



**NUI Galway**  
**OÉ Gaillimh**

**Inventing Liberia: Imagining and Representing Colony and Nation in  
American, Liberian and European Writing 1820 - 1940**

**Carmel Lambert**

**Supervisor: Dr. Muireann O'Conneide**

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**School of Humanities**

**College of Arts, Social Sciences, and Celtic Studies**

**National University of Ireland, Galway**

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## Abstract

Liberia, the West African nation, whose name connotes freedom, was the creation of the American Colonisation Society (ACS) whose initial aim was to rid the United States of a growing population of 'free people of colour.' Yet it became a unique imaginative space on to which were projected the hopes, dreams and fears of various groups in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This study examines the various ways that the country (established as a colony in 1820 and declared a republic in 1847) was imagined, constructed and represented in a wide variety of American, Liberian and English texts from 1820-1940. Ultimately, Liberia came to be widely regarded as not merely the reversal of the Middle Passage but a path whereby the descendants of slavery, figured as socially and spiritually unmoored in the New World, might be anchored and regenerated in Africa.

For the pioneering members of the free black community and newly emancipated slaves who colonised it, Liberia came to be represented as a recovered homeland, a space in which the experience of New World slavery could be rendered meaningful in the secular and sacred arenas through nation-building and the Christianisation of the African continent. White Americans promoted colonisation as the Manifest Destiny of the free black community, giving them the opportunity to carry the ideals of revolutionary America to their ancestral home. Late nineteenth-century American and Caribbean black commentators figured Liberia as a base for a Pan-African nation that presented a historic opportunity to define the ultimate destiny of the African Diaspora. These different representations positioned the Black Republic as a supposed utopia where black masculinity and femininity, so deeply undermined by the institution of slavery, could be restored and revitalised. For contemporary English and European visitors, the nation was a troubling anomaly in a continent ruled by European imperial powers. The accounts of these travellers to Liberia represented it as a state in crisis, whose failure they attributed largely to the incapacity of African people for self-government.

Liberia represents a re-figuring of the very concept of settler colonialism. Its distinctive and contested nature offers a singular paradigm that transforms and destabilises understandings of discourses regarding race and colonial relationships, complicates ideas of liberty and agency, and widens the scope of abolitionism, black nationalism and American imperialism. It adds a new dimension to our conceptualisation of the Black Atlantic and extends the developing genre of black American literature beyond the borders of the United States.

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## **Dedication**

In loving memory of my brother

Joe Lambert  
1946-2016

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## Introduction

In the weeks leading up to Christmas 1816, a Presbyterian minister, Robert Finley, arrived unannounced at the Washington home of the editor of the *National Intelligencer*, Samuel Harrison Smith. The editor and his wife, Margaret, were on their way to a reception in the White House and ‘meaning it quite as a joke,’ Margaret invited Finley to join them. There, he was introduced to the political and social elite of Washington and ‘conversed a good deal’ with the President James Madison and the Secretary of State and President elect, James Monroe.<sup>1</sup> The subject of the conversation was Finley’s idea for the colonisation of American free blacks in Africa. After Smith published Finley’s short pamphlet, ‘Thoughts on the Colonisation of Free Blacks,’ the most powerful men in Washington joined Finley in forming an organisation to put his ideas into practice. Before the end of the decade, the American Society for Colonizing Free People of Color in the United States (henceforth the ACS) had established the colony of Liberia on the west coast of Africa.

Liberia was, and remains, a unique political entity that defies easy categorisation. While it has been compared to both its neighbour, Sierra Leone and the other nineteenth-century Black Republic, Haiti, it is fundamentally different from both. Although Sierra Leone was also conceived by a philanthropic organisation as a settlement for a black diasporic population, it came quickly under British rule; Haiti’s independence from France was gained through revolution. How does one position Liberia? A settlement established by a private organisation but with the backing of the U.S. president and the active involvement of the U.S. Navy; a colony whose independence was assured almost at the moment of its creation; a nation which slipped quickly into a neo-colonial dependency on foreign powers decades before such a concept was recognised. Claude Clegg claims that Liberia came, over time, ‘to mean different things to different people.’<sup>2</sup> This was evident from its very inception

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<sup>1</sup> Nicholas Guyatt, *Bind Us Apart: How Enlightened Americans Invented Racial Segregation* (New York: Basic Books, 2016), p. 266.

<sup>2</sup> Claude A. Clegg, *The Price of Liberty: African Americans in the Making of Liberia* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), p. 247.



and goes some way to explaining the misunderstandings that surround it. Significant conceptual paradoxes appear in the debates on its foundation: its creators and supporters represented it as an opportunity for some black people to claim the liberties associated with American republicanism denied to them in the land of their birth; these 'free people of colour' were simultaneously portrayed as 'degraded' and yet worthy of becoming bearers of American values in Africa; the ACS membership consisted of philanthropic men who supported the gradual abolition of slavery as well as southern slaveholders who vowed to protect the institution. The leadership of the free black community viewed colonisation as a scheme to send its members into exile and excoriated those who participated in it as pawns of a pro-slavery organisation and traitors to their still-enslaved brethren. Yet for other free black people, whose voices we hear from Liberia, it was a means whereby they could liberate themselves from the bonds of racism and slavery, and simultaneously free their African brethren from the dark prison of barbarism. Thus, the freedom implied by the name of the colony was imaginatively expanded beyond the strictly legal definitions of abolition.

This study examines the myriad interpretations and constructions of Liberia by different organisations and individuals; the ACS, whose members and supporters represented it rhetorically as a replica of the first American colony; the first settlers who constructed an American-style republic, dedicated to the pursuit of liberty; the Liberian and black nationalists in the United States, who claimed to speak for the African Diaspora in search of a Pan-African nation, and the British commentators whose assessment of its prospects was coloured by discourses of British imperialism and scientific racism. This thesis attempts to address and account for the neglect of Liberia in colonial and postcolonial studies, a lacuna that is surprising given that both the colony and nation of Liberia challenge and destabilise understandings of colonial formations and relationships, complicate ideas of liberty and agency, widen the scope of abolitionism and black nationalism and add a new dimension to our conceptualisation of the Black Atlantic. Additionally, the earliest literary output from Liberia, with its themes of resistance and empowerment and recurring motifs of quest and journey, enriches the study of the developing genre of black American literature in the early nineteenth century.

One of the complexities inherent in writing about the descendants of slavery in the New World arises from the question of nomenclature. During the chronological period covered in this study, black people categorised themselves in terms that reflected their shifting relationship with Africa and the United States. In the early days of the American republic, they called themselves and the separate institutions that they began to establish, 'African.' As they moved to claim inclusion in the American family, those who had been freed from slavery opted for the term 'coloured people.' By the mid-nineteenth century, when supposedly scientific studies proclaimed the racial inferiority of the 'Negro race,' black leaders proudly proclaimed their identity as 'Negroes,' and insisted on the inclusion of Africa and Africans in the history of civilisation. In this study, I use the term 'black people' (while recognising its inexactness)<sup>3</sup> to refer to people of African descent in the New World rather than the standard term, 'African-American.' This latter term, a late twentieth-century neologism, confers a sense of 'cultural integrity' and a hyphenated identity on the slave and free black communities that was denied them in nineteenth and twentieth-century America.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the term does not apply to some of the central subjects of this study, such as Edward Blyden and Marcus Garvey, who were Danish and British subjects, respectively. In choosing to repeat the terms 'Negro' and 'Negro race,' common in both black and white writing of the time, I do so in recognition of the significance attached to them in the writings of Martin Delany, Frederick Douglass, Edward Blyden, Alexander Crummell, W. E. B. Du Bois and Marcus Garvey, who reclaimed them from discourses of white racism and insisted that they be worn as badges of pride.

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<sup>3</sup> Does the category of 'black people' also include those of mixed racial heritage who figure so prominently in this study? I employ, uneasily, the term 'mulatto,' by which they were known, a word and a category that are of crucial importance in the writings of Martin Delany, Edward Blyden, Alexander Crummell and Marcus Garvey. Describing themselves as 'unadulterated' blacks/Negroes, these 'race leaders' claimed superiority over those with mixed blood. The term 'mulatto' was in common usage from the early eighteenth century and was included for the first time in the U.S. census of 1850.

<sup>4</sup> In 1988, Jesse Jackson proposed the adoption of the term 'African-American.' He claimed that it conferred a sense of 'cultural integrity,' arguing that 'every ethnic group in the country has a reference to some land base, some historical cultural base.' 'Negro, Black and African-American', *The New York Times*, December 22, 1988, p. A 22.

The name of the colony and the motto adopted by the nation ‘The Love of Liberty brought us here’ draw attention to what was deemed to be the defining characteristic of the settlement. Despite the designation of the non-slave community in the United States as ‘Free People of Colour,’ its leadership highlighted the marginalisation and restrictions that made them ‘slaves without masters.’<sup>5</sup> Therefore, the meaning of the words ‘freedom’ and ‘liberty’ became central to the debates in the free black community; how might ‘freedom’ be understood in the context of colonisation at a time when the notion of liberty was usually conceptualised within the ‘paradigm of violent, redeeming struggle inherited from the American Revolution’<sup>6</sup> and strengthened by the example of the slave rebellion in the French colony of Saint Domingue which Eric Sundquist claims was the ‘primary point for both proslavery and antislavery forces in the United States.’<sup>7</sup> The fact that the ACS was an all-white organisation with some pro-slavery members caused it to be viewed by many as a deportation society despite its insistence that it facilitated only the *voluntary* removal of free blacks. Thus, a major question centres on whether the colonisation of Liberia can be regarded as a manifestation of black agency, an extension of the kind of scheme already carried out by the black mariner, Paul Cuffe (1759-1817) who had transported thirty eight people to Sierra Leone in 1815, or more properly an early version of American imperialism? Could black Americans, either technically free or

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<sup>5</sup> The phrase occurs in George Fitzhugh, *Cannibals All! Or, Slaves Without Masters* (Richmond, Va.: A. Morris, 1857) and Ira Berlin, *Slaves without Masters: The Free Negro in the Ante-Bellum South* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1975).

<sup>6</sup> Lora Romero, *Home Fronts: Domesticity and Its Critics in the Antebellum United States* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997), p. 52.

<sup>7</sup> Eric J. Sundquist, *To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 31.

While an in-depth treatment of the Haitian Revolution is outside the scope of this study, it is important to point out that it has been the subject of a great deal of exciting scholarship in recent decades. The classic work on Haiti remains C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint l’Ouverture and The San Domingo Rebellion* (London: Penguin Books, 2001). For an examination of the impact of popular movements on the course of the rebellion, see Carolyn E. Fick, *The Making of Haiti: The Saint Domingue Revolution from Below* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1990). Jeremy D. Popkin’s examination of a single event - the burning of Cap Français on June 20, 1793 - is employed to show how the overthrow of slavery was the result of complex and frequently paradoxical forces at play in France and Haiti. Jeremy D. Popkin, *You are all Free: The Haitian Revolution and the Abolition of Slavery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). More generally, Michel-Rolph Trouillot uses what he regards as the general silencing of the Haitian Revolution by Western historiography as a starting point for an examination of how power operates in the making and recording of historical narratives. Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2015).

emancipated from slavery on condition that they leave the land of their birth, ever be viewed as achieving freedom if it was facilitated by the ACS?

Hegel's writing on the master-slave relationship in *The Phenomenology of Mind* conceptualised the slave's freedom as a fought-for value. Without the life or death struggle, the slave remains in the 'attitude of bondage.'<sup>8</sup> Frantz Fanon agrees with the necessity for a struggle towards liberation, characterising the abolition of slavery as a magisterial act of white paternalism that does not confer true freedom on slaves.<sup>9</sup> James Baldwin, writing in the 1960s, observed that 'in the United States, violence and heroism have been made synonymous except when it comes to blacks.'<sup>10</sup> The version of black liberty promoted by the ACS was conceived as a deterrent to violent resistance within the bounds of the nation. Liberia was represented as the site where black men could become heirs to the American revolutionary tradition without a recourse to arms by building their own nation, founded on the principles of Christianity and republicanism. The great paradox of colonisation is that while it asserted the universal applicability of American republicanism, it simultaneously acknowledged its failure: it could promise freedom to American blacks *only* when they were removed from the imagined *white* American family and rendered unthreatening to that homogeneity on the west coast of Africa.<sup>11</sup>

Many free blacks who opposed colonisation favoured voluntary *emigration* on the grounds that they considered themselves to be an already colonised people within the United States, 'a nation within a nation,' as Martin Delany put it.<sup>12</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois has argued that American imperialism pre-dated its officially accepted starting point

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<sup>8</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind* (1807), trans. by J. B. Baillie (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Philosophical Classics, 2003), 104-112.

Susan Buck-Morss suggests that Hegel's dialectic of lordship and bondage was inspired by his reading of newspaper accounts of actual slaves' revolts in Haiti. Susan Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti and Universal History* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009).

<sup>9</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 1952, trans. by Charles Lam Markmann (London: Pluto Press, 1993), p. 220.

<sup>10</sup> James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963), p. 54.

<sup>11</sup> There is some doubt as to whether this freedom was meant to apply to both free black people and slaves, alike. This confusion arises from the divergent views of the membership of the ACS.

<sup>12</sup> Robert S. Levine, *Martin Delany: A Documentary Reader* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), p. 320.

in the late nineteenth century by locating its roots in transatlantic slavery which depended on racism to legitimate the subjugation and marginalisation of black people, creating, in effect, colonial subjects.<sup>13</sup> Homi Bhabha's characterisation of the construction of colonial subjects 'as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin,' and Fanon's account of the psychological effects of white colonisation on the black colonial subjectivity, contextualised in classical European colonies, also has relevance in the earlier American context.<sup>14</sup> Fanon's claim that the black man (in Martinique) whether he likes it or not has to 'wear the livery that the white man had sewed for him' echoes the writings of influential nineteenth-century black spokesmen who describe their experiences in almost identical terms.<sup>15</sup> The Liberian Edward Blyden writes of the psychological damage inflicted on black men by the internalization of the white gaze; Du Bois famously characterised the Negro in the United States as 'always looking at oneself through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.'<sup>16</sup>

While the concept of black America as an *internal colony* of the United States was not enunciated until the 1960s, it does provide a useful paradigm for examining the status of free blacks and slaves in the nineteenth century. Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton characterised the black condition as essentially a colonial condition, which though not perfectly analogous to classic colonialism was one in which the black community was politically, economically and socially controlled by white institutions.<sup>17</sup> Robert Allen went beyond Carmichael and Hamilton's idea of a 'colonial analogy' to state that 'black America is an oppressed nation, a semi-colony of the United States.'<sup>18</sup> While Robert Blauner contended that conditions of black people did not fit the traditional criteria of colonialism, he did concede that both classical colonialism and 'internal colonialism' as he called it 'developed out of similar

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<sup>13</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, *The African Roots of War* (Washington, D.C.: Atlantic Monthly Company, 1915).

<sup>14</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 101.

<sup>15</sup> Fanon, 34.

<sup>16</sup> Du Bois, 'The Souls of Black Folk', in *The Oxford W. E. B. Du Bois Reader*, ed. by Eric J. Sundquist, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 99-240 (p 102).

<sup>17</sup> Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (New York: Random House, 1967).

<sup>18</sup> Robert Allen, *Black Awakening in Capitalist America* (New York: Anchor Books, 1970), p. 1.

technological, cultural and power relations a common process of social oppression.’<sup>19</sup> Nineteenth-century black Americans, whether slave or free, experienced conditions analogous to those experienced by colonised peoples elsewhere where they experienced the social, political and psychological effects of white domination, making them effectively a subaltern people, enmeshed in classic colonial power relationships with white hegemonic power. This makes their experience as colonisers in Africa unique.

Liberia existed outside the normative idea of colonial settlements in further ways as a result of the confusion that attended its formation. Bronwen Everill claims that it ‘is generally rejected outright as a “true” example of imperialism or even colonialism because it was founded by a benevolent society rather than by the state itself.’<sup>20</sup> Yet Eric Burin argues that the colonisation movement was widely regarded as an integral part of the American System, a programme of national economic development that included “internal improvements” designed to strengthen and unify the nation.<sup>21</sup> Susan Ryan claims that colonisation promoted ‘American-style nation-building, national identity and citizenship,’ which, of course, had profound implications for Liberia’s later history.<sup>22</sup> David Kazanjian views the settlement as the fruit of an early manifestation of U.S. imperialism rather than the realisation of black Atlantic independence.<sup>23</sup> Amy Kaplan argues that Liberia was represented in the female writing of ACS supporters as an extension of American domesticity.<sup>24</sup> I believe that it is most fruitful to regard Liberia as the expansion overseas of the American nation replete with its ideas of exceptionalism and the doctrine of Manifest Destiny. It was rhetorically represented in ACS literature as a re-enactment of the Plymouth colony

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<sup>19</sup> Robert Blauner, *Racial Oppression in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), p. 83.

<sup>20</sup> Bronwen Everill, *Abolition and Empire in Sierra Leone and Empire* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 7.

<sup>21</sup> Eric Burin, *Slavery and the Peculiar Solution: A History of the American Colonization Society* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), p. 17.

<sup>22</sup> Susan Ryan, ‘Errand Into Africa: Colonization and Nation-Building in Sarah J. Hale’s *Liberia*’, *New England Quarterly* 68 (Dec 1995), 558-583 (p. 565).

<sup>23</sup> David Kazanjian, *The Colonizing Trick: National Culture and Imperial Citizenship in Early America* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

<sup>24</sup> Amy Kaplan, ‘Manifest Domesticity.’ *American Literature*, 70, 3, *No More Separate Spheres!* (Sep 1998), 581-606 (p. 584).

with the first Liberian settlers figured as Pilgrim Fathers. The settlers in turn appropriated this characterisation and added their own myth of Ethiopianism, which may be regarded as a black version of Manifest Destiny. Some of the earliest immigrants such as Lott Cary and Colin Teage saw themselves as part of a redeeming mission; for them, the experience of slavery was made meaningful by the part they felt called on to play in the liberation of Africa from the darkness of heathenism.<sup>25</sup>

How did the black American experience of slavery and social exclusion manifest itself in Liberia, where the settlers were transformed into a ruling class? The Liberian situation challenges and unsettles the description of the colonial world as Manichean where the colonisers are whites and the colonised are black or brown. Given that *all* the inhabitants of Liberia were black, culture became the dominant marker of identity. According to Bhabha, the colonized subject is encouraged to adopt the cultural norms of the coloniser in acts of mimicry that produce almost exact copies, 'but not quite.'<sup>26</sup> In the Liberian situation, the colonisers were themselves 'mimic men,' replicating the political, social and cultural mores of their former masters as well as their patterns of domination. In turn, other inhabitants, such as 'recaptives' rescued from slaving vessels, and the indigenous peoples of Liberia were obliged to adopt Americo-Liberian culture in order to gain citizenship of the new nation. In many ways, they were closer 'copies' of the Americo-Liberians than the Liberians were of their former masters given their shared ethnicity. What appeared to be a simple hierarchy of 'superior' settlers and their 'mimics' versus 'inferior' indigenous peoples was destabilised by the attitude of indigenous peoples like the Mandingo who regarded the settlers as mere slaves and therefore worthy only of contempt.

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<sup>25</sup> The myth of Ethiopianism, a powerful energising force for the American black community, was based on a verse in Psalm 68:31 which prophesied that 'Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch forth her hand unto God.' (The use of the word 'Ethiopia' as synonymous with 'Africa' was well established at this time.) Ethiopianism 'was central to the rise of a literature of black political protest' in the early decades of the nineteenth century and in a more secular form in later black nationalist thought. George M. Fredrickson, *Black Liberation: A Comparative History of Black Ideologies in the United States and South Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 61.

For a study of the enduring relevance of Ethiopianism, see Wilson J. Moses, *Black Messiahs and Uncle Toms: Social and Literary Manipulations of a Myth*, revised edn (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1982).

<sup>26</sup> Bhabha, p. 123.

Liberia, in all its complexity, was a unique manifestation of what Paul Gilroy termed the Black Atlantic. He and Stuart Hall highlight the processes by which the descendants of African slaves formed hybrid and heterogeneous identities in their new homelands in Europe, the Caribbean and the Americas.<sup>27</sup> Later scholars of the African Diaspora take issue with their formulation of black subjectivity which privileges the Caribbean and North American heterosexual male as normative. Michelle Wright seeks to extend their studies by including the categories of gender and sex and by also making an important distinction between those brought into the 'home space 'of the coloniser' (black Americans) and those who were brought into a 'third space' (the Caribbean) in which neither whites nor blacks originally understood the space as their home.<sup>28</sup> In her more recent work, Wright criticises the almost obsessive focus on the Middle Passage that has been the hallmark of much of the scholarship on the creation of black identity in the New World. Such a focus relies on a narrative of linear progress moving from West Africa through the Middle Passage and into the Caribbean/Americas. In order to counter this, she utilises a concept from physics, 'epiphenomenal time,' to focus on the 'now' through which the past, present and future are always interpreted.'<sup>29</sup> While such deepening of the understandings of the heterogeneity inherent in a concept such as the Middle Passage are to be welcomed, they still do not capture the multiplicity at the heart of how Liberia was perceived. Yet Wright's focus on the 'when' and 'where' of the African diaspora instead of the 'what' is a useful tool for examining the formation of Liberian identity that developed from different locations within the Middle Passage and even from interrupted journeys into it.<sup>30</sup> A further complication arises when one attempts to

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<sup>27</sup> Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London and New York: Verso, 1993).

Stuart Hall, *Cultural Identity and Diaspora: Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990).

<sup>28</sup> Michelle Wright, *Becoming Black: Creating Identity in the African Diaspora* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 7.

<sup>29</sup> Michelle Wright, *Physics of Blackness: Beyond the Middle Passage Epistemology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), p. 4.

<sup>30</sup> While black Americans settlers formed the majority of the population, two other groups contributed significantly to the racial mix: the 350 Barbadian immigrants who arrived in 1865 and the 5,000 or so 'Recaptives,' mostly from the Ibo and Congo peoples, who were rescued from slaving ships by the U.S. Navy and put ashore in Monrovia between 1845-1861. D. Elwood Dunn, Amos J. Beyan and Carl Patrick



determine the meaning of 'blackness' as a category. Who is black in Liberia? Jean Jacques Dessalines in Haiti had categorised *all* Haitians as black, a move that according to Sibylle Fischer made blackness a 'political rather than a biological category.'<sup>31</sup> While a similar move may be detected in the article of the Liberia Constitution which debarred white people from becoming Liberian citizens, thus seeming to link race and citizenship, it also created barriers to black Africans becoming part of the national family.

The first settlers who claimed to be 'the people of Liberia' regarded themselves as Americans who had been excluded from civic and political life in the land of their birth; their complaints are enunciated clearly in Hilary Teage's *Declaration of Independence* (1847). Yet they also claimed, more insistently with the passage of time, that they were also part of an African diaspora who had realised what many regard as an essential characteristic of Diaspora; they had returned home. William Safran theorised diasporas as sharing certain immutable characteristics such as unbroken cultural linkages with the point of departure and an assumed return to the 'native land.' He does not regard the descendants of slavery worldwide as conforming to his model of diaspora because though they do have a 'homeland myth', it can no longer be located precisely.<sup>32</sup> He has been criticised as overly rigid by James Clifford, who opts instead for a 'diacritical approach' which focuses on 'diaspora's borders, on what it defines itself against.' He claims that diasporas are normally defined against the 'norms of the nation state and the indigenous ... autochthonous claims by "tribal" peoples.'<sup>33</sup> Prior to the rise of the colonisation movement, black people in America stressed their emotional connection to Africa as is evidenced in their use of the word 'African' in the names of their churches and organisations and in their self-identification as a nation, bound together by a bond of common suffering. Yet, as

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Burrowes, Eds. *Historical Dictionary of Liberia*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Lanham, Md. and London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2001), p. 170.

<sup>31</sup> Sibylle Fischer, *Modernity Disavowed: Haiti and the Culture of Slavery in the Age of Revolution* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 233.

<sup>32</sup> William Safran, 'Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return', *Diaspora*, 1,1 (Spring 1991), 83-99 (p. 83).

<sup>33</sup> James Clifford, 'Diasporas' in *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 244-277 (p. 250).

Clifford once again reminds us, it is important to distinguish between nationalist longing and 'nostalgic or eschatological visions' from actual nation building and that 'nation and nation-states are not identical.'<sup>34</sup> Michael Echeruo sees the 'idea of an eventual Return [as] the most fundamental source of sustenance' for diasporic peoples.<sup>35</sup> But for the American black community, Africa, while functioning for some as 'a mythic place of desire', was not originally envisaged as a base for the construction of a nation state.<sup>36</sup> That was the promise held out by the ACS and seized upon by the settlers as the final phase of a journey that they figured as analogous to the Israelites' return to Canaan.

The figuring of Liberia as a reclaimed homeland complicates colonial discourse, which according to Fiona Bateman and Lionel Pilkington<sup>37</sup> and Caroline Elkins and Susan Pedersen,<sup>38</sup> conceptualises the colonial territory as vacant. Mary Louise Pratt describes the ways in which indigenous peoples are represented as mere 'traces on the landscape' which in turn is described as 'unimproved'.<sup>39</sup> The Founding Fathers of Liberia stressed the uniqueness of their settlement, insisting on the innocence and benevolence of its intentions towards the indigenous peoples, a claim highlighted in the rhetorical representation of the colonists as having no interest in 'territorial aggrandisement'.<sup>40</sup> Yet, as Mahmood Mamdani reminds us, 'settlers are made by conquest, not just by immigration' and that involved, in Liberia as elsewhere, the appropriation of land and resources, and the exclusion of certain groups of people

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p.251.

<sup>35</sup> Michael J. C. Echeruo, 'An African Diaspora: The Ontological Project', in *The African Diaspora: African Origins and New World Identities*, ed. by Isidore Okpewho, Carole Boyce Davies and Ali Al' Amin Mazrui (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1991), 3-18 (p. 13).

<sup>36</sup> Ben Schiller, 'U.S. Slavery's Diaspora: Black Atlantic History at the Crossroads of 'Race,' Enslavement and Colonisation', *Slavery and Abolition: A Journal of Slave and Post-Slave Studies*, 32 (2011), 199-212 (p. 201).

The phrase 'mythic place of desire' comes from Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Desire: Contesting Identities* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 192.

<sup>37</sup> Fiona Bateman and Lionel Pilkington, eds. *Studies in Settler Colonialism: Politics, identity and Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 1.

<sup>38</sup> Caroline Elkins and Susan Pedersen, eds. *Settler Colonialism in the Twentieth Century: Projects, Practices, Legacies* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), p. 2.

<sup>39</sup> Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 59-61.

<sup>40</sup> Hilary Teage, *Declaration of Independence, 1847*. Dunn et al., pp. 100-103.

from the national family.<sup>41</sup> The declaration of Liberian independence from the ACS which defined the character of the nation occurred at a particular moment in history when the rise of various nationalist movements in Europe prompted philosophical debates about nationhood. The achievement of nationhood was regarded as a definitive claim on behalf of the Negro race<sup>42</sup> to its place in the history of the world, a claim denied by Hegel, who asserted that only certain 'cultures are progressive, seeking to have their individuality recognised and embodied in a nation state on the world historical stage.'<sup>43</sup> Benedict Anderson's conception of nations as 'imagined communities,' fortified by the rise of print capitalism, is a useful paradigm for asking questions such as: whose 'imagined community' was represented by the Liberian nation? In what manner and through what means was it represented at home and abroad?<sup>44</sup>

The American settlers in Liberia claimed the right to an American-style nation on the basis of their exclusion from American citizenship *and* on their hereditary rights to the land of Africa. Post-independence Liberians, such as Blyden, drew heavily on the ideas of nationalism that emerged from European romanticism which emphasised the role

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<sup>41</sup> Mahmood Mamdani, quoted in Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 3.

<sup>42</sup> The race, at this point, encompassed only Christianised black people from the United States. The word 'Negro' did not appear in the Liberian Constitution until 1907.

<sup>43</sup> Amritjit Singh and Peter Schmidt, 'On the Borders between U.S. Studies and Postcolonial Theory', in *Postcolonial Theory and the United States*, ed. by Amritjit Singh and Peter Schmidt (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2000), 3-10 (p. 10).

<sup>44</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised edn (London: Verso, 1991). Anderson's influential work, first published in 1983, is part of the Modernist approach to the study of nations that stress the constructedness and the modernity of nations. The work of Primordialists and Ethno-Symbolists claims that it is impossible to understand modern nations without an understanding of pre-existing ethnic components. Black nationalism seems to incorporate elements of both: back-to-Africa movements certainly drew on ideas of ancient ties to a Motherland/Fatherland as is evident from their identification with Jewish claims to a homeland. For a concise and useful overview of different theories of nations and nationalism, see Umut Özkirimli, *Theories of Nationalism: A Critical Introduction* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd., 2000)

Recent work by feminist and 'non-westocentric' scholars has focused on the significance of gender, ethnicity, class and sexuality in the construction of national identities. See Anne McClintock, "'No Longer in a Future Heaven": Nationalism, Gender and Race', in *Becoming National: A Reader*, ed. by Geoff Eley and Ronald Grigor Suny (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 260-285. Also, Sylvia Walby, 'Woman and Nation', in *Mapping the Nation*, ed. by Gopal Bahkrishnan (London and New York: Verso, 1996), 235-254. In the same volume, Partha Chatterjee, 'Whose Imagined Community?', 214-225, is a useful corrective to the Eurocentric nature of nationalist discourse.

of the nation in embodying the cultural distinctiveness of a race. As Blyden developed his theories of the African Personality he looked to the nation to serve as the embodiment of traits that he regarded as distinctively African and were largely antithetical to so-called western values. In the early twentieth century, Marcus Garvey's Pan-African vision for Liberia incorporated anti-colonial and imperialistic rhetoric; he imagined it as a point of entry into Africa from which he would expel Europeans and construct a black empire, modelled on the ones he had dislodged. The means by which such visions were communicated can be understood by adapting a concept used by Stephanie Newell.<sup>45</sup> She uses the term 'paracolonial' to describe how a sense of British *colonial* identity, independent of class and locale, was generated among the newspaper-reading public of British West Africa. Similarly, discussions of what Liberia represented (or should represent) were circulated in specialist newspapers and magazines, often carried throughout the black Atlantic world by black sailors.

Elleke Boehmer points out that nations 'are frequently figured through the iconography of familial and domestic space.'<sup>46</sup> Liberia was rhetorically represented as a home into which Mother Africa could welcome her scattered children. The regenerative role of colonisation for the black man was stressed repeatedly but what were the virtues deemed necessary for him to rehabilitate himself? Amy S. Greenberg identifies in antebellum America a shifting of ideals of masculinity between 'restrained manhood' and martial manhood.'<sup>47</sup> The former, rooted in the family and buttressed by a strong Protestant faith, would gradually give way in the United States to the latter, with its emphasis on a more aggressive individuality. The ACS and particularly its female supporters promoted an image of the male coloniser as an exemplar of 'restrained manhood,' engaged in the masculine process of nation-building yet exhibiting many of the virtues deemed to be feminine, such as empathy,

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<sup>45</sup> Stephanie Newell, "'Paracolonial' Networks: Some Speculations on Local readership in Colonial West Africa', *Interventions*, 3, 3 (2001), 336-354 (p. 350).

<sup>46</sup> Elleke Boehmer, 'Stories of Women and Mothers: Gender and Nationalism in the early fiction of Flora Nwapa', in *Motherlands: Black Women's Writing from Africa, the Caribbean and South Asia*, ed. by Susheila Nasta (London: Women's Press, 1991), 3-23 (p. 5).

<sup>47</sup> Amy S. Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 11.

religiosity and communality.<sup>48</sup> These virtues would be strengthened and passed on by women, the 'symbolic bearers of the nation' in Anne McClintock's phrase. Their function was to adopt the role of helpmeets to their husbands and mothers of future Liberians, and to promote piety, temperance and domestic order in the interests of family and nation.<sup>49</sup> Interestingly, the version of Liberian femininity represented by the iconic Matilda Newport, calmly smoking her pipe as the 'savage natives' swarm around her, is at odds with the more usual literal representation of the woman as guardian of the hearth.<sup>50</sup> Of course, the mythologizing of Matilda as an almost accidental saviour of the colony also served as 'proof' that Liberia was destined to survive.

The justification of Liberia and its insistence on a right to exist were most strongly articulated in an age when discourses of 'scientific racism' had assumed 'the warrant of common sense.'<sup>51</sup> Philip Curtin points out a change from the humanitarianism of the anti-slavery movement was already taking place in the western world at around the time that Liberia entered the family of nations.<sup>52</sup> Catherine Hall claims that such a change arose from the emancipation of slaves and their subsequent appearance in the metropolis as free and equal, leading to new ways of categorising racial

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<sup>48</sup> The association of 'feminine' virtues with the African race is a feature of both white and black writing at this time. The concept of African Personality as formulated by Blyden, which influenced the development of Negritude, is the most comprehensive statement of distinctions between the Negro and the Anglo-Saxon races.

<sup>49</sup> Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 354.

<sup>50</sup> Matilda Newport was mythologised as the saviour of the nation, the 'Liberian Joan of Arc,' in the words of the French Consul to Monrovia in 1922. She was deemed to have saved the early settlement from marauding 'natives' when she used a coal from her pipe to light the fuse of a cannon. Svend Holsoe describes Newport as an invented 'historic symbol [that] was created, flourished and [was] then abolished.' Hilary Teage does not mention her in his orations on Liberian independence in 1847 (see chapter 2); she makes her first appearance in print in 1854 when a visitor to Liberia claims that the nation 'would never have been the home of immigrants had it not been for a woman, Mrs. Newport [who] secured a new port for the colored people.' Svend Holsoe, 'The Power of Liberian-Invented Tradition', *Liberian Studies Journal*, xxxii, 2 (2007), 28-41.

Matilda Newport Day was established as a Liberian national holiday in 1916 though, understandably, it was not celebrated by the indigenous peoples. It was abolished in 1980.

<sup>51</sup> Stuart Hall, 'The Rediscovery of "Ideology": Return of the Repressed in Media Studies', in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn ed. by John Storey (N.J.: Pearson/Prentice Hall, 2006), 124-155 (p. 147).

<sup>52</sup> Philip D. Curtin, *The Image of Africa: British Ideas and Action, 1780-1850* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964).

difference.<sup>53</sup> Liberian politicians and black intellectuals (whom Fanon describes as 'category mistakes' in the eyes of the white world) disrupted, in a particularly powerful manner, the boundaries between the rulers of the world and the ruled. English writing on Liberia was produced at a time when Britain and European powers were establishing their empires in Africa. The existence of a black republic represented an inconvenient minor obstacle to continental domination.

Postcolonial critics have given us insight into what Carl Plasa terms the 'complicities' that exist between 'forms of representation and knowledge ... and the implementation of power.'<sup>54</sup> They reveal the prevalence of certain ideas about Africa which justified its exploitation by European powers. V.Y. Mudimbe describes the construction of the African Other as 'primitives [who] seem frozen in a state of prelogism, thousands of years behind Western civilization.'<sup>55</sup> Christopher Miller, writing specifically on French representations of the continent, draws on Said and Foucault to describe an Africanist discourse that posits Africa as a 'third element' outside the 'interlocking profiles of Europe and the Orient.'<sup>56</sup> Where the Orient is perceived as the reverse of the West, Africa is nothing, a nullity, a 'blank slate ... with no past or future ... [that] can be made to fulfil the desires of [one's] own present.'<sup>57</sup> Patrick Brantlinger traces what he sees as the darkening of British attitudes to Africa in the mid-nineteenth century which he regards as a manifestation of 'the cynicism of empire building.'<sup>58</sup> The continent was imagined as a female body, passively awaiting the 'massive thrust of male technology' in order to drag it into modernity.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Catherine Hall, *Colonising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination 1830-1867* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), p. 45.

<sup>54</sup> Carl Plasa, *Textual Politics from Slavery to Postcolonialism: Race and Identification* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), p. 10.

<sup>55</sup> V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), p. 72.

<sup>56</sup> Christopher Miller, *Blank Darkness: Africanist Discourse in French* (Chicago University Press, 1985), p. 16.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, p.248.

<sup>58</sup> Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism 1830-1914* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 173.

<sup>59</sup> Peter Hulme, quoted in McClintock, p. 22.

These remarkably uniform representations of Africa find expression in the British travel writing on Liberia examined here. Simultaneously, Americo-Liberians were also producing their own travel accounts of their explorations of the interior; to what extent do their texts reflect the pervasive European view of Africa? As already discussed, Africa was imagined in black nationalist discourse as a Mother, awaiting the return of her scattered children and Liberia was represented as the site of the reunion. In what ways are the conventional images of Africa as empty, ahistorical and amorphous complicated by the existence of a Christian, republican nation? Rana Kabbani's provocative assertion that 'to write a literature of travel cannot but imply a colonial relationship,' opens up questions as to the motivations of British travellers in Liberia.<sup>60</sup> Pratt suggests that the 'signifying practices of travel writing encode and legitimate the aspiration of economic expansion.'<sup>61</sup> Can we generalise about the intentions behind the various travel texts on Liberia that emerged before, during and after the period of European imperial expansion in Africa? In their generally dystopian views of Liberia, can they be read simply as the inevitable result of the discourses of scientific racism and social Darwinism, or were they, in fact, anticipating and justifying a takeover of the state by the British Empire?

This dissertation, located within the major centres of the Atlantic World, explores the battling chronological, experiential and epistemological discourses centring on Liberia and forces us to re-configure conceptions of nineteenth- and twentieth-century configurations of colony, empire and nation.

The rhetorical representation of Liberia in the writings of the founders of the ACS and its female supporters was a significant factor in the establishment of the colony. The first chapter outlines the development of the ideology of colonisation within the historical context of debates on the abolition of slavery in ante bellum America. It also explores the tension in the free black community between those who insisted on their

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<sup>60</sup> Rana Kabbani, *Europe's Myths of Orient: Devise and Rule* (London: Macmillan, 1986), p. 10.

<sup>61</sup> Pratt, p. 4.

right to an American homeland and those who felt that the descendants of slavery in the United States could never find a congenial home there.

Chapter 2 addresses the founding and development of Liberia from the imagined colony and homeland of American discourse to the African lived realities. It recovers the life stories of some of the most significant players in colonial Liberia. The writings of Daniel Coker, Lott Cary, John Russwurm and Hilary Teage reveal these men, not as pawns of the ACS, but as active shapers of their own destinies, as they speculate on the meaning of liberty, their responsibilities to their still-enslaved brethren in the U.S. and their relationship with God and His plan for Africa. Teage's Declaration of Independence and the realisation of a black nation-state and homeland may be seen as the pinnacle of their achievement.

Chapter 3 examines the role of Liberia in the transatlantic debates on slavery. The towering figures of Alexander Crummell and Edward Blyden, justifying the existence of Liberia as *proof* of the capacity of the Negro race for self-rule, attempted to fashion an identity for its settlers separate from their origins as former slaves. Blyden's theory of an African Personality and Crummell's arguments for the adoption of a Victorian English culture clashed with what they regarded as an autocratic ruling class in Monrovia, with disagreements arising over education policy, the 'colonization' of the hinterland and the future role of indigenous people in the government of Liberia.

Chapter 4 explores the representation of Liberia in British discourse at a time when Africa was increasingly figured as a Dark Continent. British travellers produced texts which represented the country as a bleak dystopia. Its failings were deemed to be the inevitable result of Africans assuming the responsibility of self-government; the *American* form of such government only compounded the disaster. However, its 'failings' and its status as a non-European polity made it attractive for writers who travelled there between the wars in search of primitive authenticity.

Chapter 5 discusses Liberia at a moment of existential crisis after the First World War when the country became a pawn in an international game of power and finance and



its future seemed to lie with some European power or as a virtual colony of the U.S. Simultaneously, it became a flash point between black leaders in the U.S.: for the flamboyant Jamaican, Marcus Garvey, and the intellectual American, W. E. B. Du Bois, Liberia's crisis presented a historic opportunity to define the meaning and ultimate destiny of the African Diaspora. When the Liberian president announced in 1924 that the country's 'immediate objective [was] towards *nationalism* and not towards *racialism*; the making of a nation and not a race, it marked the end of a pan-African dream, first advanced by Blyden and most powerfully articulated by Garvey.

Caryl Phillips, dismissing a trope in European writing, claimed that 'Africa cannot cure. Africa cannot make anybody feel whole.'<sup>62</sup> Yet the corner of Africa that became Liberia was figured, from the moment of its conception, as a panacea for the ills of the black and white men and women who imagined it, described it, wrote it into existence, travelled in it and almost destroyed it. Liberia was, over the chronological period covered in this study, imagined and represented as a home for diasporic black people, physically and psychically burdened by the effects of slavery; a cure for the anxiety of white Americans in the face of the threat of slave insurrection and miscegenation; a salve to the conscience of God-fearing men and women in the United States and Great Britain; a boost to black leaders who insisted that the Negro race had capacity for self-government; a boon to those Victorian racists who saw proof of Negro incapacity in Liberia's periods of crisis; a balm to the disenchanted souls of twentieth-century Europeans. Resisting the temptation to add to such narrative burdens, my study positions it as vital to a deeper and more nuanced understanding of black agency, slavery and abolition and to our conception of race, colonial formations and relationships.

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<sup>62</sup> Caryl Phillips, *The Atlantic Sound* (London: Vintage, 2001), p. 216.

## Chapter 1

### 'I know this scheme is from God'<sup>1</sup>: The Discourse of African Colonisation in Antebellum America

*'Uncle Tom must be killed, George Harris exiled! Heaven for dead Negroes! Liberia for mulattoes. Neither can live on the American continent. Death or banishment is our doom, say the Slaveocrats, the Colonizationists and, save the mark Mrs. Stowe.'*<sup>2</sup>

*'I am not a ward of America; I am one of the first Americans to arrive on these shores.'*<sup>3</sup>

On the 6 February, 1820 a three-masted ship *Elizabeth*, sailed out of New York harbour carrying eighty-eight American 'free people of color.' They hailed mostly from New York and Pennsylvania, many of them literate and listed as having trades or professions. As evidenced from the goods they carried, which included home and garden equipment, house-building material and seed crop, they were neither travellers nor traders. They were the first American colonizers of Africa. Early contemporaneous accounts of the voyage portrayed the venture as a re-enactment of the voyage of the Pilgrim Fathers; indeed the ship *Elizabeth* was re-named the *Mayflower of Liberia*. Its departure from New York Harbour was witnessed by thousands of people, both black and white. It was simultaneously a unique event and one that is almost forgotten.

Later that same year, in an oration to mark the bicentennial of the arrival of the Pilgrim Fathers in Plymouth, Massachusetts, Daniel Webster memorialised the first *Mayflower* and marked Plymouth Rock as the spot where 'America' was born. His speech was 'a watershed moment in the development of national memory.'<sup>4</sup> After a

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<sup>1</sup> *Memoirs of Robert Finley, Part 4*, ed. by Isaac V. Brown (New Brunswick: Terhune & Letson, 1819), p. 82.

<sup>2</sup> The author is 'A contributor to a black newspaper', quoted in *New Essays on Uncle Tom's Cabin*, ed. by Eric J. Sundquist (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 60.

<sup>3</sup> Baldwin, p. 83.

<sup>4</sup> John Seelye, *Memory's Nation: The Place of Plymouth Rock* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), p. 77.

brief outline of the global history of colonisation which he characterizes as motivated by trade or the will to power, he describes the American colony as distinctive: its 'first existence [marked] by intelligence; her first breath with inspiration of liberty; her first principle the truth of divine religion.'<sup>5</sup> Placing himself imaginatively on Plymouth Rock and adopting the first-person voice of the Pilgrims, he represented present-day New England as the realization of their hopes and looked forward to the future of America fanning out from that desolate spot to all of New England and eventually to the shores of the Pacific Ocean. As proof that God had already smiled on the Pilgrims, Webster pointed to the present expanding nation: 'two thousand miles westward ... may now be found the sons of the Pilgrims, cultivating smiling fields, rearing towns and villages and cherishing ... patriarchal blessings of wise institutions, of liberty and religion.'<sup>6</sup>

William Carlos Williams writes that American history reminds us that 'poised against the Mayflower is the slave ship.'<sup>7</sup> Webster's speech delivered one version of American history: it captured the optimism of a young nation, its 'euphoric sense of national security' in the aftermath of the war of 1812, its confident belief in its own exceptionalism and in the god of Progress.<sup>8</sup> Yet, as Bhabha reminds us, 'national memory is always the site of hybridity of histories and the displacement of narratives.'<sup>9</sup> Webster's rhetorical reconstruction of the birth of America deliberately omits accounts of other voyages: the earlier settlement at Jamestown, the countless voyages of slaving ships and, significantly, the recent voyage undertaken by the ship *Elizabeth* that had left New York for West Africa just a few months previously under the auspices of the American Colonization Society, of which he was a member. The juxtaposition of these two events, the actual voyage of the *Mayflower of Liberia* and Daniel Webster's imaginative re-enactment of the arrival of the *Mayflower* at Plymouth Rock, allows us to explore the nature of the construction of the American

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<sup>5</sup> Daniel Webster, 'Plymouth Oration: Discourse in Commemoration of the First Settlement of New England Delivered at Plymouth on the 22<sup>nd</sup> Day of December 1820', in *The Speeches of Daniel Webster and his master-pieces*, ed. by B.F. Tefft (Philadelphia: Porter & Coates, 1854), 59-114 (p. 79).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, p. 89.

<sup>7</sup> William Carlos Williams, *In the American Grain* (New York: New Directions Publishing, 1956), p. 208.

<sup>8</sup> Eric Sundquist, *Empire and Slavery in American Literature 1820-1865* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1995), p. 21.

<sup>9</sup> Bhabha, p. 242.

nation and national identity and the significant challenges posed to America's self-image as the 'land of the free' by the continued existence of slavery and the presence of an anomalous group named 'free people of colour.' National narratives, such as the American myth of origin, which are 'assumed to be sites of cohesion can be seen to fissure into sites of contestation, exclusion and repression.'<sup>10</sup> The attempted colonisation of black Americans created fissures among white and black Americans over what constituted the American family and who (rightfully) belonged. The conceptualisation of Liberia in white discourse as the mirror image of the American republic and proof of the universality of American ideals was contested by the majority of black spokesmen who asked why 'universal' values could not apply to black Americans in the land of their birth. Had Americanness become synonymous with whiteness? For some other black people, Liberia promised the fulfilment of their own version of Manifest Destiny. While acknowledging the failure of American revolutionary ideals in the United States, they hoped that repatriation to the land of their forefathers would allow them to flourish as a black, Christian republican nation.

The stories elided from Webster's optimistic summary of the nation's past and future constitute the 'two national smutches that discolour [American] history: the slaves and former slaves and the 300,000 native Americans '[that] yet roam upon the outskirts of our happiness.'<sup>11</sup> The need to expunge these twin shadows led to the U.S. government's quasi-imperial ventures westward and south of its borders and its complex interaction with the American Colonization Society. These ventures were sanctioned by a belief in America's Manifest Destiny, a 'doctrine' that was characterised by a belief in the exceptional nature of the American people and their institutions and a divinely approved redemptive mission to spread those institutions throughout the world. R. W. Van Alstyne makes the point that American foreign policy has 'a vocabulary of its own, consciously-even ostentatiously-sidestepping the use of

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<sup>10</sup> Russ Castronovo, *Fathering the Nation: American Genealogies of Slavery and Freedom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), p. 6.

<sup>11</sup> Writer in the *National Intelligencer*, 1831, quoted in Nicholas Guyatt, 'The Outskirts of Our Happiness: Race and the Lure of Colonization in the Early Republic', *The Journal of American History*, 95, 4 (Mar. 2009), 986-1011 (p. 995).

terms that would hint at aggression or imperial domination.<sup>12</sup> Phrases such as ‘Empire of Liberty,’ Manifest Destiny,’ and ‘the Monroe Doctrine’ were used to legitimate both the forced assimilation and the attempted exclusion of people under the guise of conferring on them ‘the fullest liberty and the purest religion.’<sup>13</sup> The discourse of the colonisation movement was likewise couched in the language of innocence. Despite the sense among free blacks that they were about to be banished from the only home that they had ever known, the rhetoric of the ACS insisted that the scheme could not be regarded as ‘expatriation’ because black people could not be regarded as having been ever ‘really’ at home in America. Though their ancestors had been on the continent as long as their white compatriots, their ‘character’ was deemed to be at odds with the striving, aggressive traits of ‘real’ Americans; therefore sending them ‘home’ would be a blessing both to themselves and their Motherland. While they could not be part of the American Family, they could build something very like it in Africa where they could enjoy the fruits of American civilisation without the oppression they had experienced in America.

Donald Pease argues that the U.S. national narrative struggled to provide a ‘stable referent for the “We the People” clause in the Declaration of Independence’, a referent rendered vulnerable by ‘immigration, miscegenation [and] native American mimicry.’<sup>14</sup> The Founding Fathers longed for an American family, united by the same values and bound together by a common purpose. Writing at the dawn of the nineteenth century, Thomas Jefferson looked forward to a time when

our rapid multiplication will expand itself ... and cover the whole nation if not the southern continent, with a people speaking the same language, governed in similar forms and by similar laws; nor can we contemplate with satisfaction either blot or mixture on that surface.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> R.W. Van Alstyne, *The Rising American Empire* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1960), p. 6.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in *The Routledge History of Settler Colonialism*, ed. by Edward Cavanagh and Lorenzo Veracini (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), p. 217.

<sup>14</sup> Donald Pease, ‘New Perspectives on U.S. Culture and Imperialism’, in *Cultures of U.S. Imperialism*, ed. by Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 22-37 (p. 28).

<sup>15</sup> Jefferson to James Monroe 1806, quoted in Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Saxonism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 92.

The 'blot' and 'mixture' that had to be dealt with were Native Americans and Negroes, both enslaved and 'free,' whose status challenged the mythology of the Republic. Jefferson's attitude to the future of native Americans was quite hopeful. He viewed them as similar to uncultivated white people and looked forward to the day when they would be assimilated into the expanding nation. He told a delegation of their leaders in 1808:

Let me entreat you therefore on the lands now given you to begin to give every man a farm, let him enclose it, cultivate it, build a warm house on it and when he dies let it belong to his wife and children after him.

Thus 'civilized,' he promised them absorption into the American family: 'you will become one people with us; your blood will mix with ours: and will spread over this great island. You will unite yourself for us and we shall all be American.'<sup>16</sup>

While this vision died with Jefferson, he had at least entertained it as a possibility. His attitude towards black people betrays no such tolerance. His *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1780) outlines his conviction that slavery, a dangerous anomaly in a free society, ought to be abolished. Yet, at the same time, he saw nothing in the Negro race that could convince him that freed slaves would ever be fit to exercise the qualities of rationality, self-reliance and temperance that he believed were essential for the maintenance of an enlightened republic. While it was commonly accepted that black people were a 'permanently alien and unassimilable element of the population,' Jefferson was alone among American Enlightenment thinkers in attributing their inferiority to innate qualities.<sup>17</sup> This supposed inferiority, combined with the painful history of relations between black and white communities, convinced him that the only way peace and stability could be assured post-abolition was the removal of black people 'beyond the reach of mixture.'<sup>18</sup> Ralph Ellison referred to this idea as 'one of the oldest American fantasies ... to banish [black people] from the nation's bloodstre

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p. 108.

<sup>17</sup> George M. Frederickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate of Afro-American Character and Destiny 1817-1914* (Middletown, CT.: Wesleyan University Press, 1971), p. 1.

<sup>18</sup> Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (Chapel Hill and London: University of N. Carolina Press, 1982), p. 14s.

am, from its social structure, from its conscience and from its historical consciousness.’<sup>19</sup>

The idea of emigration and colonisation was not new; it had been explored in black organisations such as the Free African Society (1787) of Newport and the African Society (1794) of Providence which expressed interest in founding a colony in Africa. As already noted, the sea captain Paul Cuffe advocated emigration in the early nineteenth century. He believed that American black people could bring Christianity, commerce and civilisation to Africa, hastening the end of the slave trade and preparing that continent for its destiny as a New Jerusalem. At various times throughout the nineteenth century the possibility of voluntary black migration to various locations such as the American West, Canada, Haiti and South America, was promoted by black leaders. However, such voluntary schemes were different from colonisation: the latter was viewed primarily as designed to serve white interests, and was portrayed by the leaders of the free black community as synonymous with exile rather than emancipation. In a series of pamphlets and sermons of protest, they insisted on their rights to speak for themselves and their enslaved brothers and sisters. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. views their literary production as a means of self-inscription whereby black people defined their status within the human community.<sup>20</sup> Thematically, the texts, which appropriated the hegemonic sacred and secular text such as the Bible, the Declaration of Independence and the American Constitution, exhibit the tensions felt by many black Americans between honouring their African origins while at the same time rejecting the idea of Africa as home. They claimed their rights as legitimate members of the American civic world by virtue of the fact that their forefathers were in America even before the Pilgrim Fathers, that they had participated in its revolutionary wars and that they were the tillers of the soil. One of the most influential leaders of the black community, the founder of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME), Bishop Richard Allen, claimed for slaves and their descendants the right to be called American by virtue of the fact that they were the

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<sup>19</sup> Ralph Ellison, ‘What would America be without Blacks?’, *Time* (New York: April 6, 1970).

<sup>20</sup> Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African American Literary Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 141.

‘first tillers of the soil’ and that the ‘land, which [they had] watered with [their] tears and [their] blood, [was] now [their] *mother country*.’<sup>21</sup> While Thomas Jefferson had eulogised the tillers of the soil as a chosen people, it was only ‘the husbandman who tilled his *own acres*’ (my italics) who could be regarded as ‘the rock on which the American Republic must stand.’<sup>22</sup>

Allen spoke for the vast majority of the free black community yet many elements of a developing black mythology stressed the enduring mystique of Africa, which had found expression over many generations in support of emigration. Newly arrived slaves in the eighteenth century were ‘particularly intent upon returning “across grandywater” to their real homes.’<sup>23</sup> Over the course of the nineteenth century, their special identification with the Exodus story and the promulgation of the myth of Ethiopianism fed the idea that blacks were morally superior to white people, that they were a ‘redeemer nation’ with a mission to save the world and that their enslavement, which introduced them to Christianity, was providential. Some leaders of the ACS hoped that its discourse would chime with the free black community if it highlighted the idea that it was the destiny of American blacks to go ‘back’ to Africa and spread the light of Christianity and civilisation in that benighted continent. In a striking example of illogic, the same discourse that routinely castigated free blacks as vicious and degraded predicted a miraculous transformation in Africa: removing them to

the land of [their] fathers [where they would be] excited by new motives ... stimulated to industry and enterprise by prospects of the noblest and richest rewards, and made to cherish the manly and mighty spirit of an independent and self-governed people,

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<sup>21</sup> Richard Allen, quoted in *Pamphlets of Protest: An Anthology of Early African American Protest*, ed. by Richard Newman, Patrick Rael and Phillip Lapsansky (New York and London: Routledge, 2001), p. 98.

<sup>22</sup> Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), p. 144.

<sup>23</sup> Floyd J. Miller, *The Search for a Black Nationality: Black Emigration and Colonisation* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1975), p. 3.



would lead to their creation as entirely new beings.<sup>24</sup> Opponents of colonisation exposed this argument as ridiculous: Allen asked 'is there any fitness for such [free blacks] to be sent into a far country among heathens to convert or civilize them, when they themselves are neither civilized nor Christians?'<sup>25</sup> One of the most outspoken black opponents of colonisation, David Walker (1829), denounced the whole scheme as a 'trick' that tried to promote colonisation as a mission to Africa while, at the same time, plotting to separate free blacks from their enslaved brethren whom they might incite to rebellion.<sup>26</sup> Henry Highland Garnet echoed Walker's objection two decades later when he declared that he refused to 'listen to the harp-like strains that whisper freedom among the groves of Africa ... while three million of [his] country are wailing in the dark prison-house of oppression.'<sup>27</sup>

The linkage of abolition of slavery to colonisation in Africa became associated with Jefferson whose eminence conferred on it a legitimacy that made it acceptable to the political and intellectual elite in the opening decades of the nineteenth century. The members of that elite who gathered in Washington in 1816 to implement the scheme outlined in Finley's pamphlet, belonged to an organisation that has been described as 'the most understudied movement in the history of American slavery and abolition.'<sup>28</sup> This is due in part to its attempt to accommodate a widely diverse set of motives among its founders. The result is that it was regarded, on the one hand, as a conservative abolitionist society, offering a middle way for those who favoured abolition but feared 'immediatism,' and on the other, as a pro-slavery movement, which hoped to strengthen the institution of slavery. The founders and supporters of the ACS were driven by a complex of fears. While the early decades of the nineteenth-

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<sup>24</sup> *African Repository and Colonial Journal*, 9 (Washington, D.C.: James C. Dunn, 1834), p. 196.

This was the official organ of the ACS to which I make extensive reference. It was, of course, a propaganda tool and is therefore approached with considerable caution. After the declaration of Liberian independence, the journal was known simply as *African Repository*.

<sup>25</sup> Allen, *Freedom's Journal*, Nov. 2, 1827.

<sup>26</sup> Peter P. Hinks, ed. *David Walker's Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World* (University Park, Pa.: The Pennsylvania University Press, 2002), p. 59.

<sup>27</sup> Henry Highland Garnet, *The Past and the Present Condition and the Destiny of the Colored Race* (Troy, N.Y.: J.C. Kneeland and Co., 1848), p. 54.

