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Imagining Home: Tracing the Bond between African Americans and Africa from 1619 to 1936

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IMAGINING HOME: TRACING THE BOND BETWEEN AFRICAN AMERICANS AND AFRICA FROM 1619 TO 1936

by

DARRELL W. B. KEFENTSE

Under the Direction of Mohammed Hassen Ali

ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the intellectual, cultural, and political links between African American communities and the changing fortunes of Ethiopia. This I feel marks an important contribution in African American history and the broader global histories of the African diaspora. This dissertation also moves to demonstrate the multiple ways in which Ethiopia marked a conceptual beacon and point of reference in the struggle for African American belonging and achievement. In the broader sense, it incorporates the dynamic relationship between Anglo-Saxon Europeans, Africans, and those of the African diaspora. By tracing the founding of the North American colonies and the consequences of colonization, transatlantic migration, and the transatlantic slave trade, my objective is to reveal the foundational element
that created the need for African Americans to conceptualize Ethiopia as a significant point of reference in their struggles.

INDEX WORDS: Ethiopia, African American, Africa, Ethiopianism, Italo-Ethiopian War, Fascism, Haile Selassie
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DARRELL W. B. KEFENTSE

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Arts and Sciences Georgia State University 2015
IMAGINING HOME: TRACING THE BOND BETWEEN AFRICAN AMERICANS AND AFRICA FROM 1619 TO 1936

by

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December 2015
DEDICATION

TO: LI’L HAWK
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1 INTRODUCTION

When America’s first Black publication – the Freedom’s Journal – was founded in 1827, it gave Blacks in America a means to voice their thoughts, opinions, and ideas that ran counter to the thoughts, opinions, and ideas of most White Americans of the day. “Too long has the public been deceived by misrepresentation,” so wrote the founders in the publication’s premier issue. The Journal sought to vindicate the oppressed by relaying useful knowledge and information relating to Africa. Other Black publications emerged and followed suit. And like the Journal, which spoke out against slavery, racial discrimination, and other social injustices set upon the Black population, subsequent publications such as The Frederick Douglass Papers, the North Star, and The Christian Recorder also focused their attention on Africa. During a time when the discourse regarding Blacks spoke of them as inferior and uncivilized, these publications and others like them held Africa in high regard by focusing on the historical significance of Ethiopia and Egypt. Soon Ethiopia would emerge as an archetypal symbol of Black achievement as the term “Ethiopia” would continue to represent all Black people of Africa and the diaspora. But this raises a question – was this always the case? Did the majority of Whites in England and America always view Africa and therefore Africans with disdain? Research shows that there was indeed a “moment of transition” that took place in England when Whites began to “racialize” African people. This also occurred during the early stages of Anglo-European settlement in North America and the two were not entirely separate. The binding element of this racialization was England’s entrance into and subsequent domination of the trans-Atlantic slave trade from the 1670s up to the beginning of the nineteenth century. This created two conditions. The first was the considerable number of Anglo-Europeans venturing to Africa’s west coast relaying firsthand accounts of their experiences and “observations.” The second was a
substantial increase in the Black population in both England and its colonies thus giving rise to an increase in contact among Whites and Blacks. In analyzing both pre- and post-slave trade sources, the moment of transition is revealed.

Up until the latter part of the sixteenth century, England sat in relative isolation. The country’s Black population was considerably small as the majority of them sat on the periphery of English society. Yet, as England began to delve into the African slave trade – eventually dominating it – the number of Blacks they came into contact with increased exponentially. In time, Blacks would no longer sit on the periphery. Instead, they were integrated into English society generally holding subordinate positions as enslaved persons serving in the households of Whites. On the African coast, English travelers noted their observations giving literary discourse of the people and the land. In time, their remarks would take on a negative “racialized” tone. Interestingly, during England’s earliest ventures into the African trade, pejorative commentary about Africa and its people was virtually non-existent. This paradigm could also be seen when surveying England’s first successful colony in North America.

In colonial America, the legal and social status of Blacks was seemingly unclear at least until 1640. This year marked the first of a series of colonial legislations that would ensure the perpetual enslavement of Africans disembarking on American soil. It is documented that John Punch, a runaway servant from Virginia, was returned to his master and ordered to serve for the remainder of his natural life. This order set a legal precedence for lifetime servitude for Africans in America. By the 1660s, although there was legal precedence regarding the status of Blacks, Anglo-American attitude toward them was still ambivalent. This would change as Englishmen began their increased participation in the trans-Atlantic slave trade.
England’s establishment of viable trading companies, beginning in 1660, brought about a substantial increase in the Black population in both England and its colonies. It would not take long before the continuous surge began to distress the general White population in North America causing the creation of laws to maintain control of them in addition to the continual debasement of Blacks as a group. Initially, disparaging sentiments were generally published in books, essays and pamphlets. Later, mainstream print media would relay similar attitudes thus potentially influencing the opinions of countless others who may not have shared those views. “Detestable,” “vile,” “savage,” were just a few of the words used to describe Blacks during this time. In order to “satiate their savage appetite for blood,” Africans were known to “[suck] the blood of their enemies” so remarked essayist Arthur Lee.¹ Even those who opposed the institution of slavery seemingly could not bring themselves to view the African as anything other than inferior. “[S]o vile a stock” was the description given by abolitionist John Woolman as he suggested that the “gifts” granted to Whites are not being used as intended. The “gift” Woolman is referring to is the superior position God had granted Whites.²

One of the ways in which Blacks responded to the rhetoric was to create their own publications aimed specifically at countering any claims that Africans were inferior. By focusing on the historical accomplishments of ancient Egypt and Ethiopia, these newspapers were able to show that Africans and those of the diaspora were indeed civilized and their civilization dated back to antiquity. As mentioned, Ethiopia would be at the epicenter of this movement. Words like “civilized,” “pleasant,” “healthy” and “enlightened” were common adjectives used to

describe the people of ancient Ethiopia while simultaneously securing the name “Ethiopia” to an entire race of people. The *Frederick Douglass Papers* printed, “Ethiopia was the birth place of religion, literature, and civilization, which had spread from thence to Egypt and Greece.” While in the *Freedom’s Journal* it was written, “[Ethiopians], for more than one thousand years, were the most civilized and enlightened.” Moreover, as Black publications printed details of Ethiopia’s past what evolved was a fervency for the envisioned Ethiopia.

Blacks in America were beginning to incorporate the term Ethiopia in their very lives. Some would refer to themselves as “Ethiopian” or as a son or daughter of Ethiopia. While those who started their own churches would in some instances refer to themselves and members of their congregation as “Ethiopians.” What would eventually emerged was an adoration for the tangible Ethiopia (i.e. the country that was then known mainly as Abyssinia).

The biblical passage, “Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God” took on a number of interpretations. For some it personified a hope that freedom would someday arrive for those held in bondage and that Blacks would someday rise to prominence. For others, it embodied the likelihood that one day all Black Africans would be redeemed through Christ. Ethiopia (or Abyssinia) was seen as the “Cradle of Christianity.” It was a Christian empire that was home to the Ark of the Covenant. In both religious and secular circles, Ethiopia exemplified what Blacks could and would someday achieve.

In 1896, when Ethiopia’s independence was threatened, African Americans took notice. Both Black (and mainstream) print media played pivotal roles in disseminating information to the public during the First Italo-Ethiopian War of 1896. The *Richmond Planet, The New York Times and* others called attention continually to the Ethiopian crisis. These channels created an

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awareness of the conflict as it unfolded and sparked considerable interest in the event. Italian citizens were elated by news of their county’s continued incursion in East Africa believing that the eventual colonization of Ethiopia was a foregone conclusion. Yet, among the U.S. population there were no discernable reactions to the conflict. It wasn’t until Ethiopia’s victory that many began to believe that the biblical prophecy was being fulfilled. Italy’s defeat at Adwa sent a message to imperial powers that Africans could effectively challenge their supremacy. It also demonstrated to Africans and those of the diaspora that it was possible to effectively defeat colonialism and other form of exploitation. This strengthening connection with Ethiopia (Abyssinia) would continue as the nation’s sovereignty was again threatened by Italy during the Second Italo-Ethiopian War of 1935-36. During this crisis, the response by African-Americans was overwhelming as they saw that a victory for Italy would mean a defeat for all Blacks around the world.

Historians have approached this topic from varying viewpoints. James Meriwether argues that it was the Italo-Ethiopian conflict of 1935 that spawned a new and solidifying link between African-Americans and Africans – a link that prior to this was lacking. Ethiopia’s longstanding tradition of independence was a symbol for those who held fast to Black pride and freedom. Meriwether stresses Ethiopia’s importance to Blacks in America by stating, “For black Americans, Ethiopia stood as a lonely symbol of black achievement, resistance, freedom, power, and ultimately the last, best hope of African independence.” The desire to “get involved” was inspiring as “African Americans became the single most important pressure group in the United States pushing the government to act against Italy’s transgressions.”

argued that the connection between African Americans and Africans was strengthening as Black newspapers began to publish the events as they unfolded. As the tragedy befalling Ethiopia continued, concern for Ethiopia’s well-being became paramount. Meriwether also contends that as by the end of the 1940s, the connection between African-Americans and Africa hit a lull as “few strong ties existed between black America and contemporary Africa.”

