yet his turbulent time as a Liberia College professor and president belied the difficulty in achieving those ends. Part of his struggle was philosophical. His approach to education began to change in the 1880s as he sought training for Liberians that was distinct from Western education.

² See "Inauguration of Liberia College," *African Repository* 38, no. 5 (May 1862), 151. Because of prior commitments by a professor, the college opened its doors a year later on February 2, 1863.

³ See "Liberia College at Monrovia," *North American*, 12 February 1863, reprinted in *African Repository* 39, no. 3 (March 1863), 88.

The shift stemmed from his belief that African culture was fundamentally different from its Western counterparts. This “natural” divide was a product of his racialism, the conviction that native instincts set the African apart from his EuroAmerican rival or his Americo-Liberian cousin. If the latter two claimed “civilization” to be derived from white EuroAmericans, Blyden claimed instinctual knowledge exclusive to the “pure Negro.” But Blyden faced a quandary: he had to create an educational alternative that deserved the respect and status afforded to Western education. His stint as president of Liberia College shows his move toward “ethnoeducation,” the quest to excavate and systematize the autochthonous traditions and culture of Africa.⁴ Hence, teaching Arabic became a lasting ambition for Blyden, because the language represented a centuries-old alternative to English. Islam, too, came to signify a legitimate source of truth that rivaled that of Christianity—which led him to explore the merits of Muslim education later in life.⁵ Yet racialism did not merely drive Blyden’s educational philosophy. His experiences at Liberia College accelerated his abandonment of a strictly Western-based education. Battles with Americo-Liberians—first with President Joseph Jenkins Roberts and later with college trustees—

⁴ Term adapted from Paulin Hountondji’s concept of “ethnophilosophy.” See Paulin Hountondji, *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality*, trans. Henri Evans (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983).

Ethnocentrism can have multiple meanings, ranging from a simple “desire for self-direction” to “belief that races and ethnies, particularly one’s own, are both real and valued.” Often this is accompanied by valorization of a natal subgroup, leading to charges of ethnic chauvinism and racism. See Adam Fairclough, *A Class of Their Own: Black Teachers in the Segregated South* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press/Harvard University Press, 2007), 67; Lucius T. Outlaw, Jr., *On Race and Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 8; Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In My Father’s House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 92. For more on black chauvinism in its religious and secular forms, see Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850–1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 23-25.

⁵ Richard Turner argues that Blyden converted to Islam as early as 1871, though his evidence is largely circumstantial. Turner points to (1) Blyden’s regular reading the Quran, (2) resignation from the Presbyterian Church, (3) advocacy for building a mosque, (4) support for polygamy, (5) directorship of Mohammedan education in Sierra Leone, (6) warm reception by Muslims, and (7) the common practice of syncretistic Islam. Turner’s verdict contradicts Hollis Lynch’s conclusion that Blyden was partial toward, though never a practitioner of, Islam. See Richard Brent Turner, *Islam in the African-American Experience*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 56-59; contra Hollis R. Lynch, *Edward Wilmot Blyden: Pan-Negro Patriot, 1832–1912* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 246.

fueled his mistrust of Western-minded mulattoes. In the end, Blyden's civilizing mission at Liberia College came to an abrupt halt, undone by feuding, dysfunction, and sustained backlash to ethnoeducation.

Blyden's successors seized upon industrial education as a fresh tactic to reinvigorate the fortunes of Liberia College. Besides the practical benefit of making the school self-sustaining, it would accrue American colonizationists' goodwill, establish the "scientific" credentials of the school, and serve as a compelling touchstone for all sides to unite together. But like Blyden, subsequent presidents gained little progress in instituting it. Knowing industrial education to be a litmus test for colonizationist supporters, many faculty assented to it in principle without enacting the requisite move into the interior. Interestingly, while the goal was a perennially unrealized albatross for colonizationists, it became a negotiating tactic for educators to continue with their own separate agenda. On the downside, it left individual students with little ability to advance their studies beyond the collegiate level. Because intensive studies like medicine required overseas training, they became luxuries that few would fund, who viewed it as not only expensive excess but also a seductive lure to tempt Liberia's sons from fulfilling their duties to their homeland. Thus reinventing the college as an industrial center failed because of mistrust, rivalry, and absence of buy-in from professors and students alike.

Liberia College's Founding Vision(s)

From outward appearances, the school had auspicious beginnings. On one hand, numbers were miniscule during the first year⁶: Blyden, Alexander Crummell, and Joseph Jenkins Roberts

⁶ For context, Liberia's population numbered 200,000, with 15,000 being recaptives and emigrants from the United States.

formed the first faculty, while seven boys composed the student body.⁷ On the other hand, the three professors formed a stellar faculty, the best qualified men that Liberia could muster. Each boasted impressive credentials for his day. Alexander Crummell was the best educated man in the country, having attended Yale and graduated from Cambridge. Edward Blyden was a gifted linguist, fluent in multiple languages and a champion of cross-cultural learning. And Joseph Jenkins Roberts, once the nation's first President, had surfaced from retirement in order to lead Liberia College as its first president. The students were all boys drawn from the Americo-Liberians who had emigrated from the United States in the previous decades. In reality, the school was little more than a glorified high school housed in a single building.⁸ Yet its potential was far greater. It had the sanction of the Liberian government, financial backing of wealthy philanthropists, and high academic aspirations by ambitious, well-intentioned men. The founders desired Liberia College to be a full-fledged institution of higher education. Blyden taught Greek, Latin, Hebrew, and French; Crummell logic, rhetoric, and history; and Roberts law and jurisprudence.⁹ The first two also shared teaching duties for mathematics and philosophy.¹⁰ A traditional Western-based education, all concurred, would lead to productive citizens.

The three founding professors held strong convictions on how those expectations should materialize. Speaking at the inauguration, Blyden asserted that Liberia College would teach “a

⁷ The number of students swelled to thirteen by the end of the first school term. Another eight “sub-freshmen” attended the college’s preparatory department.

⁸ This was not all that uncommon in the nineteenth century. According to a U.S. Bureau of Education survey, 33 percent of students in U.S. colleges during 1890 were performing secondary-level work. See Bureau of Education, *Biennial Survey of Education, 1916–18* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1919), 694, as cited in Henry N. Drewry and Humphrey Doermann, *Stand and Prosper: Private Black Colleges and Their Students* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 45.

⁹ In 1863 Martin Freeman joined the faculty as the full-time mathematics and natural philosophy professor. He had held the same position previously at Allegheny Institute in Pennsylvania before becoming its president in 1856. In doing so, he became the first black president of an American collegiate-level institution.

¹⁰ See J. T., “Liberia College,” *Boston Recorder*, reprinted in *African Repository* 40, no. 8 (August 1864), 229.

practical education” by “imparting not simply skill in keeping accounts—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.”¹¹ The means to stimulating the mind, not surprisingly for Blyden, rested in classical language study. Greek appealed to him in particular, which he considered the archetype for beauty and the foundation for abstract ideas. In short, Greek was the means to culture.¹² In 1863 Blyden still aligned himself with a traditional Western education filled with a steady diet of the “classics,” which would cultivate “taste” and the highest achievement. Sensitive to the charge he was simply aping white culture, he responded that just as everyone had to masticate and digest their food, so too Liberians had to follow the same educational process as other civilizations.¹³ “We must rise, and we can rise by the same means by which other people have risen,” Blyden declared.¹⁴

Roberts joined Blyden on the dais to offer his vision for Liberia College. In Roberts’s grand scheme, the job of the institution was to train men to launch a moral and political revolution for the world to witness. By disseminating “useful and scientific knowledge,” the school could uphold free institutions, guarantee orderly governance, and perform the same

¹¹ E. W. Blyden, “Inaugural Address by Prof. E. W. Blyden,” *African Repository* 38, no. 11 (November 1862), 332.

¹² For the record, Blyden lauded all language acquisition: “Being able to select his own meaning for each word out of the word itself and its connections, he goes beyond the mere forms of words and sentences, to the principles they contain. He imbibes the spirit of the writer. His mind enlarges. He learns to form a correct estimate of the merits and defects of composition. His taste is quickened, purified, and elevated; and by being obliged to expand his vocabulary as widely as that of the author he translates, he necessarily becomes familiar with a number of new words, of which, perhaps, under other circumstances, he might only have heard. He thus acquires a command of language, and enters upon a course of indefinite improvement—a road that leads to the loftiest attainment.” *Ibid.* What set Greek apart, for Blyden, was that it served as the perceived antecedent to all subsequent civilizations and was thus the epitome of culture.

¹³ This principle did not come without some apparent anguish. “As a race we have been quite unfortunate,” grimaced Blyden. “We have no pleasing antecedents—nothing in the past to inspire us. All behind us is dark and gloomy and repulsive. All our agreeable associations are connected with the future.” *Ibid.* He would revise this assessment in coming years.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

service that Harvard had done for the United States, namely, supply the commonwealth with competently trained public servants. Study of law was vital to accomplishing these goals, he argued, because it was “essential to a systematic organization of civil society” and “no less necessary to the protection of life, liberty, and property.” Therefore, he encouraged future graduates to serve the country by aspiring to “the highest and most important offices” in the land. More than either Blyden or Crummell, Roberts stressed that the school was “a national institution, designed for the benefit of the *whole* people of this Republic . . . and not for the purpose of inculcating any particular system of theological opinions.” While acknowledging religion’s value, the president steered a decidedly secular course.¹⁵

Roberts’s secular vision clashed with Crummell’s educational philosophy, though the difference was not obvious at the time because Crummell did not speak at the inauguration. For the past decade he had maneuvered himself to found and head his own institution of higher learning, working under the auspices of the Episcopal Church.¹⁶ When that endeavor fell through, he accepted the offer to teach at Liberia College. What he had not abandoned, however, was the notion that religion and education went hand in hand. Eight months earlier he had announced “*the best and most abiding interests of man, those which pertain to civilization*” to be “*schools and religion.*”¹⁷ As such, the state had a moral obligation to cultivate religion and promote education. For Crummell, Liberia College became the ideal location at which to “Cultivate men!” It is significant the order in which he prescribed pupils reach maturity: “Men

¹⁵ Joseph Jenkins Roberts, “Inaugural Address by President Roberts,” *African Repository* 38, no. 11 (November 1862): 323, emphasis added.

¹⁶ See John Payne, “Views of the Bishop in Reference to the Progress of the Work at Monrovia,” in the Nineteenth Annual Report of the Foreign Committee, *Spirit of Missions* 19 (November/December 1854): 453.

¹⁷ Alex Crummell, “The Progress and Prospects of the Republic of Liberia,” speech delivered at the annual meeting of the New York State Colonization Society, New York, 9 May 1861, in Alex Crummell, *The Future of Africa: Being Addresses, Sermons, Etc., Etc., Delivered in the Republic of Liberia* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1862), 138, original emphasis retained.

look here to the preacher, the missionary, the school teacher, to cultivate and train up the future manhood of the country.” Crummell did not regard these vocations as necessarily separate, though, for people were to draw from a common source—“from the teacher and the clergyman”—their culture, manners, refinement, enlightenment, “high morals and pure speech.” If anything, Crummell preferred that professors come from the pastoral ranks, because education was to improve students’ moral powers in addition to their mental faculties. Additionally, Crummell espoused manual labor for all students lest they become popinjays and ladies-maids.¹⁸

Thus one can see that Liberia College became an amalgamative site for numerous goals—instilling self-esteem and group pride, building national identity, teaching social and gender roles, nurturing moral and intellectual traditions, and inculcating manual labor skills—which, while often complementary, could be contradictory in time. Blyden’s tumultuous career reflects the twists and entanglements educators faced in constructing an expansive education that was to serve the entire nation.

Edward Blyden’s Background

Edward Wilmot Blyden stood out from fellow emigrationists by virtue of his birthplace in the West Indies. A precocious student, he came to excel in speech and language, prompting his white pastor to send the adolescent to the United States for theological training. But rejection by Rutgers and two other seminaries dashed those hopes, whereupon his stymied sponsors decided to ship Blyden to Liberia for an unfettered education. In 1851 he enrolled in a Presbyterian school in Monrovia, where he learned Hebrew, theology, and classical literature.

¹⁸ See Alex Crummell, “The Duty of a Rising Christian State to Contribute to the World’s Well-being and Civilization, and the Means by which it may perform the same” oration delivered before the Common Council and Citizens of Monrovia, Liberia, 26 July 1855, on the occasion of Liberia’s Day of National Independence, in Alex Crummell, *The Future of Africa: Being Addresses, Sermons, Etc., Etc., Delivered in the Republic of Liberia* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1862), 66, 74, 77, 79.

His ascent proved rapid, as Roberts appointed him editor of the *Liberia Herald*, the Presbyterian Church ordained him into the ministry, and his high school alma mater pegged him to assume its principalship. Blyden's star continued to sparkle. After three years as principal of Alexander High School, he spent a half year touring Britain and the United States, promoting the cause of Liberian education. In 1862 he returned to Liberia in triumph, accepting a professorship of classics at Liberia College, which was about to open its doors. Two years later he assumed the concurrent position of Secretary of State. He was just thirty-two years old.

His dual diplomatic career convinced Blyden of the importance of learning Arabic. Already fluent in five other languages—English, Spanish, Latin, Greek, and Hebrew—he added the study of Arabic to the college curriculum in 1867, believing it held the key to unlocking the Muslim interior for Liberian merchants. It also marked an implicit challenge against a “mulatto” faction with whom Blyden and Crummell bickered. Americo-Liberian mulattoes constituted the ruling elite and demarcated Monrovia as the political, cultural, and educational center of the nation. When Blyden advocated situating the college within the interior in the late 1850s, it had raised hackles among Americo-Liberians. His introduction of Arabic a decade later fueled suspicions that he was utilizing it as a stepping stone in moving the college out of Monrovia and into the interior.

Tensions boiled over during the next four years. Mulatto-backed Roberts quarreled with Blyden over his assuming the Secretary of State post against Roberts's wishes. Although Blyden had accepted the cabinet position in 1862, Roberts had forced him to resign on pains of losing his professorate. When Blyden reaccepted the same cabinet position in 1864, Roberts viewed him as

insubordinate.¹⁹ Blyden probably felt safe in flouting his president's wishes because he drew his salary from neither Roberts nor his colonizationist friends in Boston but from the New York State Colonization Society. Unless found derelict of his teaching responsibilities, Blyden felt confident that he could maintain his professorship and whatever other job he pleased. Crummell, who sided with Blyden, had no such luck. Americo-Liberians succeeded in getting Crummell fired from his professorate at the college. Unable to terminate Blyden due to backing from the New York branch, they spread allegations of extramarital dalliances. In 1871 his enemies fomented a lynch mob against him on the thinly-guised pretext that he had slept with the Liberian president's wife. Blyden barely escaped with his life after the mob had strung him up and dragged him down the streets of Monrovia. The shaken professor retreated to Sierra Leone, where he waited for the furor to subside.

Personal failure preceded professional opportunity. In time, leading Americo-Liberians came to regret their mistreatment of the eminently qualified scholar. In 1880 the college trustees offered Blyden the dream job he had sought a decade earlier, the presidency of Liberia College. The reversal was as ironic as it was unexpected. Blyden had the chance to re-form the school in his own image. Through the crucible of the 1870s he had forged an educational philosophy he felt could guide the nation's direction for years to come. The real test was whether he could realize his ambitious agenda for the college and the country.

Blyden's Revised Educational Philosophy

Blyden's ascendance to the presidency of Liberia College in 1881 gave him a platform to outline his educational views and priorities. In his presidential address entitled "The Aims and

¹⁹ See J. J. Roberts to Joseph Tracy, 17 August 1865, Monrovia, Liberia, in Box 2, "July-Dec. 1865" folder, Trustees of Donations for Education in Liberia Records, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Massachusetts.

Methods of a Liberal Education for Africans,” he explained his educational philosophy in detail. Intellectual goals were to be only a small part of Liberia College’s mission. The college should advance society, religion, patriotism, and racial development, too. He described the collegiate task as *generative*, or creating the proper intellectual and moral climate from which material prosperity would later emerge. To that end, simply imparting knowledge would not suffice. Borrowing from Crummell, Blyden insisted that Liberian education center on character formation. As the freshly minted president announced,

The object of all education is to secure growth and efficiency, to make a man all that his natural gifts will allow him to become; to produce self-respect, a proper appreciation of our own powers and of the powers of other people; to beget a fitness for one’s sphere of life and action, and an ability to discharge the duties it imposes.²⁰

By *efficiency*, he meant the ability to maximize potential, apply learning to one’s surroundings, and benefit the race as a whole. Nothing disturbed Blyden more than Negro inefficiency, the inability to experience the highest personal and collective growth because of character flaws or social impediments. Inefficiency was symptomatic of a more fundamental problem for Blyden, namely the white-imposed standards for physical and intellectual excellence. He saw them as a relatively new invention that arose during the Sixth Epoch of history (from the French Revolution onward).²¹ While sparking a literary and intellectual renaissance, the epoch spawned theories that degraded and proscribed blacks, spewing “race-poison” that infected Negroes in the Western world.

Blyden viewed Liberia College as an antidote that could help inject race pride. His proposed solution to combating the Sixth Epoch was to return to the Second and Third Epochs,

²⁰ Edward Wilmot Blyden, “The Aims and Methods of a Liberal Education for Africans,” in Edward W. Blyden, *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race* (1888), 2d ed., reprint, Baltimore, MD: Black Classic Press, 1994), 85.

²¹ Blyden divided history into six epochs: the theocratic state, Greek Age, Roman civilization, Medieval Age, Modern Age, and age of science and industry.

the time of the Greeks and the Romans. Blyden still touted mathematics and the classics—that is, Greek, Latin, and their respective literature—because they helped instill mental discipline without effacing Negro individuality. What attracted him to these studies was the universal culture he perceived they carried. The principles found in Greek philosophy and Roman law, in his estimate, would inculcate care, judgment, and industry—traits he believed would bolster manhood, citizenship, and critical scientific inquiry. This is, after all, what he experienced in his own educational experiences.

But more than Crummell, Blyden qualified the value of studying the classics. While affirming one “true culture,” Blyden also acknowledged many particular contexts.²² Thus the Negro could utilize the same means of general culture, arithmetic and classical studies; but he could not imitate the Anglo-Saxon slavishly in music, history, or literature.²³ The taint of Negrophobia in these subjects led Blyden to dismiss the primacy of their study. He placed utmost confidence in the study of early epochs, which would offer correct instruction when translated to the present.

Of course, Liberians had to know local context before applying universal principles. Blyden spoke of maintaining balance, a racial equilibrium that held universal culture and African nationality in unison. The first component came from the classics; the second from the natives. Geography played a vital function, because only on African soil could the Negro find his natural

²² Blyden, “The Aims and Methods of a Liberal Education for Africans,” in *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race*, 96.

²³ Repetitive imitation was a cardinal sin for Blyden because it corrupted natives’ natural feelings and conditioned them to accept what they at first found repulsive. He made an exception for the Christian religion because of its alleged universal adaptability. See subsequent chapter for more on Christianity and the missionary impulse.

“groove.”²⁴ For Blyden the Liberian interior was superior to the coast, which white Europeans and Americans had infiltrated through their commercial, religious, and diplomatic endeavors. “Intimate intercourse with our interior brethren” would counteract the pernicious influence of foreigners.²⁵ Their alien ideas and manners, he argued, truncated Liberia’s moral, intellectual, and sociopolitical growth. As discussed in a previous chapter, Blyden put his faith in native or racial instincts, the local tastes and mental faculties that developed while living in one’s natural environment where original action and self-trust could flourish.²⁶

Blyden used classical study and its epochal universals for the outward purposes of strengthening nationality and participating in the global economy; he used native study for the inward purposes of creating a self-affirming identity and propagating a Pan-Africanism of sorts.²⁷ In each case, Blyden was taking a similarly primitivist approach. Whether returning to an earlier epoch or to an unspoiled fatherland, the Americo-Liberian had to consult the past, or more precisely, Blyden’s version of it.

Blyden’s Contentious Presidency

Blyden stirred enthusiasm for Liberia College from the start, particularly in America. Early in his tenure, he canvassed from New York to New Orleans, pitching Liberia College as a vital tool in training black Americans because “[t]here are elements in the education he will receive there [Liberia] which he can never get in this country [United States] and which are an

²⁴ Blyden, “The Aims and Methods of a Liberal Education for Africans,” in *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race*, 87.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 105.

²⁶ At this stage, Blyden’s racialism still advocated “going native,” rather than denigrating Americo-Liberians as a lost cause.

²⁷ Or as Blyden put it, “to preserve an accurate balance between the studies which carry the mind out of itself, and those which recall it home again.”

essential part of the qualifications for useful work in his fatherland.”²⁸ His appeals fell on receptive ears, as he collected \$4,000 during his stateside tour.²⁹ At least a quarter of the sum he hoped to use in building faculty housing to induce African American educators to Liberia.³⁰

While fundraising for the college, he was also recruiting prospective professors. To the religiously inclined, he marketed the school as a seminary for aspiring African American ministers to be trained in Presbyterian missions work.³¹ In early 1883 he submitted a list of twenty-one American college students who wished to complete their studies at Liberia College. Eleven were from Hampton Institute; eight from the Baptist Seminary in Atlanta; two from

²⁸ Edward W. Blyden to G. W. Samson, New York City, New York, 1 September 1882, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), “Correspondence 1882-1885” folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

²⁹ Blyden fancied himself an evangelist of sorts, boasting, “I have since my return to the city [of Washington, DC] been preaching and lecturing here to crowded houses of colored people—the most intelligent classes—and a wide spread interest has been awakened in Liberia. Mr. Frederick Douglass has expressed his interest in Liberia by having me as his guest for several days at his residence two miles out of the city.” Edward W. Blyden to I. D. Wells, Acting President of the Board of Control of the New York Colonization Society, Washington, DC, 5 February 1883, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), “Correspondence 1883” folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

³⁰ See Edward W. Blyden to I. D. Wells, Acting President of the Board of Control of the New York Colonization Society, Washington, DC, 5 February 1883, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), “Correspondence 1883” folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

³¹ Edward W. Blyden to Isaac Smith, New York State Colonization Society treasurer, Monrovia, Liberia, 10 February 1882, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), “Correspondence 1882-1883” folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York. One wonders whether Blyden’s 1873 appeal to the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions for a theological college was more pragmatic than ideological, after his repeated petitions to government officials for a school in the interior fell on deaf ears. As possible support, see Edward W. Blyden to Governor Carter, Department of Native Affairs, Lagos, Sierra Leone, 21 May 1896, reprinted in Hollis R. Lynch, ed., *Black Spokesman: Selected Published Writings of Edward Wilmot Blyden* (New York: Frank Cass & Co., 1971), 259. By the 1890s a mature Blyden frowned upon “denominational or dogmatic teaching” on the grounds that it promoted division. He still considered religion essential to “manly education,” but he defined religion ecumenically. Following Matthew 22 (and Mark 12), Blyden reduced religion to love for God and love for man.

Biddle University in Charlotte, North Carolina; and an unspecified number from Atlanta and Clark Universities.³²

Blyden's offer attracted interest partially because of the prospect of the New York State Colonization Society covering some or all of the students' tuition. At the close of 1882, he reported "[t]here will be about 16 who will be ready to go to Liberia next Spring, expecting the N. Y. S. Col. Society to provide for their support in Liberia College until they get through their studies."³³ But Blyden was adamant that beneficiaries only receive money upon their arrival in Liberia, presumably so that their presence would confirm their stated commitment to emigration.³⁴

Blyden had another reason for educating African Americans in Liberia: once over there they would find it logistically difficult to return. They would essentially be sequestered for service. He complained that once the Liberia-minded student in the U.S.

has developed talent[,] he is plied by politicians and others with arguments and inducements for remaining in this country. In this way Africa has lost a good many who in the freshness of their instincts had felt drawn to labor in the land of their fathers. We consider, therefore, that education for Africa in Africa is the surest way of getting the laborers needed in that field.³⁵

³² See Edward W. Blyden to G. W. Samson, Washington, DC, 24 January 1883, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), "Correspondence 1883" folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

³³ Edward W. Blyden to G. W. Samson, Wilmington, North Carolina, 9 December 1882, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), "Correspondence 1884-1893" folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

³⁴ See Edward W. Blyden to G. W. Samson, New York City, New York, 13 April 1883, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), "Correspondence 1883" folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

³⁵ Edward W. Blyden to G. W. Samson, New York City, New York, 1 September 1882, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), "Correspondence 1882-1885" folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

In 1882 Blyden unveiled his new recruiting strategy: “I have advised all who are studying with Africa in view to go out *at once* and enter Liberia College. They have all agreed to do so”³⁶

Although denying that Liberia College was “a rival interest” to black colleges in America,³⁷ he proceeded to compete for its students and graduates.³⁸ On one hand, he regarded African American colleges to be backward-looking because they had to teach pupils the art of forgetfulness, to erase memories of their racial oblivion. On the other hand, he esteemed Liberia College as forward-thinking because it could focus exclusively on avoiding the “sinister elements in that training.”³⁹ In short, he thought that Liberia College students could discard the cultural baggage that burdened African American students.

Back in Liberia, Blyden’s presidency was getting mixed reviews. Part of the criticism revolved around his extended leaves of absence.⁴⁰ With his trips abroad, he was soliciting funds,

³⁶ Edward W. Blyden to G. W. Samson, Wilmington, North Carolina, 9 December 1882, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), “Correspondence 1884-1893” folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York, emphasis added.

³⁷ Edward W. Blyden to G. W. Samson, New York City, New York, 28 September 1882, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), “Correspondence 1882-1883” folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

³⁸ Likewise, some African American educators viewed Blyden’s recruiting as unwanted competition. Upon news of Liberia College’s personnel problems, J. G. Craighead, theology dean at Howard University, saw a chance to exploit the situation. In a letter to the New York State Colonization Society, he asked, “Have they [Liberia College] been more productive or useful than formerly, when expressed *here*?” By bemoaning the college as “a very large and mostly a useless expenditure of money—and resistance where common sense & piety are in great demand to shape educational work,” Craighead implied that his university was the opposite. J. G. Craighead to G. W. Sampson [sic], Washington, DC, 5 June 1885, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), “Correspondence 1885” folder (6/11), in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York, original emphasis retained.

³⁹ Blyden, “The Aims and Methods of a Liberal Education for Africans,” in *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race*, 92.

⁴⁰ Blyden may not have been absent as much as his critics complained, or he made a concerted effort to raise his visibility in an effort to appease them. In the midst of his failed national presidential campaign, he appeared five times during a six-week span to preside over invocation and listen to student recitations. See M. H. Freeman to G. W. Samson, Monrovia, Liberia, 11 March 1885, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), “Correspondence 1885” folder (6/12), in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

hires, and connections; but with his successes, he was failing to manage the day-to-day operations of the college.⁴¹ As one disgruntled professor griped,

The College at present is doing you may say, nothing. Dr. Blyden heard live recitations just before the winter examination. He left here after the Trustee meeting in Jan. and staid [sic] away three months. He has now packed his books and says he is going to England the middle of this month! He had not done any work in two years in the College—in fact the College to him was simply his bread and meat and its library most of whose good books he has (according to Prof Freeman’s statement) [in] his study.⁴²

Blyden’s perceived neglect was not the only thing grating some colleagues, who complained about his disingenuousness:

Dr. Blyden left here again yesterday for Sierra Leone. He has not taught one class since his return—told the American students when they urged him to begin a class in Arabic, that they would take consumption if they studied Arabic now. When in America, he told them to come at once to the College & begin Arabic without which no one could do good service in Africa—oh! consistency thou art not found in Blyden.⁴³

He further rankled some professors when he lashed out against their “insubordination, inactivity,

⁴¹ Blyden seems to have been a better motivational speaker than college administrator. In one egregious example, he failed to add two students to the scholarship list, resulting in their funds being held up for seventeen long months. H. M. Schieffelin to G. W. Samson, New York City, New York, 11 March 1885, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), “Correspondence 1885” folder (6/11), in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York; see also M. H. Freeman postscript to G. W. Samson, Monrovia, Liberia, 16 October 1884, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 19(32), “Liberian Education—Correspondence 1884” folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

⁴² Hugh M. Browne to G. W. Samson, Monrovia, Liberia, 3 June 1884, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), “Correspondence 1884-1893” folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York. Blyden was not the only one who perhaps abused his position. Four years later a book publisher voiced similar suspicions to the colonization society: “I have had the case of books marked Liberia College as you suggest. I imagine, however, that a good many of the books, have been selected specially for Mr. King’s own library. He selected the books himself and I imagine had that in view rather than the College.” George A. Plimpton to C. T. Geyer, New York City, New York, 31 July 1888, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), “Correspondence 1887” folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

⁴³ Hugh M. Browne to G. W. Samson, Monrovia, Liberia, 9 June 1884, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), “Correspondence 1884-1893” folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

and hostility”⁴⁴—a charge his opponents dismissed as little more than the proverbial kettle calling the pot black.⁴⁵

Anger no doubt stemmed from the perpetually decrepit conditions of the college. The facilities were abysmal. Neglect, termites, and humidity had combined to make the building virtually unlivable.⁴⁶ As one professor reported, the facilities suffered from leaky roofs, caved ceilings, falling plaster, broken windows, and rotted floors and rooms. He predicted that “the College building, which unless known and promptly met[,] will seriously obstruct, if not wholly prevent educational work at Monrovia.”⁴⁷ During Blyden’s stint as president, the U.S. minister to Liberia, Henry Highland Garnet, had scarcely stepped on campus before dubbing it “a grave.”⁴⁸ Disrepair was also harming students, prompting one professor to bemoan, “It is impossible to keep the students who come healthy and strong from the ~~country~~ rural districts from being injuriously affected both in health and morals by the influences here.”⁴⁹

⁴⁴ See Thomas McCants Stewart to the Board of Control of the N.Y.S.C. Society, New York City, New York, 5 June 1885, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), “Correspondence 1882-1885” folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

⁴⁵ See Hugh M. Browne to G. W. Samson, Monrovia, Liberia, 6 June 1884, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), “Correspondence 1884-1893” folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

⁴⁶ See M. H. Freeman to G. W. Samson, Monrovia, Liberia, 17 December 1885, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), “Correspondence 1885” folder (6/12), in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

⁴⁷ M. H. Freeman to G. W. Samson, Monrovia, Liberia, 11 March 1885, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), “Correspondence 1885” folder (6/12), in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

⁴⁸ Prof. M. H. Freeman’s treasurer report, “Statement as to the Funds of the New York State Colonization Society, Jan. 1, 1885,” in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), “Correspondence 1864-1886” folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

⁴⁹ Unsigned document [probably H. M. Schieffelin, whose handwriting is similar], n.d. [c. 1882-1885], in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), “Correspondence 1885” folder (6/12), in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York; cf. Prof. M. H. Freeman’s treasurer report, “Statement as to the Funds of the New York State Colonization Society, Jan. 1,

For all his talk of a sterling fatherland, Blyden harbored concern about the detrimental “distractions” found in Monrovia, which he feared would entice pupils from their studies. Six students, or an entire class, had already “fallen” by the wayside. He suspended a male sophomore for being “led astray” and having a “pernicious effect on the other students.”⁵⁰ Although reports

1885,” in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), “Correspondence 1864-1886” folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York, in which Freeman alters Schieffelin’s quote by underscoring the “*social* problem” posed by Liberia College and omits the names of the offending students. More than likely, Freeman was the one who crossed out their names in the original document sent by Schieffelin.