<sup>28</sup> Samantha Seeley, 'Beyond the American Colonization Society', *History Compass*, 14 (2016), 93-104 (p. 93).

century United States have been characterised as an age of exceptional optimism, the institution of slavery itself was deemed to be both inherently inimical to republican ideals and sinful: 'the notion of collective guilt and judgement seemed no less real to the disciples of the Enlightenment than to the sons of the Puritans':<sup>29</sup> Thomas Jefferson worried that, since God was just and 'that his justice cannot sleep forever,' He would exact a heavy toll from the American people for the sin of slavery.<sup>30</sup> Perhaps this would arrive in the form of slave insurrection, perceived as a real threat with a bloody precedent in the French colony of St. Domingue and in the subsequent establishment of the independent republic of Haiti in 1804. Toussaint L'Ouverture had demonstrated slaves' capacity for freedom - about which doubts had been expressed - by fighting for it, and provided blacks with a heroic model of revolutionary agency. The Gabriel Conspiracy (1800) sparked fears that the lesson of St. Domingue would be spread throughout the American slave population by free blacks. Regardless of their involvement or otherwise with insurrectionary activity, their growing number in the northern states and their generally 'degraded' state led to fears of a large, permanent underclass. Finally, fear of 'amalgamation,' of a 'staining of the blood,' was deep-rooted and psychological; the presence of so many mulattoes served as proof of the sexual licence of the plantations, the 'rape and concubinage of slave women by their white masters.'<sup>31</sup> An even greater fear was that black men, frequently stereotyped as hyper-sexualised, would avenge themselves on white women when the day of reckoning came.

What was the meaning of Liberia for the men who dreamed it into being? While Finley stressed the naturalness of colonisation in the history of the world and urged the United States government to engage in similar projects, no colonisation scheme in history was ever meant to bear so many burdens and achieve so many ends as the one he envisaged. He and the other significant figure of the first years of the ACS, Charles Fenton Mercer, embody the mixture of fearfulness and zeal that

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<sup>29</sup> David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolutions 1770-1823* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 284.

<sup>30</sup> Jefferson, p. 170.

<sup>31</sup> Karen Sanchez-Eppler, *Touching Liberty: Abolition, Feminism and the Politics of the Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), p. 34.

characterised the colonisation movement. They were products of their age, imbued with the spirit of Christian benevolence and reforming patriotism as well as immersed in transnational debates on the nature of freedom and slavery, with their attendant questions on the meaning of such terms as 'redemption, repatriation, transportation and deportation.'<sup>32</sup> Both men were interested in the recent establishment of British colonies in Sierra Leone and in Botany Bay though their chief interests in such schemes stemmed from different anxieties. Mercer was 'a southern modernizer who wished to replace the slave based agrarian economy with a free labor, commercial-industrial one.'<sup>33</sup> His chief worry arose from the proliferation of a degraded class of free blacks that he believed would remain permanently so by virtue of their colour. What he saw of the urban poor in his travels to Europe and England left him in dread of a class warfare fuelled by 'all the idle, worthless, ignorant and corrupt mass of the population, both white and black.'<sup>34</sup> While he advocated a scheme of public education for poor whites, he felt that 'people of color' could not benefit from it due to their 'degradation.' His understanding of Liberia was that it would be a receptacle, 'a drain for pauperism in Virginia,' and for other states with a similar 'problem.' His hopes for what colonisation could achieve were very much in keeping with late eighteenth-century ideas in Britain and elsewhere, that viewed the establishment of colonies as an instrument of 'exonerating society of its most obnoxious members': the idle, the indigent, the criminal and the poor.<sup>35</sup> He did not concern himself with what might happen to the 'expatriates' once they arrived in Africa. He simply wanted to rid American society of 'a very dangerous class of people.'<sup>36</sup>

The devout and morally scrupulous Finley believed that human beings and society were not enslaved to sin, but were capable of redemption and ultimate perfection. When he heard of Jefferson's ideas from Mercer, he 'seized upon the idea of

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<sup>32</sup> Deirdre Coleman, *Romantic Colonization and British Anti-Slavery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 6.

<sup>33</sup> Burin, p. 13.

<sup>34</sup> Douglas Egerton, 'Its Origin is not a Little Curious': A New Look at the American Colonization Society', *Journal of the Early Republic*, 5 (Winter 1985), 463-480 (p. 469).

<sup>35</sup> Coleman, p. 24.

<sup>36</sup> James Monroe, quoted in Philip J. Staudenraus, *The African Colonization Movement, 1816-1865* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), p. 66.

colonisation as a benevolent project that fulfilled his spiritual needs.<sup>37</sup> Finley's pamphlet is a justification of the scheme on both materialistic and spiritual grounds. His conceptualisation of Liberia reflects these two dominant strands of thought. He lauds Great Britain as the coloniser *par excellence*, mentioning specifically the colonisation of Australia and Sierra Leone. While both colonies were designed as providing receptacles for undesirable people such as convicts, black people and the destitute, Finley justifies and purifies them as the foundations of Christian empires in barbaric regions of the earth:

With what ease is Great Britain transplanting a part of her population, in the remotest regions of the earth, and peopling New Holland, a land destined, like our own to extend the empire of liberty and Christian blessings to surrounding nations.<sup>38</sup>

Extending his argument to the United States, he regards the presence of a growing number of free blacks as injurious to the 'industry and morals' of the white population. He proposes their 'gradual separation from the white population by providing ... some suitable situation, where they might enjoy the advantages to which they are entitled by nature and their creator's will.'<sup>39</sup> Finley interprets God's will to be that black people should live in Africa since they were sons of Africa by colour and temperament. Therefore, sending them 'home' would be a redress to the wrongs inflicted on them during their long exile. Liberia would be a 'safe and suitable asylum' for them where they could achieve the rights of citizenship denied to them in the United States.<sup>40</sup> While colonisation was designed to remove free blacks only, Finley believed that the success of Liberia would eventually lead to 'a happy and progressive' demise of slavery. This would be brought about in a two-pronged attack on the institution, at its source on the west coast of Africa and in the southern states of America. He looked to the British colony of Sierra Leone for proof that legitimate trade with Britain and the rest of the world had destabilised the slave trade. Furthermore,

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<sup>37</sup> Edward Bartlett Rugemer, *The Problem of Emancipation: The Caribbean Roots of the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 2008), p. 72.

<sup>38</sup> Finley, p. 84. At the time, New Holland was the European name for mainland Australia.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, p. 83.

<sup>40</sup> *The African Repository and Colonial Journal*, 5 (Washington, D.C.: James C. Dunn, 1829), p. 53.

he expected that local chiefs could be induced to part with land to accommodate an American colony 'when they were informed that the sole design of the colony was to restore their own children and bring them back, free and happy.'<sup>41</sup> The hoped-for success of Liberia would encourage slaveholders, who feared 'divine displeasure,' to manumit their slaves safe in the knowledge that they that they didn't have to face a future living alongside them. The many felicitous outcomes envisaged by Finley led him to conclude that 'reason and the God of eternal justice' were on the side of the ACS and that it was clear to him that the 'scheme [was] from God.' Finley's version of colonisation, supported later by prominent women writers, highlighted its emancipatory character: freedom from all the forms of bondage that black people experienced in the United States, freedom to assume the blessings of American civilization in their homeland while extending those same blessings to their African brethren. In time, it came to be promoted as a religious rather than a political scheme, especially in the writings of its prominent female supporters, who tended to portray the ACS as engaged in building an Empire of Morality as well as of Liberty.

Despite the different emphases in the language of Finley and Mercer, the common thread is that colonisation defined the very meaning of American citizenship: the departure of black people would lead to the creation of an all-white America and thus solidify the notion that Americanness was synonymous with whiteness.<sup>42</sup> As Daniel Webster located its genesis on Plymouth Rock, the ACS sought to exclude black people from that vision of America by offering them rhetorically their own *Mayflower* and their own Plymouth Rock. Members of the ACS drew an explicit analogy between the two when they referred to Liberia as 'a city set on a hill ... a renewal on the African shore of the splendid drama acted [in New England] two centuries before.'<sup>43</sup> The discourse of colonisation was profoundly paradoxical. It emerged at a time when as Reginald Horsman explains, the Anglo-Saxon race was assumed to be the only race

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p. 86.

<sup>42</sup> The re-creation of an all-white nation would, of course, necessitate the 'removal' of native Americans as well as black people. For parallels between the discourse of colonization of 'free people of color' and the removal of native Americans, see Nicholas Guyatt, 'The Outskirts of Our Happiness.'

<sup>43</sup> *African Repository and Colonial Journal*, 11 (Washington, D.C.: James C. Dunn, 1835), p. 38.

capable of self-government.<sup>44</sup> Yet the ACS promoted Liberia as a site where members of the Negro race could as if by magic or miracle acquire the same capacity and be re-born as heirs to both the Revolutionary generation and the Pilgrim Fathers, if not exactly *American*.

Bruce Dorsey portrays the colonisation movement as an aggressively masculinist enterprise.<sup>45</sup> He cites in evidence the location of the ACS within the masculine public arena, the linking of colonisation with a discourse of manliness and the paucity of female colonisation societies. While the ACS began as a masculine endeavour, it was quickly recognised that women would play a crucial and complementary role in the movement. Dorsey makes much of the fact that few white women 'embraced the cause as their own or organised female societies to support the reform.'<sup>46</sup> However, this is to minimise the influence of those white Northern women writers who supported it and the Southern slave-holding women who were directly involved in manumission. The Nat Turner rebellion (1831) 'radically reconfigured the contest over slavery, race and colonization.'<sup>47</sup> It not only led to a surge in manumissions that resulted in the emigration of 1,300 black Southerners to Liberia over a two year period; it also 'politicised domestic life' in a way that brought women to the forefront of the colonisation movement.<sup>48</sup> There were in fact two separate but interlinked gendered discourses on colonisation: the one, usually promulgated by members of the ACS and free, independent black people stressing the redemptive role of nation building for black men, emasculated by slavery and racism, and the other, enunciated in women's writing which emphasised the importance of stable domesticity in the creation of the nation. The ACS was founded in Washington and its members included the leading national figures of the day: would-be presidents and relatives of presidents, such as Henry Clay, Andrew Jackson and Bushrod Washington, and men

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<sup>44</sup> Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1981), 62-81.

<sup>45</sup> Bruce Dorsey, 'A Gendered History of African Colonization in the Antebellum United States', *Journal of Social History*, 34, 1, (Fall 2000), 77-103.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, p. 80.

<sup>47</sup> Burin, p. 19.

<sup>48</sup> Elizabeth R. Varon, *We Mean to be Counted: White Women and Politics in Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), p. 51.

who sought to articulate the mythology of America such as Daniel Webster and Francis Scott Key, the author of 'The Star-Spangled Banner.' It sought federal funding for its operation weeks after its establishment; while the government was reluctant to involve itself in a formal colonisation scheme, the President James Monroe did allocate funds based on a provision of the Slave Trade Act (1819) that would support the re-settlement in Liberia of slaves rescued by navy patrols. By 1830, the ACS had received over a quarter of a million dollars from the federal government even though only a fraction of its emigrants were recaptives.<sup>49</sup> The involvement of the Navy was crucial in the first decades of the colony. Commodore Matthew Perry, who commanded the ship that escorted the first group of migrants, is credited with the choice of Cape Mesurado as the site of the future colony and his colleague, Robert F. Stockton was the one who conducted the 'purchase' of land from the local Deh leader, King Peter, an event that follows all too familiar patterns of colonial conquest despite the efforts of the ACS to highlight the peaceful and providential nature of the first settlement.

Stockton's orders from his Navy superiors were to examine the various points of the West African coast in search of a suitable settlement. However, his insistence to the ACS that he be left largely to his own discretion indicated a character determined to take control of a situation. When King Peter reneged on a promise to cede tribal lands to the settlers, Stockton and Ayres pursued him into his own territory, put a pistol to his head and forced the agreement. The subsequent portrayal of this moment places a heroic Stockton centre stage. Accompanied by Ayres with his 'Saxon energy,' he refused to 'sail tamely or timidly by.' They boldly made their way through the deadly jungle, endangered on all sides by wild animals and savage natives. Armed with only a pistol, Stockton demanded the cession of the lands as promised:

he pointed at the head of the king, while raising his other hand to heaven, he solemnly appealed to God of Heaven for protection in this fearful crisis ... King Peter flinched before the calm courage of the white man.

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<sup>49</sup> Burin, p. 18.

The king's subjects, 'awed by the majesty of an ascendant mind, sunk gradually, cowering prostrate on the ground.'<sup>50</sup> The purchase of the lands was effected, in an act reminiscent of the acquisition of Manhattan, for \$300 worth of rum, some muskets, shoes and umbrellas. If the United States government had not acquired a colony, it had certainly facilitated its acquisition.

Other aspects of ACS rhetoric highlighted the idea of colonisation as a masculinist project. Attitudes to black masculinity colored the colonisation discourse and display considerable ambiguity. Abolitionist voices pointed to the emasculation of the black man as one of the most pernicious aspects of the institution of slavery. Not only was he denied his civil liberties, but he was also prevented from carrying out his duties as the head of the household, protector of his wife and children. As already noted, both abolitionist and pro-slavery discourse tended to depict black people as possessing traits deemed to be 'feminine': passive, sentimental and more religious than white people. A prominent pro-slavery writer, George Fitzhugh explicitly feminised male slaves, comparing the relationship between the slave and his master with that of a husband and wife and a father and his child: 'slavery protects the weaker members of society just as do the relations of parent, guardian and husband, and is as necessary, as natural and almost as universal as these relations.'<sup>51</sup> A contradictory narrative portrayed the Negro male as hyper-sexualised and violent, his body 'intrinsically pathological,' predatory and bestial.<sup>52</sup> Given the multiplicity of opinion on the nature of the Negro, it is hardly surprising that the colony was imagined to fulfil various functions. It was promoted as a site of regeneration for the emasculated black man as a citizen, while simultaneously imagined as neutralising a potentially dangerous revolutionary spirit. Its conceptualisation as a mission field was deemed to facilitate the full expression of the religiosity of black people and also, significantly, to initiate the enlightenment of the African continent.

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<sup>50</sup> Samuel John Baynard, *A Sketch of the Life of Commodore Robert F. Stockton* (Bedford, Mass.: Applewood Books, 1856), p. 46.

<sup>51</sup> George Fitzhugh, *Sociology for the South or the Failure of Free Society* (Richmond, Va.: A. Morris, 1854), p. 258.

<sup>52</sup> Riche Richardson, *Black Masculinity and the U.S. South: From Uncle Tom to Gangsta* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010), p. 36.



The linking of colonisation to masculinity featured strongly in the rhetoric of both white and black supporters of the ACS which portrayed colonisation as utterly transformative, rehabilitating a people devoid of any virtue into agents abroad of the virtues of American, Christian Republicanism. It also denigrated black people who declined this opportunity as being less than men. The feminization and sexualisation of Africa that one finds in European writing is replicated in the ACS literature. However, the need to impress on black men their filial role as saviours of their grieving mother, Africa, complicates the discourse. Deborah Gray White has written of the dual representations of the black woman in America as both Mammy and Jezebel, the nurturing maternal figure and her antithesis, the sensual temptress.<sup>53</sup> The same duality emerges in ACS representations of the African continent. Finley employs the familiar trope of Africa as a woman, passively awaiting the masculine energy of its explorers and conquerors: '[her bosom] begins to warm with hope and her heart to beat with expectation and desire,' longing like a lover for the return of her loved one. However, Africa is also the ancient mother, burdened by the weight of her history of loss, awaiting the liberating influence of her enlightened sons. Paradoxically, the aged mother is also 'rich and fertile' with rivers 'deep enough and long enough to bear freights of empires to her bosom.'<sup>54</sup> One pro-colonisation pamphlet drew comparisons between the colonisation of America and the proposed colonisation of Africa in specifically female terms: America is imagined as the daughter of Europe and Africa as the mother of black Americans but the instinct to colonise and conquer are the same; both mother and daughter are to be 'thrown open to enlightened men.'<sup>55</sup>

Women's involvement in the colonisation movement was crucial from the 1830s when the Jackson administration ceased funding the ACS and the need for voluntary contributions became more urgent. It also became more necessary to have women's voices, deemed to be maternal and sentimental, heard as a counter to the angry and

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<sup>53</sup> Deborah Gray White, *Arn't I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South*, revised edn (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1999).

<sup>54</sup> Finley, p. 96.

<sup>55</sup> Alexander T. McGill, *The Hand of God with the Black Race. A Discourse delivered before the Pennsylvania Colonization Society* (Philadelphia, 1862), 11-12.

frequently threatening voices of abolitionists such as David Walker and William Garrison. Kaplan has demonstrated how domesticity dominated women's writing from the 1830s to the 1850s at a time when the national territory was in a state of expansion while, at the same time, under threat of collapse due to internal divisions due to slavery. She argues that the development of a domestic discourse is best understood as coterminous with the doctrine of Manifest Destiny, that they seem to embody the extreme ends of the 'separate spheres' of female and male influence: the one firmly rooted within the structured space of the home while the other concerned itself with the seemingly infinite bounds of the American nation.<sup>56</sup> The virtues that were regarded as essential to the creation of the stable home such as temperance, piety and industry were the same as those required to tame the 'foreign' space wherever that may be. Nina Baym has traced the shifting attitudes to the role of women from the early republic to the Civil War.<sup>57</sup> She sees the domestic setting of the home as a 'cradle' (to use a gendered term) of the ideology that governed the republic

from the earliest years ... [when] men and women progressives defined [the home] as the place where citizens and citizenship were produced, and ... traditional maternal duties [were deemed] to encompass instructions not only in basic literacy ... but also in rudiments of patriotism, republican values and an understanding of civic virtue.<sup>58</sup>

She detects a change of emphasis as to the woman's role in the writing of women over the period from 1820-1860: from the earlier concept of a woman as the socially subordinate helpmate of the man, but equal to him in rationality, to the notion of woman as a spiritual being, whose task is to 'harness and guide his brute force [and] to provide moral leadership for the nation and the world.'<sup>59</sup>

Maria Stewart, the first black woman to address a 'promiscuous audience' (1832-1833), called on her sisters to dedicate themselves to perfecting the domestic sphere.

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<sup>56</sup> Kaplan, p. 584.

<sup>57</sup> Nina Baym, *American Women Writers and the Work of History 1790-1860* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995).

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, p. 168.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, p.168.

Through the cultivation of habits such as thrift, temperance and industriousness, the mother in the home could influence her husband and children towards respectability and advancement in white society. Yet she also recognised that domesticity could be a constraint on women and urged their involvement in the community sphere in organisations dedicated to moral and intellectual uplift. Only through education could they free themselves from the 'chains of ignorance and poverty' that confined them to 'lives of drudgery and toil.'<sup>60</sup> While Stewart imagined a home for free black women in the United States if they 'uplifted' themselves, white colonisation women tended to portray black people as homeless vagrants and wanderers through the land. Sarah Hale, one of the most influential women of her day as the editor of *Godey's Lady's Magazine* wrote that, though the first African slaves were brought to Virginia in 1620, their descendants had 'no home, no position and no future.'<sup>61</sup> Therefore the virtues that Stewart extolled as providing blacks with an entry into American civic life were projected on to Liberia. The writings of Northern women who supported the idea of colonisation introduce a vision of Liberia as a domesticated space, embodying American values but with a softer, gentler and more 'feminine' hue, reflecting the stereotyped character of the Negro race.

Hale and Catherine Beecher, the best-selling author of *Treatise on Domestic Economy* (1841), did much to shape the public perception of what was the proper role for women in the crisis over slavery, colonisation and abolition. Both of these Northern women deplored the entry of women into the 'public sphere': as America became increasingly polarised on the subject in the 1830s, Hale wrote:

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<sup>60</sup> Marilyn Richardson, ed. *Maria W. Stewart: America's First Black Woman Political Writer* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 46.

<sup>61</sup> Sarah Hale, *Liberia; or, Mr. Peyton's Experiments* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1853), p. 2. Further references are to this edition and are referenced parenthetically within the text. George Fitzhugh's image of slaves, happily embedded in the patriarchal plantation homestead, is at odds with Hale's depiction of them as Africans, 'the stranger within the gates.' *Liberia*, p. iv.

Hale was the editor of *Ladies' Magazine* from its inception in 1828. It merged with Louis Godey's *Lady's Book* in 1837; the joint venture of which Hale was editor generally known as *Godey's Lady's Book*. Both magazines used several different titles.

Patricia Okker, *Our Sister Editors: Sarah J. Hale and the Tradition of Nineteenth-Century American Women Editors* (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 2008), p. 231.

I consider every attempt to induce women to think they have a right to participate in the public duties of government as injurious to their best interests and derogatory to their character. Our empire is purer, more excellent and more spiritual.<sup>62</sup>

She denigrated the activities of feminist-abolitionist women, one of whom identified women with slaves, claiming that if women '[had] no right to act then may [they] well be termed the 'white slaves of the North' for like [their] brethren in bonds, [they] must seal [their] lips in silence and despair.'<sup>63</sup> Hale did not believe that women would be rendered powerless by absenting themselves from the masculine arena of politics and public speeches. She and other prominent women entered the public debate through their writings, hoping 'that the pen and not the sword [would] decide the controversy going on in the land and that any part women [might] take [would] be promotive of peace and not suggestive of discord.'<sup>64</sup> Catherine Beecher expressed a similar view: 'woman is to win everything by peace and love ... But this is to be accomplished in the domestic and social circle.'<sup>65</sup> A prominent female supporter of colonisation and co-founder of a Female Auxiliary of the ACS described its work as emanating from 'the domestic circle around our own or the firesides of our neighbours, without the sacrifice of time or the proprieties of our sex.'<sup>66</sup>

The creation of the stable and ordered family home which was regarded as a microcosm of society was deemed to belong in the private, female sphere. A major concern about slavery among women was its deleterious effects on the white family. For Southern women, who routinely interacted with slaves and with whom some had

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<sup>62</sup> Sarah Hale, *Ladies Magazine and Literary Gazette*, vol. 5-6 (Boston: Marsh, Capen & Lyon, 1832).

<sup>63</sup> *An Appeal to the Women of the Nominally Free States: Issued by an Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women, Held by Adjournment from the 9<sup>th</sup> to the 12<sup>th</sup> May, 1837* (New York: Isaac Knapp, 1838), p. 14.

<sup>64</sup> Sarah Hale, *Northwood: or, Life, North and South: Showing the True Character of Both*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (New York: H. Long & Brother, 1852), p. 408.

<sup>65</sup> Catherine Beecher, *An Essay on Slavery and Abolitionism with Reference to the Duty of American Females*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Boston: Perkins and Marvin, 1837), p. 100.

<sup>66</sup> Quoted in Varon, p. 46. The quotations from Hale, Beecher and the Female Auxiliary draw attention to the sentimental mode in nineteenth-century American letters and its entanglement with anti-slavery and pro-colonisation discourse. In her study of eighteenth-century sentimental writing, Lynn Festa has examined the various ways in which sentimental tropes were employed as essential tools in the representation of British and French relations with their colonial populations. Lynn Festa, *Sentimental Figures of Empire in Eighteenth-Century Britain and France* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006).

formed emotional ties, slavery was particularly pernicious: they were 'preoccupied with their souls' and conscious of their role as the moral guardians of their society.<sup>67</sup> They feared that slavery encouraged indolence, tyranny and sexual licence in their menfolk, thus rendering them poor role models for their children. These women also deplored the effects of slavery on the slaves themselves: the total destruction of family life as well as their exclusion from civil and religious institutions. In the 1830s, they had to contend with the immediate fear of slave insurrection: the Nat Turner rebellion led many to believe that, in order to create a safe space for their children, it was necessary to create a separate space for black people. Through their writing, their support of missionary and literary societies and their actual manumissions under the aegis of the ACS, northern and southern women feminized the colonisation project. Hale was an early advocate, insisting that the ACS was 'indebted to female benevolence and influence for much if its success.'<sup>68</sup> Henry Clay, a founder member of the organisation, recognised that it was 'countenanced and aided by the fair sex, which is ever prompt to contribute its exertions in works of charity and benevolence, because it always acts from generous impulses of pure and uncorrupted hearts.'<sup>69</sup> The foremost female colonialist was the poet Lydia Sigourney, known for her work of 'piety, domesticity, sympathy and conciliation.'<sup>70</sup> In an address to the Female African Society of Hartford (1830) she described colonisation as 'these majestic designs ... that [we] cannot but consider as peculiarly adapted to awaken the sympathies of [our] sex.' She felt that women were more sensitive to the evils of slavery and more anxiously desirous of its safe abolition than men because it 'disturbed the tranquillity 'of the domestic sphere and because it led to the separation of children from their parents, but specifically their mothers. It removed from mothers their 'duties of physical care, moral example, [and] religious education thus depriving the maternal heart of its dearest privilege and highest solace.' In an appeal to 'female sympathy,' she asked mothers who teach 'her little beings whom she lulls upon her bosom to

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<sup>67</sup> Burin, p. 50.

<sup>68</sup> Quoted in Etsuko Taketani, 'Sarah Josepha Hale's Africa', *American Literary History*, 14.3 (2002), 479-504 (p. 483).

<sup>69</sup> Quoted in Varon, p. 43.

<sup>70</sup> *Lydia Sigourney: Selected Poetry and Prose*, ed. by Gary Kelly (Broadview Editions, 2008), p. 26.

breathe, ere she sinks in his cradle slumbers, a prayer for the long-benighted, much enduring Africa.<sup>71</sup> She lauded the efforts of the ACS

to establish a colony in Africa, by voluntary removal, to restore the kidnapped race to their sorrowing mother, fitted not only to rise to the level which for ages had been denied them, but to be instruments of her own regeneration [which] is a policy safe, philanthropic and Christian and one which God hath deigned signally to bless.<sup>72</sup>

The portrayal of Africa as a grieving mother awaiting the return of her scattered children is a recurring image in the sentimental women's writing on colonisation. However, the emphasis on Africa as a mother bereft of her children deflects attention from plantation slavery in the South, where slave children, as the property of the slaveholder, could be sold away from their own parents. It also overlooks the fact that some of the manumission schemes endorsed by the ACS did not seek to incorporate entire families, thus leaving American mothers and their children bereft.<sup>73</sup>

While Hale and Sigourney were the most influential white women supporters of the ACS, it was Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) that had the most galvanising effect in the anti-slavery debates. The novel, with its searing indictment of slavery, was welcomed as a powerful propaganda tool by the abolitionist movement. The fact that Beecher Stowe seems to simultaneously support colonisation by 'sending' the most enterprising and independent black character, George Harris, to Liberia, is frequently overlooked. It was an ending that dismayed and outraged black leaders, with both Frederick Douglass and Martin Delany objecting to its apparent endorsement of emigration. In a letter to Beecher Stowe, Douglass wrote, 'the truth is, dear madam, that we are *here* and we are likely to remain.

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<sup>71</sup> Lydia Sigourney, 'Address to Hartford Female African Society, 5 July 1830', *African Repository and Colonial Journal*, 8 (Washington, D.C.: James C. Dunn, 1832), 152-154.

<sup>72</sup> Letter of Lydia Sigourney to a member of the Edinburgh Ladies' Liberian Society, July 4, 1833, *African Repository and Colonial Journal*, 9 (Washington, D.C.: 1834), p. 339.

<sup>73</sup> A poignant feature of the letters of Liberian colonists to their former masters and mistresses is the persistence of the enquiries about and messages to family members who had not been included in manumission schemes.

Individuals emigrate, nations never.<sup>74</sup> His response to Delany's angry dismissal of Beecher Stowe as a 'colonizationist' reveals his wish that the fate of George Harris should not diminish the power of the novel to change the hearts and minds of white America on the question of slavery: 'we shall not ... allow the sentiments put in a brief letter of George Harris ... to vitiate forever Mrs. Stowe's power to do us good. Who doubts that Mrs. Stowe is more of an abolitionist than when she wrote that chapter?'<sup>75</sup> Despite Douglass' defence of her, there was widespread feeling that she, like so many of her Northern contemporaries, was unable 'to imagine an America in which blacks could be recognised as persons.'<sup>76</sup> When Charles Dickens reviewed *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, he chose to stress the role of colonisation in Liberia as the solution to the 'problem' of a growing free black population in the United States.

Dickens had first addressed the issue of American slavery when he published *American Notes* after his first tour of the United States in 1842. In a chapter entitled 'Slavery,' he exposed the brutality of the system in the southern states, as well as the hypocrisy of politicians in the northern states who tolerated bondage while proclaiming the doctrine of liberty.<sup>77</sup> He returned to the subject a decade later when he reviewed *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in an article entitled 'North American Slavery,' published in *Household Words*, 1852.<sup>78</sup> In his brief appraisal of the novel, he was mildly critical of Beecher Stowe for her 'overstrained conclusions and violent extremes,' while still characterising the work as 'full of high power...and lofty humanity' (NAS, 4). He considered Uncle Tom and George Harris as 'rare specimens of slaves,' (NAS, 4) but also conceded that the book presented a generally accurate account of the system of slavery as it existed in the South. The remainder of the article is devoted to the abject condition of slaves and 'free people of colour' in the United States, who 'by a long course of depressing treatment, have been made slavish in their

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<sup>74</sup> Quoted in Robert S. Levine, 'Uncle Tom's Cabin in Frederick Douglass' Papers: An Analysis of Reception', *American Literature*, 64 (1982), 71-93 (p. 82).

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*, p. 82.

<sup>76</sup> Sanchez-Eppler, p. 113.

<sup>77</sup> Charles Dickens, *American Notes and Reprinted Pieces*(London: Chapman and Hall, 1868).

<sup>78</sup> Charles Dickens, with Henry Morley, 'North American Slavery,' in *Household Words*, Vol.6 (London: Ward, Locke and Taylor, 1852). All references are to this edition and appear parenthetically in the text as NAS.

spirit' (NAS, 4). In less trenchant terms than those employed in 1842, Dickens called for the gradual abolition of slavery and the general improvement in the lives of slaves and former slaves, expressing the hope that, if educated, they would naturally and inevitably turn to their 'true home in Liberia' (NAS, 5). Echoing the discourse of the ACS and its supporters, he highlighted the positive aspects of Liberia: the allotment of free land to immigrants, the absence of racism and the opportunity to spread civilisation and Christianity throughout the continent, and characterised the settlers as people of great energy and courage. He claimed to be mystified by the lack of enthusiasm about Liberia evident among black people in the United States, given that the colony had been established expressly for their benefit. However, he believed that emancipation coupled with education would lead them to 'eventually pass over to Liberia, and form a nation...whereof America might boast for ever'(NAS, 6).

Beecher Stowe was stung by the emphasis placed by critics and commentators on that short portion of the novel which dealt with the decision of George Harris to emigrate to Liberia. While she claimed that she would approach that section differently if she were to write it again, she, nevertheless, defended the idea of Liberia as a site of regeneration for black men. She wrote in *Key*:

The present attorney general of Liberia, Mr. Lewis, is a man who commands the highest respect, for talent and ability in his position; yet, while he was in America, it is said that, like many other young, colored men, he was distinguished only for foppery and frivolity. What made the change in Lewis after he went to Liberia? Who does not see the answer? Does anyone wish to know what is inscribed on the seal which keeps the great stone over the sepulchre of African mind? It is this - which was so truly said of poor Topsy - 'Nothing But a Nigger.'<sup>79</sup>

Her use of the stone and the sepulchre imagines a scene of Resurrection: Lewis and all his counterparts, socially and intellectually dead in the United States, rise to a new life in Liberia. As already noted, the recovery of manhood was a repeated theme in both black and white pro-emigration rhetoric. Greenberg's distinction between competing versions of 'manhood' in antebellum American culture is a useful paradigm

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid, p. 51.



for an examination of the contrasting approaches to the recovery of 'manhood' as articulated by the (historical) Martin Delany and the (fictional) George Harris.

The black version of the idea of separate spheres was enunciated in a journal entitled *Colored American* in 1839. Delany, though not the author, would have subscribed to the gendered world prescribed in the article:

Man is strong - Woman is beautiful  
Man is daring and confident - Woman is deferent and unassuming  
Man is great in action - Woman is suffering  
Man shines abroad - Woman at home  
Man talks to convince - Woman to persuade and please  
Man has a rugged heart - Woman a soft and tender one  
Man prevents misery - Woman relieves it  
Man has science - Woman taste  
Man has judgement - Woman sensibility  
Man is a being of justice - Woman an angel of mercy.<sup>80</sup>

Delany felt that the black man had been emasculated on the plantations; as a biologist, he believed that the traits and characteristics acquired in one generation would be inherited in the next. Thus the docility and malleability instilled in the negro would, he feared, become a permanent feature of their 'psychological condition' which would be 'transmitted to their offspring' leading to a permanent and irreversible degradation.<sup>81</sup> To offset this eventuality, he set about theorising the 'role of the male soldier/citizen' in the act of redemptive nation-building.<sup>82</sup> For women, he prescribed a role as the 'mothers of our children' for which they should be educated: 'let their minds be well informed; well stored with useful information and practical proficiency, rather than the light superficial acquirements, popularly and fashionably called accomplishments.'<sup>83</sup> In the 1850s, Delany argued for the establishment of a separate nation though he initially did not favour Africa as a destination and dismissed Liberia, even after its declaration of independence as 'a poor *miserable mockery* - a

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<sup>80</sup> Chanta M. Haywood, *Prophesying Daughters: Black Women Preachers and the Word* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2003), p. 61.

<sup>81</sup> Delany, *A Documentary Reader*, p. 216.

<sup>82</sup> Gilroy, p. 23.

<sup>83</sup> Delany, p. 212.

burlesque on government - a pitiful dependency on the American Colonization Society.<sup>84</sup> Eventually, he came to the conclusion that the future of black Americans and Africa, which he called the Fatherland, were intertwined, pronouncing 'Africa for the Africans, and black men (i.e. American black men) to rule them.' Exhibiting all the characteristics of Greenberg's 'martial manhood,' and hoping to restore to black masculinity all the 'ideal' male qualities laid down in the *Colored American*, Delany called for a great, heroic Negro enterprise, involving the establishment of a black nation in Africa and the transformation and modernisation of the continent which he hoped would be effected by the construction of a great railroad.<sup>85</sup>

Beecher Stowe's novel proposes a softer and more 'feminine' solution to the problem of the emasculation of the black man; through George Harris she 'colonises Africa for domesticity.'<sup>86</sup> He is, first and foremost, a family man; his masculinity is evidenced in his struggles to reunite his family and remove them to a safe place. He regards as the ultimate peace his reunion with his wife Eliza and their child in the domestic idyll of, significantly, a Quaker family. Though he has not a 'cent of money, nor a roof to cover [him] nor a spot of land to call [his] own,' he believes that the greatest blessing for a man is 'to feel that his wife and child belong to *him*.'<sup>87</sup> After they have escaped to Canada, they settle into a life of domestic order in a 'small, neat tenement in the outskirts of Montreal ... a cheerful fire blazes on the hearth; a tea table, covered with a snowy cloth, stands prepared for the evening meal' (436). That is Eliza's domain. George, who has been in 'constant occupation' since their arrival in Canada, is driven

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid, p. 204.

<sup>85</sup> While Delany rejected Liberia as an autonomous black nation, he embarked on a journey to Africa in 1859 to seek a location for his own enterprise. His account of the trip, *Official Report of the Niger Valley Exploring Party*, was published in 1861. Nothing came of his plans for an African nation and he never returned to Africa. His collaborator on the trip, a Jamaican scientist called Robert Campbell wrote his own account of the trip, *A Pilgrimage to My Motherland* (1860) and immigrated to Nigeria in 1862. Delany found an outlet for his martial energies during the American Civil War when he was appointed as the first black field officer in the U.S. Army. It is notable that Campbell characterizes Africa as his motherland while Delany persisted in calling it his Fatherland, an 'obstinacy' that Gilroy (25) claims, expresses Delany's profound sense of the relationship between African nationality and black masculinity.

<sup>86</sup> Gillian Brown, *Domestic Individualism: Imagining Self in Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), p. 31.

<sup>87</sup> Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 193. Further references are to this edition and are referenced parenthetically within the text.

by 'zeal for self-improvement,' and his corner of the room holds a 'table covered with a green cloth, where there was an open writing desk, pens, papers and ... a shelf of well-selected books' (436). After his sister and Eliza's mother are reunited with them, they emigrate to France, where George spends four years in university.

David Walker, in his opposition to colonisation, had disparaged those who left for Liberia as the unwitting gulls of the ACS:

Those who are ignorant enough to go to Africa, the colored people ought to be glad to have them go for if they are ignorant enough to let whites *fool* them off to Africa, they would be no small injury to us if they reside in this country.<sup>88</sup>

Delany called them 'voluntary slaves' and castigated the Liberian President, Joseph Roberts, for being an 'echo ... a parrot' of the ACS.<sup>89</sup> But George Harris's letter to friends announcing his decision to make his permanent home in Liberia is described as 'the feelings and views of an educated man.' He can, therefore, hardly be dismissed as an ignorant mouthpiece of the ACS nor as a simple pawn of those colonialists who manumitted their slaves on condition that they agree to repatriate to Liberia. George goes to a *Republic*, no longer a colony of the ACS, and he is determined that it will take its place 'among the nations of the earth.' George is a free man, a mulatto so light-skinned he could pass for white and did so in his escape into Canada. As a free man, he chooses freely; he weighs up the competing claims of America, Haiti and Liberia as a possible home and opts for an African nationality as representing the best hopes for the African race.

Beecher Stowe joins the debate on the characteristics of the Anglo-Saxon and Negro races as well as the special dangers inherent in the hybridity of mulattoes. In contemplating the possibility of an occurrence of a slave insurrection in the United States, Augustine St. Clair opines:

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<sup>88</sup> Walker, p. 64.

<sup>89</sup> Delany, p. 205.

If ever the San Domingo hour comes, Anglo-Saxon blood will lead on the day. Sons of white fathers, with all our haughty feelings burning in their veins, will not always be bought and sold and traded. They will rise and raise with them their mother's race. (277)<sup>90</sup>

George Harris seems to concur with this view: the 'stern, inflexible, energetic elements' that were required during America's 'pioneer period of struggle and conflict,' are the characteristics of his father's Anglo-Saxon blood that he rejects. He associates it with a utilitarian and materialistic view of the world. His own relationship with his father was based on ownership: 'to him I was no more than a fine dog or a horse,' whereas to his 'poor, heartbroken mother,' from whom he was separated, he was a '*child*' and he always knew 'in his own heart' that she loved him (440). The suffering of his mother is conflated with the suffering of Mother Africa, with Liberia represented as a true coming together of the African family in a new home.

In rejecting his Anglo-Saxon blood, he embraces his mother's race 'not a dominant and commanding race [but] ... at least an affectionate, magnanimous and forgiving one' (442). Here he employs the familiar trope of black people as more feminine, or as Beecher Stowe puts it, a race 'more soft and helpless ... their gentleness, their lowly docility of heart, their aptitude to repose on a superior mind and rest on a higher power, their childlike simplicity of affection and felicity of forgiveness' (186). But George is no Uncle Tom; his version of Christianity is less given to martyrdom and more attuned to the doctrine of active service to others in realising God's kingdom on earth. Thus, George foresees the development of Liberia at the hands of American Negroes as 'essentially Christian':

having been called in the furnace of injustice and oppression, they have need to bind closer to their hearts that sublime doctrine of love and forgiveness, through which alone they are to conquer, which is to be their mission to spread over the continent of Africa. (442)

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<sup>90</sup> In explaining and justifying the depiction of George Harris, which some contemporary commentators felt was unrealistic given his character and intelligence, Beecher Stowe explained that 'it must be remembered that the half-breeds often inherit to a great degree the traits of their white ancestors.' *Key*, p. 13.

This version of an African nation and Beecher Stowe's characterisation of what Blyden would later call the 'African Personality' rejects another version of black agency, that represented by the existence of an earlier black republic, Haiti. Yet, it hovers menacingly as an image of violent resistance against which Beecher Stowe places Liberia as 'a kind of feminized Utopia strategically placed as an alternative.'<sup>91</sup> George Harris dismisses Haiti as having no future, because 'it had nothing to start with. The race that formed the character of the Haytiens was a worn out, effeminate one': 'effeminate' as opposed to 'feminised,' redolent of a French, aristocratic Catholic culture. He chooses Liberia because it is a new nation. He imagines it as blank canvas on which he and his contemporaries may form a nation, embodying the republican values of the American Founding Fathers but animated by a spirit of domesticating Christian love and forgiveness. Interestingly, he fears that he may be led astray in this endeavour by the 'full half [of] the blood in his veins [that] is hot and hasty Saxon.' However, he trusts that his wife, 'an eloquent preacher of the gospel' will 'keep before [his] eyes the Christian calling and mission of [his] race' (443).

The popularity of Beecher Stowe's novel prompted a spate of what became known as anti-Tom novels, numbering as many as thirty-four, which offered ideological challenges to her account of southern slavery.<sup>92</sup> The most important of these was Sarah Hale's *Liberia; or, Mr Peyton's Experiments* (1853) a work that is usually positioned between the literary output of 'Northern and Southern "hotheads,"'<sup>93</sup> in its recognition that slavery ought to be abolished but, fearing the effects of outright abolition, advocating colonisation. While it is usually referred to as a novel, it is a mixture of different genres: fiction, 'history' (or the ACS' version of events), geography, missives from significant historical figures in the infant colony, as well as a long appendix consisting of letters from former slaves, articles on colonisation and the Liberian Declaration of Independence. While sub-titled *Mr. Peyton's Experiments*,

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<sup>91</sup> Kaplan, p. 602.

<sup>92</sup> Sarah Meer, *Uncle Tom Mania: Slavery, Minstrelsy and Transatlantic Culture in the 1850s* (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 2005), p. 75. These novels portray plantation slavery as a benign, patriarchal institution.

<sup>93</sup> Meer, p. 75.

its main focus is on the role of women in the civilizing and colonising mission to Africa. Hale regarded colonisation as an act of benevolence:

what other nation can point to a colony planted from such pure motives of charity; nurtured by the counsels and exertions of its noblest, wisest and self-denying statesmen and philanthropists; sustained ... from a pure love of justice and humanity.<sup>94</sup>

She links the rhetoric of colonisation with that of Manifest Destiny: American institutions are so exceptional that those who believe in them have a duty to spread them not just across the continent but across the world. Not only is the civilising mission sanctioned by God, Hale also presents slavery itself as providential.<sup>95</sup> However abhorrent it may be, it does ultimately have salvific value:

The greatest mission of our Republic [is] to train here the black man for his duties as a Christian, then free him and send him to Africa, there to plant Free States and organise Christian civilization. Liberia has solved the enigma of ages ... the mission of American slavery is to Christianize Africa.<sup>96</sup>

The narrative voice of *Liberia* is undoubtedly Hale's: while the novel opens on a Virginia plantation and closes on a Liberian farm, the ideal values it espouses are hers. In her writing, Hale 'conflates the Puritan and Pilgrim enterprise with the settlement of all New England and saw New England as the cradle of the American Revolution,' which led her to conceive of the American nation as white, Anglo-Saxon and Protestant.<sup>97</sup> In an earlier novel, *Northwood* (1829), she had explored the dangers posed to the American Republic from having strayed from the values of the Founding Fathers. In *Liberia*, which deals with the greatest of these dangers, the institution of slavery, she presents the main slave owner, the kindly Mr. Peyton as seeking to do what is best for his slaves, albeit first 'inspired' to do so as an act of self-preservation following from rumours of a slave uprising. His plan to emancipate the slaves takes

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<sup>94</sup> Hale, *Liberia*, p. iv.

<sup>95</sup> This was a common idea among black leaders also, most notably John Russwurm, Alexander Crummell and Bishop Henry McNeal Turner.

<sup>96</sup> Hale, *Northwood*, pp. 407-408.

<sup>97</sup> Ryan, pp. 558-583.

shape during a trip to Washington where he meets members of the ACS. His sister, Margaret, urges caution. She warns that emancipation alone will not lead to true freedom; 'judging by the free negroes ... around us, the probabilities are that they will degenerate from honest, faithful servants into idle, degraded and worthless men, a burden and a nuisance to every respectable person near them' (46). Hale presents alternative visions of what the future for freed slaves might hold: either a life of indolence and dissipation in the free states of the North or a new beginning in Liberia, a nation constructed on the cardinal virtues of true womanhood, 'piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity.'<sup>98</sup>

Given that the aim of the novel is to promote Liberia as the ideal destination for free blacks, it is no surprise that alternative efforts to settle the slaves in the 'free states' and in Canada are doomed to failure. Peyton initially opts for a scheme that would closely replicate their lives on the plantation; he grants them plots of land to be worked by them for their own profit, as an exercise in self-reliance. After a promising two years, the slaves begin to slide into idleness; in the words of their black overseer 'dey work one day and rest two.' Some other of his slaves decline Peyton's offer of emancipation; his coachman, Ben, and wife Clara refuse to work the land which they regard as 'a mighty coming down ... after [they've] been raised in the house.' They opt for relocation to Philadelphia where Peyton finds work for Ben as a coachman.

The account of their lives there highlights Hale's attitude to 'free people of color' and her belief that their amelioration was not possible in a society where the white race was so dominant. Ben's wife, Clara, while keeping a neat and tidy house, is a spendthrift; she is 'an elegantly-dressed lady' that Peyton's wife castigates for dressing 'in an unsuitable way,' given Ben's occupation. Her daughter, Madge, is neglected: the 'round, chubby, laughing little thing, dressed in a simple checked frock,' who grew up on the plantation is transformed into a 'thin and sickly-looking child,' dressed inappropriately and wearing 'a gipsy hat with long blue streamers' (77).

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<sup>98</sup> Barbara Welter, 'The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860', *American Quarterly*, 18, 2, 1 (Summer 1966), 151-174 (p. 152).

The family's downfall is predicted in Peyton's fear that 'a love of finery was, in common with many other half-civilised people, one of their strongest passions' (72). Worst of all, in the eyes of her erstwhile mistress, Clara has attempted to become more 'genteel' by paying for Madge to have music lessons and in mixing with women like Amanda Fitzwalter, a black woman given to discussing the relative merits of Byron and Shelley. Peyton's wife despairs of the future of the 'colored race' when she considers that those who 'had been given such careful early training, so much religious instruction and, at last, liberty,' should waste 'their time and opportunities' when they should be 'vindicating their right to freedom' (83).

Hale echoes and foreshadows a debate that continued through the century on the 'proper' education for the Negro race. Booker T. Washington, like the fictional Mrs. Peyton, regarded as a waste of time the pursuit of 'higher learning.' In *Up From Slavery*, he recalled

one of the saddest things I saw during the month of travel ... was a young man, who had attended some high school, sitting down in a one-room cabin, with grease on his clothing, filth all around him and weeds in the yard and garden, engaged in studying a French grammar.<sup>99</sup>

Ben and Clara's slide into poverty and Ben's alcoholism could have been averted, Hale implies, if Clara had paid more attention to the home and less to the idle cultivation of music, poetry and fine frocks. The couple eventually finds true freedom in the only site of regeneration for 'free people of color,' Liberia, under the wise guidance of Peyton's devoted ex-slave Keziah, the moral exemplar of the novel and the mother of the new nation.

The central black character, Keziah, contravenes the norm of colonisation as a masculine project by becoming its agent and chief proponent. On the plantation, she exhibits all the characteristics that will eventually find full expression in the new colony. At the time when her master's family was under threat from a neighbouring

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<sup>99</sup> Booker T. Washington, *Up From Slavery*, 1901 (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1986), p. 122.



slave insurrection, Keziah is described as brave and fearless, but these qualities are also regarded as appropriately maternal: 'no womanish fears, no feminine tenderness was in her heart, but the fierceness and pitilessness of a lioness fighting for her young' (37). This portrayal of Keziah foreshadows the myth of Matilda Newport, another fierce woman fighting to defend her 'family' from annihilation. While Keziah is regarded by the overseer on the farm as 'de best man in de lot' there is no mistaking her feminine and domesticating nature. When her master is ill, she cooks him a nourishing gruel but also adds an extra touch, to feed the spirit as well as the body:

Keziah selected some English violets, a half-blown rose-bud and some geranium leaves and arranging them in a champagne glass, with a taste no one would have imagined lay hidden under such harsh features and an expression so forbidding, she placed the simple but fragrant bouquet on the waiter and proceeded to the sick room. (12)

She creates on her small farm a little domestic idyll; the other slaves remark on her cooking skills, her chintz cushions, her flower garden and her habit of reading the Bible to her friend, the man-child, Polydore. Her voice carries more weight than any of the men; the overseer Nathan sums up the feminine influence 'de ladies is mighty powerful over our weakness' (66). Despite her intense loyalty and devotion to the Peyton household, she eagerly accepts her master's grant of freedom. In this she offers a sharp contrast to Clara who believes that 'a nigger's nothing but a nigger, whether he's free or not' (53). Of Clara and some of the others, Peyton says that a 'desire for freedom, for its own sake, was too abstract and intangible a motive to affect them' (72). However, Keziah does grasp the significance of what she has been offered; she tells her master that she was born to be free: 'some niggers born for slaves - heaps of them fit for nothing else; but this chile ain't one of them ar people' (56). She is the only one of Peyton's slaves to embrace unequivocally the idea of colonisation in Africa.

Her response to the proposals of the ACS, as reported to her by Peyton, is a joyful acceptance of the opportunity to benefit herself and her fellow slaves but she also sees its missionary possibilities. Polydore is the most recently arrived from Africa and

has no desire to go back; his account of life there conforms to Western depictions of the continent as dark and savage. He regards his life as a slave as the happiest he has ever been, free from the threat of the 'devil-man' in the bush and the slave-catchers. He agrees to go to Liberia only to protect Keziah, 'an unprotected single womin.' While she asserts that she is 'worth two of [him] any day,' and shows no fear of the horrors that he has described, she reminds him that their civilising mission will bring to an end the savagery of Africa that he experienced:

We must make up our minds to be missionaries, and do de Lord's work as well as our own. We have been greatly blessed 'bove our poor brethren, in havin' learned here how to fight the good fight, and gain de heavenly crown. And when we go 'mong de savages, and dey come to visit us ... we can tell them 'bout de blessed Savior and teach 'em to lay down dem wicked ways ... . (137)

Once she arrives in Liberia, she becomes the main spokesperson for colonisation. The narrative is interspersed with the disembodied voices of the main, real-life proponents of colonisation, all of them male. These were the public faces of the movement: the black leaders, Lott Cary and Daniel Coker and the government agent, Jehudi Ashmun. But Keziah is Hale's exemplar on the ground of black, female agency and a significant portion of the latter part of the book belongs to her. She is transformed from American subaltern to Liberian ruling class by virtue of her assimilation of the values deemed by Hale to be required for nation building: industry, piety and domesticity. She no longer speaks the slave language of the plantation but has mastered perfectly grammatical standard English. While Polydore's brute strength is acknowledged, it is she who is credited with establishing the perfect homestead on her land (recognising as one of the 'more farsighted emigrants the advantages of agriculture,' and conforming to ACS hopes for the colony) and the farm is always referred to as Keziah's place. She plays hostess to the newly arrived Ben and Clara, serving them Hale's ideal Thanksgiving dinner of turkey, ham and sweet potatoes. On her cleared land, she has raised sugar-cane, cotton, a grove of fruit trees and a vegetable garden. She is entirely self-sufficient and has surplus for sale at the market. Thus, she realises the cherished wish of all Americans for free enterprise and private property, surrounded by a fence and a planted hedge, that marks it as

separate from the communal system of land ownership practised by her 'savage' neighbours. Her moral influence on those around her is shown in the regularising of her union with Polydore in marriage and 'in her training the native women and children who frequently visited her' (168). Eventually, she adopts two 'native' girls, thus combining the dual role of mother and missionary. She takes in 'recaptives,' one of whom turns out to be Polydore's long-lost brother whom she 'civilises' by teaching him English. In Liberia, Keziah achieves self-actualisation as wife and mother, the moral head of the family, displaying all the same virtues as the Puritans who 'founded' America. She finally becomes 'American' on the shores of Africa.

Both Hale and Beecher Stowe project on to Liberia a softer, kinder and purer version of the United States, closer in character to the mythic origin at Plymouth Rock. In placing the future of the nation in the hands of Keziah and the childlike Polydore and in the Christian George and Eliza, they imagine the new nation as site of redemption and renewal. Hale's novel closes with a vision of Liberia as a 'Christian colony, with their homes, barns, fences and waving fields, with their schools, their churches and the influence of their regular and Christian life' (243). It is a vision of what America could have become if it were not for the primal curse of slavery.

The historical counterparts to George Harris were the earliest immigrants to Liberia from the North and the Upper South; Keziah and her family represent those immigrants manumitted from slavery by 'enlightened' slaveholders and prepared for a new life in Africa. In the conceptualisation and representation of Liberia in ACS discourse and in the writings of influential, Northern women, one can discern the colonialists' image of the ideal Liberian: frugal, self-sufficient and pious; models of respectable black masculinity and femininity and agents of the American Empire of Liberty. Each one would become, in the expressed hope of the ACS, 'a missionary carrying with him credentials in the holy cause of civilization, religion and free institutions.'<sup>100</sup> Did the early immigrants fulfil the hopes of their sponsors and their own dreams of liberty when they landed on the shores of Africa?

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<sup>100</sup> Henry Clay, *The Life and Speeches of the Hon. Henry Clay* (New York: A. Barnes & Co. 1857), p. 582.

## Chapter 2

### 'Out of the House of Bondage'<sup>1</sup>: Negotiating Identities in Colonial Liberia 1820-1847

*Liberia: 'a purer form of government than any now found, even in the United States.'*<sup>2</sup>

*Liberia: 'a 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.'*<sup>3</sup>

These epigraphs, spanning the period from colony to nation capture the widely divergent views of Liberia held by expatriate black people and their American counterparts. The statement of Benedict, a Liberian politician, articulates the confident expectation, just two decades after the establishment of the colony, that the settlers were well advanced in their plans for a free republic that would replicate the ideals and institutions of the United States and even perfect them. Delany's dismissal of the newly formed republic restates the objections of abolitionists; in the process he denies agency to the settlers, insisting that they had been hood-winked into believing that Liberia was anything other than a plot devised by slave-owners to perpetuate a system that enriched them.

Who were these people described by Delany: the 'emancipated,' 'the superannuated' 'the upstart colored hirelings,' among which latter group he would, no doubt, have included Samuel Benedict? What were their motivations for leaving the land of their birth? How did they conceptualise Liberia and what did it represent for them? When the fictional character, George Harris, articulated his hopes for Liberia at the end of

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<sup>1</sup> The phrase as used in *Exodus*, 2.23 refers to Egypt.

<sup>2</sup> Samuel Benedict, *African Repository and Colonial Journal* (Washington, D.C.: Alexander and Barnard, 1841), p. 324.

<sup>3</sup> Martin Delany, Introduction to William Nesbit, 'Four Months in Liberia or African Colonization Exposed, 1855', in *Liberian Dreams: Back-to-Africa Narratives from the 1850s*, ed. by Wilson Jeremiah Moses (University Park: Penn State Press, 2010), 81-86 (p. 83).

*Uncle Tom's Cabin*, he imagined it as a 'republic of *picked* men who, by energy and self-educating force have, in many cases, individually rais'd themselves above a condition of slavery' (440). The first literary productions of the colony emerge from the pens of men with missionary zeal and republican fervour; if, in the words of George Harris, they were 'picked' men, it was not at the hands of the ACS. Rather, they had a sense of sacred or secular mission that would be realised in a nation of their own making. The diary of the Rev. Daniel Coker, who was among the first emigrants in 1820; Cary's 'Circular' of 1827; the writings of John Russwurm, the first editor of the *Liberia Herald* and Governor of Maryland-in-Liberia and the large and varied output of Hilary Teage, who succeeded Russwurm as editor of the *Herald*, and was the author of the Declaration of Independence, constitute the official voice of Liberia that provides access to the processes involved in the creation of a new nation and a new people. They represent the emerging voice of black, Liberian freedom, disseminated throughout the world.

The influence of the first colonists on the making of Liberia is overwhelming, but they were not typical of the immigrants who populated the colony in the first decades. While the tendency is to homogenise the settlers, who later became known as Americo-Liberians, the immigrants of the first decade from the quasi-free black population of the North and the Upper South had very different understanding of bondage and liberty from that understood and experienced by recently emancipated slaves. The members of this latter group had been manumitted from slavery on condition that they leave for Africa, having been chosen by their masters as the ones most likely to succeed, and given rudimentary lessons in literacy and useful trades. Their articulation of Liberian identity can be heard in the unique archive of letters that they wrote to their former masters and to the ACS. Slaves in the United States were rarely literate, access to education being prohibited by law in most states. However, emancipated slaves were frequently 'prepared' for freedom by the females in the slave-owners' family. Therefore, literacy was higher among Liberian settlers than

among the slave or free populations in the United States.<sup>4</sup> The letters from this previously subaltern group and the official writing of the leading men of Liberia provide a fascinating insight into the first decades of the colony as the settlers grappled with quotidian concerns as well as larger questions of identity, belonging and the meaning of liberty.

The free blacks who chose to immigrate to Liberia saw themselves as part of an anti-slavery movement yet they are inexplicably absent and almost forgotten in the historiography of slavery, abolition and emancipation. This historical amnesia is due to a combination of factors: the privileging of Haiti as a site of slave revolution, the 'coercive power of the Garrisonian narrative' of immediate abolitionism and the changing attitude to Africa among free people of colour in the northern states.<sup>5</sup> Black colonialists fell outside two admired traditions of resistance, the armed revolt against tyranny and the peaceful 'moral suasion' of anti-slavery movements. Thus, they were characterized as cowards, white lackeys and traitors to their enslaved brethren: Russwurm, previously a highly admired figure of resistance in the United States, was hanged in effigy in New York when he announced his intention to emigrate to Liberia.

In response to the hostility that they incurred, the immigrants frequently felt the need to set down their understanding of what colonisation meant to them and how they understood the task that was before them. Just as the leaders of the free black population had entered into print to defend their community against white charges of inferiority and incapacity, those who chose to ally themselves with colonialists were similarly forced into a defensive position. In explaining and justifying themselves, they sought to claim agency for themselves and to refute the charges that they were mere pawns of a pro-slavery organisation. In fact, many of them felt that rather than abandoning their enslaved brethren, their avowed mission to establish a Christian,

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<sup>4</sup> Tom Shick, 'A Quantitative Analysis of Liberian Colonization from 1820-1843 with special reference to Mortality', *The Journal of African History*, 12.1 (Jan 1971), 45-59 (p. 48).