African Americans were beginning to replace their idea of a liberation struggle for the ideals of freedom and democracy. Here, Meriwether points to a link between Black Americans and Africa that was lacking prior to the conflict, grew stronger during, and again waned after Ethiopia regained her sovereignty. Meriwether goes on to say that there was a noticeable shift in the link between African Americans and Africa. During the Second World War, “leaders of the major African American rights organizations expressed solidarity with the struggles of colonial peoples around the world,” however, as the war came to a close, they were now emphasizing a “universalist idea” of equality for all humans which, in essence, downplayed racial connections with Africa.

Contrary to the argument made by Meriwether, evidence demonstrates that a strong link between African Americans and Africa existed well before the First Italo-Ethiopia War of 1896, grew stronger during the Second Italo-Ethiopian War of 1936, and that connection continued well after Ethiopia regained her sovereignty.

Penny Von Eschen points to an “inseparably bound” struggle among African Americans and Africans during WWII. In, Race against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957, she asserts that the war was seen by both as a struggle not only against fascism but also colonialism. Black Americans viewed Ethiopia as the last bastion of independence in Africa. Additionally, she remarks on the common history African Americans shared with

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5 Meriwether, Proudly We Can Be Africans, 59.
6 Ibid., 58.
Africans and all people of African descent and how this history “had long been an important part of African American thought.”

Joseph E. Harris explores the critical link between the Italo-Ethiopian War and the motivation and reaffirmation of a common historical identity for Africa and its diaspora in, *African-American Reactions to War in Ethiopia, 1936-1941*. Harris maintains that “the invasion of Ethiopia ignited an emotional reaction among Africans and among descendants of Africans around the world, strengthening the bonds of pan-Africanism.” This can been seen in number of protests, demonstrations, and volunteers who sought to fight on the side of Ethiopia.

Using the phrase "Afro-American Consciousness of Africa", Bernard Magubane’s *The Ties That Bind: African-American Consciousness of Africa* explores the historical significance of the relationship of Black Americans to Africa. Although his text offers some prodigious insight on African-American attitudes towards Africa, the chapter "The Significance of Ethiopia in Afro-American Consciousness" focuses on how the Italo-Ethiopian conflict brought a new wave of African consciousness that spread through the Black community. However, Magubane also proposes that the Pan-African consciousness of the Black community lied “dormant” and was awakened to a “new level” by what was transpiring in Ethiopia. 

Although Magubane doesn’t alert his readers to when this latent period occurred in the Black community, this dissertation challenges his latent argument by suggesting that the Pan-African consciousness among African Americans existed well before the Second Italo-Ethiopian War and was free of any dormant period.

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Joseph Blyden’s *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race* (1887), contains a chapter titled, "Ethiopia Stretching out Her hands Unto God: or, Africa's Service to the World (Discourse delivered before the American Colonization Society, May 1880)." In it, Blyden places into historical context the origin of the term “Ethiopia” and how it was used as a designate for all of Africa. Additionally, “Ethiopians” was often used in reference to all “black” inhabitants of Africa and their descendants of the diaspora.\(^{10}\)

And lastly, Robert A. Hill noted that Marcus Garvey did not make a distinction between Ethiopia and Africa, but saw them as one and the same. According to Hill, Garvey stated that “there was, for a long time, in the [C]hristian world considerable difference of opinion as to the portion of the earth and the precise region to which the term Ethiopia must be understood as applying. It is pretty well established now, however, that by Ethiopia is meant the continent of Africa, and by Ethiopians, the great race who inhabit that continent. The etymology of the word points to the most prominent physical characteristics of this people.”\(^{11}\)

1.1 Sources

To gain some understanding regarding the shift in racial attitudes among Whites toward Africa and Africans in general, the primary source database Early English Books Online (EEBO) is used. This database contains digital facsimile page images of virtually every work printed in England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales and British North America. These sources provide first-hand account of Anglo-Europeans’ early contacts with Africans and their attitudes toward them as they began their ventures in the African trade. These accounts also document a clear shift in the


view of Africa and Africans that began around the mid-seventeenth century as contact between Anglo-Europeans and Africans significantly increased.

The greater portion of primary sources consist of information from Black and mainstream print media of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The *Freedom’s Journal, The Chicago Defender, The New York Times, the Pittsburg Courier* and others were essential in gauging the views and opinions of African Americans and are accessible online through the Georgia State University's Historical Newspaper Holdings. These publications provided in-depth commentaries on Ancient and contemporary Ethiopia (Abyssinia) particularly during the first and second Italo-Ethiopian wars. They also gave additional insight on the mindset of prominent historical figures like Paul Robeson and Langston Hughes, in addition to those of lesser stature. Also, commentaries published in historical Black newspapers reflect the mid-set of nineteenth and twentieth century African Americans by relaying the thoughts of individual subscribers who spoke highly of Ethiopia and viewed it as a symbol of Black achievement.

Additional African-American print media was accessed through *Accessible Archives*’ databases. These documents are OCR scanned from the original documents of the period. They also contain eyewitness accounts of historical events, vivid descriptions of daily life, editorial observations, commerce as seen through advertisements, and genealogical records available in an online environment. And while the possibility of bias within the print media can be an issue of concern, for the purpose of this study, several comparable documents are used to support given arguments. These are supplemented by secondary sources of prominent scholarship in an effort to further add validity to all points of contention.
1.2 Method and Theory

The primary method used for this dissertation is that of intellectual history. In order to gain a better understanding of the attitude of Anglo-Europeans toward Blacks in general, the historical writings of the English literati is closely examined. Additionally, the nineteenth and twentieth century print media is also considered. Using this method allows for the further understanding of ideas and the lives, culture and historical contexts that produced them.

This dissertation is divided into three parts. The first section theorizes that the racialization of Blacks by Anglo-Europeans began after the middle of the seventeenth century when their contact among them began to increase. This “moment” occurred during the time of England’s entrance and subsequent dominance of the trans-Atlantic Slave. The same occurred in the English colonies of North America. Shifting the focus of this dissertation to those colonies, what began to emerge were laws that were put in place to control Blacks as their numbers increased. In an effort to counter the racial discourse, Blacks in America began establishing their own publications for the purpose of bringing to light their truths regarding themselves. By commenting on the glorious histories of Egypt and Ethiopia, Blacks proceeded to counter the racial dialogue propagating throughout England’s domain. By connecting themselves with these ancient civilizations they moved to demonstrate that Africans were indeed civilized and made substantial contributions to humanity. This demonstrates how the print media was just one of the methods used by Blacks to combat racism and it is a method seldom discussed by historians. It also shows how from the earliest periods of English settlement, Blacks in America maintain their connection with their African brethren and their continent of origin.

The second section of this dissertation looks at the evolution of Ethiopia in African American thought. As the Black print media’s discourse on Egypt and Ethiopia continued,
Ethiopia would emerge as the preeminent symbol for Black achievement. For some, the biblical verse “Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God” meant that all Black Africans would someday be redeemed by embracing Christianity. For others, it meant that all oppressed Blacks around the world would one day remove the yoke of their oppressor and rise to a position of prominence and power. For many African Americans, the term Ethiopia became a synonym for all Black people as they would refer to themselves as such. This section argues that this led to increasing concern for the tangible nation of Ethiopia (Abyssinia) as the Black print media began to follow closely the events of 1896 as Italy attempted to colonize the sovereign nation. When Ethiopia defeated Italy at the Battle Adwa on March 2, 1896, many Black Americans saw this as a fulfillment of the biblical prophecy and further felt themselves connected with Africa. In fact, their connection had grown so strong that when Ethiopia’s sovereignty was threatened by Italy again in 1935-36, African-American response was overwhelming.

The final section looks at the Second Italo-Ethiopian War of 1935-36 and the culminating results of the increased concern and regard for Ethiopia (Abyssinia). Considered the last bastion of Black pride and freedom, African Americans were stirred to action as Italy invaded, for the second time, the independent nation of Ethiopia. Both peaceful and violent demonstrations were held as well as thousands of African Americans volunteering to fight on behalf of Ethiopia. Public figures spoke out in support of Ethiopia and others went there to support in any way they could including enlisting in the Ethiopian army.

A number of historians have written on the subject of the Second Italo-Ethiopia War. They have described in great detail African Americans’ participation in the conflict; demonstrated Ethiopia’s importance as the only African nation to defeat a European colonial power; they have revealed how important Ethiopia was in instilling pride in African Americans;
and they have written that many Black Americans used the term Ethiopia as a designation for themselves and their institutions. Yet few, if any, have discussed why Blacks in America responded to the second invasion of Ethiopia the way they did and in such large numbers. The overarching theme of this study seeks to answer this very critical question.