As an aside, only after Blyden’s departure did repairs occur. Following three years’ worth of correspondence between the college and the society, the college underwent substantive repairs in 1888, with “[e]very splinter of the wood-work [being] {instead of has been} taken out and replaced with yellow pine, the partitions excepted” and window panes replaced. Nearly ten years later, however, the college was again in a state of disrepair and shuttered: “The building is daily deteriorating, the work (however imperfect) that had been going on up to that time has been discontinued and nothing better has taken place.” The damage was extensive, for the secretary of state, determined to reopen the school, placed an order for 4,000 feet of pine flooring and 400 window panes to fix the college, which was shipped a month later. See C. T. O. King, minutes of the Executive Committee, Trustees of Liberia College, Monrovia, Liberia, 20 February 1888, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), “Correspondence 1888-1889” folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York; M. H. Freeman to Charles T. Geyer, Monrovia, Liberia, 20 February 1888, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), “Correspondence 1888-1889” folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York; R. A. Sherman, purchase order, Monrovia, Liberia, 27 April 1891, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), “Correspondence 1891” folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York; C. B. Keogh Manufacturing Co. bill, New York City, New York, 3 June 3, 1891, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), “Correspondence 1891” folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York; G. W. Gibson (Liberia secretary of state) to Charles T. Geyer, Monrovia, Liberia, 27 June 1897, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 7(32), “General Correspondence 1896-98” folder (7/4), in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York; G. W. Gibson to Charles T. Geyer, Monrovia, Liberia, 26 December 1899, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 7(32), “Correspondence 1899-1903” folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York; G. W. Gibson (Liberia secretary of state) to unknown recipient, Monrovia, Liberia, 17 June 1900, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 7(32), “Correspondence 1898-1900” folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York; British and African Steam Navigation Company shipping bill, 27 July 1900, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 7(32), “Correspondence 1899-1903” folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

⁵⁰ Unsigned document [probably H. M. Schieffelin, whose handwriting is similar], n.d. [c. 1882-1885], in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), “Correspondence 1885” folder (6/12), in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York. Worse, the student was the son of a professor at Liberia College. Much the same fate had befallen Alexander Crummell’s son in the late 1860s when he was “carried away by the next great curse of the land—drink! I was in hopes that he was thoroughly changed from all the evil habits into wh[ic]h, on his arrival from abroad, he had been led by the fashion of the country.” Alexander Crummell to Rev. L. D. Denison, Caldwell and Monrovia, Liberia, 19 May 1869, in RG 72: Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society/National Council—The Liberia Papers, Period B: 1868-1896, Box 21

leave the “crime” unspecified, it was most likely either intemperance or premarital intimacy, for which another student found himself expelled.⁵¹ All these transgressions left Blyden “very much discouraged” at the “disastrous influence of Monrovia upon so many bright intellects [sic].”⁵² He began to lobby again for removal of the college from Monrovia and to the interior, convinced that isolation would protect students from the moral decay of Liberia’s coast.⁵³

The official reason for relocating, however, was to procure more land for agricultural and industrial education. Blyden was savvy enough to realize that by linking relocation to the novel ideas propagated by Hampton Institute, he could win the backing of the New York State Colonization Society.⁵⁴ “This change of site will enable us to carry on such manual labor operations as will soon make the College to a great extent self supporting,” Blyden predicted, “as well as give the students an opportunity of receiving industrial and technical training.”⁵⁵

[35], Crummell, Rev. Alexander, 1868-1874, “Liberia Papers, Crummell, Rev. Alexander, 1869” folder, in the Archives of the Episcopal Church, Austin, Texas.

⁵¹ M. H. Freeman to G. W. Samson, Monrovia, Liberia, 10 September 1885, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), “Correspondence 1885” folder (6/12), in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York. The allegation against Saunders was that “he had fallen into some disrepute by reason of his rumored intimacy with a young girl of rather questionable character.” Having been morally compromised, he would gain readmittance only if he could persuade college officials that he had been “reformed.”

⁵² Unsigned document [probably H. M. Schieffelin, whose handwriting is similar], n.d. [c. 1882-1885], in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), “Correspondence 1885” folder (6/12), in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

⁵³ Blyden was following the same precedent he had established in the late 1870s when as principal of Alexander High School, he transferred its site from Monrovia to Harrisburg, a town in the interior. As early as 1857, he had observed, “Temptations to listless vagabondism, to nocturnal carousing and dissipation, you are aware, are numerous in this city. They have to a great extent interfered with the progress of our high schools.” Edward W. Blyden to D. A. Wilson, Monrovia, Liberia, 10 October 1857, in the African Missions Papers, Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions, microfilm, reel 5, no. 205.

⁵⁴ During the decade, the New York State Colonization Society introduced new letterhead embossed with the phrase “Liberian Education and Industries,” signaling the tilt toward industrial education.

⁵⁵ Edward W. Blyden to G. W. Samson in letter entitled “Expenses of Removal,” no place, 7 October 1882, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), “Correspondence 1882-1885” folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

Industrial Education in Retrospect

Before the weighty and testy debates of the 1890s, industrial education had a rich and lengthy history among African Americans. The term “industrial education” held different meanings for different people, which accounted partly for the ensuing squabble as African Americans contested the right of whites and fellow blacks to define the concept for their own ends. On a narrow level, industrial education meant procuring manual labor skills that would aid in gaining a trade or running a household. On a broader level, industrial education symbolized a host of commendable values, from thrift and diligence to self-help and fiscal independence.

In many trade schools within the U.S., “industrial education” for Negroes amounted to little more than domestic training, in which men studied how to make shoes and women learned to sew and perform chores. Despite the modest gains, proponents argued that they were molding moral, responsible citizens who could contribute an essential role in the Southern and national economies. Although some African Americans dismissed what they perceived to be the limited aims of industrial education, many more objected to the stated reasons and implicit assumptions of industrial educators.

Part of the disenchantment focused on people like Samuel Chapman Armstrong, the founder of Hampton Institute and a fatherly figure to Booker T. Washington. As one of the most prominent industrial schools, Hampton paralleled Tuskegee in reputation and funding, providing Washington a template for vocational training. Armstrong advised blacks to stay in the South, where they could, in time and without politics, accumulate sufficient land and morals to rise in society. Because of their alleged backward condition and inferior position, Armstrong urged blacks to remain content, work hard, and heed white guidance. His admonition found resonance, of course, among Southern whites determined to preserve the status quo and among Northern

capitalists desperate for cheap labor and a stable economy. For many African Americans, however, it was a different story, as they rejected Armstrong's paternalistic and racist notions.⁵⁶

Yet Hampton Institute stood hardly alone in advocating industrial training. The Philadelphia Institute for Colored Youth and Clark University followed suit in the late seventies and early eighties by adding industrial programs to their class offerings. Thus, when Tuskegee Institute formed in 1881, Washington's school introduced nothing new in the way of education. At the start of the 1880s, Tuskegee was merely one in an ever expanding galaxy of industrial schools, black and white. Along with Talladega College and Tougaloo College, a series of black industrial academies opened in the U.S. South, including the Beaufort Normal and Industrial Academy in South Carolina, Kittrell Normal and Industrial School in North Carolina, Haines Normal and Industrial Institute in Georgia, and the Washington School for Colored Youth in the District of Columbia.

The establishment of the private John F. Slater Fund in 1882 underwrote the rapid growth in industrial education. Many of the new schools ran comprehensive industrial programs in such fields as printing, masonry, carpentry, brickwork, blacksmithing, shoemaking, and agriculture. For women, schools offered courses in nursing and home economics. But the boom would not last. In the 1890s, the Slater Fund began to tighten disbursements because of a weak economy and a proliferation in state-funded industrial schools. By the turn of the century, half of Slater monies was earmarked for Hampton and Tuskegee. Scores of African American schools shuttered their doors, unable to cover tuition and operating expenses.

⁵⁶ For more on Armstrong and Hampton, see August Meier, *Negro Thought in America, 1880–1915* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1963), 85-99; James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 33-78; Adam Fairclough, *A Class of Their Own: Black Teachers in the Segregated South* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press/Harvard Press, 2007), 120-131.

Besides the often scant training and sometimes racist rationale, the results were, in hindsight, discouraging. Such occupations as brick masonry and blacksmithing were losing ground in the industrial age, which was also eroding the economic clout of farmers. Thus, many black schools were training their students for jobs in declining vocations or soon-to-be obsolete industries.⁵⁷ Meanwhile, urbanization and industrialization were in the process of radically reshaping the economic landscape, in which large business dominated.

But Liberia in the 1880s had different needs. In a country where trade dominated, industrial development of any kind was welcome. Its proposed placement was contentious, however, because the site for Liberia College constituted a struggle for the vision and direction of Liberia's future: toward the Euro-American West or toward the African interior.

Edward Blyden and Relocation: Part I

One after another, professors lined up to take sides on where Liberia College should reside. The matter was more than a pedantic issue for them, in light of Blyden's directive that they move their homes down St. Paul's River into the "rural district [where] we should have a much larger number [of native students]." ⁵⁸

Alfred King objected to such a transfer on the grounds that relocating the college would run counter to "where, it seems, God and the law had designed it to be." Practically, he wished that the controversy would reach finality, ruing, "Nearly thirty years have elapsed and thousands of dollars have been wasted, and yet the College is in a transition state—*no site has yet been determined on by all parties concerned*. Is there no definite purpose, or design, in all this?"

⁵⁷ John Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss, Jr., *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans*, 8th ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000), 306.

⁵⁸ See Edward W. Blyden to G. W. Samson, New York City, New York, 6 September 1882, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), "Correspondence 1882-1883" folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

Liberia College at its present spot, he argued, kept it centrally located for the towns and preserved the desires of founder J. B. Pinney.⁵⁹

Honoring a dead colonizationist's wishes was not one of Blyden's priorities, and he was not above asserting his authority to achieve his ends. When two recent faculty hires refused to move their residences, the Liberia College president recommended their termination to the Boston Board of Trustees on grounds that they were engaging in "insubordination, inactivity, and hostility to Liberian education." Professor Thomas McCants Stewart wrote an indignant letter to the board, accusing Blyden of being "the fly in the ointment" and "the manipulator of one of the most dastardly movements ever planned against College Professors." What is more revealing is Blyden's categorical condemnation of the offending professors. According to the accused,

The President of Liberia College publicly and shamefully attacked the new Professors by indirectly connecting them with his denunciation of all negroes born and educated abroad. He said that they were unfit for life in Liberia and as dangerous as they were unfit. Thus did Dr. Blyden on the 1st day of Jan'y. 1884 ~~gave the lie~~ opposed himself to the utterances of his whole life, for he had hitherto that the exiled Negro's return to Africa would result naturally from [an] abroads education and culture.⁶⁰

Stewart's charge overstated Blyden's position at that time, though not by much. Blyden was out to discredit his critics, especially Hugh Mason Browne and Thomas McCants Stewart, professors he had wooed to Liberia from the United States. Now that they opposed him, his appraisal was less flattering:

⁵⁹ Alfred B. King to G. W. Samson, Monrovia, Liberia, 12 November 1885, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), "Correspondence 1885" folder (6/12), in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York, original emphasis retained.

⁶⁰ Thomas McCants Stewart to the Board of Control of the N.Y.S.C. Society, New York City, New York, 5 June 1885, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), "Correspondence 1882-1885" folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

These men are looking back to America, and are turning into pillars of salt. They do not understand what they see. The American Negro of education with his foreign tastes and foreign blood is hardly yet prepared to enter at once into the peculiar work here with full sympathy and intelligence. White men show a far deeper insight into the necessities and methods of the work and a wider grasp of the whole subject. . . . Why is it so? Is it because these men feel an organic connection with a powerful race and are in constant intercourse with that race, gathering inspiration and stimulus? Partly this, but partly also, that all their antecedents are so different from those of the poor Negro.⁶¹

Blyden's racialism had resurfaced after taking a hiatus in his 1881 presidential address. The problem was no longer just Negroes' "foreign tastes" but now their "foreign blood."

Contradiction was evident in Blyden's shifting thought: if the Negro's foreignness was innate, how would a switch in environment assimilate him to native instincts? In 1883 the answer was unclear.

For Browne, the fundamental issue lay in who would wield control. "It is significant in this connection—every institution ever started by foreigners in Liberia has declined when they have ceased to control the same," he wrote. "The teachers also, for some time to come, must be foreigners, and these black or white—only that they believe in the *brotherhood* of man."⁶²

Browne favored foreigners because he saw them as higher up the civilization ladder than people just stepping out of "heathenism." Browne was closer to Crummell in this regard. What Blyden lauded as the natural grooves of natives, Browne lambasted as the ignorant ruts of heathens.⁶³

⁶¹ Edward W. Blyden to I. D. Wells, Acting President of the Board of Control of the New York Colonization Society, Monrovia, Liberia, 19 September 1883, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), "Correspondence 1882-1883" folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

⁶² Hugh M. Browne to "Gentlemen" [probably the New York State Colonization Society Board of Control], Spa, Belgium, 22 August 1884, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), "Correspondence 1884-1893" folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York, original emphasis retained.

⁶³ See Blyden, "The Aims and Methods of a Liberal Education for Africans," in *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race*, 87.

“*We must grow*,” he insisted, “and grow under the *dogmatic* direction of our husbandmen.”⁶⁴

Clearly, Browne lumped himself as one of the husbandmen. Not so with Blyden or the rest of the trustee board. Browne wanted to oust both parties, whom he compared to unlearned and illiterate “canalboatmen.” According to his recommendation, “We needs [sic] now in Liberia, an industrial school & common primary schools, a corps of well trained and experienced foreign teachers, and these to be under control of a foreign Board.”⁶⁵ Therefore, he urged the New York State Colonization Society to usurp the trustees’ authority for a fifty-year period in order to impose order.⁶⁶

Stewart was more circumspect than Browne but equally as passionate. He had entered into Liberian work with care and deliberation, mulling for months Blyden’s job offer. He had put on hold a promising legal career and stepped down from a prominent New York pastorate just to take this job in Liberia. What ultimately swayed his decision was nothing the country possessed at the moment but its possibilities for the future.⁶⁷ “While I was not moved by the *missionary* spirit in going to Liberia,” he confessed, “I am sure that I went because I felt that I could do more

⁶⁴ Browne to “Gentlemen,” Spa, Belgium, 22 August 1884, original emphasis retained.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ See Hugh M. Browne to “Gentlemen” [probably the New York State Colonization Society Board of Control], London, England, 22 September 1884, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), “Correspondence 1884-1893” folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York; this appeal is stronger than his June 3, 1884, recommendation that the control board “put the College entirely under your control for thirty years.” Hugh M. Brown to G. W. Samson, Monrovia, Liberia, 3 June 1884, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), “Correspondence 1884-1893” folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

⁶⁷ See “Reception of Professors Brown and Stewart,” unknown newspaper article, c. summer 1883, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), “General Correspondence 1883-1899” folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

good there than in the United States.”⁶⁸ His goodwill evaporated soon after he had landed in Monrovia.

Stewart’s opposition to Blyden arose from a sense of betrayal. After finding Stewart slow in relocating, Blyden scorched him to New York, all while remaining publicly cordial. The backstabbing dismayed Stewart, who poked, “My knowledge of the field was confined to representations; but things seen are different from things heard of.”⁶⁹ A dissembling Blyden was at the top of his list. Once stoked, Blyden’s disdain for Browne and Stewart did not waver. He censured the pair in unequivocal terms:

These Professors do not understand things here and they will not wait to see before proceeding with rash sayings and doings which excite the ill-will of the people. They have the inexperience and immaturity of youth and imperfect training. They have been accustomed only to obey *white* men, and Pharoah [sic] must speak before they will listen.⁷⁰

They were juvenile and slavish, and Blyden wanted them fired. Since he could not terminate them outright, he began to sow seeds of discord, hoping that public sentiment would turn against the pair. The imbroglia expanded as key political figures in the fledgling country took sides. As Stewart noted, “Even Gen’l Sherman of the gov’t was with us, for Dr. Blyden then antagonized

⁶⁸ T. McCants Stewart to the Board of Control of the N. Y. S. Colonization Society, n.p. [likely Monrovia, Liberia], 1 May 1885, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), “Correspondence 1885” folder (6/10), in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York, original emphasis retained.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Edward W. Blyden to I. D. Wells, Monrovia, Liberia, 24 October 1883, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), “General Correspondence 1883-1899” folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York, original emphasis retained.

him by attempting to array the mulattoes against the blacks, an old game of his.”⁷¹ For Americo-Liberians, Blyden’s racialism was wearing thin.

Blyden eventually got what he wanted when the two men returned to the U.S. disillusioned.⁷² But the fighting with colleagues over relocation, regrettably, had taken its toll. Blyden lost the power struggle in 1885 when the Trustees of the Donations for Education in Liberia voted on 19 March 1885 to fire him from the college presidency and on 29 October 1885 to strip him of his agent status.⁷³ An appeal on his behalf failed, too, when the Boston Board declined to rehire him.⁷⁴

⁷¹ Professor Stewart to the Board of Control of the N.Y.S.C. Society, New York City, New York, 5 June 1885, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), “Correspondence 1882-1885” folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

⁷² When given the chance to return to Liberia, Stewart declined, admitting, “I can not enter again upon that work and succeed. *I feel this*. But my service may be utilized in some way in connection with other work here in New York. *New men* would do more than I could in Liberia College *on the spot*—men who have aroused no antagonisms; and here at home other hands could gather more money than I.” Revealing is his choice of “at home” to describe the United States, not Liberia. His language is a far cry from his sentiment before arriving in Liberia, when “I felt that I could do more good there than in the United States.” T. McCants Stewart to G. W. Samson, New York City, New York, 14 November 1885, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), “Correspondence 1886-1887” folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York, original emphasis retained; T. McCants Stewart to the Board of Control of the N. Y. S. Colonization Society, n.p. [likely Monrovia, Liberia], 1 May 1885, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), “Correspondence 1885” folder (6/10), in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York, original emphasis retained.

⁷³ See J. C. Braman, minutes of an adjourned meeting of the Trustees of Donations for Education in Liberia, Boston, Massachusetts, 19 March 1885, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), “Correspondence 1885” folder (6/10), in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York; J. C. Braman, “Action of Boston Board October 29, 1885” transcript, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), “Correspondence 1885” folder (6/10), in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

⁷⁴ See copy of J. C. Braman to C. T. O. King letter, Boston, Massachusetts, 28 January 1886, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), “Correspondence 1886-1887” folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York. Fifteen years later, Liberia College trustees were willing to rehire Blyden, but the New York State Colonization Society, perhaps wary of past interactions with him, agreed only if Blyden were to assume a different professorship unpaid by the society. See copy of unsigned letter to C. T. O. King, New York City, New York, 4 December 1900, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 8(32), “General Correspondence Letter Books 1894-1908” folder, untitled bound letter book, p. 129, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York. Note that the reference to Blyden was mistyped as “Edward V. Bliden.”

Liberia College on the Brink

Disaster struck the same year when the New York State Colonization Society voted unanimously to cut off all funds to the school until the instability and location dispute had been resolved.⁷⁵ Liberians were left scrambling to raise the necessary funds on their own. But the economic downturn in the mid-1880s made it difficult. After seven months visiting American philanthropists, Antero Barboza, whose wife ran a girls' school,⁷⁶ reported he had only managed to scrape together a measly \$200 in donations, a mere tenth of the monies needed.⁷⁷ By 1888 college trustees capitulated, expressing their willingness to transfer the college to the interior, provided that the society would pay the hefty moving costs, of course. Bowing to the society's wishes for "mechanical industries," the trustees proposed opening a room or "cheaply constructed out building" so that "some skilful [sic] workman might be employed to teach the

A furious Blyden returned to Sierra Leone, vowing never to work again with Americo-Liberians. As his daughter related, "My father who is Dr. Blyden has got so very discouraged and lost all confidence in the Liberians that now he has nothing to do with the Liberians or anything pertaining to that Republic and has left that Country in disgust and has gone into the interior of Africa to teach the natives and and [sic] he gets no income or salary from anywhere" Elizabeth F. Binnarn to G. W. Samson, New York City, New York, 28 May 1887, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), "General Correspondence 1886-1887" folder (6/14), in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

⁷⁵ See typed minutes of the Executive Committee of the Board of Managers of the New York State Colonization Society and of the meeting of the Board of Managers of the New York State Colonization Society, 19 October 1886 and 16 November 1886, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), "General Correspondence 1886-1887" folder (6/14), in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

⁷⁶ Barboza's spouse was Mrs. M. H. Garnet Barboza, the daughter of Henry Highland Garnet, the first black U.S. minister to Liberia. After his death in 1882, Garnet Barboza named her girls' school Garnet Memorial School in honor of her father's memory. See "Appeal for Endowment Fund, Garnet Memorial School, Brewerville, Liberia," in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 12(32), "Appeal for Garnet Memorial School" folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

⁷⁷ Antero J. Barboza to New York State Colonization Society Board of Control, New York City, New York, 5 October 1886, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), "Correspondence 1886-1887" folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

boys the use of the simple tools.”⁷⁸ And in an effort to make the college self-sustaining, the trustees approved the planting of cash crops on property adjoining the college.⁷⁹

Suspension of the college, however, did create a silver lining, namely a groundswell of public support and a drive for state funding. As one executive committee member of the college enthused, “The people of Liberia are displaying a lively interest in the College and there is a widespread anxiety to see it resume operations at an early day.”⁸⁰ Moreover, the national legislature appropriated \$1,500 in scholarships for deserving students. Even so, the trustee warned the society to “open the College as soon as possible lest they [students] become discouraged and go home which would have a very bad effect on the public mind and would probably lead the Legislature to resend it said appropriation.”⁸¹ By 1891 the New York State Colonization Society was ready to give Liberia College another try.

Omar Cook and Relocation: Part II

The society hired Orator Cook in 1891 to spearhead industrial education at the college. A white agent for the New York State Colonizationist Society, the new departmental head was also an internationally renowned botanist whose enduring legacy lay in coining the term *speciation*. Unfortunately, Cook shared a similar flaw to Blyden in that he was rarely present, finding

⁷⁸ C. T. O. King, minutes of the Executive Committee, Trustees of Liberia College, Monrovia, Liberia, 20 February 1888, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), “Correspondence 1888-1889” folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

⁷⁹ Proposed crops included plantains, bananas, cassada [cassava], and coffee trees. See C. T. O. King, minutes of the Executive Committee, Trustees of Liberia College, Monrovia, Liberia, 20 February 1888, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), “Correspondence 1888-1889” folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

⁸⁰ C. T. O. King to C. T. Geyer, Monrovia, Liberia, 13 April 1891, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), “Correspondence 1891” folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

⁸¹ Ibid.

scientific investigation much more enjoyable than teaching.⁸² As one trustee complained, “O. F. Cook was appointed in the U.S.A. and sent out as Fulton Professor to teach the Natural Science and to be the Principal of the Industrial Annex[,] a new department desired by the N.Y.S.C.S. He has not yet entered upon his duties.”⁸³ Of course, Cook had his own take on the matter, advising, “Things are so far gone that attempting to teach would be foolish, to say the least. The trustees seem inclined to treat the whole matter as a private perquisite and this is especially the attitude of the President.”⁸⁴ Cook’s superciliousness may have derived from feeling slighted at the onset.

Relations were rocky. Cook’s arrival in Monrovia got off to an inauspicious start when no one from the college showed up to welcome him. The snub left trustee Charles King scrambling to soothe any hurt feelings. Professing ignorance of Cook’s departure date from America, King apologized for the “embarrassment” and assured King of faculty support because “we recognize the importance of combining Physical with intellectual training thus affording our

⁸² Cook’s first love was collecting specimens and taking extensive notes on his exploratory forays into the interior. Some of his samples wound up in the National Museum of the Smithsonian, as he was personal friends with Charles Walcott, an assistant secretary (i.e. curator) there. For example, see Charles Walcott to the New York State Colonization Society, Washington, DC, 1 December 1897, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 7(32), “General Correspondence 1896-1898” folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

⁸³ C. T. O. King to President J. J. Cheeseman, Monrovia, Liberia, 29 March 1892, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 8(32), “Correspondence 1892” folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

⁸⁴ Charles T. Geyer to J. C. Braman, n.p. [likely New York City, New York], 29 April 1895, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 8(32), “General Correspondence Letter Books 1894-1908” folder, untitled bound letter book, p. 34, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York. Cook engineered an attempted takeover of the college when he convinced the colonization society to vote for President Garretson Gibson’s firing and to appoint him in his stead. The vote carried teeth because the society also voted to abolish student scholarships and suspend all other aid until its conditions had been met. See Charles T. Geyer to J. C. Braman, New York City, New York, 7 October 1895, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 8(32), “General Correspondence Letter Books 1894-1908” folder, untitled bound letter book, p. 38, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

youth an opportunity to develop a useful manhood in his separate spheres of life.”⁸⁵ But privately, King and his colleagues were already souring on Cook. At an executive committee meeting three days later, the trustees of Liberia College complained that “professor Cook failed even to acknowledge a letter from our Executive Committee given assurances of a wish to cooperate with him in the establishment of the Industrial annex to the College”—a grievance they wanted conveyed to the unresponsive “Boards in the US (especially the Boston Board recognised by *our* charter).”⁸⁶ The trustees’ chagrin not only lay in Cook’s unaccountability—due in part to the recognition that his pay and mandate came from New York and Boston rather than Monrovia—but also stemmed from the U.S. boards’ failure to notify the trustees of their plans in advance. In the trustees’ eyes, U.S. colonizationists had foisted Cook upon them. So even as trustees iterated their dutiful support for industrial education, they chafed at the heavy handed manner in which it was being implemented.

In time, disaffection grew to be open and mutual. Appalled by the “maladroitness” around him, Cook threatened to resign his college post before a full school year had passed.⁸⁷ He had been slated to teach natural science and create the industrial department, but up to then his travels had prevented him from doing so. In the mid-nineties the New York State Colonization

⁸⁵ C. T. O. King to O. F. Cook, Monrovia, Liberia, 12 December 1891, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 8(32), “Correspondence 1892” folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

⁸⁶ Executive Committee of Trustees of Liberia College, “Extract from the Minutes,” n.p. [held at trustee R. A. Sherman’s residence, presumably in Monrovia, Liberia], 15 December 1891, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 8(32), “Correspondence 1892” folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York, emphasis added.

⁸⁷ O. F. Cook to Charles T. Geyer, Washington, DC, 26 April 1893, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), “Correspondence 1893” folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York; O. F. Cook to the Board of Managers of the New York State Colonization Society, Washington, DC, 26 April 1893, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), “Correspondence 1893” folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

Society spent \$7,000 to fund his expeditions into the interior. While costly, they generated widespread publicity for the society and tied colonization and emigration to the larger effort of commercial development exploration. Cook profited handsomely, too, drawing a salary and a \$250 bonus for a “satisfactory” report of his expedition.⁸⁸

His three-volume report ended up being more than suitable, as it stirred interest on a number of levels. It raised the profile of the colonization societies, which bankrolled his expedition and published his findings. It whetted Westerners’ hunger to know more about the “Dark Continent” and its “lost savages.” It advanced natural and social scientists’ research by chronicling different tribal customs and by describing the terrain, climate, and geography of the interior. And it aided prospective African American emigrants in deciding whether to take the calculated risk of relocating.

For the last audience, Cook’s agricultural experiment drew considerable interest.⁸⁹ On orders from the society, Cook had started a plantation at Mount Coffee, Liberia, designed to serve as “model farm, industrial school, and settlement.”⁹⁰ Like Hampton and Tuskegee, Liberia College aspired to build its own self-sufficient farm. The payoff was potentially huge. The hope

⁸⁸ See Charles T. Geyer to John D. Nells, n.p. [likely New York City, New York], 5 May 1898, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 8(32), “General Correspondence Letter Books 1894-1908” folder, untitled bound letter book, p. 73, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

⁸⁹ To illustrate: “I have read and reread with profound interest Pro. O. F. Cook’s Third Report of the Republic of Liberia[,] especially the account of his industrial [sic], practical, and experimental, farm located at Mt Coffee, Liberia, and the manner in which he recommends that this farm be operated. I know great many of my people who are quite anxious to immigrate to Liberia” J. F. Washington to New York State Colonization Society, Birmingham, Alabama, 1 July 1897, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 7(32), “General Correspondence 1896-98” folder (7/4), in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

⁹⁰ J. C. Wilson to Charles T. Geyer, Washington, DC, 19 January 1898, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), “Correspondence 1896-1897” folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York; O. F. Cook to Charles T. Geyer, Washington DC, 20 January 1898, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), “Correspondence 1896-1897” folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

was that one day the Mount Coffee plantation would underwrite the college, “effect a properly conducted colonization movement,” and “consummat[e]” and “bring these [stateside philanthropic] societies into complete harmony.”⁹¹ A vocal supporter of Hampton, Cook sought the endorsement of its president, Dr. Hollis Burke Frissell, who Cook claimed stood poised to “give us most valuable assistance in getting the best negro assistants and in reaching the public interested in this and kindred matters.”⁹² An industrial “school” acted, then, as a means to stimulate renewed interest in emigration.