<sup>5</sup> Robert Forbes, 'Truth Systematized', in *Prophets of Protest: Reconsidering the History of American Abolitionism*, ed. by Timothy P. McCarthy and John Stauffer (New York: New Press, 2006), 3-22 (p. 14). William Lloyd Garrison (1805-1879) was an early supporter of the ACS. In 1831, he launched a newspaper *The Liberator*, denouncing the organisation and proclaiming his support for the immediate abolition of slavery.

republican nation on the coast of West Africa would hasten the demise of the slave trade by attacking it at its source. Their writings explore themes of the working of God in history, the unquenchable desire for liberty (however that might be understood) and their relationship with Africa, and form the basis for an understanding of what Liberia was supposed to stand for in the first decades of its existence. This study locates these writings within the developing genre of black American writing from which they have traditionally been excluded. Tim Youngs characterises the history of black Americans as resting 'on two archetypes of travel: the forced journey into slavery, signified by the Middle Passage; and the willed flight to freedom.'<sup>6</sup> Uniquely, these first Liberian texts describe a reversal of the Middle Passage and a journey to freedom, not to the Northern 'free' states or Canada, as is the norm in slave narratives but to the place that they began to figure as the natural home for diasporic Africans. They ought properly be viewed as a transatlantic articulation of black selfhood through literary forms already developing in the free black communities in the United States: the treatises, sermons and appeals that constituted a counter-discourse to white hegemonic thought. Russwurm and Coker while still in the United States had written significant works on slavery, racism and the need for black Americans to 'plead their own cause,' themes that they continued to explore from the perspective of Africa.<sup>7</sup> They also share many of the characteristics of the earliest slave narratives which Philip Gould argues might be regarded as a 'religious genre,' sharing with evangelical Christianity the importance of the individual's 'new birth.'<sup>8</sup> The writings of the early immigrants describe physical and spiritual journeys out of their own forms of bondage, glorying in the exhilarating power of liberty and claiming that Liberia was a site of regeneration for the scattered sons and daughters of Africa.

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<sup>6</sup> Tim Youngs, 'Pushing Against the Black/White Limits of Maps: African American Writings on Travel', *English Studies in Africa*, 53,2 (2010), 71-85 (p. 71).

<sup>7</sup> John Russwurm was co-founder of the first black newspaper in the United States. The first edition, announced its mission statement: 'We wish to plead our own cause. Too long have others spoken for us.' *Freedom's Journal*, 1,1 (New York: Cornish and Russwurm, March 16, 1827).

For a history of the newspaper see Jacqueline Bacon, *Freedom's Journal: The First African-American Newspaper* (New York: Lexington Books, 2007)

<sup>8</sup> Philip Gould, 'The rise, development and circulation of the Slave Narrative', in *The Cambridge Companion to the African-American Slave Narrative*, ed. by Audrey Fisch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 11-27.

Coker, Cary and Colin Teage were men of deep Christian faith (Coker was a Methodist minister while Cary and Teage became Baptist preachers) who shared an abhorrence of slavery. Yet, they believed that there was some divine purpose in it, an intuition expressed by the earliest black American poet, Phillis Wheatley (1773) who wrote 'Twas mercy brought me from my *Pagan* land'.<sup>9</sup> For them, the enslavement of Africans had teleological meaning; God, having forged them in the furnace of slavery, rewarded them by giving them the gift of Christianity. This allowed them to play their part in the divine plan for Africa, as prophesied in the psalm, 'Princes will come out of Egypt, Ethiopia shall soon stretch forth her hands unto God.' Daniel Coker (1780-1846) was an intriguing and paradoxical figure of the early colonisation movement. The son of a white woman and a black slave, he was regarded as too white to become a bishop in the AME; he was the first 'African' author of an anti-slavery tract yet became inextricably linked with colonisation; he was the leader of the first group of immigrants to Africa yet never set foot on the land that would become the colony of Liberia. His diary, begun as the *Elizabeth* departed from New York in 1820, is the earliest literary production of the immigrants. It positions their journey to Africa within the biblical framework of the Exodus story, linking the 'returning' Africans with the Israelites' release from captivity in Egypt and their final conquest of the land of Canaan as their homeland.<sup>10</sup> In this conceptualisation, blacks in America are not Americans just as the Israelites in Egypt were not Egyptians. He and all the descendants of slavery had been held in captivity by the American Pharaohs, awaiting the opportune moment to return home.<sup>11</sup> Thus, the voyage of the *Elizabeth* is a reversal of the (unmentioned) voyages into captivity endured by their ancestors. Their journey is one of hope and promise and is portrayed as the fulfilment of God's plan. Coker describes an incident on the voyage to Liberia when the *Elizabeth* came across a shipwreck where all aboard had drowned. Unlike that doomed ship, the colonisation ship survives intact because God parted the waves and 'led his chosen armies

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<sup>9</sup> Phillis Wheatley, *Complete Writings*, ed. by Vincent Carretta (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 2001), p. 13.

<sup>10</sup> Daniel Coker, *Journal of Daniel Coker: A Descendant of Africa* (Baltimore: Edward J. Coale, 1820).

<sup>11</sup> A serious complication of black nationalist discourse should be noted here. It simultaneously figured black Americans as Israelites in captivity and yet claimed Egypt and the Pharaohs as 'proof' of the Negro's place in history.



through.<sup>12</sup> This African Elect, 'scattered and peeled ... meted out and trodden underfoot' will be gathered again at the foot of Mount Zion. Coker wonders 'what is God about to do for Africa? Surely something great.'<sup>13</sup>

While the first settlement on the shores of Africa was a disastrous failure and Coker never did experience life in the American colony, he nevertheless conceptualised it as a New Canaan.<sup>14</sup> Like Moses, he 'was permitted [only] to see the promised land but not to enter it.' However, he was sanguine about the future: although he would not personally experience life in 'the earthly Canaan,' he felt this was 'of small moment so that thousands of Africa's Children are safely landed.'<sup>15</sup> Simultaneously, he saw the colony as presenting an opportunity to build a more true version of a model society than existed in the United States. It would become an African version of the 'City on a Hill' envisaged by the American Pilgrim Fathers. From its centre would shine the light of Christianity on the benighted continent of Africa. Like the earlier pilgrims who had signed the *Mayflower Compact* before they disembarked on American soil, so too did the adult immigrants on board the *Elizabeth*. According to the agreement known as the *Elizabeth Compact*, the colony would be governed by the ACS and the colonists would assume 'all the rights and privileges enjoyed by the citizens of the United States.' The *Compact* also envisaged the eventual withdrawal of the ACS and the establishment of a sovereign and independent government.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Coker, p. 12.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, p. 14.

<sup>14</sup> The immigrants on board the *Elizabeth* landed in Freetown, Sierra Leone, where Coker and the three white agents of the government and the ACS sought advice about a suitable location for a settlement. Failing to gain assistance there, the party moved on to Sherbro Island where an associate of Paul Cuffe had built a small settlement. It was wholly unsuitable, lacking any fresh water supply and beset by hostile indigenous peoples. Within three months of their arrival, a quarter of the settlers had died, including the three white agents. While Coker was now in charge, he was regarded with distrust and suspicion by both the immigrants and the Africans. The failure to acquire land for a settlement was attributed by the colonists to the fact that the African chiefs viewed Coker as a *white* man and would never cede land to him. Coker retreated to Freetown to await a further contingent of immigrants, including his wife and children. However, this second group, mostly free blacks from Richmond, Virginia, including Cary and Teage, also regarded Coker as being too close to the white agents of the ACS. The fact that he was a Methodist whereas the Richmond black community was Baptist further exacerbated tensions between them. While Coker survived to hear of the establishment of Liberia in the area around Cape Mesurado, he lived out the remainder of his days in Freetown, two hundred and fifty miles north of the colony.

<sup>15</sup> Coker, p. 52.

<sup>16</sup> Dunn et al., p. 83.

The earliest resistance to ACS governorship of Liberia was led by Lott Cary, whose life in the United States embodied many of the virtues of the ideal coloniser. He had none of the early advantages of Coker and Russwurm, who, as free men and mulattoes had attained the same level of education as their white relatives and were well known within the free black community in Philadelphia and New York. Cary was born into slavery in Charles City County, Virginia, in 1780. After a period of youthful dissolution, he experienced conversion in Richmond First Baptist Church and rehabilitated himself as literate, industrious and entrepreneurial. As a result he managed to accumulate the eight hundred and fifty dollars required to purchase his liberty and that of his two children (his wife having died shortly before).<sup>17</sup> Cary's choice of reading, the Bible and Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, provide clues as to the twin driving forces of his life; while he volunteered to become a Baptist missionary in Africa, he also anticipated a lucrative commercial relationship between the United States and his new home and invested in a trading company in Richmond before his departure. Marie Tyler-McGraw makes the point that free Virginian blacks, who opted for a life in Liberia in the 1820s, understood the 'referents for liberty,' such as religious, political and commercial freedoms.<sup>18</sup> The ACS conceptualisation of the colony of Liberia as 'a nation in the bud' and the claim that black men's engagement in nation building was redemptive for them was meaningful and compelling for men like Cary and his fellow missionary, Colin Teage. Cary's farewell sermon on the text of *Romans: 8* articulated his belief that only in Africa could he reach his full potential and, in so doing, aid in the uplifting of his race:

I am an African; and in this country, however meritorious my conduct and respectable my character, I cannot receive the credit due to either. I wish to go to my country where I shall be esteemed by my merits - not by my complexion and I feel bound to labor for my suffering race.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Miles Mark Fisher, 'Lott Cary, the Colonizing Missionary', *The Journal of Negro History*, 7, 4 (Oct. 1922), 380-418 (p. 383).

<sup>18</sup> Marie Tyler-McGraw, 'Richmond Free Blacks and African Colonization 1816-1832', *Journal of American Studies*, 21, 2 (1987), 207-224 (p. 215).

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in J. B. Taylor, *Biography of Elder Lott Cary: Late Missionary of Africa* (Baltimore: Armstrong and Berry, 1837), p. 16.

The statement is an expression of a feely chosen decision paradoxically taken under the duress of an oppressively racist society. In a later 'Circular addressed to the Colored Brethren of America' (1827) written from Liberia, he stresses his own agency: 'I do not consider that I was sent away, but came with my own free consent; through the kind and benevolent aid of the good Colonization society.'<sup>20</sup> Cary's insistence that he was *aided* rather than *used* by the ACS and that he was not an unwitting pawn in the scheme of colonisation seems to be borne out by the fact that he seemed willing to challenge the agents of the organisation when he deemed them to be overstepping their authority in Liberia. The ACS agent with whom he quarrelled, Jehudi Ashmun, described him in terms that were in-keeping with the ACS discourses of the 'degraded' free black man in the United States; being 'wretched in the extreme ... a person destitute of natural affection ... disobliging, suspicious ... no less perverse and untractable, than he was debased and wretched, as a man.' Yet, in the aftermath of the settlers' 'mutiny' against Ashmun in 1824, when a constitution curtailing the powers of the ACS and defining the rights of settlers was drawn up, Cary appears to have undergone 'not only a reform, but an absolute reversal of every perverse disposition and habit in the revolting catalogue of his character took place.'<sup>21</sup> Thus, Cary becomes the living embodiment of the fulfilment of the ACS promise, that the act of colonisation would make men out of a degraded population. This theme was taken up by Cary himself in his 'Circular' to his fellow free blacks still in America who were resisting colonisation and criticising Liberia. As a self-made man, Cary exhorts his listeners in the stereotypical language that equated black people with monkeys, to come to Liberia and experience the transformation that has characterised his own life: 'you will never know, whether you are men or monkies so long as you remain in America ... I shall believe you to be *men* when I see you conducting the affairs of your own government.'<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Lott Cary, 'Circular Addressed to the Colored Brethren and Friends in America, 1827', ed. by John Saillant, *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 104, 4 (Autumn, 1996), 481-504 (p. 494).

<sup>21</sup> Ralph Randolph Gurley, *Life of Jehudi Ashmun, late Colonial Agent in Liberia* (Washington: James C. Dunn, 1835), p. 132.

<sup>22</sup> Quoted in Saillant, p. 494.

Of course, as already outlined, Cary's transformation had already begun long before he left the United States. He is repeating the discourse of the ACS here but also articulating the feelings of many well-educated black people who made the decision to immigrate to Liberia, realising that, despite their exemplary performance in arenas normally reserved for whites, there was no place for them within the American nation. John Russwurm described the plight of free blacks like himself who felt acutely the effects of their exclusion from a society where

the mere name of colour blocks up every avenue ... [the black man] must be sensible of the degraded station he holds in society, and from which it is impossible to rise, unless he can change the Ethiopian hue of his complexion. He may possess wealth; he may be respected; he may be learned; still all united, will avail him little; after all, he is considered a being of inferior order; and always will be, as no opportunity will ever be afforded him to cultivate or call into action the talents with which an All-wise Creator may have endowed him.<sup>23</sup>

Toni Morrison, writing of the flight from the Old World to the New, describes the appeal of the 'clean slate,' which was seen as 'a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to be not only born again but to be born again in new clothes ... the new setting would provide new raiments of self.'<sup>24</sup> For people like Russwurm, journeying from the New World to the Old, Liberia was imagined as a clean slate, a *tabula rasa* on to which he and his fellow immigrants could inscribe their own dreams. Interestingly, the sense of the possibilities afforded by their *departure* from the United States has parallels with the feelings of optimism of the millions of white immigrants *arriving* there during the nineteenth century. However, the parallels are not exact. American black rhetoric claimed that their immigration was a *return* to the Old World, yet while they may have felt and frequently described a sense of being born again, they remained attired in the 'borrowed' clothes of their American birthplace.

In a departure from normative European colonisation schemes that justified conquest on the basis of religious, cultural or racial superiority, Cary claimed for black

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<sup>23</sup> John Russwurm, *Freedom's Journal*, March 7, 1829.

<sup>24</sup> Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 34.

Americans an inherited right to the land they were about to settle. Like many of his contemporaries, he believed that American slaves and their descendants had not 'forfeited a right of inheritance of their fathers by being carried by force from their country.'<sup>25</sup> Cary appealed to American free blacks to assert their natural claim to their ancestral lands: 'as long as Africa remains unpeopled by any other nation ... you may know she is waiting for her rightful Sons, and here you or your children must and shall come.'<sup>26</sup> Cary's reference to 'any other nation' clearly refers to recognised European polities; he did not regard indigenous societies as constituting nations. By stressing the ancestral link between Africa and American blacks, he emphasises the naturalness and innocence of the colonial venture. Katherine Harris has summarised the attitude of the indigenous leaders to the arrival of the American settler. While some of the chiefs and kings insisted that the colonists were not foreigners, but their countrymen as evident from their colour, others claimed that the Americans were strangers who had forgotten their relationship to the land of Africa. If this were not the case, they argued, the Americans, once they had arrived on the shores of Africa, would have cut all ties with white men and placed themselves in the care of local Africans.<sup>27</sup> A statement by the 'citizens of Monrovia' reveals the gap that had opened up between the settlers and the indigenous peoples:

We are proprietors of the soil we live on and possess the rights of freeholders. Our suffrages, and what is of more importance, our sentiments and our opinions have their due weight in the government we live under. Our laws are altogether our own; they grow out of our circumstances; are formed for our exclusive benefit; and are administered either by officers of our own appointment, or by such as possess our confidence.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Gardiner Spring, *Memoir of Samuel John Mills*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (New York: Saxton and Miles, 1842), p. 184.

<sup>26</sup> Quoted in Saillant, p. 501.

<sup>27</sup> Katherine Harris, *African and American Values: Liberia and West Africa* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1985), pp. 15-16.

<sup>28</sup> 'Address of the Colonists at Monrovia to the Free people of Colour in the United States', *The African Repository and Colonial Journal*, 4 (Washington, D.C.: James C. Dunn, 1829), p. 188. At a public meeting in Monrovia in 1827, the 'citizens,' aware of the many prejudices that existed in the U.S. regarding Liberia, issued an article that claimed to give a true picture of the colony. As vice-agent, Lott Cary was probably most responsible for the initiative.

After the initial tumultuous phase of internal dissent and external attack in Liberia, and Cary's untimely death in 1828, the settlers' were represented by the two pre-eminent men in the colony, John Russwurm (1799-1851) and Hilary Teage (1802-1853) whose literary output established Liberia as 'an integral, if not yet well-understood, dimension of the transnational scope of "American" identity in the nineteenth century.'<sup>29</sup> Kwame Anthony Appiah in his study of later Liberians, Alexander Crummell and Edward Blyden, points out that they were the first Negro spokesmen *for Africa speaking from the continent of Africa*.<sup>30</sup> However, this is to overlook the contribution of Russwurm and Teage. Their writings began to articulate a Pan-African awareness where Liberia was positioned as a home not just for blacks from the United States, but also from other locations within the New World.<sup>31</sup> In their lives and careers, the heterogeneity of the Black Atlantic is revealed: Russwurm, the cultured and cosmopolitan Jamaican who became the first black governor of a colony in Africa; and Teage, the son of a slave, who rose to become known as 'Jefferson of Liberia.'

Russwurm was born in Jamaica in 1799 to a 'Negro' or a mulatto woman whose name is not known and a white merchant father, originally from Virginia but who had spent most of his early years in Britain. The formative influence on Russwurm's early life was his father and the education that he had chosen for his son. This began in Montreal, Canada, and culminated in Bowdoin College, Maine, from where the young Russwurm graduated in 1826. Apart from his liberal education, he was exposed quite early to free black communities in Boston and New York which were deeply impressed by the Haitian Revolution and who advocated emigration of North American free

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<sup>29</sup> Timothy B. Powell, *Ruthless Democracy: A Multicultural Interpretation of the American Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 127.

<sup>30</sup> Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 5.

<sup>31</sup> Some scholars distinguish between pan-Africanism and Pan-Africanism. They use 'pan' to refer to movements and to forms of cultural expressions that linked all Negroes of the African diaspora as one finds in the writings of early Liberians. Pan-Africanism is used to refer specifically to the clearly recognizable movement in the twentieth century which organised the five Pan-African Congresses, from 1919-1945, and the All-Africa People's Conference of 1958. The term Pan-African is used here to avoid unnecessary confusion. See George Shepperson, 'Pan-Africanism and "Pan-Africanism": Some Historical Notes', *Phylon*, 23, 4 (1960), 346-358.

blacks to the island. By this time, Hilary Teage had already emigrated with his family to the colony of Liberia. Less is known about his early life. He was born in 1802 in Virginia to Colin Teage, who had redeemed himself and his family from slavery and had become missionary to the new colony in West Africa. While Hilary is described as literate in the lists of the ship, the *Nautilus*, little else is known of his schooling, though his writings bear witness to a broad liberal education.

Both men shared a view that the desire for liberty was innate in the hearts of all men and could not be permanently denied, and that the formulations of liberty that governed the United States were probably the finest ever expressed by man (though Russwurm was also an admirer of the Haitian Revolution). However, given that black people were barred from enjoying the fruits of civic life in the United States, they linked the search for liberty with emigration to Africa where they could enjoy the exercise of the 'inalienable rights' denied them in America. While they both held many public offices in Liberia, it is as writers that they made their greatest contributions. They served as editors of the *Liberia Herald* (Russwurm from 1830-1834 and Teage from 1835-1849). Aware of a global audience, they used the newspaper as a forum to engage in a transatlantic debate on slavery and freedom, to justify colonisation and to extol the virtues of Liberia. West African newspapers, of which the *Herald* was an early example, were 'historically situated articulators of social relationships between different groups of literate Africans and the colonial authorities,' as Newell suggests.<sup>32</sup> This articulation had an added dimension in the Liberian context where the literate immigrants were engaged in a heated debate with the Northern free black population in the United States. This engagement in ongoing transatlantic discourses was crucial in the formation of a Liberian identity; while both groups lay claim to the promise of American-style republican freedom, the immigrants asserted their role as harbingers of liberty, not just to black people in the United States but to the descendants of slaves throughout the Western hemisphere. The establishment of a Christian, republican nation that could take its place among the nations of the earth was deemed to be

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<sup>32</sup> Stephanie Newell, 'Articulating Empire: Newspaper Readership in Colonial West Africa', *New Formations*, 73,2 (2011), 26-41 (p. 26).

capable of fulfilling several major roles. It would provide a haven for the oppressed children of Africa everywhere; its mission to civilise and Christianise Africa would destroy the slave trade and it would end, forever, the 'calumnies' uttered against the race throughout the ages.

Once in Liberia Russwurm continued to elaborate on themes that he had first addressed in *Freedom's Journal*. While the paper had promised to act as 'a single voice [that would] be heard, in defence of five hundred thousand free people of colour,' Russwurm's transnational approach was evident in his intention to speak of the experience of black people everywhere: those still 'in the iron fetters of bondage,' in the United States, former slaves in the Republic of Haiti and indigenous peoples of Africa. The editors promised to publish 'useful knowledge of every kind' about the 'vast continent' and hoped that 'as it became daily more known ... many things [would] come to light, proving that the natives of it are neither so ignorant nor stupid as they have generally supposed to be.'<sup>33</sup> In order to educate western blacks, the *Journal* published a series of articles designed to show that Africa was home to ancient and glorious civilisations. Russwurm's knowledge of classical culture, and his undoubted familiarity with the widely read works by the French scholar, Count Volney and the Haitian diplomat, Baron de Vastey, led him to conclude that the Egyptian civilization of ancient antiquity was built by black Africans. To those who asserted that Egypt was not really African, he quoted Herodotus' claim that Egyptians had 'black skins and frizzled hair,' and asserted that 'Egyptians and Ethiopians were of one colour ... and were equally civilized.' When he considered the depth of the degradation of the descendants of Africa in the modern world, he admitted that he 'wept over the fallen state of [his] people.'<sup>34</sup> Thus he was inevitably drawn into the contentious debate on the nature, status and future of free blacks in the United States.

In the pages of *Freedom's Journal*, he initially argued that the primary interest of free people of color was in their elevation in the land of their birth and in the

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<sup>33</sup> *Freedom's Journal*, March 16, 1827.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, April 6, 1827.



‘emancipation of their brethren in bondage.’ He insisted that free blacks would never ‘consent to emigrate from America until the prior removal ... of [the slaves]’ degradation and suffering.’ Even if such a happy event came to pass, he vowed that they ‘would never ask the aid of the American Colonization Society to carry [them] to *their* land “flowing with milk and honey.”’<sup>35</sup> Yet despite these assertions and for reasons that are not clear, Russwurm changed his position on emigration.<sup>36</sup> In February 1829, having claimed to have read every article he could find on both sides of the colonisation debate, he concluded:

In the bosom of the most enlightened community on the globe, we are ignorant and degraded; under the most republican government, we are denied all the rights and privileges of citizens; and what is still worse, we see no probability, that we, as a community will ever make it ... to rise from our ignorance and degradation ... we consider it mere waste of words to talk of ever enjoying citizenship in this country: it is utterly impossible in the nature of things: all therefore who pant for this must cast their eyes elsewhere.<sup>37</sup>

Many of those who agreed with Russwurm’s conclusions favoured emigration, but not colonisation in Liberia, proposing Canada and Haiti as possible alternatives. Russwurm himself had for over a decade expressed his fascination with the Republic of Haiti whose revolutionary leaders he greatly admired; he had delivered the commencement address at Bowdoin College on the topic ‘The Condition and Prospects of Hayti.’ He regarded the events of the Haitian Revolution as utterly transformative of the lives of the slaves, whose leaders had, through violent struggle, ‘stepped forth as men, and showed to the world, that though Slavery may benumb, it cannot entirely destroy our faculties.’ He looked forward to a time when Haiti ‘treading in the footsteps of her sister republics [would], like them, exhibit a picture

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid, July 6, 1827.

<sup>36</sup> His biographer, Winston James, claims that ‘no catalyst can be identified ‘that explains the change of mind.’ He suggests that Russwurm, like many other blacks of Caribbean origin, ‘simply found the degradation (of life in the United States) unendurable.’ Winston James, *The Struggles of John Russwurm: The Life and Writings of a Pan-Africanist Patriot* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2010), p. 45.

<sup>37</sup> *Freedom’s Journal*, Feb 14, 1829.

of rapid and unprecedented advances in population, wealth and intelligence.’<sup>38</sup> Why he declined the opportunity to settle there is a matter of conjecture.

Black Americans who contemplated emigration in the 1820s expected that their lives would be significantly improved in their new home, wherever that might be. Bruce Dain claims that this expectation had not been realised in Haiti where ‘post-emancipation ... civil wars and subsistence poverty posed [profound difficulties] for African American eschatologies, which very often equated salvation with middle-class prosperity and values.’<sup>39</sup> Certainly, by the mid-1820s many early immigrants from the United States were returning, complaining of poverty and cultural alienation; the country, French-speaking and Catholic, felt strange and disorientating for Protestant American blacks. For someone like Russwurm who had absorbed middle-class values of educational achievement and respectability, Haiti had lost its appeal, despite his sustained admiration for its heroic founders. Russwurm dismissed immigration there: ‘the experiment has been tried, and hundreds have returned back; with these words in their mouths, “if we are to be slaves, let us be slaves in America.”’<sup>40</sup> By contrast, as already noted, Liberia was more easily imagined as a blank canvas on which black Americans could imprint American values.

Russwurm departed for Liberia in 1829 and began recording his impressions almost immediately on his arrival. These are characterised by his employment of the favourite trope of colonisation discourse which highlighted the liberating character of the colony, especially for black men. Russwurm’s first experience of Monrovia prompted him to exclaim: ‘Ah, it is so pleasing to behold men who formerly groaned under oppression walking in the dignity of human nature, feeling and acting like men who had some great interest at stake.’ His immediate impressions of the colony were highly favourable: he especially commended his fellow-colonists for the dignity with which they carried out their public duties and proudly announced, ‘we have here a

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<sup>38</sup> Reprinted in James, pp. 132-134.

<sup>39</sup> Bruce Dain, review of *Liberation Historiography: African Writers and the Challenge of History* by John Ernest, *The Journal of Southern History*, 71 (Nov. 2005), 881-883 (p. 882).

<sup>40</sup> ‘Facts Speak Louder than Words’, *Liberia Herald* (Monrovia, Dec. 22, 1831).

Republic in miniature.<sup>41</sup> Russwurm also imbues Liberia with religious significance. In the inaugural editorial of the *Liberia Herald*, he proclaimed 'we are pilgrims in search of liberty and it is our duty to profit from the wisdom of those who have gone before us.'<sup>42</sup> The ensuing article makes it clear that the phrase 'those who have gone before' refers to the American Pilgrim Fathers, from whom the new settlement should seek inspiration, especially in the matter of the role of education. In addition to imagining Liberia as a new Plymouth, Russwurm also saw in it the beginning of the realization of the fulfilment of the promise of Ethiopianism. Believing as he did that 'it [was] decreed by Him who reigns above, that the descendants of Africa now in America must return and assist in the great work of evangelising and civilising the land,' he saw, in the observation of the Sabbath in Monrovia, that 'the commencement of the prophecy was taking place.'<sup>43</sup>

In his writings in the *Herald* he framed Liberia as a 'site of identification' for the descendants of slavery throughout the world.<sup>44</sup> In an early expression of his Pan-Africanism, a core feature of his own and Teage's writing, he argued that 'there [was] no home for the man of color [other] than Africa:' only there could he 'walk forth in the all the majesty of his creation ... a new born creature - a *Free Man*' (italics in the original).<sup>45</sup> When the punitive 'Black Laws' of 1829 were passed in Ohio, his editorial repeated this belief and he urged all the members of his race 'who [had] the independence to think for themselves and a courage to dare the worst, in pursuit of Freedom' to leave a place where they would never be more than 'sojourners.' He battled against the image of Liberia as a 'death sentence rather than the start of a new life,' by pointing out that all new settlements experience difficulties in the beginning, and that a prize such as liberty could not be won without some form of self-sacrifice.<sup>46</sup> Russwurm himself found that he was not prepared to endure what he

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<sup>41</sup> Quoted in James, p. 216.

<sup>42</sup> 'To Our Readers, Inaugural Editorial', *Liberia Herald* (Monrovia, March 1830).

<sup>43</sup> Quoted in James, p. 59.

<sup>44</sup> Adam Lewis, 'A Traitor to his Brethren?': John Brown Russwurm and the *Liberia Herald*, *American Periodicals: A Journal of History and Criticism*, 25, 2 (2015), 112-123 (p. 116).

<sup>45</sup> Quoted in James, p. 208.

<sup>46</sup> Shick, p. 59.

Antonio McDaniel states that with a death rate of one in five within the first year of arrival, Liberian immigrants experienced the highest mortality rates in accurately recorded history up to that point.

regarded as the gross mismanagement of the colony at the hands of the white agents of the ACS whose arrogance and contempt for both settlers and Africans he resented deeply. Seeking to avoid handing publicity to the enemies of colonisation, he made several discreet efforts to effect a change of policy and personnel. The Maryland Colonization Society (MCS), having been apprised of damning information about poor governance in Liberia, set about establishing its own colony, Maryland in Liberia, at Cape Palmas in 1834, and, in a more enlightened step than the ACS seemed capable of, invited Russwurm to be its governor. He served as the first black governor until his death in 1851.<sup>47</sup>

Russwurm was succeeded in 1835 as editor of the *Liberia Herald* by Hilary Teage, who is a central figure in the creation of the founding myths of Liberia. A teenager on the *Nautilus* in 1822, he had by this time risen to become one of the foremost leaders of the colony as a Baptist minister, shipping merchant and elected official. Contemporaries describe an affable and charming man, noted for his ‘vivacity and cheerfulness,’ ‘highly accomplished in his manners, very agreeable, various and winning in his conversation: of a kind, obliging and generous disposition and earnestly intent upon building up the cause of civilization and Christianity in Africa.’<sup>48</sup> His writings include public orations, poems and hymns, newspaper articles and editorials and, most significantly the Liberian Declaration of Independence.

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Antonio McDaniel, *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot: The Mortality Cost of Colonizing Liberia in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 95.

<sup>47</sup> Maryland in Liberia declared its independence from the MCS in 1854. Renamed the Republic of Maryland, it joined Liberia as Maryland County in 1857.

<sup>48</sup> *Maryland Colonization Journal* (Baltimore, Md.: 1853), p. 72.

Given Teage’s prominence in the transition from ACS colony to Liberian nation, it is difficult to account for his neglect by historians and colonial/post-colonial scholars. An exception is Carl Patrick Burrowes “‘In Common with Colored Men, I have Certain Sentiments’: Black Nationalism and Hilary Teage of the *Liberia Herald*”, *American Journalism*, 16, 3 (1999), 17-35.

For Teage’s role specifically as editor of the *Liberia Herald* and in the development of press freedom in Liberia, see Burrowes, *Power and Press Freedom in Liberia 1830-1970: The Impact of Globalization and Civil Society on Media-Government Relations* (Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, 2004).

The writings of Hilary Teage are collected by Burrowes in *Black Christian Republicanism: The Writings of Hilary Teage*, 1st edn (Know Your Self Press; 2016). I have been fortunate to access this work in typescript prior to its publication, courtesy of the author.

On the twenty-fifth anniversary of the founding of the colony, Teage delivered an oration that echoes the style of Daniel Webster's speech on Plymouth Rock.<sup>49</sup> Like that earlier speech, Teage's was a watershed moment in the development of a nation. He adopts the discourse of the ACS in positioning the settlers within the framework of the colonisation of America that would have been familiar to his listeners, reiterating Russwurm's categorisation of the settlers as 'pilgrims.' This allows him to make a special claim for the differences between the Liberian colony and most other colonial ventures, a point he elaborates on in the Declaration of Independence when he argues for Liberia's distinctiveness: it 'is not the offspring of ambition, nor the tool of avaricious speculation. No desire for territorial aggrandisement brought us to these shores.'<sup>50</sup> Being merely 'inhabitants, [but] not citizens of the country of [their] birth,' they became 'pilgrims in search of liberty.' As Lott Cary had explained:

the first thing which caused our voluntary removal to this country ... is *liberty*; liberty in the sober, simple, but complete sense of the word: the liberty of speech, action and conscience, which distinguishes the free, enfranchised citizens of a free state.<sup>51</sup>

Edward Said points out that all official imperial discourse says 'that it is not like all the others, that its circumstances are special, that it has a mission to enlighten, civilize, bring order and democracy and it uses force only as last resort.'<sup>52</sup> Despite Teage's pleading that the settlers were mere pilgrims, his account of the foundation of the colony follows a pattern reminiscent of earlier colonial settlements: the safe arrival after a perilous sea journey, the prayer of thanksgiving, the acquisition of land in exchange for tobacco and trinkets and the planting of the American flag as the immigrants 'took possession of the land in the name of virtue, humanity, religion' and the quashing of violent resistance by indigenous peoples. Their first sight of the land

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<sup>49</sup> Wilson Armistead, *Calumny refuted by facts from Liberia with extracts from the Inaugural address of the Colored President Roberts; an eloquent speech of Hilary Teage, a colored senator and extracts from a discourse by H.H. Garnet, a fugitive slave, on the past and present condition of the colored race* (Leeds: Anthony Pickard, 1848).

All references to Teage's speech are to this edition and are referenced parenthetically as *Oration* in the text.

<sup>50</sup> Dunn et al., p. 101.

<sup>51</sup> *African Repository and Colonial Journal*, 4 (Washington, D.C.: James C. Dunn, 1829), p. 188.

<sup>52</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism*, 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition (New York: Vintage, 2003), p. xxi.

follows European discourse where the settlers face ‘an ancient wilderness, rank and compacted by the growth of a thousand years, unthinned and unclaimed by a single stroke of a woodsman’s axe’ (*Oration*, 20). The image of the *terra nullius* justifies the encroachment of the settlers, whose energising power will transform the neglected landscape into a fertile land.

The account of the colonial encounter with the ‘natives’ is also described in familiar terms. The African is characterised in antithetical terms: he is essentially innocent in Coker’s description, ‘naked, sitting on the ground or on mats, living on the productions of the earth, as ignorant of God as the brutes that perish,’ whereas Teage presents him as ‘savage as his patrimonial wilderness, celebrat[ing] his votive gifts to Demons’ (*Oration*, 20). To the ears of his fundamentalist Christian audience this word conjures up visions of Satan and his followers: the indigenous people are not just heathens but devil-worshippers as well. In a hymn written by Teage which depicts the Manichean struggle between the virtue of the settlers with the vice of the indigenous people, he utilises the trope of the African savage to convey the heightened sense of danger faced by the settlers. Their adversaries are depicted as vicious, but, worst of all, they are perceived to be cannibals, which, as Brantlinger points out, was regarded ‘as the absolute nadir of human behaviour.’<sup>53</sup>

Their Gods of wood and stone they trust  
To give success in fight  
The warrior and the stupid priest  
To murder here unite.  
We were beset by those around  
Who craved to drink our blood  
Whose malice, hatred knew no bound  
Whose hearts of love were void.<sup>54</sup>

This scene could have been repeated in any number of accounts of colonial encounters between European colonists and African natives where the crucial marker

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<sup>53</sup> Patrick Brantlinger, *Taming Cannibals: Race and the Victorians* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2011), p. 2.

<sup>54</sup> ‘Hymn composed by Mr. H. Teage to be sung on 1<sup>st</sup> Dec. 1836’, *The African Repository and Colonial Journal*, 13 (Washington, D.C: James C. Dunn, 1837), p. 231.

of difference and perceived superiority was racial; the colonist was always white and the colonised always black or brown. The encounter of the American settlers and the coastal 'natives' was a unique meeting of people who shared a common skin colour. The tantalising omission from Teage's speech is the fact that some of these 'savages' were still involved as middlemen in slave-trading, and that their ancestors were probably involved in the trade that had sent Teage's ancestors to America.<sup>55</sup> The depiction of the savage hordes justifies the civilising and Christianising mission. The arrival of the small band of Christian settlers and their victory over vastly superior numbers of 'savages' is depicted as a providential moment. While Teage professes to regret the loss of 'native' lives due to the 'superiority of the cannon, 'he believes that the day will be remembered for 'higher and nobler virtues,' the triumph of civilisation over savagery and of Christianity over heathenism (*Oration*, 23). Not only were the new arrivals destined to save souls and abolish the slave trade, they would also restore all of Africa to its former glory.

Teage, like Russwurm, believed that Africa had a glorious past, though, like most European writers, he saw no signs of 'civilization' in sub-Saharan Africa. His poem 'Land of the Mighty Dead' celebrates the 'pyramidal halls' of the pharaohs, the 'sculptured walls 'of Carnac and Thebes.'<sup>56</sup> Like generations of black nationalists who were inspired by the poem, he believed that Africa had slipped into a state of degradation through its embrace of idolatry. However, its salvation was now at hand and he exhorted his audience to remember and replicate the virtues of the first settlers - their piety, heroism and self-sacrifice - in the construction of a Christian, republican nation, built according to the ideals of the American Founding Fathers. Teage had campaigned actively for a separate nationality and independence for the

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<sup>55</sup> While Teage does not address the possible kinship of the settlers with the indigenous Africans in the territory, a settler, Peyton Skipwith, writing to his former master, commented on the hostility of the indigenous tribes: 'it is something strange to think that these people of Africa are called our ancestors' quoted in *Slaves No More: Letters from Liberia 1833-1869* ed. by Bell I. Wiley (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1980), p. 52. In the twentieth century, several black American writers describe feelings of discomfiture during their travels in West Africa. For example, one traveller wonders 'had some of my ancestors sold their relatives to white men?', Richard Wright, *Black Power: A Record of Reactions in a Land of Pathos* (New York: Harper, 1954), p. 121.

<sup>56</sup> *African Repository and Colonial Journal*, 19 (Washington, D.C.: Alexander and Barnard, 1843), pp. 191-193.

colony that had become a Commonwealth in the 1830s. Ultimately confusion over the status of Liberia in international law forced the issue of independence; being neither a protectorate of the United States nor a sovereign state, it 'occupied an anomalous position in the international world.'<sup>57</sup> In the midst of efforts to clarify its legal status, the settlers asserted their claim to speak for themselves. Governor Roberts (the first black governor of the colony) argued that if they accepted Britain's characterisation of Liberia as 'a private company of traders, or settlers,' then they would be still be regarded as a people 'without a country or a home ... outcasts upon the world, and persecuted in every clime.'<sup>58</sup> The inevitability of independence highlights a unique feature of Liberia; it was never imagined as a permanent colony but one that 'would become a self-governing nation built upon the United States' principle of republican government.'<sup>59</sup> In the earliest years of the settlement, one official stated that the ACS were the 'guardians of a nation in the bud,- a miniature of this Republic, - a colored America on the shores of Africa.'<sup>60</sup> Teage repeated the organic imagery in his speech when he likened the colony to a 'germ,' whose time had come to 'burst from its enclosure in the earth, unfold its petals to the genial air, rise to the height and swell to the dimensions of the full-grown tree.' He issued a clarion call to his audience to assert their rights to become a free, self-governing black nation. The failure to grasp this opportunity, which he regarded as an 'inglorious fate' would be 'to shrivel, to die and [be] buried in oblivion.'

Fellow Citizens! We stand now on ground never occupied by a people before - However insignificant we may regard ourselves, the eyes of Europe and America are upon us, as a germ destined to burst from its enclosure in the earth ... Rise fellow citizens! Rise to a clear and full perception of your tremendous responsibilities ... you are to give the answer, whether the African race is doomed to interminable degradation. (*Oration*, 37)

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<sup>57</sup> R.P. Falkner, 'The United States and Liberia', *American Journal of International Law*, 4 (1910), 529-545 (p. 529).

<sup>58</sup> *Liberia Herald*, Feb 5, 1847.

<sup>59</sup> Brandon Mills, "'The United States of Africa': Liberian Independence and the Contested Meaning of a Black Republic', *Journal of the Early Republic*, 34, 1 (Spring 2014), 79-107 (p. 82).

<sup>60</sup> *African Repository and Colonial Journal*, 3 (Washington, D.C.: James C. Dunn, 1828), p. 321.



For Teage, Liberia at the moment of independence, is transformed into a cynosure, a symbol of Negro capacity for self-government to which the eyes of the world are drawn. Its people, whom he had previously described as 'colonists' or 'Americans' are now referred to as 'Liberians.' By an act of self-inscription, epitomised by the Declaration of Independence for which he was largely responsible, he figures the settlers as a 'risen people,' emerging from the dark earth. The images of Resurrection, of dying to an old life and being born anew, previously used in the discourse of physical-force resistance to enslavement, is appropriated by Teage in the service of constitutional change. His claim that the eyes of Europe and America were on Liberia seemed to be validated by the ACS member who announced that he 'looked with more interest on [Liberia] ... the only black republic that had ever been established in the world' than on 'the mighty change going on in Europe' (a reference to various nationalist uprisings in Europe in the 1840s). He predicted that 'every despotic nation in Europe will perish before Liberia' because its citizens had 'learned the principle of liberty in the United States.'<sup>61</sup> While the ACS can hardly be regarded as a neutral observer, the swift diplomatic recognition of the new nation by Britain and France appeared to justify Teage's claim.

In his global study of declarations of independence, David Armitage points out that 'independence' encapsulates both the demand for political separation as well as the idea of national distinctiveness and difference.<sup>62</sup> The Liberian Declaration of Independence is a unique document by virtue of the fact that it did not have to demand separation nor did it seek to highlight its distinctiveness. In 1846, the ACS advised the settlers 'to take into their own hands the whole work of self-government, including the management of all foreign relations and to publish to the world a Declaration of their true character as a sovereign and independent state.'<sup>63</sup> The production of the documents marked a smooth and bloodless transition from colony to nation that was unlike any nation formation up to that point. During the first six

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<sup>61</sup> Brandon Mills, p. 92.

<sup>62</sup> David Armitage, *The Declaration of Independence: A Global History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 4.

<sup>63</sup> *African Repository and Colonial Journal*, 22 (Washington, D.C.: C. Alexander, 1846), p. 68.

months of 1847, eleven repatriated American men gathered in Monrovia to write the nation of Liberia into existence. The Liberian Constitutional Convention, as the group was named, produced the key mechanisms of statehood as its members understood them: a Declaration of Independence, a Constitution and a Bill of Rights. In addition, they adopted a national seal and a motto. These texts give official recognition to the character of Liberia as already enunciated in the first literary output of the colony.

The seal of Liberia is an expression of the official mind of the nation. It is described in the following manner:

A dove on the wing with an open scroll in its claws. A view of the ocean with a ship under sail. The sun is emerging from the waters. A palm tree, and at its base a plough and a spade. Beneath the emblems, the national motto, THE LOVE OF LIBERTY BROUGHT US HERE.<sup>64</sup>

The seal and motto express an aura of serenity and peace. The tranquil sea and the presence of the dove belie the true nature of the various displacements that were involved in the creation of the new nation: the landscape, devoid of any human traces, reiterates the trope of the *terra nullius* found in Euro-American texts. The graceful sailing ship elides all traces of more sinister ships, including those slaving ships still trading off the West African coast. The dove invokes both Old and New Testament iconography: a reminder of God's covenant with Noah and of the Holy Spirit's presence at the baptism of Jesus. This highlights the settlers' belief that their nation is the fulfilment of God's covenant with the descendants of slaves, newly returned to their Promised Land. The scroll in its claw contains a 'message of renunciation from the American Colonization Society,'<sup>65</sup> while also representing learning, law and the values of the Enlightenment. The sun emerging from the waters represents a new beginning for the settlers while the palm tree, spade and plough depict an agricultural society in the making. The name of the new polity, Liberia, and the word 'liberty' in the motto stress the notion of freedom. The effect is to highlight the nation as a site of renewal, regeneration and peace.

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<sup>64</sup> Dunn et al., p. 295.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, p. 295.

The seal and motto embody uncomfortable ambiguities, omissions and contradictions. The motto draws attention to itself: who, in Liberia, might the words describe? Did they represent the aspirations of only the first group of immigrants, people who were relatively free to choose to leave the United States and who opted for Liberia over other possible alternatives? Could the words also encompass equally those Americans who had the unenviable task of having to choose either continued slavery or expatriation and who now constituted half of the settler population? What might the words mean to the increasing numbers of African 'recaptives' who had been taken from slaving ships by American naval squadrons and settled in Liberia? The words 'brought us here' clearly excludes the sixteen indigenous tribes who were already resident on the lands recently occupied by the settlers.

Teage's articulation of a new political family embodied two distinct characteristics of nationhood: the one based on 'race' and the other on the embrace of the idea of Liberia. Access to citizenship was limited to 'people of colour' and the 'children of Africa.' While words such as pan-Africanism and African diaspora were not yet in use, Teage's writing on nationhood ushered in a pan-Africanism that would find its fullest expression in the twentieth century in the thinking of Marcus Garvey. It was based on a premise that all the descendants of Africa everywhere were linked by a common heritage, history and ethnicity, a 'de-territorialized form of affinity.'<sup>66</sup> Its first articulation in Liberia privileged black people from North America, making their experience normative. In the opening lines of the Declaration of Independence, Teage's 'imagined' community, 'the people of Liberia,' are described as former 'inhabitants of the United States,' now exiled from the land of their birth. However, this shared diasporic identity blurs their true heterogeneity. Teage speaks as a member of the Liberian elite, the earliest of settlers who were freeborn. The language of the official documents expresses their concerns and motivations: the list of grievances against the United States government reflects only their experience, with

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<sup>66</sup> Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), p. 11.

complaints ranging from harassment, denial of civil rights and ‘taxation without representation.’ The majority of American immigrants had experienced more heinous crimes against their persons such as chattel slavery, but this is mentioned only euphemistically, in the phrase, ‘they were debarred by law from the rights and privileges of man.’

However, his idea of nationhood also allowed for the admission of other descendants of Africans who would assent to the mission statement of the founding documents: the establishment of a ‘nation of colored people on the soil of Africa, adorned and dignified with the attributes of a civilized and Christian community.’<sup>67</sup> Given that ‘the great object of forming [the] colonies [was] to provide a home for the dispersed and oppressed children of Africa,’ Teage imagined the Liberian Republic as an asylum for the descendants of slavery who still had hereditary rights in the land of their forefathers. Like most diasporic discourse that claimed such rights, he did not consider the implications for the people already inhabiting the so-called Promised Land.<sup>68</sup> He regarded Liberia as a stepping stone to the formation of ‘an African government’ and urged European powers to ‘yield the direction of affairs to intelligent colored men,’ by which he meant westernised black men like himself. Thus, while the Constitution enshrined the idea that *race* should be the essential mark of nationhood, it privileged diasporic Africans over continental Africans, whom he viewed in the same essentialising and undifferentiated manner common in Euro-American discourse. The American settlers were pre-destined, in the words of their new president, Joseph Roberts, to redeem their African brethren ‘from the deep degradation, superstition and idolatry,’ into which they had fallen and shine on them ‘the light of science and Christianity.’<sup>69</sup>

Leon De Kock, describing the process of the European civilising mission in Africa marks the most significant changes that occurred on what was portrayed as a journey from

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<sup>67</sup> Teage, quoted in *The Annual Report of the ACS* (Washington, D.C.; James C. Dunn, 1833), p. 21.

<sup>68</sup> Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp, *Setting Down the Sacred Past: African-American Race Histories* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010), p. 163.

<sup>69</sup> Roberts, quoted in *African Repository and Colonial Journal*, 28 (Washington, D.C.: C. Alexander, 1848), p. 125.

darkness into light: a transformation in the practice of agriculture; the cession of sovereignty of tribal lands; the abandonment of ancient cultural mores; the transition from orality to the literary culture of Christianity. Its purpose was to re-make the 'social and cultural modalities of identity.'<sup>70</sup> The path to Liberian citizenship required that 'natives' relinquish their own culture, swearing before 'three creditable and disinterested persons' that they had, over a three year period, 'abandoned all the forms, customs and superstitions of heathenism ... and conformed to all the forms, customs and habits of a civilized life.'<sup>71</sup> The ACS, referring to the continuing influx of 'recaptives,' worried about the problem of 'civilizing' people who had so recently belonged to tribes 'who had devoured each other like beasts ... gorging on human flesh,' yet they assimilated well.<sup>72</sup> A visitor in 1840 wrote:

... they call themselves *Americans*; and from the little civilization they have acquired, feel greatly superior to the natives around them; they have the same privileges as the emigrants: have a vote at the elections; each man has his musket, and is enrolled in the militia. Their women, instead of being nearly naked, as all the native African women are, we found dressed in the same modest manner as our own emigrants; all take great pride in imitating the custom and manners of those who are more civilized, having furniture in their houses and many comforts they never dreamt of in their own country.<sup>73</sup>

Gauri Viswanathan explains how conversion, which may seem like a total abandonment of everything one has known in the past, offered to certain groups an escape from social or political oppression.<sup>74</sup> The truth of this is borne out in the Liberian context. Some small tribes were assimilated into the Liberian nation, 'voluntarily' ceding rights over their territory in return for the power of Liberia to protect them from slave trading chieftains from the hinterland. Others hoped to profit

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<sup>70</sup> Leon de Kock, *Civilising Barbarians: Missionary Narrative and Textual Response in Nineteenth-Century South Africa* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1996), p. 47.

<sup>71</sup> Constitution of the Commonwealth of Liberia, 1839. All legislation enacted prior to independence remained in force; this law of 1841 became the basis on which the citizenship of 'native' Africans was determined. Charles H. Huberich, *Political and Legislative History of Liberia*, 2 vols (New York: Central Book Co., 1947) vol. II, p. 1030.

<sup>72</sup> *African Repository and Colonial Journal*, 23 (Washington, D.C.: C. Alexander, 1847), p. 77.

<sup>73</sup> *African Repository and Colonial Journal*, 16 (Washington, D.C.: Joseph Etter, 1840), p. 291.

<sup>74</sup> Gauri Viswanathan, *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity and Belief* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

from trade and have schools established in return for the formal cession of lands.<sup>75</sup> The comments of one 'recaptive' illustrate the perceived benefits of 'colonial modernity,' such as land ownership and literacy, and the ways in which assimilation frequently provided an escape from a more uncertain fate.<sup>76</sup> He explained his decision to remain in the colony: 'if I go back to my country, they make me slave - I am here free - no one dare trouble me. I got my land - my wife, my children, learn book - all free - I am here a *white* man!'<sup>77</sup> Despite assertions such as this, some commentators highlighted the potential for exploitation that characterised the apprenticeship system. They feared that the original settlers had absorbed and internalised the values of a segregationist and racist society in the United States and reproduced them in Liberia. Thus, the asymmetrical relationship between the original settlers and the 'recaptives' fostered an attitude whereby the one group of former slaves regarded the other group with contempt.

Bhabha explores the mechanisms of the civilising mission which he sees as founded on ideas of repetition, imitation and resemblance. While the native subject is encouraged to mimic the coloniser by adopting his belief system, institutions and cultural habits, the result is never an exact copy, 'the same but not quite.'<sup>78</sup> This leads to ambivalence on the part of the coloniser as mimicry contains an element of mockery; it is at once 'a resemblance and a menace,' and exposes the limitations of the civilising discourse. Bhabha describes colonial mimicry in binary terms where the colonised subject mimics the coloniser. The unique colonial situation that pertained in Liberia complicates his formulations. While the 'recaptive' and local Africans were required to adopt settler values as a condition of citizenship, the (black) colonisers/civilisers were themselves engaged in an elaborate mimicry of the white Southern plantocracy. Many visitors to Liberia remarked, often mockingly, on the various ways that the settlers clung to their American identity. From the outset, their clothes, their private and public building and their religious worship provided 'critical

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<sup>75</sup> M.B. Akpan, 'Black Imperialism: Americo-Liberian Rule over the African peoples of Liberia 1841-1964', *Canadian Journal of African Studies* (1973), 217-236 (p. 221).

<sup>76</sup> The phrase 'colonial modernity' is used by Cooper, p. 142.

<sup>77</sup> *African Repository and Colonial Journal*, 16 (Washington, D.C.: Joseph Etter, 1840), p. 291.

<sup>78</sup> Bhabha, p. 122.

points of cultural orientation and differentiation from the other groups with whom they shared the territory.<sup>79</sup> Their insistence on their Americanness drew expressions of disgust from the white American officials in the colony: Dr. Lugenbeel, who recorded the proceedings of the Constitutional Convention, regarded the declarations of self-determination expressed by Beverly Wilson, a man of 'unmixt African origin,' as 'really sickening coming as they do from so ignorant a man.'<sup>80</sup> His comment suggests that Wilson's colour as a 'pure' black man rendered him especially unacceptable to Lugenbeel and points to the fact that gradations of colour were significant markers of status in Liberian settler society. Travellers to the country invariably remarked on the distinctions made between American mulattoes and Americans of 'unmixt African origin' and between all settlers and all 'native' Africans.

In the first decades of the Liberian colony, mulattoes formed the elite of successful traders and merchants. A contributor to the ACS journal, *African Repository*, in 1832 gave an account of a dinner which he attended in Monrovia, hosted by the white governor Joseph Mechlin and including the settler elite of the colony. The final toast of the evening, to the 'Fair of Liberia' elicited 'some not pleasant looks [from] some very dark gentlemen present. The governor very adroitly came to the rescue by suggesting to the proposer, 'The Fair Sex of Liberia,' you doubtless meant?' The writer explained to his American readers that 'fair is a specific term with Liberians, signifying the shade of colour; as a "little fair; quite fair; very fair; almost white, and so on."<sup>81</sup> Distinctions based on colour, with the added factor of cultural difference, meant that Africans were relegated to an even lower rung of society. Russwurm despaired of the settlers' attitudes to all Africans; whether 'assimilated' or not, he claimed that the statement 'he is native' was enough to relegate them to the status of outsider.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Stephen C. Lubkemann, 'Diasporas and their Discontents: Return without Homecoming in the Forging of Liberian and African Identity', *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, 13,1 (Spring, 2004), 123-128 (p. 127).

<sup>80</sup> Brandon Mills, p. 93.

<sup>81</sup> Dr. James Hall, 'My First Visit to Liberia (Concluded)', *African Repository and Colonial Journal*, 62 (Jan 1886), pp. 1-2.

<sup>82</sup> James, p. 70. In Alice Walker's novel, *The Color Purple* (1983), Nettie describes her sense of disorientation on hearing the Liberian president talk 'about his problems with the natives. It was the first time I'd heard a black man use that word. I knew that to white people all colored people are natives.' Alice Walker, *The Color Purple* (London: The Women's Press, 2000), p. 120.

The exaggerated form of mimicry as practised by the settlers seemed to point not just to a need to assert their distinctiveness, but also to a sense of anxiety that, surrounded as they were by the atavistic forces of Africa, they could easily slip into primitiveness. If their identity as (almost) white Americans could be assumed arbitrarily, it could also presumably be lost. This vulnerability demanded a vigilance in patrolling the boundaries between settler and 'savage' with great care. Despite their apparent fixation with gradations of colour, it was their fetishisation of American culture that set them apart from the African population: the colony 'had America in its eyes while it turned its back on Africa; though it was necessarily in Africa, it was preferably not of it.'<sup>83</sup> The character of Liberia was shaped by the values of its founding fathers, who were overwhelmingly Virginian. Tyler-McGraw rightly contends that their transatlantic voyage to Africa did not return them to their native home, because they were Virginians first and then American.<sup>84</sup> Teage provided the fullest articulation of their vision for the future that might have been spoken by the American Pilgrim Fathers:

We were animated by the hope that we should be at liberty to train up our children in the way that they should go, to inspire them with the love of an honourable fame; to kindle within them the flame of a lofty philanthropy and to form strongly within them the principles of humanity, love and religion.<sup>85</sup>

Whereas Euro-American discourse stressed the role of men in the grand imperial and expansionary projects of building railroads, opening up the interior or the American West and establishing commercial routes, the colonisation of Liberia highlighted two particular avenues towards the regeneration of the American black man. On the one hand, and of the utmost importance, was his reclamation of the role as father to his children, denied to him in slavery. Simultaneously, he would plant the seeds of liberty

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<sup>83</sup> Lamin Sanneh, *Abolitionists Abroad: American Blacks and the Making of Modern West Africa* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 15.

<sup>84</sup> Mary Tyler-McGraw, *An African Republic: Black and White Virginians in the Making of Liberia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), p. 5.

<sup>85</sup> Dunn et al., p. 102.



and republican values, whose fruits had been unavailable to him in the United States. Through these avenues, he would become a *man* and a *citizen*.

While acknowledging that Liberia was ‘no Elysium,’ Teage claimed that it was the only place where a black man could ‘clean up his farm rather than clean another man’s boots.’ He repudiates the characterisation of the black man as fit only to be shoeshines, a stereotype internalised by blacks themselves as reported by David Walker. Urging the need for racial uplift, Walker described his feelings of despair when he encountered a black man who insisted that he ‘never want[ed] to live any better or happier than when [he could] get plenty of boots and shoes to clean.’<sup>86</sup> Such self-denigration and indolence had no place in Teage’s vision for Liberia. Like the fictional George Harris who also insisted that Liberia should not be imagined as Elysium for black people, Teage described a ‘field of work’ that had to be undertaken by the new Liberians. This, as imagined by Teage, involved the creation of an agrarian society, conceived on the lines of Jefferson’s rural idyll. Leo Marx states that ‘nowhere in [American ] literature is there a more appealing, vivid or thorough statement of the case for the pastoral ideal’ than that expressed in Thomas Jefferson’s *Notes on the State of Virginia*.<sup>87</sup> For Jefferson, God’s Chosen People were the tillers of the earth, in whose ‘breasts he has made his peculiar deposit for substantial and genuine virtue.’ The farmer, owning his own land, is dependent on his own resources, his self-reliance and his ingenuity. The Jeffersonian idyll was therefore a rural one: the workshops of the world should remain in Europe, the gentleman farmer would work on his family-sized farm, self-sufficient, moderate in all things and free. Teage’s evocation of the Liberian idyll follows closely on this tradition. It is constructed on the opposition between a commercial society and an agrarian one. Even though the colony was only twenty-five years old at the time of Teage’s oration, the majority of the settlers, including Teage himself, had already settled for a life of trade and commerce in preference to a life on the farm; many of the ‘free people of color’ were urban; the ex-slaves recently freed from plantations seemed to show no attachment to the land

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<sup>86</sup> Walker, quoted in Hinks, p. 31.