1.3 Outline of chapters

Chapter two assesses the literature of sixteenth century England. The writings of Richard Eden, John Hakluyt, and others give insight on their opinions of Africa and Africans. In addition, they also relay the observations expressed by those who actually travelled to the continent (i.e. English travelers, merchants, and slave traders) during England earliest ventures in the African trade up to England’s domination of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Chapter three focuses on the English colonies of North America and the emergence of the racialization of Africans there – noting that England’s moment of transition and the transition that took place in its North American colonies was not mutually exclusive. The chapter also looks the outcome of the racialization of Black in America (i.e. racialized discourse). Chapter four examines how the Black print media was used as a tool to counter negative racial discourse about Blacks. The print media also aided in the development of African-American consciousness regarding Africa by focusing much of its discourse on the ancient civilizations of Egypt and Ethiopia. Ethiopia emerged as a symbol of Black pride and freedom. What is also discussed is the birth of Ethiopianism and its role in the development of Black-American consciousness regarding Africa. Lastly, this chapter looks at the First Italo-Ethiopian War and how the Black print media followed the events as they progressed. Ethiopia’s victory over Italy would further place
Ethiopia in the forefront of Black consciousness. The final chapter looks as the Second Italo-Ethiopian war and the zeal with which African Americans responded to it.

2 AFRICA, THE “DARK” CONTINENT?

“The companie went without armour: for he sayd, that although the people were blacke and naked, yet they were civill.”

2.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the development of race-bound discourse in England and attempts to pinpoint its "moment of transition" as England shifted from isolation to colonial superpower. As a result of this transition, England began to "racialize" the African continent as their exposure to a wider variety of different cultures increased. Literature provides insight on a people who were considered, as individuals, “exotic “or “curiosities”, and as a group, insignificant. The amount of literary discourse regarding Africans in England and those abroad was limited as the majority of Blacks sat on the periphery of English society. As England began delving in the African trade, their attitude toward the indigenous people was a reflection of their attitude toward Blacks in England. They too saw them as exotic or curiosities and when they wrote of their contacts with Africans, their words were virtually absent of deprecating remarks.

In 1672, the Royal African Company was founded and given exclusive trading rights on the African coast. The company soon began transporting more than 5,000 enslaved Africans annually to the new world. Additionally, over time “thousands of blacks were [also] landed on

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12 Walter Wren, "The Voyage of M. George Fenner to Guinie, and the Islands of Cape Verde, in the Yeere of 1566. With Three Ships, to Wit, the Admirall Called the Castle of Comfort, the May Flower, and the George, and a Pinnasse Also."
13 This figure includes all English colonies in North America and the Caribbean.
the English shores to be kept in bondage in England.”

This substantial increase in the Black population had a considerable impact on the lives of its people. No longer did they sit on the periphery of English society; instead they became an integral part of it however subordinate their position afforded them. What followed was a notable shift in the attitude among Anglo-Europeans – a posture that can best be described as racial. This view of Blacks would continue as a substantial number of English citizens made their way to the West African coast, mainly as traders, merchants, physicians and observers. As a result, literary discourse regarding African people began circulating throughout England. Their correspondences with the monarchy, which eventually made its way to the public at large, give great insight on how the English viewed the indigenous people of Africa both before and after the commission of English royal trading companies.

2.2 English attitude toward Africans and their descendants prior to the charter of the Royal African Company (1550-1670)

Prior to the establishment of the Royal African Company in 1672, English contact with Blacks was minimal because the Black population that existed in England during this period was considerably small and gradually increased over time. Additionally, their status (as a group) was not one of prominence but rather inconsequential. They were, for the most part, servants, performers, or tradesmen. Ron Ramdin, in Reimagining Britain makes this point clear when he argues that, “In Britain, African... people continued to work as servants and performers with

little, if any, improvement in their daily lives.”

From the mid-sixteenth century onward, Blacks, for the most part, were employed as servants, pageant performers, jesters, and musicians while others held positions as professional soldiers, needlemakers, metal workers, and goldsmiths. Monarchs sought these “blackamoors” to provide services for the royal court. To hold a “blackamoor” in one’s employ had become a status symbol, as Edward Scobie maintains in his book, *Black Britannia*. He asserts, “At about this time, it became the vogue for titled and eminent persons to keep blackamoors as pets.” And it was not out of the ordinary to see a person of prominence traveling from Portugal to England accompanied by a “Turk” or a “negroe.” And although there were those who managed to create for themselves a prominent position in English society, the majority of Blacks living in early modern England lived on the social fringe. In *Things of Darkness*, Kim F. Hall addresses the status of Blacks during this period. She writes:

...blacks were not necessarily recognized even as a marginalized population... [and] evidence for an African presence is minimal. However, the status of black people as curiosities or oddities meant that they were considered both as individual ‘cases’ and as emblematic of a larger group (itc. mine).

What Hall proclaims is that this limited perception held by the English reflected how they viewed Blacks outside the confines of England’s borders (i.e. their view of all Blacks everywhere). This perspective, in addition to their minimal contact, evidence suggests, exhibited

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a perception of Blacks by the English as non-threatening. This in turn created a discourse on Africans that took on a more moderate tone.

The noted British geographer Richard Hakluyt illustrated in the second edition of his multivolume work, *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation* (1598), that the language in which English merchants such as John Lok, John Hawkins and others used to describe the indigenous inhabitants of Africa does not speak of a people who were, in their eyes, "uncivilized" or "barbarous." Instead words like "gentle" and "loving" were used. In volume two of Hakluyt’s work he documented some of the first Anglo-Saxon voyages to Africa from ca. 1552 to 1616. By no means were these English merchants beneficent. Their prime motivation was to essentially turn a profit for their nation and themselves. They traded in a variety of goods including human souls. These were England’s earliest ventures into the Atlantic slave trade. It is with certainty that Hakluyt’s intentions were not to express the sentiment of merchant travelers toward the indigenous populations of the world. In fact, he expressed plainly his reasoning behind such a large undertaking: It was to "commend [the] nation for their high courage" and to show his "ardent love of [his] country." However, his work is instrumental in that it documents some of England’s first contact with the various peoples on the African continent.

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20 During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, these terms, and others, were commonly used by travelers to Africa in their description of the people. This is demonstrated in the latter part of the chapter.
21 Richard Hakluyt, *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries ... by Richard Hakluyt Master of Artes, and Sometime Student of Christ-Church in Oxford*, ed. George Bishop and Ralph Newbery, Early English Books, 1475-1640 / 2360:02; Early English Books, 1475-1640 / 2361:01 (Imprinted at London : By George Bishop, Ralph Newberie and Robert Barker., 1598-1600., 1598), 129: This chapter specifically looks at the voyage to Benin beyond the country of Guinea, as explored by Master Bird and Master Newton, Merchants of London, with a ship called the Richard of Arundell, and a Pinesse; It was James Welsh, chief shipmaster of said voyage in 1588 who initially made this observation.
Richard Eden was a translator and alchemist in sixteenth-century England. He was also an avid supporter and promoter of colonial projects and ideas. His work had a major impact on Hakluyt to which he reprinted Eden’s, "A briefe Description of Afrike." In it, he divided the continent into two sections; *Africa the Great* and *Africa the Less*. "The Less" encompassed the kingdoms of *Tunis* and *Constantina*. To the south, the Libyan Desert. He considered this part of Africa “very barren” because of its great deserts. The people of this region were Muslims and were described as “rustic, living scattered in villages.” Further south, and still incorporated into “the Less” was the kingdom of Guinea inhabited by the “Blacke Moores,” called Ethiopians. They, according to Eden, lived in low straw-covered cottages. He commented on their belief by writing:

"..but all the regions of Guinea are pure Gentiles, and idolatrous, without possession of any religion, or other knowledge of God, then by the law of nature".

His comment referring to their religion, or lack thereof, was to distinguish those who resided south of the “the Less” from those Muslims that inhabited the north.

Eden designated the "the Great" (in part) as the *Barbarie* and the people therein, *Moores* (sic). The lands of Lybia and Ethiopia (ruled over by the mythical king Prester John) was also included. His general description of Africa is void of any degrading or derogatory references to the land and its people. And although he at times grossly oversimplifies this very complex

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25 In this context, Eden uses the term Ethiopian to describe the “Black” inhabitants of Africa or “Negroes.” This idiom should not be confused, in this instance, with the people who inhabited the land of Ethiopia as Eden saw the two as different not only in culture, but also in appearance as he described some as “the color of an Olive.” The importance of Ethiopia the region and its people will be discussed later.
continent, Eden puts forth a great deal of effort to enlighten the English monarchy to what he believed was a true and accurate description of Africa.

Hakluyt continued his discussion by recounting some of England’s earliest voyages to the African coast by noting that in 1553, three English vessels; the Primerose, the Lion, and a pinnace called the Moone, set sail for Benin and Guinea. The crew consisted of around one-hundred and forty “men of the lustiest sort” and with the exception of a Portuguese captain named Anthonie Anes Pintado, this was their first voyage to these lands. Their aim was to acquire as much gold as could be traded. Upon arriving to the coast of Benin, a small contingent took the pinnace and sailed up the river. After traveling some sixty leagues inland and walking another ten leagues from the river’s edge, the men arrived at the king’s court. They immediately took notice of his skin color. They described him as a "blacke Moore" but "not so blacke as the rest". After which they remarked on his dwelling where it was detailed as "long and wide, with walls made of earth." One observer held a seemingly envious posture by stating:

"And here to speake of the great reverence they give to their king, it is such, that if we would give as much to our Savior Christ, we would remoove from our heads many plagues which we daily deserve for our contempt and impietie." 