For all its benefits, industrial education had its drawbacks—ones that circumscribed Liberian choices even as they expanded their options. Part of the disadvantage went beyond dollars and cents. While colonizationist-funded education engendered a natural sense of personal gratitude, it could devolve into an unhealthy dependence by emigrationists, whose personal loyalties to their white sponsors could cloud their judgment. When disagreements arose, Americo-Liberians were often reluctant to criticize their benefactors, many of whom they regarded as their mentors and even confessors. As Alfred King expressed, “I have the utmost respect for your Soc. I was educated by it. And in later years Dr. Pinney gave me great insight into the true aims of the institution in Liberia. I know I am in accord with them. Perhaps, I have not impressed you.”⁹³ The desire to please could lead to obsequious professions of loyalty and admiration. Even Blyden had appealed to the definitive authority of the society, explaining, “They [dissenting Negro professors] have been accustomed only to obey *white* men, and Pharoah

⁹¹ O. F. Cook to Charles T. Geyer, Washington DC, 20 January 1898, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), “Correspondence 1896-1897” folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ Alfred B. King to Charles T. Geyer, Clay-Ashland, St. Paul’s River, Liberia, 29 February 1888, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), “Correspondence 1888-1889” folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

[sic] must speak before they will listen. I hope that *Pharoah* [sic] will speak with no uncertain utterance. I hope that *you* will uphold the hands of the College authorities here in the great work before us.”⁹⁴ Blyden’s deference is understandable to a degree. By charter and precedent, Liberian administrators possessed limited control, which the U.S. societies could override by the mere threat of withholding funds. And yet, Blyden’s petition to the U.S. boards to resolve interpersonal conflicts did little to establish the “natural instincts” he so adamantly expounded. Bereft of real authority, he did what his predecessors and successors did: he looked to Boston and New York for his marching orders.

Negotiation and Resistance at Cape Mesurado

At the same time, beneath the obligatory oaths of loyalty, Liberian educators attempted to chip out their own autonomous niches. Distance proved both a curse and blessing in doing so.

On the downside, without a reliable transatlantic telegraph exchange in Liberia, lapses between correspondence and reply could be excruciatingly slow. Predictably, the Boston-based Trustees of Donations for Education in Liberia suffered from a dearth of information on Liberia College. The following excerpt exemplifies the tenuous communication between America and Africa:

Surprise is expressed that eighteen months should have elapsed since the passage of certain amendments to the act of incorporation of Liberia College, at the instance of the New York and Boston Boards, without anything having been done towards the repair of the College building, and asking for information upon that point: and as to the employment of a suitable corps of instructors and the putting of the Institution in working

⁹⁴ Edward W. Blyden to I. D. Wells, Monrovia, Liberia, 24 October 1883, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), “General Correspondence 1883-1899” folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York, original emphasis retained except for last italics.

order. This Board has not heard from President Cook since his last departure from this country.⁹⁵

Since sending an inquiry in February 1894 to the college president, the Boston board had not yet heard back from him by September, seven months having passed. His silence aroused enough suspicion to the extent that “it was stated to him that the Board would be very glad to learn from him what, in particular, induced his return to this country [United States] at this time and what he might be accomplishing in the interest of the College.”⁹⁶ The New York State Colonization Society fared little better. Its correspondence secretary wrote with some exasperation, “There has been no communication of interest from the Board of Managers at Monrovia. One has recently been received asking for appropriations for salaries for Professors and teachers, but no list of scholars, or statement of the work they were doing was made.”⁹⁷

Rivalries could exacerbate miscommunication. The U.S. societies and Liberia College trustees often jockeyed for control of the school, and relations could be frosty. The New York board protected its own information with territorial possessiveness, especially when it came to monies. For instance, in 1895 the society’s secretary and treasurer, Charles Geyer, typed a curt communiqué to the college trustees, remonstrating, “The Society resents the manner of the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees of Liberia College in seeking the information asked and declines to furnish it to them. The funds are held for the Board of Trustees of Liberia

⁹⁵ J. C. Braman to Charles Geyer, Boston, Massachusetts, 13 September 1897, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 7(32), “General Correspondence 1896-98” folder (7/3), in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

⁹⁶ J. C. Braman to Charles Geyer, Boston, Massachusetts, 22 September 1896, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 7(32), “General Correspondence 1896-98” folder (7/4), in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

⁹⁷ Charles T. Geyer to the Board of Managers of the New York State Colonization Society, New York City, New York, 3 May 1892, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 8(32), “Correspondence 1892” folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

College and this Society is in frequent communication with them and has furnished, within a recent period, full particulars of the trust funds held and the accrued income. This society prefers to conduct its business and correspondence direct [sic] with the parties interested and they may as well understand it now as at some future time.”⁹⁸ After a two-day cooling off period, Geyer eventually sent the requested information, but only as “a personal favor.”⁹⁹

Prolonged silence in America could lead to operational paralysis in Liberia, such as when one Liberia College trustee complained of being “in the dark” and without requisite advice or authorization to act.¹⁰⁰ The school’s board of trustees depended on its American sponsors for guidance, primarily because they controlled the purse strings for scholarships, branch sites, and a proposed relocation of the college. Correspondence on these matters would last months until the beginning of the next school year, when it would start all over again.

Domestic correspondence between the two U.S. boards also reveals a mixture of confusion and negotiation. In an 1892 letter to New York, the Boston Board president, J. S. Ropes, admitted to being “somewhat startled and much puzzled” by Liberia College’s trustees’ claim to have submitted annual reports the last two years.¹⁰¹ He wondered whether they regarded

⁹⁸ Charles T. Geyer to Charles Hall Adams, Liberian Consul General, New York City, New York, 23 April 1895, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 8(32), “General Correspondence Letter Books 1894-1908” folder, untitled bound letter book, p. 32, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

⁹⁹ Charles T. Geyer to Charles Hall Adams, Liberian Consul General, New York City, New York, 25 April 1895, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 8(32), “General Correspondence Letter Books 1894-1908” folder, untitled bound letter book, p. 32, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

¹⁰⁰ H. D. Brown to Charles T. Geyer, Monrovia, Liberia, 7 March 1888, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), “Correspondence 1888-1889” folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

¹⁰¹ J. S. Ropes to Charles T. Geyer, Boston, Massachusetts, 16 May 1892, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 8(32), “Correspondence 1892” folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

their last letter to Boston to constitute a report; he clearly did not consider a list of professor names and student numbers to be a full accounting.¹⁰²

On the upside, the slow correspondence cycle enabled Liberians the occasional freedom to force a society into making crunch-time decisions favorable to their liking. Presidential succession at the college in 1892 provided them one such opening. In the eyes of both Boston and New York, the trustees had exhibited chutzpah in naming their own college president. They had passed over New York and Boston's preferred candidate on the grounds that he had declined the office. Furthermore, they lobbied for their own choice, Garretson Gibson, who needed the U.S. boards' stamp of approval. More precisely, he needed the salary that only the Americans could authorize. Labeling Gibson a "tool," Ropes recommended \$500 be earmarked for Gibson's annual pay—a paltry figure considering that Blyden had received 2½ times this salary when serving as the college president a decade earlier and that Cook currently earned four times this amount as an appointed professor.¹⁰³ Because Gibson was not the top pick of the U.S. boards,

¹⁰² Names themselves could pose stumbling blocks, as in the following: "In fact, I do not know which Mr. King you wish us to confer with, whether Alfred B. King, who is the Principle [sic] of the Alexander High School, at Clay Ashland; or Charles T. O. King, who is the Secretary of the Executive Committee of the College." M. H. Freeman to G. W. Samson, Monrovia, Liberia, 22 October 1884, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 19(32), "Liberian Education—Correspondence 1884" folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

¹⁰³ J. S. Ropes to Charles T. Geyer, Boston, Massachusetts, 2 June, 1892, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 8(32), "Correspondence 1892" folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York; J. C. Braman to G. W. Samson, Boston, Massachusetts, 10 December 1883, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), "General Correspondence 1883-1899" folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York; Edward B. Merrill, George A. Plimpton, and John W. James of the New York State Colonization Society Executive Committee, "Report of the Auditing of the Treasurer's Accounts to May 1, 1896," New York City, New York, 25 May 1896, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 7(32), "General Correspondence 1896-98" folder (7/4), in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

Gibson found he had little initial support, financial or otherwise, in America.¹⁰⁴

Still, the trustees had outmaneuvered their American sponsors. An annoyed yet resigned Ropes was ready to acquiesce, especially since no other candidate appeared readily available in the necessary timeframe. He also detected a strategic benefit in affixing his imprimatur to the matter, namely the chance to accrue leverage. As he confided to New York, “I think we are much more likely to gain influence with the trustees in this way [approving Gibson’s appointment] than in any other which occurs to me.”¹⁰⁵ He wanted to delay a decision, though, until Cook had reported back to New York, when he hoped a clearer picture would emerge.¹⁰⁶

Ropes waited nearly four months before communicating with Gibson, penning a diplomatic yet subtle reminder of who was in charge. Ropes held out the possibility of granting aid “to the utmost of our power” should Gibson meet certain demands and criteria. He was to be “a thoroughly honest, disinterested, efficient, and fearless manager.” Above all, he had to be a reliable and continual source of information. Noting the “little correspondence between us” in years past—that is, the lack of proper communication from the college trustees—Ropes refused “wasting further amounts upon this [college] or any other object” until

¹⁰⁴ Ropes came to revise his opinion of Gibson shortly thereafter. The point remains, however, that upon learning of the change, Ropes was less than thrilled by the alternative to Mr. Davis, who he suspected had been “induced to decline the appointment” of college president. J. S. Ropes to Charles T. Geyer, Boston, Massachusetts, 2 June, 1892, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 8(32), “Correspondence 1892” folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ No wonder, then, that Cook shared a tense relationship with his Liberian colleagues. He represented a threat not just because of his independent agenda but also because he had the ear and trust of the U.S. boards. His pay would likely have been a source of envy and resentment too, considering that he eclipsed the trustees in compensation. Between his professorial salary and his expedition funding, he commanded over \$10,000 a year. See Edward B. Merrill, George A. Plimpton, and John W. James of the New York State Colonization Society Executive Committee, “Report of the Auditing of the Treasurer’s Accounts to May 1, 1896,” New York City, New York, 25 May 1896, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 7(32), “General Correspondence 1896-98” folder (7/4), in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

informed of the *actual* state of affairs, and to know definitely the plans and intentions of the Trustees and the method in which they propose to carry them out. If you can supply this *deficiency*, and give us a clear and definite plan of your future arrangements for carrying out the work of education in Liberia you will not only have our hearty support, but will do yourself and your colleagues much honor by this good work and, as I fully believe, awaken much interest and obtain much help from this country.¹⁰⁷

Finally, he pressed Gibson for “full information respecting the industrial department which it is so desirable to establish” because “the more fully you can give us the facts and your views the better will our Board be pleased.”¹⁰⁸ Of course, the implication was that Ropes was dissatisfied with the trustees and would continue to withhold “hearty support” until he had been appeased.

From the above statements, we can see that Ropes viewed the job in Monrovia to be that of managing and executing the policies established in Boston and New York. He wrote with the self-assurance of knowing that he held veto power over anyone the college wished to hire. Yet Ropes was also confronting the limits of his authority. The influence of the Boston-based Trustees of Donations for Education in Liberia—which had peaked in the late fifties and early sixties—had waned in direct proportion to their decreased levels of financial support to the college. By the 1890s the New York State Colonization Society had surpassed the Boston board in contribution levels. So while Ropes attempted to dictate terms to Gibson, he had to work behind the scenes to ensure that Boston and New York maintained a united front before Monrovia. For his part, Gibson had only to supply the requisite obeisance and wait until the calendar year forced Ropes’s hand. In this skirmish at least, Gibson and the college trustees had won a minor but important concession.

¹⁰⁷ J. S. Ropes to G. W. Gibson, Boston, Massachusetts, 25 July 1892, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 8(32), “Correspondence 1892” folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York, emphasis added.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

Curriculum counted as another area of success for Liberian educators, whose prescribed course of study generated little opposition from either Boston or New York. Collegians studied such traditional subjects as grammar, history, geography, algebra, arithmetic, natural science, and human anatomy and physiology. At least one female instructor ordered French and music textbooks, with the specific request that sheet music include secular in addition to sacred numbers. Maps, slates, pencils, crayons, blackboards, and an organ rounded out her wish list.¹⁰⁹ Because the above were intended for the female department of Liberia College, the omissions are noteworthy. Women collegians did not follow a classical track of study, which included learning ancient languages like Greek and Latin—foundational courses for the ministry. In contrast, Crummell had previously outlined an ideal ministerial track that included Greek, rhetoric, and philosophy for clergy candidates.¹¹⁰ Neither did women train in law, business, or Arabic—fields that lent themselves to trade, governance, and diplomacy. Remarkable was the breadth of study, however. Provided they could gain admittance, secure funding, and procure the requisite textbooks—a luxury afforded to no more than two dozen—women in Liberia had access to a broad, liberal arts education that would have been universally envied. At the same time, the depth did not rival that of the men’s course of study. Male students took more algebra and science courses that included botany, chemistry, and astronomy. Their training extended to

¹⁰⁹ Susan A. King to C. T. Geyer, Monrovia, Liberia, 9 September 1897, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 7(32), “General Correspondence 1896-1898” folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York. While Liberia College admitted women students, they attended classes segregated by gender. No record shows that female instructors taught male students, nor of male professors lecturing to female collegians.

¹¹⁰ Alexander Crummell, No. 2, Annual Expenses (Students), 20 January 1868, in Archives of the Episcopal Church, RG 72: Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society/National Council—The Liberia Papers, Box 21 [35], Crummell, Rev. Alexander, 1868-1874, Period B: 1868-1896, Folder: Liberia Papers, Crummell, Rev. Alexander, 1868.

learning ethics (i.e. moral philosophy) and current events—necessary elements in becoming paragons of faith and commerce.

In early 1900 Garretson Gibson was the acting college president, before assuming the national presidency later that same year.¹¹¹ His annual textbook order in 1900 is an ideal starting point for analysis because the order originated from the State Department, thereby allowing for the necessary funds to purchase a comprehensive booklist.¹¹² It reveals an interesting breakdown:

Category	No. of Books	Percent
Geography	36	5.5%
History	36	5.5%
Mathematics	96	14.8%
Music	24	3.7%
Periodicals	4	.6%
Political Science	24	3.7%
Science	156	24.0%
Theology and Moral Philosophy	108	16.6%
English books	60	9.2%
French books	14	2.2%
Greek books	62	9.5%
Latin books	28	4.3%

¹¹¹ Unlike Blyden, Gibson preferred “a corps of white Professors” teach at Liberia College, though he deemed their likely presence “*very improbable*” because climate and “the laws of nature” conspired against their ever coming. Another Liberia College professor, George Brownell, shared Gibson’s conclusion. After arriving in Monrovia in 1892, he had suffered such an acute bout of African fever that he had convalesced on the Grand Canary Islands. According to Brownell’s father, “He helped place in a coffin one white man who landed in Monrovia one day before him and also another white man who arrived two weeks before him died while my son was sick. He says it is a perfect ‘death hole’ there for white men. A few can live there but the majority die.” G. W. Gibson to Charles Geyer, Monrovia, Liberia, 13 July 1897, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 7(32), “General Correspondence 1896-1898” folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York, original emphasis retained; W. A. Brownell to Charles T. Geyer, Syracuse, New York, 4 February 1892, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 8(32), “Correspondence 1892” folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

Later in 1900, Gibson went on to become Liberia’s fourteenth president. Significantly, the government expanded its financing of Liberia College during his four years in office (1900-1904). See C. T. O. King to J. C. Braman, Monrovia, Liberia, 24 February 1900, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 7(32), “Correspondence 1899-1903” folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

¹¹² G. W. Gibson to Charles T. Geyer, Liberia College order for books, Monrovia, Liberia, 22 March 1900, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 7(32), “Correspondence 1899-1905” folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

Spanish books	2	.3%
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Table 3. Statistical breakdown of textbook order in 1900.

From the book list, one can find an intriguing mix of classical education and a modern liberal arts education at work in Liberia College’s curriculum, which achieves an approximate balance between the sciences and the humanities. Roughly, 45 percent of the books fall into math and the sciences; 25 percent cover the languages; 15 percent treat theology and philosophy; 10 percent deal with the historical; and 5 percent address the arts.¹¹³ Furthermore, omissions are noticeable in law, logic, rhetoric, medicine, literature, and “industrial” education.¹¹⁴ With Blyden no longer in the picture, Arabic language textbooks were absent from the curriculum order. Mechanical studies had its own challenges. Throughout the nineties, educators on both sides of the Atlantic had touted the virtues of industrial education, even taking the initial steps to create an industrial department at the school. Cook had intended Mount Coffee to be the centerpiece for this venture, but the farm had languished to such a degree that he eventually recommended the New York

¹¹³ I am grouping the categories loosely here. Math and the sciences also include physical geography textbooks. Theology counts Bibles as part of its purview (à la Blyden). The historical encompasses history textbooks as well as political science (i.e. maps). The arts tally music books and periodicals, which include *Literary Digest*. The periodicals could easily have fit in the history/political science category though, because the other publications consist of *Public Opinion* and *New York Evening Post*. Together, the textbooks (e.g. Barner’s U.S. History), references (e.g. Webster’s Dictionary) and periodicals (e.g. *American Review of Reviews*) take a decidedly American slant. See also Charles T. Geyer to Ginn & Co., New York City, New York, 27 June 1899, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 8(32), “Correspondence 1892” folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York; Charles T. Geyer to Ginn & Co., New York City, New York, 2 May 1900, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 8(32), “Correspondence 1892” folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

¹¹⁴ At this time, Liberians still outsourced medical education to Britain and America, despite Cornelius McKane’s prior offer to create a medical department at the college. See Cornelius McKane to A. B. Merrill, Savannah, Georgia, 29 February 1896, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 7(32), “General Correspondence 1896-1898” folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

State Colonization Society seize control from the college.¹¹⁵ The absence of textbooks does not signal that Liberian educators had devalued industrial education, but the lack of industrial equipment purchases does hint that administrators had diminished its primacy by 1900. No doubt expenses played a role, as startup costs for a coffee plantation required a long-term financial commitment of at least seven years.

The Problem of Americo Aspirations

Blyden came to prioritize native education in part due to the outsized ambitions of Americo-Liberian students. While the goal was noble—students bidding to craft their own educational opportunities abroad—Blyden feared professional opportunities would seduce students to abandon Liberia in favor of more lucrative, comfortable vocations in England or America. The New York State Colonization Society offered a limited number scholarships to worthy candidates. The requirements were stringent: “a young man of sound health, of good scholarship and of consistent piety” who maintained good grades, church membership, and an *unswerving commitment to labor in Africa*.¹¹⁶ Reviewers considered his parentage, academic and pastoral references, and most importantly, the likelihood that he would keep his word and return

¹¹⁵ See Charles T. Geyer to John D. Wells, n.p. [probably New York City, New York], 14 October 1898, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 8(32), “General Correspondence Letter Books 1894-1908” folder, untitled bound letter book, p. 76, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York. The society sent an agent, one George P. Goll, to do so in late 1898. A scant six months later, he was clamoring to return stateside in order to marry, a move the society discouraged by threatening to terminate his salary. See Charles T. Geyer to W. D. Coleman, n.p. [probably New York City, New York], 11 November 1898, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 8(32), “General Correspondence Letter Books 1894-1908” folder, untitled bound letter book, p. 81, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York; Charles T. Geyer to G. P. Goll, New York City, New York, 8 May 1899, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 8(32), “General Correspondence Letter Books 1894-1908” folder, untitled bound letter book, pp. 92-93, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

¹¹⁶ “Application of Beneficiaries for Aid from the Scholarship Funds of the N.Y. State Colonization Society,” in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 8(32), “Correspondence 1892” folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York, emphasis added.

to Africa upon finishing his matriculation. Although unstated, the understanding was that the scholarship recipient would remain single, because sending a family to Liberia raised the costs exponentially as well as the chance of the family's returning to America because of low pay or poor living conditions.¹¹⁷

Blyden did not have to look farther than Thomas Sherman, who balked at returning to Liberia after a college stint in America. "After having taken things in consideration and due deliberation," Sherman announced, "I do hereby decide not to return immediately" and "to make my departure to England this fall."¹¹⁸ He faced an uphill battle to convince his colonization sponsors, though, who had refused his earlier request to go to Germany or England and doubted his claim that "I am perfectly willing to leave this land any day, I haven't anything to prevent me, nor, am I enchanted by the grandeur of America, nor do I desire to remain here any longer, I wish it was so that I could return immediately."¹¹⁹ Despite his professions of loyalty, the New York State Colonization Society pulled his funding and forced a chastened Sherman to return home.

¹¹⁷ Liberia College mirrored this prohibition in "forbidding students from entering into matrimonial alliances while members of the institution," because it reasoned that the cost of supporting a spouse threatened (male) students ability to finish their studies. Edward W. Blyden to G. W. Samson, New York City, New York, 13 April 1883, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), "Correspondence 1883" folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York; see also C. T. O. King to G. W. Samson, Monrovia, Liberia, 29 August 1883, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), "General Correspondence 1883-1899" folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

¹¹⁸ Thomas E. Sherman to Charles T. Geyer, Springfield, Massachusetts, 5 August 1888, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), "Correspondence 1888-1889" folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

¹¹⁹ Thomas E. Sherman to Charles T. Geyer, Springfield, Massachusetts, 30 June 1888, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), "Correspondence 1888-1889" folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

A medical student, Cornelius McKane, ran into the same stonewall when he petitioned to extend his stay abroad.¹²⁰ On the verge of earning his M.D. at the University of Vermont, he made his strongest case for postponing a return to Liberia: “I have a thorough theoretical course in medicine but lack clinical experience. Public prejudices prevent my entering any of the large hospitals in the country. Will not the society aid me to obtain two courses at the University of Edinburgh that I might become a credit to them and a blessing to any people in Africa[?] It seems sad for one to return home now without the polish I need to make one a real light in Africa—I hope you will overlook my eagerness and ambition”¹²¹ Obviously the board did not, because a follow-up letter left the Liberian reduced to pleading, “I go to London for no person [sic] aggrandizement . . . I ask you to give me a chance.”¹²² The supplicant turned petulant after receiving a firm no, remonstrating, “I cannot see how I can prudently accept the Society’s offer to return immediately to Liberia. You know my plans. To return to Liberia without any definite work is to impede my progress and prevent my usefulness. As a mere practitioner of medicine I can do Liberia but little good. . . . I have prepared myself to go to London to accomplish the work I have planned.”¹²³ For all their faults, Liberian educators and missionaries did often share a sense of sacrifice, which some of their protégés struggled to

¹²⁰ Ironically, McKane was once a protégé of Blyden, who had lobbied for a scholarship on McKane’s behalf. See Edward W. Blyden to G. W. Samson, n.p. [likely New York City, New York], 6 September 1882, in “Liberia College, 1882” folder, New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 16(32), at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

¹²¹ Cornelius McKane to Charles T. Geyer, Hanover, New Hampshire, 16 July 1891, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), “Correspondence 1991” folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

¹²² Cornelius McKane to Charles T. Geyer, Hanover, New Hampshire, 19 October 1891, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), “Correspondence 1991” folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

¹²³ Cornelius McKane to Charles T. Geyer, Hanover, New Hampshire, 23 October 1891, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 6(32), “Correspondence 1991” folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

emulate, at least to the standard set by their predecessors. Students like McKane came under scrutiny when they requested more resources and opportunities than their benefactors had originally intended for them. McKane's request for monies to buy medical books, instruments, and medicines—while perfectly logical—did little to endear him to his sponsors, who considered his petition “out of line.”¹²⁴ His impending marriage to a fellow medical student did not help either. In the end, McKane deserted Liberia, moving to Savannah, Georgia, a half decade later. In a six-page, handwritten letter, he confided his ongoing resentment at the past treatment by Liberia's educational leaders. Whether “from ignorance viciousness blinded prejudice or jealousy” they mounted “vigorous and persistent opposition . . . in a sly underhanded way.” Much to his chagrin, they rejected the establishment of a college medical department he proposed and rebuffed his offer to help reorganize the school. Only one man living in Liberia he deemed serious about education, and he was a white agent of the American Colonization Society. As a result, McKane grew as disillusioned as Blyden in concluding, “The aboriginal African will redeem his own country” because “he is better fitted by nature and circumstances.” In this sense, he is better positioned than the American Negro, “a semibarbourous [sic] race recently merged [sic] from heathenism and slavery” that still suffered from “the same peculiarities and perversions from the South.” This was the real “Negro problem” that McKane believed would take more than a century of “evolution” to eradicate. So, like Crummell, McKane decided to uproot to America, where his “labors would be welcomed and appreciated.”¹²⁵

¹²⁴ J. C. Wilson to S. D. Alexander, Washington, DC, 12 December 1892, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 8(32), “Correspondence 1892” folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

¹²⁵ Cornelius McKane to A. B. Merrill, Savannah, Georgia, 29 February 1896, in the New York State Colonization Society Records, MG 347, Box 7(32), “General Correspondence 1896-1898” folder, in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City, New York.

Conclusion

At the turn of the century, Liberia College was in transition. It no longer followed Blyden's vision for the school. In the 1860s Blyden had dreamt Liberia College would be the educational epicenter of Africa, where students would obtain a classical education founded upon Western principles. By the 1880s Blyden had altered his dream to the point of utilizing Liberia College as a civilizing vehicle that would help build an intellectual mecca dedicated to sociopolitical and cultural Africanity. Neither dream came true by the advent of the twentieth century because too few people shared his vision. Liberian educators splintered into factions that sapped morale and undermined operations. Fractious infighting drove away promising scholars and left administrators lamenting what might have been. Without solidarity, Liberian trustees had little chance of wresting control of the college away from U.S. colonizationists. Liberians struggled to balance deference with their bid for institutional autonomy. Sometimes, individual professors and administrators attempted to manipulate the U.S. boards for their own devices. Blyden himself was not above enlisting the support of the U.S. boards when disputing fellow Liberians. Even when Americo-Liberians resisted pressure from the boards, dependence on American funds prevented any public confrontation or complete rupture. Each side needed one another. Liberians needed the U.S. boards for revenue and arbitration, while colonizationists needed the Liberians for publicity and implementation of their goals. That did not prevent the parties from trying to co-opt each other. Internal rivalries only worsened relations, leading some disillusioned professors to abandon the country altogether and the U.S. boards to withhold critical information sometimes from the other. The dysfunction and distance guaranteed inertia, confusion, and ineptitude. In the morass that was Liberia College, its survival represented a minor miracle. And yet mere existence was a hollow victory when compared to its lofty aims in

1862. The inability to transcend philosophical and political differences meant that completing Blyden's overarching dream of an indigent, independent education in Africa would have to wait for another century.

Part of the hurdle was Blyden himself. His racialism isolated him, turning enemies and even allies against him. Beyond such deleterious effects, it suffered from internal defect. While he espoused racialism, his identity and educational philosophy were self-consciously constituted, not derived from an organic connection with primordial sources. That is, his racist notions resulted from social experience and political practice. He arrived at racial instincts not from within but from without. Yet he was unwilling to acknowledge extrinsic causes behind his or his enemies' motivations. Americo-Liberians were, in essence, irredeemable. Their opposition to his agenda simply proved their damned state. In his estimation, decades if not centuries would have to transpire before their biological intermixture could be reversed. In the interim, he grew convinced that higher education was being wasted on "tainted" Americo-Liberians.

The pedagogical arc of Liberia College further compounded Blyden's problems. Early on, educators conceived Liberia College along Western lines. It was tradition defined in "classical" terms. By the 1880s Blyden desired an education that was culturally and sociohistorically particular. It was tradition derived from indigenous sources. In the 1890s industrial education served as an adulterated vision that would rally all sides together. It was tradition under the name of innovation. Blyden was ready to combine all three approaches, but by the turn of the century, his vision had been gutted. Educators turned to either classical or industrial approaches, eschewing African norms and thereby purging natural "race feelings" in the process.

The final flaw grew out of Blyden's inability to secure institutional control of Liberia College. Throughout his career, he never had full freedom to enact his educational vision. As Wilson Moses noted, educators like Crummell held a contradictory blend of beliefs: political black nationalism, Victorian civilizationism, and Anglocentric elitism.¹²⁶ At Liberia College Blyden tried to work out a consistent philosophy, one that incorporated African languages, religions, and customs into his notion of "African nationality." But this meant modifying or jettisoning the last two tenets of civilizationism and EuroAmericophilia. The problem was that while he rejected white superintendence in principle, he accepted it in practice. This habit extended outside his college interactions with the Boston and New York boards. For instance, he praised the rule of King Leopold in the Belgian protectorate of the Congo, preferring to see it as an instrument for imposing peace and civilization. In other words, he saw EuroAmerican intervention as a means to forging national and institutional unity. This enigmatic view makes sense when realizing that Blyden accepted half steps as temporary solutions because of his racist convictions. He was willing to tolerate white control and supervision for decades because he was confident that, in the end, whites could not endure the African climate and would die out or move away of their own accord. Likewise in the 1880s he viewed Islam and its attendant culture as a half measure that would someday lead to Christian redemptionism of Africa. And yet the underlying tension remained: Blyden was still utilizing Western-styled elitism and civilizationism to effect black nationalism. Even when he extrapolated a pure, untainted classical or Christian method, he needed white capital and actors to aid his efforts. When Americo-Liberians proved unworthy for the job, he had nowhere else to turn. Although he

¹²⁶ Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *Creative Conflict in African American Thought: Frederick Douglass, Alexander Crummell, Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Marcus Garvey* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 84.

valorized “pure Africans” his ethnoeducation required the active abetting of white colonizationists to oversee uneducated Negroes and non-instinctive mulattoes. Accepting this particular half measure meant an indefinite postponement of Blyden’s dreams for Liberia College—one that, to his dismay, he could neither rush nor rectify during his lifetime.

CHAPTER 5

“Neither the Church of God, nor civilization will ever prosper in these regions”:
Black Missionaries’ Battles Over Faith and Fealty in Liberia

“Foreign missions” in Liberia was a collectivizing project that intended to unite African American emigrants and West African natives under the auspices of “black nationality.” White and black missionaries labored to bind the populace together with an evangelical nationalism that emphasized the spiritual, social, and material benefits of Christian conversion. If missions was a nationalizing endeavor, it was also a race-defining project through which missionaries developed and deployed their ideas about race. In Liberia, missionaries of all stripes—Caucasian, African American, and African—struggled to work out different and often competing notions of what race meant. In short, missions became a site for contestation, for challenging prevalent conceptions of race and reformulating it in a place where blacks were now the reigning majority. Racial friction, though, soon gave way to cultural disputes and ethnocentric strife. By the first decade of the twentieth century, the banner of “black nationality” was in tatters, unthreaded by natives’ disaffection with the resulting inequality evident in their daily lives.