<sup>87</sup> Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Idea in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 118.

or to think of farm labour as anything other than backbreaking and humiliating. In hindsight, one can regard Teage's prescription for a happy life as having already come too late.

Yet, Teage insists that 'virtue and independence [are] to be measured by the pursuit of the wholesome and pleasing and primitive employment of agriculture and husbandry' and that 'no nation can be independent which subsists wholly by commerce.' He does not obviate the necessity for commerce and also acknowledges its value in the spread of civilisation but warns that the same ship that carries virtue also carries vice. An over-reliance on commercial activity 'keeps [the settlers] looking constantly abroad to the neglect of the improvement of their own country' (*Oration*, 34). He follows a long-standing rhetorical tradition that celebrates the countryside over the town or city. Virgil, in his *Aeneid*, created a symbolic landscape, a delicate blend of myth and reality, where the harmonious relationship between man and nature fosters economic self-sufficiency, peace and contentment. English poets of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, repelled by the squalor of the Industrial Revolution towns, depicted them as dens of iniquity, or in the words of William Blake as 'dark satanic mills.' Teage sets forth an image of an industrial space (none such existed in Liberia, of course) as a hellish place, characterised by 'bustle, confusion, vice, general dependency and poverty.' By contrast, he invests the countryside with positive values of 'quiet, tranquillity, order, virtue and plenty' (*Oration*, 32). He reminds his listeners that God's original covenant with mankind involved the instruction to 'till the earth' and 'never until this degenerate age, has this simple, primitive, patriarchal occupation been despised.' Therefore, he, exhorts them to take up 'the sacred plough,' not just to redeem the earth but to redeem themselves. To this end, he rhapsodises the life of the farmer:

Behold the farmer as he goes forth in the morning to his daily task; how firm and elastic his step; how cheerful his sun-burnt countenance; how active his athletic arm! Behold how cheerfully he labours; how the fat valleys around him leap with corn; how the spacious plains teem with grain and the ancient forests fall beneath his resounding axe. (*Oration*, 32)

The landscape that is depicted here is, of course, an idealised, imaginary American one, transported to Africa. This is Jefferson's republican idyll: a quiet, *empty* land of forests and prairies awaiting the cultivating arm and axe of the white man. This process was already well underway in the United States by the 1840s. In keeping with the romantic, American pastoral tradition, Teage completes the tableau of what looks like an American frontier family with 'an affectionate, industrious frugal wife, unsophisticated by the vices and dissipations of the fashionable world and prattling progeny, blooming in health' (*Oration*, 34). In Teage's mythic account of the Liberian farm, Hale's Keziah and Beecher Stowe's George Harris would feel quite at home.

The reality for his audience was at odds with this vision. In a later meditation on the meaning of Liberian citizenship, Teage expressed the view that the Constitution had been too lenient in admitting to the franchise all black American men from 'the moment they landed whether from the rice swamps of Carolina or an oyster cellar in New York.' He came to believe that such people might have been granted liberty too soon (a claim made generally by white commentators on *all* blacks, no matter how well educated) and argued that citizenship should be granted only after the 'atmosphere of liberty had inflated their lungs and expanded and elevated their minds.'<sup>88</sup> At the time of Liberia's declaration of independence, the majority of its settler population were people who fell into this category. Lawrence Langer coined the phrase 'choiceless choices' to describe 'options' faced by victims of the Holocaust, between one form of terrible decision and another.<sup>89</sup> It is a term that captures the situation faced by many slaves manumitted from slavery in the 1830s on condition that they depart for Liberia. They were rural people, mostly barely literate and generally poorly equipped for a life of 'liberty' in Africa. They were frequently resistant to emancipation, especially if other family members were still enslaved to different masters. Some pleaded to be allowed to remain enslaved rather than embark on what was frequently portrayed as a journey to certain death. Once there, some like a female ex-slave of the Minor family of Virginia, wrote to the ACS: 'I have been in Africa

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<sup>88</sup> Teage, quoted in Burrowes, *Black Christian Republicanism*, p. 52.

<sup>89</sup> Lawrence L. Langer, *Admitting the Holocaust: Collected Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 46.

a long time and I wish to come home.’<sup>90</sup> The existence of an archive of letters from these manumitted slaves to their former masters and mistresses provides a fascinating alternative insight into Liberian life from the one that emerges from the writings of the earlier settlers. The writings of this previously subaltern class, the most reluctant and ambivalent of immigrants, describe the hardship and precarious nature of life in the colony for people who had very limited material or social resources. They also provide an insight into the lives of immigrant women, whose voices had not been heard previously. The letters cannot be regarded as examples of private communication between ex-slave and former master; they were written to be read to the master’s family and also to the slaves still held by him and, even in some cases, transmitted to the ex-slaves’ extended family on other plantations. In many cases, they were also published in colonisation journals. The letter writers were almost always reliant on their former masters and the ACS for basic supplies as well as for maintaining contact with their extended families in the United States. Therefore, as Dorsey points out, one finds a tension in the letters between a need to complain to their patrons for neglecting them, while still echoing the rhetoric of colonisation.<sup>91</sup>

The letters of members of the Skipwith family to their former master John Hartwell Cocke reveal many of the recurring concerns of the manumitted slaves. Cocke had inherited over a hundred slaves when he took over the family plantation in Virginia in 1801; his embrace of evangelical Christianity combined with fears of slave insurrection led him to a determination to prepare his more promising slaves for freedom and send them to Liberia. The certificate of emancipation that he gave to his most valued slave, Peyton Skipwith, attests to the latter’s intelligence, his proficiency in his trade of stone-masonry, his dedication to his religion and the cause of temperance, all qualities that Cocke believed qualified Skipwith for ‘citizenship in a free community.’<sup>92</sup> The thirty-one-year-old Skipwith left for Liberia in 1833,

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<sup>90</sup> Quoted in Wiley, p. 26.

<sup>91</sup> Bruce Dorsey, ‘The Transnational Lives of Africa-American Colonists in Liberia’, in *Transnational Lives: Biographies of Global Modernity 1700-Present*, ed. by Desley Deacon, Penny Russell and Angela Woolacott (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 171-182 (p. 179).

<sup>92</sup> Michael I. Nicholls, ed. ‘News from Monrovia: The Letters of Peyton Skipwith to John Hartwell Cocke’, *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 85, 1 (Jan 1977), 65-85 (p. 66).

accompanied by his wife and six children. He lost one daughter to the 'African fever' shortly after arrival and his wife died seven months later. His early letters to Cocke are a litany of misfortunes; they reflect the experiences of many young immigrants in the 1830s, one of whom wrote: 'we never knew what slavery was until we come to this country': such testimony is profoundly at odds with the exhilaration felt by Russwurm.<sup>93</sup> Skipwith describes his own illnesses, dysentery and 'night blindness,' his problems with the climate which made his work as a stonemason impossible, his failed attempts at farming due to the poverty of the soil and the labour situation. He complains that 'well-off people have the natives as slaves, [so] poor people from America have no chance to make a living as the natives do all the work.'<sup>94</sup> In desperation, he pleads with his former master, 'let me no [sic] on what terms I can come back.'<sup>95</sup>

His teenage daughter, Diana, exhibits many of the virtues embodied in Hale's fictional Keziah. She epitomises the ideal female coloniser, taking charge of the domestic sphere, and adopting a public role deemed suitable for women, that of teacher. While her letters to her former master's family express grief at the parting and a deep sense of longing to be back in Virginia, they also reveal a practical determination to survive and thrive in her new home as well as a strong religious faith. After the early death of her mother, she assumes the domestic duties in her family. Reflecting the colony's inability to become self-sufficient in the production of food, she writes to her master's daughter, Sally Cocke, for flour, meat and seeds. She is also determined to better herself educationally as can be seen in her request for paper so she can practise her writing: within a decade, Peyton announces that she is a teacher in a Sunday school and running a temperance society. Pratt uses the term 'contact zone' to describe social spaces where cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power.<sup>96</sup> Like Keziah, Diana develops a relationship with 'native' Africans. Despite her gender and her relative poverty and

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<sup>93</sup> Quoted in Eric Burin, 'The Strange Career of John Cocke: Contextualizing American Colonization Society Manumissions', *Liberia Studies Journal*, 26, 2 (2000), 63-82 (p. 69).

<sup>94</sup> Quoted in Wiley, p. 36.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid*, p. 37.

<sup>96</sup> Pratt, p. 7.

obscurity in the settler class, she occupies a position of privilege by virtue of her literacy; in one of her letters she describes her discussion with the 'natives' probably in her role as a teacher. She explains that God gave them a choice between education and subsistence farming (growing rice) and some have clearly chosen education. She sends Sally a 'pocket' made by native women as well as local produce such as palm oil and alligator skins, and gradually comes to the conclusion that she feels at home in Africa.

The letters reveal the settlers grappling with the implications of freedom in Liberia. For some, it meant an escape from harassment or even violence and an opportunity to create independent lives, a sentiment expressed in a letter of Mary Jackson to her former master: 'we are in our own free soil, where none can molest us or make us afraid.'<sup>97</sup> For others, freedom brought self-respect and dignity through the recognition of others, especially of white men. Former slave, Abraham Blackford, references white people's politeness to him; they 'step one side of the pavement and touch their hats and call [him] Mister.'<sup>98</sup> The majority of the immigrants appear to have absorbed the Protestant work ethic of their former homes, evincing a strong belief in the value of hard work, self-help, temperance and piety. Those who failed to show such independence of spirit were rebuked by their peers, who implied that they were a burden to the new nation and were not ready for freedom. One letter-writer worried for Liberia's future unless they got the 'right' kind of immigrant: he wrote of people 'raised dum as horses at home ... [where] they have the cowhide ... hardly ever off their backs and when they come here they feal [sic] so free they walk about from morning to evening without doing one stroke of work.'<sup>99</sup>

The letters of the settlers increasingly echo the discourses of colonisation and the official rhetoric of Liberia as the colony progressed towards nationhood. Thus, Peyton begins to write of Liberia as home: 'I feel satisfied with my present home, and desire

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<sup>97</sup> Quoted in Wiley, p. 130.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, p. 23.

<sup>99</sup> David Kazanjian, "'When they come her they feal so free:": Race and Early American Studies', *Early American Literature*, 41, 2 (2006), 329-337 (p. 334).

no other,' and feels an added security and prosperity due to the presence of the U.S. Naval Squadron that had helped disrupt the slave trade. However, echoing the words of Hilary Teage and others who were campaigning for independence, he wrote 'we must be a people recognised by foreign nations, or else come under the eye of some[one] that will protect us when called upon.'<sup>100</sup> One of the most prolific writers was the young printer, James Minor, who worked in the *Liberia Herald*. His letters capture his exuberance in his new-found freedom while also promoting Liberia as the only feasible home for the black American, echoing the sentiments of his editor at the paper, John Russwurm:

Ho! All ye that are by pale-faces laws oppressed, come over to the [black man's] destiny! ... Africa is the land of freedom; where else can the man of colour enjoy temporal freedom but in Africa? They may flee to Hayti or Canada, but it will not do; they must fulfil the sayings of Thomas Jefferson, 'Let an ocean divide the white man from the man of colour.' Seeking refuge in other parts of the world has been tried; it is useless. We own that this is the land of our forefathers, destined to be the home of their descendants.<sup>101</sup>

While some letter-writers continue to complain that their masters have not replied to their entreaties for help or that they have been mistreated by the officials of the ACS, the majority express a growing sense of independence and pride in the progress the colony has made, as this letter attests: 'Liberia. Our glorious asylum is still under the wise and judicious protection of a God, moving slowly, yet surely, in wealth and prosperity.'<sup>102</sup>

The success of the nation would be evaluated, both in Liberia and in the United States, using American standards as normative. Buck-Morss describes a similar process in the aftermath of the declaration of Haitian independence. She cites the case of the Baron de Vastey, secretary to King Henri Christophe who was charged with the task of representing Haiti to Europeans. His central argument was that Haitians were capable of establishing 'a civilized nation according to European standards,' citing examples

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<sup>100</sup> Quoted in Wiley, p. 60.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid, p. 17.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, p. 115.

of its commerce, agriculture, military prowess and royal palace.<sup>103</sup> The achievement of such a republic, recognizable as such by the European powers, allowed Haitians to see themselves as a 'symbol of black dignity and black power' in 'unambiguously ethnonational terms.'<sup>104</sup> The peaceful achievement of black sovereignty in Liberia was read as testament to the superiority and universality of American revolutionary principles. Contemporary American sources highlighted the Americanness of the foundational texts, the different branches of government, the status of various officials, even the flag itself, to such an extent that they seemed to give 'little credit for independence to the black settlers, who were generally depicted as mere vessels for transporting U.S. institutions to Africa.'<sup>105</sup> The new nation was 'the child of our own [American] institutions, bearing our likeness, breathing our spirit and bestowing our privileges.'<sup>106</sup>

The depiction of the U.S.-Liberian relationship as familial was a persistent feature of pro-colonisation rhetoric in the U.S. Both before and after independence Liberia was variously described as 'the child of the U.S.,' a 'step-child' or a 'foster-child' of the United States as well as a 'sister republic', metaphors that stress infantilism and female helplessness. Yet, for all the protestations of familial regard, the U.S. government denied formal recognition to the Republic of Liberia, as it had also done in the case of Haiti. When a bill was finally moved in 1862 authorising the U.S. President Abraham Lincoln to open diplomatic relations with Liberia and Haiti, one of the objectors, while professing an interest in Liberia as 'a child of American benevolence,' feared that such a move would send out a very dangerous signal. It could be read and was 'intended as an acknowledgement of the equality of the races,' which 'philosophic idea,' he regards as 'an English idea but eminently un-American.'<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Buck-Morss, p. 146.

<sup>104</sup> David Nicholls, *From Dessalines to Duvalier: Race, Colour and National Independence in Haiti* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1976), pp. 3-41.

<sup>105</sup> Brandon Mills, p. 95.

<sup>106</sup> Helen C. Knight, *The New Republic* (Boston: Massachusetts Sabbath School Society, 1851), p. 247.

<sup>107</sup> Abraham Lincoln, quoted in Taketani, p. 494.



Despite such official reticence, the ACS insisted that the achievement of Liberian sovereignty was a transformative event. American black people had been regenerated, not through violent insurrection, but through the peaceful adoption and implantation of American religious, civic and political institutions in Liberia. Thus when President Joseph Roberts visited the United States in 1848, although he was not accorded official recognition, the ACS pronounced him to be the embodiment of their ethos: 'we saw the African race under a new aspect ... the tone of conscious inferiority and servility, so universally and so naturally characteristic of the race here [in the U.S.] had given way to a manly bearing which at once commanded respect.'<sup>108</sup>

Teage who had done so much to bring the nation into existence cautioned against over-optimism in the heady days after independence when the president was being lauded on the international stage: 'we would warn our people against the infatuation of supposing that because we have declared ourselves sovereign and independent, therefore [we] have fulfilled our destiny and attained the summit of political perfection.'<sup>109</sup> In the decade that followed there were other voices articulating new visions of what Liberia was supposed to stand for and how these might be realised. The most compelling of these were Edward Blyden and Alexander Crummell whose conceptualisations of what constituted a westernised African nation were widely articulated in an age of intense transatlantic debates on slavery, abolition and the status of the Negro race.

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<sup>108</sup> *African Repository*, 24 (1848), pp. 259-260.

<sup>109</sup> Teage, quoted in Burrowes, *Black Christian Republicanism*, p. 159.

## Chapter 3

### The Black Man's Burden: The Establishment of a 'Great African Nationality' in Liberia<sup>1</sup>

*We have a great work before us, a work unique in the history of the world ... The world is looking at this Republic to see whether 'order and law, religion and morality, the rights of conscience, the rights of persons and the rights of property' may all be secured and preserved by a government administered entirely by Negroes. Let us show ourselves equal to the task.*<sup>2</sup>

*Take up the Black Man's Burden  
Send forth the best ye breed,  
To serve as types of progress,  
To teach, to pray, to plead ...*<sup>3</sup>

In the summer of 1878 Liberia's Ambassador to the Court of St. James, Edward Blyden, (1832-1912) was received by Queen Victoria and subsequently proposed for honorary membership of the elite club, the Athenaeum. He regarded the honours as a recognition by the British people, whom he greatly admired, of not just his own eminence but also of the capacity of the Negro race to enter fully into the family of nations and disprove definitively the myth of Negro inferiority. His erstwhile friend and co-worker in Liberia, Alexander Crummell (1819-1898) described his own early encounter with the myth where the criterion for the humanity of the Negro race had been laid down: John C. Calhoun, a strong defender of slavery, was overheard to say that 'if he could find a negro, who knew the Greek syntax, he would then believe that the negro was a human being and should be treated as a man.' Gates claims that these overheard comments resonated all through Crummell's life, that 'he never stopped

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Blyden in a letter to a member of the ACS adopts the phrase he heard used by a member of the Sierra Leone government. Quoted in Hollis R. Lynch, *Edward Wilmot Blyden: Pan Negro Patriot 1832-1912* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 96.

<sup>2</sup> Edward Blyden, 'The Aims and Methods of a Liberal Education for Africans', in *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1888), 82-107 (107). All further references to this collection of Blyden's writings appear parenthetically as *CINR*.

<sup>3</sup> J. Dallas Browser, 1899, quoted in Patrick Brantlinger, 'Kipling's "The White Man's Burden" and Its Afterlives', *English Language in Transition, 1880-1920*, 50, 2 (2007), 172-191 (p. 178).

believing that mastering the master's tongue was the sole path to civilization and intellectual freedom.<sup>4</sup> The same could be applied to Blyden though he came to recognise that even such achievement could never fully liberate him from the white gaze that reduced him and fixed him as an 'African.' In recounting an event that bears uncanny resemblance to one described decades later by Fanon,<sup>5</sup> Blyden describes a moment when he is attending an exhibition of 'wild animals' in Blackpool, England. As if he were one of the animals, a nurse accompanied by two young charges, looks at him with 'a sort of suspicious, if not terrified, curiosity.' Eventually, on hearing him speak, she tells the children 'look, look, there is a black man and he speaks English.'<sup>6</sup> Gilroy has drawn attention to

the special political problems that arise from the fatal junction of the concept of nationality with the concept of culture and the affinities and affiliation which link the blacks of the West to one of their adoptive, parental cultures: the intellectual heritage of the West since the Enlightenment.<sup>7</sup>

Whereas Gilroy is concerned with the status and engagement of black people with western culture from within the western world, Blyden and Crummell occupy a singular space: as educated western black men, who sought to lay the foundations for what Blyden imagined as a 'great African nationality,' one of the greatest challenges they faced was how to incorporate the *original* 'parental culture' into the character of Liberia. Their voluminous writings expose the tension between their consciousness of the multiplicity of ways in which Western culture had denigrated Africa and Africans while at the same time expressing their belief in the superiority of Western culture and in particular that of Victorian Britain. Their works, which constitute the major literary output of Liberia in the first decades after independence, took the form of addresses, articles and pamphlets as well as sermons (they were both clergymen) which interwove sacred and secular themes. Their major themes expounded in

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<sup>4</sup> Henry Louis Gates, Jr. *Loose Canons: Notes on the Culture Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 73.

<sup>5</sup> Fanon describes the reaction of a French child who points to him and says, 'Mama, see the Negro! I'm frightened!', Fanon, p. 112.

<sup>6</sup> Blyden, 'West Africa before Europe', *Journal of the Royal African Society*, 2, 8 (July 1903), 359-374 (p. 363).

<sup>7</sup> Gilroy, p. 2.

Blyden's 'The Call of Providence to the Descendants of Africa' (1856) and in Crummell's 'Relations and Duties of Free Colored Men in America' (1860) were the justifications for the colonisation of Africa and appeals to New World blacks to support Liberia; the vindication of the Negro race; the insertion of Africa into the history and future of civilisation, issues returned to many times by both men. Their most important contributions are probably their articulation of an educational policy for Liberia. In Blyden's 'Aims and Methods of a Liberal Education for Africans' (1881) and Crummell's 'The English Language in Liberia' (1862), they expounded their beliefs in the superiority of English classical education, with certain modifications, for a rising African nation, hoping to create a class of young, westernised Africans who would spread the idea of a Liberian national culture and embody a Liberian identity. These writings, read alongside official government policies on expansion and the proposed assimilation of indigenous peoples as well as the earliest accounts of settlers' explorations of the Liberian hinterland, sought to define the nature of Liberia. The writings asked questions such as: what does it mean to be Liberian? What is the relationship of the settlers to their African neighbours, and to the descendants of Africa, both 'free' and still in captivity in the New World?

Blyden and Crummell arrived in Liberia in the 1850s at a moment of change, just a few years after its establishment as an independent nation but not yet fully engaged with the reality of what nationhood might entail. Their journeys had begun at different points of the globe associated with the triangular slave trade; their lives emblematic of the entwining and entanglements of the 'roots' and 'routes' of the African diaspora.<sup>8</sup> Blyden, born free in the Danish West Indian island of St. Thomas, and Crummell, whose father was an African-born slave, were shaped by their experiences of exclusion from the white establishment. Blyden's first experience of American-style racism occurred when he was refused admission to three Presbyterian seminaries on the basis of his race; Crummell's when he sought ordination in the Episcopal Church, whose bishops were deeply hostile to the idea of Negro priests. In addition to their

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<sup>8</sup> The phrase 'roots and routes' is used by Gilroy, illustrating some of the tensions of the Black Atlantic, where 'movement, relocation, displacement and restlessness are the norm', Gilroy, p. 133.

Christian faith, their lives were moulded by their classical education and their abiding admiration for what they regarded as the defining values of Victorian Britain. Blyden departed the United States for Liberia in 1850, hoping that he would be a part of an influx of New World educated Negroes who would transform the African continent. Crummell's decision to leave the United States, initially for England, occurred at a time when many young black people like him were making the journey, usually in the cause of abolition. Like Frederick Douglass, who exulted in the freedom he experienced in England,<sup>9</sup> Crummell wrote:

I do indeed thank God for the providence that has brought me to this land, and allowed me, for once in my life, to be a freeman. Oh the acquisition to one's heart, mind and soul, the consciousness in all its fullness that one is a man.<sup>10</sup>

After obtaining a B.A. from Queen's College, Cambridge, he resolved not to return to the United States and reversed his lifelong anti-colonisation stance. He left England for Liberia in 1853 under the auspices of the Protestant Episcopal Church of America, probably driven by financial motives but also impressed by the work of evangelisation already taking place there. He remained there until 1872 devoting all his energies to a cause that he eventually came to believe was lost.

The writings of Blyden, Crummell and the Liberian travel accounts examined here emerged from a post-colonial nation in a strictly temporal sense though McClintock has drawn attention to the instability of the term, arguing that the 'historical rupture suggested by the preposition "post" belies both the continuities and discontinuities of power.'<sup>11</sup> The post-independence Liberian-American relationship was characterised by a sense of continuity rather than change: the Liberians still looked to their former masters for trade, commerce, occasional naval protection and daily

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<sup>9</sup> Douglass wrote 'instead of a democratic government ... I am under a monarchical government ... I breathe and lo! the chattel becomes a man!', quoted in *Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass* ed. by Philip S. Foner (New York: International Publishers, 1975), p. 127.

<sup>10</sup> Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *Alexander Crummell: A Study of Civilization and Discontent* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 54.

<sup>11</sup> McClintock, p. 12.

intercourse with the 'civilised world.'<sup>12</sup> They were committed to carrying on the policies of the ACS; the 'mission statement' of the republic remained 'the redemption of Africa and the disenfranchisement and elevation of the African race.'<sup>13</sup> This was the *raison d'être* of Liberia, as its president, Joseph Jenkins Roberts, reiterated as he travelled to the United States and Europe seeking diplomatic recognition for the new state and proclaiming it as a land of liberty. Blyden argued that as Liberia was currently engaged in diplomatic attempts to be 'received into the family of nations,' surely the time had come to decide who would be included in the Liberian family, asking 'can we make a nation without the aborigines?' The enlargement of the settlers' sphere of influence was envisaged in the plans to begin the assimilation of indigenous Africans: the Constitution had recommended that the government should appoint travelling agents to instruct them in 'the arts of agriculture and husbandry.' Official policy in the 1850s, articulated most strongly by the Whig party, and by the second president of the republic, Stephen Benson, argued for integration with and assimilation of 'native' Africans.<sup>14</sup> In his inaugural address (1856) he insisted that indigenous people should not be catered for in separate institutions, expressing the fear that such separatism might lead to a 'state of things that [would] cause them (the indigenous peoples) to be regarded as intended to sustain the relation to us (the settlers) of hewers of wood and drawers of water, while our sons and daughters may be encouraged to live in idleness, luxury and affluence.'<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> At some point after the establishment of the Republic of Liberia, the original settlers began to be known as Americo-Liberians probably to distinguish them from other citizens such as 'Recaptives' and assimilated indigenous peoples. I use Americo-Liberian when referring to immigrants from the United States only. Blyden, as an immigrant from the West Indies, described himself as Liberian, the designation of choice for Crummell also who sought to distance himself from the ruling elite of Monrovia.

<sup>13</sup> Blyden, 'A Vindication of the African Race,' in *Liberia's Offering: Being Addresses, Sermons, Etc.* (New York: John A. Gray, 1862), 31-64 (p. 63).

<sup>14</sup> After the achievement of independence, the divisions between mulatto and black came to be represented by two political parties; the True Liberian Party of the mulatto merchant elite of Monrovia and the Old Whigs of the black, mostly upriver (St. Paul) settlements. In the 1860s, both parties reorganised, with the former re-naming itself The Republican Party and the latter The True Whig Party. Though Benson was a member of the True Liberian Party and a prosperous Monrovia trader, he favoured the development of relationships with the interior. The presidency was dominated by mulattoes until the victory of the Whig, Edward J. Roye, in 1870.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Henry Summerville Wilson, *Origins of West African Nationalism* (New York: Springer, 2016), pp. 21-22.

The official narrative constructed by the Liberian leadership and the new immigrants Blyden and Crummell, stressed the distinctiveness of the nation. They argued that it did not conform to normative settler colonies, which as Bateman and Pilkington propose, were always marked by a commitment on the part of the colonisers to 'annihilate native or indigenous peoples.'<sup>16</sup> Blyden countered the criticism that Liberia's treatment of its indigenous peoples was exploitative by reiterating the claim of the framers of the Constitution that the settlers were not 'influenced by 'avaricious speculations or by desires for 'territorial aggrandisement,': they did not intend 'to dispossess the natives of their land and drive them to die barbarians in the forest, but to guide them by a salutary control, and instruct them in the arts of peace.'<sup>17</sup> Blyden imagined a paternalistic role for the settlers, with them instructing the natives in the productive cultivation of the land and the development of its resources. They also had a 'moral and intellectual' mission: 'to work upon the *people*, as well as upon the *land* - upon *mind* as well as upon *matter* (emphasis in the original).'<sup>18</sup>

Laura Franey claims that the success of British imperial rule was built not on military might, but rather on a combination of other forces, such as psychological coercion, reinforced by its education system, the introduction of new religious frameworks that undermined traditional modes of authority and the cultivation of collaborative relationships between colonial officials and indigenous rulers, a construct that she calls an 'empire of the imagination.'<sup>19</sup> Liberia's version of the 'civilising mission' that both the French and the British were engaged in in their neighbouring colonies, employed all of these approaches while still maintaining that, theoretically at least, it differed fundamentally from them. Liberia was increasingly portrayed, especially by spokesmen like Blyden and Crummell, as a home, not just for American black people, but one that would be capacious enough to accommodate members of the Negro race, whether diasporic from any of the former slave societies of the New World or

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<sup>16</sup> Bateman and Pilkington, p. 1.

<sup>17</sup> Hilary Teage 'Treatise on Self Government,' in Burrowes, *Black Christian Republicanism*, pp. 241-248.

<sup>18</sup> Blyden, 'Call of Providence to the Descendants of Africa', in *Liberia's Offering*, 67-91 (p. 87).

<sup>19</sup> The phrase is borrowed from Rider Haggard's novel *She* (1887) in Laura Franey, *Victorian Travel Writing and Imperial Violence* (London: Palgrave, 2003).

native African, either from the local indigenous tribes or the 'recaptive' Africans. It is also apparent from the educational philosophy espoused by Blyden and Crummell that they sought to imbue Liberian national culture with a distinctly Victorian British hue that would make of Liberia an Anglo-American (and, for Blyden, at least) African hybrid, unique in the history of civilisation.

Figuring the nation as a reunited family, they envisaged its head as the Christianised black man from the New World, at least until such time as the Liberian education system had produced its own educated elite. Blyden, in particular, came to believe that Liberian identity should amalgamate the existing political culture of American republicanism with the finest flowerings of western culture, exemplified for him in the British education system. Increasingly, he came to the conclusion that African culture, of whose value he had no doubt, should be incorporated in the national culture. Finally, unlike European powers intent on colonizing Africa, Liberia did not have the means to subdue the interior by force, even if it had the inclination to do so. While this was implicit in much of the rhetoric in the decades after independence, it was explicitly stated in the 1870s when Liberia, perceiving itself as vulnerable to the encroachments of European interests, claimed that it could establish control in the interior: 'what England, France and Germany acquire expensive naval and military force to accomplish, we can effect by Race sympathies and Race interests.'<sup>20</sup> In stressing its distinctiveness and a certain moral superiority, Liberia managed to create the illusion that the expansion of the nation was not conquest and colonisation but rather a coming-together of long-lost cousins.

Blyden elaborated on the special and superior character of the government's plans for expansion. He cited the harmful effects on the natives of 'the overpowering and domineering rule of the Anglo-Saxons' in British colonies which was driven by the desire for profit and 'passion for territorial aggrandisement.' By contrast, the Liberian

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<sup>20</sup> Letter from Liberian Secretary of State, G.W. Gibson to Liberia's Representative in France, 1879, quoted in James Fairhead, Tim Geysbeek, Svend E. Holsoe and Melissa Leach, eds. *African-American Exploration in West Africa: Four Nineteenth-Century Diaries* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), p. 74.



settlers, he argued, fully understood that their progress and prosperity depended on 'the co-operation of the aborigines.' What distinguished Liberia from all existing colonies was that 'the aborigines [were] not a race alien from the colonists,' but were, in fact, 'of the same family.'<sup>21</sup> This recurring image was dismissed as illusory or downright misleading by black leaders in the United States who opposed colonisation. Douglass scathingly pointed out that

the savage chiefs of the western coast of Africa, who for ages have been accustomed to selling their captives into bondage and pocketing the ready cash for them, will not more readily accept our moral and economical ideas than the slave traders of Maryland and Virginia.<sup>22</sup>

For all Blyden's desire for inclusiveness and his insistence on sameness, neither 'branch' of the family viewed the other as anything but profoundly different. If the family was to be re-united, it required, first of all, that the African branch abandon all of the ways of life that had sustained it for generations. Moreover, the threat of forcible amalgamation was ever present. The government frequently employed the language of European imperialism as it did when it outlined its policy for 'the annexation of the interior kingdom of Medina,' and its outsourcing of plans for the building of a railroad that would 'penetrate ... this virgin market of interior Liberia.'<sup>23</sup>

Government policy as summarised by Blyden was 'to push the settlement beyond the seaboard to the elevated and salubrious regions of the interior and to incorporate the Aborigines as fast as practicable into the republic.'<sup>24</sup> The initial points of contact occurred in what may be categorised as 'tribal zones, [those areas] continuously affected by the proximity of a state but not under state administration'<sup>25</sup> In these zones, the state typically engage[d] in a policy of both 'coercion' and 'seduction': the

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<sup>21</sup> Blyden 'Call of Providence', p. 88.

<sup>22</sup> Frederick Douglass, quoted in *Apropos of Africa: Sentiments of Negro American Leaders on Africa from the 1800s to the 1950s*, ed. by Martin Kilson and A. Cromwell Hill (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd. 1969), p. 164.

<sup>23</sup> 'Notes: Measures are on Foot', *Observer* (Monrovia: 1879), quoted in Fairhead et al., p. 76.

<sup>24</sup> Blyden, 'Origin and Purpose', *CINR*, 108-129 (p. 118).

<sup>25</sup> R. Brian Ferguson and Neil L. Whitehouse, eds. *War in the Tribal Zone: Expanding State and Indigenous Warfare* (Santa Fe: School of American Research, 2000), p. 3.

primary means of coercion [being military threats; those of seduction are gifts, trade opportunities and pledges of political support].<sup>26</sup> The expansion into the tribal zones was planned along classic colonial lines involving exploratory journeys with the aim of inscribing and mapping the territory; encouraging the extension of Christian missions; developing an education policy for the natives; and negotiating treaties and land concessions with neighbouring tribes.

Within a decade of independence, the move to integrate the hinterland and the interior had begun. American sources reported approvingly that 'there [was] quite a tendency among intelligent members of the Republic of Liberia to visit the interior to ascertain the resources of the country.'<sup>27</sup> The accounts of James Seymour and George Sims, who made their journeys into the interior of Liberia in 1858, were modest and largely unheralded in the wake of the news that the best known European explorer of Africa, David Livingstone, had completed the west-east crossing of the continent two years previously. Benjamin Anderson's account of his journey in 1868 (published in 1870), the most famous of the Liberian travel accounts, was overshadowed by Livingstone's accounts of his travels in the area around Tanganyika as he searched for the source of the Nile.<sup>28</sup> Sara Mills has observed that the traveller's account of a journey must always 'be seen in the light of discourses circulating at the time,'<sup>29</sup> and his or her exploration is 'freighted with multiple meanings associated with science, literature, religion, commerce and empire.'<sup>30</sup> The first Liberian travellers to the Liberian hinterland were burdened by the already established European version of Africa and its people which Blyden claimed had constructed

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p. 7.

<sup>27</sup> *The African Repository*, 36 (Washington, D.C.: C. Alexander, 1860), p. 216.

<sup>28</sup> While Americo-Liberians travelled short distances into the interior, especially during the lifetime of the 'interior chief' King Boatswain, who was supportive of the colony, his death in 1836 led to a deterioration of relations between the colony and the chiefs. Contact was re-established after 1850. The diaries of the travellers, Sims, Seymour and Anderson, are published in Fairhead et al., *African-American Exploration in West Africa: Four Nineteenth-Century Diaries*, pp. 93-278. All references are to this edition and appear by page number parenthetically in the text.

<sup>29</sup> Sara Mills, *Discourse of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 69.

<sup>30</sup> Felix Driver, *Geography Militant: Cultures of Exploration and Empire* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), p. 2.

a totally fictitious being (the African) out of the traditions of slave traders and slave holders, who [had] circulated all sorts of absurd stories, and also out of prejudice inherited from ancestors who were taught to regard the Negro as a legitimate object of traffic.<sup>31</sup>

Brantlinger describes the development of the myth of the Dark Continent as emanating from the opening up of Africa as 'Victorian explorers, missionaries and scientists flood[ed] it with light.' Paradoxically, that light led to a darkening of Africa as it was 'refracted through an imperialist ideology that urged the abolition of savage customs' in the name of civilisation.<sup>32</sup> The myth depicted an essentialised African, marked with the signs of the savage: fetishism, nakedness and cannibalism. It also highlighted his indolence, his childlike nature and his arrested development on the evolutionary ladder. The continent was imagined as the very antithesis of European Enlightenment, a savage, anarchic and irrational space, whose characteristic traits came to be regarded as direct obstacles to the European modernising mission and therefore justifying direct 'imperial intervention and control.'<sup>33</sup>

What sets the writings of Sims, Seymour and Anderson apart from standard nineteenth-century colonial texts of exploration is that their 'cultural cartography,'<sup>34</sup> the positioning of themselves vis-à-vis the Other, is complicated and problematized by the fact that both share the same racial characteristics. Is their distinctiveness as black explorers of a land rhetorically figured as their fatherland/motherland evident in the texts that they produced? In what ways do they mirror the contemporaneous representations produced by white Europeans? The Americo-Liberians' attitude to the African interior mirrored the dominant European image of the benighted continent in so far as they saw themselves as Westerners, carrying the light of civilization, rather than as Africans, travelling among their brethren. Whether they were official agents of the state, such as Anderson, or more 'amateur' travellers such as Sims and Seymour, they had an understood mission: to attempt to classify the

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<sup>31</sup> Blyden, quoted in Mudimbe, p. 118.

<sup>32</sup> Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness*, p. 173.

<sup>33</sup> McClintock, p. 40.

<sup>34</sup> Dennis Porter, *Haunted Journeys: Desire and Transgression in European Travel Writing* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), p. 20.

'threshold peoples' who eluded 'the networks of classification that normally locate states and positions in cultural space,'<sup>35</sup> to identify and categorise which of the tribes might be easily assimilated and which were likely to prove resistant to state authority. The attempt to map the territory was literally and symbolically an act of domination and control. The travellers moved through the countryside exploring its physical contours, 'gathering ... information - scientific, geographical, agricultural, ecological or ethnographic,'<sup>36</sup> in an act of 'territorial surveillance, appropriation of resources and administrative control.'<sup>37</sup> They named the rivers and mountains after current and former political leaders and identified suitable locations for future settlements.

Seymour and Sims had both private backing and government support for their trips, undertaken in the 1850s, and were motivated by a mixture of missionary zeal and commercial interests. Their travel accounts were published in the *Liberia Herald* and in various American colonisation journals. The two most substantial journeys, undertaken by Benjamin Anderson in 1868 and 1874 as 'scientific' explorations of the interior, were sponsored by the government with significant backing from H. M. Schlieffen of the New York Colonization Society. In addition to funding the trip, Schlieffen also published the account of the first trip, *Journey to Musadu*, through the Smithsonian Institution in 1870. The central aim of Anderson's journey was to explore 'the interior as far as possible' with special focus on Musadu (159). The lure of that city was based on the settlers' belief that it was the location of a highly civilised society, in marked contrast to what they regarded as the savagery and barbarism of their immediate neighbours. Traders from there and beyond brought ivory, gold, iron and cloth and impressed the settlers by their industry and intelligence. Moreover, many immigrants proudly claimed that their African ancestors were Mandingoes, indicating the superiority of their ancestry, a claim mockingly and dismissively

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<sup>35</sup> Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2008), p. 95.

<sup>36</sup> Mary Louise Pratt, 'Scratches on the Face of the Country; or, what Mr. Barrow saw in the Land of the Bushmen', in *'Race', Writing and Difference* ed. by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 138-162 (p. 144).

<sup>37</sup> Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p. 39.

referred to by Anderson when he arrives in Musadu, insisting that some of the immigrants may have humbler ancestors in 'lesser tribes.'

*Seymour's Extracts from the Journal of the Journey to the Interior of Liberia* (1858) and *Sims' Scenes in the Interior of Liberia* (1858) include many of the features of European travel writing in the nineteenth century outlined by Pratt: 'the observing and cataloguing of nature,' the motif of the 'monarch of all I survey,' the naming of rivers and mountains, and the accounts of travellers' own endurance and heroism.<sup>38</sup> In the Americo-Liberian journals, the travellers are the central protagonists, presented as fearless and heroic as they face many challenges and dangers. Sims casts himself in such a mode when he describes how he single-handedly liberated thirteen captives bound for a French slaver off the coast (97). Seymour faced mortal danger when he was attacked: like Park, he was rescued by a native woman who 'dropped a sympathetic tear and was as attentive as a mother' (153). Pratt has categorised the classic colonial accounts of the arrival of the white explorer/traveller entering the native village as 'potent sites for framing relations of contact and setting the terms of its representations.'<sup>39</sup> They involve the bestowal of Western commodities by the traveller to the head chief in exchange for the promise of safe passage and also typically include scenes of scrutiny, usually of the native women. The Liberian accounts replicate the exchange: the travellers present beads or other trinkets to the chief and, in return, receive food and lodgings. They scrutinise the people, especially the women, and are examined in return. The Americo-Liberians are regarded as wondrous and strange by the indigenous peoples who claim to be encountering such outsiders for the first time. The descriptions of the encounter between the explorer and the native that feature prominently in European accounts are problematized in the Americo-Liberian accounts: though the strangers are linked to the indigenous people by colour, they are nevertheless regarded as profoundly different when they enter the native villages. Sims describes an encounter with an old woman who, despite her courtesy in handing over her hut to accommodate him, refuses to shake

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 201-204.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, p. 78.

his hand, declaring, 'He looks like any other man, but I am afraid of him' (102). He is taken aback when he is referred to as a 'white man,' because he is a 'Merica man:' the appellations have nothing to do with the colour of his skin but reflect the fact that he 'sarvy book' (can read books) and that he dresses in western clothes. Despite his insistence that he is not white, his 'viewers' insist that he is and therefore has 'to undergo and submit to the most minute inspection ... the inspectors [being] chiefly ladies and very inquisitive ones too' (96). Such encounters challenge the claims of racial unity propounded in the official state discourse; while settlers and indigenous people might be regarded as Negro peoples, a world of difference, exemplified by books and clothes, exists between them.

The travellers in turn engage in their own surveillance. David Spurr describes the European 'imperial gaze' turned on the body:

The eye treats the body as a landscape: it proceeds systematically from part to part, quantifying and spatializing, noting color and texture and finally passing an aesthetic judgement which stressed the body's role as object to be viewed.<sup>40</sup>

The surveillance carried out by the Americo-Liberians is not merely for aesthetic purposes although they do comment on the attractiveness of certain females. The bodies - male as well as female - are judged and appropriated as putative citizens of the state. Seymour, at several junctures, engages in this type of inventory. He describes the people of Darvarnee as 'some of the finest [he] had ever seen - the men well-formed, muscular and handsome, dark skin, good features [who] would, no doubt, if cultivated, acquit themselves well in any profession.' In a nearby town, he encounters the king, 'a young man of some degree of manliness, who would be an ornament to society, if educated' (139). The native African women are highly praised, both for their looks, their adornments and their industriousness, especially evidenced by the fact that they make their own clothes. He describes the women of one tribe as 'not to be surpassed [for] ... their lively, intelligent countenances ... and their industry

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<sup>40</sup> David Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing and Imperial Administration* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 23.

in cotton-picking, carding, spinning and weaving' (138). Such ability 'should make Liberians blush, who think they cannot make their own dress' (142). He particularly admires the 'beautiful Mandingo damsels ... [their] teeth as white as snow, hair tastefully plaited, clad in white or colored cotton cloth, with a part of the body naked, displaying symmetry, and beauty and form'(128). Blyden, on one of his trips into the Liberian hinterland, engaged in a similar act of surveillance, extolling the virtues of the Mandingo women whose physical and intellectual virtues rendered them, in his opinion, ideal future mothers of the Liberian nation:

their hands and feet are very small, and beautifully formed; their countenance open, intelligent and prepossessing; their manner easy and graceful ... I saw various styles of beauty among the girls; the lascivious and coquettish beauty; the refined and dignified beauty; the reserved and intellectual beauty; the scornful beauty; the amiable and attractive beauty; the sociable beauty and the impressive beauty.<sup>41</sup>

Seymour and Sims challenge at times the characterisation of Africa as a 'benighted continent.' Sims assures his readers that once the interior is properly known, the 'old stigma of indolence and ignorance' will disappear (127). Arriving in a town, not yet under Liberian rule, he describes the 'industry, cleanliness, economy and mechanical genius [of the people] far surpassing any [he] had ever seen among the natives of the coast or many of the immigrants from the United States.' Sims also praises the morals of the natives of the interior as far superior to the 'natives living near the beach (coast) who have had intercourse with foreigners' (123). They both occasionally present a view of native life that is edenic; the people of the tribe of King Seiyea are described as having 'all the common wants of life in abundance.' Seymour cannot imagine how 'the civilized world [could] add to their happiness' unless it adds to their 'mental' advancement (141). This advancement is understood to mean the influence of 'good religion' as the people are in 'moral darkness' (132, 154).

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<sup>41</sup> Blyden, 'The Boporu Country', *African Repository*, 47 (Washington, D.C.: Colonization Building, 1871), 321-337 (p. 329).

The surveillance of the body is repeated in the surveillance of the landscape. Both men write lyrically of the countryside they pass through, romanticizing and aestheticizing the landscape, while at the same time identifying possible sites for future commercial or missionary settlements, Sims evokes a pastoral vision at odds with the representation of Africa as a chaotic, anarchic and unhealthy space: his description of the country of the Tuma people is of 'a country of hills and valleys, shady groves and meandering streams' whose peace is broken only by the purple-beaked and rainbow-coloured bird (100). On another occasion, he resorts to poetry to describe a landscape as '... a goodly sight to see.'

What heaven hath done for this delicious land,  
What fruits of fragrance blush on every tree,  
What goodly prospects o'er the hills expand. (108)

Seymour, monarch of all he surveys, describes ascending a ridge, and viewing the surrounding countryside, 'a part of Africa which presents one of the greatest varieties of nature,' with its hills, valleys, streams, creeks and rivers, its farms and deposits of iron. Not surprisingly, he identifies it as a place where 'a Liberian settlement could be established to great advantage' (136). He also names physical features: near the St. Paul river, he identifies a site that 'would be a good place for the Capital of Liberia,' naming it 'Mount Stephen, in honour of President Benson' (127). Later, from the top of a mountain that 'had the most extensive view that [he] had yet seen,' which he named Mount Roberts, he determines that it 'should be occupied by missionaries [as] the inhabitants are willing, peaceable [and] numerous' (131).

The accounts of Seymour and Sims depict the interior of Liberia in largely utopian terms; while it needs some civilisation in order to incorporate its people into the state, they hope that it would not render them as degenerate as the some of the Africans on the coast. The journals of Benjamin Anderson, who travelled just over a decade later were promoted as the 'true,' scientific and objective account of the Liberian interior and its inhabitants. They depict the interior as a generally anarchic space, characterised by barbarism, indolence and brutality, and resistant to the forces of civilisation. In seeming to promote a dystopian vision, Anderson is making a case for



the military intervention of the state, if that is what is required in order to subdue the natives. Anderson's journey was central to the government policy of 'opening up' the interior for trade, land on which to establish settlements of immigrants (still anticipated in the 1860s) and as a move towards the assimilation of the native tribes, of which the Mandingoes were regarded as the supreme example of the 'pure Negro.' McClintock argues that European exploration of 'undiscovered lands' expressed the belief that 'a precise catalogue of visible surfaces - created by compass, caliper and camera could guarantee both metaphysical and military mastery of the globe.'<sup>42</sup> Anderson announces his claim to scientific and, by extension, political authority in the opening chapter when he gives an inventory of the instruments used to calculate lines of latitude and longitude; the sextant, aneroid barometer, thermometers, compasses and artificial horizon, purchased in New York by Schlieffen and shipped to Liberia. The mapping of the territory was undertaken at a crucial moment in the nation's history as France and Britain began to dispute its claims. In a principle that came to be named 'Effective Occupation,' established by the European powers at the Congress of Berlin (1885), land without inscription was deemed to be empty. They declared that claimed territory must contain border stations, trading posts or military installations, shared symbols of power and control. The absence of these, and more crucially a Liberian map, the object that at once claimed to represent the objective 'truth' about a place while simultaneously conferring 'the right of territorial control', rendered the nation vulnerable to the encroachment of her colonial neighbours.<sup>43</sup>

In his study of explorers on the North American continent, Bruce Greenfield makes the point that the degree of amenability of native Americans to Euro-American projects for land use and development became the main criterion for distinguishing between 'good' and 'bad' Indians.<sup>44</sup> Anderson's surveillance of the landscape and its people is carried out with an eye to immediate government policy, a significant feature of which was attempting to categorise 'good' and 'bad natives' in order to

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<sup>42</sup> McClintock, p. 81.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, p. 28.

<sup>44</sup> Bruce Greenfield, *Narrating Discovery: The Explorer in American Literature 1790-1855* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), p. 103.

determine which of the sixteen indigenous peoples would be most amenable to 'civilisation' and incorporation into the state. The frequent panoptic sweeps of the countryside are described in dry prosaic and factual language; the landscapes that support the subsistence farming of the indigenous peoples are depicted as empty, 'meaningful only in terms of capitalist future and of potential for producing a marketable surplus.'<sup>45</sup> Anderson, as a politician and former secretary of the Treasury, makes an inventory of the resources of the interior that lie just outside Liberian control, casts an 'improving eye' over them and figures out the means by which they might be appropriated to the state.<sup>46</sup> Thus, when he reaches the country of the Bonsie peoples, he is impressed to find that they had achieved self-sufficiency in the production of food and clothing, something that the Liberian settlers had not been capable of. He sees the prospect for Liberia becoming a major 'cotton-producing power ... if the primitive, barbarian industry were only assisted by some labor-saving machinery,' such as a cotton gin (188). Brian Schoen has linked the trajectory of slavery in the American South with that of the centrality of cotton in the global economy of the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>47</sup> Given that Anderson was writing after the abolition of slavery in the United States, perhaps he hoped that the Liberian settlers, many of whom had experience of cotton-growing, would be eventually able to expand an already existing native industry and administer a death blow to the American plantation system.

His surveillance of the various peoples is likewise directed towards the state's expansionary policies. In the face of stalled immigration, the state would need the local Africans to provide labour, suitable partners for inter-marriage and military personnel. Anderson categorises the peoples he encounters according to their suitability for these roles in a hierarchy, with 'cannibals' at the bottom and Mandingoes at the top. Cannibalism is linked to the Deh peoples which probably renders them unreceptive to civilising influences. The people of the Pessy country are

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<sup>45</sup> Pratt, p. 61.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, p. 61.

<sup>47</sup> Brian D. Schoen, *The Fragile Fabric of Union: Cotton, Federal Politics, and the Global Origins of the Civil War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).

of a 'mild and moldable disposition ... who from their docility and tractableness ... out travel all [the] surrounding tribes in manual and artisan labour.' He proposes that they, through the apprenticeship of children and young adults to Americo-Liberian families, should become the manual labour force of Liberia, not requiring to be 'bookishly educated' for that role (276). The Boozie people are imagined as possible partners in marriage for the settlers as well as useful additions to the militias. They are well built, with 'stoutly developed bodies,' healthy and hygienic and 'wedded to no particular species of error.' The men are strong and 'of sufficient muscular strength to hold a United States musket, bayonet fixed, at full arm's length in one hand' (191). The superior people are the Mandingoes, widely recognised among the settler population as the noblest and purest Negroes of the hinterland. Blyden, for example, characterised them as more independent, and therefore superior to other Negroes, especially those in the New World,

in never having been under foreign masters, in never having imbibed a sense of inferiority or a feeling of self-depreciation. They had never to look to white men for anything, so as to form in their minds comparisons between themselves and others disparaging to themselves. They are entirely free from the mental and moral trammels which the touch of the Caucasian has imposed on us.<sup>48</sup>

While Anderson criticises their avarice and their fondness for war, he also concludes that they are the people who

offer to Liberia a more speedy prospect of assimilation and union than any other tribe ... a strong moral advantage is already gained from their being a reading and a writing people ... they have a natural reverence for learning and mental superiority. (221)

Anderson's approach to the indigenous peoples is less conciliatory and more aggressive than that evinced by Seymour and Sims. Commenting on the attack on Seymour, Anderson blames his fellow-countryman for being too trusting and placing too much reliance on 'the simple-heartedness and good feelings of untutored

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<sup>48</sup> Blyden, 'The Boporu Country', p. 322.

barbarians'. He describes himself as 'a moving arsenal,' on the grounds that the 'more formidable [he appeared] the better for peace and safety on the highways of African travel' (225) Resistance to Liberian authority, continued involvement in the slave trade and the purported cannibalism of certain tribes as evidenced by their filed teeth are presented as justifications for immediate government action and the use of force, if necessary:

Unless the government shows energy and control, it will always be difficult to visit these parts - almost within the territorial limits of Liberia - for any purpose whatever. The fact was but too plainly humiliating, that we had lost *prestige* and respect. The policy of too much moderation and forbearance is often abused or misunderstood by warlike barbarians, whose swords are an appendage of their daily apparel. (168)

Anderson's recommendation is that the government establish trading posts in the Boozie and Mandingo country to establish trade between the natives and the Liberians, and to strengthen whatever missionary stations might be established 'out there,' envisaging the forces of commerce and Christianity working 'amicably together' (217).

Even though Anderson was endowed with the status of government agent and scientific explorer, his authority and legitimacy were questioned both within and beyond Liberia in ways that did not apply to European explorers. Despite government claims to a sharing of 'race interests' with the indigenous peoples, Anderson's racial identity as a New World Negro undermined his claim to authority and expertise. This was especially the case as he travelled among the Mandingoes who regarded themselves as lords of the interior and who considered themselves superior to the settlers. Anderson recognised their contempt for the American settlers as 'newcomers' to Africa and nothing more than slaves, saying that they had 'hard hearted and unalterable opinions respecting the freest man if he [had] once been a slave (265). Travellers like Blyden acknowledged that Mandingo communities were more advanced, more independent and more industrious than the Americo-Liberian settlements, concluding 'if they are savages, they are the most civilized savages

known to history; if barbarians, the most enlightened barbarians,' thereby highlighting the irony of the government's policy of 'civilising' the interior.<sup>49</sup>

Anderson's authority also came under scrutiny in European scientific and diplomatic circles. He was writing at a time when European travellers and explorers flooded the markets with accounts of their involvement in grandiose schemes and heroic adventures, through which accounts they came to be regarded as 'ideal types of imperial masculinity.'<sup>50</sup> Anderson, dispatched by a government claiming authority in the interior on the basis of racial affinity, was undermined by Europeans on that very basis. A French explorer, Capt. Henri D'Ollone, questioned the authenticity of Anderson's account, claiming that it had been fabricated from stories that he heard from slave traders from the interior. The captain, a member of the French infantry, had himself been 'on a mission' in the Liberian interior and could attest to the inaccuracies in Anderson's maps, a claim that fuelled hopes of the French government's plans to dismantle Liberia's borders. The final 'proof' offered by D'Ollone was that Anderson,

who many of you think is an English person or an American is simply a black Liberian; that none of his brethren have ever dared adventure more than 10 km from the sea or navigable river for fear of being eaten by the natives, aggressive cannibals; that he had only very ordinary education, little in relation to the use of instruments that he would have had to carry to make astronomical calculations and which he makes a lot of in his book.<sup>51</sup>

D'Ollone invokes the cultural and intellectual superiority of the European explorer, his own authority as a French soldier, well versed in military and cartographic exercises, brave and daring as opposed to the *mere* Liberian of minimal learning and courage. Anderson's credibility, thus undermined by his racial identity, needed appeals to bastions of Western science such as the Smithsonian Institute and the Royal Geographic Society to vouch for his authenticity.

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid, p. 335.

<sup>50</sup> Carl Thompson, *Travel Writing* (London: Routledge, 2011), p. 53.

<sup>51</sup> Fairhead et al., p. 80.

The policy of opening up the interior was carried out simultaneously with that of actively encouraging further immigration both from the West Indies and the United States, even though that hope began to fade in the 1880s. Blyden, in his role as Secretary of State, enthusiastically supported the Pan-African approach of the Liberian president who issued an invitation to the 'Brethren of the Antilles ... of all classes and pursuits' to immigrate to Liberia and 'build up an African Nationality ... and thus aid in restoring to this ancient cradle of civilization to her pristine glory.'<sup>52</sup> Liberian ambassadors such as Crummell and Blyden who appealed instead to the sense of duty of all 'Africans' to a common burden of duty and obligation to this infant state' did not take account of the fact that the African diaspora was constituted by many different racial cultures and political forms.<sup>53</sup> While 'blackness' is constituted by and in opposition to western discourse, the Black as Other assumed distinct characteristics depending on his location as Wright has demonstrated: thus, while the Jamaican, the black American, or the Barbadian might be 'black,' they did not share common experiences of relationships with centres of power nor with Africa. Liberian opponents of the scheme to encourage the immigration of West Indian black people, such as Roberts and other mulattoes, argued that they would feel more at home in Sierra Leone 'where the manners and morals of the people are more English and more adapted to their early habits.'<sup>54</sup> The group of over three hundred skilled Barbadians who arrived in 1865 were, according to an English traveller, regarded as 'black Irish' by the Liberian elite, and the Barbadians themselves continued to regard themselves as proud 'British subjects born.'<sup>55</sup> While the hopes of large scale immigration from the West Indies never materialised, the Liberian government still hoped that American black people would heed the call to return to Africa.

Blyden's address to American free black communities, 'The Call of Providence to the Descendants of Africa in America' (1856) and Crummell's 'Relations and Duties of Free

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<sup>52</sup> Daniel Warner, quoted in Lynch, p. 33.

<sup>53</sup> Lynch, p. 34.

<sup>54</sup> Lynch, p. 39.

<sup>55</sup> Winwood Reade, *African Sketch Book, Vol. 2*. (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1873), p. 289.

This distinction, between North American blacks who *claimed* American citizenship and West Indian blacks who *were* British citizens, is of crucial importance in the career of Marcus Garvey, examined in Chapter Five.

Colored Men in America' (1860), appropriate much of the contemporary rhetoric of Manifest Destiny and American exceptionalism in their arguments supporting colonisation and in their pleas for immigration to Liberia. Thus, a return to Africa is represented as a claiming of a birth-right: like the Israelites in exile, New World black people have a God-given right and duty to the land of their forefathers. Blyden quotes from the book of Deuteronomy 1:21 in support of this view: 'behold, the lord thy God hath set the land before thee: go up and possess it, as the Lord God of thy fathers hath said unto thee.' As already noted, black leaders represented the early settlers in Liberia as a chosen people whose survival was providential. Blyden and Crummell argued that the survival of black people in the United States was also providential and must be taken to mean that they were destined for greatness. Of course, they differed from other black leaders as to where that destiny lay. Thus, for example, Blyden and the former slave, Henry Highland Garnet, who was opposed to emigration at this time, made comparisons between blacks and Indians, both of whom were regarded as inferior peoples. In considering their different fates, they discern a peculiar destiny. Garnet wrote:

The red man of North America are retreating from the approach of the white man. They have fallen like trees on the ground in which they first took root and on the soil which their foliage once shaded. But the Colored man, although they have been transplanted on a foreign land, have clung to and grown with their oppressors, as the wild ivy entwines around the trees of the forest, nor can they be torn thence.<sup>56</sup>

The adaptability of the Negro race was therefore regarded as a more important characteristic than the indigenoussness of the native American; such adaptability would ensure the survival of the black man while the Indian vanished into extinction. Using the same organic imagery employed by Garnet, Blyden saw the Negro race as being overshadowed and choked by the dominant hegemonic group rather than living symbiotically with it; like 'feeble oak dwarfed by the overspreadings of a large tree, having not the advantage of rain and sunshine and the fertilizing dews.'<sup>57</sup> The image

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<sup>56</sup> Garnet, p. 25.