Having learned Portuguese as a child, the king asked the men why they were there. Pintado replied that they were merchant travelers in search of the commodities of his country. The voyaged ended with great profits gained for the merchants and for England.

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27 Hakluyt, “The first voyaige to Guinea and Benin” vol. 2, 11-12.
28 Ibid., 12.
29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
One year later, upon hearing the success of the Primerose in Guinea and Benin, John Lok and his crew set sail for their second voyage to Guinea to a place where "the Primrose (sic) was, and received much gold at the first voyage..."\textsuperscript{31} After arriving in Guinea, Lok gave his account of "the people and their maners" to which he included a brief description of Africa. He asserted that in the "old time" they were called \textit{Aethiopes} and \textit{Nigritae}, but his contemporaries refer to them as them as "Moores" or "Negroes."\textsuperscript{32} He distinguished the region of Guinea from that of Ethiopia and maintained that although there are many nations of people so named [Ethiopian], the region called Ethiopia is divided into two parts: “Aethiopia under Aegypt” which he describes as "a great and rich region" and "inner Ethiopia" which is "not yet knowne for the greatness thereof." To the east is the land ruled by the Christian Emperor Prester John whom Lok understood was also called \textit{Papa Johannes}. His empire extended "far beyond the [Nile], and extended to the coasts of the Red and Indians Seas."\textsuperscript{33} Continuing his description, Lok named the various peoples inhabiting what he designated as the "middle region" of the Christian Empire but only mentioning their names. Yet, when he began his discussion of the region of Troglodytica he gives specific details about the people living therein.\textsuperscript{34} He writes that they "dwel in caves and dennes" and that the "flesh of serpents their meat." He continued to say that they are a people with no language but who communicate through "grinning and chattering." And lastly, he declared that there are the Blemines who are “without heads...having their eyes and mouth in their breast.”\textsuperscript{35} What is most interesting about his depictions is that according to Lok’s own records, he never travelled to this part of Africa. In fact, Lok admitted that his

\textsuperscript{31} Hakluyt, “The second voyage to Guinea set out by Sir George Barne, Sir John Yorke, Thomas Lok, Anthonie Hickman and Edward Castelin, in the yere 1554. The Captaine where of was M. John Lok” vol. 2, 330.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 331.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., vol. 2, 332.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 333.
description of the people of Troglodytica is not based on his or any of his men's observations but deferred instead to the ancient Roman and Greek texts of Pliny and Diodorus Siculus. He concluded his dialog with the following statement:

Many things more might be said of the manners of the people, and of the wonders and monstrous things that are engendered in Africke. But it shall suffice to have said thus much of such things as our men partly sawe and partly brought with them.37 [emphasis mine]

Lok relayed his personal observations and those of his men while simultaneously conveying their own preconceived ideas about the African continent. The notion that Africa bore such monstrous beings is rooted in the works of those who existed some fifteen centuries earlier. Pomponius Mela, Pliny the Elder, and others wrote about the continent reproducing fictional accounts of their “observations.” These ideas were well ingrained in the mindsets of those throughout Europe. But during their initial contacts circa the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, these notions were summarily dismissed to the point where new discourse regarding Africa, written by learned men, began to evolve. One such work was that of John Ogilby.

In 1670 an eminent geographer and cosmographer, John Ogilby produced, Africa being an Accurate Description.... This was the first in what was to be a multi-volume edition. He sought to bring to the world a "New Model of the Universe" in which his objective was to produce an accurate description of all the kingdoms and dominions in the four regions. In his preface he noted that his desire was to dispel the myths of old regarding the African continent and the people therein and to essentially update this information with what he considered was the "undoubted truth." His sources were derived from "Eye-witnesses" of late sea voyages and he

36 Hakluyt, “The second voyage to Guinea...”
37 Ibid., vol 2, 334.
used this information for the purpose of "exploding Old Tales, Fictions, and Hear-says of the Antients (sic) [by] Collecting and Translating better and more Modern Authority." 38 In this case, “more modern authority,” is defined as those who travelled to Africa during the sixteenth century – a period that predates the advent of viable English trading companies.

Ogilby insisted that the "ancients," never really had a clear grasp of the African continent. Those areas unfamiliar to them – the majority of sub-Saharan Africa – were deemed uninhabitable due to the excessive heat from the sun. Yet those who believed these areas to be inhabited were done so by "such monstrous Nations, that they deserve not to be accounted Humane." 39 He referenced the works of Roman geographer Pomponius Mela who had asserted that the Cynocephali had heads and claws like dogs, and barked like them as well. And that there existed the Sciapodes, who were wondrous, swift, and hopped on one leg. They lied down on their backs making their single foot an umbrella whilst shading themselves from the heat of the sun. And the headless Blemmyers40 “whose Eyes and Mouth are the onely Face, and that delineated upon their Breasts.” 41 Throughout his discourse, Ogilby was steadfast in his assertion that Africa is in fact “fruitful” and “populous” and his sources reflect this. 42

Ogilby’s work sought to dispel the notions put forth by the ancients that a great portion of the continent was uninhabitable. For the most part, he continued, “the land is habitable, from the mildness of the weather and the seasons conducing thereunto” and also from its great mountains and rich mines, to its many provinces and kingdoms. 43 This is particularly holds true for the

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38 John Ogilby, Africa being an accurate description of the regions of Egypt, Barbary, Lybia, and Billedulgerid, the land of Negroes, Guinee, Ethiopia, and the Abyssines, with all the adjacent islands, either in the Mediterranean, Atlantick, Southern, or Oriental Sea, belonging thereunto…(London, 1670), preface.
39 Ibid., 4.
40 As noted, John Lok also mentions these mythical creatures during his second voyage to Guinea, referring to them as Blemines.
41 Ogilby, Africa Being an Accurate Description of the Regions, 4.
42 Ibid., 5.
43 Ibid., 24.
areas south of the Sahara. Ogilby painted a picture of the continent as one that possesses natural beauty, is diverse, and enjoys natural resources in abundance. But his most compelling statements were those he noted about the people.

Ogilby remarked on the inferiority of the indigenous people but only in comparison to those of European descent. He doesn’t use the term *inferiority* in the context that African people are inferior beings. Instead, he emphasizes the fact that because of their technological inadequacies, “a great number of them…were conquered by a few *Portugues*.”

This, he believed was because of their disinterest in learning how to use firearms rather than some innate inability that prevented them from learning how to use them. Ogilby also suggested that in *some* places, “the people are very wilde, savage, and dangerous,” but qualifies this by stating that it is the Barbary that is most savage due to their ongoing battle against Christian forces in the regions.

In the section titled, “Negroland, or the Countrey of Blacks,” Ogilby continues his discussion of the people of the sub-Saharan region.

"Negro-Land," according to Ogilby, consisted of lands "spreading North to the South, that is, from the Desart of Lybia, to the Banks of the River Niger." This would include a large portion of sub-Saharan Africa with the exception of *Nether* and *Upper* Ethiopia of which he discussed separately.

After giving a detailed description of its geography, his dialog turns to the people, their government and their religion.

The people, as he described them, were "very black" with "excellent teeth being white as Ivory." They had "handsom Ayre" about them and took "comeliness of anew Beauty."
possessed diverse languages whereas some regions share a common tongue while other dialects
differ every few miles. Their governments, for the most part, were essentially Monarchical
living under law and order. The majority practiced some type of religion anciently worshipping
one God that is "Lord of Heaven." He also noted that their "perswasion" was not impressed
upon them by some priest but rather their own instinct. From this traditional faith they were then
instructed in the "Mosaick Laws" which they embraced and practiced so devoutly that they
"wholly ecclipsed the Jewish (sic)." 48 He went on to say that some then turned to Christianity
and from there Islam which a great many continued to practice. Ogilby then focused his
discussion on Nether and Upper Ethiopia giving detailed account of its inhabitants.

The area of Nether Ethiopia extended beyond Negro-land and included areas as far west
as Angola and the Congo; as far east as the territory of Zanguebar; and as far south as the Cape
of Good Hope. The inhabitants of Congo region, in the country of Piri, were perceived as
“quiet” and “adverse from wars” while the Macikongen were described as being “very black”
with some being a “kind of Olive-Colour.” They were described as having curly black hair, well
set bodies, and their “lips not so think as other Bla

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The inhabitants of Upper Ethiopia, designated specifically as the Empire of Abyssine or
"Prester John's Countrey, are black with curley hair, “quick spirited, and lovers of Learning and
Learned men. 50 And not only are the men learned, but the women also. Ogilby declared that,
“the Abyssines, yea the very Women, are diligent and zealous of Literature, taking great delight

49 Ogilby., “Nether Ethiopias,” 490; 532.
to study the Scriptures,” compounded with the fact that they “hath a great affinity with the Chaldean, Hebrew, and other Oriental Tongues.”