Through their letters back to their home mission board, Episcopal missionaries revealed the uneven power relations between whites, black “Liberians,” and natives. The parties waged contentious battles over crucial issues of congregational authority, lay membership, and ecclesiastical direction. The nature of Christianity further muddied the waters, with missionaries wrestling over the “core” of the gospel message. Oftentimes, missionaries attached cultural judgments to the faith they preached. Moreover, denominational allegiance sometimes carried political ramifications, which pitted missionaries against the unconverted if not each other. The

story of Episcopalian missions in the mid-nineteenth century, at times, was an ugly battle for control and influence.

A paramount concern in the entire exercise is the question of culture. How did missionaries account for the different cultural sensibilities in the interior? Was Christianity to be deculturative, accretive, or syncretistic? Answering these questions led missionaries to take divergent paths and elevated seemingly petty arguments to a series of perpetual crises. The inability to settle the role of culture, ultimately, made it impossible to unify Liberia on the basis of a common racial identity and destiny. The quest for racial harmony proved not just elusive to attain but illusory in its promise of a shared national identity.

Modest Beginnings

In the mid-1850s the Protestant Episcopal Church deployed missionaries, both black and white, to Liberia in an effort to gain a toehold in the country. During this time period, Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians were the other major denominations active in the region. The two earliest and most prominent missionaries—Lott Carey (Baptist) and Daniel Coker (AME)—both sailed to Liberia in 1821. This chapter focuses on Episcopalian missions because of the unique racial composition of its missionary force. Unlike the Presbyterians, Southern Baptists, or African Methodists—almost all of whose missionaries were black¹—the Episcopal Church employed Caucasians, African Americans, and Africans in more equitable proportions. While blacks were in the majority, a handful of white Episcopalians went on to have distinguished careers in Liberia. In seeking to collaborate, these missionaries provide a window into the successes and failures of US missionary activity on the western coast of Africa. Although it is

¹ The Presbyterians had the lone white missionary in this group. See William Seraile, “Black American Missionaries in Africa, 1821–1925,” *Social Studies* 63, no. 5 (October 1972): 198-202.

easy to characterize their limitations as byproducts of their culture, this chapter argues that proselytizing Episcopalians struggled hard to break free of societal norms in order to disseminate the Christian Gospel.

The same year that Coker and Carey landed in Liberia, at its general convention in Philadelphia the Protestant Episcopal Church created the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society to propagate the Gospel and promote the denomination in the United States and abroad. The work in West Africa was daunting, with seven hundred thousand natives within Liberia's colonial borders. Even if the society were to build a half dozen mission posts, they would reach only an estimated fifteen hundred natives. And it had difficulty in establishing just one mission station. The society's formation did not translate into fieldwork immediately, because the church found funds scarce and missionaries reluctant to go to Africa. The most promising candidate was Ephraim Bacon, the Liberian agent for the American Colonization Society. He and his wife spent months on deputation, raising financial support throughout the eastern United States. After collecting eighteen hundred dollars and packing their belongings, the Bacons learned that the ACS refused them passage to Liberia, probably in retaliation for Ephraim's resigning his position with the ACS in order to devote his efforts fulltime to ministry. Over the next fifteen years, another half dozen candidates failed to pan out, leaving the church stymied in its outreach to Africa.

The introduction of Episcopal missionaries to Liberia, ironically, came about without the direct efforts of the parent society. Members of St. James Church in Monrovia wished to form a religious society to establish a school in the interior. Since they wanted to affiliate with the Episcopal Church, the society adopted its lay reader, James M. Thompson, as its first official missionary. Thompson had emigrated as a free black from Connecticut, and together with his

wife in 1836 he opened a mission school at Mount Vaughan. Later known as Hoffman Institute, the school initially enrolled seven children, five boys and two girls. Although having two official missionaries in place, the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society deemed it unwise to leave the operation entirely in the hands of colonists. The society appointed a white missionary, Thomas S. Savage, to oversee the fledgling mission outpost in Liberia. In a move repeated more than once, Savage received the bulk of the credit for opening the Mount Vaughan post. Disease soon devastated the mission, taking the lives of both James Thompson and Savage's wife Susan. Thompson's widow continued to teach at the school for thirty years; but Savage, with his medical training, made his name as a naturalist before returning to the United States in 1847. By then, his services to the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society were no longer needed, because it had retained a new white supervisor, one who would shape Episcopal missions in Liberia for the next third of a century.²

John Payne and the Question of Race

John Payne was a white antiracist who thought mission work provided *the* governance model for Liberians to emulate. He had arrived a year after Savage and gradually consolidated power over a thirty-year career. Born in Virginia, he landed in Africa in 1837, energetic and eager to establish the Episcopalian Church in Liberia. He was both vigorous and disciplined, maintaining a rigorous work schedule. According to his own estimates, he preached 312 times a year, taught students on a daily basis, and translated two hours every morning. During his career there, he translated a significant amount: the Gospel of Mark, Prayer Book, and school books into the Grebo language. Payne was also fearless. After the Greboes went to war with Liberian

² Paragraph draws upon *Handbooks on the Missions of the Episcopal Church: No. 4, Liberia* (New York: The National Council of the Protestant Episcopal Church, 1928).

colonists in 1843, he was forced to take his family and flee for safety.³ But as soon as the fighting subsided, he returned to the Cavalla station in order to continue his work. Security was never a guarantee, as 1845 witnessed more than a hundred casualties, entire villages razed, and mission stations vandalized. To compound the problem, tropical disease killed or impaired the missionary force until Payne was the last ordained missionary who remained. By default, he became the de facto leader and over the next two decades, oversaw the creation of scores of churches and village schools in the interior.⁴

Payne was typical of many white missionaries laboring during the mid-century. He had faith in black amelioration and eschewed the notion that Africans were innately deficient in intellect. He envisioned the day when native converts would be able to lead and sustain their own religious and social institutions. He was a fervent believer that the Christian gospel would effect a prosperous, civilized population, given enough time. For Payne, the maturation process would take scores of years before natives could responsibly handle their own affairs. In 1848 Payne observed “we find, in the history of modern Missions and of the Church, that the process of rendering Christianity self-sustaining in any heathen country, has been the work, not of a few years, but of generations.” After a decade in the field, he reported finding three natives, at most, who were fit enough to conduct ministry. His pupils learned well enough, but intellectual capabilities masked “superstition, the moral weakness of infancy, the fickleness of childhood, the vanity of youth.” The stench of degradation clung to whole communities, and years would have to pass for them to climb out of “the depths.” By extension, Payne doubted whether African American missionaries, or “colonist missionaries” as he called them, could do much good either.

³ The “First Grebo War” between settlers and Greboes commenced in 1856, but at the time of the 1843 conflict, missionaries referred to the outbreak of hostilities as a war.

⁴ Paragraph draws upon Samuel D. Ferguson, *An Historical Sketch of the African Mission of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the U.S.A.* (New York: Foreign Committee, 1884), 7-15.

Only a generation ahead of “the Heathen” they would accomplish little on the mission field, he believed.⁵

Experience caused Payne to revise his opinions, though. White missionaries were hard to recruit, and many who came left soon thereafter, overcome by debilitating tropical diseases. Because of climate and contact with Christian civilization, Americo-African colonists had the best chance of reaching the heathen, Payne concluded. The establishment of a functioning government in Monrovia impressed him, and if “Colonists already fill every civil office in Liberia, the higher ones, most ably; why should they not also, in time, fill all in the Church?”⁶ Although swift development of their “self-growing” character surprised him, he embraced the idea of a church-state alliance, one that would end the regional slave trade, curb tribal warfare, and promote lawful commerce. Like Sierra Leone, Liberia could utilize “good government and a strong missionary influence” to effect “rapid temporal and spiritual improvement.”⁷ All that was needed now was the right ally.

The idea of laboring with an equal, in reality, still resided in the distant future. While admiring the rapid ascent of colonists, Payne noted: “Obviously, however, they still need the helping hand of their more favored American brethren to develop and perfect their social, intellectual, and political constitution.” Only under “steady Christian influence by a competent agency” could Liberians perform effective, efficient outreach to “the most ignorant, degraded, and wicked child, ever found in a civilized land.”⁸ Payne demonstrated this viewpoint by

⁵ Paragraph quotes from J. Payne, “Foreign Missionary Correspondence from the Rev. Mr. Payne,” Cavalla, West Africa, 26 October 1847, in *Spirit of Missions* 13, no. 2 (February 1848): 82-83.

⁶ J. Payne, “Africa,” Cavalla, West Africa, 20 July 1848, in *Spirit of Missions* 14, no. 3 (March 1849): 83.

⁷ Jno. Payne, “The African Mission,” *Spirit of Missions* 17, no. 6 (June 1852): 192.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 199-200.

assuming the title of “Senior Missionary.” Although the rank could smack of self-aggrandizement, to Payne it merely reflected the de facto hierarchy that existed in the present condition. With few exceptions, natives were fit only to be assistants, and colonist missionaries could succeed presumably with the “right direction.” The second group needed proper training and correct superintendence. His promotion in 1851 to Missionary Bishop at Cape Palmas and Parts Adjacent, no doubt, validated Payne’s sense of self-importance and leadership style.⁹ Fourteen years after coming to West Africa, Payne had entrenched himself as the nation’s top Episcopalian leader. His next task would be to find and mentor worthy disciples to carry out his agenda.

Eli Stokes and the Racial Challenge

Payne had already failed in his first attempt. In 1850 he had contacted Eli Worthington Stokes, a newly arrived African American from Rhode Island.¹⁰ Stokes was an astute and talented individual who dreamed of one day gaining his own see. He had gotten his ministerial start in Baltimore, one of only two colored pastors in the city (his brother being the other). Ordained in 1843, he moved on to organize a church in New Haven, Connecticut, where he stayed until elevated to the priesthood two year later.¹¹ Bishop John Henshaw of the Rhode Island diocese—who had been Stokes’s colleague while in Baltimore—invited him to transfer to Providence in order to assume the rectorship at Christ Church. Finding the church mired in debt, Stokes embarked on a fundraising tour in Europe—a foreshadowing of his future resourcefulness

⁹ See “Sixteenth Annual Report of the Foreign Committee,” *Spirit of Missions* 16, no. 7 (July 1851): 326.

¹⁰ Payne identified Stokes as being from Baltimore, but his last residence and home diocese had been Providence, Rhode Island—an important fact that Stokes would seek to exploit in his feud with Payne.

¹¹ In the midfifties, James T. Holly—later the first black bishop to Haiti—stepped in as rector to Stokes’s old church in New Haven, St. Luke’s Church.

once he arrived in Liberia. Christ Church eventually dissolved and its congregants folded into another parish. But by then, Stokes had left for what he hoped would be a larger scope of ministry in Africa.¹²

Getting to the continent had taken some perseverance. Bishop Henshaw expressed doubt about Stokes's health and fitness in 1849, but Stokes remained undeterred and determined to go.¹³ He assured the bishop and Foreign Committee that despite his delicate health, he would manage just fine once in Africa. And because he already knew Payne beforehand, Stokes felt “fully satisfied that we shall freely unite in building up the church of Xt in that now benighted land.”¹⁴ On the bases of these promises, Henshaw vouched for him and the Foreign Committee agreed to send him to Cape Palmas. Before arriving in Liberia—or even being appointed—Stokes was seizing the initiative, requesting the honor of naming the church at Cape Palmas, where he hoped to minister: “I wish the committee would allow me the privilege of naming the new church at Cape Palmas—as it is the first. I would much desire that it should be called CHRIST church, which I think highly appropriate.”¹⁵ The name had special significance for Stokes because he had served as the rector for Christ Church in Providence before its untimely

¹² Paragraph based on George F. Bragg, *Men of Maryland* (Baltimore: George F. Bragg, 1914), 99-103.

¹³ See J. P. K. Henshaw to P. P. Irving, Providence, Rhode Island, 19 June 1849, “Liberia Stokes, Rev. E. W., 1849” folder, Box 12, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, at the Archives of the Episcopal Church [hereinafter AEC], Austin, Texas; see also Eli W. Stokes letter [probably to Episcopal Foreign Missions secretary Pierre Irving], Providence, Rhode Island, 4 July 1849, “Liberia Stokes, Rev. E. W., 1849” folder, Box 12, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

¹⁴ Eli W. Stokes letter [probably to Episcopal Foreign Missions secretary Pierre Irving], Providence, Rhode Island, 4 July 1849, “Liberia Stokes, Rev. E. W., 1849” folder, Box 12, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

¹⁵ Eli W. Stokes letter [probably to Episcopal Foreign Missions secretary Pierre Irving], Providence, Rhode Island, 28 June 1849, “Liberia Stokes, Rev. E. W., 1849” folder, Box 12, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC, original emphasis retained.

dissolution.¹⁶ Thus he left the U.S. for Liberia with the mind that “I can be of more service there than here.”¹⁷ His remarks reveal his intention to continue the work that he had already started—head up an Episcopal church of black congregants. But whereas Stokes thought he would be working alongside Payne, Payne was under the impression that Stokes would serve as his assistant.

Relations soured almost immediately. Signs of strain filtered back to the Foreign Committee, for Stokes was unusually reticent, declining to report on field matters because “as the Rev[eren]d J. A. Payne, has the charge of all, I have thought it prudent to leave the whole matter to him. Hence my silence.”¹⁸ Meanwhile, Payne was slandering Stokes in private. He reported Stokes’s views to be “*monstrous*” because (ironically) Stokes had a low opinion of Africans. Payne accused him of advocating forced conversions and recommended the Foreign Committee intervene in order to stop this insubordinate.¹⁹ Stokes’s main transgression appears to have been in failing to consult with Payne, who condemned him for “a want of common sense & discretion.” Presumably, Stokes could have avoided committing a series of errors in the field—preaching ungrammatical sermons, employing an “immoral” teacher, requiring Baptist and Methodist congregants to become Episcopalian—if only he had heeded Payne’s direction. Stokes’s “ridiculous” and “obnoxious” character led Payne to question whether he was even saved. The senior missionary suspected that Stokes’s previous stint at Oxford had precluded a

¹⁶ Incidentally, Crummell had pastored this same church from 1841 to 1842.

¹⁷ Eli W. Stokes letter [probably to Episcopal Foreign Missions secretary Pierre Irving], Providence, Rhode Island, 30 May 1849, “Liberia Stokes, Rev. E. W., 1849” folder, Box 12, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

¹⁸ Eli W. Stokes letter [probably to Episcopal Foreign Missions secretary Pierre Irving], Cape Palmas, West Africa, 27 March 1850, “Liberia Stokes, Rev. E. W., 1850” folder, Box 12, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

¹⁹ Payne failed to back up this imputation with direct evidence: “If words have any meaning he [Stokes] would advocate this.”

proper view of the church's role, namely that of humble servanthood.²⁰ Actually, Payne oscillated on whom to blame. From the Stokes predicament, he judged American training to be “a very superficial education” that ill prepared African Americans for mission work.²¹ He surmised that white benefactors coddled blacks to the extent that they misled their protégés as to their true abilities. Blacks, inflated by well-meaning flattery, possessed a distorted understanding of their real qualifications. Worse, “their intercourse with their white brethren becomes galling.” Payne was especially offended that Stokes would claim that “he was [being] degraded & oppressed on account of his color.”²² From Payne's vantage, Stokes's overblown sense of self-dignity caused him to take “any dissatisfaction” of him to “the very extreme of presumption and absurdity.” An exasperated Payne questioned whether anyone could please this perpetual malcontent.

By June 1850 the feud was both public and personal. Stokes wrote a lengthy complaint to the States, detailing a fractious relationship with Payne. The senior missionary had placed Stokes underneath James Dennis, a man for whom Stokes had little respect, labeling him “a discarded Methodist preacher.”²³ Stokes portrayed Dennis as both capricious and vindictive, leading to a rupture between the two. Dennis issued an ultimatum to Payne: either dismiss Stokes or he would leave. Payne chose to retain both men. A frustrated Stokes accused Payne of blindsiding him by leaving him unwarned and unprepared to handle this “very wicked man” whom Payne

²⁰ Paragraph quotes from J. Payne to P. P. Irving, Cavalla, West Africa, 28 March 1850, John Payne 1850 folder, Box RG 72-7, AEC, original emphasis retained. While Payne mentioned Stokes's education at Oxford, this writer has not been able to verify his matriculation at said institution.

²¹ J. Payne to P. P. Irving, Cavalla, West Africa, 4 June 1850, John Payne 1850 folder, Box RG 72-7, AEC.

²² J. Payne to P. P. Irving, Cavalla, West Africa, 28 March 1850, John Payne 1850 folder, Box RG 72-7, AEC.

²³ Eli W. Stokes letter [probably to Episcopal Foreign Missions secretary Pierre Irving], Cape Palmas, West Africa, 24 June 1850, “Liberia Stokes, Rev. E. W., 1850” folder, Box 12, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

had appointed as catechist and school principal.²⁴ Payne's refusal to explain himself further infuriated Stokes, who felt deserted and betrayed. That Payne was younger than Stokes probably did not help either.

For his part, Payne viewed Stokes as a test case, and he judged Stokes a disaster.²⁵ Consequently, Payne reverted to his original position that black missionaries be homegrown. While he believed colonists reared from birth in Liberia held the advantage of always being free, a more important benefit emerged: "Trained up in such circumstances, young men may be fitted to labor harmoniously & pleasantly with their white Brethren in Africa, & of with those of the For. Committee."²⁶ Social conditioning was the missing ingredient in emigrant missionaries, and Payne was too impatient to wait on their seasoning. Limiting missionaries to domestic Liberians, Payne predicted, would mitigate if not obviate the "injury" of learning in the United States. Moreover, the policy would ensure they received the "proper influence" by being "under the care of a judicious & pious Christian minister." Payne had his eye on an ideal candidate with "the proper character," Garretson Gibson, though he was still three years away from completing sufficient training to assume his own church. In the interim, Payne needed someone to blunt Stokes, who had adopted an openly adversarial stance against his superior.²⁷

Beneath his complaints, Payne's underlying problem was less about recalcitrant personalities—of which he himself was one—and more about governance. The colonial encounter led him to favor a structure of inequality that reserved preeminent authority for white

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ For all his criticism of Stokes, Payne had to acknowledge that he had redeeming qualities. Stokes was admittedly "kind and amiable," and his sermons were seemingly popular to all but the "more intelligent" listeners. J. Payne to P. P. Irving, Cavalla, West Africa, 4 June 1850, John Payne 1850 folder, Box RG 72-7, AEC.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

missionaries. Yet, it would be a mistake to characterize Payne as power mad. Like many race theorists of the day, his racial thinking was at odds with his theological convictions.

Race Theory in Perspective

American race theory provided a starting discourse that missionaries, consciously or subconsciously, deployed or deplored on the field. Since the eighteenth century, race and Americanness shared a close association. With his *Letters from an American* (1782), Michel-Guillaume-Jean de Crèvecoeur defined “an American” as either European or possessing European ancestry. Although he permitted intermixture, he limited it to relations between fellow Europeans. A half decade later, Thomas Jefferson published his influential *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1787), which attracted wide readership over the next century because of his stature. In *Notes* Jefferson, though decrying the evils of slavery, deplored the ingrained inferiority of Negroes, who he alleged were below whites in their mental makeup. One could not simply chalk their deficiencies up to environmental reasons, Jefferson argued, because they had the surrounding white culture from which to glean lessons. The absence of Negro accomplishment, then, must signal innate inferiority, he concluded. Nature, not servitude, was the source for this so-called “distinction.” Jefferson was far more concerned that slavery had deleterious effects on whites, making them lazy, morally callous, and at risk for slave revolts. Although he denigrated Negro intellect and creativity, he—unlike some later polygenesists—considered the Negro to be a moral equal of whites and hence still part of the human race.²⁸

Jefferson was not without critics. Samuel Stanhope Smith, a New England divine and Princeton professor, offered a rebuttal in 1791 with *An Essay on the Causes of the Variety of*

²⁸ For more on Jefferson, see Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550–1812* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968).

Complexion and Figure in the Human Species. Smith dismissed Jefferson's complaint of blacks failing to learn from whites by pointing out that whites prevented blacks from social amalgamation, thereby hampering any advancement. To cultivate genius required freedom. Yet as historian Bruce Dain has noted, Smith still retained a hierarchical understanding of culture. He castigated the savagery and despotism in Africa, blaming them for Negroes' "dullness." The only African culture he respected was Abyssinia, whose occupants he believed had migrated from Asia. Heat, poverty, and "nastiness" all conspired to keep native Africans in savagery and sin. Blackness was an unfortunate, hereditary byproduct of living in a torrid climate. Unlike Jefferson, Smith thought the condition redeemable, though it required settling African Americans in a temperate area where they could live in unmolested freedom.²⁹

Charles Caldwell, a medical professor at the University of Pennsylvania, challenged Smith's environmentalism. He questioned the validity of Smith's theory, arguing that climate alone could not account for racial difference. In 1830 Caldwell outlined his racial theories in *Thoughts on the Original Unity of the Human Race*. God had created four different species—Caucasian, Mongolian, Indian, and African—in a hierarchal order with Caucasians at the top and Africans at the bottom. Predictably, civilization was the domain of Caucasians, whereas Africans wallowed in a cultural wasteland. Caldwell popularized two important strands of thought, polygenesis and phrenology. In his mind, the latter supported the former. Thus he observed that the skulls and genitalia of blacks resembled that of apes, which served as empirical evidence to refute the biblical account of monogenesis.³⁰

²⁹ For more on Smith, see Bruce Dain, *A Hideous Monster of the Mind: American Race Theory in the Early Republic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

³⁰ For more on Caldwell, see Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981).

In many ways, Caldwell represented the logical extension of an earlier figure, Johann Friedrich Blumenbach of the University of Göttingen. A medical doctor himself, Blumenbach was a skull enthusiast, collecting and using cranium artifacts to extrapolate different classifications of humans. By studying skulls sent from various parts of the world, he derived five categories of races: Malayan, Caucasian, Mongolian, American, and Ethiopian. His division of races had lasting influence because not only was he the first to use the term *Caucasian* as shorthand for *white*, his geographic terms also corresponded to later color designations of brown, white, yellow, red, and black. As historian Nell Painter has shown, Blumenbach retooled his taxonomic system over a twenty year span to connote value based on aesthetic considerations. Hence, “[t]he white colour holds the first place, such as is that of most European peoples.” The skin and symmetry that Blumenbach extolled for their preeminent beauty Caldwell interpreted as signs of cultural and intellectual superiority. He would not be the last.³¹

In the same decade as Caldwell’s *Thoughts*, a Philadelphia physician and craniologist, Samuel Morton, published *Crania Americana* (1839), the opening salvo from a new school of ethnologists. Morton surpassed Blumenbach’s impressive stash of skulls with six hundred of his own, the largest collection in the world.³² Through precise measurements of the skulls, Morton surmised that the races had very real physical differences based on varying cranial sizes. His book included an appendix from a phrenologist colleague, George Combe, who argued that Morton’s research had scientific value to the extent that it assigned moral and mental worth to each race based on objective physical data. That hard data ended up being cranial capacity.

³¹ For more on Blumenbach, see Nell Irvin Painter, *The History of White People* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2010).

³² Morton had around six hundred skulls in the midforties. By his death in 1851, he had amassed more than a thousand skulls in his house, which earned the moniker, “American Golgotha.” See Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man*, rev. and exp. ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1996), 83.

According to Morton's numbers, Caucasians had the highest mean, and Ethiopians the lowest. Within the Caucasian race, he ranked the Teutonic "family"—made up of English, Germans, and Anglo-Americans—the best; while he rated the Negro family the worst, appraising American-born Negroes even below their African brethren. Variant skull size, by itself benign, reinforced pernicious racial thinking, which linked it to innate mental ability: the smaller one's brain, the more diminished one's intellectual capacity. Caldwell seized on Morton's numbers to reassert Anglo-Saxon superiority, crowing that "the inhabitants of the United States, being also of the best Caucasian stock . . . promise to be even more than the Britons of future ages."³³ Yet Caldwell's polemics were tame compared to those from another lightning rod, Josiah Nott.

A surgeon out of Mobile, Nott crackled with supercilious hyperbole that elated supporters and enraged opponents. Intent on preserving slavery and white supremacy, he argued that Morton's data conclusively proved that smaller Negro brains signified stunted moral and intellectual faculties. A study of "niggerology" would show that the peculiar institution merely reflects the natural scientific order, he proposed.³⁴ In 1854 he teamed up with Egyptologist George Gliddon to write *Types of Mankind*, a 738-page tome that he hoped would demolish monogenesis and establish that races possessed fixed moral, physical, and intellectual differences. Negroes were savage and irredeemable, *Types* contended, and had been so since their discrete creation. Like Morton, Nott and Gliddon subscribed to a "family" of Caucasians, which the authors claimed were destined to civilize the earth. So long as Negroes recognized racial inequality, they could learn from their social superiors. It was manifest destiny at its whitest.

³³ Charles Caldwell review in *Western Journal of Medicine and Surgery* (3 December 1840): 124-26, quoted in Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*, 128. It did not seem to matter to Caldwell that Morton's numbers showed the opposite, that the English exceeded Anglo-Americans in cranial dimensions.

³⁴ See Dain, *A Hideous Monster of the Mind*, 225.

Payne was an environmentalist still shackled to the belief that whites possessed superior traits of civilized maturity and superintendence. Unlike scientific racists, he regarded blacks as full human beings capable of understanding the Gospel message and electing for Christian conversion. Their “degraded” environment did nothing to impair the potential for spiritual receptivity or growth, he believed. But his racialized prism could not admit the idea that blacks could be the intellectual equals of their white counterparts, at least in the short term. Payne was willing to concede inevitable equalization in time, but his timetable stretched decades if not a century or more. Black governance was out of the question, and he resented Stokes for aspiring to what he perceived, for the foreseeable future, to be the exclusive domain of whites. Payne was not far from Samuel Stanhope Smith, both of whom attributed black obtuseness to a nasty environment. Of course, the problem for Stokes was that he still found himself regarded as a dullard.

Faced with this affront, Stokes refused to stand still. A so-called “ultra-protestant-episcopalian,” he displayed a savvy combativeness that instantly put Payne on the defensive. Stokes charged Payne with violating church doctrine by utilizing laypersons to perform duties reserved only for ordained ministers (like administering the Eucharist). Thus Stokes could claim that he was the truer Episcopalian and raise questions about Payne’s fitness to lead. While acknowledging such a practice could be construed as “heresy,” Payne shifted attention back to Stokes, who “must be strangely ignorant of human nature” if he raised such a fine doctrinal distinction on the mission field. Furthermore, Payne repeated the spurious charge that Stokes did not believe in regeneration—because no one had heard him preach on the subject.³⁵ In raising the specter of a false shepherd, Payne was laying grounds for seeking Stokes’s expulsion. Yet rather

³⁵ See Jno. B. Russwurm to Jno. Payne, Cape Palmas, West Africa, 1 July 1850, John Payne 1850 folder, Box RG 72-7, AEC.

than wait for a decree from the Foreign Committee, Payne fomented the congregation at Harper, Cape Palmas, to petition for Stokes's ouster from their pulpit.³⁶ And Payne went so far as to usurp Stokes's Eucharist responsibilities, ostensibly because Stokes's bouts with fever rendered him "almost unintelligible."³⁷

The takeover was much messier than Payne portrayed. When Payne ordered Stokes to stop administering the sacraments, Stokes openly defied him by announcing that he would proceed with officiating communion. Consequently, Payne's ally, Gov. John Russwurm, had boycotted Stokes and led congregants to an open-air service convened by Payne.³⁸ Calling the rival event "astonishing" and "unheard of," Stokes exercised literary license in condemning the event as a pagan ritual.³⁹ It was a "Romish" mass during a "dark and gloomy night" that hearkened back to the "condition of the church, in the dark ages" replete with "glaring" torches and shadowy schismatics.⁴⁰ A humiliated Stokes, shorn of authority, wrote the Foreign Committee to protest this blatant behavior, complaining: "If you had given me any power I could have, prevented all this, but you put me under M[r.] Payne, and he put me under these preachers! and allows them to do as they please with me."⁴¹ By comparing Cape Palmas to Sodom, Stokes

³⁶ See J. Payne to P. P. Irving, Cavalla, West Africa, 4 June 1850, John Payne 1850 folder, Box RG 72-7, AEC.

³⁷ J. Payne to P. P. Irving, Cavalla, West Africa, 14 September 1850, John Payne 1850 folder, Box RG 72-7, AEC.

³⁸ Interestingly, the governor deserted on the grounds that Stokes "was not Methodist enough for him," a similar charged leveled against Crummell.