<sup>57</sup> Blyden, 'Call of Providence', p. 71.

of the 'feeble oak' seems paradoxical given the usual representation of the oak as the king of trees; Blyden seems to suggest that the strength and power of the mighty African race is thwarted in the uncongenial environment of the United States. As he began to develop a theory of the distinctiveness of the Negro race, he came to regard the lives of black people in the United States as intolerable, literally soul-destroying. He wrote:

every race has a soul ... and the soul of the race finds expression in its institutions and to kill these institutions is to kill the soul ... a terrible homicide. The Hebrews could not see or serve God in the land of the Egyptians, no more than the Negro under the Anglo-Saxon.<sup>58</sup>

The only alternative was the establishment of an 'African nationality in Africa, the great need of the African race,' whose beginnings in Liberia he described as 'the foundations of [an] empire.'<sup>59</sup>

In their efforts to promote immigration to Liberia, Blyden and Crummell developed a discourse on the theme of the black man's burden, playing on the word to mean both an intolerable load and a profound responsibility. Blyden described the condition of the Negro in the New World as carrying 'the burden of slavery and the sorrows of oppression.'<sup>60</sup> While the burdens were physical for those who were chattel slaves, being literally 'beasts of burden,' both writers emphasised the psychological impact even on those who, like themselves, had been born free. Blyden drew on the authority of the French historian and political thinker, Alexis de Tocqueville, to bolster his argument that free black people were held in a dangerous bondage of which they were barely aware. According to the Frenchman, blacks were never themselves; they were engaged in an act of humiliating mimicry, trying to insinuate themselves into company of those that are repelled by them. At the same time, they were reminded of their inferiority at every turn, made to feel ashamed of their ancestry, their bodies and their intellectual abilities. The antidote to this condition, put forward by Blyden

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<sup>58</sup> Quoted in Robert W. July, *The Origins of Modern African Thought: Its Development in West Africa during the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, 2004), p. 214.

<sup>59</sup> Blyden, 'Call of Providence', p. 75.

<sup>60</sup> Blyden, 'Origins and Purpose of African Colonization', p. 117.



and Crummell, lay in the assumption of a different burden; responsibility for the reclamation and redemption of the race that they believed was the duty of every free black man. In assuming that burden, Liberia could become a site of regeneration and wholeness, restoring to diasporic Africans a sense of integrity while simultaneously redeeming 'native' Africans from heathenism and barbarism.

The process of nation building in Liberia presented a unique challenge to Blyden and Crummell as colonising educators, that Blyden, in particular, grappled with for much of his life. Unlike European colonisers, they could not whole-heartedly endorse the language and culture that they employed to instil a sense of race pride and thus elevate and vindicate their race. Blyden felt acutely the tensions between his reverence for the achievements of Western culture and his awareness that it was a culture that denied or disparaged the entire civilisation of Africa. Even Crummell, a more unequivocal disciple of the Enlightenment, acknowledged the fact that he, just one generation removed from Africa, was speaking in English was 'indicative of our sorrowful history; the language we use tells of subjection and conquest. No people lose entirely their native tongue without the bitter trial of hopeless struggles, bloody strife, heart-breaking despair, agony and death.'<sup>61</sup>

Blyden characterised the lives of westernised black people as determined by pervasive 'caricatures and misinterpretations.'<sup>62</sup> Even in religion, where they might have expected solace, they found only images that reinforced their sense of inferiority. All the 'exquisite representations' to be found in Christian iconography from 'the *Good Shepherd* of the Catacombs to the *Transfiguration* of Raphael, all the 'models for imitation' exhibit the 'physical characteristics of a foreign race.'<sup>63</sup> Blyden cites the example of a sermon he heard in New York City where a black minister, preaching on the verse in John's Gospel, 'we shall be like Him,' exclaimed 'brethren, imagine a beautiful white man with blue eyes, rosy cheeks and flaxen hair, and we

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid, p. 20.

<sup>62</sup> Blyden, 'Aims and Methods of a Liberal Education', p. 82.

<sup>63</sup> Blyden, 'Mohammedanism and the Negro Race', *CINR*, 1-29 (p. 17).

*shall be like him.*<sup>64</sup> The minister spoke, not with irony or incredulity, but with a longing that, for Blyden, expressed a deeply internalised sense of self-loathing.

In their formulation of a policy for the education of Liberian youth, Blyden and Crummell hoped to produce a system that would liberate black people from the destruction wrought by European and American domination and denigration in the past: Blyden felt that a useful motto for the Negro race was the advice of Themistocles who, when asked about the art of memory, answered ‘teach me rather to forget.’<sup>65</sup> They hoped that their institution would produce new Liberians, on whose shoulders would rest the evangelisation and civilisation of Africa. Like the English educator Thomas Arnold before them and the black American intellectual Du Bois, after them, they envisaged an elite who would become ‘race leaders’, the ‘Talented Tenth’.<sup>66</sup> If Liberia were to serve as the shining light from which civilisation would flow into the African continent, what were to be its characteristics that all of Africa should wish to emulate?

Lord Macaulay, in his famous ‘Minute on Indian Education’ (1835), advocated the introduction of English education in India, leading to the creation of a class of people who would become ‘English in taste, in opinion, in morals and in intellect.’<sup>67</sup> Viswanathan has explored the ways in which the ‘English literary education [was adapted] to the administrative and political imperatives of British rule.’ She argues that the ‘humanistic functions’ usually associated with literature, such as ‘the shaping of character, or the development of the aesthetic sense or the discipline of ethical thinking,’ were linked to ‘education for social and political control.’<sup>68</sup> Given this linkage, what may be gleaned from the curricula of Liberia College, as designed by Blyden and Crummell? It certainly aspired to the creation of high-minded young

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid, p. 18.

<sup>65</sup> Blyden, ‘Aims and Methods of a Liberal Education’, p. 92.

<sup>66</sup> Du Bois, ‘The Talented Tenth’, in *W. E. B. Du Bois, Selections from his Writing*, ed. by Bob Blaisdell (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Thrift Edition, 2014), 41-60.

<sup>67</sup> Lord Macaulay, quoted in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, ed. by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (London and New York: Taylor and Francis, 2006), p. 31.

<sup>68</sup> Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), p. 3.

gentlemen but to what end? What was the education system trying to achieve? What kind of 'Liberians' would emerge from the academy?

The College, conceived in Boston and financially supported by two American boards, was imagined as an essentially American college. Its emphasis, according to its patrons, ought to be patriotic, serving the social and political interests of the state. A wealthy American supporter of the college argued against proposals that envisaged Liberians being educated in England: 'if they send their young men to England to be educated for lawyers, doctors, legislators etc. what sort of republicans will they probably return?'<sup>69</sup> In Liberia, the three men appointed to run the college, administratively and academically - Blyden, Crummell and the former president, Joseph Jenkins Roberts - could not agree on the ethos of the College, seeming to clash on whether it should be an expression of Americo-Liberian identity or something new entirely. The clash over the actual location of the college symbolised the divisions: Roberts, as a representative of the mulatto elite and seeking to protect the Americo-Liberian hegemony, fought to have the college sited in Monrovia whereas Blyden and Crummell proposed a larger and more suitable site inland in the farming country of Clay Ashland, where the settler population was black. The hierarchical nature of Liberian society, based on distinctions of colour, drew comment from several visitors. The U.S. Minister to Liberia, visiting in 1879, wrote to a colleague:

This hybrid class the unwritten history of Liberia declared to be superior in intellectual development ... to the native or emigrant negro ... the government was formed with the aboriginal freemen at the base, the general structure the emigrant negro, the superstructure the hybrid.<sup>70</sup>

The decision to site the college in Monrovia represented the triumph of the mulatto interest, which Blyden and Crummell regarded as parochial and self-serving.

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<sup>69</sup> Quoted in Thomas W. Livingston, 'The Exportation of American Higher Education in West Africa: Liberia College, 1850-1900', *The Journal of Negro Education*, 45, 3 (Summer 1976), 246-262 (p. 253).

<sup>70</sup> Quoted in Lynch, p. 38.

Blyden, as Professor of Greek Language and Literature and Instructor in Hebrew and French, and Crummell, Professor of Intellectual and Moral Philosophy and English Language and Literature, hoped to devise an education system appropriate to 'a rising Christian state,' heavily influenced by contemporary British educational policy. The two men were intellectually and temperamentally more at home in Britain than in the United States, a fact brought home to Blyden during recent visits to both countries. Experiencing the realities of racism where he was forced to travel in segregated trams and trains, he felt again the 'degradation' of the American free black person.<sup>71</sup> His description of the ignorance and intolerance that he witnessed in the very heart of the U.S. where he was refused entry to the House of Representatives, contrasted with the warm welcome he had received in England, when he had visited Cambridge that same year; for both him and Crummell, Cambridge represented the pinnacle of British civilisation.

They viewed Liberia College as an opportunity to replicate some of its defining characteristics by providing students with a 'good, sound, moral English education.' There was nothing in the curriculum to gesture to the fact that this was an African College on the west coast of Africa (a lacuna Blyden tried to address during his presidency of the second Liberian College). They looked to Britain for practical support in implementing their plans. Blyden wrote to his friend William Gladstone asking for a donation of a small library containing the works of 'Cicero, Herodotus, Shakespeare, Milton and the Oxford or Cambridge Examination Papers for 1859.'<sup>72</sup> Blyden cited approvingly the judgement of Lord Macauley that a Cambridge education was a guarantee of success in life:

take the Cambridge Calendar for two hundred years, look at the Church, the Parliament, or the Bar, and it has always been the case that the men who were first in the competition of the schools have been the first in the competition of life.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Lynch, p. 29.

<sup>72</sup> Hollis Lynch, *Selected Letters of Edward Wilmot Blyden* (Millwood, N.Y.: KTO Press, 1978), p. 30.

<sup>73</sup> Blyden, 'Inaugural Address at Liberia College 1862', *Liberia's Offering*, p. 118.

He had also met Arthur Penrhyn Stanley, the biographer of Thomas Arnold, read Thomas Hughes' fictional account of Rugby school, *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, and was a great admirer of Arnold's emphasis on the classics.

Blyden defended the emphasis on a classical education against those who argued that a practical or vocational education would be more appropriate for black students. Whereas the debate in the United States over the 'miseducation' of the Negro continued throughout the nineteenth century, culminating in the conflict between Booker T. Washington and Du Bois on the subject, it acquired an added urgency in Liberia. If the achievement of independence in 1847 and the subsequent recognition by the European powers brought Liberia into the family of nations, Blyden and Crummell hoped that their plans for Liberia College would signal an entry into the intellectual family of the western academy. Their insistence on a classical education for young Africans took place against a backdrop of a developing 'scientific racism' in intellectual circles in England and the United States with influential thinkers asserting that the Negro 'was not a human being, that he did not belong to the human race ... that he was of a different species than the white man.'<sup>74</sup> Thomas Carlyle, whose influence on contemporary debates is considered in Chapter Four, claimed that black people were born to be mastered and could never attain to the level of English civilisation.

Gates sees resistance to such thinking in the insistence of black intellectuals that they master 'the very essence of Western civilization.'<sup>75</sup> Only then, Crummell claimed, and not through a 'stinted training ... a caste education [or] a Negro curriculum,' could he 'claim his rightful heritage, as a man.'<sup>76</sup> Fanon similarly characterised the black man of the Antilles who strove to become 'closer to being a real human being ... [by] his mastery of the French language.'<sup>77</sup> For Crummell, the study of western culture ought

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<sup>74</sup> Crummell, 'The Attitude of the American Mind Towards the Negro Intellectual', in *Destiny and Race: Selected Writings, Alexander Crummell*, ed. by Wilson J. Moses (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), 289-300 (p. 292).

<sup>75</sup> Gates, *Loose Canons*, p. 71.

<sup>76</sup> Moses, *Destiny and Race*, p. 297.

<sup>77</sup> Fanon, p. 18.

to begin with the study of English; apart from the fact that English was the language spoken by the majority of the first prospective students, it was the obvious and self-evidently correct choice as Crummell explained in an important speech, 'The English Language in Liberia', that he delivered twice (1860 and 1861) before the opening of the college.<sup>78</sup> He argued that English should be the medium of evangelisation and civilisation on the basis that it was 'a language of force and power,' 'simple, terse and forceful,' unique in its 'thought, its wisdom, its practicality, its enterprising spirit, its transforming power.' He claimed that its etymology was Anglo-Saxon in the main and this gave it 'force, precision and boldness.' These qualities impart to the speaker of it a common sense and integrity not associated with other languages. Moreover, it was, Crummell believed, the language of freedom; in it were enshrined 'those great charters of liberty which are the essential elements of free government and the main guarantees of personal liberty.'<sup>79</sup> No doubt, one of the 'great charters of liberty' referred to here was the American Declaration of Independence; Crummell does not seem aware of the irony implicit in his own position as an 'exile' from the country of his birth which had both English and Christianity as its bedrock.

Rachael Gilmour makes the point that the 'function of language' in the colonial context is 'to verify the hierarchical ordering of the savage and civilised, wild and cultivated, untamed and tamed.'<sup>80</sup> For Crummell, the English language embodied 'the noblest theories of liberty' and the 'grandest ideas of humanity,' whereas the 'native languages' of Liberia showed 'definite marks of inferiority.' He dismissed them all with a quotation from Dr. Leighton Wilson who described them as 'harsh, abrupt, energetic, indistinct in enunciation, meagre in point of words, abound[ing] with inarticulate nasal and guttural sounds, possess[ing] but few inflections and grammatical forms.'<sup>81</sup> Not only did Crummell have a low opinion of these languages as instruments of communication, he also regarded the culture expressed in them as

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<sup>78</sup> Alexander Crummell, 'The English Language in Liberia', *The Future of Africa: Being Addresses, Sermons etc.* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1862), 9-54.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, p. 25.

<sup>80</sup> Rachael Gilmour, *Grammars of Colonialism: Representing Languages in Colonial South Africa* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 1.

<sup>81</sup> Crummell, 'The English Language', p. 19.

hopelessly inferior. Since they were the languages of 'rude barbarians' they must be 'marked by brutal and violent sentiments,' which displayed as a 'predominance of animal propensities.'<sup>82</sup> The abandonment of such languages in favour of a 'civilised' tongue would be a first step in removing the indigenous peoples from the jungle, as Fanon remarked. But as Ngugi wa Thiong'o reminds us, 'language ... is the collective memory bank of a people's experience and history.'<sup>83</sup> One of the many paradoxes of Crummell's thought is that while he acknowledged the immensity of the loss of African culture experienced by slaves in the United States, including his own father, he still justified the civilising mission that would lead to the same losses for the sixteen indigenous peoples of Liberia. While extolling the fact that the descendants of slaves now shared the 'speech of Chaucer and Shakespeare, of Milton and Wordsworth, of Bacon and Burke, of Franklin and Webster,'<sup>84</sup> he recognised that in order

to give our small fraction of the race the advantages I have alluded to, a whole continent has been brought to ruin; the ocean has been peopled with millions of victims; whole tribes have been destroyed; nations on the threshold of civilization returned to barbarism; and generation upon generation of our sires brutalised.<sup>85</sup>

Appiah argues that Crummell's love of the English language stemmed, not from its being the '*Sprageist* of the Anglo-Saxons ... but [that it was] the vehicle of Christianity.'<sup>86</sup> Crummell thought that the greatest blessing of the English language was 'its peculiar identity with religion,' and felt that no other language was better suited to the expression and dissemination of Christian truth. He singled out the King James Bible as a text of extraordinary beauty, whose power was 'the prompting spirit of legal statutes, constitutional compacts and scientific ventures.' In his view, it and his version of Protestantism should be the cornerstone of the civilising mission in Liberia. Therefore the list of texts that he drew up for inclusion in the syllabus would, he hoped, 'cultivate thought and reflection ... judgement and reason ... [and] a chaste

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid, p. 20.

<sup>83</sup> Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: James Currey, 1994), p. 15.

<sup>84</sup> Crummell, 'The English Language', p. 9.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, pp. 29-30.

<sup>86</sup> Appiah, p. 20.

and wholesome imagination.’ His list, a selection of poetry, essays, histories and biographies of eminent men, conforms to the ‘humanistic ideals of the Enlightenment’ as well as inculcating in the young students the processes of ‘socio-political control.’<sup>87</sup> This catalogue displays a bias towards English rather than American texts, reflecting his admiration for the expressions of culture exemplified in the High Anglican Church, Cambridge University and in the philanthropic and humanitarian organisations that had made him feel welcome and free during his sojourn in England. One text that seems out of place is Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*. However, Crummell probably saw something of himself in Crusoe’s attempts to teach Friday ‘everything that would make him useful, handy and helpful; but especially to make him speak, and understand me when I spake.’<sup>88</sup> He would certainly have agreed with the writer who saw Crusoe as ‘typical of the Britons who ... have by pluck and perseverance planted colonies all the world over and turned howling wildernesses into regions of prosperity and plenty.’<sup>89</sup>

While Liberia College was envisaged as a school for the education of boys, Blyden and Crummell also believed in the necessity of educating girls. Cooper makes the point that while the building of empires, and presumably nations also, was a ‘masculine operation,’ making them ‘into a way of life seemed to many a quintessentially female task.’<sup>90</sup> One of the few female voices that emerged from Liberia during this period is that of a visiting black American preacher who cast an ironic eye over the male-dominated public sphere in Monrovia. Amanda Smith describes a meeting for immigrants where the welcoming committee was exclusively male. She ‘infiltrated’ the meeting, bringing her own chair and placed herself in the centre of the aisle, chiding the men for talking incessantly about ‘a country where they could be MEN’<sup>91</sup> (emphasis in the original). If Liberia was thus portrayed as effecting the regeneration

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<sup>87</sup> Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest*, p. 3.

<sup>88</sup> Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* (London and Cambridge: Macmillan & Co., 1866), p. 213.

<sup>89</sup> A.C. Lidell, quoted in Alastair Pennycook, *English and the Discourses of Colonialism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 11.

<sup>90</sup> Cooper, p. 184.

<sup>91</sup> Amanda Smith, *An Autobiography: The Story of the Lord’s Dealings with Mrs. Amanda Smith, the Colored Evangelist: Containing an Account of Her Life Work of Faith and her Travels in America, England, Scotland, India and Africa as an Independent Missionary* (Chicago: Meyer and Brother Publishers, 1893), p. 415.



of black men, how was the role of women envisaged? Would they be likewise rehabilitated in their new surroundings?

Rajagopalan Radhakrishnan claims that 'nationalist ideology sets up Woman as victim and goddess simultaneously.'<sup>92</sup> Crummell was acutely conscious of the unique victimhood of the enslaved black woman:

in her girlhood all the delicate tenderness of her sex has been rudely outraged. In the field, in the rude cabin, in the press-room, in the factory, she was thrown into the companionship of coarse and ignorant men.<sup>93</sup>

Yet, Crummell would have imbibed the Victorian 'sexual ideology [which] cast women as the weaker sex [yet] endowed her at the same time with unquestionable moral authority, rooted in the ostensibly feminine virtues of nurturing, childcare and purity.'<sup>94</sup> Even with the loss of her 'femininity' and the various burdens placed on her in slavery, the black woman's burden in Liberia was to adopt the role of mother of the nation.

Crummell was appalled by the standards of educational achievement he witnessed among the female settler population. It is clear from his commentary on Americo-Liberian women that they did not conform to the ideal of the farmer's wife as constructed by Teage or to Hale's picture of the ideal female colonist, Keziah. Nor did they measure up to indigenous women, whose industry in the making of their own clothes had been noted in the travel account of Seymour. Crummell echoes Hale's castigation of newly emancipated female slaves for what he regarded as their obsessive interest in fashion. He complained about the 'general frivolousness of the female mind in this country ... and [was astonished] how women [could] live such trifling, unthinking lives.' Drawing attention to the harshness and difficulties of what was essentially frontier life, he found it difficult 'to understand [that] Parisian millinery

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<sup>92</sup> Rajagopalan Radhakrishnan, *Diasporic Mediations: Between Home and Location* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 193.

<sup>93</sup> Moses, *Destiny and Race*, p. 213.

<sup>94</sup> Antoinette Burton, 'The White Woman's Burden: British Feminists and the Indian Woman 1865-1915.' *Women's Studies International Forum*, 13, 4 (1990), 295-308 (p. 296).

maintains such a tyrannous control, as it does, over the sex.’<sup>95</sup> Crummell prescribed an education appropriate to the female mind as an antidote to the frivolity and ignorance that he detested. Since there was no organised schooling available, he advised that literary clubs should be established for the purpose of reading, writing and composition on ‘improving topics’ and that every respectable householder should ‘put in his wife’s hands some thoughtful Literary Journal.’ The study of these, he hoped, would cultivate ‘taste and thought’ and set girls on ‘the track of reflection’. As a result, women would become the ‘true and equal companions of men and not their victims.’<sup>96</sup> The role of women in Liberian settler society was restricted to the domestic sphere or to areas where nurturing characteristics, usually associated with females, would be advantageous, such as nursing and teaching. Crummell and Blyden believed that the future of the nation depended on the intellectual and moral training of girls, a view later expressed by a prominent Gold Coast educator: ‘Educate a man and you educate an individual, educate a woman and you educate a nation.’<sup>97</sup> They concurred with the sentiments of Martin Delany on the proper education for women as outlined in Chapter One and hoped that women, embedded securely in their own domestic sphere and with the proper training of the mind, could rehabilitate themselves and become the mothers of the nation.

Blyden and Crummell’s plans for education were severely undermined by their ongoing struggles with the mulatto elite which, they felt, regarded the black man as inferior to the mulatto. It seemed to them that the colour problem of the United States had replicated itself in Liberia, where being nearly white had replaced white as a mark of superiority. Crummell described the sadness he felt at arriving in Africa to find ‘one’s black face a disgrace,’ and Blyden accused the mulattoes of hating the ‘very word Negro.’ The Boston Board dismissed Crummell in 1866; since it did not pay Blyden’s salary, it could not take any action against him. Though Crummell remained in Liberia for a further six years, he had lost faith in the ruling elite in Monrovia. He

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<sup>95</sup> Crummell, ‘The English Language’, p. 42.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, p. 43.

<sup>97</sup> James Kwegiir Aggrey, quoted in *Educating Tomorrow: Lessons from Managing Girls’ Education in Africa*, ed. by Angela Thody and Eleanor Stella Kaabure (Cape Town: Juta & Co. Ltd., 2000), p. 45.

had envisaged a Protestant, culturally Anglo-Saxon, hierarchically ordered African state, characterised by 'plain living and high thinking.'<sup>98</sup> What he experienced was a mulatto enclave that he characterised as 'a filthy class ... who hate the Negro more intensely than any slave dealer in the South ever did,' and was intent on 'turning Liberia into a great Plantation.'<sup>99</sup>

Crummell left in despair in 1872, hoping that an American Protectorate could be established to govern the country, a bitter acknowledgement from a man who had insisted proudly on the capacity of black people for self-government. His only hope for the future lay with assimilated Africans. He concurred with many of Blyden's developing theories on the distinctive characteristics of the 'pure Negro,' while disagreeing with him on such fundamental issues as the role of traditional African cultures in the Liberian nation. Blyden's articulation of the theory of the 'African Personality' is one of his most important legacies to succeeding generations of black nationalists. It is rooted in his concept of race and explains why he felt that the Negro race would never reach self-actualisation outside of Africa nor in a cultural setting that neglected to honour and celebrate its essence, such as the ill-fated Liberian College. Ironically, his thinking was influenced by and mirrored to a large extent the Euro-American racial doctrines of the day.<sup>100</sup> He accepted the premise that races were distinct but denied the supposed superiority of whites, insisting that 'each race was equal but distinct,' endowed with different talents, instincts and destiny. He concurred with the views that different races could not co-exist and that successful nation building was contingent on racial homogeneity. These beliefs provided the theoretical framework for his 'mission' to repatriate diasporic Africans to Liberia; he concluded that only in Africa, the source of 'rain and sunshine and the fertilizing dews,' could the black man 'come into his own.'<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> The phrase is William Wordsworth's from a sonnet 'Written in London, 1802.'

<sup>99</sup> Blyden, quoted in Lynch, p. 41.

<sup>100</sup> These views were promulgated in many purportedly scientific texts from the mid-nineteenth century and are dealt with more fully in Chapter Four. Examples include James Hunt, *On the Negro's Place in History* (London, 1863), J.C. Nott, *Types of Mankind: Or Ethnological Researches* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1855) and Count Arthur de Gobineau, *Moral and Intellectual Diversity of Races* (Philadelphia, Lippincott, 1856).

<sup>101</sup> Blyden, 'Call of Providence', p. 71.

Blyden was influenced by European nationalist writing by Mazzini, Fichte and most especially Herder who 'advocated racial and national unity and averred that every people had its special mission to fulfil.'<sup>102</sup> Discerning what the special mission of a race might be demanded a recognition of its essential defining qualities. Blyden's theorising on the essence of the Negro race bears a striking similarity to the writings of contemporaries such as Ernest Renan and Matthew Arnold. Renan, in *Poetry of the Celtic Races* (1859) and Arnold in *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (1867), categorise the Celtic spirit as feminine, childlike and spiritual in opposition to the masculine materiality and political energy of the Teutonic races. Blyden's concept of the African Personality is built on a similar series of binaries and in opposition to everything that he deemed western culture to be. He described the European character as individualistic, competitive and aggressive; in contrast, the African was socialistic, co-operative and yielding. European society was highly materialistic, overly reliant on science and losing touch with both the land and God. African society, largely agricultural, had 'leisure and taste for the metaphysical.' Africa would never, he hoped, develop cities; rather he expressed the wish that 'Bethlehems and Nazareths [would] spring up in various parts of the continent.' He cited the novelist George Sand, who wrote: 'there are forces of weakness, of attractiveness, of docility, of attractiveness or of suavity, which are quite as real as the forces of vigour, of encroachment, of violence and of brutality.'<sup>103</sup> These 'softer aspects of human nature,' outlined by Sand, he ascribes to the Negro race for the 'African is the Feminine.' He argued that the world at that particular juncture needed the African race to save it from the forces of material and greed that threatened to destroy it. He envisaged a time when Africa would be the 'spiritual conservatory of the world,' and that Europeans would have to resort to Africa in order to recover some of the simple elements of faith.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Lynch, p. 60.

<sup>103</sup> Blyden, 'Origin and Purpose', pp. 126-128.

<sup>104</sup> Blyden, 'Africa's Service to the World', *CINR*, 130-149 (p. 143).

Crummell agreed with the basic idea that the special genius of the African race was its 'addiction to aesthetical culture,' which he regarded as a feminine quality and typical of the those people 'whose ancestral homes were in the southern latitudes ... the children of the sun.' He summarised the African character as marked by a 'proneness to spontaneity,' a natural love of 'that which is pleasing, polished and adorning,' ... a lover of harmonies and colours ... all the rich, precocious, gorgeous and genuine plants.' But, he cautioned that spontaneity, valuable as it is, requires the restraints and limitations which come from judgement and which can only be furnished by the 'imperial faculties of moral and mental nature, the conscience and Reason [because] no people can be fed on flowers.'<sup>105</sup> The required counterbalance of the 'imperial faculties' would be furnished by the culture of the most successful imperial power of the time, the British.

The logic of these positions as applied to Liberia led to a divergence between Blyden and Crummell on the future of the nation. Crummell believed that the native African would have to move metaphorically towards Monrovia, for all its faults, and cleave to the Euro-American idea of civilisation. He saw nothing of value in indigenous cultures so these would have to be obliterated in the drive towards expansion and development; the 'softness' of the African way of life would yield to the 'robustness' of modernity. His personal accounts of successful assimilation of indigenous Africans and 'recaptives' into Western civilisation describe their mastery of literacy, their rejection of traditional values and conversion to Christianity and their acquisition of proficiency with firearms. In response to those accusatory voices in the United States, who claimed that Liberians had adopted 'precisely the same policy that other colonizers [had] for the last hundred years in Africa,'<sup>106</sup> Crummell attempted to frame assimilationist policies as humanitarian: 'assuming the ... childhood of the natives... [the state had] responsibility of guardianship over them.' Because the Africans were like children, they could not yet recognise what was best for themselves and might

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<sup>105</sup> Crummell, quoted in *Civilisation and Black Progress in the South*, ed. by J. R. Oldfield (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1995), 153-154.

<sup>106</sup> *Proceedings of the Colored National Convention Held in Rochester*, July 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>, 1853 (Rochester: Printed at the office of Frederick Douglass' Paper, 1853), 47-57.

even need to be coerced. He cited John Stuart Mill (1859) who argued that ‘barbarians have no right as a *nation* except a right to such treatment as may, at the earliest possible period, fit them for becoming one.’<sup>107</sup> Crummell claimed that the use of ‘proper’ force was the state’s ‘prerogative and duty with respect to the native.’ It should be the

force of restoration and progress, the force which anticipates the insensate ferocity of the pagan, by demonstrating the blessedness of permanent habitation and lasting peace; which forestalls a degrading ignorance and superstition by the enlightenment of schools and training.<sup>108</sup>

As proof of the effectiveness of Liberia’s policy of eradicating slavery within its borders, he claimed that entire tribes had migrated from the interior seeking the protection of the government and some of them even evinced proof of its civilising reach:

one day a naked savage came to my house and asked me for a pen and paper. I inquired ‘what do you want with them?’ He replied, ‘I want to write a letter.’ The man I said was a naked savage and the person to whom he sent it was a naked savage; yet, if there is one, there are hundreds of savages who have been taught in our schools, and after receiving some education have returned to their homes.<sup>109</sup>

While it is highly unlikely that the acquisition of literacy proceeded in the presence of nakedness, one of the marks of savagery to the settlers, it is clear that Crummell regarded the ‘savage’s’ ability to hold a pen as a positive step towards western modernity. A further and even more hopeful sign is illustrated in his account of the advances made by ‘recaptives,’ many of whom had become fully assimilated. Crummell regarded them as more malleable by virtue of the fact they lacked local knowledge, and facing hostility from the local indigenous peoples, were forced to turn for protection to the government:

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<sup>107</sup> Quoted in *John Stuart Mill on Civilization and Barbarism*, ed. by Michael Levin (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 41.

<sup>108</sup> Crummell, ‘Our National Mistakes and the Remedy for them’ (Monrovia 1870), in *Africa and America: Addresses and Discourses* (Springfield, Mass.: Willey, 1891), 167-198 (p. 185).

<sup>109</sup> Crummell, *African Repository*, 37 (Washington, D.C.: C. Alexander, 1861), p. 275.

... they are quiet, peaceable, industrious men. No vestiges of idolatry - such as fetishism, obeahism, or devil worship - have been observed among them, and they have embraced the Christian faith. They have now become citizens of the republic. They have been enrolled among her soldiers, and they can now perform their duties with as much precision as the others. There is nothing which does so much for civilising a man as putting a gun into his hands. It makes a savage into a man directly.<sup>110</sup>

In contrast, Blyden felt that assimilation did not necessitate the total abandonment of traditional culture; the Africans would benefit from the best that Western culture had to offer, while, in turn, the settlers should turn towards the interior and learn from the culture of the indigenous Africans, 'the lordly natives ... who have never felt the trammels of a foreign yoke.'<sup>111</sup> His vision for the future of Liberia, inextricably linked in his mind with the fortunes of its educational establishments, was articulated in an address on 'Aims and Methods of a Liberal Education for Africans' that he delivered at the inauguration of the reconstituted Liberia College in 1880. On this occasion, Blyden visualised an institution that would be 'suited to the necessities of the country and the race ... [as well as] suited to the individuality and the manhood of the African.' He employed the mythical figure of the Sphinx as representing Africa, posing riddles to passers-by, to emphasise his theory that only Africans could understand or explain the needs of the Negro race. He hoped that his new curriculum would allow 'the African [to] advance by methods of his own.'

Daniel Paracka in his study of Fourah Bay college of Sierra Leone points to the importance of the college's links to North and West African Arabs.<sup>112</sup> Blyden likewise envisaged Liberia College as furnishing an alternative paradigm to the Middle Passage, privileging a different set of 'roots' and 'routes.' His American contemporary, Henry David Thoreau, wrote of the journeys undertaken by the English settlers in America: 'The Atlantic is a Lethean stream, in our passage over which we have had an

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid, p. 277.

<sup>111</sup> Blyden, 'The Call of Providence', p. 68.

<sup>112</sup> Daniel Paracka, *The Athens of West Africa: A History of International Education at Fourah Bay College, Freetown, Sierra Leone* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), p. 92.

opportunity to forget the Old World and its institutions.’<sup>113</sup> What Blyden wished for the Liberian settlers was an even more drastic amnesia; they would have to forget the history of the Middle Passage as well as the narrative of modern Euro-American history and the articulation of ‘those theories - theological, social and political - [that] were invented for the degradation and proscription of the Negro.’<sup>114</sup> He therefore proposed that modern history be excluded from the curriculum of Liberia College to be replaced by a history of ancient Africa.

Just as his predecessors Russwurm and Teage had done, he challenged the Euro-American voices who claimed with great authority that Africa had contributed nothing to the world’s civilisation. A contemporary writer on Liberian affairs wrote:

If all the Negroes of all generations have ever done were to be obliterated from recollection forever, the whole world would lose no great truth, no profitable arts, no exemplary form of life. The loss of all that is African would offer no memorable deduction from anything but the black catalogue of crime.<sup>115</sup>

Blyden’s rebuttal of such thinking appeared in ‘The Negro in Ancient History’ (1869), the first work by a black man to appear in a literary journal.<sup>116</sup> Laurie Maffly-Kipp makes the point that intellectual western black people constructed an image of Africa by drawing on biblical and classical sources, choosing ‘one African lineage ... in place of another, perhaps more troubling, image.’<sup>117</sup> Blyden opted for a vision of the African as central to Western civilisation. Drawing on evidence from the Bible and the works of Herodotus and Homer, he concluded that the ‘enterprising sons of Ham, from which [he] was descended’ had built the Pyramids. As he viewed them for the first time, he described ‘the blood flow[ing] faster through [his] veins’ and wished that he

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<sup>113</sup> Henry David Thoreau, *Walking*, 1852 (Los Angeles, CA.: Enhanced Media Publishing, 2017), p. 34.

<sup>114</sup> Blyden, ‘Aims and Methods of a Liberal Education’, p. 95.

<sup>115</sup> A.H. Foote, *Africa and the American Flag* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1854), p. 207.

<sup>116</sup> It was published in *The Methodist Quarterly Review* (New York: Carlton and Lanahan, 1869).

<sup>117</sup> Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp, *Setting Down the Sacred Past: African-American Race Histories* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press at Harvard University Press, 2010), p. 27. As noted in the previous chapter, one of the uncomfortable and troubling facts, elided from the history of the indigenous Africans, is that at least some of the indigenous tribes acted as middlemen between the interior and the coast in the transatlantic slave trade.



could address every African in the world with the words of Hilary Teage's poem, 'Retake Your Fame.'<sup>118</sup> It is particularly appropriate that he attributed to the sons of Ham such a monumental treasure at a time when the hegemonic white discourse on slavery invariably invoked the 'curse of Ham' as a justification for its continuance. The reclamation of African history would entail the eventual introduction of Arabic and native languages into the curriculum; in the meantime, the main 'instruments of culture' employed by the college would be Latin and Greek, not just for their efficacy in the development of mental discipline, but also because they do not contain 'a sentence, a word or a syllable disparaging to the Negro.'<sup>119</sup> Blyden also had come to the conclusion that Islam was a religion more suited to the needs of the African than Christianity, which had stunted the development of the Negro by disparaging traditional customs and institutions. By contrast, Islam had brought about the flowering of the 'African Personality,' had preserved native institutions and had been a unifying force, transcending tribal divisions and hostilities. This overly idealised view was challenged by Crummell's overly hostile corrective, when he opined that while Muslims had furnished 'a modicum of enlightenment, they [had flooded] the continent everywhere with oceans of disaster, ruin and bloodshed.'<sup>120</sup> Blyden's approach to the construction of a Liberian identity demanded a selective approach to history: in omitting the history of transatlantic slavery he hoped to downplay the experience of loss and degradation of New World Africans. At the same time, he chose to ignore the endemic nature of slavery in the Arabic cultures that he lauded and elevated.

Blyden despaired of the fact that

the Christianised Negro looked away from his native heath ... [was] under the curse of an insatiable ambition for imitation of foreign ideas and foreign customs ... [found] neither delight nor solace in the sympathetic study of native institutions.' He advocated the 'creation of a national culture that

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<sup>118</sup> Blyden, *From West Africa to Palestine* (Freetown: T.J. Sawyer, 1873), p. 112.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid*, p. 97.

<sup>120</sup> Quoted in Moses, *Destiny and Race*, p. 189.

would represent the African idea ... African literature, with the smell of Africa upon it ... African freedom, African thought and African theology.<sup>121</sup>

A return to indigenous African culture would provide an entry into the past for the settlers from the New World, facilitate a return to the source and allow the African Personality to find expression.<sup>122</sup> For Blyden, then, diasporic Africans

must listen to the songs of our unsophisticated brethren as they sing their history, as they tell of their traditions, of the wonderful and mysterious events of their tribal and national life, of the achievement of what we call their superstitions; we must lend a ready ear to the ditties of the Kroomen who pull our boats, of the Pesseh and Golah men, who till our farms; we must read the compositions of the Mandingoes and the Veys. We shall in this way get back the strength of the race.<sup>123</sup>

His plans for the education of a new Liberian are expressions of his imagining a Negro nation, combining the 'best which has been thought and said in the world,' with the distinctive features of the African soul.<sup>124</sup>

When Blyden later came to critique the condition of Liberia, he judged it as a failed African state and concluded that the fault lay with the American settlers. He believed that their failure to legislate as Africans for Africans accounted for the state of almost permanent crisis that pertained in Liberia: he described it as 'racially an unconstitutional state ... [as it had] made laws for [its] social, industrial and religious government in conflict with the natural Constitution of the country.'<sup>125</sup> But how could

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<sup>121</sup> Quoted in Lynch, *Selected Letters*, p. 461.

<sup>122</sup> The lasting influence of Blyden can be seen in the writings of Amilcar Cabral, 1924-1973, leader of PAIGC against Portugal from 1962-1973. He wrote: 'the African will be free culturally only if without complexes and without underestimating the importance of accretions from the oppressor and other cultures, they return to the upward paths of their own culture, which is nourished by the living reality of its environment and which negates both harmful influences and any kind of subjection to foreign culture.' Amilcar Cabral, *Return to the Source: Selected Speeches of Amilcar Cabral* (New York: N.Y.U. Press, 1974), p. 43.

<sup>123</sup> Blyden, 'Aims and Methods of a Liberal Education', p. 106.

<sup>124</sup> The phrase is from the Preface to Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy*, 1869, in *Victorian Prose: An Anthology*, ed. by Rosemary J. Mundhenk and LuAnn McCracken Fletcher (New York: Columbia Press, 1999), 337-348 (p. 352).

<sup>125</sup> Blyden, 'Aims and Methods of a Liberal Education', p. 125.

they have created an African state when, as he claimed, they had not forgotten the New World? They had

brought with them the social, industrial and religious trammels that bound them to the intellectual and material 'fleshpots' of America ... The mere passage across the sea did not change their mental condition.

That American inheritance led them to 'legislate as Americans in America for Americans,' fashioning 'Liberia [as] a little bit of South Carolina, of Georgia, of Virginia ... tacked on to West Africa ... and further complicated by additions from other sources'. Liberia could only hope to develop as an African nation if it forged a connection 'with the parent stock ... who are the root, branch and flower of Africa and of any Negro State in Africa;' otherwise it might as well become a part of some European colony.<sup>126</sup> Blyden's preferred option at the end of his life was that it would become a British Protectorate, but only if Britain studied, respected and preserved African institutions. His friendship with Mary Kingsley and the foundation of the African Society in 1901 bolstered his faith in the future of British imperialism in Africa.

Pratt has drawn attention to the fact that Kingsley located herself within the project of empire while rejecting the tropes of imperial domination, seeking to separate mastery from domination and knowledge from control.<sup>127</sup> Blyden admired Kingsley's books on Africa, *Travels in West Africa* (1897) and *West African Studies* (1899), for their portrayal of traditional culture and institutions and concurred with her views of colonial administrators and missionary societies who casually dismissed and disregarded them. He disagreed with her idea that expansion into the interior should be left in the hands of traders, believing that the interests of 'natives' would be more secure under enlightened government rule. They both favoured the extension of British spheres of influence, hoping that the modernisation of Africa could be effected in a partnership between enlightened Europeans and Africans, who should be encouraged to develop institutions that would reveal the essence of the race.

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<sup>126</sup> Blyden, quoted in Teshale Tibetu, *Edward Wilmot Blyden and the Racial Nationalist Imagination* (Rochester: Rochester University Press, 2012), pp.102-104.

<sup>127</sup> Pratt, p. 215.

What Blyden wished for Liberia at the end of his life was akin to the Celtic-English union envisaged by Arnold, as 'a happy patriarchal marriage between the feminine and attractive but inferior Celt and the masculine and superior Saxon, whose domination was natural and inevitable but whose own existence would be enriched by feminine influence'.<sup>128</sup> Blyden denied the superiority of any one race, envisaging a marriage of equals between the masculine energy of a European imperial power and the feminine essence of the African character, hoping that the former would not overwhelm the latter. Yet, everything in the history of Liberia that he had experienced, from the appropriation of its territory by the British and the French to the crippling exploitative loans, showed that the nation was 'powerless to protect itself against the weight of brute force.'<sup>129</sup> An American analyst reported the widespread desire among 'the unofficial classes' for an American protectorate as 'a way out of the troubles which beset them on every side.'<sup>130</sup> The country that had usually been portrayed as a child, step-child or daughter of America was now to be dependent on the 'fatherly interest' of the United States: an (American) official report advised that it should assume control of Liberia's collection of customs, appoint financial advisors, send military personnel to train its police force and establish a naval station off the coast. Blyden did not live to witness the capitulation of Liberia to the forces of western capitalism, a system that he decried as inimical to the interests of Africa. Neither did he experience the international flowering of the twentieth-century Back-to-Africa Movement, spearheaded by Marcus Garvey, a 'pure Negro' from the Caribbean like himself. He might have regarded Garvey as the 'black Moses' that he predicted would lead the exodus, and who would 'have the brass and assurance,' the 'heart, soul and faith' needed to complete the task.<sup>131</sup> He would have admired Garvey's insistence that 'Africa was for the Africans ... at home and abroad,' but he

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<sup>128</sup> Marjorie Howes, *Yeats's Nation: Gender, Class and Irishness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 22.

<sup>129</sup> Emmett J. Scott, 'Is Liberia Worth Saving?', *The Journal of Race Development*, 1, 3 (Jan 1911), 277-301 (p. 293).

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid*, p. 278.

<sup>131</sup> Cited in Lynch, *Pan-Negro Patriot*, p. 121.

would surely have been dismayed that Garvey, in his hyper-masculine imperialism, revealed no trace of the African Personality as he had envisaged it.

## Chapter 4

### Liberia: A Black Republic, or 'Uncle Tom's Refuge for the Destitute?'<sup>1</sup>

*'Travellers with closed minds can tell us little except about themselves.'*<sup>2</sup>

*'I had to look after the savage ... he was an improved specimen ... to look at him was as edifying as seeing a dog in a parody of breeches and a feather hat, walking on his hind legs.'*<sup>3</sup>

In 1848, a year after Liberia declared its independence, its first president, Joseph Jenkins Roberts, arrived in Britain to seek diplomatic recognition for the new republic. His visit brought Liberia into the spotlight at a time of ongoing transatlantic debates on abolitionism, the relative merits of schemes of colonisation and civilisation, empire and race. For the many British people who wanted to support the abolition of slavery but were uncertain as to the social and financial repercussions of such a move, the settlements in West Africa, Liberia and its neighbour the Crown Colony of Sierra Leone, were regarded as providing possible solutions. Roberts' visit coincided with the publication of Thomas Carlyle's 'Occasional Discourses on the Negro Question,' whose conclusion was that the 'black gentleman is born to be a servant and, in fact, is useful in God's creation only as a servant.'<sup>4</sup> What then of this particular black gentleman, Joseph Roberts, claiming to speak on behalf of a Negro Christian Republic seeking to take its place among the nations of the earth? Roberts' departure from Britain with the blessing of Queen Victoria seemed to provide an answer to the doubters: Liberia was proof that Negroes, freed from slavery and racism, could enter into the family of sovereign nations. Its recognition by Britain and later by France represented the acme of achievement. Yet, within two decades, the promotion of the country as a model colony transformed into

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<sup>1</sup> Sir Richard Burton, *Wanderings in West Africa*, 1863 (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1991), p. 281. All further references are to this edition and are inserted as *Wanderings* parenthetically in the text.

<sup>2</sup> Chinua Achebe, 'An Image of Africa', *Research in African Literature*, 9, 1 (Spring 1978), 1-15 (p. 12)

<sup>3</sup> Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness and Other Stories* (Ware, Herts.: Wordsworth Editions, 1995), p. 64.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Carlyle, *Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question* (London: Thomas Bosworth, 1853), p. 28. Carlyle's original pamphlet, 'Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question' appeared in *Fraser's Magazine* in 1849.

an independent nation was undermined by the accounts of British travellers who figured it as a failed state, the humanitarian agenda of its supporters overwhelmed by the changing attitude to Africa and Africans that had developed in mid-century Britain.<sup>5</sup>

Richard Phillips argues that ‘dystopian narratives are never mere descriptions, but [are] interventions.’<sup>6</sup> The literary representations of Liberia examined in this chapter can be seen as ‘interventions’ in debates about the capacity of the African race which were crystallised in Britain in the writings of Thomas Carlyle and John Stuart Mill. Mid-century travel writers such as Richard Burton and Winwood Reade agreed with Carlyle that the Negro was *ontologically* incapable of envisioning freedom and had to be ‘compelled to work [in order] to do the Maker’s will who had constructed him with such and such capabilities and prefigurements of capability.’<sup>7</sup> Later travellers to Liberia, such as Harry Johnston and Lady Dorothy Mills, tended towards Mill’s view as expressed in his response to Carlyle: that black people were not innately inferior and that the differences between the races would gradually be eroded through enlightenment and the adoption of the cultural, moral and constitutional standards of the English. In addition to the racism that colours all the texts, one also finds an intense antipathy towards American-style Republicanism. Lisa Lowe has shown how travel writing can address ‘national anxieties about maintaining hegemony in an age of rapidly changing boundaries and territories.’<sup>8</sup> The travellers belonged by and large to the English upper middle-class or aristocracy and were acutely sensitive to the increasing encroachment of the ‘lower classes’ into the public arena in Great Britain. It is scarcely surprising to find that sensitivity displaced on to the colonial sphere where it finds expression in their appalled reaction to finding people doubly offensive to their sensibilities, Negro *and* Republican, in control of commerce, the law and government.

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<sup>5</sup> Curtin argues that the 1830s and 1840s mark the high point of humanitarian influence over British imperial policy on Africa, p. 293.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Phillips, ‘Dystopian Spaces in Colonial Representations and Interventions: Sierra Leone as “The White Man’s Grave”’, *Geografiska Annaler. Series B. Human Geography*, 84, 3/4. *Special Issue: The Dialectics of Utopia and Dystopia* (2002), 189-200 (p. 189)

<sup>7</sup> Carlyle, pp. 11-14.

<sup>8</sup> Lisa Lowe, *Critical Terrains: French and British Orientalisms* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 31.

Implicit in all of the texts dealt with here is the comparison between Liberia and Sierra Leone. The invitation to compare was made explicit by Sir John Harris, the parliamentary secretary to the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society who, in a letter to the Foreign Office, described the advice he gave to Graham Greene prior to Greene's trip to Liberia in 1936:

I have strongly urged him to see a properly governed colony before he goes to Liberia, and he is now making arrangements ... to visit Sierra Leone, travel through the interior, witness the well-ordered and progressive administration on the British side of the border, then enter Liberia and travel down to Monrovia.<sup>9</sup>

Apart from Hodgkin, who admired the founding spirit of Liberia, and Greene, who was not seeking 'well-ordered and progressive,' the other writers and indeed the majority of English commentators regarded Sierra Leone as vastly superior to its neighbour, despite the frequently voiced criticism of its Creole elite. Liberia was figured as a failed anomalous state that would inevitably become part of some European political system, preferably the British Empire.

The man appointed as the first Liberian consul in Britain, Thomas Hodgkin, a Quaker doctor, is remembered today for his identification of the blood disease that bears his name. But his extensive epistolary archive reveals that he was a founder or member of all the major scientific and humanitarian organisations that flourished in early to mid-Victorian Britain, including the Aborigine Protection Society (APS, 1837), whose motto *Ab Uno Sanguine* encapsulated Hodgkin's thinking on the indivisibility and fraternity of the human family.<sup>10</sup> The rhetoric of such organisations was characterised by paternalistic racism; the 'backward races' were regarded as children who could be led into modernity by the mature races of the Anglo-Saxon world.<sup>11</sup> His concern for the fate

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<sup>9</sup> Sir John Harris, quoted in Tim Butcher, *Chasing the Devil: The Search for Africa's Fighting Spirit* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2010), p. 22.

<sup>10</sup> *The Colonial Intelligencer; or, Aborigines Friend*. New Series, 3, 27 (London: Published for the Society, 1850).

<sup>11</sup> Evidence of the persistence of this attitude into the twentieth century can be found in the writing of Albert Schweitzer in the 1930s. Referring to his relationship to 'the African,' he wrote: 'I am your brother, it is true, but your elder brother.' Albert Schweitzer, *The Primeval Forest* (Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1998), p. 99.



of indigenous peoples worldwide had led him to view with distaste certain aspects of British colonial practice. He regarded British colonial settlements as fundamentally unjust, driven as they were by the desire for 'pecuniary aggrandizement' and the need in the metropolis to find a living space for the nation's 'redundant population.'<sup>12</sup>

Hodgkin's close friendship with prominent ACS agents Elliott Cresson and Ralph Gurley, whose visits to Britain in the 1830s and 1840s he facilitated, and his correspondence with Liberians Joseph Roberts and Hilary Teage led him to promote Liberia as an alternative colonial model of settler colonialism. On the foundation of the British African Colonization Society (1834) of which he was an enthusiastic member, he wrote that he was opposed to colonies that sought 'to remove the original possessors of the soil, to make way for an exotic race.'<sup>13</sup> However, he believed that racial, if not cultural, affinity gave the Liberian settlers a moral advantage over European colonisers; thus he hoped that they would promote civilisation and Christianity without destroying indigenous populations and cultures. Moreover, the settlers' involvement in legitimate commerce could not fail to inspire the local tribes to abandon the slave trade. Thomas Buxton, who had his own plans for the *civilization*, but avowedly not for the *colonization* of Africa, conceded that Liberia 'presents an example of a black community managing their own affairs on civilised principles ... [and] the natives bordering on [it] are very desirous of putting their children in [its] care.'<sup>14</sup> In this new version of the colonial relationship the 'aborigines' would be protected by settlers who shared their racial heritage and therefore would be instrumental in the creation of a national family. Impressed by what he regarded as the early success of the Liberian colony, Hodgkin proposed that small settlements of freed slaves from British colonies, supported by British philanthropy, would be 'planted' along the west African coast, thus solving the 'problem' of emancipation in the West Indies.

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<sup>12</sup> Hodgkin appeared before the Select Committee on 9th May and 11th June, 1836.

<sup>13</sup> 'Dr. Hodgkin's Remarks on the African Colonisation Society', in *African Repository and Colonial Journal*, 10 (Washington: James C. Dunn, 1834), p. 308.

<sup>14</sup> Thomas Fowell Buxton, *The African Slave Trade and Its Remedy* (London: John Murray, 1840), p. 487.

The declaration of Liberian independence confirmed Hodgkin in his view that Liberia was a black Utopia that proved that the supposed inferiority of black people was the result of nothing more than the 'slow but long continued operation of causes affecting the cultivation or the neglect of the intellectual faculties.'<sup>15</sup> Championing Liberia as the ideal colony, he expressed his regret that Britain had not 'copied the good example set in the American colony' in which the 'surrender of territory and sovereignty is purchased, where constitutional government is established and a simple intelligible and Christian code of laws is in operation to which natives and colonists are obliged to submit.'<sup>16</sup> In his support for Liberia, Hodgkin was at odds with the thinking of the time, both in the 1830s and 1840s when the popular mood favoured immediate abolition and decried colonization,<sup>17</sup> and later in the 1850s and 1860s, when the very humanity of the African race was called into question. His regard for the capability of the Negro race, as evidenced by what he felt was the good governance of Liberia, was severely at odds with the darkening view of so-called inferior races that came to dominate the discourse over the next decades.

A split in the Ethnological Society of London (ESL) and the subsequent establishment of a rival organisation, the Anthropological Society of London (ASL) encapsulated the growing divisions on the subject of race.<sup>18</sup> The founder of the new society, James Hunt, argued in his inaugural paper, 'On the Negro's place in Nature' (1863), that Africans belonged to a different species, closer to the ape than to the European. As a result, they

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<sup>15</sup> Thomas Hodgkin, 'On Great and Sudden Change in the Circumstances of a Race, Considered in Reference to the Emancipation of the Negro', in *Freed-Man*, vol. 2 (London: S. W. Partridge, 1865), 90-102 (p. 94).

<sup>16</sup> Hodgkin, quoted in Zoe Laidlaw, 'Heathens, Slaves and Aborigines: Thomas Hodgkin's Critiques of Missions and Anti-Slavery', *History Workshop Journal*, 64 (Autumn 2007), 133-161 ( p. 153).

<sup>17</sup> For an in-depth discussion of the rise of Immediatism in Britain and the attempts of the ACS to counter it, see Richard J. M. Blakett, *Building an Antislavery Wall: Black Americans in the Atlantic Abolitionist Movement 1830-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983)

<sup>18</sup> For background on the split between the ESL and Hunt, see George W. Stocking Jr., 'What's in a Name? The Origins of the Royal Anthropological Institute (1837-71)', in *Man*, New Series, vol. 6, 3 (Sept 1971), 369-390.

The ESL (1843) was another of the many societies that bore the stamp of Hodgkin's thinking. It was an offshoot of the APS which he had initially hoped would combine humanitarian activism with a study of mankind. He gradually came to see the need for a separate society having 'nothing to do with any missionary, educational or commercial operation.' Kass and Kass, p. 393.

could be 'humanized' and 'thrive only in those parts of the world where [they] lived in [their] natural subordination to the European.'<sup>19</sup> Decrying advocates of the abolition of slavery, he warned that

the Negro has an aversion to labour, and so great a propensity for indulgence and vice, that no prospect of advantage can stimulate him ... without force, he will sink into lethargy and revert to his primitive, savage character.<sup>20</sup>

Hunt opined that the system of slavery of the American South produced the ideal black man. It rendered him productive by the enforced labour regime yet also provided him with an outlet for his supposed innately affectionate nature: 'nowhere does the Negro character shine as highly as it does in his childish and fond attachment to his master and his family.'<sup>21</sup> Such classification of black people as innately and permanently servile appeared, as Catherine Hall reminds us, as a reaction to their increasing visibility in the metropolis.<sup>22</sup> Fighting a rear-guard action, the supposedly scientific method of categorising racial difference employed by the ASL reduced the African to a *body*: Blyden later excoriated Hunt, Reade and Burton as

noisy and blustering anthropologists ... who invented all sorts of arguments based on the estimates of physical phenomena as conceived by phrenology or physiognomy, using signs and symbols taken from every part of the man ... to prove the mental and moral inferiority of the Negro.<sup>23</sup>

The ASL characterised an approach to Africa from the middle of the nineteenth century that led to the darkening of the continent in the European imagination. Its members can be regarded as 'imperialists' before the age of formal imperial rule. Bridges in his commentary on explorers in East Africa points out that they 'explicitly or implicitly ... recommended that [it] should be ruled by Europeans [and] while such ideas had little

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<sup>19</sup> James Hunt, *On the Negro's Place in Nature: A Paper Read before the London Anthropological Society* (London: Trubner & Co. 1863), p. 52.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, p. 53.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, p. 55.

<sup>22</sup> Catherine Hall, p. 45.

<sup>23</sup> Edward Blyden, *African Life and Customs* (Baltimore, MD.: Black Classic Press, 1994), p. 8.

effect until the late 1870s, they did create a 'frame of reference' within which latter missionaries and administrators were to work.'<sup>24</sup>

The travel books of Reade and Burton appeared at a time when the British reading public felt that they 'knew' Africa. An article in *The Daily Telegraph* (1866), while claiming that Africa had become a 'bore', characterised the continent as 'a black wilderness, inhabited by foul, fetid, fetish worshipping, loathsome and lustful barbarians.'<sup>25</sup> The writings of Reade and Burton lie firmly within that discourse; Reade, in particular, seems to be particularly fascinated with tales of cannibalism, 'sprinkling cannibals around West Africa rather like raisins on a cake.'<sup>26</sup> Yet, there was another, less familiar, Africa; the westernised Africa of the coast in Sierra Leone and Liberia where hierarchies of class and race were disrupted by the presence of black people who were striving to attain power or had actually done so. Liberia's rhetorical representation as a land of freedom for black people represented a profound destabilisation of Fanon's notion of the colonial world as Manichean where, as Christopher Fyfe points out, 'authority was manifested very simply. White gave orders, black obeyed.'<sup>27</sup> The strategy employed by English observers to deal with this cognitive dissonance was to insist on the 'scientific fact' of the inferiority of black people and to denigrate the achievements and culture of the young nation.