The works produced by Eden, Hakluyt, and Ogilby give tremendous insight on their perspectives regarding the African continent and its people. Clearly, they were relaying what they believed were true and accurate accounts and undoubtedly were influential on the literati of the period. There comments were also free of disparaging remarks. Yet, as England transitioned from its “traditional insularity,” what emerged was the development of discourse regarding Africans that took on a racialized tone. As the English began to establish a dominant position in the African slave trade, their exposure to Blacks in England and those of the African continent increased. This increased exposure created anxiety among them. So instead of describing them as gentle and loving, they were now, for the most part, seen as uncivilized and barbaric.

2.3 Mendacity: English attitude towards Africans and their descendants after the charter of the Royal African Company (1672-1750)

“The Natives are wild, inhospitable, treacherous People”

By the latter part of the seventeenth century, overseas exploration and colonization by the English continued to grow at an exponential rate. The advent of the Royal African Company all but solidified England’s place as a colonial superpower as the nation continued to delve into the African trade. As the population of Blacks in England began to increase, it became necessary for its citizens to distinguish themselves from the darker “others” that were emerging around them. Hence, the language used prior to this period that spoke of ‘black’ in terms of death and

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51 Ibid., 644.
mourning, sin and evil was now being used to describe Africans.⁵³ So now, Blacks in England who were initially deemed “curiosities” and “oddities” and Blacks in Africa thought to be "Goodly men" who are by nature "very gentle and loving" were now being described as something of the contrary.⁵⁴ Kim Hall traces the foundation of this discourse by suggesting that this semantic shift emerged in conjunction with England’s intensified interest and participation in colonial travel and the African trade.⁵⁵

Hall proposes that it was England’s transition from isolation and the loss of its “traditional insularity” that provoked the development of “racialism” – an attempt to portray the cultural and social differences between races. Additionally, this “moment of transition…sets the stage for the longer process by which preexisting literary tropes of blackness profoundly interacted with the fast-changing economic relations of white Europeans and their darker ‘others’ during the Renaissance.”⁵⁶ What Hall suggests is that as England moved closer to transitioning from isolation to colonial superpower, those who were once an isolated people (i.e. the English) were now more widely exposed to a variety of different cultures. This increased exposure to cultural difference created, over time, “anxiety” and what she calls “racialism” within the British world. Because of this, all preexisting literary words or images used to describe the “other” (i.e. Blacks) were now being integrated into the English ever expanding interest. Hence, not only did the ideas of the ‘other’ and the developing language used to describe them pertain to those Blacks who lived in England, now it was used to describe those Blacks in Africa and those of the so called New World. Additionally, she argues, this language began to take on a more racialized

⁵⁶ Ibid., 3-4.
tone. So the question remains, when did this shift in tone occur? The answer lies in England’s venture into the African slave trade.

Research studies have documented that England acquired knowledge of the West African coast some time during the reign of Edward VI (1547-1553). Prior to this period England knew little or nothing of these parts. Hall qualified this by stating that England’s introduction to the Atlantic slave trade can be traced back to 1552 when “John Lok sold the first slaves that he captured in Guinea.” Historian Ron Ramdin concurs when he illustrated in *Reimagining Britain: Five Hundred Years of Black and Asian History*, that this era “was the inauspicious beginning of a trading connection between the English Merchant Adventurers and the West African people, a commercial and religious enterprise that would, in the years to come, lead to an increased black Africa (and Africa-descended) presence in Britain.” Arguably, this was not England’s first venture in the trade. Some seventy years earlier, two English merchants, John Titam and William Fabian discreetly assisted the Portuguese in the trading of slaves on the west coast of Guinea under the patronage of the Duke of Medina Sidonia. The voyages proved to be quite profitable for the two men who, in just a few years’ time, procured a liberty to trade from Portugal. The nephew of William, Peter Fabian, would follow in his uncle’s footsteps and continue the African trade turning a substantial profit.

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57 Ibid., 6.
60 Ramdin, *Reimagining Britain: Five Hundred Years of Black and Asian History*, 14.
62 Ibid.
From this point forward, English presence on the African coast increased and their participation in the trade and the knowledge gained of the continent rose as the following demonstrates:

From that Era, tho' not always from England, English Subjects were considerable Adventures, till such Time as Queen Elizabeth granted a Patent to Thomas Gregory of Taunton in Somersetshire, and William Pope, for carrying on a Trade to North Guinea, for a certain Number of Years, after which [England's] Traffick thither increased, and fell from Time to Time under new Regulations.63

And although this did increase English contact with Blacks at home and abroad, it was not until James I created the Company of Adventures of London Trading into Parts of Africa in 1618 that English exposure to Africans rose significantly. It was through this company that England built its first factory in Africa.64 At this point, Portuguese control over the trade began to weaken. As a result, the English, French, and the Dutch began competing with one another for the crucial rights to the slave trade that would provide the needed labor for their colonial ambitions.65 And although evidence suggests that England’s earliest attempt at monopolizing the Atlantic trade was unsuccessful, clearly voyages took place and were indeed profitable.66 By 1660, England’s participation in the slave trade had brought in a “steady flow of black men and women into England.”67 However, their exact numbers were not recorded.

63 Ibid., 12.
64 Hall, Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England, 21; George Frederick Zook acknowledges that England’s first factory was built in 1588 under the reign of Queen Elizabeth I; see Zook’s, “The Company of Royal Adventurers Trading into Africa,” 6.
65 Ibid., 21-2.
66 Ibid., 19.
67 Scobie, Black Britannia; a History of Blacks in Britain, 8-9; Douglas A. Lorimer, Colour, Class, and the Victorians: English Attitudes toward the Negro in the Mid-Nineteenth Century ([Leicester, Eng.], New York: Leicester University Press ; Holmes & Meier, 1978), 25.
Not until the creation of the *Royal African Company* did England’s efforts to monopolize the Atlantic slave trade come to fruition. Consequently, the number of English persons exposed to Blacks in England and throughout the Atlantic world increased exponentially. In 1672, King Charles II chartered the RAC giving them “sole Privilige of trading on the coasts of *Africa*, from *Salee* to the *Cape of Good Hope*, for the Term of 1000 years” and the authority to “Declare Warr with any of the Heathen Nations that are or shall bee Natives of any Country within the said Territories in the said parts of Africa.”68 This charter was not created solely as a means of economic gain, but also to serve as a method of vindicating the rights of the nation.69 Since England and the Dutch had been at odds over the trade for years, in addition to the friction created by the first Dutch War, England’s growing interest in the slave trade would deal the Dutch a fatal blow propelling England to the forefront of global hegemony and making them the economic powerhouse of the Atlantic sea trade. Their ventures gained them as much as fifty thousand pieces of gold at a time. The gold was minted in England and designated “Guineas.”70 All other goods were either sold publicly at a “Candle,” or used for the acquisition of additional Africans to work the royal plantations in America which could not exist without them.71 This was the start of England’s monopoly on the Atlantic trade.

As mentioned, with the RAC charter, the enslavement and trading of Africans increased significantly. Now that the English had an even greater interest in Africa’s west coast, more of

70 Ibid., Entries of Papers Concerning the Royal African Company, 7.
71 Entries of Papers Concerning the Royal African Company, 7; A "candle" refers to an old English custom of "selling by candle". When an items was up for bid, a pin or nail would be inserted near the burning end of a candle. When the candle melted enough so that the pin or nail was released, no further bids on that particular item would be taken.
them began traveling to it. And just as in prior decades those who traveled to Africa wrote about their experiences and gave their perspectives on the land and its people. However, during this time, the discourse began to take on a more racialized tone. It was during this period, evidence demonstrates, that as England began to break away from what Hall suggested was their “traditional insularity” and as a consequence their increased contact promoted the development of “racialism.” Learned men such as James Houstoun, John Newberry and others commented extensively on the African continent from its people to its geography. The remarks made by these gentlemen demonstrate a dramatic shift in the attitude of the English toward Africans specifically and Black in general.

In 1725, Dr. James Houstoun was employed by the RAC as a physician and the Surgeon-general to their settlements. His job was to "sort out" those enslaved Africans he considered “merchantable” and to advise on ways the trade could be improved to the "Advantage of Britain in general, and the Royal African Company in particular." With the exception of Angola and [Gambia], he visited all English settlements along the west coast of Africa. He gave what he understood to be his "true and impartial" accounts of the Guinea settlement and his efforts to "obviate the misrepresentations" given by "selfish, mean cringing Creatures" who sought to serve their own end. The "creatures" he's referring to are the captain generals and chief governors representing the RAC whom he readily vilifies throughout his discussion. The focus of his communication is to bring to light their improprieties. However, in doing this, he relays his "observations" of the inhabitants of Guinea. When giving his account of the people, their

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72 James Houstoun, Memoirs of the Life and Travels of James Houstoun, ... From the Year 1690 to This Present Year 1747. ... Collected and Written by His Own Hand. (London: 1747), 128-30; Some New and Accurate Observations Geographical, Natural and Historical. Containing a True and Impartial Account of the Situation, Product, and Natural History of the Coast of Guinea, ... By James Houstoun (London: printed for J. Peele, 1725), 40.
73 Ibid., Some New and Accurate Observations Geographical..., 2.
customs and religion he used terminology that can be easily described as pugnacious and derogatory. In his description of the “natives” of Guinea, he pointed out that “their natural Temper is barbarously cruel, selfish, and deceitful” and that their government is of equal standing. In regards to their society, he described their customs as “exactly [resembling] their Fellow Creatures and Natives, the Monkeys.” And their religion, he noted, “…some [worshiped] Rocks, others Snakes, Spiders, &c. according to the different Humours of the Fetiche-Men”

Houstoun was a loyal supporter of the Atlantic slave trade. And although the RAC needed no convincing, he appealed to them to not only continue the “glorious” trade, but to center the trade to the advantage of England.