³⁹ Eli W. Stokes to the [Foreign] Committee, Cape Palmas, West Africa, 11 July 1850, "Liberia Stokes, Rev. E. W., 1850" folder, Box 12, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Eli W. Stokes to the [Foreign] Committee, Cape Palmas, West Africa, 7 July 1850, "Liberia Stokes, Rev. E. W., 1850" folder, Box 12, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

insinuated that Payne was wicked and perverse, and Stokes requested a transfer to Monrovia, exclaiming: “For God sake do not send any minister here that has the least spark of integrity!”⁴²

By then, Stokes had exhausted all his tactics. His counter-petition against his critics had gone nowhere. And his argument that Payne was not even the same color as either himself or his parishioners had fallen on deaf ears. Stokes faced an uphill battle because after decades on the field, Payne commanded the loyalties of the church leadership. In September 1850 Payne requested formal permission to fire Stokes on the basis of “Mr. Stokes’ total unfitness to accomplish good in the ministry here or elsewhere.”⁴³ Stokes saw the irreparability of the situation and chose to retreat to the capital city—on the pretext of recovering his failing health.⁴⁴ In reality, he intended to form his own church. This ambition had been evident as early as the summer, when he wrote the board: “Gentlemen Africa is large. Let me raise up a congregation in Monrovia creditable to the Board and the whole church.”⁴⁵ The Foreign Committee, siding with Payne, declined to grant him permission to do so; and in fall 1850 they remanded him home to the United States. Bruised and weary from his battles with Payne, Stokes accused the committee of having “disrespected” him by repeatedly ignoring his plight. Declaring that God would judge between them, he compared their treatment to a lynching, “like hanging a man uncondemned.”⁴⁶

⁴² Postscript No. 2 to Eli W. Stokes to the [Foreign] Committee, Cape Palmas, West Africa, 7 July 1850, “Liberia Stokes, Rev. E. W., 1850” folder, Box 12, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

⁴³ Ibid. Three years later, Payne would write the Foreign Committee and request that they “silence, or otherwise, destroy” Stokes. See J. Payne to P. P. Irving, Monrovia, Liberia, 28 October 1853, “Payne 1853(2)” folder, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

⁴⁴ See John Payne to P. P. Irving, Chesapeake Bay, Virginia, 28 June 1851, “Liberia Payne, Rev. John, 1851” folder, Box 7, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

⁴⁵ E. W. Stokes to the Foreign Committee, Cape Palmas, West Africa, 9 July 1850, “Liberia Stokes, Rev. E. W., 1850” folder, Box 12, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

⁴⁶ E. W. Stokes to P. P. Irving, Monrovia, Liberia, 7 December 1850, “Liberia Stokes, Rev. E. W., 1850” folder, Box 12, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

The real issue was not his alleged insubordination, he contended, but Payne's jealousy that colored people welcomed Stokes as their own. Recalcitrant to the end, he resolved to build his own church with "my people."⁴⁷

Alexander Crummell and the Need for Christian Civilization

Alexander Crummell's 1853 arrival in Liberia gave Payne the necessary counterweight to combat Stokes's appeal. Here was an educated, articulate black man who could serve as Stokes's rival and Payne's proxy. Within sixty days, Payne issued an enthusiastic endorsement for the missionary novice: "I am sure I shall express the sentiments of all who know him, when I say that the endowments of mind and spirit, with which the Giver of all grace has favored him, in connection with the fact that he is a *colored man*, eminently fit him to establish the Church, and to take charge of the institution in contemplation for this place."⁴⁸ Yet Crummell soon discovered what Stokes already knew: Payne had difficulty ceding authority to colored colonists.

Cracks in the relationship formed within six months of Crummell's arrival. The bishop's racial views offended Crummell who, as a dinner guest of Payne's, was on the receiving end of "the bitter vulgar remark—'your race is the lowest, meanest, most lying, thievish, treacherous, back biting race on earth.'"⁴⁹ Crummell had had experience with prejudiced bishops before with

⁴⁷ Ibid., emphasis added.

⁴⁸ John Payne to P. P. Irving, Bassa Cove, West Africa, 12 September 1853, "Liberia Payne, Rt. Rev. John, 1853(2)" folder, Box 7, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC, emphasis added. Cf. John Payne, "Views of the Bishop in Reference to the Progress of the Work at Monrovia," in Nineteenth Annual Report of the Foreign Committee," *Spirit of Missions* 19 (November/December 1854): 451, where the editor italicizes the last two infinitive phrases. The phrasing and emphasis imply that Crummell was planting an Episcopal Church in virgin territory, which was not the case, as Eli Stokes had started his church four years earlier. The difference was that Crummell's was sanctioned.

⁴⁹ Alexander Crummell to William Coppinger, 1 November 1864, Papers of the American Colonization Society, microfilm, reel no. 160. Perhaps unwittingly, Crummell himself contributed to Payne's negative racial assessment. When asked about the competency of one colored Episcopalian missionary, Crummell had expressed his dislike for the man's "angry manner," "mercenary motives," and "improper spirit." Crummell's criticism

the Onderdonk brothers in New England. Partly to escape prejudice such as theirs, he had studied abroad—which was ironic in that it was what caught Payne’s initial attention and respect. In his mind, Crummell had procured training “of the right sort,” an English education Payne esteemed as an essential qualification for any colonist missionary.⁵⁰

A chasm grew between the two men as they began to work together. As discussed previously, Payne preferred an Episcopalian high school and college be located in Monrovia—which was one of the chief reasons Crummell had come to Liberia. Crummell made this goal plain, for Payne reported: “Mr. Crummell is most desirous that we establish on the beautiful site, on the extremity of Cape Mesurado, an Episcopal Institution.”⁵¹ This arrangement appealed to Crummell even more when Payne tabbed him to run the proposed school. But Payne’s first priority lay in Crummell’s establishing a thriving Episcopal church to compete with Eli Stokes for members and influence.⁵² By this time, Stokes had succeeded in erecting St. Paul’s Church in the capital.⁵³ Tapping his European contacts again, he had raised enough money to finance a

reinforced Payne’s conviction that the colored population in the United States failed to possess the character, efficiency, or fitness to be useful in Liberia. As a consequence, they “have disappointed the expectation of their friends.” J. Payne to P. P. Irving, Cape Palmas, West Africa, 10 April 1854, “Liberia Payne, Rev. John, 1854(2)” folder, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

⁵⁰ J. Payne, “Africa,” Cavalla, West Africa, 20 July 1848, in *Spirit of Missions* 14, no. 3 (March 1849): 85.

⁵¹ John Payne, “Views of the Bishop in Reference to the Progress of the Work at Monrovia,” in *Nineteenth Annual Report of the Foreign Committee*, *Spirit of Missions* 19 (November/December 1854): 453.

⁵² This appears to have contradicted what he originally told Crummell, because he had earlier inverted the priorities with the high school to be built before the church. He changed his mind on the grounds that the growing congregation needed a new sanctuary to house their worship, but in reality Payne needed to stem defections to the charismatic Stokes. See John Payne to P. P. Irving, Bassa Cove, West Africa, 12 September 1853, “Liberia Payne, Rt. Rev. John, 1853(2)” folder, Box 7, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

⁵³ In October 1850 a group of church wardens and vestry published a set of resolutions in the *Liberia Herald* organizing Stokes’s fledgling institution. On 12 October 1850 they petitioned the Foreign Missions Board for financial aid in erecting a sanctuary and for official recognition of Stokes as their rector. See “Resolutions,” *Liberia Herald* 1, no. 6[?] (October 1850), hand-copied in “Resolutions adopted by male citizens of Monrovia,” “Liberia Papers, Miscellaneous, Resolutions adopted by citizens of Monrovia to start a church with Rev. E. W. Stokes, 1850” folder, in Box 17, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

small church which, to Payne's chagrin, Stokes was advertising as Episcopalian. Consequently, Payne ordered Crummell to focus on the urgent task of building a church before proceeding to the school.

Crummell's architectural plans for Trinity Church were grandiose. Despite a small congregation size, he envisioned a sanctuary that would hold ten times the current number of parishioners. The church would boast a Gothic tower and cost the princely sum of \$6,000 or \$7,000.⁵⁴ Not surprisingly, Crummell ran into opposition when he announced his preliminary estimate. Mixing contrition with tenacity, he wrote: "I regret that my proceedings relation to ch[urch] bldg have caused apprehensions on the part of the Com[mitt]ee in N.Y. But let me say that the estimate of 6 or 7000 dollars was carefully made; and they shall not reach up to \$10,000 if care, prudence, simplicity, after this intimation of yours, can prevent that wh[ich] appears to you extravagant."⁵⁵ Yet the structure he proposed did not match the size of his congregation. Payne observed that "the ordinary congregation of Trinity Ch[urch] Monrovia, has not yet reached one hundred, and while provision should be made for increase, a reduction of the dimensions of the church will still admit of this object."⁵⁶ More pointedly, Payne distanced himself from Crummell in stressing that the church building "was planned however, without consulting *me*."⁵⁷ Part of Payne's disenchantment stemmed from what he considered Crummell's

⁵⁴ See Rev. Alex. Crummell letter, Monrovia, Liberia, 11 November 1854, *Spirit of Missions* 20 (March 1855): 129. To put that in perspective, Payne proposed a college structure for a third of that amount. See John Payne, "Extracts from a Letter of Bishop Payne," *Spirit of Missions* 20 (April 1855): 182; John Payne, "Report of the Rt. Rev. John Payne, Missionary Bishop at Cape Palmas and Parts Adjacent, West Africa," *Spirit of Missions* 20 (November/December 1855): 627.

⁵⁵ Alex Crummell letter, Monrovia, Liberia, June 1855, Box 1, Crummell, Rev. Alexander, 1853–1867, RG 72: Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Papers, Period A: 1822–1867, AEC.

⁵⁶ John Payne letter, n.p., 13 February 1856, Box 1, Crummell, Rev. Alexander, 1853–1867, RG 72: Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Papers, Period A: 1822–1867, AEC.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, emphasis added.

excessive housing allowance. The prior year, Crummell had leased a house in Monrovia for \$175 a year, an amount Payne thought “hardly justifiable under any circumstances.” In 1856 Payne severed Crummell’s \$100 supplemental housing stipend.⁵⁸ Perhaps the reduction derived from the bishop’s weariness with Crummell’s persistent overdrawing of his account, including a \$300 past due account from the previous year. Crummell attributed the overspending to his wife’s chronic illness, which necessitated accommodations outside of town. In truth, he had squabbled with two previous landlords about his housing arrangements, leading to his eviction and eventual settlement twenty-five miles outside Monrovia.⁵⁹ Yet Payne acceded to Crummell’s expressed desire to live nearer to Monrovia. The bishop approved \$500 for Crummell to repair a house at Cape Mesurado, but by year’s end, Crummell had abandoned the site for being too remote and inaccessible. Whether through indecision or fickleness, Crummell was taxing both Payne’s budget and patience. And building projects were the least of Payne’s concerns. Stokes was still drawing members away from Trinity Church.

Stokes had devised an ingenious way to circumvent Payne’s authority. In the early 1850s he raised funds in Scotland for his church and petitioned to transfer it to the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Glasgow.⁶⁰ Thus in submitting to the leadership of Anglican bishops abroad, he instigated competing claims of authority and obfuscated church canon. Payne charged Stokes

⁵⁸ See Crummell letter, Monrovia, Liberia, 3 February 1856, Box 1, Crummell, Rev. Alexander, 1853–1867, RG 72: Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Papers, Period A: 1822–1867, AEC, original emphasis retained.

⁵⁹ The distance is in question, as Payne contradicts himself by varying the miles from twenty to twenty-five. In any case, the distance prevented Crummell from coming to the church more than once or twice a week—which may have been his plan all along. See Jno. Payne to S. D. Denison, *Barque Mendi* (at sea), 30 April 1856, “Payne 1856(2)” folder, RG 72-7: Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Papers, Period A: 1822–1867, AEC; cf. Jno. Payne to S. D. Denison, Monrovia, Liberia, 8 May 1856, “Payne 1856(2)” folder, RG 72-7: Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Papers, Period A: 1822–1867, AEC.

⁶⁰ See copy of Thomas M. Clark to Walter J. Trower, Providence, Rhode Island, 16 July 1855, “Liberia Stokes, Rev. E. W., 1855” folder, Box 12, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

with plotting to seize control of the episcopate, but Payne found himself foiled because Stokes maintained support in both Rhode Island and Scotland.⁶¹ Even when an investigatory subcommittee recommended he be put on trial, Stokes's home church in Rhode Island rejected the list of charges against him, contending that it had been tampered with, was a forgery, and hence did not count as an official affidavit.⁶² Payne wanted the Rhode Island diocese to either recall or suspend Stokes, but it declined on the grounds that collecting the facts from afar was too difficult and the charges too vague. Meanwhile, the Payne faction in Liberia tried to publish an official denunciation in the church journals, only to be rebuffed out of fear of libel.⁶³ Stokes had his own publishing weapon, an editor at the *Liberia Herald*, who pushed for "a bishop of *pure African blood*—we recommend our beloved partner Rev. E. W. Stokes for this office."⁶⁴

By 1860 Stokes found himself in an enviable position. Crummell was bleeding parishioners, who found him to be "imperious, self-willed, and so thoroughly *English* that he

⁶¹ This sponsorship would only be temporary, as the Scottish bishop, Walter J. Trower, later denied his involvement, denouncing Stokes's "utter unscrupulousness" for misrepresenting their relationship. Contrary to Stokes's "preposterous notion," Trower claimed he had never consecrated Stokes as Bishop of Liberia. Another Scottish bishop intimated that Stokes was motivated by blind ambition, because he had confided that he hoped to be a bishop himself. The point, however, was that Stokes was able to make inroads by attempting to pit competing church hierarchies against each other. W. J. Trower to Bedell, Glasgow, Scotland, 3 August 1856, "Liberia Trower, Rt. Rev. W. L., 1856" folder, Box 13, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72-13, AEC; C. H. Terrot letter, Eden, Scotland, 1 July 1856, "Liberia Terrot, Rt. Rev. C. H. 1856" folder, Box 13, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC; cf. Thomas M. Clark to J. Payne, Providence, Rhode Island, 3 September 1856, "Liberia, Rt. Rev. Thomas M. Clark, 1838 & 1855–1856" folder, Box 1, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

⁶² See Report to the Standing Committee of the Diocese of Rhode Island, Case of Rev. E. W. Stokes, April 1855, "Liberia Stokes, Rev. E. W., 1854–1855" folder, Box 12, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC; Thomas H. Vail and Thomas Burgifs to T. M. Clark, Providence, Rhode Island, 18 June 1855, "Liberia Stokes, Rev. E. W., 1854–1855" folder, Box 12, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

⁶³ See copy of John Kitton to Ben Franklin, Hutton, Preston, Lancashire, England, 30 June 1855, "Liberia Stokes, Rev. E. W., 1854–1855" folder, Box 12, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

⁶⁴ Jno. Payne to S. D. Denison, Monrovia, Liberia, 8 May 1856, "Payne 1856(2)" folder, RG 72-7: Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Papers, Period A: 1822–1867, AEC, original emphasis retained.

cannot, and will not adapt himself to circumstances.”⁶⁵ His congregation had dwindled to around twenty-five. Stokes could not help but deride his rivals’ ineptitude, noting that Trinity would not be finished “for some considerable time yet” and boasting that he could have built three churches with the monies invested in Trinity.⁶⁶ But by 1861 Stokes was broke, and trickling donations forced him to beg Payne for financial aid.⁶⁷ Of course, Payne declined to offer any help other than platitudes. Yet Stokes had another stratagem to deploy: if he could not win backing from a European or American bishop, he would recruit an African one. And he would not be going alone; Crummell was about to enlist with him.

In the mid-1860s Crummell alarmed Payne when he flirted with joining the African independent church movement pushed by Stokes. The notion of independence did not mean that church leaders renounced denominational affiliation or missionary legacy. Instead, it referred to the conviction that church leadership be black and (white) missionary control be kept minimal.⁶⁸ Stokes had devised a plan in which the bishop in Sierra Leone would expand his authority by extending his current diocese or creating a new one in Monrovia, whereby Stokes could head a church under the auspices of the Anglican Church.⁶⁹ He needed signatures for his petition, though, and recruited Crummell for help. Along with two other men, Stokes and Crummell declared the creation of the Diocese of Monrovia and published an open letter stating the reasons

⁶⁵ Ibid, original emphasis retained.

⁶⁶ E. W. Stokes letter, Monrovia, Liberia, 21 January 1860, “Liberia Stokes, Rev. E. W., 1860–1866” folder, Box 12, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

⁶⁷ See E. W. Stokes letter, Monrovia, Liberia, 26 February 1861, “Liberia Stokes, Rev. E. W., 1860–1866” folder, Box 12, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

⁶⁸ Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 114.

⁶⁹ See A. F. Russell to J. Payne, Clay-Ashland, West Africa, 10 February 1866, “Liberia Russell, Rev. A. F. 1860–1867” folder, Box 10, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72-10, AEC.

for their actions. Rather than being a premature step, their declaration had been forced upon them, the quartet argued, by Bishop Payne's deprivation of their ecclesiastical rights. He had violated their civil liberties by proposing a forty-year "foreign" governance of Liberian churches. In their words: "We feel quite certain that if we had been in any territory of the United States, and had been *white* men[,] Bishop Payne would never have ventured to impose upon us a system which is unparalleled in all American Church History, for its exclusiveness, stringency, and crudeness."⁷⁰ In short, the black clerics objected to what they perceived as an illegal power grab by Payne, whose proposed system would rob them of pastoral autonomy by putting the whole of Liberia under his control.⁷¹ They accused him of prejudice, racism, and even "pro-slavery feelings" in trying to "break up and crush out our organization!"⁷² For a decade, Payne had intimidated and terrorized subordinates through insults and threats of firing, they charged. Enough was enough: "We can stand it no longer. In America such treatment was our lot, and we had to bear it; we cannot endure it here."⁷³ Payne blamed Crummell as the primary author of the document—it was not difficult to decipher because many of the quotes attributed to Payne could only have come from Crummell—and targeted him as the chief opponent. Payne's alarm had grown into animosity.

⁷⁰ Eli W. Stokes, Alex. Crummell, Garretson W. Gibson, and Thomas J. Thompson, "Letter of the Liberian Clergy [to the Special Committee on Missions]," Monrovia, Liberia, July 1864, in "Liberia Clergy Letter: 1865" folder, Box 17, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72-17, AEC, original emphasis retained.

⁷¹ As stated previously, Payne's official title was "Missionary Bishop at Cape Palmas and Parts Adjacent"—which left unspecified whether Monrovia fell under his jurisdiction. Traditionally, people had understood "Cape Palmas and Parts Adjacent" to exclude the Liberian coast, including Monrovia.

⁷² *Ibid.* The pro-slavery charge may have derived from Payne's (alleged) comments: (1) "What right have you to complain of the white man, when you Africans sold your own people into slavery?" and (2) "I have been thinking whether a slave has the right to run away from a good master; and have come to the conclusion he has not."

⁷³ *Ibid.*

Stokes lost faith in Crummell, too. Crummell harbored his own ambitions apart from Stokes. He floated the proposal that he be made bishop of any newly created diocese, even drafting a legislative bill that would have appointed him as the diocese head.⁷⁴ He campaigned for the promotion by enticing undecided churchmen with the promise of paid positions should he become bishop. Stokes worked to undermine Crummell, leaving their alliance in tatters. Black solidarity went only so far. In any case, Stokes was dead within two years, felled by illness brought about by malnourishment. By then, Payne was on the verge of retiring, weary of the continued resistance to his leadership. And Crummell had worn out after battling his firing from Liberia College the previous year. Bereft of friends, he returned to the interior in order to preside over a startup church at the New Georgia settlement.

Alexander Crummell and the Charge of Imperialism

Historian Tunde Adeleke has dismissed Crummell as no different than other “European racial classifiers” in that he internalized “Eurocentric cultural dichotomies” by extolling English civilization and lionizing its language.⁷⁵ Because Crummell deplored an unregenerate Africa, Adeleke judges him to be an agent of Western imperialism. An examination of Crummell’s philosophy of missions paints a more complicated picture.

In 1895 Crummell laid out his mature thinking on the role of civilization in Christian evangelism. In an essay entitled “Civilization as a Collateral and Indispensable Instrumentality in Planting the Christian Church in Africa,” he argued that missionaries had two duties, one spiritual and the other social. He rejected the notion of a private, otherworldly faith that did

⁷⁴ See A. F. Russell letter excerpt, Monrovia, Liberia, 5 January 1866, “Liberia Russell, Rev. A. F. 1860–1867” folder, Box 10, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72-10, AEC.

⁷⁵ Tunde Adeleke, *Unaffrican Americans: Nineteenth-Century Black Nationalists and the Civilizing Mission* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1998), 87, 90.

nothing to ameliorate the social conditions of the prospective converts. Both the “inner spiritual condition” and “external circumstances” needed the missionary’s attention, Crummell argued. He outlined three self-evident truths: (1) Christianity is not solely individualistic; (2) it is both celestial- and temporal-minded; and (3) it develops adherents to the “highest lev [sic] of humanity.” Therefore, he recommended that missionaries expand their efforts beyond the individual to the current “organisms of life,” or the larger spheres in which the person operated or lived—be it family, school, industry, or the state. As Crummell put it: “It seems then somewhat clear that, added on to the duty of personal salvation, comes the farther obligation of the reconstruction of society in its several forms.” Social renovation was to elevate people to “order, rectitude and excellence”—which would result in God’s glory and man’s progress. Crummell viewed progress as the union of godliness and culture, the lifting up of man both internally and externally. Sanctification extended not just to the spirit but also to the mind and body. The result would be civilization, or as Crummell defined it, “clarity of the mind from the dominion of false heathen ideas.” This word was a broad category that connoted a wide array of actions and behaviors—many of which the black missionary adjudged according to Anglocentric values and standards.⁷⁶

Although critics could complain that Crummell did little to indigenize Christianity, he was convinced that he was effecting evangelism through “high” culture. Two examples from the mission field demonstrate how he desired to use the church to accomplish uplift. First, he insisted that a church bell, rather than an existing cow’s horn, be installed to call people to

⁷⁶ Paragraph quotes taken from Alexander Crummell, “Civilization as a Collateral and Indispensable Instrumentality in Planting the Christian Church in Africa,” in *Africa and the American Negro . . . Addresses and Proceedings of the Congress on Africa Held under the Auspices of the Stewart Missionary Foundation for Africa of Gammon Theological Seminary in Connection with the Cotton States and International Exposition, December 13-15, 1895*, edited by J. W. E. Bowen (Atlanta: Gammon Theological Seminary, 1896), 119-24.

worship.⁷⁷ Second, he requested an organ, which “will tend to elevate, and purify the simple life of our people.”⁷⁸ Historian Mark M. Smith has noted that whites tended to cast black music as “rousing, emotional, but unrefined.”⁷⁹ Listening to sounds from non-native instruments, Crummell believed, refined audiences. But beyond elevation, the experience *purified* the hearers. Whereas the gospel was justificatory for him, civilization was just as salvific, in the sense that it sanctified the believer. Contrary to what he wrote nearly thirty years later, social renovation represented *spiritual* growth for Crummell. The consequence, then, is a dichotomous distinction that is as binary as the black/white social distinction. From a doctrinal viewpoint, “heathenism” was not an intrinsic fallibility but a backward and infantile state that Episcopalians needed to overcome. Yet rather than one accepting Adeleke’s depiction of Crummell, one can see another perspective at work here. Crummell understood culture to be the great leveler, a tonic against racism and biological difference. High culture became not simply a social cohesive but a critique against racism in the West. Five years after leaving the mission field, he delivered a Thanksgiving homily in which he preached that “high and grand civilization” would lead to greatness and a “vital destiny” in human history. It would precede permanency and progress and hence “develop wonders for the world.”⁸⁰ By demonstrating Negro superiority on the global

⁷⁷ See Crummell letter, Caldwell and Monrovia, Liberia, West Africa, 1 February 1869; Crummell letter to Rev. L. Lavage, Caldwell and Monrovia, Liberia, West Africa, 19 May 1869; Crummell letter, Caldwell and Monrovia, Liberia, West Africa, 10 June 1869, “Liberia Papers, Crummell, Rev. Alexander, 1869” folder, Box 21 [35], Crummell, Rev. Alexander, 1868–1874, Period B: 1868–1896, AEC.

⁷⁸ Annual Report of Rev. Alex. Crummell, “Liberia Papers, Crummell, Rev. Alexander, 1868” folder, Box 21 [35], Crummell, Rev. Alexander, 1868–1874, Period B: 1868–1896, AEC.

⁷⁹ Mark M. Smith, *How Race Is Made: Slavery, Segregation, and the Senses* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 22.

⁸⁰ Sermonic quotes taken from Alex Crummell, “The Destined Superiority of the Negro,” in Alex Crummell, *The Greatness of Christ and Other Sermons* (New York: Thomas Whittaker, 1882), 332-52, in Moorland-Spangarn Research Center, Library Division, Howard University, Washington, DC.

stage, Crummell hoped to prove the worthiness of the race. Yet eminence would not come without effort and for Crummell, it started with ecclesiastical admonition of family roles.⁸¹

In his mission work Crummell placed an inordinate amount of stress on correct living. Behind the pulpit, he implored his congregation “to live properly as ‘colonists do.’”⁸² He grew elated when “discovering a *two-storied* red house going up” with separate bedrooms and parlor.⁸³ “This is the beginning,” he gushed, “but I hope next year to see a half dozen such houses in the settlement, and many other civilized improvements.”⁸⁴ If edifices were important, so too were their occupants, especially wives and mothers.⁸⁵ Families “need careful, punctual endeavors for the improvement of their *temporal* condition; to make the women tidy and domestic in their habits; to learn [sic] them to sew; and to teach them to read. Satisfied that this work *must* be done, or, otherwise these people will eventually relapse into utter nakedness and their old heathenisms.”⁸⁶ Shepherding families was key to winning recognition for the race, but Crummell often felt he was losing the battle for civilization. He had started out with a clear goal: to uplift the race by having his followers imitate “high” culture.⁸⁷ But their obstinacy in refusing to

⁸¹ E.g., Alex Crummell, “Marriage,” second Epiphany sermon taken from John 2:1, in Alex Crummell, *The Greatness of Christ and Other Sermons* (New York: Thomas Whittaker, 1882), 50, in Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Library Division, Howard University, Washington, DC.

⁸² Alex Crummell letter to Rev. L. D. Denison, Caldwell and Monrovia, Liberia, 19 May 1869, “Liberia Papers, Crummell, Rev. Alexander, 1869” folder, Box 21 [35], Crummell, Rev. Alexander, 1868–1874, Period B: 1868–1896, AEC.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, original emphasis retained.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ See also Alex Crummell, “The Black Woman of the South: Her Neglects and Her Needs,” in *Africa and America*, 59-82.

⁸⁶ Annual Report of Rev. Alex. Crummell, “Liberia Papers, Crummell, Rev. Alexander, 1868” folder, Box 21 [35], Crummell, Rev. Alexander, 1868–1874, Period B: 1868–1896, AEC, original emphasis retained.

⁸⁷ For comparison, Blyden had arrived at a much dimmer view of mission work. In 1876 he penned two articles on the state of African missions, eschewing the notion of any “evangelical” progress among the natives. “Christian civilisation” in Sierra Leone and Liberia was both “extraneous and imported,” leaving little lasting impact

abandon “low” culture ultimately frustrated Crummell and helped spur his departure from Liberia.

Payne and the (Muted) Rebuke of White Paternalism

With Crummell’s exit, Episcopalian missions could have sunk into oblivion. Payne had retired in the late sixties under a cloud. A Scottish-born missionary, Benjamin Hartley, wrote the board in January 1867 to complain about “a great lack of spirituality” and “few signs of *real Christian fruit*” at Payne’s station, which reduced mission work to “a mere farce.” Allegedly, Payne baptized and confirmed Africans indiscriminately, only a quarter of whom “intellegently [sic] knew what they were doing when admitted into the church.” As a result, Hartley judged, “The consequence of this superficiality is that nine tenths are not a whit more spiritual than their heathen neighbors, and soon have to be suspended.” Finding themselves cut off from mission supplies of food and clothing, the expelled natives soon offer a formal apology in order to have their rations restored. “For *them*,” a wry Hartley observed, “honesty is not the best policy.” Even after graduating from the Cavalla school, natives “are hanging on the station as the easiest way to get a living” and “expect to be supported by the mission.” Perhaps most damning of all was Hartley’s assessment of Payne himself, whom he implied was running his own personal plantation: “*All individuality* must be sacrificed to the mind and will of Bp. & Mrs Payne if a missionary wants to live in peace . . . as every thing is carried out on Southern principles.”⁸⁸

on the indigenous population. The president of Liberia had reached much the same conclusion, observing that sustained warfare between Americo-Liberians and natives had “made them [natives] rather to hate than to admire Christian civilisation.” Then again, President James Payne was hardly an unbiased observer, declaring that the war was a native plot to “exterminate[e] the entire civilised population.” James S. Payne, inauguration address, Monrovia, Liberia, 3 January 1876, quoted in Edward Wilmot Blyden, *Christianity, Islam, and the Negro Race*, 2d ed. (1888; reprint, Baltimore, MD: Black Classic Press, 1994), 60.

⁸⁸ Benjamin Hartley, “Letter to the Committee of Foreign Missions on the state of the Mission and Missionaries in Western Africa,” New York City, New York, 21 January 1867, “Liberia Papers, Miscellaneous,

In response to Hartley's philippic, the foreign missions committee launched an official investigation into the "want of harmony among the missionaries and teachers."⁸⁹ When interviewed, a retired colleague of Payne, Jacob Rambo, recalled "there was generally harmony among our whites" and "there was seldom a misunderstanding—more with natives or Liberians than whites." Although student conduct was an issue, Rambo advised investigators to consider "the materials—heathen scholars—and in most cases plainly educated native and Liberian teachers" of whom "we could not expect so much." Ironically, he cited *Crummell's* model school at Mt. Vaughan as proof of *Payne's* progress among natives. Whereas Rambo held Payne in high esteem, he took a dim view of Liberian clergy, who were "*clannish, yea quite exclusive!*" If anything, he believed them to be prejudiced against whites because "they have often smitten the hand that fed them, and stabbed the heart that loved them well."⁹⁰ A German-American missionary, John Duerr, highlighted the educational deficiencies of Payne's students, stating that while students were "well stuffed" with learning, no one explained the meaning of what they were reading and reciting.⁹¹ He echoed Hartley in declaring that the real hindrance was "the

Hartley, Rev. Benjamin, 1867" folder, in Box 16, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC, original emphasis retained.

⁸⁹ It is worth noting that, in spite of similar complaints by Stokes and Crummell, the mission board did not take action until a white missionary complained, ostensibly because Payne was mistreating white missionaries as poorly as black ones: "Liberian missionaries supposed they were treated badly on account of color but white missionaries are treated in the same manner, just as if they were native heathen." Ibid.

⁹⁰ J. Rambo to S. D. Denison, New Oregon, Iowa, 26 February 1867, "Liberia Papers, Miscellaneous, Rambo, Rev. James, 1867" folder, in Box 16, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC, original emphasis retained.