The European colonial landscape of West Africa in the mid-nineteenth century consisted mainly of British and French interests, among which the British colony of Sierra Leone was distinctive due to the role played by the Creole elite. By the time of Reade and Burton's visits, the Creoles were known simply as 'Black English,' a name that the British had bestowed on them. They were a prosperous bourgeoisie who had risen in the ranks of the civil service, a logical conclusion of the 'civilising mission.' The English governor saw in them the opportunity to create a Christian African community that would serve

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<sup>24</sup> Roy Bridges, quoted in Tim Youngs, *Travellers in Africa: British Travelogues, 1850-1900* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), p. 5.

<sup>25</sup> Quoted in Douglas Lorimer, *Colour, Class and the Victorians: English Attitudes to the Negro in the MidNineteenth Century* (London: Leicester University Press, 1978), p. 12.

<sup>26</sup> Hammond and Jablow, p. 94.

<sup>27</sup> Christopher Fyfe, 'Race, Empire and the Historians', *Race and Class*, 33, 4 (1992), 15-30 (p. 15).

as a model of enlightenment for their fellow countrymen<sup>28</sup> and a British Parliamentary Select Committee in 1865 recommended self-government for the colony under their leadership.<sup>29</sup> In neighbouring Liberia, another class of westernised Africans was attempting to 'impose a deliberately American civilization on their decidedly African milieu.'<sup>30</sup> Both Creoles and Americo-Liberians existed not only outside the norms of the Englishness and Americanness that they tried to imitate but also outside the known African norms of savagery. In their liminality, they attracted the fiercest criticism from European travellers. Reade and Burton were profoundly disoriented and outraged at the encroachment of 'natives' into the space normally reserved for white men. As good 'anthropologists' they would have agreed with their friend, Hunt, that the black man had a place in nature as a labourer or beast of burden. Neither of them had any objections to slavery. Reade saw no cruelty in it; believing that the 'negro is often happier as a slave to a white man than as a free man in his own country.'<sup>31</sup> While Burton believed that the 'negro instinct' doomed the African to a state of perpetual savagery, he still foresaw for him a role in civilisation, where 'the black hand' would be needed to clear the 'enormous tropical regions ... [and] fit them to become the dwelling-places of civilized men.'<sup>32</sup> Thus the greatest challenge faced by Reade and Burton on their travels in West Africa was not the 'savage' but the 'improved African' that they encountered in the towns along the coast.

### **William Winwood Reade (1838-1875) and Sir Richard Burton (1821-1890)**

One of the stated missions of the ASL was the accumulation of ethnological knowledge in advancing the cause of the aggrandisement of the British Empire. Thus Reade's *Savage Africa* (1864) and *The African Sketchbook* (1874) and Burton's *Wanderings in*

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<sup>28</sup> T.C. McCaskie, 'Cultural Encounters: Britain and Africa in the Nineteenth Century', in *Black Experience and the Empire* ed. by Philip D. Morgan and Sean Hawkins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 166-193 (p. 169).

<sup>29</sup> Vivian Bickford-Smith, 'The Betrayal of Colonial Elites', in Morgan and Hawkins, 194-227 (p. 202).

<sup>30</sup> Everill, p. 77.

<sup>31</sup> Winwood Reade, *Savage Africa: Being the Narrative of a Tour in Equatorial, Southwestern and Northwestern Africa* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1864), p. 238. All references are to this edition and appear as *Savage* parenthetically in the text.

<sup>32</sup> Richard Burton, *Two Trips to Gorilla Land and the Cataracts of the Congo* (New York: Johnson, 1876), p. 311.

*West Africa* (1863) became vehicles by which the whole of West Africa was positioned so that it would, sooner or later, be 'influenced, exploited or ... directly controlled,' by the English.<sup>33</sup> Reade presents an Africa that had been widely exposed to European civilisation, where, as Driver put it, 'a world of cultural difference was being contaminated by the world market.'<sup>34</sup> Those parts of Africa, not opened up to modernity, such as the interior of Liberia, are 'a white blot on the page of science, a *terra incognita* in this age of steam' (Savage, 384) a comment which Mc Laughlan argues reveals Reade's unease at a 'deficit in Victorian claims to encyclopaedic awareness and panoptic visions.'<sup>35</sup> Reade's vision for the 'redemption' of Africa would eliminate that deficit; he and Burton believed that the only European power that had the resources to remove the 'blot' and finally conquer all of Africa was Britain. While their focus is not solely on Liberia, their writings express the view that Africans generally, whether acting alone or in concert with a British ruling class, are incapable of partaking in the activities of power.

Fabian has characterised as 'colonial hagiography' the discourse of the nineteenth-century European in Africa: 'the intrepid explorers mapping the unknown; saintly missionaries offering their lives for the salvation of pagans; heroic military men vanquishing an enemy that always outnumbered them; unselfish administrators toiling for the public good.'<sup>36</sup> Winwood Reade (1838-1875) did not fit easily into any of these categories; he described his intention to be the

first young man about town to make a *bona fide* tour in West Africa; to travel ... with no special object and at his own expense, to flâneur in the virgin forest; to flirt with pretty cannibals and to smoke cigars among cannibals. (Savage, 1)

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<sup>33</sup> Roy Bridges, 'Exploration and Travel outside Europe 1720-1914', in *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing* ed. by Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 53-69 (p. 53).

<sup>34</sup> Felix Driver, 'Distance and Disturbance: Travel, Exploration and Knowledge in the Nineteenth Century', *Transactions of the RHS*, 14 (2004), 73-92 (p. 78).

<sup>35</sup> Robbie McLaughlan, *Re-Imaging the "Dark Continent" in fin de siècle Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), p. 2.

<sup>36</sup> Johannes Fabian, *Out of Our Minds: Reason and Madness in the Exploration of Central Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), p. 5.

Despite his claim to having ‘no pretensions to the title of explorer,’ he did aspire to opening ‘up a new region, and to have a red line of [his] own on the map’ (*Sketch*, vol.2, 351). His second voyage to Africa was sponsored by a West Africa trader, Andrew Swanzy and was conceived as a scientific venture; Reade planned to collect insects for the Royal Geographic Society, botanical specimens for Kew Gardens and ethnological data for Thomas Huxley. While Reade was something of a dilettante, Sir Richard Burton was an experienced explorer and colonial official and something of a renaissance man: best known for his explorations in East Africa, he was also an ethnologist, polyglot, poet, infantry officer and a consul of the British Foreign Office. He was perhaps the best known proponent of the polygenist thesis as promulgated by the ASL at the time of his travels in West Africa, his account of which was originally published anonymously under the heading ‘Author a F.R.G.S.’, probably due to the harshness of his views on Africans.

The words ‘wanderings’ in the title of Burton’s book and ‘sketch’ in Reade’s point to the fact that these are more impressionistic than scientific accounts of exploration. Reade’s characterisation of himself as a flâneur suggests a harmless and innocent tour, with no political intent whatsoever. Nor was his work regarded as having any scientific value; despite his sponsorship by the RGS, his journey ‘had not excited the slightest interest among English geographers.’ Thus he wrote in the preface to the book ‘I hope to have many lady readers and therefore reserve for a future publication much matter of a purely scientific nature’ (*Sketch*, vii). Despite his airy dismissal of it as suitable for mainly ‘lady readers,’ this book, and his previous work, promote a view of Africa that is aggressively imperialist at a time when the major European powers were on the threshold of a carve-up of the continent and when Liberia struggled to protect its borders from the encroachments of the British and the French.

Reade’s books chart a well-worn path from the grey, familiar English port to Africa, ‘that land of adventure and romance’ (*Savage*, 12), his first encounter with the ‘native,’ and with Negroes who call themselves ‘civilised.’ In Bhabha’s formulation, the coloniser, the ‘civilised’ post-enlightenment man, is ‘tethered to his dark reflection, the shadow of the colonised man ... that breaches his boundaries, repeats his actions at a distance, disturbs

and divides the very time of his being.’<sup>37</sup> Reade’s arrival in Sierra Leone, which he scathingly refers to as ‘The Paradise of the Blacks,’ is deeply disorienting as he finds himself ‘surrounded by boat-fuls of Negroes who called themselves Englishmen but who resemble baboons.’ His first encounter with a Creole man leads him to reflect on the effects of the British policy of assimilation and its efforts to improve Africans, a policy of which he does not approve: the ‘negro imitates the white man as the ape imitates the negro. The result in both cases is a caricature’ (*Savage Africa*, 19-23). The bestial imagery is interspersed with what he regards as moments of hilarity: the ‘most comical of all [being] the manner in which negroes identify with the parent country.’ Reade’s reaction is a reminder that the ‘black English’ were not regarded as equal to the white English at home or abroad; British claims of jurisdiction over the territory of Sierra Leone did not confer Englishness on its inhabitants, a point re-enforced by Burton who claimed that national identity could emerge only in the context of hundreds of years of civic and legal institutions.

Burton, on his visit to Freetown, took even greater offence than Reade at the behaviour of the ‘mimic men’ who encroach into areas that he believed were the preserve of the English. As a member of the British Foreign Office, a representative of British law and justice overseas, he is angered to find Africans, whom he describes as ‘half-reclaimed barbarians,’ adjudicating in the Sierra Leone courts. The ‘menace’ described by Bhabha is evident in his reaction:

surely such an outrage against reason ... such a caricature of justice ... was never contemplated by British laws. Our forefathers never dreamed that the liberty and the institutions for which during long centuries they fought and bled, would thus be prostituted - be lavished upon every black recaptive ... after a residence of some fourteen days of the English empire. (*Wanderings*, p.220)

Sierra Leone, which he characterises as ‘an unfortunate, mistaken colony’ destabilises the very idea of Englishness.

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<sup>37</sup> Bhabha, p. 62.



When Reade and Burton reach Monrovia, their distaste at the idea of a black middle class is amplified by the *Americanness* of the place and the pride of its citizens in their democracy and republicanism. Thus, the sensibilities of the travellers are doubly offended; not only are black men in positions of power but their belief in American exceptionalism allows them to characterise Europeans as inferior. Reade and Burton, in response, make it clear that they regard the idea of ‘American culture’ as oxymoronic. They believe that the manifold problems that they identify in Liberia arise from its genesis as an American idea, promulgated mainly by the same type of people they associate with Exeter Hall: evangelicals, Abolitionists, sentimental liberals and people who do not understand Africa.<sup>38</sup> For Burton, all of these types are embodied in the person of Harriet Beecher Stowe who had been rapturously received in Britain some years earlier. His representations of Liberia as ‘Uncle Tom’s refuge for the Destitute’ and ‘Mrs. Stowe’s most frouzy paradise’ mock colonialists’ tendency to portray Liberia as a utopia. In referencing Uncle Tom, he implies that the settlers were characterised by a ‘cringing servility,’<sup>39</sup> that made them pawns of the ACS. In the absence of the energy and initiative required to build empires (or any successful nation), Burton portrays Liberia as a dystopian space: a shabby, neglected and already degenerating settlement with risibly inflated ideas of its own importance (*Wanderings*, 281).

Burton positions himself as rational and objective voice on Liberia. He argues that it was a travesty of a colony due to the fact that it arose from two misguided beliefs: that people, once enslaved, could ever be emancipated and that African chiefs could cede legitimately the land of the tribe. Drawing on the authority of the Bible, the early Church Fathers and traditional African thought, Burton argues that slavery is a divinely sanctioned, natural and *permanent* state: ‘how astonished St. Athanasius and St. Augustine would have been had the idea of an “underground railway” been presented

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<sup>38</sup> Exeter Hall was a building on The Strand, London, in which meetings of the Anti-Slavery Society were held in the 1840s and 1850s, quickly becoming the ‘epicentre of the global evangelical movement’ that had become a metonym for humanitarian ideas about Africa and Africans. David William Bebbington, *The Dominance of Evangelicalism: The Age of Spurgeon and Moody* (Westmont, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2005), p. 72.

<sup>39</sup> This phrase was used by Blyden to characterise an attitude of American black people that he (and many black spokesmen) deplored, ‘Call of Providence’, p. 68.

to them!' (*Wanderings*, 270). Given the centrality of the Exodus story in anti-slavery rhetoric, it is interesting to note that Burton missed a possible analogy between the underground railroads and the miraculous deliverance of the Israelites from captivity when God parts the Red Sea in order to facilitate their crossing!<sup>40</sup>

Burton also objects to the abolition of slavery on the grounds that various forms of enslavement were common and deemed 'natural' in Africa, a frequent argument in European nineteenth-century travel texts that shifted the blame for transatlantic slavery on to Africans themselves. He explains that the idea of permanent enslavement is not repugnant to the African mind: 'in Africa, once a slave, always a slave'<sup>41</sup>... the African phrase is 'pose a man come up slave, he be slave all time' (*Wanderings*, 280). A further challenge to the legitimacy of the state arises because it was established on land supposedly purchased from African chiefs, a feature of the Liberian colony that its supporters, including Hodgkin, regarded as exceptional and praiseworthy and one that set it apart from the normative European colonial practice where land was simply taken. However, Burton dismisses such a land transaction as a 'Europeanism' that has no basis in African culture or custom, because the 'negro never parts with his ground in perpetuity' (*Wanderings*, 280). Whatever deal may have been struck between the first settlers and the local chiefs would have lapsed on the deaths of those people and the land would have reverted to the tribes.

In the judgement of Reade and Burton, Liberia is a failed nation, due not only to the innate incapacity of the Negro race but also to the flaws that they detect in its defining American characteristics: democracy, republicanism and evangelical Christianity, all anathema to both men. Burton dismisses its claim to nationhood, comparing it instead

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<sup>40</sup> It has often been noted that the Old and the New Testaments were employed in the service of campaigners for *both* the retention and the abolition of slavery. David Brion Davis claims the story of the 'Curse of Ham,' in *Genesis* was 'the most authoritative justification for slavery,' and that 'no other passage in the Bible has had such a disastrous influence through human history.' On the other side, *Exodus*, the story of a Chosen people whom God had delivered from bondage, was the most powerful text of liberation for slaves, abolitionists and colonialists. David Brion Davis, *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 64-66.

<sup>41</sup> As already noted, Burton's Liberian contemporary, Benjamin Anderson, acknowledged that the very existence and authority of Liberia was severely undermined in the minds of the indigenous peoples it sought to control by virtue of the fact that the colony had been founded by former slaves.

to a frontier territory like California: Liberia, the 'young and flourishing republic as she loves to call herself started up, like California in Lucian's *Minerva*, in 1847' (*Wanderings*, 282). Minerva emerging fully formed from the head of Jupiter, already an adult and the embodiment of wisdom, is meant to represent California which was admitted to U.S. statehood (in 1848) before it was even a territory. Both states seem to come out of nowhere, populated by a ragtag mixture of adventurers and outsiders, travelling east or west in the hope of finding freedom or riches. Burton's rejection of these new states reflects the philosophy of Thomas Arnold whose 'Introductory Lecture on becoming Regius Professor of Modern History' (1841) posited the theory that nations were analogous to the person, whose development proceeded from infancy to youth and finally manhood. Burton is repelled by the idea that nations can claim to emerge without an accumulated history of law and institutions, or battles for liberty fought over many centuries. He, like many commentators on the Liberian ruling elite, including later English travellers such as Harry Johnston and Lady Dorothy Mills, felt that the 'ideas of perfect liberty [had] too soon been given to these people, considering their perfect ignorance' (*Wanderings*, 273).

Burton characterises Liberia as a racialised copy of the United States: 'all is America blackened' (*Wanderings*, 293). For Reade, 'Liberians are Yankee to the core' (*Sketch*, vol. 2, 259).<sup>42</sup> Burton attacks what he regards as the arrogance of Yankee rhetoric of American exceptionalism and Manifest Destiny. In the United States, and second hand in Liberia, such 'bunkum' appears in the press, replete with

sneers touching kings and queens, lords and landlords, the decadence of England and the oppressively brilliant prospects of the United States, the blessings of democracy, and the curses of limited monarchy, till every New World reader thinks himself, very vainly, a shining light to those who dwell in the outer darkness of European civilisation. (*Wanderings*, 300)

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<sup>42</sup> In fact, the culture of the Liberians was modelled on that of the Southern states, the Confederacy, as opposed to the Yankees. Reade seems to be referring only to its political institutions. Both men supported the Confederacy in the American Civil War; Burton describes relaying news of a Confederate victory at the Battle of First Manassas (1861) 'not without an irrepressible chuckle', *Wanderings*, p. 292.

If America represented itself rhetorically as the exemplary 'city on a hill,' Liberia had promoted itself as occupying a similar position in Africa. Burton regards such thinking as outrageous; it was Victorian Englishmen (and a few Scotsmen) who 'opened up' Africa and they and their descendants should properly be regarded as the rulers and saviours of the continent. His thinking is an amalgam of racial and class prejudice, an imperialist world view that predated the formal colonization of Africa that was to follow the Berlin Conference (1884). He had promulgated his views on Africans in general on several occasions in the ASL. Here, we see his class prejudice; his belief in the rightness of constitutional monarchy and his distrust of democracy that he regarded as the worst form of despotism, imposed on the people by 'an ambitious and unscrupulous *medio ceto*, a dynasty of doctors, lawyers, professors and politic mongers that [enslave] them to a thousand rogues *in esse* instead of to - possibly - one' (*Wanderings*, 7).

One detects in Burton's writing an acute nostalgia for an era that was passing; as a minor aristocrat, he mourned what he saw as the loss of authority in Britain over a subordinate and subservient people. How much more painful was it for him to witness Negroes, whom he regarded as inferior, not just in class but in race, lay claim to a superior culture and form of governance? Reade also attacks the culture of Liberia where 'everything is done in small mimicry of their stepmother' (*Savage*, 29). He mocks the pretentiousness of Monrovia, which is laid out like Washington 'on an ambitious scale.' The House of Representativeness reminds him of the Capitol in Washington down to the spittoons and the politicians' feet on the table. He is contemptuous of the settlers who persist in characterising their nation as a province of freedom. While such rhetoric was central to Liberia's self-image, it is also crucial for Reade's agenda that he denigrate it, dismissing all talk of freedom as 'poetical balderdash ... served up in this Land of the Free where so many people are free to starve' (*Savage*, 30).

English visitors to Monrovia invariably commented on the poverty of Liberia, blaming it on the indolence of the settlers. Reade and Burton's judgement of the Americo-Liberians was heavily influenced by the Victorian attitude to work, with its insistence on self-reliance, self-discipline and piety, an attitude later described as the Protestant work

ethic.<sup>43</sup> Central to the propagation of such a notion were the writings on the subject by Carlyle and Samuel Smiles. Carlyle elevated work to the status of religion, claiming for it 'a religious nature characterised by its 'perennial nobleness and sacredness.'<sup>44</sup> Smiles' mid-nineteenth-century work *Self Help* defined a 'gospel of work' that spread around the globe as 'efficiently and fervently as any of the great nineteenth-century missionary endeavours.'<sup>45</sup> Both men link work with masculinity; for Carlyle, 'the one unhappiness of a man [is] that he cannot work; that he cannot get his destiny as a man fulfilled.'<sup>46</sup> Thus, the idle man is placed outside the arena of normative masculinity. In *Occasional Discourse*, Carlyle racialised the idea of idleness, arguing that the innately indolent (Negroes) must be compelled to work by white overseers. In the absence of such control and coercion, the Negro, Quashee as he calls him, 'will sit around all day, rum bottle in his hand, no breeches on his body, pumpkin at discretion and the fruitfulest region of the earth going back to jungle round him.'<sup>47</sup> Carlyle's writing exposes the paradoxical nature of his attitude to black people. In his natural state, the black man is deemed to be idle and therefore not regarded as fulfilling his true manhood; in his unpaid and involuntary labour, he is reduced to the level of a mere beast of burden, his master's property, and, therefore, not really a man. In both cases, he falls short of the model of masculine citizenship. The westernised Africans of the coast on whom Reade and Burton cast a judgmental eye were caught in this double bind: they were simultaneously faulted for their indolence and their ambition. In choosing the 'work' of government, trade and religion, instead of 'real Negro' work, they were judged to have 'lost their manhood by becoming gentlemen.'<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> While Burton and Reade may themselves have fallen within the category that Carlyle had described as 'the idle aristocracy' 'dilettante-ing' around and would surely have disapproved of his characterisation of them, they certainly accepted his formulations on work for the lower classes and races.

<sup>44</sup> Thomas Carlyle, *Past and Present* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1845), pp. 268-275.

<sup>45</sup> Asa Briggs, *Victorian People: A Reassessment of Persons and Themes, 1851-1867* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), p. 118.

<sup>46</sup> Carlyle, *Past and Present*, p. 152.

<sup>47</sup> Carlyle, *Occasional Discourses*, p. 36.

<sup>48</sup> Editorial, *Sierra Leone Weekly News*, July 30, 1862, quoted in Burton, *Wanderings*, p. 221. It is an ironic fact that the mostly idle Reade and Burton were also regarded by people like Carlyle and Smiles as in danger of becoming *feminine* and decadent.

The image of Liberia promulgated by Reade and Burton contains a cluster of stereotypes of the African and the westernised black person. Bhabha, in his formulation of the stereotype in colonial discourse, stresses the importance of 'fixity' while also drawing attention to the ambivalence of the process by which the Other is fixed in an unchanging representation.<sup>49</sup> The fact that stereotypes frequently rely on difference of skin colour or 'race' is deeply challenged in the Liberian context: can the same stereotype apply to the American Negro, the Americo-Liberian and the indigenous 'African'? Those who had been enslaved in the United States tended to be portrayed as either unpredictable, brutish, hypersexualised 'creatures' or loyal, gentle and nurturing servants. The 'African' at home was generally described as 'savage,' bestial, frequently cannibalistic and often sexually deviant. Yet, he could also be depicted as childlike and innocent, playful and eager to please. The 'improved Africans' or westernised black people may have acquired the patina of civilisation but they tended to be regarded as more savage than civilised: as characters in a Conrad story explain, they 'spoke English and French with warbling accents ... [but they] cherished in [their] innermost heart the worship of evil spirits.'<sup>50</sup> This echoes Fanon's assertion that, in the eyes of the white man, the Negro is always reduced to the level of the stereotypical African, in all his supposed bestiality and savagery.

Bernard Schweizer identifies in the writing of Graham Greene a 'coast-interior duality', the dialectic of the decadence of the coast and the innocence of the interior, which is a feature of all the travel texts examined here.<sup>51</sup> Though Burton and Reade did not subscribe to the idea of the Noble Savage, they regarded the uncivilised Africans as far superior to what they considered to be the mongrel breeds on the Coast. Thus, Burton exalts the native village where the chief 'walks about with fetishism and executioner [but where] there is still some manliness amongst men, some honour amongst women' (*Wanderings*, 267). Reade and Burton characterise the Americo-Liberians as lost between two cultures. Despite their claim to racial affinity with indigenous Africans they

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<sup>49</sup> Bhabha, pp. 94-95.

<sup>50</sup> Joseph Conrad, 'An Outpost of Progress.' Keith Carabine, ed. *Joseph Conrad: Selected Short Stories* (Ware, Herts.: Wordsworth Editions Ltd., 1997), p. 3.

<sup>51</sup> Bernard Schweizer, 'Graham Greene and the Politics of Travel', *Prose Studies*, 21, 1 (1998), 95-124 (p. 97).

are driven by the need to proclaim ‘the ‘alien-ness of the ruling group.’<sup>52</sup> They are forced by their shared skin colour to adopt exaggerated manifestations of difference, such as habits of Western style dress totally inappropriate in the tropical heat. In the eyes of European travellers they are hybrids who are ‘incapable of valuing the coarse but instinctive efforts of their forefathers or the refined and purifying elements of civilised life.’<sup>53</sup>

Blyden deplored the ‘vituperation’ of Burton and Reade and their amused condescension of Negroes striving for political autonomy, insisting that ‘the opening up of Africa [was] to be the work of Africans’ (*CINR*, 147). While the English travellers knew and admired Blyden personally, they believed that his hope for the emergence of a great African nationality with its centre in Liberia was misguided. Reade, while admitting that their natural imitateness had improved the lives of many Americo-Liberians, saw no future for the nation: ‘I must confess that this Negro Republic has failed,’ he announced in 1873. ‘It has no money, immigration is slack; they do not intermarry with the natives and the population is decreasing’ (*Sketch*, vol. 2, 260). Its instability meant that, in Reade’s view, it had no part to play in the future of Africa. Rejecting the traditional triad of Christianity, Commerce and Civilisation, Reade proposed two possible approaches to the ‘redemption’ of Africa. Since he did not believe that Africans could ever be elevated to the level of Europeans, he recommended that they be restored to ‘the level of those from whom [they] had fallen,’ which is the culture of Muslims; therefore the civilisation of the continent should be entrusted to the forces of Islam. The opening up of Africa to modernity and its subsequent administration should be, he believed, entrusted to the French and the British. He foresaw and urged a coalition of the forces of European Christianity and African Islam working together for the exploitation of Africa: ‘the interior of Africa is in the hands of the Mussulman. We have only to gain them as our allies, to gain entrée to its mysteries and treasures’ (*Savage*, 585).

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<sup>52</sup> Chatterjee, ‘Whose Imagined Community?’, in Bahkrishnan, p. 221.

<sup>53</sup> Editorial, *Sierra Leone Weekly Times*, July 30<sup>th</sup>, 1862.

The penetration of the treasure-laden continent, imagined as female and passive, is a favoured trope of English writing about Africa in the nineteenth century. However, Reade's personification of Africa draws on and subverts the image, common to black nationalist discourse, of the ageing and grieving mother awaiting the return of her lost sons. By contrast, Reade's portrayal of the maternal figure is predatory and nightmarish. Old Mother Africa is imagined as carrying a 'huge burden on the back.' What exactly is the nature of that burden? Is it the hidden riches and treasures that will soon lead to her despoilment and maybe the extinction of her progeny? Or is the burden that the African will have to bear in the so-called civilisation of the continent, a scenario Reade describes in the closing pages of the book? He issues a warning to the prospective European powers which will, inevitably, be lured by a fetishistic desire for precious metals into the darkness of savage Africa. While Africa was represented to its returning diaspora as a recovered Eden, Reade warns of the serpent that always lurks within and his vision is, ultimately, horrific:

[Africa is] a woman, whose features ... are sad and noble but which have been degraded, distorted and rendered repulsive by disease; whose breath is perfumed by rich spices and by fragrant gums, yet through all steals the stench of the black mud of the mangroves and the miasma of the swamps; whose lap is filled with gold but beneath lies a black snake, watchful and concealed; from whose breasts stream milk and honey, mingled with poison and with blood ...swarming around her are thousands of her children whose hideousness inspires disgust, their misery compassion. She kisses them on the lips, and with her own breath she strikes them corpses by her side. She feeds them at her breasts, and from her own breasts, they are poisoned and they die. She offers them the treasures of her lap and as each hand is put forth the black snake bites it with fatal fangs. (*Savage*, 383)

One of the preoccupations of the ASL was the investigation of the causes for the extinction of the 'inferior' or 'primitive' races about whom Hodgkin and the APS had worried so much. Reade and his fellow 'anthropologists' tended to regard such extinction as the logical corollary of progress. Nor did they feel that there was anything worth saving in aboriginal cultures. They would have shared Dickens' view that the 'virtues [of the noble savage] are a fable; his happiness a delusion; his nobility nonsense' and his 'absence [would be] a blessed relief and an indispensable preparation for the



sowing of the very first seeds of any influence that can exalt humanity.<sup>54</sup> Reade's characterisation of the life of the African is equally negative: 'the savage lives a life without a future or a past, without hope or regret and dies the death of a coward and a dog for whom the grave brings darkness and nothing else' (*Savage*, 238). In his most famous work, *The Martyrdom of Man* (1872) he expounds his Darwinian view of the evolution and perfectibility of Man. Writing on the 'abolition of existing faiths,' he urges:

let us therefore purify the air and, if the light kills a few sickly plants which have become acclimatised to impurity and darkness, we must console ourselves with the reflection that in Nature it is always so, and that of the two evils, we have chosen that which is least.<sup>55</sup>

The 'redemption' of Africa and its conversion to the light of European civilisation might ultimately lead to the extermination of the Negro altogether, though not before he has made his contribution in a manner that is consistent with his traditional role in the white world as a beast of burden driven by his white master:

Africa shall be redeemed. Her children shall perform this mighty work. Her morasses shall be drained; her deserts shall be watered by canals; her forests reduced to firewood. Her children shall do all this. They shall pour an elixir vitae into the veins of their mother, now withered and diseased. They shall restore her to youth and immortal beauty. In this amiable task, they may possibly be exterminated. We must learn to look on this result with composure. It illustrates the beneficent law of Nature, that the weak must be devoured by the strong. But a grateful posterity will cherish their memories. When the cockneys of Timbuctoo have their tea-gardens in the oases of the Sahara; when hotels and guide-books are established at the sources of the Nile; when it becomes fashionable to go yachting on the lakes of the great Plateau; when noblemen, building seats in Central Africa, will have their elephant parks and their hippopotami waters; young ladies on camp stools under palm trees will read with tears *The Last of the Negroes*; and the Niger will become as romantic as the Rhine. (*Savage*, 452-453)

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<sup>54</sup> Charles Dickens, 'The Noble Savage', *The Works of Charles Dickens: Reprinted Pieces* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1900), 120-127 (p. 127). As discussed earlier, Dickens was in favour of the abolition of slavery in the United States in the 1840s and 1850s. However, his views on 'inferior races' darkened considerably in subsequent decades, particularly in the aftermath of The Morant Bay Rebellion (1865) and The Indian Rebellion (1857).

<sup>55</sup> Winwood Reade, *The Martyrdom of Man* (London: Kegan Paul, 1910), p. 531.

This passage contains elements of Swiftian satire that raise questions as to the seriousness of Reade's vision; did he really believe that the Negro race would be exterminated? Or was he merely echoing debates in the United States on the fate of native Americans? An American contemporary of Reade's, writing in 1865, felt that if the western settlement could 'not be secured short of their [native Americans] utter extermination, why extermination it must be.'<sup>56</sup> An alternative to extermination imagined the preservation of representatives of the various nations in a living, human zoo:

What a splendid contemplation when one ... imagines them as they might in future be seen ... preserved in their pristine beauty and wildness, in a magnificent park, where the world could see for ages to come, the native Indian in his classic attire, galloping his wild horse, with sinewy bow and shield and lance amid the flowing herds of elks and buffaloes. What a beautiful and thrilling specimen for America to preserve and hold up to the view of her refined citizens and the world in future ages.<sup>57</sup>

Reade imagines a redeemed Africa with elements of both visions: the continent is imagined as empty, a novel *terra nullius* in which idle Europeans can sport and play. While the animals remain, the Negro, his work accomplished, has been effaced from the land and his vanished tribe will be romanticised in sentimental stories read by young ladies, the same readership which Reade hoped would be drawn to his own travel tales. His exaggerated and fanciful vision of Africa as Disney World conceals the deadly serious imperialistic mission that would shortly be launched in Africa.

Within a decade, the Congress of Berlin initiated the 'scramble for Africa' and the darker forces that Reade had predicted were unleashed in the imperial possessions, most notably in the Congo. While Liberia, as an independent republic, was technically not available for occupation, the principle of 'Effective Occupation' as laid down in the

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<sup>56</sup> Samuel Bowles, *Across the Continent: A Summer's Journey to the Rocky Mountains, the Mormons and the Pacific States* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan, 1966), p. 69.

<sup>57</sup> George Catlin, *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs and Conditions of the North American Indians*, vol.1 (London: Published by the Author, at the Egyptian Hall, Piccadilly, 1841), p. 262.

The fate of indigenous peoples in the United States was a recurring theme in literary and visual representations. For example, James Fenimore Cooper's *Last of the Mohicans* (1826) describes the clash of 'civilisation' and 'barbarism' in eighteenth-century colonial America while John Gast's *American Progress*, (1872) depicts the native American fleeing before the forces of modernity during white settlement of the West.

Congress meant that its boundaries were vulnerable to annexation by the French and the British. A neutral traveller and explorer in Liberia at the time, the Swiss zoologist Johann Buttikofer, noted that the nation was still a place of interest as the only Negro republic on the continent, but reference to Hilary Teage as ‘the ... freedom poet ... of those long-gone days so full of hope,’ suggests that Liberia’s best days were over.<sup>58</sup>

### **Sir Harry Johnston 1858-1927**

Like many of his contemporaries, the Liberal politician, Sir Charles Dilke, ruminated on the fate of ‘inferior races’ as he travelled around the English-speaking nations of the world in the mid-1860s. Of their gradual extinction which he felt was in many cases inevitable, he felt that ‘it was not only a law of nature but a blessing to mankind.’<sup>59</sup> However, the Negro race seemed to be immune to that law and was ‘not passing off the stage of human affairs but [rather] had an immense amount of history before it.’<sup>60</sup> How then would black people co-exist with the rampaging spread of European imperialism in Africa? A prominent defender of the rights of indigenous peoples, Thomas Hodgkin, (nephew of the founder of the APS discussed earlier) wrote, in 1896, in defence of the rightness and inevitability of the ‘mission of Anglo-Saxon race to penetrate into every part of the world and to help in the great work of civilisation,’ while warning that everywhere it went ‘the national conscience should go also.’ He repeated the trope of the ‘native races’ as children who ‘must be protected against the superior brain power of the races which had reached maturity.’<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> *Travel Sketches from Liberia: Johann Buttikofer 19<sup>th</sup> Century Rainforest Explorations in West Africa*, ed. by Henk Dop and Phillip T. Robinson (Lieden and Boston: Brill Books, 2013), p. 149. Buttikofer, a noted Swiss zoologist, made two journeys of exploration to Liberia in 1879-1882 and 1886-1887. His book, in two volumes, which was published in German in 1890, is regarded as the first comprehensive monograph on Liberia. He was given unfettered access by the Government to the Liberian hinterland in the hope that whatever exploration and research he carried out could help in the state’s territorial claims on areas outside its immediate control. He is known as ‘the Father of Liberian Natural History.’ His book, had it been published in English, might have rendered much of Harry Johnston’s two-volume work *Liberia* (1906) redundant.

<sup>59</sup> Sir Charles Dilke, *Greater Britain: A Record of Travels in English-Speaking Countries during 1866 and 1867*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn (London: Macmillan & Co., 1869), p. 88.

<sup>60</sup> Mary Kingsley, quoted in Bernard Porter, *Critics of Empire: British Radicals and the Imperial Challenge*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 1968), p. 50.

<sup>61</sup> Thomas Hodgkin, 1896, quoted in Porter, p. 51.

The European imperialist is therefore envisaged in many different guises: as mentor, protector and potential aggressor. It is a surprisingly apt portrayal of Sir Harry Johnston: explorer, botanist, writer, Africanist and colonial administrator. His several exploratory journeys to Liberia over two decades (between 1882 and 1906) and the encyclopaedic *Liberia* (1906) that followed made him the European 'expert' on the country at a time when Britain, France and Germany sought to extend their influence over it.<sup>62</sup> His representations of Liberia, ostensibly more fair-minded and objective than those of Reade and Burton, are actually more damning. His eminence as an Africanist and his experience as an administrator in British colonial Africa conferred on him an authority that the earlier travellers lacked. He was regarded as an expert on what African colonies should be and how they ought to be governed.

Ania Loomba reminds us that the etymology of the word 'colony,' the Latin word *colonia*, connotes cultivation and settlement.<sup>63</sup> Veracini has shown how settler citizenship was tied to ownership and residency on the land; hence the term 'settler' ... implied a marked degree of fixation.<sup>64</sup> Additionally, in the modern world, the exploitation of resources became a defining feature of colonial formations. Johnston characterises Liberia in the early twentieth century as a disintegrating state whose problems stem largely from the failures of its settlers to establish a *proper* colony. Despite its rhetorical linkage to the first settlements of America, Liberia did not follow the pattern of clearance and cultivation of the land that characterised those settlements. Johnston implies that the Liberian state never established 'effective occupation' over *any* of its territory. Its failure to increase its population, to cultivate the land, domesticate its indigenous animals and exploit its natural resources were offered as proof that the Negro, even when westernised, was incapable of self-government and was still need of the guiding hand of the white man.

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<sup>62</sup> Harry Johnston, *Liberia*, 2 vols. (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1906), p. v. All further references are to this edition and appear parenthetically in the text.

<sup>63</sup> Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 7.

<sup>64</sup> Veracini, p. 80.

Despite evincing a more 'modern' and less overtly racist approach to Africa than previous travellers, Johnston shared with them many of the most enduring preconceptions about Africans: that the Negro race was naturally indolent and that Africa was stuck in an earlier evolutionary era, a feature of European writing that Fabian describes as the 'denial of co-evalness.'<sup>65</sup> Johnston characterises Africans as frozen in the 'Paleolithic stage of culture, stopped in some rut, some siding of human culture, whereas the White man during the last 1,000 years has gone speeding ahead till he has attained the powers and outlook of the demi-god.'<sup>66</sup> He also shared the widespread view of the Americo-Liberians as 'imitation Anglo-Saxons,' unequal to the task of self-government. However, unlike Reade and Burton who favoured Carlyle's view of the Negro race, Johnston agreed with Mill, believing that Africans could, with proper guidance become useful (though not equal) partners in the civilisation and exploitation of Africa.

As editor of *Hints to Travellers* (1889) Johnston had written 'it is the duty of every civilised traveller in countries newly opened to research to collect plain, unvarnished facts.'<sup>67</sup> While Johnston was lauded for his 'objective' and 'scientific' portrayal of Liberia, he can hardly be described as neutral and disinterested. In his travels there, he was 'taking a good look at the marketplace of empire '<sup>68</sup> as well as eyeing its economic potential for his own gain. While he was Britain's Colonial agent in Liberia, he was instrumental in facilitating loan negotiations between the British and the Liberian government in 1906. However, the bulk of the £100,000 loan went to his own Liberia Development Company on the understanding that it would build infrastructure in the interior. After two years and the depletion of the monies set aside for the project, the end result was a fifteen-mile dirt track. He also had commercial interests in a charter company intent on exploiting the wild rubber forests and rich mineral deposits of the

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<sup>65</sup> Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), p. 62.

<sup>66</sup> Harry Johnston, *The Backward Peoples and Our Relations with Them* (Oxford: Humphrey Milford, 1920), p. 57. Given the Victorian preoccupation with railroads as symbols of modernity, Johnston's imagery here is fitting.

<sup>67</sup> Johnston, quoted in James Urry, *Before Social Anthropology: Essays on the History of British Anthropology* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 17.

<sup>68</sup> McClintock, p. 82.

country.<sup>69</sup> Johnston did not believe that the government had either the ingenuity or the financial resources to exploit the country's wealth and felt that such a task would eventually be undertaken by the powers that were best equipped to do so, the British.

Johnston depicts the nation of Liberia as a small, weak female, dependent on the continued forbearance of her more powerful relatives. While the motto of Liberia, 'the love of Liberty brought us here' claims agency for the former slaves, Johnston portrays the nation as having been

set apart for the unfettered development of the black race. We have allowed them to take - which means we have given them - a little garden in which to show what their husbandry can do. To this careless gift, we should at least add Time. (*Liberia*, vi)

The great modernising project that is Western imperialism and capitalism is thus set against the little cottage industry of Liberian independence; the one a serious enterprise of global significance, the other a harmless hobby. While Johnston argues for more time for Liberia to prove itself in the nation-making game, there is no doubt that he sees its demise as an independent nation as inevitable and thinks that it would be best served by amalgamation with its neighbour, Sierra Leone, which he calls 'the elder sister of Liberia.'<sup>70</sup> The overall tone in his commentary on Liberia is one of grandfatherly indulgence mingled with the intellectual superiority and wisdom that are supposed to come with age.

Johnston describes the genesis of the country as an atonement for the wrongs of slavery but its continued existence and survival depends on the restraint and sense of fair play shown by the British and the French, the latter of which 'holds back her mighty forces and the tidal wave of her African Empire from the skirts of this small African Republic' (*Liberia*, v). While he masculinises the French imperial power in Africa, it is more in

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<sup>69</sup> For an account of Harry Johnston's involvement in British-Liberian loan negotiations and his business interests in Liberia, see Amos Sawyer, *The Emergence of Autocracy in Liberia: Tragedy and Challenge* (San Francisco: ICS Press, 1992).

<sup>70</sup> Blyden, of course, had advocated such an amalgamation though he envisaged that the new polity would be under Negro rule.

keeping with Britain's self-image to project it as a maternal figure at a time when Queen Victoria was the iconic representation of the British Empire and whose statue appeared in all the British possessions on the continent. Said points to the significance of the widespread display of monumental sculpture and other iconic images as part of the ideological vision of the empire 'implemented and sustained not only by direct domination and physical force but much more effectively over a long time by *persuasive means*, the quotidian processes of hegemony.'<sup>71</sup> While Liberia, as a republic, did not have a statue of Victoria in its capital, her image was widely circulated and she was regarded with great affection and admiration.<sup>72</sup> Many indigenous Africans seemed to have shared a widespread recognition of her as the 'Great White Mother.'<sup>73</sup> Might not Liberia then benefit from becoming part of her benign imperial family? While Johnston never states explicitly that Liberia would be better off as part of the British Empire, his insistence on the superiority of British rule over the 'black and brown' races leads to that inescapable conclusion. Moreover, he makes a claim for a British familial connection with Liberia; the African republic is a child of the United States that Johnston categorises as 'our daughter,' thus making Liberia Britain's grandchild. This familial imagery serves to highlight the dependence and immaturity of Liberia and also inserts Britain into its history.

Johnston, as an 'expert' in colonial affairs, diagnoses Liberia's problems as stemming from its inception; the mistaken policy of re-locating New World black people to Africa and burdening them with the task of establishing a democratic republic (a flawed political entity in Johnston's eyes) given their lack of experience of liberty and their 'natural' indolence. He argues that emancipated slaves who felt compelled to leave the

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<sup>71</sup> Said, p. 131.

<sup>72</sup> Blyden testifies to the special regard among Liberians for Queen Victoria. She had received President Roberts during his visit in 1848. Blyden himself had met her twice and asked that these meetings be publicised in the *African Repository* 'so that it might serve to encourage the Negro youth in America' (Lynch, p. 182). The most widely reported royal visit and the one that led to the greatest outpouring of affection for Victoria in Liberia was the meeting between the Queen and 'Aunt' Martha Ricks in 1892. Ricks, then aged 76, was born a slave in Tennessee and immigrated to Liberia in 1830. She had long harboured a dream of meeting with Victoria. The two met and (despite the royal protocol that forbade a commoner from touching the queen) Ricks reported 'she shook hands with me.' Ricks presented a hand-embroidered quilt in which the queen, as a keen needlewoman, showed great interest. Ricks became the most famous female Liberian of her day; her portrait hangs in the National Portrait Gallery, London.

<sup>73</sup> As already mentioned, Liberia did have its own national 'mother figure' in Matilda Newport.

States should have settled in the West Indies or South America where they would have found like-minded people, the descendants of New World slavery, who had absorbed the culture of Euro-American societies. The settlers who went back to Africa and tried to establish a nation were bound to fail, he felt, as 'they [had] become too widely separated in physical constitution, in political and commercial ideals from Africa to resume with ease the African citizenship of their forefathers.'

Instead, their descendants

impressed by European culture were trying to devise a new and appropriate civilisation for Negro West Africa - preserving all that [was] good and practical in America's teaching, shedding what [was] inappropriate and inventing precepts suited to the Negro's mind and body.' (*Liberia*, vi)

Central to Johnston's understanding of Liberia's failure was his attitude to work. Here, he followed closely on Carlyle: his own characterisation of Africa bears a striking resemblance to Carlyle's portrayal of the West Indies written nearly seventy years previously, especially in their deployment the image of the European as the heroic tamer of primeval nature and bearer of civilisation. Johnston writes of Africa as 'a miserably unhappy place before the white man entered it; rampant cannibalism and wars to feed it; trials for witchcraft and poison ordeals; epidemics one after another; famines, droughts, floods; wild beasts before the natives had guns.'<sup>74</sup> Carlyle described primeval scenes of 'jungle, savagery, poison-reptiles and swamp malaria.' The taming of such a landscape required great 'heroism in obscure battle: to sink, in mortal agony, before the jungles, the putrescence and waste could become arable' and the 'Saxon-British' were the ideal men for such an ordeal. The sleeping riches of the land remained 'asleep, waiting the white Enchanter who would say to them Awake!'<sup>75</sup> The land is imagined as female, dark and menacing but curiously passive. Carlyle and Johnston, as well as Reade and Burton, insist that, while the 'darker races' should be forced to labour in the cultivation of the land, it is the white man's rationalising and energising intelligence, as well as what Peter Hulme called 'the massive thrust of male technology' that are

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<sup>74</sup> Johnston, *The Backward Peoples*, p. 21.

<sup>75</sup> Carlyle, *Occasional Discourse*, p. 36.



required to tame the earth and make it fruitful.<sup>76</sup> Such a man does, in fact, possess the demi-god status claimed for him by Johnston; God created the world, but it takes an Englishman to complete the task entrusted to Adam.

Johnston portrays the Americo-Liberians, with no tradition of free labour, no appreciation of the Victorian work ethic as, uniquely in colonial Africa, unsuited to the task of civilising their indigenous peoples. This judgement of the settlers echoed that of a white governor in the first decade of the colony who predicted the failure of Liberia, given that they 'never when in the United States voluntarily labored for their own support, and now when the stimulus of the overseer's lash is removed [they] cannot be induced to exert themselves sufficiently to procure even a scanty subsistence.'<sup>77</sup> Such a judgement in the Liberian context obscured the very real difficulties the settlers faced in trying to create a farming economy: their unfamiliarity with tropical agriculture, the challenges of the climate, the lack of suitable tools as well as a profound psychological aversion to agricultural work on the part of those who had been recently manumitted from slavery. Given the general unfitness and un-readiness of the settlers to colonise successfully the land that they have inherited, the wealth of the country remains unexploited. Johnston thinks it is shocking that

semi-savages should be driving ill-bred sheep, scraggy cattle or ponies hardly fit for polo over plains and mountains that are little else than treasure vaults of valuable minerals and chemicals; or that they should roam with their blow-pipes and arrows through forests of inestimable value for their timber, drugs, dyes.<sup>78</sup>

He believes that it was wrong to 'lock up the potential wealth of that country for the benefit of a people whose mode of life was of a very low order and of no use to the mass of humanity.'<sup>79</sup> Thus he justifies the British imperial mission, which like the American doctrine of Manifest Destiny, is couched in quasi-religious terms. God ordered Adam to subdue the earth and since the African is incapable of such a task, it falls to the white

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<sup>76</sup> Peter Hulme, quoted in McClintock, p. 22.

<sup>77</sup> Joseph Mechlin, 'Latest from Liberia', *African Repository*, Vol. 8, 10 (December 1832), p. 298.

<sup>78</sup> Johnston, *The Backward Peoples*, p. 59.

<sup>79</sup> Johnston, quoted in Bernard Porter, p. 277.

man. However, he is impelled to do so not out of greed or the expansion of imperial control, but for the *good of humanity*.

A further stain on the character of Liberia, according to Johnston, is its Americanness. He characterises Liberian culture as a copy of American culture that is already a copy; it imitates the 'east coast ... which ... but reflects the culture of 18<sup>th</sup> century England.' (*Liberia*, vii). He says that Liberia reminds him of 'the American chapters in Charles Dickens' *Martin Chuzzlewit*,' a novel in which America, its people and institutions are presented in a wholly negative light, a sentiment shared by Johnston. Lawrence Buell points out that foreign visitors to the United States in the nineteenth century invariably commented on Americans' lack of 'refinement,' portraying them as more irrational and less philosophical than Europeans and dismissing them as 'hasty and slapdash nation-builders.'<sup>80</sup> For Dickens, the problem of the American is that he is not English; his sharp practice, his boastfulness and his dirty and disgusting habits, such as the ubiquitous habit of spitting, are set against the fastidious reserve of the Englishman. Johnston is reminded of all those unfortunate American habits when he assesses the ruling class of Liberia. His major charge against them is their 'religiosity, claiming that they have made a "fetish" of the Old Testament,' are 'prudish to a truly American extent,' and 'exhibit the Puritanism of New England in the 18<sup>th</sup> century almost unabated' (*Liberia*, 353). Like the American 'gentry' whom he dismisses as 'pathetic cardboard Europhiles,' so too the Liberians are dismissed as 'imitation Anglo-Saxons' (*Liberia*, 419). While he recognises that they have a 'right to boast of their own civilisation,' being 'mentally much more European than African,' and therefore not as backward as those they seek to govern, yet he feels that there is nothing of value in Americo-Liberian culture. Johnston advises that they should 'turn their backs on America and their face towards Africa or they will dwindle to nothing, leave no heirs and implant no permanent civilisation on those whom they have come to redeem' (*Liberia*, 370).

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<sup>80</sup> Lawrence Buell, 'American Literary Emergence as a Postcolonial Phenomenon', *American Literary History*, 4, 3 (Autumn 1992), 411-442 (p. 418).

He offers 'scientific' advice on the problem of the decline of population in the 'civilised' part of Liberia given that immigration had ceased. Bringing his expertise as a botanist who was interested in the cross-fertilization of different species to bear, he judges the settlers to be of inferior stock:

Many of the first immigrants from America were broken-down people, worn out slaves, dissatisfied sickly mulattoes or octoroons. Liberia is no country for the half-breed between the North European and the Negro; nor is this a miscegenation to be encouraged. It is not a good cross. (*Liberia*, 341)

He recommends a different type of hybrid of the settler with their ancient African bloodlines, though he recognises, as Reade did, that feelings of cultural superiority and pride in their 'white heritage' would prevent them from marrying a Negro (i.e. 'native' wife.) Johnston's 'imperial gaze' lingers over the various indigenous tribes which might be suitable for inter-marriage with the settlers. The Kru and Bassa tribes he judges as containing 'comely types in men and women' but asserts that there 'is nearly always a grotesque appearance in these unmixed negroes.' Like Blyden, he singles out the Mandingo people as the optimal co-partners in Liberia; they 'ought to become the 'backbone' of the Republic.' Only they 'can check the white man's sneer ... and even compel[s] his admiration if he has an artist's eye' (*Liberia*, 342).

Said distils imperial discourses, be they Orientalist or Africanist, into the phrase "'They" were not like "us" and for that reason deserved to be ruled.'<sup>81</sup> The question of who should rule and in what manner was addressed by Joseph Chamberlain, British Secretary of State to the Colonies, in 1897, when he outlined a new vision of British imperial power, one that stressed both its omniscience and its benevolence, which Rudyard Kipling described as the 'white man's burden':

... our rule ... can only be justified if we can show that it adds to the happiness and prosperity of the people, and I maintain that our rule does, and has, brought security and peace and comparative prosperity to countries that never knew

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<sup>81</sup> Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London, Vintage Books, 1994), p. xii.

these blessings before. In carrying out this work of civilisation we are fulfilling what I believe to be our national mission.<sup>82</sup>

Johnston acknowledges that the white man's sense of his own omnipotence and omniscience may have led to instances of cruelty in his dealings with 'inferior' races, but this did not make him a critic of imperialism *per se* or a champion of the rights of indigenous peoples generally. He argued that benign and enlightened English rule had resulted in the fact that the 'backward races' were now less retrograde and unenlightened than they had been before. In the British possessions, the 'improved Negro' showed signs of adaptability that were useful in the service of empire. He had acquired new skills and was an 'excellent shorthand clerk, telegraph operator, skilled photographer, steamer engineer' and was an 'irreproachable butler with extraordinary readiness.' But this did not mean that Africans were fit to 'form coherent states, to govern themselves and maintain their place as independent nations in the Commonwealth of the World.'<sup>83</sup> Placing all Africans together in one homogeneous group, he decries their lack of 'esprit de corps and sympathy with other Negroes.' If such feelings had existed, slavery would not have become so firmly entrenched nor would the continued domination of Africa by Europe be possible. Why, he asks, is the Negro a subject race? 'It is not only the inherent wickedness of the white man, the delight of the mentally superior race to impose servitude on the mental inferior.' It also arises from the fact that 'no single, separate African race has felt anything like solidarity with the Black race in general.'<sup>84</sup> In this criticism of the Negro race, Johnston seems to echo the sentiments of Burton and European discourse generally in implying that Africans themselves were responsible for slavery; if they had been nicer to each other, Europeans could not have established and maintained the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The logical extension of such thinking would seem to be that if Europeans had shown more *esprit de corps* and more sympathy with each other, there would never have been wars on the continent of Europe.

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<sup>82</sup> Joseph Chamberlain, 'Speech at the Royal Colonial Institute, March 1897', in *English Historical Documents 1874-1914*, ed. by David Charles Douglas and W. D. Handcock (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 388-390 (p. 389).

<sup>83</sup> Johnston, quoted L. R. Gardiner and J. H. Davison, *British Imperialism in the Late-Nineteenth Century* (London: Edward Arnold, 1968), pp. 12-13 and 58.

<sup>84</sup> Johnston, quoted in Bernard Porter, p. 277.

Johnston believed that the modernisation of Africa, which meant opening up the continent and exploiting the land and natural resources, depended on co-operation between the European imperialists and the native people. In the 1920s, claiming that imperialism had been cleansed of its worst features, he wrote that

it would be wise [for 'backward people'] to accept for some time longer the advice, the guidance of white nations which have the best home education, an unfettered press and the beginning of a national conscience of what is really right and wrong according to the canons of Christianity.<sup>85</sup>

While Johnston considered the Liberian elite to be somewhat more advanced than 'native' Africans, he did not deem it fit just yet to be entirely self-governing. He suggested that Liberia be given time (he suggests fifty years) in order to prove itself in the eyes of the world's nations. In order to arrive at their standards, the Liberians would have to 'fit themselves by their education and training.' However, the only version of that education deemed appropriate is a Western style one that would equip them for nation building of a type recognised in the civilised world. But, how does a black African improve himself sufficiently in order to be capable of self-government without, at the same time, becoming a laughing stock to the Europeans whom he seeks to replace? Johnston mocks the Liberian elite for their presumption in assuming a claim to govern and for their sense of cultural superiority vis-à-vis the 'natives.' Only white Europeans are allowed that privilege.

Johnston's book was regarded as the definitive work on Liberia. Yet other, more popular and widely accessible books continued to appear in the first decades of the twentieth century. How should one account for Liberia's continuing appeal and what new insight, if any, did they offer? The travel accounts of three very different British travellers, Mary Gaunt, Lady Dorothy Mills and Graham Greene, reflect changes in travel writing as a genre, while, at the same time, highlighting the unchanging representation of Liberia as a profoundly dystopian space. The 'evidence' put forward included the lurid tales of

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<sup>85</sup> Johnston, *The Backward Peoples*, p. 59.

cannibalism, the absence of maps, and the dysfunctional and corrupt ruling class of Monrovia. The popular view of Liberia in Britain was formed by the newspaper headlines that heralded Mills' book *Through Liberia* in 1926: 'An earl's daughter among Cannibals!', 'Earl's Daughter goes to see Babies eaten in the Bush,' and 'Lady Mills studies Cannibal Rites.'<sup>86</sup> The official British attitude may be gleaned from the Government's *Blue Book*, supplied to Greene prior to his trip in 1936. It presents a comprehensive catalogue of natural and man-made horrors: the swarming rats that are everywhere in the Republic; the dreaded diseases, including leprosy, dysentery and elephantiasis; the almost total lack of medical provision and the terror perpetrated by the Frontier Force.<sup>87</sup> Characterisations such as these made travel to Liberia appealing to Gaunt, Mills and Greene: the women's personae as lone, female, intrepid traveller was boosted by their willingness to embark on such dangerous journeys. For Greene, who wanted an encounter with 'the primitive,' Liberia was, as Simon Gikandi points out, a 'depository of alterity' that seemed to have vanished in the European colonies.<sup>88</sup>

### **Mary Gaunt (1861-1942) and Lady Dorothy Mills (1896-1959)**

At first glance, there is little to suggest that Mary Gaunt and Dorothy Mills might be regarded as fellow travellers. Gaunt, the daughter of an Australian county court judge, decided to try to make a living as a writer in metropolitan London after the sudden death of her husband. Mills was a privileged member of the Establishment, the daughter of Robert Horace Walpole, 5<sup>th</sup> Earl of Orford, and his American heiress wife. Despite the fact that she was the first London bride to wear a gold wedding dress, she describes her married life as financially insecure. After the war, she embarked on a career as a writer, working as the editor of a 'causerie' where she reported on prize fights, wrote reviews and a column that she describes as 'advice to flappers.'<sup>89</sup> Despite the differences in their backgrounds, the middle class, colonial Gaunt and the aristocratic Mills shared a

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<sup>86</sup> Dorothy Mills, *A Different Drummer: Chapters in Autobiography* (London: Duckworth, 1930), p. 174.

<sup>87</sup> Graham Greene, *Journey Without Maps*, 1936 (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1976), pp. 17-18. All further references are to this edition and appear parenthetically in the text as *JWM*.

<sup>88</sup> Simon Gikandi, *Maps of Englishness: Writing Identity in the Culture of Colonialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p. 179.

<sup>89</sup> Mills, p. 15.

common motivation (apart from financial difficulties) for embarking on the type of travel that they undertook. They seem to have been driven by the cluster of desires that Shirley Foster identifies in the writings of nineteenth-century women:

the anticipated fulfilment of long-cherished dreams often awakened in childhood; the desire to enter a fairy-tale or legendary world glamorised by the romantic imagination; the lure of the unknown and the 'uncivilised,' with their accompanying challenges, the search for a new self-hood, released from the narrow parameters of home life.<sup>90</sup>

Both women fashion an identity for themselves that challenges patriarchal ideology while ironically depending on the support, guidance and protection of influential men, who facilitate their travels in West Africa. They position themselves as pioneers, whose gender guarantees a different representation of Liberia from that of their male counterparts. Gaunt complains that she is frustrated by all that is left undescribed in male travel writing, the 'thousand and one little trifles that make ignorant eyes see the life that is so different from that in a civilised land.'<sup>91</sup> While she does not state specifically that these trifles are visible only to female eyes, there is a clear implication that she will produce a very different account of West Africa than the reading public is accustomed to. Mills is more explicit in her intention, claiming that she will focus on the lives of women 'for man may show one the mind of his race, but woman shows one its heart.'<sup>92</sup> Yet, despite these determinations, it is not obvious from the study of these women's books that they move through the colonial and post-colonial world differently from men or that they 'mistrust the rhetoric of mastery, conquest and quest' that characterises so much of male travel writing.<sup>93</sup>

While neither woman references her, they can hardly have been unaware of the best known woman traveller to West Africa, Mary Kingsley. Her *Travels in West Africa* (1897)

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<sup>90</sup> Shirley Foster, *Across New Worlds: Nineteenth-Century Women Travellers and their Writings* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), p. 12.