James Houstoun and those after him communicated at length their personal travels to Africa or they recounted the travels of others in an effort to gain a better understanding of this mysterious continent. Yet, unlike the merchant traders of old who wrote down their encounters as a matter of record, learned men of science sought a much greater purpose. Their desired was to educate the masses in the hope that others would better understand the world in which they lived. As a consequence of their efforts, the people of the African continent were portrayed as nothing less than uncivilized.

Historical and geographical writer Thomas Salmon produced a body of work called Modern History: or, The Present State of all Nations (1744). It includes the observations of travelers who had recently visited the remotest parts of the globe. Salmon challenged the notion that during the time of Herodotus, Africa had been circumnavigated and that the designated “Torrid Zone” was not habitable. The circumnavigation of the African continent, he argued,
could not have been done without the aid of a compass. He also suggested that the ancients lacked confidence in themselves when they expressed this idea and that it had become "sufficiently evident" that they were "deceived in their notion." In the first chapter titled, "of Africa in general," Salmon gives his account of the people of the African continent and their habits. In addition, he offers a number of abstracts of the ancient history of most of the countries discussed.

Salmon began with “the Negroes [of Guinea] because they are so well known among us.” He described them as generally good statured, well-proportioned and robust but also vicious and corrupt in their morals. He included their physical characteristics from their skin complexion, hair texture and the physical traits of their faces. His attention then turned to the mulatto population to which he remarked were the descendants of the copulation of the Portuguese and Negroes. To him, these men were nothing more than drunkards and thieves – “treacherous to the last degree.” As for the women, they were “prostitutes to both Negroes and Europeans.” Salmon concluded that the character of both “Negroes” and “Melatto’s” (sic) was “very deficient in point of courage”..., extremely lazy and indolent,” and they can be readily charged with the most barbarous cruelty.

Although Salmon’s main purpose in writing Africa in General was to dispel the notion that Africa was circumnavigated during time of Herodotus, he also expressed his views of the people therein. His words, like others during his time, showed signs of contempt. He questioned the very nature of the people by debasing their moral character. The basis for his derision is

77 Thomas Salmon, "Modern History," i.
78 Ibid., 40.
79 Ibid., 40-1.
80 Ibid.
81 Ibid.
rooted in the “observations” of recent travelers to Africa and not those of his own. A similar approach to “understanding” Africa and its people can be seen in the works of the literary scholar John Newberry.

In 1748 John Newberry made the point that "the Knowledge of History is one of the best Accomplishments we can possess; it gives us Experience without grey Hairs, and make us wise at the Labour and Expense of others." But its foundation -- that is the "eyes and feet" of history -- is "geography" coupled with "chronology."82

Newberry is considered the father of children's literature. His work during the 18th century opened the door to a sustainable market for this genre. He was an avid believer in the education of the youth and saw geography as not only a pleasurable branch of learning but also a profitable one.83 Newberry’s Geography made familiar and easy to young gentlemen and ladies, is the sixth volume of his Circle of Sciences. Its purpose was to educate children in Geography which he felt were being “brought up without the least idea of it.”84 His work is divided into two parts. Part one describes the globe as being divided by land and water and he discusses its zones, climate and so forth. Part two surveys more closely its geographical makeup. He examines the continents of Asia, Africa, and the Americas and gives detailed information about the inhabitants. Similar to John Ogilby, Newberry references the ancients and how they were "very imperfect and full of false Relations." Their approach to understanding the earth, he continued, fell short because they knew "little or nothing" of it and that the "Moderns have corrected many of their Errors."85 So like Ogilby, Newberry believed that what he wrote about the people of

82 Newberry, "Geography Made Familiar and Easy to Young Gentlemen and Ladies. Being the Sixth Volume of the Circle of the Sciences, &C. Published by the King's Authority.," ii.
83 Ibid., i.
84 Ibid.
85 Ibid., viii.
Africa were true and accurate accounts. But unlike Ogilby, Newberry’s descriptions took on a more racialized tone.

In regards to Africa, Newberry's text divides the continent into several geographical locations: the Barbary, Egypt, the Desert, Negroland, Guinea, Ethiopia, and the "African Islands." Those of the Barbary, he said, were "a covetous, unhospitable, treacherous People… who follow their common trade of robbing travelers." Of Egypt, he spoke highly of the great pyramids referring to them as "remarkable" and “stupendous” structures that have stood the test of time. Yet, the people who inhabit the land he described as, "cunning, treacherous, cowardly, and cruel being much degenerated from their Ancestors." The people of Negroland, he called "uncivilz'd and ignorant." But unlike his discussion of those in Egypt and the Barbary, which lacked any physical description, Newberry gives detailed accounts of the physical attributes of the people of Negroland. He described their complexion, hair texture, and facial features presumably to distinguish them from their northern neighbors. The people of Guinea are mentioned in regards to the slave trade as he noted many “thousands” are transported to America to work the plantations of Mexico and Peru to toil in the mines. Those not discussed in this context are described as being "generally courteous to Strangers…but they are said to be addicted to cheating."

Newberry divided Ethiopia into Upper and Lower. Upper Ethiopia included Nubia, Abyssinia and the provinces of Ajan and Zanguebar. The lower consisted of Congo, Angola, Benguela and others. With the exception of the Abyssinians who he described as having "a great deal of Wit and to be fond of learning," he generalizes all the inhabitants of both upper and lower

81 Ibid., 238-9.
82 Ibid., 246.
83 Ibid., 250-1.
Ethiopia by commenting that, "they are ignorant, unpolish'd, and superstitious."\textsuperscript{90} And lastly, the African Islands, he noted that "the Natives are wild, inhospitable, treacherous People."\textsuperscript{91}

Newberry's rudimentary approach to geography coupled with his comments regarding the people of Africa demonstrates how racialized views of the African continent reached not only adults, but children also. These men sought to educate the masses to what they believed were true and accurate accounts of Africa and its people.

\section*{2.4 Conclusion}

By examining the literary discourse of Anglo-Europeans in England, evidence suggests that during a time when their contact with Blacks was minimal, they (the English) perceived Blacks as “curiosities” and “oddities” and as the insignificant “others” sitting on the periphery of English society. Additionally, this point of view echoed a perception that Blacks in and outside the boundaries of England were non-threatening. The language used by merchants, travelers and others described the African people as gentle and loving. However, by the latter part of the seventeenth century, and as overseas exploration and colonization efforts increased, so too did the population of Blacks in England and English colonies throughout the western hemisphere including those who settled on the African coast. This increased contact caused Anglo-Europeans to begin distinguishing themselves from the darker “others” that were emerging around them. Blacks in England, Africa, and throughout the British Empire were now viewed as threatening due to their continuous and increasing contact. This increased contact produced anxiety. Literary discourse reflected this anxiety in the form of cultural and social distinction made by Anglo-Europeans toward Blacks. This discourse, evidence again suggests, emerged in

\textsuperscript{91} Ibid., 261.
conjunction with England’s intensified interest and participation in colonial travel and the African trade brought about by the advent of the English royal trading companies. This literature, it can be said, was mirrored in England’s North American colonies.

The attitude of Anglo-Europeans regarding Blacks in England and those in Africa also reflected the attitude of the colonial citizens in the western hemisphere. As contact between Anglo-Americans and those designated as “Negroes” in America increased, so too did their level of anxiety. And just as it did across the Atlantic, their anxiety was reflected in their literature from which emerged a racialized discourse regarding Blacks in America. However, what eventually developed was a counter-discourse that sought to connect those of the African diaspora with the African continent. The following chapter delves into the racial discourse as it emerged well after the settlement of North America by Anglo-Europeans as the Black population began to increase post England’s entrance into the trans-Atlantic Slave Trade.