⁹¹ Interestingly, Duerr had harsh words for Samuel Ferguson, then a junior missionary: "Mr. Ferguson knows very little about teaching & preaching, but he never came [to teacher and catechist meetings] because the Bp thought him too much of a gentleman & he is proud, assuming & self-conceited & despises the foreign missionaries." In Duerr's opinion, both Ferguson and Samuel Seton were unfit for ordination.

tyrannical rule of the Bp. & Mrs. Payne.”⁹² They were rude, petty, and querulous; and Duerr claimed their mismanagement drove him from Liberia after only nine months. A third retired missionary, Alice Colquhoun, blamed Payne’s wife for the low morale, describing her as “despotic . . . domineering, and dictatorial in the extreme.”⁹³ And Payne shared “like tendencies” with his spouse by exhibiting “a haughty manner” and “the spirit of domination.”⁹⁴

The ensuing report noted the “peculiarity of temperament of Bishop Payne,” namely that he was insensitive to others and inconsistent in disciplining subordinates. Moreover, it blamed him for failing to develop “self-reliant & independent” native pupils, who it found were in a perpetual “state of dependence upon the mission” without basic crafts or skills.⁹⁵ “While we abhor the doctrine of modern scepticism that civilization must precede Christianity,” the report read, “at the same time we hold that Christianity properly construed* does promote a healthful civilization—where this result is not manifested, therefore, we must reasonably infer some defect in the Christian training.” It speculated that part of the trouble grew from “Bishop Payne’s early training having been a southern man & [his having been] reared in a slave state.” In spite of Payne’s stated opposition to slavery, the report surmised he had been “unconsciously” influenced

⁹² J[ohn] W[illiam] C[assimor] Duerr to S. D. Denison, Put in Bay, Ohio, 8 February 1867, “Liberia Papers, Miscellaneous, Duerr, Rev. J. W. C., 1867” folder, in Box 16, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

⁹³ A chief complaint against Mrs. Payne was that she played favorites, as demonstrated by outfitting her native supporters with the best of donated Western wear—which reportedly inflamed jealousy from neighboring villagers. The Paynes likely saw the practice differently. A partial reason Greboes lobbied for an Episcopal presence was due to the material superiority they witnessed from Westerners. Whether under the guise of Christian benevolence or a civilizing influence, the prospect of consuming or wearing Western goods, then, became one more method to attract followers—a process of “acculturation” that bound native to missionary.

⁹⁴ Alice E. Colquhoun, Easton, Maryland, 16 March 1867, “Liberia Papers, Miscellaneous, Colquhoun, Alice, 1867” folder, in Box 16, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

⁹⁵ Blyden referred to this practice as *pauperising*, which reduced natives to a state of servility while inculcating superciliousness and a dictatorial spirit within the missionary. See Blyden, *Christianity, Islam, and the Negro Race*, 194.

* Word is only partially legible and may be *consistent*.

it—which in turn explained the “defective training” of his students. The report concluded that he trailed “the spirit of the age” and alluded to the quandary of dealing with the longtime bishop. He was deemed unfit to be transferred to another mission field because investigators believed he was too set in his ways to reverse course and would only introduce the same problems to his new locale. So after rejecting his transfer, the report recommended he be retained and directed to encourage more self-sufficiency among the natives.⁹⁶ The report did little to vindicate Payne, and the bishop likely sensed the board’s tepid support, because he retired from the mission field within a year after receiving the report.

Samuel Ferguson and the Racial Experiment

Fortunately for the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society, a capable successor was waiting in the wings. In time Samuel David Ferguson became the esteemed bishop, an office that both Stokes and Crummell had coveted decades earlier. Ferguson possessed many of the characteristics that his predecessors did not; he was humble, deferential, and diplomatic. Yet beneath his calm exterior, he harbored a steadfast desire to prove himself an equal to his white superiors and colleagues. He clashed repeatedly with meddling whites as he enlarged his influence.

Born in 1842 Ferguson emigrated to Liberia as a child, disembarking in Monrovia in 1848. His early years were spent in Charleston, South Carolina, where his lifelong affiliation with the Episcopal Church happened almost by chance. As an infant, he had fallen ill and was on the verge of death. His Baptist father and Catholic mother grew concerned enough to seek out an Episcopalian bishop for baptism and last rites. Ferguson recovered, though, and attended school

⁹⁶ H[enry] H. Morrell, “On the State of the African Mission,” n.d. [c. 1867], “Liberia Papers, Miscellaneous, Morrell, H. H.” folder, in Box 16, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

in Charleston before his family uprooted for Liberia. They joined the settlement of Sinoe in the summer of 1848, but African fever struck down his father and two of his siblings. At this critical juncture, John Payne took a personal interest in the fatherless boy, who rapidly excelled in the mission school at Sinoe. Payne confirmed and ordained him; more importantly, Payne gave him his first teaching post at age twenty in the neighboring town of Cavalla. Their relationship was sufficiently close enough that he lived with the Paynes during his time there.⁹⁷

By most accounts, Ferguson was exactly what the Foreign Committee was seeking. He exhibited initiative, loyalty, and perseverance. In 1868 Payne elevated him to the priesthood at Crummell's church, Trinity Church in Monrovia. He shuttled between Cape Palmas and Mount Vaughan, preaching at St. Mark's Church while serving as principal of Mount Vaughan's high school. When Payne retired to the United States in 1869 after over thirty years of service, Ferguson began to assume more administrative duties and to supervise Episcopalian missionaries caught in the middle of a brewing war between Liberians and natives. He performed the basic duties of bishop while the Episcopal Church struggled to find a suitable replacement. The first bishop it sent died less than three months after landing in Liberia; the second, Charles Clifton Penick, did not arrive until 1877, eight years after Payne had relinquished his duties. As a result, Penick leaned heavily on Ferguson's expertise. When Penick retired in 1883 Ferguson continued to juggle numerous administrative tasks. His faithful reports and stabilizing presence finally convinced the Foreign Committee to appoint him as Missionary Bishop to Cape Palmas and

⁹⁷ Biographical details drawn from "A Biographical Sketch of the Right Rev. Samuel D. Ferguson, D.D., D.C.L., Missionary Bishop to Cape Palmas and Parts Adjacent," n.d. [c. early 1900s], in "Biographical Sketch of Samuel D. Ferguson" folder, Box 47, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

Parts Adjacent in 1884, making him the first black Episcopal bishop in Africa.⁹⁸ Under his bishoporate, Episcopalians flourished in Liberia. His charges more than doubled the mission outposts, doubled the students instructed, nearly quadrupled church communicants, and almost doubled the number of churches in the country.

Despite Ferguson's achievements, he shared many of the same complaints as Crummell. Ferguson objected that—after assuming responsibilities for running the high school in addition to pastoring the church—his missionary salary had dropped 20 percent, leaving him with the unenviable choice of going into debt or neglecting his family's needs. Although he believed missionaries were not to obsess about their pay, “[y]et the laborer is worthy of his hire.”⁹⁹ Another drawback was the mission board's practice of paying their black missionaries in specie or drafts, rather than in U.S. dollars, because merchants devalued the former by 35 percent.¹⁰⁰ Although facing similar problems as Crummell, Ferguson handled the setbacks with more tact. In asking for higher pay on the basis of his eight years of experience and his raising a family, he added: “However, I must and will be guided by the better judgment of the Committee and . . . must be contented with whatever they see fit to allow me. I know they have not the means at

⁹⁸ One can argue that Samuel Crowther was the first black bishop in West Africa with his ordination in 1864, though because he belonged to the Church of England, he was technically not Episcopalian but Anglican.

⁹⁹ S. D. Ferguson to H. H. Morrell, Cape Palmas, 10 March 1868, “Liberia Papers, Ferguson, S. D., 1868” folder, in Box 25, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers, AEC.

¹⁰⁰ In contrast, Episcopal bishops used gold when traveling because of its common currency and stable valuation. See S. D. Ferguson to J. Kimber, Cape Palmas, Liberia, 8 May 1878, “Liberia Papers, Ferguson, Rev. S. D. 1878” folder, in Box 25 “Ferguson,” Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC. When Ferguson became bishop, he requested that international donations arrive “in green back.” Copy of S. D. Ferguson to R. Fulton Cutting, n.p. [probably Harper, Liberia], 10 October 1888, “Liberia Papers, Ferguson, Bp. S. D. 1888(2)” folder, in Box 26, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

command which they have had in former years”¹⁰¹ Shrewd to be just subservient enough, Ferguson fared better than either Stokes or Crummell in pressing his claims.

In spite of his financial trials, Ferguson headed a relatively successful missions post. His school was one of the largest, educating seventy-one “scholars” in 1869; and his parish, St. Mark’s Church, was the first and most populous “African church” in the Episcopalian denomination, boasting 150 congregants by 1871.¹⁰² To alleviate his travel, he built a house nearer his ministry sites. But Ferguson ran afoul of his oversight committee, which objected to his living in a house of his own, rather than the designated mission house. He penned a respectful reply in which he pointed out that they had not objected three years earlier, when he had built the house in order to be closer to his parish. His letter’s tenor was a model of respectful decorum:

Please do not charge me with *dictating* to your Committee. Far be it from me. With an humble conviction of the relations we sustain to each other, I have only expressed my opinion. I have been engaged in the service of the Committee for the last ten years, and ought at least to be considered as having an interest in the work. Not being here to see things as they are for yourselves, I am sure you will not entirely disregard the suggestions of those who see and know the true state of things.¹⁰³

Flexibility was a trademark of Ferguson early on. For instance, he was elated to report during Passion Week of 1873 that Methodists and Baptists had worshiped with his church in an

¹⁰¹ S. D. Ferguson to S. W. Denison, Cape Palmas, Liberia, 9 January 1869, in Box 25, “Liberia Papers, Ferguson, S. D., 1869” folder, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers, AEC.

¹⁰² See S. D. Ferguson to S. W. Denison, Cape Palmas, Liberia, 9 January 1869, in “Liberia Papers, Ferguson, S. D., 1869” folder, Box 25, “Liberia Papers, Ferguson, S. D., 1869” folder, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers, AEC; S. D. Ferguson to T. S. Savage, Mount Vaughan, Cape Palmas, Liberia, 24 May 1869, in “Liberia Papers, Ferguson, S. D., 1869” folder, Box 25, “Liberia Papers, Ferguson, S. D., 1869” folder, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers, AEC; “Report of S. D. Ferguson for the Year Ending June 30, 1871,” in “Liberia Papers, Ferguson, S. D., 1871” folder, Box 25, “Liberia Papers, Ferguson, S. D., 1869” folder, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers, AEC.

¹⁰³ S. D. Ferguson to William H. Hare, Cape Palmas, Liberia, 15 June 1871, in Box 25, “Liberia Papers, Ferguson, S. D., 1869” folder, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers, AEC, original emphasis retained.

ecumenical service. His ecumenical practices continued because he commented in 1875 that “our [denominational] neighbors have learnt to regard us in a different light, for we were favored with frequent visits from them”—a revealing remark that the Episcopal organ was quick to excise in its printed version.¹⁰⁴ A year later, the journal editor again omitted Ferguson’s description of a local revival in which ~~“Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, Congregationalists and Episcopalians all united in supplicating a special outpouring of the Spirit.”~~¹⁰⁵ In this case, ecumenism and emotionalism appear to have been the offenses for which Ferguson found himself censored. In later years he himself grew more doctrinaire, especially after ascending to the bishopric, when he ordered a female teacher’s firing unless she left Methodism and joined the Episcopal church.¹⁰⁶ But in his early years Ferguson emulated his mentor Payne by associating with those believers not strictly Episcopalian.

Ferguson was much more optimistic about natives’ abilities than his predecessors. While he could be critical of his wards, he was also careful to explain their shortcomings. So though one boy was “not at all a bright scholar,” his English language deficiency was due to “neglected” training as a child; likewise, while a native boy was “rather dull” and slow to comprehend an idea, he never forgot it once mastered. Unlike Payne, Ferguson perceived select natives as capable of leadership or “executive ability.”¹⁰⁷ As bishop, he far surpassed his predecessors in

¹⁰⁴ S. D. Ferguson to R. B. Duane, Cape Palmas, Liberia, 2 April 1875, “Liberia Papers, Ferguson, Rev. S. D., 1875” folder, Box 25, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

¹⁰⁵ S. D. Ferguson to S. D. Denison, Cape Palmas, Liberia, 29 December 1876, “Liberia Papers, Ferguson, Rev. S. D. 1876” folder, in Box 25 “Ferguson,” Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

¹⁰⁶ See S. D. Ferguson to Wm. S. Langford, Harper, Liberia, 20 April 1888, “Liberia Papers, Ferguson, Bp. S. D. 1888(1)” folder, Box 26, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

¹⁰⁷ S. D. Ferguson to R. B. Duane, Cape Palmas, Liberia, 5 May 1875, “Liberia Papers, Ferguson, Rev. S. D., 1875” folder, Box 25, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

delegating authority to natives. For example, in 1889, 38 percent of his missionary staff were aborigine¹⁰⁸:

Position	White	Liberian	Native
Presbyter	1	6	4
Deacon	0	2	1
Candidate for Holy Orders	0	4	4
Lay reader	0	10	2
Physician	1	0	0
Female teacher	1	7	1
Male catechist or teacher	0	7	13
Business agent	0	2	0

Table 4. Numerical breakdown of the bishop’s missionary staff.

At the same time, his sympathetic assessment of natives’ abilities contrasted with his gloomier take on their spiritual condition: “the poor Africans in the rear groping in the grosser darkness of heathenism.”¹⁰⁹ In 1883 he posed in the below picture¹¹⁰—furthest right figure on the second-floor balcony—and drew a connection between the girls’ orphan asylum and the government lighthouse on the left. He described the asylum as a “sanatarium” [sic] for the sick, and the lighthouse as a beacon piercing the “nocturnal darkness” of heathenism.¹¹¹ As such, he implied that the Episcopal church and Liberian government worked alongside each other to rescue

¹⁰⁸ “Missionary Staff,” 20 September 1889, “Liberia Papers, Ferguson, Bp. Samuel D. 1889(5)” folder, in Box 27, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

¹⁰⁹ S. D. Ferguson to J. Kimber, Cape Palmas, Liberia, 4 October 1879, “Liberia Papers, Ferguson, Rev. S. D. 1879” folder, in Box 25 “Ferguson,” Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

¹¹⁰ “The Cape Palmas Orphan Asylum,” *Spirit of Missions* 48 (1883): 373.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 372; Ferguson to Kimber, 4 October 1879, AEC.

Africans from themselves: “a fit emblem of what the institution is, or sh[oul]d be, to the poor Africans.”¹¹²

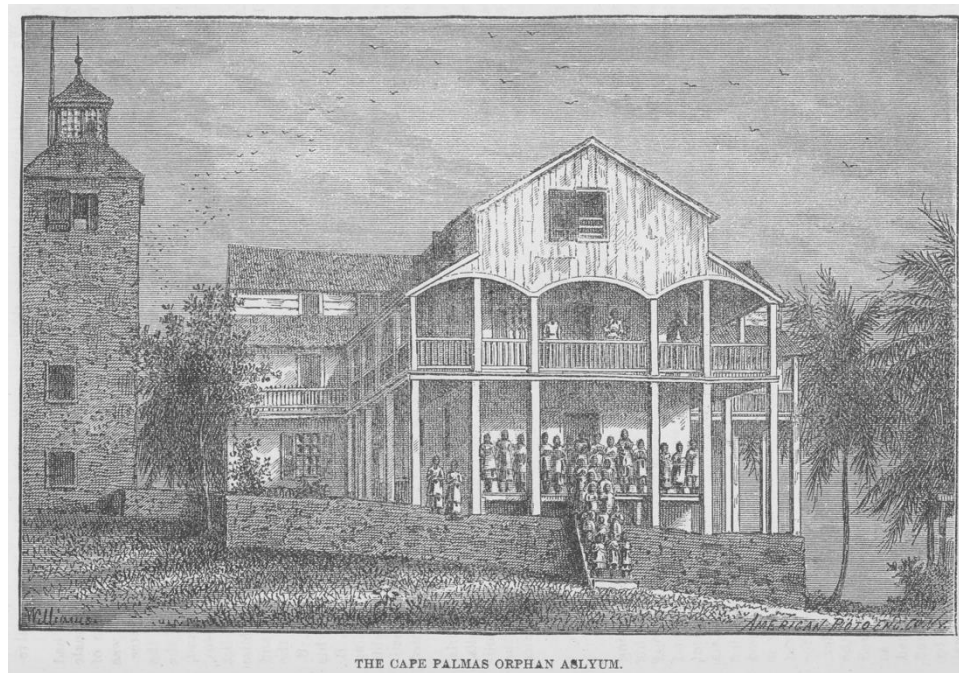


Figure 3. The Cape Palmas Orphan Asylum and the lighthouse.

This negative evaluation carried over to cultural considerations, too. When a fellow missionary requested a transfer, he met with some “hesitation” on the oversight committee because the mission house was “built in the native style.” Before they would permit him to move, they required the natives construct a house appropriate “for a teacher.”¹¹³ Elsewhere, Ferguson described a “more comfortable” house as having raised floors and separate kitchens.¹¹⁴ Later

¹¹² Ferguson to Kimber, 4 October 1879, AEC

¹¹³ S. D. Ferguson to J. Kimber, Cape Palmas, Liberia, 12 July 1877, “Liberia Papers, Ferguson, Rev. S. D. 1877” folder, in Box 25 “Ferguson,” Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

¹¹⁴ S. D. Ferguson to Wm. S. Langford, 28 September 1886, Report for the Year Ending June 30th, 1886, “Liberia Papers, Ferguson, Bp., S. D. 1886(3)” folder, in Box 26, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

when he became bishop, Ferguson would insist that missionaries live separately from their native charges.

The outbreak of tribal war in the late 1870s provided an opening for the opportunistic Ferguson. In an unintentionally humorous account, he recounted traveling into the interior to evangelize a tribe preparing to go to war. Undaunted, he preached on death and the afterlife to a crowd of warriors with guns in hand. “They listened attentively and, I trust, were benefitted,” he reported. His second audience was less so. In the neighboring town, he changed his message to the battle between David and Goliath. “The Gospel was never listened to under more unfavorable circumstances,” as the warriors rushed away upon hearing two false alarms. As Ferguson noted dryly, they had found “a good excuse for withdrawing their attention altogether from me.” Just as he was closing in prayer, the enemy appeared, leading him to beat a hasty retreat for his canoe.¹¹⁵

Perhaps the presence of simmering hostilities, or potential for their bubbling over, influenced Ferguson to adopt a warlike mentality. In any case, he was prone to martial language. Thus he portrayed Payne as “a faithful worn-out soldier from the field of battle, with the satisfaction that a partial victory has been won, and the hope of final conquest.” Moreover, Ferguson referred to himself and his fellow Episcopalians as “the Church militant” fighting “on the battlefield, face to face with the enemy . . . advancing to a new position on territory claimed by him.”¹¹⁶ Even bishops, dignified as they were, became “battle-tested officers in waging

¹¹⁵ S. D. Ferguson to J. Kimber, Cape Palmas, Liberia, 29 September 1877, “Liberia Papers, Ferguson, Rev. S. D. 1877” folder, in Box 25 “Ferguson,” Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

¹¹⁶ S. D. Ferguson to J. Wimber, Grand Bassa, Liberia, 11 September 1884, “Liberia Papers, Ferguson, Bp., S. D. 1884(4)” folder, in Box 26, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC; S. D. Ferguson to Mrs. S. A. C. Bond, n.p., 31 May [188]7, “Liberia Papers, Ferguson, Bp., S. D. 1887(3)” folder, in Box 26, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

war.”¹¹⁷ Bellicosity was biblical because Ferguson received his “marching orders from the Captain of our Salvation” and was “ready to go forth to the conflict . . . until all this land shall be conquered and possessed for our King.”¹¹⁸

Personal tragedy struck Ferguson in 1878 when his wife died, leaving him the father of five motherless children. The widower took comfort in what he believed was God’s providence, but he was sorely tested by what happened next.¹¹⁹ Following his wife’s death, the mission board lowered its support for Ferguson, surmising that his church would make up any difference. A “perplexed” Ferguson wrote: “While you continue to recognize me as your missionary it cannot surely be a matter of indifference with you whether I eat or starve”¹²⁰ He warned the mission board that he would be forced to seek secular employ. His superior’s response grated him particularly. Whereas Bishop Penick thought the missionary should earn the average salary of those to whom he was ministering, Ferguson found this rule to be impractical and ludicrous. “I don[’]t think such a theory has ever been put into practice anywhere. The cases of your own experience, which you mentioned, refer, I presume, to your pastoral connexion with self-supporting churches. If to service you rendered some missionary organization your salary could

¹¹⁷ S. D. Ferguson to J. Kimber, Cape Palmas, Liberia, 8 February 1877, “Liberia Papers, Ferguson, Rev. S. D. 1877” folder, in Box 25 “Ferguson,” Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

¹¹⁸ S. D. Ferguson to Mrs. S. A. C. Bond, n.p., 31 May [188]7, “Liberia Papers, Ferguson, Bp., S. D. 1887(3)” folder, in Box 26, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

¹¹⁹ See S. D. Ferguson to J. Kimber, Cape Palmas, Liberia, 21 November 1878, “Liberia Papers, Ferguson, Rev. S. D. 1878” folder, in Box 25 “Ferguson,” Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

¹²⁰ S. D. Ferguson to J. Kimber, Cape Palmas, Liberia, 19 March 1879, “Liberia Papers, Ferguson, Rev. S. D. 1879” folder, in Box 25 “Ferguson,” Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

not have been rated according to such a principle”¹²¹ Under such a system, clerks and mechanics would earn more than a missionary, Ferguson protested. Penick refused to budge, rejoining: “The great work of Missions is not Church sustention but Church extension.” Furthermore, he rejected the notion that the missionary society should become the “equalizer of salaries.”¹²² An aggrieved Ferguson wrote the Foreign Committee in order to document what he considered the dismissive attitude of Penick, insinuating that the bishop had ignored logic in snubbing his request. Not until a half decade later did the committee raise his salary to an acceptable \$1,600 a year—after he had remarried and sired an additional child.¹²³

Ferguson’s run-in with Penick had not been his first clash with a white missionary nor would it be his last. Crummell’s nemesis had been Bishop John Payne (who ironically had been Ferguson’s benefactor). Ferguson found his fiercest rival in William Allan Fair, a white missionary who arrived in 1875 to run the Orphan Asylum at Cape Palmas. Fair and Ferguson began to feud almost immediately. As a white missionary, Fair was both headstrong and supercilious. In his first published comments after arriving in Cape Palmas, he noted: “I was very kindly received by the people everywhere I went. They were much pleased to see a *white* Missionary again.”¹²⁴ Fair did not take orders well from Ferguson, either ignoring or disputing him. An early sign of discord arose when Fair declined to attend meetings over which Ferguson

¹²¹ S. D. Ferguson to Charles C. Penick, Cape Palmas, Liberia, 3 October 1879, “Liberia Papers, Ferguson, Rev. S. D. 1879” folder, in Box 25 “Ferguson,” Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

¹²² Copy of C. C. Penick to S. D. Ferguson, Cape Mount, Africa, n.d. [probably 20 September 1879], “Liberia Papers, Ferguson, Rev. S. D. 1879” folder, in Box 25 “Ferguson,” Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

¹²³ See S. D. Ferguson to J. Wimber, Cape Palmas, Liberia, 4 August 1884, “Liberia Papers, Ferguson, Bp., S. D. 1884(3)” folder, in Box 26, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

¹²⁴ W. A. Fair, “Letter from the Rev. W. A. Fair,” *Spirit of Missions*, vol. 41 (October 1876): 504-505 [Cape Palmas, letter dated 2 August 1876], emphasis added.

presided. When Ferguson made his absences a matter of public record, Fair resorted to grudging excuses, offering vague and thinly veiled recusals such as: “I am sorry to say that I am not feeling very well today. In consequence of which, *and for other reasons*, I beg to be excused from attending the meeting.”¹²⁵ Publicly, Ferguson attempted to soothe feelings with a formal resolution calling for Christian friendship and harmony while expressing regret for any “unpleasant feelings on the part of Rev. W. A. Fair, our foreign brother.”¹²⁶ But privately, Ferguson blasted him for being hostile and arrogant:

Rev. Mr. Fair has been pleased to assume an attitude antagonistic to our efforts. . . . He manifests no disposition whatever to advise with us on the subject [of mission work]. He is giving directions concerning the work—making changes, etc, without a word with any of us who have been in the field so long and are better acquainted with the workings of the mission than himself. But if he did this without censuring [sic] us for the part we are disposed to take in compliance with your instruction, it would not be so bad. He comes right down upon me with a charge of taking an advantage of him simply because I have done what you requested me to do. I have never been so completely astounded at the doings of an intelligent Christian man before.¹²⁷

Moreover, Ferguson indicated that he was up to the challenge and would not back down from Fair. “Be assured that we (I speak for the col[ore]d Brethren) will do all in our power to keep down strife on the one hand,” he vowed, “and preserve alive the little fire on the other.”¹²⁸ The Foreign Committee sided with Ferguson and informed Fair he was at fault in the matter, leading

¹²⁵ William Allan Fair to S. D. Ferguson, Orphan Asylum [Cape Palmas, West Africa], 2 August 1876, in “Liberia Papers, Ferguson, Rev. S. D., 1876” folder, Box 25, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC, emphasis added.

¹²⁶ S. D. Ferguson to S. D. Denison, Cape Palmas, Liberia, 19 August 1876, “Liberia Papers, Ferguson, Rev. S. D. 1876” folder, in Box 25 “Ferguson,” Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

¹²⁷ S. D. Ferguson to S. D. Denison, Cape Palmas, Liberia, 26 August 1876, “Liberia Papers, Ferguson, Rev. S. D. 1876” folder, in Box 25 “Ferguson,” Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

Fair to apologize to Ferguson for “misjudging” the situation.¹²⁹ Whether due to incompetence or retaliation, Fair began to send substandard reports to Ferguson, who refused to sign off on them. As a consequence, Fair sent out subsequent correspondence—which Ferguson intercepted—questioning his rival’s leadership. Ferguson had had enough. He wrote to the Foreign Committee requesting that he no longer be assigned to work with Fair, stating: “When a matter is entrusted to me in common with others you expect me to exercise my best judgment. Now if I cannot express my opinion without his being offended because it happens to differ from his own views, there is no good to be derived from our being associated.”¹³⁰ One final flare up occurred a decade later when Fair refused to administer communion to one of Ferguson’s protégés, who was under suspicion of committing adultery. By then, Ferguson was bishop and overruled Fair.¹³¹ Undeterred, Fair wrote to Ferguson, demanding to read the adultery trial proceedings for himself, because he considered them to be “uncanonical and unjust.”¹³² In other words, he was charging Ferguson with malfeasance in his presiding over the trial. Ferguson refused to turn over a record of the trial—which by then had been disposed of in his protégé’s favor—to Fair, whom he considered “the most litigious and disagreeable brother that I have ever had dealings with, white or colored.”¹³³

¹²⁹ See S. D. Ferguson to S. D. Denison, Cape Palmas, Liberia, 21 November 1876, “Liberia Papers, Ferguson, Rev. S. D. 1876” folder, in Box 25 “Ferguson,” Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

¹³⁰ S. D. Ferguson to J. Kimber, Cape Palmas, Liberia, 2 June 1877, “Liberia Papers, Ferguson, Rev. S. D. 1877” folder, in Box 25 “Ferguson,” Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

¹³¹ S. D. Ferguson to W. S. Langford, Harper, Liberia, 12 April 1886, “Liberia Papers, Ferguson, Bp., S. D. 1886” folder, in Box 26, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

¹³² S. D. Ferguson to W. A. Fair, Harper, Liberia, 11 July [188]7, “Liberia Papers, Ferguson, Bp., S. D. 1887(5)” folder, in Box 26, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

¹³³ S. D. Ferguson to Wm. S. Langford, Cape Palmas, 11 July 1887, “Liberia Papers, Ferguson, Bp., S. D. 1887(5)” folder, in Box 26, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

Ferguson and Native Resistance

A more serious challenge to his authority came in the same year. In spring 1887, Ferguson reportedly confided to Penick that native rights were “being trodden upon,” with Liberians leveling “attempted taxation without protection or benefit.”¹³⁴ Whether from true concern or malicious intent, Penick relayed Ferguson’s words to the U.S. State Department.¹³⁵ The Liberian government reacted unfavorably upon learning of the letters.¹³⁶ Its secretary of state, E. I. Barclay, accused Ferguson of being “traitorous” with the intent of “thwarting . . . and paralyzing every effort which may be made for the pacification” of “insurgents.” Barclay demanded that Ferguson turn over all incriminating documents so that the government could review them for “disaffection and disloyalty.”¹³⁷ Under the cloud of indictment, Ferguson described himself as “greatly astonished” at the “slander” against him.¹³⁸ He professed unshakable “love” for the government and declared the natives’ action to have “no just cause.”¹³⁹

¹³⁴ George R. Stetson to Col. Lamont, U.S. State Department, Washington, DC, 1 June 1887, “Liberia Papers, Ferguson, Rev. S. D. 1887(2)” folder, in Box 26, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

¹³⁵ In any case, Penick did not always have the highest opinion of Ferguson, writing in 1887, “It is so hard to get the truth sent across here just as it is that I hardly know what to believe about this. Now that you have a Liberian Bishop it should be harder than ever to get the heathen side of that quarrel.” He preferred “a man of war to settle the trouble.” F. Tebeyo Allison to S. D. Ferguson, Cape Mount, Liberia, 25 July 1887, “Liberia Papers, Ferguson, Bp. Rev. S. D. 1887(6)” folder, in Box 26, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

¹³⁶ Liberian government officials were drawn into the controversy after the U.S. minister to Liberia began to question publicly the loyalties of Ferguson based on information the U.S. State Department had furnished him to that effect. Sensitive to international opinion, especially from the United States, Liberian diplomats pressed the government to silence Ferguson’s purported criticism of its native policies. See W. Davis to S. D. Ferguson, Monrovia, Liberia, 19 July 1887, “Liberia Papers, Ferguson, Bp. S. D. 1887(6)” folder, in Box 26, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

¹³⁷ E. J. Barclay to S. D. Ferguson, Monrovia, Liberia, 19 July 1887, “Liberia Papers, Ferguson, S. D. 1887(2)” folder, in Box 26, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

¹³⁸ S. D. Ferguson to E. J. Barclay, Cape Palmas, Liberia, 10 August 1887, “Liberia Papers, Ferguson, S. D. 1887(2)” folder, in Box 26, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

The “rebellious tribe,” he declared, “must suffer all the ill consequences that may follow.”¹⁴⁰ Ferguson offered his own missionaries—who were “as deeply interested in the welfare of their people as Bishop Penick ever can be”—to counter the retired bishop’s personal views and “base misrepresentation” of him.¹⁴¹ Privately, Ferguson fumed at Penick’s “prejudice and disposition to do harm.”¹⁴² He suspected Penick of trying to undermine his position with the natives and sabotage the mission work under his administration.¹⁴³ In Ferguson’s mind, Penick was “evil[ly] disposed” in trying to incite the “heathen” against him. Penick—realizing the danger he had put Ferguson in and perhaps hoping to avoid further attacks on his reputation—retracted his earlier statements about Ferguson.¹⁴⁴ Without incriminating evidence or testimony, the Liberian secretary of state issued a commendation of Ferguson, praising his “correct” patriotism and loyalty.¹⁴⁵ Thus Ferguson was able to clear his name and rectify the “entire misapprehension.”¹⁴⁶ But the saga left him less freedom to maneuver: he was now on record as supporting the

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² S. D. Ferguson to Wm. S. Langford, Harper, Liberia, 11 August [188]7, “Liberia Papers, Ferguson, Bp. Rev. S. D. 1887(6)” folder, in Box 26, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

¹⁴³ Ferguson made his feelings plain six months later: “I cannot avoid thinking that his [Penick’s] skirts are not altogether clear. . . . It is not to be expected that he would do anything to help forward my administration since it does not meet his approbation, and he might even prophesy and wish its non-success; but I did not think he would try to cripple me in such a manner.” S. D. Ferguson to Wm. S. Langford, Harper, Liberia, 23 February 1888, “Liberia Papers, Ferguson, Bp. S. D. 1888(1)” folder, in Box 26, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

¹⁴⁴ See C. Clifton Penick to the Secretary of State of Liberia, Louisville, Kentucky, 24 October 1887, “Liberia Papers, Ferguson, S. D. 1887(2)” folder, in Box 26, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

¹⁴⁵ Copy of E. J. Barclay to S. D. Ferguson, Liberia’s Department of State, Monrovia, Liberia, 17 September 1887, “Liberia Papers, Ferguson, Bp. S. D. 1887(6)” folder, in Box 26, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

¹⁴⁶ Copy of T. F. Bayard to J. Houston Eccleston, U.S. State Department, Washington, DC, 9 December 1887, “Liberia Papers, Ferguson, S. D. 1887(2)” folder, in Box 26, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

government over and against the natives. In September 1887 he had disseminated an open pastoral letter in which he intertwined the fate of missions and the government, stating that “the Mission will best succeed in its holy purposes by supporting and strengthening (morally) the government; and furthering the interest of the missionary enterprise by the government will have much to do with the prosperity and success of the nation.”¹⁴⁷ Furthermore, he ordered that every church incorporate prayer for the Liberian president and “all in Civil Authority.”¹⁴⁸ Thus his position hardened under the guise of doing one’s Christian duty.