<sup>91</sup> Mary Gaunt, *Alone in West Africa* (London: T. Werner Laurie, 1912), p. 7. All further references are to this edition and appear parenthetically as *Alone* in the text.

<sup>92</sup> Mills, 46.

<sup>93</sup> Karen R. Lawrence, *Penelope Voyages: Women and Travel in British Literary Tradition* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994).

appeared at a time when some of the certainties of imperial hegemony began to be questioned. While she stated her conviction that 'England ... had every right to extend her trade across the globe and to protect the English flag, emblem of the highest form of justice' she was, at the same time, unhappy with much colonial practice, insisting that African culture (regarded as an oxymoron by many imperialists) had intrinsic value and should be preserved. Her writing therefore frequently expresses ambivalence and divergence from the hegemonic culture that one might also expect to find in the later writing of Gaunt and Mills. Yet, the contention of Sara Mills that women find it difficult to adopt the imperialist voice and therefore display a less authoritarian stance is not supported, particularly in Gaunt's writing.<sup>94</sup> Nor do these early twentieth-century women travellers furnish a fresh understanding of Liberian life; in fact they both defer to the authority of Johnston despite the fact that Gaunt had asked Blyden what she should write about in Liberia, to which he replied 'write about what you see. And if you do not understand what you see, ask until you do' (*Alone*, 53). Reading the travel books of Gaunt and Mills together, it becomes clear that gender is only one influencing factor and that class and historical periods are also important determinants in the representation of the Other. Thus, Gaunt's status as a 'colonial lady' herself is more significant than gender and Mills' upper-class status accounts for the superiority of her tone whether she is addressing members of the ruling class of Liberia, foreign missionaries, her carriers or the women of the villages of the Liberian hinterland. Their travel books are worth reading as companion pieces: Gaunt confines her travels to the coastal settlements; Mills, by contrast, displays little interest in Monrovia, preferring instead the part of the country that is 'as yet largely un-surveyed and unmapped.'<sup>95</sup>

Gaunt's travels in West Africa were facilitated by the head of the Colonial Office and by her publishers, who commissioned her to write a book about the 'wonderful old forts [slave forts] ... that lay neglected and crumbling along the shores of the Gold Coast.' Though her travels included stop-overs in Gambia and Sierra Leone, her main interest

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<sup>94</sup> Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 2003).

<sup>95</sup> Dorothy Mills, *Through Liberia* (London: Duckworth, 1926), p. 8.

All further references are to this edition and appear parenthetically in the text as *Through*.



lay in Liberia; on her arrival there, she concluded that she had finally encountered 'something new':

The Gambia and Sierra Leone had been too much regulation Tropics: all that I had seen and done I had at least read of before, but this was something different! This had all the glamour of the unknown, the unexpected. I went to bed that night with the feeling that I was really entering into the land of romance. (*Alone*, 66)

As already discussed, Liberia was routinely depicted in English writing as a 'failed state' by men who claimed authority as explorers and administrators, men who 'knew' Africa. Gaunt's authority depended on her status as a representative of her race<sup>96</sup> but also derived from her experience as a colonised subject herself. Of the many inadequacies she describes in Liberia, she considers the nation's greatest failing to lie in the settlers' inability to fashion the kind of harmonious domestic sphere that she considers essential to the success of a colony/nation. Like Sarah Hale and Harriet Beecher Stowe, she imagined that a colony/nation ought to be built on a strong Protestant work ethic, characterised by self-sufficiency, industriousness and plain living. Thus, when she focuses on the squalor and decay of Monrovia, where it seemed to 'be no one's business to knock a nail or replace a board' (*Alone*, 70), she primly proclaims that such a situation would never have arisen in 'the strenuous old days of the Colony' of Victoria, Australia (*Alone*, 2).

Gaunt is scathing in her denunciation of the settlers and, in a repudiation of the discourse that promoted colonisation as regenerative for black men, describes the Americo-Liberians as 'an effete race, blatant and arrogant of speech [with] an arrogance that is only equalled by their appalling ignorance.' Like Reade and Burton, she views them as 'a travesty of the European' a shocking contrast to some of the indigenous peoples of West Africa, 'the Mandingo or Joloff of the Gambia, the stately Ashanti or the busy agricultural Yoruba ... gentlemen in their own simple, untutored way, courteous and dignified' (*Alone*, 70). Her commentary on the ruling class echoes the views of earlier

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<sup>96</sup> Mona Domosh, 'Towards a Feminist Historiography of Geography', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 16, 1, (1991), 95-104.

travellers that romanticise certain African peoples who conform to the roles expected of them while denigrating those who dared to adopt Western lifestyles.

Her contempt for this latter group coupled with the anxiety in the face of mimicry, identified by Bhabha, are evident in her description of her meeting with the Liberian president, Arthur Barclay and his wife. Gaunt undercuts the grandeur of the name of the president's dwelling, The Executive Mansion, by describing the 'clothes drying on weeds and grass of the roadway ... in front of the main entrance,' and the 'ragged fringe of torn and rotting wood' in the house next door. Inside the 'mansion' she describes as inappropriate the 'blue Brussels carpet' on the drawing room floor, preferring 'the sanded, earthen floor' she saw in a 'native' woman's house. Her sense of inappropriateness extends to the inhabitants of the house, whom she declines to name. She, as 'an Australian with strong feelings on the question of colour', cannot accept the idea of black people in positions of authority and though she describes the president's wife as a 'kindly, black lady' she admits that an 'unbridgeable gulf' lay between them because their 'modes of thought were not the same' (*Alone*, 68). Despite the trappings of power, Gaunt judges the Liberian state to be a failure: 'after 90 years of self-government ... the Liberian, arrogant without proper dignity, boastful with absolutely nothing in the world to boast about unless it be the amazing wealth of the country he mismanages so shamefully' (*Alone*, 78).

Nor have Liberians succeeded in creating the safe asylum for which they crossed an ocean. Gaunt claims that they have never achieved the liberty that is their proud boast. Their lives are lived in the shadow of their 'tribesmen within their borders [who] will eat them up,' a reminder to her readers that cannibalism is rumoured to still exist in the hinterland. In order to achieve some kind of security, they are required to hire an 'army of mercenaries ... that they can't pay for' (*Alone*, 72). In her judgement, Liberia 'was all shoddy from the very beginning. It is now shoddy come to its inevitable end.' Instead of the oft-quoted image of 'Ethiopia stretch[ing] forth her hand to the Lord', Gaunt describes Liberia 'stretching out her hands, crying dumbly to the white man, the cry that came across the water of old [St. Paul's vision of the cry of the Macedonians] "Come

over and help us". Its future, according to Gaunt, depends on 'the civilised nations ... stepping in and saving her despite herself' (*Alone*, 79).

Lady Dorothy Mills' account of her journey to Liberia in 1926 marks a significant departure from all other earlier accounts in that it positions Liberia as a unique African space in a world that had been increasingly 'conquered' by mass tourism. She was an inveterate traveller, well known in her own day as a 'globetrotteress' and an 'adventuress',<sup>97</sup> and a prodigiously prolific writer who is practically unknown today. Thompson detects in the writing of many Victorian travellers an 'anti-touristic rhetoric' that distinguishes him/her from the more vulgar tourist masses.<sup>98</sup> Such travellers present themselves as wandering away from the beaten track, where 'all experience is predictable and repetitive and all cultures and objects mere "touristy" self-parodies.'<sup>99</sup> In her travel books, Mills disdains the rise of tourism and is acutely nostalgic for the 'primitive' places that have been lost in its wake. This is most evident in her description of the changes that had occurred in travel to Timbuktu; a city that was once 'a legend' is now just 'another item in a Cook or Lunn itinerary.'<sup>100</sup> She sees signs of the encroachment of modernity in Liberia in the increasing numbers of American motor cars in Monrovia: therefore, the focus of her book is on the indigenous peoples of the interior and on her own relationship to them as a traveller who has arrived among them maybe just in time before the exotic has turned into the familiar.

Her interest in Liberia was probably piqued by an earlier trip that she had undertaken to Haiti. In her estimation, Haiti had an easier beginning than Liberia, despite its bloody revolution because 'the whole country was welded by a common instinct ... all men from a bondage of four hundred years were brothers under the skin.' By contrast, Liberia was built by settlers

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<sup>97</sup> Sara Mills argues that the use of such terms to describe women travellers paints them as eccentric and somehow ridiculous, *Discourses of Difference*, p. 118.

<sup>98</sup> Thompson, *Travel Writing*, p. 54.

<sup>99</sup> James Buzard, *Beaten Track: European Tourism, Literature and the Ways to Culture* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 4.

<sup>100</sup> Dorothy Mills, *The Golden Land* (London: Duckworth, 1929), p. 204.

originally a people of a thousand separate entities whose only bond or knowledge of each other was a common longing for freedom, cast up on a shore, whose time-honoured owners were pagans and barbarians, speaking a host of unknown languages with not an idea or an ideal in common with their conquerors. (*Through*, 26)

Where can one position Mills in relation to the power structures of Liberia in the 1920s? A notable feature of her book is that she makes scant reference to the ruling elite or to the momentous changes taking place around the time of her visit; her time in Monrovia seems to have been spent with the white community.<sup>101</sup> Nor does she comment on the 'strangeness' of a black ruling class as was *de rigueur* in European and American travel writing about Liberia. However, this is not to assume that she approved of such arrangements. One can infer from her comments on Africans' lack of imagination, creative ability and indolence that she didn't have much regard for the Liberian government. Inderpal Grewal alerts us to the fact that English women travellers 'travelled with a colonial habitus of racial superiority;' in Mills, this was exaggerated by her even more elevated status as an aristocrat.<sup>102</sup> Like Burton, she deplored the idea of democracy, socialism and, worst of all, communism. While she is quite content to mingle with 'native' women, she is disquieted by her conversation with an 'enlightened African' whom she meets 'in the rough heart of the primitive bush.' She describes him as 'a passionate patriot' for whom "Africa for the Africans" was his heart's cry' (*Through*, 75). He was clearly a follower of Marcus Garvey, whose motto he had adopted, but his dream of an African socialist Utopia and his stated admiration for the British Labour politician, Ramsay MacDonald (which Mills, as a high class Tory, is sorry to see), also point to his left-leaning politics.<sup>103</sup> While she professes sympathy for the African's longing for 'the sunlight of world power,' as an antidote to centuries of darkness, her attitude to the Liberian nation is most truly reflected in her comment that 'to give (the African) a white man's responsibility is like making a child walk too soon.'<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> The arrival of the Firestone Rubber Company in Liberia in 1926, the year of Mills' visit, is examined in Chapter Five.

<sup>102</sup> Inderpal Grewal, *Home and Harem: Nation, Gender, Empire and the Culture of Travel* (London: Leicester University Press, 1996), p. 79.

<sup>103</sup> The dissemination of the ideas of Marcus Garvey is dealt with in Chapter Five.

<sup>104</sup> Dorothy Mills, quoted in Eugene Benson and L. W. Conolly, eds. *Encyclopaedia of Post-Colonial Literatures in English*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 544.

Mills moves through the hinterland in a manner reminiscent of nineteenth-century male explorers for whom Africa was a stage on which to play out their fantasies of domination. In describing her motivation for travel, she presents herself as both driven by such fantasies and yet curiously detached and even hostile to the inevitable consequences of her discoveries: she wants to be both the first and last voyeur and voyager into these unknown spaces:

Nothing thrills like the discovery of an unknown tribe, a new oasis or the right to trace a new name on a map ... [the] spirit of sheer personal possession tempered with a sneaking and selfish regret that in a few years it will be public property to a world of engineers, scientists, writers and eventually to all the paraphernalia of tourist agencies.<sup>105</sup>

She travels with all the authority conferred on her by her status and her race, both notable given that she is journeying through a countryside that, ostensibly, is governed by republican and black power. If there are times when she laments not having the power of white men, such as 'not being able to knock down a man who annoys you,' this is more than compensated for by her authoritative requisitioning of everything she needs for her journey: she describes her commandeering of 'a small army of stalwart blacks' waiting to escort American missionaries, saying 'what did I care for missionaries or for the laws of common honesty? I whose soul was aflame for carriers of brown muscle' (*Through*, 35). A similar air of aristocratic privilege, tinged with contempt for the masses and nostalgia for the old order, is on display when she is given smooth passage by the local Commissioner through what was regarded as a particularly dangerous territory. She describes

something that appeals to some kind of primitive, atavistic snobbery ... as if one had gone back a thousand or more years, and travelled as kings then used to travel, lying back at ease under a burning sun, carried on the bowed heads of straining black slaves, while passers-by shrank back into the bushes to make way and loud martial music heralded and acclaimed one. (*Through*, 108)

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<sup>105</sup> Mills, *A Different Drummer*, p. 22.

Yet there are also moments when she adopts what may be regarded as a more feminine persona, as when she focuses on inter-personal relationships, and contemplates the social roles of English and African women, a type of discourse described by Susan Blake as striving 'to achieve reciprocity, both on the trail and in the text.'<sup>106</sup> Here, she positions herself as just one of the women, by turns sisterly in her communication with 'native' women and motherly in her relationship with her carriers. She claims that 'savage women have the same problems as white women, for all [the latter's] modernity and sophistication,' and goes so far as to suggest that polygamy has made the African woman's life easier than her European counterpart in that it decreases labour and increases leisure. Marriage for the European woman, who has 'a career or active outside interests' is 'akin to a cage in which a squirrel tries to run both ways at once, getting nowhere.'<sup>107</sup> Yet, she acknowledges the drudgery of the daily life of African women, who 'do all the work in the fields, while the men sit in circles gossiping, eating, spitting and sucking at clay pipes,' waiting for them 'to come back and cook' (*Through*, 222).

Alison Blunt in her study of Mary Kingsley wonders whether such 'subjective identification' may be regarded as a manifestation of anti-conquest in opposition to the more masculinist strategies of objectification that can be seen as pro-imperialist.<sup>108</sup> Grewal challenged the notion that English women travellers subverted imperialism or patriarchy, arguing that just because their own lives were circumscribed at home did not mean that they were either anti-imperialist or empathetic towards 'native' women.<sup>109</sup> Mills tends to romanticise the lives of indigenous peoples, especially the women, in ways that would be unthinkable for her when it came to the working class in her home country.

It has frequently been noted that many women's traveller tales feature the narrator travelling alone through dangerous territory and yet coming to no harm. Sara Mills

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<sup>106</sup> Susan L. Blake, 'A Woman's Trek', in *Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance*, ed. by Nupur Chaudhuri and Margaret Strobel (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 19-34 (p. 29).

<sup>107</sup> Mills, *A Different Drummer*, p. 55.

<sup>108</sup> Alison Blunt, *Travel, Gender and Imperialism: Mary Kingsley and West Africa* (New York and London: Guildford Press, 1994), p. 111.

<sup>109</sup> Grewal, p. 80.

suggests that such a presentation in the case of British colonial writing implies that the colony is so well controlled and patrolled that British citizens would always be safe. Travel in the Liberian hinterland which is meant to represent a descent into chaos is strangely equally free from threat and danger. The apparent contradiction arises from the representation of 'the African' as essentially childlike and feminine; even the Mano cannibal is described as 'likeable, childlike ... good-tempered and fantastically gay' (*Through*, 127). In the 1920s, Mills achieved a kind of fame and notoriety as the lady who travelled among cannibals and seemed to regard the experience as vaguely amusing: she describes an occasion when she wondered whether one of the Mano tribe who had 'carried [her] pick-back across a river might at the very moment ... be full of the partially digested remains of some friend or relation' (*Through*, 128). More scandalous to her readers was a tale told to her by an old man which equated cannibalism with the sacrament of the Eucharist. Peter Hulme in his discussion of cannibalism in European discourse makes the point that 'Africans [could] be portrayed as noble savages or savage cannibals depending on the colonial situation.'<sup>110</sup> In the Liberian context, stories of cannibalism were deeply embarrassing to the government; a nation that prided itself on its mission to Christianise and civilise Africa and serve as a beacon for the whole continent found itself portrayed in the Western press as the last bastion of savagery in West Africa. Yet, simultaneously, the government used such stories as justification for extending its rule over the hinterland, frequently employing methods as savage as the rites supposedly enacted by the 'cannibal' Leopard Society.<sup>111</sup>

For Mills, the value of Liberia lay in its access to the 'Primitive,' represented specifically by the rhythmic beat of the drum and the communal African dance. Her fascination with atavism and her exploration of the connection between 'primitive' dance and the modern dances that she enjoyed in London mark her as a traveller influenced by the Modernist movement and some of the important texts of anthropologists, psychoanalysts and art critics of her day. Torgovnick describes the works of Malinowski,

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<sup>110</sup> Peter Hulme, *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean 1492-1797* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 52.

<sup>111</sup> The government's Frontier Force, established in 1908, quickly became a byword for savagery and terror inflicted on indigenous peoples.

Frazer and Freud, as a search for 'the universal truth about human nature' which, they believed, could be revealed in their study of 'primitive' societies. As previously noted, Fabian argues that such scrutiny posits those societies as existing outside of linear time, whose 'eternal present' mirrors the infancy of western civilisation. While this is a major pre-occupation of Graham Greene as he travels through the Liberian forest, one sees evidence of the same thought processes in Mills.

Her autobiography reveals that she was an enthusiastic dancer and would undoubtedly have participated in the latest dance crazes to hit London. Susan Jones identifies one such dance, 'The Cakewalk' which emerged from the first black revue, '*In Dahomey*' staged in 1903. She characterises the 'ambivalence' at the heart of the modernist approach to primitivism in both literature and dance where the 'reader/viewer is invited in her/his encounter with alterity to experience wonder, awe, erotic desire, but also approbation and fear.'<sup>112</sup> Such ambivalence is well illustrated in Mills' accounts of her experience of witnessing first-hand the 'savage' African dance: she is drawn to its animal exuberance but realises that it can be experienced safely only within the confines of a European space. Mills describes her own animal vitality as she dances from dusk until dawn at a New Year's party in the European Hotel in Conakry, French Guinea: 'the perspiration poured down everyone's faces ... there was no formality ... one whirled breathlessly from the arms of one stranger to another ... my frock seemed to melt with every movement, but I had forgotten to feel superior or blasé.'<sup>113</sup> Freed from the prescriptions of her home life where, for some, dances like the Charleston were denounced as 'freakish, degenerate, negroid,' she wanders into the territory of the primitive.<sup>114</sup> However, she is also aware of the dangers of such transgression. She describes an encounter with a British colonial officer who scoffed at her belief that African dance elicited atavistic feelings. He, stirred by the delirious beat of drums, joined in the 'half-intoxicated gyrating crowd.' She is ashamed and embarrassed by the transgressive nature of the spectacle:

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<sup>112</sup> Susan Jones, *Literature, Modernism and Dance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 152-153.

<sup>113</sup> Mills, *The Golden Land*, p. 19.

<sup>114</sup> Quoted in John Stevenson, *British Society, 1914-1945* (London: Penguin, 1984), p. 397.



His eyes were blazing and yet vacant, with the expression of a sleep walker. Once a naked girl, laughing, held up to his lips a bowl of native brewed spirit, from which he drank deeply ... He paid no attention to me as I stood at the edge of the dance, beckoning him, for it did not seem good to me that a white official, sole representative of his kind in a land of barbarians, should ... publicly join in an orgy that had already exceeded its official decorum.<sup>115</sup>

In the Liberian hinterland, she is the representative of English decorum: she admits that the 'drums of Africa ... have the power to call to something atavistic deep down in some of us,' and is enthralled by 'the "bucks" of the village, superb young animals, naked except for a loin cloth.' Yet she achieves a certain distance by adopting the tone of an anthropologist tracing the links between the dance and more civilised and modern forms: [it is] 'undoubtedly the basis of ragtime ... with the full-blooded, healthy eroticism of the virile young child of nature, who unknowingly and therefore unashamedly is yet half an animal' (*Through*, 57).

Torgovnick argues that the need expressed in modernism for the primitive to be eternally present and available accounts in part for the anxiety expressed about the speed with which 'primitive' societies vanish.<sup>116</sup> Mills, travelling through Liberian villages that are still largely outside the jurisdiction of the government, is saddened to find evidence of western civilisation. In scenes analogous to Mary Kingsley finding a razor where she least expects it on her travels in the Congo, Mills experiences a sense of disruption and dislocation when she encounters western commodities, such as safety pins, cigarette cards and the tattered clothes that are a 'blot upon the artistic landscape' (*Through*, 2013). One is left with a strong sense that Mills would like the Liberian hinterland to be fixed in the moment in which she finds it, to be ever available as a repository of mankind's earliest origins. She states her preference for 'the absolute wilds [over] semi-civilisation with its treacheries, its dirt and its vermin.'<sup>117</sup> If one cannot have English civilisation, she would opt for 'pure African' which she romanticises and aestheticises:

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<sup>115</sup> Mills, *The Golden Land*, pp. 120-121.

<sup>116</sup> Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive*, p. 185

<sup>117</sup> Mills, *A Different Drummer*, p. 199.

The body of the savage is beautiful, with his sleek black skin that becomes him as does the skin of the leopard, his brother. His wife, as she crouches over her cooking pot ... forms a little theme for a sculpture; his children are little naked, glossy Cupids. In short, the child of nature is beautiful till he learns the ways and acquires the gadgets of white men.

Unfortunately, as the savage engages with modern civilisation 'the sculptured beauty ... is lost as he crouches, monkey wise, over the wheel of a Ford car.'<sup>118</sup> Interestingly, it is not in his savage state that the African appears most simian but when he attempts to mimic the white man.

### **Graham Greene (1904-1991)**

Greene was a young English novelist, one of a generation 'who made uncomfortable journeys in search of bizarre material' when he travelled to Liberia in 1936.<sup>119</sup> The trip may also have been occasioned by an invitation from the Parliamentary Secretary to the Anti-Slavery and Aboriginal Society (of which his uncle, Sir Graham Greene, was a prominent member) to investigate the possible continued existence of slavery there. For Greene, who had been captivated by stories of Africa from his childhood, the journey had major psychological significance. Torgovnick's contention that, in the twentieth century, Africa had become 'a way station for men suffering from cultural alienation or psychic distress,'<sup>120</sup> seems particularly apt in the case of Greene; his travels into the Liberian hinterland facilitated a deep exploration of his own fractured psyche, his childhood and, in parallel, the infancy of the human race. Whereas the earlier male travellers discussed here travelled through the country with an eye to the economic, political or strategic uses that it might serve, Greene is the embodiment of western man who figures it as a locus 'on to which all identification and interpretation, all dissatisfaction and desire, all nostalgia and idealism seeking expression could be projected.'<sup>121</sup> While he admits to a fascination with Africa that stemmed from the

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<sup>118</sup> Mills, *The Golden Land*, pp. 39-40.

<sup>119</sup> Graham Greene, *Ways of Escape* (London: Bodley Head, 1980), p. 45.

<sup>120</sup> Marianna Torgovnick, *Primitive Passions: Men, Women and the Quest for Ecstasy* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 23.

<sup>121</sup> Henri Baudet, *Paradise on Earth: Some Thoughts on European Images of Non-European Man* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), p. 55.

adventure tales of his childhood, he insists that it was not ‘any part of Africa [that] acted so strongly on the unconscious mind.’ It would have to carry with it a ‘quality of darkness, of the inexplicable’ (*JWM*, 20). The appeal of Liberia lay in the fact that it was not a European colony; the very inefficiency of its administration, for which it was so widely condemned by earlier travellers and commentators, meant that its hinterland was largely unknown to Europeans. The only existing maps of Liberia available to him showed a blank space in the interior, covered in one by the single word ‘Cannibals.’ It was the closest he could come in the 1930s to the ‘blank unexplored continent.’

Greene’s book embodies some of the features of earlier writing about Africa while, at the same time, marking a significant departure from it. Africa is still imagined as the Dark Continent, but that darkness could be creatively or personally productive. Africa was still unknowable, but new ways of thinking about the human psyche might furnish an entry into that unknown world. Africa was primitive but that very quality might refresh a tired and decadent art. Africa was savage, but the First World War had revealed a kind of savagery too; maybe a less ‘civilised’ savagery might have something to teach humanity. In the twentieth century, Africa began to be fetishized; the qualities of its blackness, its primitiveness and its instinctiveness are imbued with magical powers to heal the fissured psyche of the western cerebral man. For Greene, its appeal was emotional; he explains that he thought of the continent as ‘a shape ... and the shape is, of course, the human heart’ (*JWM*, 21).

Greene was influenced by the work of Sigmund Freud and Carl Gustav Jung. He had undergone psychoanalysis in his teens with a Jungian analyst and was particularly interested in Jung’s theory of the collective unconscious which was deemed to contain archetypes, ‘the identical psychic structures common to all, the archaic heritage of humanity.’<sup>122</sup> Greene’s *Journey Without Maps* is an account of a journey into his own psyche, an exploration of memory, both personal and collective. He echoes Jungian thought in his frequent references to ‘going deeper’ as he journeys through the Liberian forest. But he possibly owes a greater debt to Freud, whose influence he acknowledges

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<sup>122</sup> Anthony Stevens, *Jung: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 47.

in the final section of the book: Both Jung and Freud had characterised western society as repressive. Jung, recalling his own trip to Africa, concluded that:

the predominantly rationalistic European finds much that is human alien to him and he prides himself on this without realising that his rationality is won at the expense of his vitality, and that the primitive part of his personality is consequently condemned to a more or less underground existence.<sup>123</sup>

Freud, in *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), describes the fundamental tensions between the individual and civilised society. The individual's quest for instinctual freedom is stymied by society's demand for conformity. Therefore, what we call civilisation, represented in Freud's writing by patriarchy and monotheism, is 'largely responsible for our misery and ... we should be much happier if we gave it up and returned to primitive conditions.'<sup>124</sup> Greene acknowledges his debt to Freud who has made modern readers aware of 'the ancestral threads which still exist in our conscious minds to lead us back' (*JWM*, 248). In following the 'ancestral threads,' into the Liberian forest and seeking to understand their meaning, Greene finds a sense of heightened awareness, a consciousness of being fully alive and a sense of deep fulfilment.

His first experience of Africa is of Freetown, where 'the English had planted their seedy civilization and then escaped it as far as they could' (*JWM*, 38) up to the Hill Station from which non-Europeans were excluded. The seediness (a favourite Greene word) of the town is evoked in the descriptions of the tin shacks, the broken windows, the peeling posters, the mean stores, all presided over by the ever-present vultures, Greene's recurring image of decay and corruption. Following a long tradition of English writing on the Creole population of West Africa, Greene depicts its members as pathetic figures, positioned between two worlds but belonging fully in neither. He sees their partnership with the British as having dehumanised them while purporting to 'civilise' them. They are reduced to figures of fun 'to the heartless eye of the white man,' and the 'more desperately they try to regain their dignity, the funnier they become' (*JWM*, 39). They

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<sup>123</sup> Carl Gustav Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, trans. by Richard and Clara Winston (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), p. 245.

<sup>124</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'Civilization and Its Discontents' 1930, trans. by James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010), p. 58.

represent Bhabha's 'flawed mimesis in which to be Anglicised is emphatically not to be English.'<sup>125</sup> Just as Dorothy Mills characterises the African tinkering with a Ford car as a monkey, Greene describes the Creole copy of English civilisation as 'rather like a chimpanzee's party' (*JWM*, 41).

When he moves on to Monrovia, he is, like all European visitors, struck by the Americanness of the town. The Americo-Liberians remind him of the 'American of Tammany Hall ... [in the way] they have taken to politics with the enthusiasm of practised crap players,' a reference that suggests 'the corruption of American politics' that the ruling elite has copied (*JWM*, 19). Greene also characterises them as lacking in sympathy for the indigenous peoples because their 'two hundred years of American servitude had separated them from Africa ... and [they] had lost touch with the true primitive source' (*JWM*, 244).<sup>126</sup> Yet, despite the obvious failings that he detects, he seems to exonerate the settlers, viewing them with a kind of paternalistic pity for all that they have endured. The plight of the settlers in Freetown was not all that different, yet Greene finds in Monrovia a simplicity 'which would redeem it from the complete seediness of a colony like Sierra Leone' (*JWM*, 242). This he seems to attribute to the fact that 'from the first, these American half-caste slaves were idealists in the American manner' (*JWM*, 19). In Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow says that while the 'conquest of the earth is not a pretty thing' it may be 'redeemed' by the 'idea' that lay behind it. The reference is presumably to the 'civilising mission' which, in the context of British imperialism 'did some real work.'<sup>127</sup> Greene also believes the colonisation of Liberia emanated from a pure ideal, echoing the assertion of the Founding Fathers, that their colonial project was not born of greed or any desire for aggrandisement, but rather from the simple, human desire for liberty.

Brantlinger in his discussion of *Heart of Darkness* describes how fragile ideals are in the real world, and how they can quickly be transformed into idols.<sup>128</sup> There is no doubt that

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<sup>125</sup> Bhabha, p. 86.

<sup>126</sup> Greene is confirming Blyden's contention that the African soul is destroyed in the New World.

<sup>127</sup> Conrad, *Heart of Darkness and Other Stories*, pp. 34, 38.

<sup>128</sup> Brantlinger, "'Heart of Darkness': Anti-imperialism, Racism or Impressionism', *Criticism*, 27, 4 (1985), 363-385.

the Liberian ideals disintegrated into a fetishizing of power and status which Greene acknowledges. However, he does not attribute the failure of Liberia to any innate capacity of the Negro race: rather he considers it remarkable that it survived at all considering its genesis as 'a black people planted down, without money or a home, on a coast of yellow fever and malaria to make what they [could] of an Africa from which their families had been torn two centuries before' (*JWM*, 242). He is harsher in his judgement of European imperialism and global capitalism than he is of the Liberian ruling elite: 'England and France ... robbed them of territory: America has done worse, for she has lent them money.'<sup>129</sup> His emphasis on the exploitative practices of European imperial powers in Africa generally and of the Firestone company in Liberia point to the double standards and hypocrisy of Euro-American commentary on Liberia.<sup>130</sup> Perhaps his empathy for the Americo-Liberians also stems from the fact that their forefathers returned to Africa in search of some form of liberation and regeneration. After all, did not Greene himself travel to Liberia as a pilgrim in search of the same?

When Greene leaves the coast and travels into the hinterland, he falls under what European travellers had taken to calling 'the spell of Africa' characterised by 'its listlessness, its *laissez faire*,' its 'timelessness, irresponsibility and [its] freedom' (*JWM*, 119, 134). The two epigraphs used by Greene point to some of the important motifs in the book and also hint at his deeper motivation for the journey. The lines from Auden's poem 'Oh where are you going?' express the tension between the 'fearer' and the 'farer' and the merging of dread and desire as he steps from 'granite to grass.' The passage from Oliver Wendell Holmes compares the individual's fragmented psyche to a map. It points to the need to 'put the pieces together [to make] a properly connected whole.' Greene's choice of these pieces indicates that he envisaged the trip as simultaneously dangerous and psychologically necessary. His journey into the Liberian hinterland is a pilgrimage in search of transcendence through immersion in the 'primitive.' His physically demanding trek through the forest is also a journey into his own psyche that

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<sup>129</sup> The negotiations between Liberia, the U.S. government and the Firestone Corporation are discussed in Chapter 5.

<sup>130</sup> Greene echoes the cry of black nationalists and Pan-Africanists who criticised European imperial powers in Africa for holding Liberia to higher standards than they themselves were prepared to enforce.

facilitates a reconnection with his (lost) childhood. It is analogous to psychoanalysis, 'a long journey backwards without maps' (*JWM*, 97). As he travels further away from civilisation, he finds, almost unexpectedly, a 'curious lightness and freedom' (*JWM*, 132). He describes himself as having been a fearful child, beset by existential dreads as well as more commonplace fears of birds and moths and mice. In the Liberian villages, as far from civilisation as he could get, he is forced to face his fears and the 'pain of memory' (*JWM*, 97). Amidst the dirt and deprivation, he finds renewal and regeneration: 'the rats jumped down when I turned out the lantern, but I wasn't any longer afraid of rats. I was discovering in myself a thing I never thought I possessed: a love of life' (*JWM*, 171).

While Africa represented many things for Greene, its overwhelming appeal was that it was not 'cerebral.' The privileging of the head over the heart had led to what he regarded as the waste land of western civilisation: if one could go back to the beginning, it might be possible to 'discover ... from what we have come, to recall where we went astray' (*JWM*, 21). Freud, creating an analogy between the child and the 'savage,' postulated that an encounter with the 'savage' is useful for understanding 'civilised' cultures: 'the mental life of those we describe as savages or half-savages ... has a particular interest for us if we are right in seeing it as a well preserved form of an early stage of our development.'<sup>131</sup> Primitivism provides a mirror where the 'civilised' man can come face to face with what he once was before the fall into civilisation or as Greene says 'before we went astray' (*JWM*, 21). Torgovnick has described how primitive societies came to be represented in early twentieth-century discourse as 'feminine, collective and ecstatic' in opposition to civilisation that is imagined as 'masculine, individualistic and devoted to the quotidian.'<sup>132</sup> The Liberian village becomes for Greene the repository of values that are regarded as feminine and no longer prized in the hyper-rational West. He describes the hardship faced by the people; their poverty, the precariousness of their existence, their fear of real and supernatural forces in the shape

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<sup>131</sup> Freud, 'The Horror of Incest', in *Totem and Taboo: Some Points of Agreement between the Mental Life of Savages and Neurotics*, 1950 (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 1.

<sup>132</sup> Torgovnick, *Primitive Passions*, p. 14. Of course, Blyden had characterised the African Personality in those terms also, as did Du Bois. Greene's sense of the happiness and the harmony of the Liberian village bears a striking resemblance to the account of Du Bois' described in Chapter 5. Du Bois, however, makes no reference to the real hardship faced by Liberia's indigenous peoples.

of the dreaded Frontier Force and the Liberian Devils respectively.<sup>133</sup> Yet, he highlights the timelessness of their villages, their sense of community and their childlike innocence and enjoyment of life:

I never wearied of the villages in which I spent the night; the sense of a small courageous community barely existing ... the [people's ] laughter and their happiness seemed to me the most courageous thing in nature. Love ... existed here without the trappings of civilisation. They were tender towards their children ... they were tender towards each other ... . (*JWM*, 80)

In such places, Greene feels a sense of pity, not for the poor, primitive Africans but for Europeans and what they have done to themselves in their pursuit of 'the smart, the new, the chic [and] the cerebral' (*JWM*, 249).

Greene quotes the words of Sir Walter Raleigh on Guiana (1595), a country 'that hath yet her maidenhead, never sacked, turned nor wrought ... the graves [that] have not been opened ... the mines not broken with sledges.'<sup>134</sup> Schweizer reads those words as both a justification for imperial expansion while at the same time expressing nostalgia for a pristine order of existence.<sup>135</sup> Greene's travels to Liberia took place just a decade after the Liberian government had ceded a million acres of its forests to Firestone; his writing is therefore coloured by an awareness that the virgin territory traversed on his journey is on the brink of annihilation by the forces of modernity. Writing in 1925, Du Bois had wondered if Liberia, 'a little thing set upon a Hill' could 'escape the power that rules the world,' which he identified as 'the power of modern capital.'<sup>136</sup> In Greene's estimation, the nation had not managed to escape but rather had 'all but surrendered sovereignty' to a 'commercial company [that had] no interest in Liberia but rubber and dividends' (*JWM*, 232).

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<sup>133</sup> The 'Liberian Devils' whom Mills described as a Cannibal cult were, according to Greene, the unknown (because masked) heads of secret bush schools. The schools which initiated girls and boys into adulthood were the Sande and Poro respectively. Greene describes the 'power' of the devil as emanating from the fact that 'no human part of [him] is allowed to show' and no one may see the devil unmasked for fear of blindness or death' (*JWM*, 90).

<sup>134</sup> William Oldys and Thomas Birch, eds. *The Works of Sir Walter Raleigh, Vol. 111. Miscellaneous Works* (Oxford: The University Press, 1829), p. 464.

<sup>135</sup> Schweizer, p. 96.

<sup>136</sup> Du Bois, 'The Negro Mind Reaches Out', p. 414.



## Chapter 5

### From “Black Zion” to “Bitter Canaan”: The Death of a Racial Utopia in Twentieth-Century Liberia<sup>1</sup>

*‘Eventually, all peoples exhibit the homing instinct and turn back physically or mentally, hopefully or helpfully, to the land of their origins’.<sup>2</sup>*

*‘One three centuries removed  
From the scenes his fathers loved  
Spicy groves, cinnamon trees,  
What is Africa to me?’<sup>3</sup>*

On the 1<sup>st</sup> August 1920, Marcus Garvey, a British citizen of Jamaica, launched the First Annual Convention of the Negro Peoples of the World in Harlem, New York. In the course of the extraordinary month that followed, he was elected ‘Provisional President of Africa’ and the Bill of Rights drawn up at the Convention declared that ‘all the Negro denizens of the world [were] henceforth claimed as citizens of Africa.’<sup>4</sup> It was the most audacious act of re-creation during a period of intense black intellectual reconfiguration, commonly referred to as the Harlem Renaissance. Gates tracks the symbolic transition from ‘Old’ to ‘New Negro’ in the period between Reconstruction and World War Two, which he describes as ‘a turning away from the

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<sup>1</sup> “Black Zion,” a term frequently used to describe Pan-Africanism and Back-to-Africa movements, draws attention to similarities between these movements and Zionism. W. E. B. Du Bois explicitly acknowledged the connection when he wrote in 1919: ‘the African movement means to us what the Zionist movement must mean to the Jews, the centralisation of race effort and the recognition of the racial fount’, quoted in *W. E. B. Du Bois on Race and Culture*, ed. by Bernard Bell, Emily R. Grosholz and James B. Stewart (London: Routledge, 2014), p. 199. “Bitter Canaan” is the description of Liberia used by Charles Johnson, a professor of sociology from Fisk University, who was part of the commission set up by the League of Nations, to investigate allegations of slavery in Liberia in 1930. Back-to-Africa movements were usually figured in Biblical terms, where slaves and their descendants were imagined as returning to the Promised Land and founding a new Canaan. Johnson’s term expresses the disillusionment he felt on his visit to Liberia. Though he had drafted a manuscript entitled ‘Bitter Canaan’ on his return from Liberia, it was not published in his lifetime. Charles S. Johnson, *Bitter Canaan: The Story of the Negro Republic* (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 1987).

<sup>2</sup> Alain Locke, ‘Apropos of Africa’, in Hill and Kilson, *Apropos of Africa*, p. 351.

<sup>3</sup> Countee Cullen, ‘Heritage’, in *The Black Poets: A New Anthology*, ed. by Dudley Randall (London: Bantam Books, 1971), pp. 95-96.

<sup>4</sup> Marcus Garvey, *Selected Writings and Speeches of Marcus Garvey*, ed. by Bob Blaisdell (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications Inc., 2004), p. 16.

labyrinthine memory of enslavement and *towards* irresistible, spontaneously generated black and sufficient self, ... daring to recreate a race by renaming it.’<sup>5</sup> Garvey went further than merely substituting the adjective ‘old’ for ‘new,’ in his assertion that henceforth all Negroes were to be citizens of Africa. Claiming that there [was] ‘absolutely no difference between the native African and the American and West Indian Negroes, in that [they were] all descendants from the same family stock,’ he announced a programme that would unite and return the Negroes of the diaspora to the Motherland, Africa.<sup>6</sup> The ‘homing instinct’ referred to by Locke found expression in the Garvey movement as a both a mental and physical turn towards Africa and specifically Liberia.

In the preface to his book, *Liberia*, Harry Johnston wondered whether the nation would survive or would eventually become a ‘footnote to history.’ As it faced yet another existential crisis in the beginning of the twentieth century, it became the centre of intense focus among international powers and black leaders due to historic events that had implications for its survival. The future of the country was debated and decided, far from the continent of Africa, in the stately buildings of Washington and Paris and on the streets of Harlem, New York. Not only had it become a pawn in a game of international power and finance, it had also become a ‘flash point’ for Pan-Africanists, leading to heated debate and ‘vitriolic abuse’ between black leaders and intellectuals such as Marcus Garvey and W. E. B. Du Bois, for whom its present crisis presented a historic opportunity to define the meaning and ultimate destination of the African Diaspora.<sup>7</sup>

The debates on the status and future of Liberia appeared in a variety of publications across a wide variety of genres. These include the records of diplomatic exchanges between the U.S. and Liberian governments; the debates on the feasibility of African

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<sup>5</sup> Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Gene Andrew Jarrett, eds. *The New Negro: Readings on Race, Representation and African American Culture, 1892-1938* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> Garvey, *Selected Writings*, p. 72.

<sup>7</sup> Ben F. Rogers, ‘William E. B. Du Bois, Marcus Garvey and Pan-Africa’, *The Journal of Negro History*, 40, 2 (April 1995), 154-165 (p. 165).

self-rule that took place during the Paris Peace Conference and the Pan-African Conferences in Paris in 1919; the polemical works of W. E. B. Du Bois and Marcus Garvey, which appeared in *Crisis* and *The Negro World*, respectively. Du Bois was the pre-eminent black man of letters in the early twentieth century while Garvey was the foremost rhetorician; therefore while Du Bois' literary style impresses in its logic and its erudition, Garvey's theatricality and emotional appeal to his listeners is difficult to grasp in the transcription of his speeches. Garvey himself never set foot on African soil but a report by one of his representatives indicted Americo-Liberian rule, as did the prominent black journalist, George Schulyer, in his newspaper articles and in the novel, *Slaves Today: A Story of Liberia* (1931), both inspired by his trip to the country. They provide sharp contrasting representations to those that appear in Du Bois' romanticised travel sketches, 'Little Portraits of Africa' (1924).

As the country approached its centenary, the vision of its first settlers as a 'New Canaan' and as a 'City on a Hill,' that would serve as a beacon of light for all of Africa, seemed to have evaporated. The country was destitute, its ruling class regarded as an autocracy, its indigenous peoples cowed, some of them enslaved. The European and American outsiders who pronounced on its future regarded it as something of a blank slate on which they hoped to inscribe their own plans for a fresh beginning: its European colonial neighbours regarded its parlous state as an opportunity for colonial expansion; America, stressing its historic links to it, viewed it as an African outpost that would serve in the future as a military and communications base; Garvey imagined it as the nucleus of his African liberation movement. Du Bois, while recognising its current difficulties, regarded it as symbol of Negro capability, its survival as an independent republic even more pressing in the aftermath of the U.S. takeover of Haiti in 1915.

Garvey's plan was, by far, the most visible and the most spectacular. The Negro Convention was an extraordinary event to have taken place in the largest city of a democratic republic governed by a white elite. All the participants were black; the pageantry surrounding the Convention was a mixture of imperial ceremonial and Caribbean carnival and Garvey, the Provisional President of Africa, had anointed as

his second-in-command the visiting mayor of Monrovia, Gabriel Johnson, on whom he had conferred the title 'Potentate Leader of the Negro Peoples in the World.' The iconic image of the day, Garvey in his 'majestic robes and bicornate helmet,' accompanied by Johnson in his regalia, linked the two imagined capitals of the transnational Negro world, New York and Monrovia. According to Garvey's plans, the two would soon become one. The plea of Blyden for one 'great centre of the race where [its] physical, pecuniary and intellectual strength [would] be collected' was about to gain new force; Liberia would become the gateway into Africa for the millions of the scattered children of the African Motherland.<sup>8</sup>

At the same time as Johnson was being declared 'Potentate Leader of the Negro Peoples in the World,' his father-in-law, C.B. King, the President of Liberia, was involved in tortuous loan negotiations with the U.S. Government in Washington. The ruling elite of Liberia was hedging its bets, torn between two possible outcomes: Garvey's Pan-African scheme or a continuation of the status quo, supported by 'official' American money. King's announcement in 1924 that 'Liberia's immediate objective is towards *nationalism* and not *racialism*; the making of a nation and not a race' was the definitive statement on the future of Liberia and marked the end of the Pan-African dream that had been first advanced in the Liberian context by Blyden and most powerfully articulated by Marcus Garvey.<sup>9</sup>

Appiah characterises the Pan-African vision as centred on a 'single guiding concept: race.' Accordingly, Africa was regarded as the motherland of the Negro race whose descendants felt they had the 'right to act in it, to speak for it, to plot its future.'<sup>10</sup> However, the Pan-Africanism of the early twentieth century was not a monolith. The term itself is contested and its meaning elusive: O.P. Esedebe attributes to it several broad components, including a claim that Africa is a homeland for Africans and those of African descent, that they therefore share a sense of solidarity and that they are

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<sup>8</sup> Blyden, 'Call of Providence', p. 74.

<sup>9</sup> C. B. King, in *The Annual Messages of the Presidents of Liberia 1848-2010: State of the Nation Addresses to the National Legislature*, ed. by D. Elwood Dunn (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 2001), p. 665.

<sup>10</sup> Appiah, p. 5.

committed to the freedom and independence of Africa and Africans everywhere.<sup>11</sup> T.E. M'bayo agrees that it envisaged that Africans 'at home and abroad' would find common cause in combatting the dehumanising effects of slavery, colonialism and racism while arguing that Pan-Africanism was a flawed and impractical project, that, in its manifestation in the early twentieth century, sought to substitute European colonial power with American Negro influence.<sup>12</sup>

The rhetoric of Du Bois, the most visible Pan-Africanist, seems to support this contention. While he attacked the so-called 'civilised' Europeans who denied any measure of self-determination to Africans on the grounds that they would slip back to barbarism, he echoes the paternalism of British Africanists such as Harry Johnston in his assertion that Africans should 'only exercise self-government as fast as their development permits.'<sup>13</sup> Du Bois argued that Europeans were primarily interested in the exploitation of Africa rather than in its civilisation; if they were interested only in its civilisation, why not transfer power to educated and assimilated Africans whom they themselves had trained? Or better still, why not entrust the role to the 150 million African peoples of the Diaspora 'gaining slowly an intelligent, thoughtful leadership [whose] seat is today in the United States.'<sup>14</sup> The assumption that American black men should be at the vanguard of African progress was firmly rejected by French colonial black people. Blaise Diagne from Senegal and Gratien Candace from Guadeloupe insisted on saying 'we Frenchmen,' when the Americans said 'we Negroes.' Candace spelled out his attitude to Liberia, pointing out that, as it was less developed than the European colonies, why would anyone wish to be a part of it? This echoed the official view from the Paris Peace Conference: 'as Liberia does not yet hold

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<sup>11</sup> O. P. Esedebe, 'Origins and Meaning of Pan-Africanism', *Presence Africaine*, 1, 73 (1970), 109-127.

<sup>12</sup> T. E. M'bayo, 'W. E. B. Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, and Pan-Africanism in Liberia, 1919-1924', *Historian*, 66 (2004), 19-44, pp. doi:10.1111/j.0018-2370.2004.00062. x.

<sup>13</sup> For an account of Du Bois' attempted intervention in African affairs during the Versailles Peace Conference, see Clarence G. Contee, 'Du Bois, the NAACP and the Pan-African Congress of 1919', *The Journal of Negro History*, 57, 1 (Jan 1972), 13-28.

<sup>14</sup> Du Bois, 'The Negro Mind Reaches Out', in Alain Locke, *The New Negro* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014), 385-414 (p. 411). Du Bois rejected this view towards the end of his life. Speaking on the occasion of his 91<sup>st</sup> birthday he said, 'once I thought of you Africans as children whom we educated Afro-Americans would lead to liberty. I was wrong. We could not even lead ourselves, much less you.' Quoted in James H. Meriwether, *Proudly We Can Be Africans: Black Americans and Africa, 1935-1961* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), p. 11.

out a bright promise for the realization of national desires for the negro, the establishment of other republics would appear undesirable.' Far from being a shining beacon in Africa, Liberia was represented as a failure whose example would deter 'the contented black population of the British Empire [from going] to any new black state.'<sup>15</sup>

The attitude of colonial Africans to American black people points to the validity of the contention of Gilroy, Wright and others that the space in which black subjectivity was constructed resulted in very different understandings of the 'historic and existential dialectic of the Black Diaspora and the African homeland.'<sup>16</sup> The very different positioning in the diaspora of Garvey, a citizen of the British Empire and Du Bois, a quasi-citizen of the United States, their colour (Garvey was a 'pure' Negro whereas Du Bois was light-skinned) and their class meant that they had widely divergent views on the nature of the deliverance that they agreed the Negro race needed. A very large percentage of Garvey's followers in New York were Caribbean British subjects, like himself, who constituted twenty-five percent of the population of Harlem. They were regarded as culturally distinct from American black people, especially those who were internally displaced and who had poured into northern urban centres during the Great Migration. Caribbean black communities believed that they possessed qualities of independence and initiative that they did not see in their American counterparts who had been 'taught a cringing servility.' The Jamaican journalist, W.A. Domingo, characterised the 'outstanding contribution of West Indians to American Negro life [as] the insistent assertion of their manhood in an environment that demande[d] too much servility.'<sup>17</sup> Garvey's articulation of black masculinity, explored later in this chapter, bears the hallmarks of his Jamaican upbringing: 'the white man of the world has been accustomed to deal with the Uncle Tom cringing Negro. Up to 1918, he knew no other negro than the negro represented through Booker Washington.'<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Contee, pp. 13-28.

<sup>16</sup> F. Abiola Irele, "'What is Africa to Me?'" Africa in the Black Diaspora Imagination', *Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture and Society*, 7, 3-4, (2005), p. 26.

<sup>17</sup> W.A. Domingo, quoted in Winston James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in Early Twentieth-Century America* (London and New York: Verso, 1998), pp. 3-4.

<sup>18</sup> Garvey, *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers, Vol.1, 1826-1919*, ed. by Robert A. Hill (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), p. 502.

The organisations established by Du Bois (The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the NAACP) and Garvey (Universal Negro Improvement Association, the UNIA) reveal the differences in the philosophy and ideology of the two men. Du Bois, though proud to call himself a Negro, had insisted on the word 'colored' over Negro on the grounds that black Americans should be committed to the cause of 'non-white' people everywhere. The 'national' of the title grounded the association firmly within the United States whereas Garvey's association proudly announced his global intentions from the beginning. Though Garvey dedicated his association to the Negro, he used the word interchangeably with 'the Black man' and the African, and depicted Du Bois' decision to opt for the word 'colored' as proof that 'he hate[d] black people as being ugly.'<sup>19</sup> The conflict between the two men again raised the questions that had dogged the relationship between Martin Delany and Frederick Douglass, and had led to the bitter struggles between Blyden and Crummell, and the ruling elite of Liberia: could a person of adulterated blood claim to embody the 'essence' of the Negro race? Would it not be the case that whatever exceptional qualities he displayed be attributed to the invigorating power of the Anglo-Saxon race? Blyden, who like Garvey originated in the West Indies, asserted that the true leader of the African diaspora should be a pure-blooded Negro rather than the 'mongrels' who ruled in Liberia. Garvey, who was being hailed as a 'Black Moses,' could see himself in Blyden's prediction that

the Negro leader of the exodus, who will succeed, will be a Negro of the Negroes, like Moses was a Hebrew of the Hebrews - even if brought up in Pharaoh's palace he will be found. No half-Hebrew and half-Egyptian will do the work.<sup>20</sup>

A commentator on the scene in Harlem felt that Garvey's pure blackness conferred on him a significant advantage when it came to the question of race leadership:

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<sup>19</sup> Garvey, *Selected Writings*, p. 112.

<sup>20</sup> Edward Blyden, quoted in Lynch, *Pan-Negro Patriot*, p. 121.

every Negro who has respect for himself and for his race will feel when contemplating such examples as Toussaint l'Ouverture, Phyllis Wheatley ... and Marcus Garvey, the thrill of pride that differs in intensity from the feeling which he experiences when contemplating other examples of great Negroes who are not entirely black.<sup>21</sup>

Garvey's dismissal of Du Bois and his black American opponents as 'nearly all Octoroons and Quadroons'<sup>22</sup> was, according to Du Bois, an expression of the 'Jamaican colour scheme' that Garvey had imported into the United States.<sup>23</sup> It bears some resemblance to that described by Fanon who claimed that the black colonised subject in Martinique, alienated from himself, wished to turn white: 'to marry white culture, white beauty, white whiteness.'<sup>24</sup> Referring to his failure to establish the UNIA in his home country, Garvey places the blame on his compatriots of lighter hue than himself. These 'black whites' as he calls them did not want to be identified with an organisation that had the word 'Negro' in its title; they had 'believed themselves white under the West Indian order of society.'<sup>25</sup> Or, as Du Bois put it, Jamaica's 'colour scheme' encouraged the 'mulatto' population to 'bleach out their colour as soon as possible,'<sup>26</sup> whereas in the United States, a mulatto like himself could proudly proclaim that he was a Negro.<sup>27</sup>

Du Bois' early work focused on the American Negro whom he characterised as 'an outcast and a stranger in [his] own house.' He never wavered from the conviction that the United States was *home* for American black people, though still denied. In the concluding chapter of his seminal work *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) he argued that

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<sup>21</sup> Hubert Harrison, *A Hubert Harrison Reader* (Middleton, Ct., Wesleyan University Press, 2001), p. 180.

<sup>22</sup> Garvey, *Philosophy and Opinions*, vol. 1, p. 308.

<sup>23</sup> Du Bois, 'Back to Africa', in Sundquist, p. 266.

<sup>24</sup> Fanon, pp. 17 and 45.

<sup>25</sup> Garvey, *Selected Writings*, p. 4.

<sup>26</sup> Du Bois, in Sundquist, p. 266.

<sup>27</sup> In his autobiography, Du Bois describes the transformative experience of his life when, as a young teacher in the South, he became aware of his African roots. He declared that from then on 'a new loyalty and allegiance replaced my Americanness: henceforth I was a Negro.' The landmark Supreme Court ruling of 1896, *Plessey v. Ferguson*, determined that anyone with a traceable amount of Negro blood was to be classified as a Negro. Therefore, despite his very mixed heritage and his light-coloured skin, Du Bois was a Negro. Charles Gallagher and Cameron D. Lippard, eds. *Race and Racism in the United States: An Encyclopaedia of the American Mosaic*, 4 vols (Santa Barbara, CA.: Greenwood, 2014), vol. 1, p. 563.



the physical, spiritual and cultural contributions of slaves and their descendants to American life meant that they were 'woven into the very warp and woof of [the] nation.' That image of a nation as a tapestry evoked the many dependent and interwoven strands: he described the 'vigor and ingenuity' of the white American spirit complemented by 'gift of story and song ... a gift of the Spirit' that was the great contribution of the African presence.<sup>28</sup> Jessie Fauset, who worked with Du Bois on *Crisis*, claimed that whatever the rhetoric of 'homeland' employed by American blacks, their true 'dream country' was 'founded on that document which most realises and sets forth the primal and unchanging needs of man - the Constitution of the United States.'<sup>29</sup> Of course, the 'dream country' of Liberia was created to answer the same needs by the same method, albeit at a remove on the continent of Africa.

Garvey described the black person in the New World as homeless, though he figured 'home' as 'nation': speaking on behalf of all 'Africans,' of the diaspora, he declared: 'we are 280 millions of homeless people with no country and no flag. In America, they make a joke of it, that every nation has a flag but the coon.' Garvey held deeply pessimistic views of American democracy. Employing the language of Social Darwinism, he spoke of it as a 'white man's country' where the Negro was in danger of 'racial extinction':

If the Negro were to live in this Western hemisphere for another five hundred years he would still be outnumbered by other races who are prejudiced against him. He cannot resort to the government for protection for government will be in the hands of the majority of the people who are prejudiced against him, hence for the Negro to depend on the ballot and his industrial progress alone, will be hopeless as it does not help him when he is lynched, burned, jim-crowed and segregated. The future of the Negro therefore outside of Africa, spells ruin and disaster.<sup>30</sup>

To the question 'What is Africa to Me?' posed by the Harlem Renaissance poet Countee Cullen, Du Bois would have characterised the continent as a place of memory and myth, a source of inspiration and creativity to which diasporic blacks owed

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<sup>28</sup> Du Bois, in Sundquist, p. 238.

<sup>29</sup> Jessie Fauset, 'Nostalgia', in *Crisis*, 22,4 (New York: NAACP, 1921), p. 157.

<sup>30</sup> Garvey, *Philosophy and Opinions*, p. 53.

support in order to bring about its freedom and independence. For Garvey, it represented the place where they could achieve an integrated subjectivity as an antidote to the 'physical and psychic threat of disintegration' encountered in their enforced exile.<sup>31</sup> It was the place to which they would 'have to go and seek salvation or remain [in the United States] and die.'<sup>32</sup>

From his travels in the Americas and Europe, Garvey concluded that the black man everywhere was 'the object of degradation and pity ... in the sense that he has no status socially, nationally or commercially.' He came to understand that the only 'protection against injustice [was] ... power - physical, financial and scientific.' Describing a transformative moment in his life when he came to understand the reasons for white hegemony and the universal degradation of the Negro race, he wrote: 'where is the black man's government? Where is his president, his country, his ambassador and his army? I could not find them and then I declared "I will help to make them."' <sup>33</sup> In a striking appropriation of the language of the German Chancellor Von Bulow who in 1897 had justified the cause of German imperialism, Garvey demanded for diasporic Africans their 'place in the sun.'<sup>34</sup> Thus, at the 1920 Convention he exhorted his followers: 'if you believe that the Negro should have his place in the sun; if you believe that Africa should be one vast empire, controlled by the Negro, then arise.' Like Von Bulow who had stressed the need for Germany to foster and cultivate the interests of shipping, trade and industry, Garvey, rejecting the romanticism of people like Blyden, imagined an Africa competing commercially with European imperial interests. Unlike them, the aspiration of diasporic Africans to *their* 'place in the sun' was, according to Garvey, a just claim, based as it was on the rights of inheritance to the land of their forefathers.