3 COLONIAL AMERICA: A NEW EPOCH IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BLACKS AND WHITES

“The Mulatto harkened well to all this, though a sudden fear surprised him, because certain Indians passed by, and noted his long conference with us. The poor and timorous mulatto then told us, that he was in danger, for having been known by us, and that he feared the Indians would kill him…We persuaded him not to fear anything they could do to us, who had Soldiers, Guns and Ordnance to secure ours and his life also”

From: The English-American His Travail by Sea and Land

3.1 Introduction

The English Crown had specific goals in mind when it sent its first colonists to settle the “New World.” They sought to challenge the Spanish Catholic Empire who had their fair share of colonies in South and Central America and the Caribbean; to convert the “local natives” to Christianity; and, more importantly, to “make the entire enterprise [profitable].” \textsuperscript{93} Those who remained in England were privy to the unspeakable horrors that the colonists faced. Yet, the number of English citizens who made the arduous journey which John W. Sweet describes as, “a dangerous, enticing New World,” had to have been motivated to do so either by their own volition or by coercion. \textsuperscript{94} For those who migrated by choice, this is especially curious considering the options available to them at the time. English migration to other countries was not uncommon. Alison Games comments on the eastward migration of the English in 1635 by noting that, “1595 men left London to serve as soldiers on the continent, and another 1000 people (men, women, and children) [migrated to] the continent.” She goes on to mention other locations where these Londoners migrated: “India, Indonesia, West Africa, Turkey, Moscow, Lisbon, and any number of other places where men pursued profit.” \textsuperscript{95} Yet, in that same year, nearly five thousand people left from London to America in pursuit of a better life. But for the settlers who paved the way for these latter migrants – having to contend with disease, starvation, relentless indigenous attacks, attacks by the Spanish and so on – life in colonial America was abysmal. Initially, the Virginia colonies were not self-sustaining as the colonists faced insurmountable difficulties to the point of near extinction. The second wave of migrants sent by


\textsuperscript{94} Ibid. 1.

the Virginia Company did more harm than good. Instead of relieving the original colonists, they added to their burdens. However, there were two key factors that brought about the colonies’ eventual growth during the first half of the seventeenth century. The first was migration and the second was the tobacco boom of 1619. And as tobacco became a main staple, migrants from England were welcomed as their labor was desperately needed. Additionally, in 1619 Africans were brought into the Jamestown settlement and became a permanent fixture of colonial life.

During the first half of the seventeenth century, Blacks in colonial North America were no different (at least from a social standpoint) than their White counterparts. They labored, they completed their indenture, and they lived as free men and women. But this would change drastically during the second half of the century as their numbers began to increase and the dramatic shift from servitude to slavery began to take hold in the colonies. Those who were once deemed “negroes,” became the quintessential source of slave labor and took near center stage in colonial life. Laws were created to “deal” with a people most colonists began to see less as individuals and more as property. With this, a unique discourse regarding these “others” followed.

Giving first a brief historical account of the first years of the Jamestown colony and the hardship the first settlers faced, this chapter looks at when the transition from indenture to slave labor occurred as the need for labor became the mainstay in the Chesapeake colonies. It will also discuss how The Company of Royal Adventurers into Africa (later The Royal African Company) satisfied this need for labor by furnishing the colonies with an ample supply of African souls. With this massive influx of Black laborers into the colonies, a fundamental change could be seen in the attitude of White colonists – similar to their English counterparts – as they began to view

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themselves as being better than Blacks. Lastly, it explores how legislation was used as a means of controlling the ever-increasing Black population in an effort to ease the fears and anxieties of Whites.

3.2 First arrivals

The year was 1606 when three ships set sail from a port along England’s Thames River; they were the Godspeed, the Susan Constant, and a pinnace called the Discovery. Their destination was North America. It is with little doubt that the 105 settlers aboard knew what was in store. The four month voyage from December to April would have them cramped with the supplies and ships’ gear. Their company, besides each other, were the animals brought along that shared the living space on the open decks. The ships were notoriously filthy and the smell was unimaginable. The vessels were also incubators for nearly every known disease of the period. In fact, unbeknown to all, Reverend Robert Hunt, with whom the passengers travelled, was infected with typhoid.97 On 26 April, 1607 the voyagers made land at the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay. Less than a month later on May 13th, England established its first successful settlement in the western hemisphere.98

Upon landing on the shore, twenty or so men disembarked and made their way inland. Within minutes, they were confronted by a band of Native Americans brandishing bows and arrows. Without warning they engaged the colonists in battle. Captain Archer and Mathew Morton were hit first. Captain Newport, raising his pistol and aiming carefully fired off one

97 Frank E. Grizzard and D. Boyd Smith, Jamestown Colony: A Political, Social, and Cultural History (Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-CLIO, 2007), xxiv.
98 Although the first English settlement in the western hemisphere was the Roanoke colony in what is today North Carolina, the colony met its untimely demise from unknown circumstances. One hundred or so settlers disappeared virtually without a trace. The only clue to their whereabouts was a carving of the word “CROATAN” – the name of a small Native American group living in the area. It is believed that they may have been absorbed into their society; however, this was never confirmed. See “The First Voyage to Virginia; Undertaken by Mr. John White. 1589” in John Smith’s The generall historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles ...” (1624), C4.
shot, but missed. Although the sound of his weapon was thunderous, the warriors were not fazed. They continued until their arrows were spent. Depleting their supply, they dispersed. The captain and his crew, making their way further inland, fortified their position thus establishing the settlement of Jamestown, Virginia.

Life in the first permanent English colony of Jamestown was harsh. Typhoid, dysentery, malnutrition, and the Powhatan confederacy (named after its powerful chief) were beyond challenging for the new arrivals. The newly formed *Virginia Company of London* sent 105 colonists to Virginia in December, 1606 in the hope that these adventures would be able to exploit any valuable minerals that could be found. This, the investors believed, would bring significant returns on their venture. However, the colonists learned quickly that they were not prepared for the unforgiving nature of colonial life. Locating minerals resources adequate enough to satisfy the needs of the Virginia Company proved to be as problematic as the Algonquians whom they hoped to control. This, coupled with a severe shortage of food, nearly eradicated the entire colony. The precarious nature of colonial life had the settlers depending on the Powhatan to provide for them their most basic needs of which the Virginia Company proved unable or, quite possibly, unwilling to do.

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99 John Smith, 1580-1631., *A True Relation of Such Occurrences and Accidents of Noate as Hath Hapned in Virginia since the First Planting of That Collony, Which Is Now Resident in the South Part Thereof; Till the Last Returne from Thence, 1608*, Special Collections, A3.
101 Throughout his texts Captain Smith uses the terms “Algonquians” (which is the language spoken by the Powhatan) and “Powhatan” (which is the name of the people under the leadership of Chief Powhatan), interchangeably; see Smith’s *True Relation*.
So what was it that motivated England’s residents to undertake such a hazardous voyage while risking life and limb to settle unknown territories? Undoubtedly these first settlers were not destitute and they most certainly were not criminals given a second chance in colonial America. In fact, a greater portion of England’s first colonists were members of the wealthier class designated as “gentlemen.”

So again, what motivated them to migrate? The answer to this question can be found in the creation of the Virginia Company.

Established in 1606, the Virginia Company led extensive campaigns to motivate English citizens to travel to the New World in hope of drawing enormous profits from their venture. Poems, sermon, financial reports, laws, tracts, ballads, and various other forms of literature were used by the company to attract settlers and investors. In fact, at one point complaints to the Privy Council became common as people protested the “cozening ballads that induced Englishmen to emigrate.”

Across the Atlantic, Spain was acquiring enormous wealth from their American colonies and they posed a significant threat, militarily, to England. The Crown saw the new Virginia colony as a means of gaining a foothold in the Americas coupled with the vision of expanding the Empire with additional settlements. Additionally, the colony was seen as a means of creating profitable trade opportunities. The early settlers, at least a large portion of those who signed on, did so “in the hope of returning home within a year or two, preferably rich.” The remainder were motivated by the prospect of land ownership. It is not clear exactly which colonists were motivated by land ownership and which were driven by profit but what is known

103 With the exception of the thirty-seven settlers designated as “diverse others”, gentlemen made up the largest “occupation” of the settlement with thirty total. The occupations of the remaining thirty-eight varied from laborers to council members; none of which exceeded twelve members within any given occupation. See “The Proceedings of the English Colonie in Virginia...” in John Smith’s The generall historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles ...” (1624), 43-4; and Barbour’s “Complete Works of Captain John Smith” ed., 207-9.
104 Appelbaum and Sweet, Envisioning an English Empire: Jamestown and the Making of the North Atlantic World 98.
105 Ibid., 31.
is that the early stages of English colonization were insufferable as demonstrated during the period from October 1609 to May 1610 known as the starving time.

During the first month of May in 1607, the colonists appeared to have control of their circumstances. The environment was seemingly kind, and there was an abundance of wildlife in the surrounding wilderness. The ships arrived teaming with enough supplies to get the newcomers through the toughest times, at least to the Virginia Company’s best estimate, until their next supply ships arrived presumably in the fall. Although the newly established colony was by no small stretch of the imagination a haven for the settlers, it did however show semblance of prosperity. Nevertheless, by summer, this would quickly change. The oppressive heat, disease, and the deteriorating relationship between the colonists and the surrounding indigenous population wreaked havoc throughout the settlements. These, coupled with food spoilage, and the colonists’ inexperience and unwillingness to make proper use of the soil proved more than challenging as their numbers began to dwindle. Yet, as the summer heat subsided, the fortune of the colony began to turn. Friendly relations between the settlers and Native Americans were established just as the indigenous population began reaping crops sown earlier that year. To the colonists’ relief, they could now begin bartering for much needed provisions. The diseases that initially reduced the population began to subside, and in January, 1608 the hunger stricken, but certainly not starving, colonists welcomed their first supply ship. In fact, John Smith mentioned that, when Captain Newport was in Jamestown, they had twelve weeks of

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106 John Smith, *A True Relation of Such Occurrences and Accidents of Noate as Hath Happned in Virginia since the First Planting of That Collony, Which Is Now Resident in the South Part Thereof, Till the Last Returne from Thence* (London: Printed for Iohn Tappe, and are to bee solde at the Greyhound in Paules-Church-yard, by W.W., 1608), A3-B1.