Natives certainly felt this way. According to Ferguson: “The king and chiefs are said to complain that instead of standing neutral as did the white missionaries when ‘desperate wars and contentions’ were going on, I ‘want to make my Episcopal work an instrument’ of enslaving them; and to [sic] state that since the Mission has been in their country they have ‘never witnessed any like act compared with this.’”¹⁴⁹ In their minds, Ferguson’s alliance with the government was both unprecedented and unwelcome. They accused him of abandonment, styling themselves as “shepherdless Christians.”¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ S. D. Ferguson, “Pastoral Letter,” n.p., September 1887, “Liberia Papers, Ferguson, Rt. Rev. S. D. 1887(8)” folder, in Box 26, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ S. D. Ferguson to Wm. S. Langford, Harper, Liberia, 9 November 1887, “Liberia Papers, Ferguson, Bp. S. D. 1887(9)” folder, in Box 26, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC; cf. Neye Kědábła, Yedeo Gódí, Tane Póś, et al to the Secretary of the Foreign Committee, Cavalla, 3 August 1887, “Liberia Papers, Miscellaneous, From S. D. Ferguson correspondence regarding rebellion against Liberian Government, 1886–1887” folder, in Box 49, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

It is interesting how the House of Chiefs portrayed themselves and Ferguson to the American board. They claimed that their tribes had been on the verge of realizing the fruition of white missionaries’ gospel work, when “a Liberian” with the “spirit of antifreedom” halted a mass conversion. In any case, their charge that white missionaries had remained neutral was patently false, as Fair had vigorously lobbied for U.S. intervention in the Grebo War of 1875.

¹⁵⁰ S. D. Ferguson to Wm. S. Langford, Harper, Liberia, 9 November 1887, “Liberia Papers, Ferguson, Bp. S. D. 1887(9)” folder, in Box 26, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

Continual comparisons to his white predecessors rankled Ferguson, who pointed out that prior white missionaries had very much intervened in intertribal conflicts by taking sides. If Bishop Payne had been in a similar predicament, he would have taken the exact same steps, Ferguson argued. After all, he was merely following the orders of the Foreign Committee, who had stated: “It is under the protection of that Government that the Missionary work is carried on, and every thing conspires to make the Committee the most anxious that nothing shall interfere with the growth and prosperity of said Government.”¹⁵¹ The lengthy defense of his actions—ten handwritten pages—suggests that Ferguson felt pressure to justify his stance as congruent to that of his white compatriots.

Yet it is notable to whom Ferguson had not compared himself. He had justified his actions as in concord with Bishop Payne rather than Bishop John Auer, who had been Payne’s immediate successor. The Greboes had viewed Auer favorably because he had introduced trade teachers to the populace—a move that threatened to undermine colonists’ monopoly in skilled tradesmen. The German-born Auer had also expanded James Thompson’s Mount Vaughan mission school, envisioning it becoming a full-fledged institute. Finally, Auer was open to baptizing polygamists who expressed an otherwise genuine commitment to conversion. Greboes stood poised to embrace this forward-thinking bishop, but his unexpected illness and death in 1874 fueled conspiracy theories among Greboes that the Liberians had had a hand in his expiration. The eventual elevation of Ferguson, for many Greboes, symbolized a depressing return to the status quo.

¹⁵¹ 1874 Foreign Committee directive cited in D. Ferguson to Wm. S. Langford, Harper, Liberia, 9 November 1887, “Liberia Papers, Ferguson, Bp. S. D. 1887(9)” folder, in Box 26, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

Ferguson further damaged his credibility when he claimed personal disinterest after swearing institutional allegiance to the Liberian government. “I am sure it cannot be proven that I have at any time shown partiality,” he huffed.¹⁵² He had, and publicly too. It was a fine line that Ferguson had to traverse: balancing patriotism with altruism. For many natives in Cavalla, he had failed to do so. He was no longer Missionary Bishop of Cape Palmas and Parts Adjacent; he was that “Liberian Bishop,” politicized and disowned.

Episcopalians and the Ethnic “Problem”

Natives had a long, troubled history with the colony and subsequent state of Liberia. Forty years earlier, Episcopalians had relied on the Liberian government and U.S. navy to open and secure the interior for missionaries. In 1843 Commodore Matthew Calbraith Perry, accompanied by then Governor J. J. Roberts, had led a squadron of U.S. Navy ships into Cape Palmas to suppress Kru and Grebo attacks on shipping vessels, which had resulted in the earlier loss of an American schooner and the execution of its crew. A white Episcopalian missionary, Launcelot Byrd Minor,¹⁵³ had first reported the grisly details to the U.S. Secretary of the Navy, and he urged the secretary in no uncertain terms to retaliate¹⁵⁴: “It would ill become me, a minister of the Gospel, to recommend any unnecessary effusion of blood, but forbearance, in the

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Minor was a gifted linguist who performed deputation with fellow Virginian, John Payne, and arrived in Liberia with Payne in 1837. He served six years in Liberia before succumbing to dehydration at the age of 29. His death left Payne as the senior field missionary and the obvious candidate to be the first Episcopalian bishopric in Liberia. For a short biography of Minor, see Mrs. E. F. Hening, *A History of the African Mission of the Episcopal Church in the United States, with Memoirs of Deceased Missionaries, and Notices of Native Customs* (New York: Stanford and Swords, 1853), 122-208; for a heartfelt eulogy, see also John Payne, “Journal of the Rev. Mr. Payne,” *Spirit of Missions* 8, no. 11 (November 1843): 422-23.

¹⁵⁴ Minor risked his life to warn a Dutch schooner captain of a similar native plot to capture his vessel and dispose of the crew. In successfully alerting the captain of danger, Minor became a target for assassination. See L. B. Minor to J. A. Vaughn, Tabbou [sic], 4 July 1842, “Liberia, Minor, Rev. L. B. – 1842” folder, in Box Oversize 1, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

present case, would not be mercy. It would be evident to every one acquainted with the African character, that a severe example is now absolutely necessary, to secure any thing like respect and security to our countrymen trading on the coast.”¹⁵⁵ Because innate “native hideousness” led to their “lawless violence” and “deception,” he recommended naval officers besiege and raze the hometown of the Bereby ringleaders.¹⁵⁶

The next year, Perry landed five hundred marines and sailors, who killed fifty natives and torched a dozen villages in Bereby.¹⁵⁷ Overwhelmed by Perry’s forces, the natives sued for peace and signed a treaty that promised unfettered trade through their territories, ceded authority to the Liberian government to resolve disputes, and guaranteed the entrance and safety of missionaries to the region. The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Episcopal Church sent Perry hearty congratulations on the beneficial services he rendered on its behalf.¹⁵⁸ In reply, Perry promised to expend “our utmost exertions to foster and protect the missionary establishments.”¹⁵⁹

Conflict flared over the next decades, leading to intermittent clashes in 1856, 1868, 1875, and 1893. The mid-1880s revolt, then, stood in a series of longstanding disputes between interior tribes and the coastal government. The difference in 1885, however, was that the native rebellion

¹⁵⁵ Mrs. E. F. Hening, *A History of the African Mission of the Episcopal Church in the United States, with Memoirs of Deceased Missionaries, and Notices of Native Customs* (New York: Stanford and Swords, 1853), 184.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 185.

¹⁵⁷ See “Latest from Africa—Attack by Americans on the Natives,” in “Liberia Papers, Miscellaneous, Account of attack of Commodore Perry on Liberia clipping, n.d.” folder, in Box 16, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

¹⁵⁸ See P. P. Irving to M. C. Perry, New York City, New York, 19 July 1844, as referenced in M. C. Perry to Pierre P. Irving, St. Lago, Cape de Verdes, 22 October 1844, in “Liberia, Perry, Commander, M.C., 1844” folder, in Box 6, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

¹⁵⁹ Copy of M. C. Perry to Pierre P. Irving, St. Lago, Cape de Verdes, 22 October 1844, in “Liberia, Perry, Commander, M.C., 1844” folder, in Box 6, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

threatened to tear apart the unity of the Episcopal mission force. Missionaries had not had to make this stark choice during the 1868 Grebo war, in which they had been regarded as neutrals and protected or ignored by natives on both sides of the conflict.¹⁶⁰ Part of the reason for the altered treatment was the 1881–1882 passage of sedition legislation that proscribed treasonous acts against the Liberian government, which extended to aiding or abetting enemies of the state. The result was that it muzzled dissenters who feared running afoul of the stringent law. Unlike the 1860s, Ferguson faced the added problem of corralling a sizable congregation of indigent converts, some of whom actively assisted the rebellion. Their actions pressured other native Christians to take a stand—either for or against—in the dispute, and stressed an already precarious group to its breaking point.

In 1885 Cavalla experienced upheaval as natives broke their accord with the Liberian government. According to the native missionary Martin Park Keda Valentine, tribal chiefs regarded the compact as a non-binding “friendship” that they were free to withdraw from at any time. A large contingent of natives regarded the “Republic of Liberia” to be a title “merely assumed by a few black people who came to Africa solely in their own interest, seeking to annihilate the native tribes, as the Americans had done the Indians.” The catalyst for revolt was the imposition of custom duties that prevented the tribes from trading freely with any foreign ship captain. When they prevented the Liberian duty collector from taking payments in Cavalla, the government in Monrovia levied a stiff fine of \$200 and demanded they desist in their

¹⁶⁰ See Jno. Payne, “Report from the African Mission to the Board of Missions of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, assembled in New York, October, 1868,” Proceedings of the Board of Missions of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, at their Thirty-Third Annual and Eleventh Triennial Meeting, held in New York, October 9th, 1868 (Troy, NY: A. Kirkpatrick, 1868), 120-22, in Box 5, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—Records of the Board of Missions of the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society UP 234, AEC; see also Copy of Neye Kédábla, Yedeo Gódí, Tane Póś, et al to S. D. Ferguson, Cavalla, 11 February 1887, “Liberia Papers, Miscellaneous, From S. D. Ferguson correspondence regarding rebellion against Liberian Government, 1886–1887” folder, in Box 49, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

unauthorized “interference.” It also took punitive action when it imprisoned their delegates to the Superintendent’s Council.¹⁶¹ Refusing to bow to unfair taxation, the Gbedewe (or Half Cavalla) tribe declared independence and appealed to the neighboring British and Sierra Leoneans to free them from “foreign rule.”¹⁶²

Native missionaries faced a quandary. To follow their bishop required them to repudiate the rebellion, but to oppose it risked losing native backing and threatened to decimate years of work and alliance building.¹⁶³ One native in particular, John Payne Valentine Kãẽ, had agonized for years over choosing the ministry over “home, homefolks & friends”—a sacrifice that had admittedly “retarded my progress in spiritual life.”¹⁶⁴ When conflict broke out, he abandoned his educational post and moved to Taboo to reside with the rebels.¹⁶⁵ He may have been one of the reported “renegade converts” who turned their backs on the missionaries and exhorted the

¹⁶¹ See Copy of M. P. K. Valentine, C. H. Morgan, A. H. F. Vinton, et al. to Pres. H. R. W. Johnson, Cavalla, 1 December 1886, “Liberia Papers, Miscellaneous, From S. D. Ferguson correspondence regarding rebellion against Liberian Government, 1886–1887” folder, in Box 49, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

¹⁶² Paragraph quotes taken from M. P. Keda Valentine statement excerpt, in *Annual Report on the Foreign Missions of the Protestant Episcopal Church* [1886-1887], 6, in Box 8, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—Records of the Board of Missions of the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society UP 234, AEC.

¹⁶³ See Jno. Payne, “Report from the African Mission to the Board of Missions of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, assembled in New York, October, 1868,” *Proceedings of the Board of Missions of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, at their Thirty-Third Annual and Eleventh Triennial Meeting, held in New York, October 9th, 1868* (Troy, NY: A. Kirkpatrick, 1868), 120-22, in Box 5, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—Records of the Board of Missions of the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society UP 234, AEC; see also Copy of Neye Kẽdãbla, Yedeo Gódí, Tane Póś, et al to S. D. Ferguson, Cavalla, 11 February 1887, “Liberia Papers, Miscellaneous, From S. D. Ferguson correspondence regarding rebellion against Liberian Government, 1886–1887” folder, in Box 49, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC, where this difference is made explicit by African chieftains. In the end, the missionaries lost the Cavalla region as well as thirty-five preaching stations.

¹⁶⁴ John Payne Valentine Kãẽ to Joshua Kimber, Buchanan, Grand Bassa, Liberia, 31 January 1883, “Liberia Papers, Valentine, John Payne, 1876-1883” folder, in Box 44, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

¹⁶⁵ See S. D. Ferguson to Wm. S. Langford, Grand Bassa, Liberia, 2 May 1887, “Liberia Papers, Ferguson, Rev. S. D. 1887(3)” folder, in Box 26, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC. Ferguson promptly terminated Kãẽ’s salary in retaliation.

natives to emulate the Americans of 1776.¹⁶⁶ They denounced the native missionaries as traitors and accused them of plotting the extermination of natives through alleged arson and poisonings. Natives forcibly repossessed the land, compelling the missionaries to flee to neighboring stations for safety and effectively ending the Church's involvement at Cavalla.

Yet loyalist missionaries contributed to their own demise. Ferguson and Samuel Waddington Kla Seton, a Grebo missionary, seem to have acted as backdoor liaisons between the Liberian government and loyal chieftains.¹⁶⁷ Two dozen native missionaries pledged their fealty to the Liberian President and spoke out against heathen greed (natives' desire for control of their trade apparently being the basis for their charge). An unnamed native convert declared that "neither the Church of God, nor civilization will ever prosper in these regions until peace & perfect union [with Liberians] shall have been established." Public pronouncements like this did little to endear the people to missionaries. Rhetorical skirmishes soon turned into the real thing. Martin P. K. Valentine—the principal of Hoffman Institute and Ferguson's right-hand man—suffered martyrdom in Liberians' eyes, when he was killed while helping lead a hundred-man contingent of Cuttington College students and workers against the Gbedewe rebels.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ M. P. Keda Valentine statement excerpt, in *Annual Report on the Foreign Missions of the Protestant Episcopal Church* [1886-1887], 6, in Box 8, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—Records of the Board of Missions of the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society UP 234, AEC. Thomas Collins was almost certainly one of the instigators. See Copy of Neye Kédábla, Yedeo Gódí, Tane Póś, et al to S. D. Ferguson, Cavalla, 11 February 1887, "Liberia Papers, Miscellaneous, From S. D. Ferguson correspondence regarding rebellion against Liberian Government, 1886–1887" folder, in Box 49, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

¹⁶⁷ See Copy of Charles Hodge, Swenh Yedobo, and Hnee Nyea to Pres. H. R. W. Johnson, Big Town, Cape Palmas, 20 November 1886, "Liberia Papers, Miscellaneous, From S. D. Ferguson correspondence regarding rebellion against Liberian Government, 1886–1887" folder, in Box 49, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

¹⁶⁸ See S. D. Ferguson to William S. Langford, Cape Palmas, Liberia, 11 July 1896, "Liberia Papers, Ferguson, Bp. Samuel D. 1896(3)" folder, in Box 28, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

Samuel Seton and “Culture War”

Political affiliation was only one arena of contention. Cultural practices drew Ferguson into another unwanted debate. A fellow missionary, Samuel W. Kila Seton, broke from the church after being ousted for alleged “gross immorality” under Bishop Penick.¹⁶⁹ Seton’s feud with Ferguson arose when the bishop declined to reinstate him.¹⁷⁰ He wrote Ferguson to inform him that he was starting his own denomination, the African Evangelical Church of Christ, and would no longer “dapple with you in the human teachings.”¹⁷¹ Instead, Seton would engage in

It is notable that though Ferguson professed ignorance and bewilderment to his superiors over Valentine’s military involvement, he had advocated such action for almost a decade: “heathen minds that cannot be affected by moral suasion must needs [sic] be brought under subjection by physical force.” S. D. Ferguson to William S. Langford, Cape Palmas, Liberia, 20 January 1887, “Liberia Papers, Ferguson, Bp. Rev. S. D. 1887” folder, in Box 26, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

¹⁶⁹ William Fair accused Seton of acting “contrary to [Seton’s] ordination” by marrying “a harlot.” Allegedly, Seton’s second wife had engaged in premarital relations with another man while a teenager and, based on that finding, Penick removed Seton for “violating” his ordination vow of having his family be “wholesome examples of the flock of Christ.” Noteworthy is that, in spite of the controversy, Ferguson backed Seton when he married him and his fiancée, Laura Potter. Samuel Waddington Seton, “The Defence of the Rev. S. W. Seton to an Ecclesiastical Court in U.S. America,” Cape Palmas, West Africa, 21 January 1878, “Liberia Papers, Seton, Samuel W., 1877-1878” folder, in Box 40, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

Fair had a frosty relationship with Seton. In 1877 he examined Seton’s students without Seton’s knowledge or consent—an affront that Seton refused to forgive. See William A. Fair to S. W. Seton, Cape Palmas, 28 September 1877, “Liberia Papers, Seton, Samuel W., 1877-1878” folder, in Box 40, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC; S. W. Seton to William A. Fair, Cape Palmas, Liberia, 3 October 1877, “Liberia Papers, Seton, Samuel W., 1877-1878” folder, in Box 40, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

Not only had Penick dismissed Seton, the bishop had also done so without first convening an ecclesiastical court (which eventually acquitted Seton of the charges on a 4-3 vote) to investigate Fair’s indictment. Seton wrote the foreign missions secretary and all but accused Penick of being presumptuous and vindictive. See S. W. Seton to J. Kimber, Cape Palmas, Liberia, 2 January 1878, “Liberia Papers, Seton, Samuel W., 1877-1878” folder, in Box 40, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

¹⁷⁰ Ferguson’s refusal to restore Seton can only be seen as a rupture between personal friends, for they had been co-ordained into the diaconate and Ferguson had married Seton and his wife in 1877. See Samuel W. Seton to J. Kimber, Cape Palmas, Liberia, 25 September 1877, “Liberia Papers, Seton, Samuel W., 1877-1878,” in Box 40, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

¹⁷¹ S. W. Seton to S. D. Ferguson, 1 September 1887, ACS Archives, No. 109583-4 (MS Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC), quoted in David A. Shank, *Prophet Harris, the “Black Elijah” of West Africa*, abridged ed. (New York: E. J. Brill, 1994), 72.

divine teaching and would “endeavour to win you all to Christ and into his Church.”¹⁷² Most infuriating for Ferguson would have been the charge that the Episcopal Church had “departed from the pure word of God,” in favor of dogma, “opposing and jarring” creeds, and denominational discord. As for Seton, he would preach the unadulterated Gospel and recognize the authority of none but Jesus, “the only Head of His church.”¹⁷³

Ferguson was not amused. He had a printed tract circulated throughout the country, accusing Seton of being a false prophet, treacherous wolf, evil seducer, crafty deceiver, and damned heretic.¹⁷⁴ Privately Ferguson feared not for “our civilized people” but for “the poor heathen and weak converts,” who he thought would be led astray by Seton’s new “sect” which allowed converts to continue the practice of polygamy.¹⁷⁵ Monogamy was the “opposing and

Perhaps not coincidentally, Blyden withdrew from the Presbyterian denomination a year prior. See Hollis R. Lynch, “Introduction,” in Edward Wilmot Blyden, *Black Spokesman: Selected Published Writings of Edward Wilmot Blyden*, edited by Hollis R. Lynch (New York: Frank Cass & Co., 1971), xxvi.

¹⁷² Seton to Ferguson, 1 September 1887, ACS Papers, quoted in Shank, *Prophet Harris, the “Black Elijah” of West Africa*, 72.

¹⁷³ Copy of Saml. W. Seton to S. D. Ferguson, Hoffman, Liberia, 18 September 1887, “Liberia Papers, Ferguson, Bp. S. D. 1887(8)” folder, in Box 26, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC. Ferguson accurately assessed the situation when he wrote that Seton would have reconciled with the Episcopal Church had it restored him. “The grapes are sour,” Ferguson observed, “because he c[oul]d not get them.” S. D. Ferguson to Wm. S. Langford, Harper, Liberia, 8 September 1887, “Liberia Papers, Ferguson, Bp. S. D. 1887(8)” folder, in Box 26, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

¹⁷⁴ See S. D. Ferguson, “A Warning!” 3 September 1887, “Liberia Papers, Ferguson, Bp. S. D. 1887(8)” folder, in Box 26, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC. In response, Seton threatened to expose Ferguson by publicizing “unpleasant” details about the bishop. See copy of S. W. Seton to S. D. Ferguson, Hoffman, Liberia, 8 September 1887, “Liberia Papers, Ferguson, Bp. S. D. 1887(8)” folder, in Box 26, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

Ferguson had reason to fear Seton, who won election to the Liberian national legislature in 1887, becoming the first Grebo elected to that body. Thus Seton carried tremendous clout among fellow Greboes—of whom Ferguson was not one—and one must recognize the political overtones underlying Ferguson’s concurrent theological criticism of Seton.

¹⁷⁵ S. D. Ferguson to Wm. S. Langford, Harper, Liberia, 8 September 1887, “Liberia Papers, Ferguson, Bp. S. D. 1887(8)” folder, in Box 26, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

jarring creed” that Seton had alluded to earlier, one that he found at odds with the societal norms of the natives.¹⁷⁶ Polygamy was a controversial issue that prevented many natives from joining the Episcopalian ranks. In some ways, owning wives was similar to owning slaves in the antebellum Deep South of the United States. It bestowed status and wealth upon the practitioner, allowing him to procure more property and recognition in turn. For example, natives discouraged one tribal king from converting because monogamy was beneath his royal dignity and would mark him as a poor man who could not afford to purchase more wives. In contrast, Ferguson considered monogamy a “sure test” to identify the civilized from the heathen.¹⁷⁷ He deployed a slippery slope argument, insisting that if he relented on polygamy, a host of other compromises would follow. Additionally, monogamy preserved the purity of the church because it “has undoubtedly kept many false professors out of the Church.”¹⁷⁸ So unlike Seton, Ferguson regarded monogamy as “divine law” rather than a cultural trait or phenomenon.¹⁷⁹

While Seton founded the African Evangelical Church of Christ, he held meetings and disseminated literature on behalf of the Russellites, later known as Jehovah’s Witnesses. Public association with Russellites would have been one more basis for Ferguson’s charges of heresy and sectarianism. Indeed, Ferguson organized an 1888 ecumenical conference of Baptists, Methodists, and Episcopalians, which issued the warning: “This is the greatest danger that has ever threatened Liberia. War and pestilence and famine bear no comparison to it...” See *A Letter to the Churches, to All the Christian Churches of Liberia*, Cape Palmas, Liberia, 28 July 1888, in Episcopal Church History Archives, quoted in Shank, *Prophet Harris, the “Black Elijah” of West Africa*, 74.

¹⁷⁶ According to a missionary stationed at Cape Palmas, 60,000 polygamists inhabited the area. See copy of R. H. Gibson to S. D. Ferguson, Cape Palmas, Liberia, 19 September 1887, “Liberia Papers, Ferguson, Bp. S. D. 1887(8)” folder, in Box 26, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

¹⁷⁷ S. D. Ferguson to Wm. S. Langford, Harper, Liberia, 17 October 1887, “Liberia Papers, Ferguson, Bp. S. D. 1887(8)” folder, in Box 26, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC; for context, Fair adjudged civilization in a similar manner. He reported the “spread of intelligence” among the Grebo tribe as measured by the growing disuse of *gree-grees* (i.e. idols); 80 percent drop in known “devil-doctors”; decline in trials by ordeal (i.e. drinking poison); absence of “wild orgie” at funerals; increased burials by soil interment; and diminished betrothals (i.e. selling of child brides). See Samuel D. Ferguson, *An Historical Sketch of the African Mission of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the U.S.A.* (New York: Foreign Committee, 1884), 49.

¹⁷⁸ S. D. Ferguson to Wm. S. Langford, Harper, Liberia, 17 October 1887, “Liberia Papers, Ferguson, Bp. S. D. 1887(8)” folder, in Box 26, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

Admiring Seton's emphasis on African autonomy, Edward Blyden deemed the bishopric appointment of Ferguson, "a mulatto," to have been a mistake.¹⁸⁰ Blyden opposed Ferguson because his version of Christianity trampled Blyden's native instincts. Fifteen years earlier, Blyden had laid out his recommendations for mission work:

Now, if I may venture to suggest advice to those attempting to open new missions among the people of this coast—especially the intelligent tribes—it would be, Respect and preserve the harmless instincts of the people. Let the boys and girls in the schools eat the simple, wholesome food of their country and with spoons only, as they sometimes do among their own people, or with their fingers as is more generally done, and let them eat this sitting on mats and not at a table with knives and forks and chairs. Let them wear the clothing of their country made in the best style, clean and neat, that in the process of their training they may not receive the impression that the external accidents of European civilization are the essentials of Christianity. . . . Then when they leave school and return to their people, they will have nothing to *unlearn* before they can be useful and secure the sympathy of their relatives and acquaintances.¹⁸¹

Polygamy, for Blyden, was another benign instinct that in no way impinged on the essence of Christianity. If anything, he viewed the practice as salutary because it "protected and sheltered" women from prostitution and concubinage.¹⁸² Blyden pronounced Western-oriented missionaries to be misguided and their "theories" failures because missionaries misapplied them to Africa: "The marriage laws of Europe have proved disastrous in the Equatorial regions of the globe" because they obliterated the societal arrangements already in place.¹⁸³ Combined, Blyden's intellectual arguments and Seton's religious teachings posed a stiff challenge to the bishop's authority.

¹⁸⁰ See E. W. Blyden to Wm. Coppinger, Lagos, Sierra Leone, 3 October 1887, ACS Papers.

¹⁸¹ Edward W. Blyden to W. H. Hare, 14 September 1872, Freetown, Sierra Leone, "Liberia Papers Blyden, Professor Edward W. 1871–1872" folder, in Box 20, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, at the AEC, original emphasis retained.

¹⁸² Edward Wilmot Blyden, *African Life and Customs* (1908), reprint, Baltimore: Black Classics Press, 1994), 24.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 21.

Ferguson's fear proved justified, when tribal leaders favored the new doctrine and questioned why it was not being taught by Episcopalians.¹⁸⁴ One missionary urged Ferguson "to examine all your Catechists and teachers, (especially Greboes) as to their soundness in this direction."¹⁸⁵ Ferguson concurred. He wanted converts to speak out against polygamy. Anything less was tantamount to betrayal and disloyalty. A professing Christian who did not side publicly with the church was not worthy of being called one because he deserted his church in the heat of battle.¹⁸⁶ Behind the scenes, Ferguson promised a potential ally, Robert Gibson, that he would recommend him for a future appointment within the church—and hence the prospect for "pecuniary reward."¹⁸⁷ In reality, Ferguson was offering inducement for Gibson to switch sides, because Gibson was allowing Seton to conduct his church services in Gibson's home. Ferguson exhibited a deft pragmatism in dealing with Gibson, who had earlier been suspended from Episcopalian work for cohabitating with a woman not his wife.¹⁸⁸ Yet because he retained stature with the natives, Ferguson deemed him "able to exert a good influence" and "considerable

¹⁸⁴ Interestingly, the most visible supporter of Seton's teaching was the chief of Big Town, a kinsman of Seton's. Tribal affiliations, then, also played a factor in the unfolding religious politics. See S. D. Ferguson to W. S. Langford, Harper, Liberia, 8 October 1887, "Liberia Papers, Ferguson, Bp. S. D. 1887(8)" folder, in Box 26, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

¹⁸⁵ Copy of R. H. Gibson to S. D. Ferguson, Cape Palmas, Liberia, 19 September 1887, "Liberia Papers, Ferguson, Rt. Rev. S. D. 1887(8)" folder, in Box 26, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

¹⁸⁶ Sentence is gender specific because Ferguson used the male term *sons* here. His word choice also reveals the familial obligations he placed upon members and converts in doing their expected duty.