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<sup>31</sup> Amy Abugo Ongiri, 'We are Family: Miscegenation, Black Nationalism, Black Masculinity and the Black Gay Cultural Imagination', in *Race-ing Representation: Voice, History and Sexuality*, ed. by Kostas Myrsiades and Linda Myrsiades (New York and Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Inc., 1998), 231-246 (p. 232).

<sup>32</sup> Garvey, *Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers*, Vol. III, Sept. 1920-Aug. 1921, ed. by Robert A. Hill (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), p. 79.

<sup>33</sup> Garvey, *Selected Writings*, p. 3.

<sup>34</sup> Felicity Rash, *German Images of Self and the Other: Nationalist, Colonialist and Anti-Semitic Discourse* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 135.

His rallying cry 'Africa for the Africans' became the twentieth-century version of a black nationalism first enunciated in the middle of the nineteenth century by Martin Delany. While the dream of earlier nationalists was deferred in the aftermath of the Civil War and the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment that officially ended slavery in the United States, it was never completely abandoned; in Garvey, it found an energetic executor. He expanded on the nineteenth-century rhetoric of a recovered homeland by adding to it a strong anti-colonial dimension, drawing inspiration from early twentieth-century Indian and Irish nationalist movements. While Africa was largely under the control of European imperialism, he also regarded the supposedly independent Liberia as in thrall to outside forces. Understanding sovereignty to reside ultimately in economic independence, he declared that it was the solemn duty of the UNIA to 'free Liberia from any debt she owed to any white government,' and pledged that it would raise five million dollars to do so. Thus, Liberia came to be re-imagined in the twentieth century in Garvey's rhetoric: under the eventual stewardship of the UNIA, he hoped that its distinctly American character would be refashioned as the birthplace of a Pan-African empire arising from the ashes of European imperialism.

Garvey's followers constituted an 'imagined political community' as described by Anderson, rhetorically represented as family - Garveyites - and linked globally through the UNIA newspaper, *Negro World*. Just as Blyden had used newspapers and journals to establish connections throughout the African diaspora in the New World, *Negro World*, which included articles in French and Spanish as well as English, and was frequently translated in to various African languages ensured that Garveyism spread throughout the European colonial world. It is estimated that at its peak it reached a worldwide circulation of 50,000 copies though its readership probably amounted to significantly more. It was regarded as dangerous and subversive by colonial powers who cited it as a factor in uprisings and general unrest in places as diverse as Dahomey, British Honduras, Kenya, Trinidad and Cuba.<sup>35</sup> It was banned as seditious in most colonies though it continued to be influential through the agency of black

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<sup>35</sup> Tony Martin, *Race First: The Ideological and Organizational Struggles of Marcus Garvey* (Dover, Mass.: The Majority Press, 1976), p. 93.

seamen who spread its message and through the agents who had established UNIA chapters in forty-one countries.

Garveyism can be understood, at one level, as an anti-colonial movement in that its leader was trying to mobilise free New World blacks against European imperial powers in Africa; he represented the continent of Africa as free for the taking if the white man could be dislodged. Harold Cruse described Garveyism as 'Afro-British nationalism functioning outside of its historical British empire context, hence avoiding British confrontation,' though the censorship of his newspaper can be seen as a confrontation of sorts.<sup>36</sup> Garvey's articulation of an African nation was influenced by three different and often conflicting ideologies and political thought: a version of Ethiopianism that he shared with the nineteenth-century black nationalists and the Founding Fathers of Liberia; the militant brand of Irish nationalism that found expression in the 1916 Irish Rising and the War of Independence and, paradoxically, British imperialism, though his great hero was Napoleon, on whom he frequently modelled himself. At other times, he represented himself as Moses, Toussaint L'Ouverture and Robert Emmet. He greatly admired the blood sacrifice of the 1916 Rising and later drew inspiration from the efforts of Irish republicans to draw attention to their cause. When Eamon De Valera embarked to the U.S. in 1919 in order to plead the cause of Irish freedom, Garvey was particularly impressed, especially with the ability of his supporters to raise funds and to master the art of propaganda. Garvey's identification with the movement for Irish independence peaked with the dedication of the new permanent site of the UNIA in Harlem; he named it Liberty Hall in honour of the headquarters of the Irish Citizen Army during the Easter Rising. His call for an International Convention of the Negro Peoples of the World in 1919 was modelled closely on a successful Irish race Convention that same year and he was duly elected Provisional President of Africa at the convention in 1920, the same year that De Valera was elected Provisional President of Ireland.

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<sup>36</sup> Harold Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* (New York: Morrow, 1967), p. 124.

Chatterjee claims that anti-colonial nationalism, while seeking to challenge colonial domination, simultaneously endorses its schema, asserting equivalence with the dominating power while also claiming difference through a separate identity. He distinguishes between political and cultural movements of nationalism, describing the former as a 'derivative discourse' that draws on the language and ideas of the colonial masters while the latter finds inspiration in indigenous sources. As Chatterjee argues, anti-colonial nationalism seeks to create its own domain of sovereignty within colonial society, by creating two separate spheres: a material sphere of economy, statecraft, science and technology, within which colonial power expresses its authority, and a separate sphere of culture including religion, culture and family claimed by nationalism. Its particular mission is to 'fashion a "modern" national culture that is nevertheless not Western.'<sup>37</sup>

The form of Irish nationalism articulated by Pearse and de Valera rejected modernity in favour of an indigenous culture. De Valera's vision of a new Ireland 'would be the home of a people who valued material wealth only as a basis for right living, of a people who, satisfied with frugal comfort, devoted their leisure time to things of the spirit.'<sup>38</sup> Du Bois in his most romantic and Utopian writing about Africa imagined 'a civilization without coal, without noise, where machinery [would] sing and never rush and roar and where men [would] sleep and think and dance ... and women [would] be happy.'<sup>39</sup> Garvey's anti-colonial rhetoric did not represent the kind of separate cultural sphere theorized by Chatterjee or the anti-materialism of Du Bois' idyllic Africa. While he occasionally claimed for the Negro a higher ethical standard than that found in other races, and while he drew on quasi-mystical notions such as Ethiopianism to argue for the covenanted nature of the return to Africa, his idea of African freedom was distinctly modern. If white power was built on economic and military might, black power would have to develop the same tools in order to combat it. It has frequently been noted that while Garvey was anti-colonial, he was not anti-

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<sup>37</sup> Chatterjee, p. 217.

<sup>38</sup> Eamon De Valera, 'On the Language and the Irish Nation', in *Speeches and Statements by Eamon De Valera, 1917-1973*, ed. by Maurice Moynihan (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1980), p. 466.

<sup>39</sup> Du Bois, quoted in Sundquist, p. 647.

imperial; in his plans for Africa, he was merely substituting black imperialism for white. Clarence Walker characterises Garveyism as a 'recrudescence of colonization' which accepted the fundamental principle of the ACS and its supporters, that black people had no place to call home in the United States.<sup>40</sup> However, he did not represent his back-to-Africa scheme as colonisation nor did he dwell on the history of Liberia. Unlike Du Bois, who was interested in saving Liberia for its own sake and for what it represented to the Negro race, Garvey's main interest in the nation was as a stepping stone; Liberia would be his first destination in Africa but not his last. Nor did Liberia have special resonance for his followers, the vast majority of whom were Caribbean black people. While it is true that some of Liberia's most prominent men were also of Caribbean extraction, the nation had never exerted a hold on the imagination of the Caribbean black population. Even those who settled in Liberia were often at pains to stress their Britishness; as already noted, Winwood Reade recounts meeting former West Indians who insisted 'we are British subjects born.'<sup>41</sup>

The African Empire that Garvey envisioned and sold to his followers was modelled on the British Empire, with its army, navy and vast global industrial might and represented everything that Liberia lacked. Apart from slogans such as 'Up you Mighty Race,' 'Wake Up, Ethiopia,' and 'Africa for the Africans' what exactly did Garveyism mean for Africa? While he frequently expressed the idea of a Negro nation as a revolutionary, democratic, and self-governing republic of equals, he envisaged and dramatized it as a fetishistic Black Empire. In order to reclaim Africa for the Africans, he would have to confront the great European imperial powers and match them in numbers and in military might. In many of his orations, he figured the African continent as a vast, undifferentiated space peopled by four hundred million Negroes who would rise up, under his leadership, in a great apocalyptic military struggle 'on the battle plains of Africa' to 'answer the cry of our fathers who cry out ... for the redemption of our own country, our motherland, Africa.' There they would die, if

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<sup>40</sup> Clarence Walker, *Deromanticizing Black History: Critical Essays and Reappraisals* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991).

<sup>41</sup> Reade, *African Sketch Book*, vol. 2, p. 259.

necessary, gallantly fighting to plant the standard of liberty.<sup>42</sup> His fellow countryman, the poet Claude McKay, while doubting that anyone could be as naïve as Garvey seemed to be, described how Garvey, ‘ignoring all geographical and political divisions ... gave his followers the idea that that vast continent of diverse tribes ... [was] waiting for the western Negroes to come and help them drive out the European exploiters.’<sup>43</sup>

Garvey’s elaboration on the subject of ‘liberty’ focused on the status of the black man in the African diaspora, expressed in a distinctly Caribbean style. The tension that Bederman notes between late nineteenth-century notions of masculinity that privileged ideas of self-discipline and responsibility and an emerging one that promoted physical expression and aggression seems to be resolved in Garveyism.<sup>44</sup> The movement valorised *both* black respectability and independence as well as an attitude expressed in McKay’s poem ‘If we must die’:

Like men we’ll face the murderous cowardly pack,  
Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back.<sup>45</sup>

Garvey announcing the regeneration of the African proclaimed, ‘this is the age of men, not of serfs and peons and dogs, but men and we who make up the membership of the UNIA reflect the new manhood of the Negro.’<sup>46</sup> The freedom of the African empire would be effected through economic, technological and military power. Its leadership would be strong and authoritarian: the ‘government should be absolute ... when we elect a President of a nation, he should be endowed with absolute authority to appoint all his lieutenants from cabinet ministers, governors of states and Territories, administrators and judges to minor officers.’<sup>47</sup> Given that he had already been elected ‘Provisional President of Africa’ at the 1920 convention, there was no doubt as to who

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<sup>42</sup> Garvey, *Selected Writings*, p. 110.

<sup>43</sup> Claude McKay, quoted in Colin Grant, *Negro with A Hat: The Rise and Fall of Marcus Garvey* (London: Vintage Books, 2010), p. 265

<sup>44</sup> Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995)

<sup>45</sup> McKay, ‘If we must die’ in *Complete Poems*, ed. by William J. Maxwell (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2004), p. 177.

<sup>46</sup> Garvey, *Philosophy and Opinions*, p. 181.

<sup>47</sup> Garvey, *Philosophy and Opinions*, p. 74.

the Great Black Leader should be. Occasionally, Garvey seemed to draw back from the idea of a grand imperializing project, rhetorically re-iterating the tropes of the earliest black nationalists and Liberian leaders to conjure up a vision of deliverance centred on a tranquil domestic space, a family home. As McClintock reminds us, the nation is figured through the iconography of a familial and domestic space, from which, in Garvey's articulation, women are curiously absent. He expresses his desire

... for a place in the world, not to disturb the tranquillity of other men, but to lay down our burden and rest our weary bones and feet by the Niger and sing songs and chant our hymns to the God of Ethiopia.<sup>48</sup>

This was not quite the version of the Jeffersonian idyll that featured so prominently in nineteenth-century rhetorical representations of Liberia. It owed more to George Washington's longed-for retirement after his career as revolutionary general had ended. He had on more than fifty occasions referred to a phrase, repeated in three different places in the Old Testament, to describe his longing for a life of simplicity and contentment, to 'sit under [our] own vines and fig trees and no one shall make [us] afraid.'<sup>49</sup> It was a phrase frequently appropriated by black leaders; its combination of images of an independent life on one's own plot of ground allied to the sense of physical security had particular resonance for both enslaved and 'free' American blacks. While Jefferson's idyll highlights the busy and active life of the farmer, in Washington's the emphasis is on *rest* after a life of military activity. Garvey, who imagined himself as a general like Washington involved in a revolutionary war, also looked forward to a life of peace in Africa once the white man has been expelled. He repeats the rhetoric of the Liberian Founding Fathers to insist that it was not the intention of the western black people to go to Africa 'for the purpose of exercising over-lordship of the natives,' but rather [to live] in a spirit of 'brotherly co-operation.'<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Garvey, *Selected Writings*, p. 167.

<sup>49</sup> Daniel Dreisbach, 'The "Vine and Fig Tree" in George Washington's Letters: Reflections on a Biblical motif in the Literature of the American Founding Era', *Anglican and Episcopal History*, 76, 3 (Sept 2007), 299-326 (p. 300).

<sup>50</sup> Garvey, *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers*, vol. IV, 1 Sept. 1921-2<sup>nd</sup> Sept. 1922, ed. by Robert A. Hill (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), p. 611.



His vision of the black man at rest highlights characteristics such as passivity, spirituality and a love of music and song that were deemed to be the essence of the African personality. They rarely featured in Garvey's figuring of the Negro race; he usually regarded such traits as 'feminine' whereas he preferred to stress a more muscular and masculine vision of the African. The role that women would play in the restoration of Africa, while never addressed by Garvey, can probably be gleaned from the UNIA doctrine on the role of women generally. As women are figured as the 'symbolic bearers of the nation,'<sup>51</sup> the role of black women as 'mothers of the race' was stressed. One male Garveyite opined 'if you find any woman, especially any black woman, who does not want to be a mother, you may rest assured she is not a true woman.'<sup>52</sup> Women who did not embrace the role of mother could find an outlet for their nurturing maternal instinct through involvement in benevolent organisations and in the 'caring professions,' such as the UNIA nursing organisation, The Black Cross. Garvey's two poems about Africa, 'The Black Woman' and 'The Black Mother,' express the two facets of womanhood deemed appropriate by the UNIA. In the former, Africa is depicted as a virginal goddess, who has been 'dethroned through the weakness of [her] men' but who will be restored to her former glory through the recovered bravery of her 'new' sons. In the latter, he extols the virtue of the mother as a source of unconditional love and support to her sons. The women of the UNIA would find 'emancipation' either through the self-esteem of their men or through the embrace of a role as his helpmeet. A member of the UNIA claimed that the liberation of black men involved men going 'back to the days of true manhood when women truly revered [them] and urged his readers to 'again place [their] women upon the pedestal from which they [had ] been forced.'<sup>53</sup> Presumably, he wished for a total repudiation of the Jezebel stereotype of the black woman but wanted to retain many of the characteristics of the stereotypical Mammy.

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<sup>51</sup> McClintock, p. 62.

<sup>52</sup> Quoted in Clare Corbould, *Becoming African Americans: Black Public Life in Harlem 1919-1939* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009), p. 50.

<sup>53</sup> Quoted in *Gendered Domains: Rethinking Public and Private in Women's History*, ed. by Dorothy O. Helly and Susan Reverby (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1992), p. 156.

Garvey sold his vision of Africa to a people who knew very little about it, not just through his writings but, more importantly through his public performances. McClintock, in her analysis of the spread of national movements, highlights the capacity of its leaders to 'organise a sense of popular collective unity through the management of mass ... *commodity spectacle*.'<sup>54</sup> She argues that different forms of visual spectacle lie at the heart of modern manifestations of nationalism. Garvey was particularly effective in his use of the visual arts to communicate a political message. His 'spectaculars' as he called them, combined with his oratory, were acts of both empowerment and resistance. It is difficult to capture the effect of his oratory on his audience from the written copies of his speeches that circulated through *Negro World* but contemporaries judged him to be an utterly compelling speaker. He had fashioned himself into a powerful orator through elocution lessons, debates and tours of black and white evangelical churches, a training that resulted in a voice that was 'strange and eclectic, part evangelical ... part formal English, and part lilting speechifying' that resounded all the way 'from 135<sup>th</sup> to 125<sup>th</sup> Street.'<sup>55</sup>

The First Annual Convention of the Negro Peoples of the World represented the height of his power as putative leader of the Negro race. It acknowledged the varied backgrounds of his followers in its public performances. In a nod to the norms of democratic assemblies, the Convention drew up a Bill of Rights, adopted a flag, a tricolour of red, green (in sympathy with the Irish struggle, according to Garvey) and black, and elected Garvey the 'Provisional President of Africa.' However, the system of honours and titles that he bestowed on the African government-in-waiting, such as Potentate Leader, Duke of the Nile and Baron of the Zambezi would have been anathema to true republicans, mimicking as they did both Freemasonry and British royalty. Clarence Walker, in characterising Garvey as 'a lower middle-class colonial,' draws attention to his choice of music for his public gatherings as a further example of his mimicry: his repertoire included Eckert's 'Swiss Song,' the Overture from

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<sup>54</sup> McClintock, p. 374.

<sup>55</sup> Grant, p. 139. Garvey's genius for the spoken word places him within the tradition of great black American spokesmen stretching from Frederick Douglass to Martin Luther King, for whom 'acting and speaking were inextricably linked', Grant, 89. By contrast, Du Bois was regarded as a poor public speaker.

*Rigoletto* and the 'Gloria' from Mozart's *Mass*. Given that the UNIA sought to promote everything black and African, the absence of any representative of the great flowering of Harlem music, such as 'Jelly Roll' Morton and Bessie Smith may seem surprising. However, Garvey had very little appreciation for the artistic expression of the artists of the Harlem Renaissance. He believed that all art should serve as propaganda and the message that he wanted to promote was that of a strong, dominant, progressive race. Other elements of his pageantry mirrored the coronation of a King of England combined with some elements of a Caribbean carnival. One of Garvey's biographers remarked that he was 'never able to throw off the impression that British folderol and glitter had made on him in his childhood.'<sup>56</sup> This is to imply that Garvey was merely impressed with gaudy show. However, Bhabha has shown how the act of mimicry has the effect of undermining colonial authority; copying the manners and culture of the 'superior' culture produces not just resemblance but also menace.<sup>57</sup> Garvey's mimicry was influenced by his Caribbean background where some forms of carnival are meant to poke fun at imperial authority.<sup>58</sup> In his ostentatious displays of empire, was Garvey admiring or drawing attention to the ridiculous nature of such ceremonials? His depiction of British ceremonials seem to suggest that he regarded them as ludicrous:

Can you tell me where you can find more titles and robes than in Europe? If you watch the picture from Buckingham Palace to the House of Commons in Westminster, you will see hundreds of men with all kinds of uniform, all kinds of turbans, all kinds of breeches ... the whole thing looking like one big human show and everyone going to the circus to watch. <sup>59</sup>

Yet, he also seemed to believe genuinely in the power of such 'spectaculars' to instil a sense of race pride: if they had a part to play in the dominance of the British Empire, he felt they would likewise inspire his followers. When people like Du Bois professed themselves ashamed of Garvey's antics as confirming white racist stereotypes of black men, Garvey accused him of being a traitor to his Negro blood. He referred to an

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<sup>56</sup> Joel A. Rogers, *World's Great Men of Colour*, 2 vols (London: Touchstone, 1996), vol. 2, p. 417.

<sup>57</sup> Bhabha, p. 86.

<sup>58</sup> Robert A. Hill, quoted in Michelle Ann Stephens, *Black Empire: The Masculine Global Imaginary of Caribbean Intellectuals in the United States, 1914-1962*(Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005), p. 97.

<sup>59</sup> Garvey, *UNIA Papers*, vol. 1V, p. 469.

article that Du Bois had written describing his sense of pride in watching a black soldier being awarded the title chevalier of the Legion d'honneur in France. Garvey felt that this showed that Du Bois was a pathetic figure, ashamed of his blackness and seeking validation by the white world. According to Garvey, Du Bois was the true 'mimic man.'

Garvey's appeal did not lie solely in the production of 'spectaculars.' He had a plan and a programme designed to set in motion the first part of his back-to-Africa scheme. He believed that black enterprise and economic success were crucial steps to the elevation of the race. The 'trading arm' of the UNIA, the African Communities' League, was established to encourage black businesses such as factories (manufacturing black dolls, for example), restaurants and laundries and UNIA members were encouraged to 'Be Black, Buy Black, Build Black.' From these small beginning in Harlem, Garvey hoped to build a great commercial empire.<sup>60</sup> He understood that ships were the great symbols of national power and he felt that they were also the symbols of racial greatness: in the words of a contemporary 'nations and people never rose to power without ships.'<sup>61</sup> Stephanie Smallwood describes the dispersal of African peoples into the New World as an 'inexorable one-way trajectory'. While the slave ships were always doubling back on return voyages, their 'human commodities' followed a 'relentlessly linear course: the direction of their transatlantic movement never reversed.'<sup>62</sup> What Garvey was symbolically proposing was a reversal of the Middle Passage, this time with black people not as commodities but as captains, merchants and passengers, with Africa as a chosen destination. Moreover, unlike the small groups who had made similar journeys before them such as the settlers of Liberia, Garveyites would pay their own way and travel proudly in their own ships. Share certificates in the new shipping line bore the image of a globe turned towards Africa, bearing the inscription 'Africa, the land of Opportunity' and the image of a steamship with a welcoming African on each side.' One of Harry Johnson's detailed suggestions

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<sup>60</sup> Grant, p. 259.

<sup>61</sup> Hubert Harrison, quoted in Judith Stein, *The World of Marcus Garvey: Race and Class in Modern Society* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University, 1986), p. 82.

<sup>62</sup> Stephanie E. Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 6.

for Liberia was that the sailing ship on the nation's motto be replaced with the steamship as a symbol of Liberia's entry into the world of modernity. In Garvey's Black Star Line, both the images of the slave ship and the sailing ships that brought the settlers to Liberia were rendered redundant. His plan to rescue Liberia from the clutches of British and French indebtedness involved the establishment of the UNIA in Monrovia and a makeover of Liberia along European lines. The UNIA would build the infrastructure that was so badly needed, establish commercial shipping lines to link with the Caribbean and the United States and re-fashion the country as a modern, outward-looking nation. In return for the \$5 million dollars that the Liberian government desperately needed, the UNIA would be granted five hundred square miles in Maryland County for a settlement of Garvey's followers.

The promise of the ACS in colonising Liberia was that it would restore and regenerate black masculinity. The accounts of European travellers highlighted the failure of any such restoration, depicting instead a ruling elite that was effeminate, degenerate and corrupt. Garvey's representative in Liberia, Elie Garcia, described the governing class as 'the most despicable element in Liberia,' self-serving and weak and, most damning of all, 'using the natives as slaves.' The attempted entry of the UNIA into Liberia prompted a new articulation of black masculinity as industrious capitalists and anti-colonial revolutionaries. In Garcia's judgement, Garvey and his followers would never be allowed into the country because they would constitute a threat to the ruling elite: 'if any number of honest Negroes with brains, energy and experience [came] to Liberia and [were] permitted to take part in the ruling of the country, they (the Americo-Liberians) [would ] be ousted in a very short while.'<sup>63</sup> The attempts of the UNIA to establish itself in Liberia were not helped by the culture clash of the Americo-Liberians and the West Indians nor by the growing influence of Du Bois who convinced the Liberian leadership that the 'the UNIA was opposed by the better element of American Negroes.' Ultimately, the Americo-Liberian elite was guided by a sense of self-preservation, as evidenced in the editorial in the *Liberian Commercial* which

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<sup>63</sup> Garvey, *Philosophy and Opinions*, pp. 399-400.

warned the UNIA 'Liberia is Ours to Maintain, Ours to Defend, Ours to Enjoy.' This position was elaborated on by a government official who wrote to the UNIA:

You are welcome but your number, your influence and combined power should not be sufficient to supplant our political preferences; i.e. the presidency, the secretary-ship, consulship abroad, custom services etc. You must adopt our ways, be scattered amongst us, be not over-zealous about the affairs of the aborigines - us first.<sup>64</sup>

Garvey's anti-colonial rhetoric doubly threatened the Liberian status quo: its call to Africans to overthrow European domination could inspire the indigenous peoples of Liberia to resist Americo-Liberian rule, and it made Liberia even more vulnerable to attempted annexation by Britain and France. This latter consideration led the Liberian President to clarify his position on the UNIA: 'Under no circumstances will Liberia allow her territory to be made the centre of aggression or conspiracy against other sovereign states.'<sup>65</sup>

While Garvey might be accused of naiveté in his dealings with Liberia, Du Bois' failure to confront the realities of Liberia is more indefensible. The championing of Liberia had assumed a new urgency for him, given that Haiti, the only other black republic, had been occupied by the United States in 1915. Citing 'widespread violence, actual anarchy and imminent danger to foreigners' lives and property,' the American government sent in the Marines with the immediate objective of achieving hegemony in the Caribbean and promoting American-style democracy in the region. The NCAAP sent an observer, Weldon Johnson, to report on conditions on the island. He highlighted the hypocrisy of those powers who proclaimed the 'freedom of small nations,' and yet stood aside as the United States suspended the Haitian Constitution and permanently disbanded the legislature. Johnson insisted that the independence of Haiti was of the utmost importance, not just for the Haitians themselves but for black people everywhere: 'Haiti is the one best chance that the Negro has in the world to prove that he is capable of self-government. If Haiti should ultimately lose her

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<sup>64</sup> Cyril Henry, quoted in *UNIA Papers*, vol. III, p. 503.

<sup>65</sup> C. B. King, 'Open Letter', *Crisis*, 22, 2 (New York: NAACP, June 1921), p. 53.

independence, that one best hope will be lost.<sup>66</sup> His omission of Liberia as a remaining beacon of hope for the Negro race is telling; had Johnson already accepted that Liberia had no hope of survival in the face of territorial depletion and permanent debt? He referred to the Haitian situation as ‘the seizure of a nation by the National City Bank of Wall St.’<sup>67</sup> Did he foresee the same fate for Liberia at a time when its president was visiting the United States in search of yet another loan? Du Bois feared the worst, warning that unless Liberia could convince the great powers that it was able to stand alone and develop the country its territory would be dismembered.<sup>68</sup>

Du Bois travelled to Africa for the first time in 1923. The visit and his subsequent writing about it reveal the two paradoxical aspects of his relationship with the continent that may be understood in terms of the ‘twoness’ and ‘double consciousness’ that he claimed afflicted the black American. In that context, he had claimed that Africans, through their gift of spirituality, could save an increasingly materialistic world from itself. His sojourn in Liberia seemed to confirm his belief in the distinctiveness of the Negro while coming face to face with the reality that it could not withstand the forces of international capitalism. Africa was for him a mythic idea, a ‘nation’ that ‘consisted primarily of trans-historical consciousness, outside of property or the literal black body.’<sup>69</sup> While he described his ancestral ties to Africa as having been extremely tenuous, symbolised by a fragment of an African song of his great-great-grandmother that was passed down through the generations, he always felt a relationship with the continent was ‘a tie that [he] could feel better than explain.’ Thus, his travels in Liberia facilitated a reflection on the emotional ties that bound him and black Americans to a land from which they had been removed for several generations. On the other hand, as a sophisticated Victorian gentleman he was committed to western-style development in Liberia that he understood would inevitably destroy the ‘traditional’ African way of life that he eulogised.

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<sup>66</sup> James W. Johnson, quoted in J. Michael Dash, *Haiti and the United States: National Stereotypes and the Literary Imagination*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998), p. 50.

<sup>67</sup> Johnson, quoted in Matthew Pratt Guterl, *The Color of Race in America 1900-1940* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009), p. 138.

<sup>68</sup> James T. Campbell, *Middle Passages: African American Journeys to Africa 1787-2005* (New York: Penguin Books, 2007), p. 233.

<sup>69</sup> Sundquist, *To Wake the Nations*, p. 559.

Du Bois' account of his travels in Liberia consists of a series of sketches that he published in *Crisis* (1924). Entitled 'Little Portraits of Africa,' they are like postcards: immediate, impressionistic and lacking narrative. They record a journey to a mythic place and can be read as an account of a spiritual epiphany, the cathartic unpeeling of layers of reserve, what he had earlier described as New England personality mixed with Dutch taciturnity. Yet, he could never completely escape the air of cultural superiority that was the legacy of his western education; he is always one step removed from 'native' Africa, comfortably immersed in the social life of the Americo-Liberian elite. Everywhere he went, he was treated with great hospitality, carried in a hammock by 'singing ... black boys,' waited on by 'endless native servants,' in a mansion dating from the earliest settlement, where he and his Americo-Liberian hosts dined on the finest Western food and wine attended by happy 'natives' who have the 'leisure of true aristocracy - leisure for thought and courtesy, leisure for sleep and laughter.'<sup>70</sup>

The form of Du Bois' writings on his personal encounter with Africa is at odds with the style of most of his writing at that time which was analytical, scientific and polemical. 'Little Postcards' produces a vignette effect, a dreamlike mythic representation which eschews detailed narrative and avoids analysis. This means that he does not have to deal with the uncomfortable realities of Liberian life that he was clearly familiar with. While Du Bois employs many of the standard tropes of European travel writing about Africa with its descriptions of the lushness of the vegetation, the mystical quality of the landscape and the representation of the continent as feminine, Africa for him is not a 'Dark Continent.' Rather it is represented as an edenic place, a prelapsarian paradise, full of riotous colour, of sunshine, of, paradoxically, sounds of animal life, music and of an ancient Silence.

In imagery reminiscent of Odysseus' account of the land of the lotus eaters, Du Bois depicts a land suffused with 'sunlight in great gold globules, soft heavy-scented heat,'

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<sup>70</sup> Du Bois, in Sundquist, *Reader*, p. 89.



producing a 'divine, eternal languor.' Repeating the trope of the continent as female, Du Bois emphasises its sensuality, its dreaminess and its fecundity. It is place of enchantment: he wrote 'the spell of Africa is upon me. The ancient witchery of her medicine is burning my drowsy, dreamy blood.'<sup>71</sup> McClintock writes of Columbus' imaging of the Caribbean islands as 'a cosmic breast, in relation to which the epic male hero is tiny, lost infant, yearning for the Edenic nipple.'<sup>72</sup> Du Bois' writing on Africa links the primitive, the female and oceanic feeling, describing it as 'a great black bosom where the Spirit longs to die.' He is transported by the sights and sounds of Christmas Eve when 'Africa is singing in Monrovia.' It represents the conjoining and culmination of two transatlantic journeys: the African slaves brought their rhythms to the southern states, blended it with the Christian hymns and returned with this new creation to the land of their forefathers. In a moment of epiphany, he realises that the Monrovia music 'is the same rhythm [he] heard first in Tennessee forty years ago.' The division of the song between the men's 'strong voices' and the 'high mellow voices of women' constitutes 'the ancient art of part singing, so curiously and insistently different' yet familiar to him because it is the same music of 'the mission revival hymns.'<sup>73</sup> Interestingly, Du Bois does not seek out pure African music of a type described in a poem published the year of his visit by one of the poets of the Harlem Renaissance, Gwendolyn Bennett. In 'Heritage,' she wrote:

I want to hear the chanting  
Around a heathen fire  
Of a strange black race.<sup>74</sup>

Like Blyden and contemporary European travellers, Du Bois extols the virtues of the African village. The German sociologist, Ferdinand Tönnies (1887), had elaborated on two distinct types of social organisation that he named *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*; the former characterised as an organic community based on kinship and

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid, p. 646.

<sup>72</sup> McClintock, p. 22.

<sup>73</sup> Du Bois in Sundquist, p. 641.

<sup>74</sup> Gwendolyn Bennett, 'Heritage', in *Shadowed Dreams: Women's Poetry of the Harlem Renaissance*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, ed. by Maureen Honey (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2006), p. 5.

the latter as a rationalised and mechanistic society.<sup>75</sup> Du Bois visited only one village on his trip to Liberia, and this became for him the exemplar of The African Village, a *gemeinschaft* that in its spirituality and communality represented one of Africa's great gifts to the world. Lacking the accoutrements of modern life, it still possessed all the requirements necessary for an integrated and wholesome life: in that 'clean, quiet small' place he found 'authority ... religion, industry and trade, education and art.' Ironically he was about to become probably the most influential black voice in favour of policies that would bring about the demise of that way of life.

Du Bois' most lasting contribution to Liberia was the role he played in what he regarded as its economic salvation. He identified Liberia's chief problem as being 'black and poor in a rich, white world, and in precisely that part of the world where colour is ruthlessly exploited as a foundation for American and European wealth.'<sup>76</sup> Despite the clarity of this assessment, he would play a decisive role in bringing American capital into the country on terms that were grossly exploitative of the Liberian state. Cedric Robinson characterises his intervention in Liberia as disastrous in the long run in that it reduced the country to neo-colonial status.<sup>77</sup> The proposed deal - a loan of \$5 million (from a New York bank that was a subsidiary of Firestone) in exchange for a concession of land for ninety-nine years at a cost of six cents an acre - was enthusiastically supported by Du Bois. Determined to keep Garvey out of the country, Du Bois recommended that the American government give diplomatic and economic support for the country's modernisation. His aid plan meant the marshalling of all the agents of western modernity: economists, anthropologists, census takers, educators and 'benevolent' foreign capitalists. He hoped that United States policy towards Liberia would be guided by paternalism and friendship rather than exploitation. He described in vivid detail what he regarded as the moment of Liberia's 'salvation':

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<sup>75</sup> Christopher Adair-Toteff, ed. *The Anthem Companion to Ferdinand Tönnies* (London: Anthem Press, 2016)

<sup>76</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, 'Liberia, the League and the United States', *Foreign Affairs*, 11, 4 (July 1933), 682-695 (p. 695).

<sup>77</sup> Cedric Robinson, 'W. E. B. Du Bois and Black Sovereignty', in *Imaging Home: Class, Culture and Nationalism in the African Diaspora* ed. by Sidney Lemelle and Robin D. G. Kelley (London and New York: Verso, 1994), 145-157.

I remember standing once in a west African forest, where thin, silver trees loomed straight and smooth in the air. There were two men with me. One was a black man, Solomon Hood, the United States Minister to Liberia; a man of utter devotion whose solicitude for the welfare of Liberia was like a sharp pain driving him on. And he thought he had found the solution. The solution was the white man beside us. He was a rubber expert sent by the Firestone Corporation.<sup>78</sup>

His characterisation of Hood might have applied equally to himself. He desperately wanted Liberia to survive as an 'independent' republic and he still believed in the capitalist system and in American exceptionalism. He hoped that 'it was possible for a great corporation, headed by a man of vision, to go into a country with something more than the idea of mere profit.' However, as if fearing a repeat of the atrocities of the Belgian Congo, he wrote personally to Harvey Firestone: 'the one thing above all which we must avoid [is] taking capital into a small country and putting it under the control of officials who despise natives and organise ruthless exploitation.'<sup>79</sup>

The intervention of Du Bois and, in particular, his blindness to the flagrant abuses of power committed by the Liberian elite was highlighted by George Schulyer, a black American journalist, satirist and essayist who lampooned all the prominent people of the day. He took particular aim at the writers of the Harlem Renaissance and the rhetoric of Du Bois and Garvey pointing out that if the Negro race was as special as the 'race leaders' were insisting, it did not need to be proclaimed all the time; it would be self-evident. Their special pleading for the gifts of black people was turned on its head: highlighting their mysticism, their artistry and their music merely implied that they were not suited to the tough world of business, commerce and politics. In 1931, the *New York Evening Post* sent Schulyer to Liberia as a special correspondent to investigate the accusations of slavery levelled against the Liberian government. The six-part series that resulted from his trip appeared in the *Post* and in all the major white newspapers in the United States. Claiming to be the one who would finally tell

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<sup>78</sup> Du Bois, 'Liberia, the League and the United States', p. 682.

<sup>79</sup> Du Bois, quoted in Frank Chalk, 'Du Bois and Garvey Confront Liberia: Two Incidents of the Coolidge Years', *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 1, 2 (Nov 1967), 135-142 (p. 138).

the truth about Liberia, his accounts seem to expose Du Bois as a fantasist who had willed Liberia as an idyllic homeland into existence. He conceded that 'Liberia [was] once the hope of all race conscious Negroes [and] in the early years it seemed a glorious vindication of the black race's capacity for self-government ... but today only the lunatic fringe of Garveyite Aframericans remain deluded.'<sup>80</sup> Adding insult to injury, Schuyler seemed to include Du Bois within this group. His journalistic pieces and the melodramatic novel that he published on his return from Africa, *Slaves Today: A Story of Liberia* (1931), present a damning picture of the country at a time when it was being adjudged in the League of Nations and in the court of public opinion as a 'slave state.'<sup>81</sup>

*Slaves Today* is an amalgam of two interlinked stories, the one a 'realistic' exposé of the depravity and cruelty of the Americo-Liberian ruling class and the other a love story of the indigenous couple, Zo and Pameta. In the Preface to the novel, Schulyer claimed that slavery still existed throughout the world in the 1930s under many different euphemisms and this was also the case in Liberia. While the findings of the League of Nations had indicted the Liberian government for implementing labour policies that were *akin* to slavery, the title of Schulyer's novel makes it clear that he admits to no distinction: throughout the novel he explicitly and implicitly links the Americo-Liberians with the slave-owning class in the ante-bellum South.

The villain of the novel is District Commissioner, David Jackson, the head of the Frontier Force. The post of District Commissioner and its military back up had been created with the introduction of Indirect Rule and was designed to oversee the extension of Liberian rule into the hinterland. Jackson is a sadistic bully; when he arrives at the village of Takama to demand government 'taxes,' he orders the public flogging of the chief who cannot pay. The attempt of the villagers to defend their leader from such a shameful act results in their massacre and the capture of Pameta

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<sup>80</sup> Jeffrey B. Leak, ed. *Rac(e)ing to the Right: Selected Essays of George S. Schuyler* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2001), p. 17.

<sup>81</sup> League of Nations International Commission of Inquiry into the Existence of Slavery and Forced Labour in the Republic of Liberia, 1930. See I. K. Sundiata, 'Prelude to Scandal: Liberia and Fernando Po, 1880-1930', *Journal of African History*, xv, 1 (1974), 97-112.

as a concubine for Jackson. Her husband, Zo, goes in search of her but is captured and shipped to the Spanish colony of Fernando Po.

Combining realistic details of the accounts of the Monrovia elite with the melodrama of the Pameta-Zo story, Schulyer's intention is clear: to create a picture of Liberia as a twentieth-century slave society, reminiscent of the one that its Founding Fathers had escaped a century before. Mindful of his American readership, he presents a picture of the 'vast tropical territory' of Liberia as an African version of a former American slave state, Virginia, the birthplace of the majority of the earliest settlers in Liberia. He makes sure that his readers grasp the full irony of the Liberian situation by pointing out that its first settlers had come

to this expanse of jungle to found a haven for the oppressed of the black race but their descendants were now guilty of the same cruelties from which they had fled. The Americo-Liberians were to rule; the natives to obey.<sup>82</sup>

The violence inflicted on the villagers by Jackson echoes the accounts of several nineteenth-century American slave narratives, most notably in the accounts of sadistic beatings that appear in the writings of Frederick Douglass and Solomon Northup. The sexual degradation of women at the hands of the slave owner and the attendant jealousy of his wife towards the female slave is also a feature of the American slave narrative that finds an echo in Schulyer's novel. In *Twelve Years A Slave*, Northup describes how he is forced to flog his owner's slave mistress, Patsey. In the orgy of violence that ensues, during which Patsey is 'literally flayed,' the slave-owner's wife, Mistress Epps, stands on the verandah of her plantation home 'gazing at the scene with an air of heartless satisfaction.'<sup>83</sup>

Jackson's wife, Florence, an American-educated, 'aristocratic Liberian lady,' affects ignorance of the true position of her maid Pameta, who has joined his 'scattered harem of nearly two score girls and women,' and is the 'supplementary wife' in his

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<sup>82</sup> George S. Schulyer, *Slaves Today: A Story of Liberia* (New York: EMS, 1931), p. 100.

<sup>83</sup> Solomon Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1968), p. 196.

Monrovia mansion. In reality, she knows that concubinage is common among her class and 'she hate[s] the institution, hate[s] her position as head of the harem and hate[s] each of the women.'<sup>84</sup> She understands the practical uses of the 'institution' among the indigenous peoples but is appalled by its prevalence among the 'civilized' citizens of Monrovia. Adopting the trope of the European's fear of 'regression,' Schulyer describes Florence's fear that her husband is 'becoming native.' She muses on the 'living irony that is Liberia': her forefathers had come to Liberia filled with Christian ideals, trained to Anglo-Saxon customs and suffused with the true spirit of pioneers. They had planned to establish in Africa a replica of America. Instead of conquering Africa, they and especially their descendants had been conquered by it. One by one they had adopted the worst habits and customs of the aborigines they despised. Why does Florence ascribe to Africa the sexual abuse of female slaves and slavery itself, when these were features of the lives of her forebearers in America? Surely, the inescapable point is that the Liberian elite *did* establish a 'replica of America' both in its highest ideals and its worst failings.

The Zo strand of the story also echoes the accounts of the Middle Passage. He is transported to the Spanish colony of Fernando Po (in reality the destination of Liberia's forced labour) on a ship called the *Santa Clara*. The descriptions of the overcrowding on board, the human misery and degradation and the actual conditions on the island mirror accounts of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Schulyer attacks the black American elite for seeking to downplay what he regards as slavery pure and simple. He wrote 'I loathe the hypocrisy of those negroes who are willing and eager to cover up the misdeeds and cruelties of other Negroes just because they are Negroes, even though their victims be Negroes.'<sup>85</sup> In defence of Liberia, Du Bois contended that, in the context of its struggle for survival, its only resource was its human labour. In selling that to the highest bidder, Liberia may have been guilty, but surely no more so than the purchasers or the European powers whose abuses of the indigenous peoples were well known. Du Bois seemed to be making the point that

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid, p. 227.

<sup>85</sup> George Schulyer, 'Views and Reviews', *Pittsburgh Courier*, 1 July (1933), sect.1, p. 10.

Liberia was being held to a higher standard of morality and freedom than other nations. If that were the case, Du Bois himself, in his 'belligerent and commendable Negrophilism' as Schuyler put it, may ironically have been the cause.<sup>86</sup>

Schulyer's journalism represents Liberia as a black dystopia, replicating many of the familiar images of the European travel writing examined in the previous chapter. Monrovia is depicted as a filthy colonial port, lacking a working sewage system and covered in garbage. The ruling elite, whom Du Bois had characterised as latter-day Washingtons and Lincolns, he described as 'the most shiftless, untrustworthy, incompetent and grafting class to be found anywhere today.' The lives of indigenous Africans under Americo-Liberian control amounted to sheer misery, characterised by a regime of forced labour, violence and the sexual exploitation of women. Who is ultimately responsible for this state of affairs and how is to be resolved? Re-iterating the imagery of the familial relationship that existed, rhetorically at least, between the United States and Liberia, Schuyler claimed that 'America fathered Liberia but has failed to mother her.'<sup>87</sup> In this figuring of Liberia, the colony-nation was effectively an orphan: the idea of Mother Africa is rendered redundant and the supposed nurturing femininity of the Negro race non-existent. America which ought to have assumed both paternal and maternal roles left a child bereft, without even a responsible adult in charge. In such cases, efficient outsiders may be the only effective answer to the ensuing chaos. Schulyer presents a single oasis of calm and efficiency in the whole country, the Firestone rubber plantation, 'a totally different world, a picture of what this beautiful country might become under intelligent control.' He concludes that 'there are times when the masses are actually better off when ruled by efficient, foreign imperialists than by their own clique who are frequently more cruel and exacting.'<sup>88</sup> At the time of his writing, foreign imperialists were already in place.

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<sup>86</sup> Oscar R. Williams, *George S. Schuyler, Portrait of a Black Conservative* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2007), p. 59.

<sup>87</sup> Leak, p. 19.

<sup>88</sup> Schulyer, quoted in Campbell, pp. 259-260.

Emily Rosenberg positions Liberia in the early decades of the twentieth century as a 'private protectorate' of the United States, occupying an intermediate stage between colonialism and neo-colonialism, though the latter concept was not yet in use.<sup>89</sup> The loan advanced to Liberia came from private investments while the U.S. government agreed to 'supervise' certain aspects of Liberian affairs in order to satisfy the lenders. The world of international finance, power and diplomacy was a highly gendered world and reflected the presumed ideals that characterised the bourgeois family. The qualities that were highly prized in the family such as self-reliance, restraint, supervision of dependents, were also deemed to be necessary in the rule of nations. These were also qualities that were regarded as conspicuously lacking in black people; therefore the contracts that were eventually signed between Liberia, the U.S. and Firestone contained specific details of American government oversight and supervision in areas such as finance, and the conduct of the Frontier Force. If Liberia had once embodied the spirit and ideals of American republicanism, it could now be regarded as a site where American imperialism would find a foothold on the African continent.

Though President Harding's request to Congress to approve a loan to Liberia stressed the 'historic ties' between the two countries, he and his officials in the State Department also highlighted the commercial opportunities available in Liberia. Moreover, it was argued that the United States needed a base in Africa, and as Liberia was the nearest point to South America, it could become an important base in the U.S. wireless network. Liberia was thus imagined as being on the threshold of modernity, thanks to its tutelage at the hands of its 'stepmother.' However, it was also positioned as a receptacle for problematic U.S. citizens, an echo of some of the

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<sup>89</sup> Emily S. Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream: American Economic and Cultural Expansion 1890-1945* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011), p. 134.

For an account of the negotiations between Liberia, the United States and Firestone, see Emily Rosenberg, 'The Invisible Protectorate: The United States, Liberia and the Evolution of Neo-Colonialism, 1909-40', *Diplomatic History*, 9, 3 (July 1985), 191-214.

Kwame Nkrumah, President of Ghana coined the term 'neo-colonialism' in his book, *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (1965) to describe the decisive role played by western powers in the cultures and economies of their former colonies through multi-national corporations and cartels. Du Bois, having finally turned his back on the capitalist west, retired to and died in Ghana, a guest of Nkrumah.



early rhetoric of the ACS that had planned to siphon off from the United States ‘a very dangerous class of people.’ During the urban race riots that erupted in northern American cities, one state official wrote:

From the point of view of unrest among the Negroes in the United States, it seems of the utmost importance to maintain undiminished our prestige in and control over affairs of Liberia. The fact that these agitators can be confronted with the statement that if they are not satisfied with conditions in the United States, they can resort to a black man’s land in Africa with a republican form of government, will make in a large measure for tranquillity among the negroes in this country. It would however be very dangerous for the country were Liberia to be in any degree under the control or domination of a foreign power, as it could easily become a hot bed of intrigues against the U.S. at a time when racial unrest is rife in this country.<sup>90</sup>

A last-ditch effort to persuade Liberia to allow the UNIA to set up its organisation and to begin the settlements of New World black people was launched by the *Gold Coast Leader*, a paper that had been founded by Casely Hayford, an admirer of Blyden and one of the most influential West Coast Africans of his day. The paper was sympathetic to the economic aims of Garvey, while rejecting his ideas for a military campaign. The article is striking not only for its rhetoric, with its deployment of early colonisation imagery allied to the discourse of late nineteenth-century imperialism, but also for its appeal to the Americo-Liberians to assume their moral and historic responsibility. It reminds the Liberian ruling class what Liberia once stood for: that the motto ‘The Love of Liberty brought us here’ still had resonance in the twentieth century for thousands of diasporic Africans.

The editorialist, “Ahinnana” wrote:

To me, it seems that the hour of opportunity has struck for Liberia and that she should look neither to the left nor to the right, but go straight forward in the path of duty to the great Ethiopian race. ... What more natural than that she [Liberia] should elect to open her arms to Ethiopia’s exiled children, yearning for motherhood - yearning to return to the arms of mother Africa?

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<sup>90</sup> Quoted in Noel Maurer, *The Empire Trap: The Rise and Fall of the U.S. Intervention to Protect American Property Overseas 1893-2013* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2013), p. 131.

The whole continent turns a lingering look towards the “Lone Star” and is anxious what her attitude will be. Will she receive her children in the name of Africa, or will she ruthlessly thrust them aside? No, I believe she will realise her responsibility, her duty and respond ... What are the spoils that these peculiar people shall bring to mother Africa? The new African shall come back with all the spoils of science and modern knowledge ... and shall cause this our land to flow with milk and honey not for the enjoyment of the foreign parasite, but for the nourishment of Ethiopia’s own children ... Our continent awaits to be opened up. Why, in the name of reason, should not the African take part in the opening up of its own continent? Why should he not build railways, open up mines, cause cities to rise in desolate places, found governments to force the respect of men?<sup>91</sup>

The editorial’s assertion that the ‘hour ... has struck,’ combined with the repeated use of the word ‘Ethiopia’ suggests that the fulfilment of the prophecy is at hand and that it is Liberia’s fate that it should be realised. The familiar trope of diasporic Africans as a scattered people longing for their mother is elaborated on in an unusual manner: Liberia, normally figured as an *American* space, is here re-figured as a stand in for the African mother. The nation is portrayed as the beacon of light and hope that figured so prominently in early colonisation literature, not only to the scattered diaspora but to the rest of the African continent. In opening her arms to its latest pilgrims, it would fulfil the hopes of the Founding Fathers who envisaged their colony as a Promised Land and a new Canaan. The new pilgrims would bring different gifts from those brought by the first settlers. Where the founders brought with them the American Christianity and republicanism that were necessary to establish the nation, the new immigrants would bring all the necessities required for its advancement as a modern state. Employing the familiar trope of Africa as passive and inert, the writer envisages the creative and energising force of New World black people, rather than European imperialists, engaged in the task of modernisation.

The Americo-Liberians’ response to the appeal demonstrated their determination to preserve their own self-interest while disguising it as nationalism. President King announced that the policy of his government to reject UNIA plans was ‘influenced by

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<sup>91</sup> Quoted in *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers*, Vol. X 1923-1945, ed. by Robert A. Hill (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), p. lxx.

considerations which tend to secure and strengthen national existence, progress and stability [rather] than by *racial utopias*' (emphasis in the original). While he welcomed individual black people from the New World, he advised that they must adapt to Liberian ways and put aside the culture of their home place. Employing the rhetoric of the Israelite deliverance from captivity, he advised intending immigrants to 'break bridges behind [them] and think no more of the flesh pots of Egypt.'<sup>92</sup> Of the many ironies inherent in the Liberian nation which had built its own power on the lessons learnt from the 'flesh pots of Egypt,' by replicating the hierarchy, structures of political power and economic exploitation of the American Plantocracy, this was surely the most egregious. In closing the door to the African Diaspora and in its exploitation of its indigenous peoples, Liberia repudiated the rhetoric of its Founding Fathers and its most famous advocates. It could no longer claim to be a haven for the scattered children of Africa, a shining 'city on a hill' or the centre of a great African Nationality.

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<sup>92</sup> C. B. King, quoted in Dunn, *The Annual Messages of the Presidents of Liberia*, p. 665.

## Conclusion

The representations of Liberia examined here chart a fall from grace: a nation promoted as a 'City on a Hill,' a beacon of light in the Dark Continent and for the scattered children of Africa became a veritable 'heart of darkness'. The revelations of state-sponsored slavery struck a devastating blow to the self-image of the nation as a province of freedom. Despite a revival in its fortunes during and after World War Two, due to its close relationship with the United States, the spectacularly violent coup that toppled Americo-Liberian rule in 1980 eclipsed earlier accounts of violence and brutality. Over the following two decades, Western media's reporting on Liberia focused relentlessly on images of savagery and barbarism: the nation, conceived in 'the love of liberty' became a byword for unspeakable horror, 'a swirling new ring of hell.'<sup>1</sup>

Liberia, conceived and invented by a white American elite, was promoted as a racial utopia for free people of colour in the United States and represented the extension into Africa of American ideals of Christian Republicanism and Manifest Destiny; the first immigrants imagined it as an ancestral home in which they could create for themselves and ultimately all diasporic black people an alternative identity, where they could reclaim their humanity, insert the Negro race into history and fulfil their providential and redemptive role in Africa as prophesied in Ethiopianism. The achievement of independence in 1847 marked Liberia as an international symbol of African capacity at an important historical juncture when transatlantic debates on slavery converged with the promulgation of scientific racist discourses. Over the remaining decades of the nineteenth century and in the opening years of the twentieth, Liberia retained its symbolic status as the only Black Republic in Africa, fiercely defended by the proponents of a developing Pan-Africanism and patronisingly condemned by its imperial neighbours.

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<sup>1</sup> *Time Magazine* (New York: 22nd April 1996).

Despite such a richly complex history, Liberia is neglected in post-colonial criticism, studies of slavery and abolition and in American historical consciousness. While Haiti, the other nineteenth-century 'Black Republic,' has become the subject of exciting scholarship over the last several decades, Liberia remains largely ignored. This situation is due partly to the confusion and contradictions that attend the ACS and, more significantly, to the fact that the earliest black proponents of Liberia fall between two admired traditions of black engagement with white society: the one, armed rebellion, as best exemplified by the Haitian Revolution; and the other, a powerful rhetorical resistance to white hegemonic thought, as evidenced in the writings of David Walker, Martin Delany and Frederick Douglass. Black supporters of African colonisation and early Liberian settlers such as Lott Cary, John Russwurm and Hilary Teage opted for a third way. While they were frequently vilified in the free black community as collaborators with slaveowners and traitors to their still-enslaved brethren, they saw themselves as active agents in their own emancipation. They proclaimed their 'return' to Africa, bearing the fruits of American liberties, as their Manifest Destiny and the fulfilment of the promise of Ethiopianism.

Liberia has been the subject of myriad interpretations and constructions by different organisations such as the ACS and Marcus Garvey's UNIA as well as individuals who claimed to speak for the African Diaspora, such as Edward Blyden and W. E. B. Du Bois. In its trajectory from colony to nation to neo-colonial state, it offers an important, if unsettling, addition to post-colonial studies. With its rhetorical focus on how it came to be represented as a reversal of the Middle Passage and a site of regeneration for black masculinity and femininity, Liberia adds an extra dimension to conceptualisations of the Black Atlantic and the intersection of race and nationhood with gender. This project adds depth to the study of early black American literature by bringing within its ambit the writings of early Liberian settlers. It widens the scope of studies of American imperialism, black nationalism and Pan-Africanism, normally viewed as mid to late nineteenth-century phenomena. It also provides an added dimension to studies of colonial and postcolonial West Africa which focus almost exclusively on the European imperial presence there, thus transforming our

understandings of African colonial formations, power relationships and representations of the Other.

This work recovers the voices of people who are largely absent from the study of slavery and abolition. In a variety of genres, both the leaders of early Liberian society and settlers who were manumitted from slavery offer a unique archive as they speculate on the meaning of liberty, the phenomenology of freedom, and their relationship and responsibility to their still-enslaved brethren in the United States and to the continent of Africa. The writings of Alexander Crummell and Edward Blyden serve as significant precursors to twentieth-century explorations of the devastating psychological effects of slavery and racial division; their work enriches the study of writers such as W. E. B. Du Bois, Frantz Fanon, Aimé Césaire, Amílcar Cabral and others.

While this project set out to examine the construction and representation of Liberia from its infancy up to a specific moment of existential crisis in the early twentieth century, it does not claim to be comprehensive. One area omitted from my examination of Liberian writing is the small but significant output of indigenous Liberians who were students in the United States in the late nineteenth century. One of the first African novels in English, *Guanya Pau: A Story of an African Princess* (1891), was written by Joseph J. Walters while he was a student in Oberlin College, Ohio. Thomas Besolow and George Peabody wrote accounts of their lives in Liberia and their experiences in America; these texts provide insights into the process of assimilation of Africans into western culture as well as offering a fascinating account of the complex race relations they were forced to negotiate in the United States.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas Besolow, *From the Darkness of Africa to the Light of America* (Boston, Mass.: T. W. Ripley, 1890). It was reissued the following year with widespread revision. He published a further memoir in 1892, *The Story of an African Prince in Exile* (Boston, Mass.: F. Wood, 1892).

George Peabody's memoir is entitled *Bahr-Fofoe: A Bassa Boy: from the Darkness of Heathendom to the Light of Christianity, the Story of an African Prince told by Himself* (Lancaster, Pa.: The New Era Printing House, 1891).

For an account of the lives of Besolow and Peabody during their stay in the United States and of the publication and reception of their memoirs, see Gareth Griffiths "'The Boys from the Bark *Liberia*': Liberian Life Narratives in late nineteenth-century America', *Liberian Studies Journal*, 33, 2 (2008), 1-24.

These young men, called Africo-Liberians in the United States where they were training to be missionaries, embodied one of the major ideals of the Founding Fathers of Liberia: the Christianisation of Africa. As the nation approaches the bicentenary of its establishment as a colony, it is interesting to consider where it stands today in relation to those ideals and to speculate on its future. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of January, 2018, George Weah was inaugurated as the twenty-fifth President of Liberia. Reporting the event, the western media referred to the challenges he faced, re-iterating the trope of Liberia as a site of violence, poverty and suffering. Yet, there was also much in Weah's campaign and inaugural speech that revived the representation of Liberia as a place where new beginnings could be imagined, not just in the lessons from his own life as a young Kru boy from the Monrovia slums who shone on the world football stage, but also in his insistence on the peaceful and democratic transition of power, something which had not been achieved in the preceding six decades. Referring to the nation's founders, who 'left the pain and shame of slavery to establish a society where all would be free and equal,' he called on the Liberian Diaspora, scattered by the ravages of war, to return home and help build a New Liberia, based on the principles of 'freedom, justice and democracy.' Only then could 'Mama Liberia' become 'the home of glorious liberty [established] by God's command' as articulated in the national anthem, *All Hail, Liberia, Hail*.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> 'President George M. Weah's Inaugural Address', *Liberian Observer* (Monrovia: Jan 22, 2018).

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