¹⁸⁷ See S. D. Ferguson to R. H. Gibson, Harper, Liberia, 20 September [188]7, "Liberia Papers, Ferguson, Bp. S. D. 1887(8)" folder, in Box 26, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

¹⁸⁸ Ferguson had treated another subordinate entirely differently by suspending him—without actual proof—for becoming "unduly intimate with a woman" not his wife. Ferguson justified his overcautious approach on the grounds that even the hint of immorality could mislead the heathen as to the teachings of Christianity. S. D. Ferguson to William S. Langford, Harper Station, 23 December 1889, "Liberia Papers, Ferguson, Rev. Samuel D. 1889(6)" folder, in Box 27, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

weight” on behalf of Episcopalians.¹⁸⁹ Thus he lobbied successfully for Gibson’s reappointment.¹⁹⁰ Yet the gambit had weakened Ferguson in the process, making him appear desperate and devious in his dealings with the natives. Never again would he be on the amicable terms he had once enjoyed as a young missionary on the field. Safeguarding himself against both white and black assaults, Bishop Ferguson grew conservative both in his doctrinal and racial outlook.

William Wadé Harris and the Syncretistic Alternative

It is difficult not to view Ferguson’s tenure as a missed opportunity. Nowhere is this more evident than in contrasting Ferguson to one of his subordinates, William Wadé Harris, who was one of Ferguson’s greatest triumphs—but also a living repudiation of his teachings. Born around 1860 in a Grebo village five miles from Cape Palmas, Harris spent his childhood living in a religiously mixed household. His father was a practicing polygamist who observed the prevalent spiritism of the region; however, his mother was a convert to Methodism and sent him to live with her brother, a Grebo Methodist Episcopal preacher, at age twelve.¹⁹¹ Like his mother, Harris professed Christianity and underwent baptism before his eighteenth birthday. But the death of his mother left him again under his father’s control, from which he extricated himself by becoming a

¹⁸⁹ S. D. Ferguson to W. S. Langford, Harper, Liberia, 8 October 1887, “Liberia Papers, Ferguson, Bp. S. D. 1887(8)” folder, in Box 26, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

¹⁹⁰ Gibson accepted Ferguson’s terms, for a month later Ferguson reinstalled him and put him back on the payroll. See D. Ferguson to Wm. S. Langford, Monrovia, Liberia, 7 December 1887, “Liberia Papers, Ferguson, Bp. S. D. 1887(9)” folder, in Box 26, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society—The Liberia Mission Papers RG 72, AEC.

¹⁹¹ Harris’s mother had probably attended one of the Methodist schools in the area as a child, only to be “reclaimed” by her family and exchanged for dowry.

kruboy, or crew member, on a British cargo ship trading along the coast.¹⁹² His travels exposed him to new religious experiences. While in Lagos, he worshiped at a Tinubu Wesleyan church known for its separatist doctrine. The English skills he gained from the British enabled him to return home and begin work as an intermediary between the Liberian government and Grebo tribes, rising to the eventual rank of official translator for all Maryland County. In 1885 he had garnered sufficient social standing to marry Rose Bedo Wlede Farr, the daughter of an Episcopalian native missionary.¹⁹³ By 1888 he had adopted Episcopalianism and caught the attention of Bishop Ferguson, who confirmed him at Harper and hired him in 1892 to teach near his birth village, Half Graway. Years later, Harris confessed he had been motivated to convert out of a desire for monetary gain, but at the time, his allegiances appeared sincere, because Ferguson rapidly promoted him from catechist and assistant teacher to lay reader and pastor of a nearby Episcopal congregation. In 1903 Ferguson bestowed Harris with a coveted school headmastership. By now, Harris was at the pinnacle of societal success. He was a respected Episcopalian missionary with the outward accoutrements that attested to such status: a large family, an annual income over \$400, and a two-storied brick house. Moreover, he was a Grebo who had achieved the same stature as Seton, recognized by both sacred and secular authorities as an influential leader and liaison between Greboes and Liberians.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹² The arrangement could well have been mutual, as it was customary for Grebo families to rent out their sons as krumen on passing ships.

¹⁹³ This event is significant because it evinces that Harris had identified with Liberians in several ways. First, he married five years after returning from his voyages, or put another way, five years after returning kruboy usually married. He was following the Western custom of “climbing the social ladder” before procuring a wife. Second, he wed in 1885, the same year in which Greboes declared war against Liberians. And third, he built a two-storied house out of brick and cement for him and his new bride to live in—the type of model house that Crummell had once praised as a material sign of civilization.

¹⁹⁴ This paragraph and subsequent two draw upon Gordon Mackay Haliburton, *The Prophet Harris: The Study of an African Prophet and His Mass Movement in the Ivory Coast and the Gold Coast* (London: Longmans, 1971); Sheila S. Walker, *The Religious Revolution in the Ivory Coast: The Prophet Harris and the Harrist Church*

But political developments soon forced Harris's hand. Sometime in 1908 Harris switched from recognizing Monrovia's jurisdiction to supporting the localized authority of chieftains. A near mutiny in Monrovia inspired him in February 1909 to replace the Liberian flag with the Union Jack at the Harper station. He declared his return to "heathenism," promoted aborigine rule, and urged the establishment of a British protectorate to achieve this goal. By taking this public stand, Harris was siding with Blyden and Seton.¹⁹⁵ Predictably Ferguson favored Liberian governance and promptly fired Harris for siding with his nemeses. Stripped of his translator and missionary duties, Harris was found guilty at trial and sentenced to a short stint in jail.

Tensions reached a boiling point in 1910, resulting in a three-month war between Liberians and Greboes. A freed Harris had allegedly exhorted his compatriots to resist Liberian rule during the short-lived rebellion, which resulted in devastating defeat for the Greboes.¹⁹⁶ A broken, disillusioned Harris found himself once more in jail. It was during this imprisonment he experienced a vision in which the angel Gabriel visited him and instructed him to abandon Western clothes and become an itinerant Christian prophet. Once released, Harris donned a simple white gown (reminiscent of the garb worn by local tribal priests) and traversed Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire barefoot. Accompanied by two women whom he called his wives,¹⁹⁷ he preached a message of repentance, exhorting listeners to burn their fetish idols and be baptized.

(Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983); David A. Shank, "The Harrist Church in the Ivory Coast," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 15, no. 1 (1985): 67-75; David A. Shank, *Prophet Harris, The "Black Elijah" of West Africa*, abridged by Jocelyn Murray (New York: Brill, 1994); Mark A. Noll and Carolyn Nystrom, *Clouds of Witnesses: Christian Voices from Africa and Asia* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2011), 65-79.

¹⁹⁵ Seton had died a year earlier in February 1908.

¹⁹⁶ Harris's 1910 involvement may be hearsay, as historian David Shank is relying on a personal interview with a family acquaintance of the Harrises, seventy years after the fact. See Shank, *Prophet Harris, the "Black Elijah" of West Africa*, 99, n. 101.

¹⁹⁷ Ironically, one of the pair was Helen Valentine, the widowed daughter-in-law of M. P. K. Valentine. She died in 1915, shortly after being arrested with Harris in Côte d'Ivoire and beaten while in French colonial custody.

Moreover, he claimed to be Elijah, the prophet of Jesus Christ, and the angel Gabriel his teacher.¹⁹⁸

Harris's evangelistic methods were not Ferguson's. He pronounced healing upon the sick, cast curses on Sabbath breakers, and battled local priests by pitting their fetish power against his own. Armed with a Bible, cross-shaped staff, a bowl of water, and a calabash—according to reports—he would visibly defeat the material objects wielded by his opponents. His gospel was much more permissive than Ferguson's. Harris allowed native converts to practice polygamy, retain their pagan songs (by substituting God's name in place of their local deities), and attend any church of their choosing. He elevated former witch doctors to his apostolate and insisted that God created different laws for black and white people. The result was that he baptized thousands of indigenous converts, who flocked to the self-proclaimed black Elijah and prophet of Jesus Christ. Establishing churches that observed a syncretistic intermixture of Christianity, Islam, and spiritualism, Harris's followers—called “water people”—came to number over two hundred thousand in what became known as the Harrist Church, a separatist denomination that parted ways with Episcopalians over politics and theology. Although Harris counseled converts to look to the white man and his Bible for further teaching, Harris and his acolytes rejected a deculturative Christianity that voided their existing cultural mores and spiritual values.

Conclusion

Despite cultural shortcomings, no one should discount the commitment of the missionaries in this chapter. John Payne, Eli Stokes, Alexander Crummell, and Samuel Ferguson sacrificed immensely while serving in Liberia. All experienced material deprivation, and most

¹⁹⁸ Pierre Benoît, *Benoît Notes I*, 12, trans. David A. Shank, in Shank, *Prophet Harris, the “Black Elijah” of West Africa*, 140.

felt the sting of losing loved ones to disease. Each of their legacies attests to noble actions. Payne spent over half his life ministering to black people in a land four thousand miles from his native Virginia. Stokes died prematurely after sharing his food until he had too little left on which to subsist. Crummell repeatedly housed and fed visitors in his home, even when he could ill afford the expense. And as bishop, Ferguson fought hard on behalf of his missionaries for equal pay. Even their rigid views can be somewhat explained. To a degree, the men's cultural blinders arose from a well-meaning racial apologetic, namely, the belief that Africans were eminently able to participate in "civilization," or the Western discourse of life.

Yet, while their intentions were noble, their relations were often rocky. As progressive as Payne was compared to fellow white Virginians, he never could overcome his distrust of blacks in positions of authority. As perceptive as they were in detecting and challenging white supremacy, Stokes and Crummell failed to build a functional alliance because of petty jealousy and personal ambition. And despite his wish to act independently, Ferguson retreated in the face of white and native opposition. Cultural intolerance emerged from a common migratory problem. Black emigrants had lost their former identities and could not easily reproduce them in a new land. Christian nationalism offered the promise of being the basis for a new collective identity. More easily seen in retrospect, much of the difficulty arose from trying to build a nationality on top of a preexisting indigenous population, one that was ill-suited to embrace the wholesale importation of EuroAmerican Christianity. The defect many missionaries failed to see in the nineteenth century, sadly, was that the three Cs—Christianity, civilization, and commerce—need not be concomitant. The logic for connecting the trio was alluring: the gospel's spread, transformed mores, and legitimate commerce could potentially stamp out the slave trade and commend the race. But by linking the three in a rigid EuroAmerican construct, missionaries

shackled their beneficiaries with an alien faith that neither invested nor conjoined aborigines to the budding nation. Imposing exploitive trade terms and a deculturative civilization, predictably, bred distrust of Episcopalians' motives and their advertised faith. Blyden, Seton, and Harris pointed to an alternate course of action, one which assimilated African traditions and customs into the practice of Christianity. But doing so required shedding preconceived notions of morality, religiosity, and individual worth. It also obliged missionaries to revisit existing political and socioeconomic structures that barred natives from full societal and ecclesiastical participation. Neither of these developments happened in the nineteenth century. The exclusive focus was on erecting a Christian racial polity. And though racial harmony was to be the intended bedrock for an evangelically informed black nationality, Episcopalian missionaries found the foundation crumbled when cultural and ethnic concerns were injected into the debate over color.

CONCLUSION

“The Love of Liberty Brought Us Here”: Visions of Freedom in the Age of Colonialism

Vision is a luminous thing. It can lead and inspire if properly conceived and channeled. The best ones obtain buy-in by virtue of their ideas and ideals. The visionary also creates passionate followers by living an exemplary life that models the desired characteristics of his or her vision. For proponents of Liberian emigration, principles of justice, unity, and equality proliferated in their pre-migration writings. Prominent emigrationists espoused grand theories of republicanism, Christian evangelism, and free-trade capitalism, arguing that their adoption would elevate the African race to heights comparable to those in Europe and America.

Yet vision is just as often a nebulous thing. Its job is to bind people together in a common cause, a collective goal for which people will suffer and sacrifice. Many emigrationist thinkers assumed that kin or ancestry would be the coagulant that would cohere disparate groups into a free citizenry and a black nationality. Biology is an amorphous adhesive, however, as most African Americans learned upon arriving in Africa. They had underestimated their own acculturation process, with many natives regarding them as thoroughly “white” in their thinking and living. Their preferred style of government, economics, and religion required introducing and persuading natives to adopt new systems of thought and values.

In the wrong hands, vision can turn into a deleterious thing. Defective vision can lead to it being ineffective, even destructive. For instance, one sees limited vision in the motto and imagery on Liberia’s national seal: “The Love of Liberty Brought Us Here” refers exclusively to African-Americans emigrants, with a picture of a sailing ship offshore reinforcing their arrival.

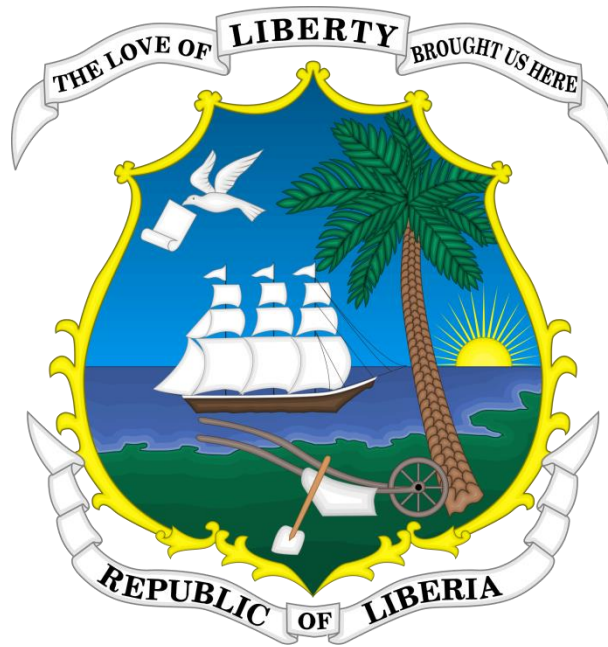


Figure 4. Liberia's National Seal.

The coat of arms—along with the 1847 Liberian flag, which was a striking replica of the United States'—underscores the privileged advantage Americoites had in defining the nation at its founding. If they were inviting natives to adopt their civic nationalism, they were also imposing the requirement that aborigines abandon cornerstones of their tribal identities. Here is the element of coercion that historians decry, that cause them to denounce the colonizing nature that was present in the nationalizing project.

Nationalization is not wholly hegemonic, however. It is part suture, part sunderance. Liberians needed the loyalty of natives, or more precisely the right kind of natives, in order to project power, unity, and stability to the outside world. Therefore, “the interior question” was never whether to incorporate indigenes into the republic; it was an issue over how deeply to absorb them into the political, religious, and socioeconomic fabric of the country.

Without a searing willingness to interrogate reality, vision can falter and slip into an incongruous thing. Early emigrationist thinkers articulated ethereal principles that highlighted

universal respect and brotherhood. Martin Delany's patriotism stipulated not only love of country but also universal love for mankind. Edward Blyden equated republicanism to fraternalism, an "all for one and one for all" *mentalité*. Alexander Crummell likened the African race to a family, with all the obligatory affections and expectations that such a bond demands.

But such noble ideals capsized once they crashed upon the rocky African coastline. No Liberian president could meet such lofty standards in their policies toward natives. *Realpolitik* won out, as Liberian politicians maneuvered to secure national stability through land, taxation, and trade protectionism. To understand nineteenth-century Liberia is to view everything through the lens of survival. As a nation, Liberia faced long odds. It wrestled with staggering weaknesses in financing, development, skilled workers, military preparedness, and international relevance. Liberia's undercapitalization and U.S. noninterventionism led to lopsided contests with world powers France and Britain over trade and resources. Foreign incursion combined with a native insurrection had the potential to lead to the domination over and partition of Liberia. This was the nightmare scenario that Liberians sought to avoid. In protecting its territorial integrity and regional influence, Liberia overreached in land acquisition and trade restrictions, alienating important neighbors like the Kru and Greboes.

Liberian society had its own tensions. Color, class, and county rivalries threatened to unravel the fragile unity that kept Liberia intact. Citizens could hardly expect to sustain a unified front against European powers or hostile natives if they could not maintain mutual security and ingrain a common identity. They needed a homogenized history, a shared vision about the past.

Liberia perpetuated founding stories that spoke of unified resolve against an omnipresent enemy. These national fables celebrated the victors and castigated the losers. Americo-Liberians crafted a triumphalist myth, slanted to present colonists in the most noble and heroic hue, namely

defending their lives and liberty from physical extinction and cultural death. Conversely, it cast natives in the vilest light, as faceless savages who imperiled the good community. Thus, historical episodes were both self-referential and stereotypical. In fashioning such a narrative, Liberians laid the groundwork, both knowingly and unwittingly, for future exclusion of natives into the body politic. On one level, chronicle consonance was understandable. The call for cohesion in the face of security risks was a strategic maneuver to unite competing Liberian communities in service of a higher purpose, the collective safety of the country.

Yet it seems many times as if the default position was to accept a false dichotomy between suppressing rights or risking revolt. This occurred even in Liberia's treatment of allies. Whether returned Congoes or educated natives, at times they experienced a shabby, second-class reception. They lived in a liminal zone that counted them as friends of the republic but not entitled to full rights. The shared benefits of Liberia's vision were adulterated, at best.

A flawed doubleness lay at the heart of the Republic's message. Liberians forged an alloyed appeal that melded the Christian, civilized, and commercial into what they hoped would be a compelling argument for black nationality. At the same time, they considered the tripartite amalgam to be a shield against heathen barbarity and continental backwardness. Commerce, civilization, and Christianity, then, were both enticement and entrenchment that allured and repelled. Yes, it was a bridge to societal inclusion, but it was a ribbon-thin plank guarded by vigilant gatekeepers.

Liberia's leaders were influential arbiters for entry into the republic, but they differed on the requirements for admission. President J. J. Roberts was willing to welcome aspirants who submitted to governmental authority and accepted a limited bill of rights. President James Payne took a hardline stance that shunted aside applicants without the requisite feelings of patriotism.

Crummell favored moral-minded supplicants who assented to top-down authority from Anglo-centric institutions like the church. Samuel Ferguson and Edward Blyden were less doctrinaire, but Ferguson had to curb his advocacy for natives and Blyden had to flee the country after losing a power struggle with Americoese.

In the highly charged decades of the seventies and eighties, Liberians were quick to vilify native sympathizers as collaborators and even conspirators. Missionaries attracted suspicion when they supported native grievances. The perceived perfidy of educated natives was another reason to suspect the patriotism of missionaries. Either their training was defective, or their loyalties were divided. It was dangerous to be seen as on the wrong side of the citizen/native divide, as Bishop Ferguson discovered when the secretary of state called him out for subversion. And disagreement could be hazardous to one's health, as Blyden and President Edward Roye learned, when Americoese were quick to inflame public ire by bandying around words like *traitor* and *saboteur*.

These reactions unearth two fault lines running below the surface. First, the use of divisive rhetoric to damage native sympathizers betrays the fragility of the new republic. In their struggle for independent survival, many leading Americo-Liberians chose ethnic unity over solidarity with natives. By equating national loyalty with group interests, Liberians promoted a selective patriotism that grew increasingly strident and polarizing: either one was an ardent supporter of Monrovia's government and policies or one was a traitor. Their decision had deepening ramifications for societal boundaries and native-citizen relations, resulting in exclusion of natives, demonization of dissenters, contraction of native rights, foreignization of obstreperous tribes, and calcification of social hierarchies that cemented Americo elites at the top. Second, the concern over native intentions exposes the simmering mistrust harbored toward

domestic tribes. The underlying premise, and hence the overriding fear, was that natives were a potential fifth column, willing to sell out the country to the French or British. That natives would side with foreign outsiders, ironically, was just another sign for Liberians that aborigines were not yet ready for full inclusion and participation in representative government. The perverse logic seems to be that if they truly understood and embraced the principles of liberty, they would rally around the republican values inherent in Liberian rule, rather than kowtow to the oversight of monarchal governments. So if they are pledging loyalty to France or Britain, the reasoning goes, would not that signal natives' inadequate judgment, if not downright gullibility? Of course, Liberians conveniently overlooked the underlying reason for natives' wanting to escape Monrovia's sphere of influence in the first place, namely the broken promises and ill treatment at the hands of African-American immigrants.

Not enough Americo-Liberians were asking hard questions. What is the reality confronting our neighbors if they surrender their land, if they must pay taxes, if they are forced to abandon traditional beliefs and social practices? What are the economic consequences if they lose direct access to European trade? What are the political ramifications of denying them legislative representation? How have we Liberians contributed to intertribal enmities and educational disparities? And more importantly, what steps are we going to take in order to ensure equal opportunities for citizens and natives alike? Failure to answer these types of probing questions led to an observable breach between principles and praxis.

An imposed vision can prove a rancorous thing. Lack of introspection was due to Americo hubris that stemmed from both self-aggrandizement and self-interest. As well intentioned as emigrants might have been, they harbored an abiding sense that their way of life was the best one to protect and promulgate. What was good for Americo-Liberians was good for

Africa, a premise they confirmed as much in deeds as in words. This blinkered belief sowed doubts over whether Liberians had any genuine interest in correcting economic imbalances, creating shared narratives, or establishing collaborative rule. Finance, remembrance, and governance became zero-sum activities, sites for bitter contestation that extended into the next century and beyond.

An exacting vision can feel like an onerous thing, while a conflicting vision can result in a dichotomous thing. The Americo-Liberian appeal lay in continual progress, that upward mobility would enhance the lives of the civilized practitioner. But ascent was arduous and, even with a benefactor, the social climb could take decades. One of John Payne's native protégés had to wait three years before he was able to assume an entry-level teaching position and achieve a stable income. Furthermore, civilized natives could find the destination unfulfilling, an uneasy coexistence between their public personas and their authentic selves. One prominent native, William Wadé Harris, spent twenty-five years of his Christian life climbing the socioeconomic ladder before he renounced it all—his job, house, and family—and returned to his native roots. Like other Westernized natives, Harris had found himself in an anomalous space, neither governing nor governed. Despite his school headship, his social standing was precarious, dependent on staying in the good graces of his Liberian sponsor, Bishop Samuel Ferguson. In the end, Harris found the Liberian vision to be discordant with his spirit and values. Whichever path he followed, he experienced dissonance. Either he was a cultural sellout because his lifestyle no longer mirrored that of fellow indigenes, or he was a political traitor when his loyalties reverted to his Grebo people. Unable to reconcile his two cacophonous identities, he sank into a depression that only lifted after he had witnessed an angelic vision that called for him to be an itinerant prophet free from either Episcopalism or African spiritualism.

Faith-based vision has the danger of backsliding into a sanctimonious thing. The doctrine of universalism lent itself to the idea that savages were salvageable civics. In this construct, native recipients—in spite of their waywardness—had the capacity to (1) understand and embrace the Gospel and (2) join an existing community of believers. Yet the conviction that they were savages spoke to the chauvinism inherent in Liberians’ hamartiology, namely that aborigines’ entire pre-conversion state was degenerate. Ministers like Crummell substituted civilizationalism for sanctification; Christian profession meant not only a conversion of hearts but also a revolution in habits, as converts found that creed and conduct were inextricably intertwined. Although this tenet is neither heterodox nor extrabiblical,¹ where Americo-Liberians erred was in making those works culturally particularistic. For example, Crummell preached the familial relationship between Liberian and native. It is a shrewd argument that laid the grounds to expand civic entitlements to all the country’s inhabitants. Yet it also unintentionally put natives at a disadvantage, because Crummell’s prescribed family is a specific recipe that calls for adding essential ingredients like monogamy, patriarchy, and gender norms—which he considers concomitant with Christianity. Thus, their absence marks moral deficiency, implies cultural inferiority, and contributes to ethnic typecasting.

Over time, though, vision can grow into a polymorphous thing. While vision can fail when imposed from the top down, it works best when people claim the vision for themselves, refitting it to meet their needs, whatever those may be. This is what historians like Tunde Adeleke miss when they excoriate missionaries as indistinct actors in the colonial theater of domination. According to this script, missionaries are the lead soldiers who advance the imperialist agenda of their parent country on unsuspecting natives. Such a depiction is little more

¹ For example, see James 2:14 where St. James asks: “What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works?” (KJV).

than caricature in Liberia. Individual missionaries like Crummell and Eli Stokes battled white prejudice, ecclesiastical politics, and Americo preeminence. Harris and Samuel Waddington Kla Seton were two converts who broke from the Episcopal church in their pursuit of a middle way, one which prohibited deculturative religion while preserving the core of salvation. In doing so, they restructured relations with missionaries, refashioned the gospel message to one agreeable on their terms, and redeployed it to spheres independent of Americo-Liberian control. They also appropriated the symbolic referents of faith: Harris's Bible book became a physical talisman against "devil doctors," while Ferguson's monogamy-as-litmus-test-of-conversion became a false doctrine in Seton's construction. Whatever Liberians' original vision, it became something different in the hands of natives.

Historians have reached varying conclusions on nineteenth-century Liberia, based on how they have perceived the legitimacy or consistency of its vision for society. James Ciment argues that Liberians placed survival above their ideals.² This work tries to show that though survival was a pressing concern, it was not necessarily antithetical to ideals, which were themselves variegated and open for debate. Liberians engaged in broad discussions about the composition and direction of the country, cognizant that national ideals would help ensure the republic's survival. The scope and timing of inclusion was up for grabs, but the vision was always to graft natives onto the budding nation. James Smith contends that conflict was inevitable between Africans and black Americans because of divergent cultural habits.³ This work examines some of the theoretical tenets underpinning the culture habits of black Americans

² James Ciment, *Another America: The Story of Liberia and the Former Slaves Who Ruled It* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2013), xix.

³ James Wesley Smith, *Sojourners in Search of Freedom: The Settlement of Liberia by Black Americans* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1987), ix.

and how they translated in practice. Conflict was not foreordained, because early emigrants and citizens disagreed among themselves over how to treat natives. The eventual dominance of Americo-Liberians has led some historians to write fixed oppositional narratives that fail to acknowledge the volatility and malleability of native policy in the first decades of nationhood. Tom Shick views Liberia as the coexistence of two unequal societies, one settler and the other African. The faith-based, missionizing sentiments of the ACS, he judges, were never enough to guide Liberians, who needed more tangible support in the form of money and immigrants. Bereft of dollars and numbers, Liberia was left with only an ideological commitment to racial nationalism. The country entered into loose alliances with African tribes in order to expand or strengthen its geographical claims, but without currency or critical mass, it was unable to entice or coerce integration of the two disparate societies.⁴ This work complements Shick by analyzing the ideological components of that nationalism. Despite pre-migration rhetoric of racial unity, Liberian nationalists made surprisingly few appeals to race after independence. It was commerce and Christian-influenced civilization that became the overriding mantras for black nationality. The perpetuation of inequality was a sad reality in nineteenth-century Liberia. Yet Schick glosses over the gradated inequities depending on the subgroup. To speak of two disparate societies fails to delineate the group dynamics within society. Liberian society contained a hodgepodge of peoples: affluent Americoes, ambitious artisans, manumitted slaves, recovered Congoes, Barbadian immigrants, and educated natives. And “uncivilized” tribes had their own factions, as the Greboes and Half-Greboes demonstrate. A binary social construct leads to an adversarial history that lacks nuance. Amos Beyan attributes unequal social relations to colonizationist-introduced paternalism, which entrenched coastal elites as Liberia’s sole powerbrokers.

⁴ Tom W. Shick, *Behold the Promised Land: A History of Afro-American Settler Society in Nineteenth-Century Liberia* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1980), 135-43.

According to Beyan, these merchant-princes imitated slaveholders in the American Colonization Society with their practice of class stratification and labor exploitation. Furthermore, he blames the ACS of failing to provide enough capital for Liberians to withstand the larger “world economic system,” by which he means a Marxian system that divides the haves from the have nots, thereby producing simultaneous wealth and poverty in society.⁵ Yet Liberians inherited Western modes of thought that went well beyond a simple Marxist issue of who owned the means of production. Moreover, they faced pressure unique to their race. White missionary agencies burdened Liberians with a redemption mandate to save Africa from heathenism, while white colonizationists saddled them with an exculpatory mentality to prove themselves as worthy representatives of their race. Tensions besides paternalism also factored into societal inequality. Identification and disassociation, benevolence and self-interest, cultural profusion and economic protectionism—these were other competing impulses prevalent in the first half-century of the republic’s existence. Does inequality rise to the level of imperialism? Claude Clegg believes it does, asserting that African-American liberty came at the expense of Africans. The price of freedom for Liberians was a corresponding deprivation of lives, land, and liberty for natives. It was an exploitive regime in the same vein as European colonial powers, Clegg concludes, marked by both dispossession and oppression.⁶ Clegg is not altogether wrong in his assessment. A combined ward and apprenticeship system proved ripe for abuse. Land expropriation was deplorable, too, though it comes with a caveat: what Clegg tends to minimize is the geopolitical pressures that drove Liberians to extend their territory. Bracketed by both the French and

⁵ Amos J. Beyan, *The American Colonization Society and the Creation of the Liberian State: A Historical Perspective, 1822–1900* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1991), 130-38.

⁶ Claude A. Clegg III, *The Price of Liberty: African Americans and the Making of Liberia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 5, 247-48, 269.

English, Liberia felt it had to assert control over coastal regions or lose them forever to the colonial powers. The threat was real and imminent. Foreign traders and colonial governors were strident in urging their home governments to force land concessions from Liberia. Britain and France were relentless in issuing ultimatums in order to compel Liberia's submission to trade demands and territorial reduction. Under the specter of subjugation and partition, Liberians felt they had no choice but issue a preemptive, clarion claim of ownership, regardless of whether indigenous tribes agreed with the validity of their control. Caree Banton argues that Liberian expansionism differs from European colonialism in its motivation; concerns over national sovereignty and black respectability informed their attempts to regulate and cultivate natives. She identifies four distinct groups within Liberian society—African Americans, West Indians, recaptives, and natives—who projected conflicting visions of what Liberia could become: in her words, “a site of freedom, a colony, and a pan-African republic.”⁷ For Americo-Liberians, commerce, civilization, and Christianity were the building blocks for realizing any of these visions. They formed the basic materials for a patchwork people stitched together by an imagined, racial kinship. But in practice, they came to act as value-laden signifiers that divided Americoes from the other groups. Rather than bind the country together, commerce, civilization, and Christianity became the rift that eventually unraveled the social fabric of Liberia in the late twentieth century. Because Americo-Liberians failed to build a common vision for a shared future, they struggled to form a cohesive nation-state where the dream of liberty extended to all people.

⁷ Caree Banton, “‘More Auspicious Shores’: Post-Emancipation Barbadian Emigrants in Pursuit of Freedom, Citizenship, and Nationhood in Liberia, 1832–1912,” (PhD diss., Vanderbilt University, 2013), 219.

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