107 There were actually two supply ships that departed England for Virginia. The first was captained by Christopher Newport. But because of bad weather the second vessel, led by Captain Francis Nelson, had to make land somewhere in the West Indies – possibly the Spanish colony of Hispaniola; see "The Proceedings and Accidents of The English Colony in Virginia, Extracted from the Authors following, by William Simons" in Smith’s *The generall historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles ...* (1624), H1.
victuals – much of which was provided by Powhatan. This was enough to not only feed the colonists, but also to store provisions for Captain Newport on his second voyage back to England in April. During that same month, Captain Nelson’s vessel finally arrived with additional supplies. Adding to the provision already held, the colonists had enough victuals “sufficient for halfe a yeare.” Smith recalled the tone of the colony during that spring of 1608 in the closing lines of “True Relations”:

Wee now remaining being in good health, all our men wel contented, free from mutinies, in love one with another, and as we hope in a continuall peace with the Indians, ... to see our Nation to enjoy a Country, not onely exceeding pleasant for habitation, but also very profitable for commerce in generall, no doubt pleasing to almighty God, honourable to our gracious Soveraigne, and commodious generally to the whole Kingdome.

It is apparent that by the summer of 1608, the colonists were doing fairly well for themselves. They had overcome their early misfortunes and, if we are to take Smith’s observations into account, they had enough provisions to last them at least until winter. Their relationship with the indigenous population was cordial, which meant that they could readily barter for corn or other desired victuals if food stores ran low. Moral was high, and they were even “hewing downe Trees, and setting Corne.” But, as fall approached, the colonists’ fortunes turned once again.

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108 Historians place Captain Newport in Jamestown on March 9, 1608; three months after his initial return. See Smith’s, A True Relations of Such Occurrences and Accidents of Noate, ed. Charles Deane, 61, n. 5; and The Complete Works of Captain John Smith (1580-1631) in Three Volumes, ed. Philip L. Barbour v1, 106, n. 195.
109 Smith, A True Relation of Such Occurrences and Accidents of Noate as Hath Hapned in Virginia since the First Planting of That Collony, Which Is Now Resident in the South Part Thereof, Till the Last Returne from Thence, D4.
111 Smith, A True Relation, E4.
112 Ibid., E1.
In September, 1608, Smith was elected president of the Virginia council. As the colony’s newly elected leader, his first duty was to find a means that would sustain the colony through the coming winter. Food was in short supply and the colony was dependent on the indigenous population for corn. How did this happen when, by his own account, the colony had enough provisions to last them until winter? There were several factors that caused Smith concern that the settlers would not last the winter unless measures were taken. One of which rested on Captain Newport’s second return voyage to Jamestown. When Newport arrived that September, he brought with him an additional seventy colonist and “not enough provisions” bringing the total number of colonists to about two hundred. Additionally, in a letter addressed to the Virginia Company, Smith excoriated them for not sending more provisions and skilled men such as carpenters, blacksmiths and so on. Another factor that alarmed Smith was that the colonists never learned to hunt and fish well enough to support the population. In *A True Relation of Such Occurrences*, he bemoaned, “though there be fish in the Sea, foules in the ayre, and Beasts in the woods, their bounds are so large, they so wilde, and we so weake and ignorant, we cannot much trouble them.” And finally, during their three-month stay, from September through November, Newport’s sailors ate and drank up a large portion of their own food rations and traded to the Native Americans most of those provisions meant for the colonists. It was indeed a troubling time. And to make matters worse, the Virginia Company, in a letter addressed to the colonial council courtesy of Captain Newport, ordered the colonists to search for gold; make an attempt at finding the Roanoke colonists; and stage a coronation for king Powhatan; all

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114 Ibid., 2:189.
115 Ibid., 2:186-7.
during a period when the majority of their time was spent trying to survive.\textsuperscript{116} Smith noted this in his letter to the Virginia Company explaining why it would be difficult to partake in such endeavors considering the condition of the colony. He wrote:

\begin{quote}
For in overtoyling our weake and unskillful bodies, to satisfy this desire of present profit, we can scarce ever recover our selves from one Supply to another … These are the causes that have kept us in Virginia, from laying such a foundation, that ere this might have given much better content and satisfaction; but as yet you must not looke from any profitable returnes.\textsuperscript{117}
\end{quote}

When Newport departed in early December, the colonists were “constrained to give him three hogsheads of that to victual him homeward” burdening their ever decreasing food supply.\textsuperscript{118} With the welfare of the colony at stake, Smith and a handful of men ventured out on a dangerous expedition to acquire needed corn. Nearly losing their lives in the process, Smith received corn from Powhatan which was enough to "keepe 46 men six weekes.” Smith and his men returned to Jamestown with “479 Busels of Corne” and “neare 200 waight of deere suet.”\textsuperscript{119} Jamestown would not starve this winter. The period John Smith described as “the starving time” would come later.

By the summer of 1609 the storehouses that held the colony’s precious victuals had rotted out. Those provisions that had survived the dampness and humidity were consumed by the rats that were, coincidently, brought to Virginia by the settlers. "So many thousands rats (increased first from the ships) … This did drive us to our wits ende, for there was nothing in the countrie

\begin{footnotes}
\item\textsuperscript{116} Philip L. Barbour, ed. \textit{The Complete Works of Captain John Smith}...., 2:188.
\item\textsuperscript{117} Ibid. 2:190.
\item\textsuperscript{118} Ibid., 2:192.
\item\textsuperscript{119} Ibid., 2:206.
\end{footnotes}
but what nature afforded.” The colonists could no longer rely on the indigenous population because Virginia was experiencing a drought which meant the Native Americans’ food surplus was minimal at best. By winter’s end, the settlers ran short of their supply of corn and the spring and summer months were their leanest times when they lived mostly on what the land could offer: small game, fish and berries. And to worsen an already desperate situation, when the Virginia Company sent a fleet to the colony its flag ship, the Sea Venture, was lost. The remaining vessels barely had enough provisions for the three hundred aboard. Adding to an already desperate situation, after the newcomers arrived, there were now approximately five hundred hungry mouths to feed and not nearly enough resources to accommodate. And to make matters worse, John Smith – who up to this point had successfully led the colony through its last winter – was suffering from severe burns and was on his way back to England. This left George Percy in charge and desperate. And unlike Smith, Percy would fail miserably in providing for his fellow colonists, essentially ushering in the great famine.

The starving time was the nadir of England’s colonial venture. Smith later described the period as “too vile to say and scarce to be believed.” And Percy who was there during the time recalls “unsufferable hunger” and being driven “to eat those things which nature most abhorred” It was an experience that nearly eradicated the English settlement dissolving all hope of an established Anglo-European colony in the new world. Yet, the colony persevered and with the aid of a restructured Virginia Company began to show some semblance of prosperity.

120 Philip L. Barbour, ed. The Complete Works of Captain John Smith...., 1:263.
By 1618, the Virginia Company had reorganized and was no longer focused on the quick returns of precious metals. Instead, they turned their sights toward tobacco. The incentive for those settlers who could afford to partake in the venture was fifty acres of land to grow this new “cash-crop” provided they “purchased” a contractual laborer to work the land. These indentured servants were available so long as their colonial sponsor paid their travel expense from England to Virginia. In return, servants would pay back their patron with his (or her) labor in the hope of gaining their freedom and land once their contract expired. All those who became indentured were from England but that would change when in 1619 the first Africans arrived to the Virginia settlement and, it is believed, became an integral part the indentured labor system.

Traditionally, throughout most of continental Europe, landownership was something experienced by the few. The noble gentry held large land tracts while the common class either worked the land as farmers (classified as serfs), or as tenants who paid taxes directly to the landowner. This was also true in England. Yet, as the feudal system began to erode and the population of England increased, the availability of land became scarcer. Newly established American colonies would remedy this if the colonies proved viable. In the Chesapeake, unlike the feudal system in England, a settler could hold free and absolute title to land, namely, “one hundred acres for every share of twelve pounds and ten shillings” courtesy of the Virginia Company while those who could not afford to invest in the company could “sell” themselves as contractual laborers for a fixed period.\(^\text{124}\) Indentured servitude, like serfdom would eventually create a substantial labor force for the colonies and aide in its sustainability.\(^\text{125}\) Yet, for the

\(^{124}\) Council for Virginia, A Declaration of the State of the Colonie and Affaires in Virginia with the Names of the Adventurers, and Summes Adventured in That Action. By His Maiesties Counsell for Virginia, 1620, Special Collections, EEBO, 9.

\(^{125}\) It is documented that indentured servitude existed in the colonies as early as 1609 and did little to aid in their early development. It was not until the system was revised by the Virginia Company in 1619, in conjunction with the “tobacco boom” that same year, did the Virginia settlements begin to show signs of prosperity. For further details see Abbot Emerson Smith and Institute of Early American History and Culture (Williamsburg Va.), Colonists
indentured the opportunity for improving their lives was limited. He or she was given food and lodging for the duration of their contract. And although motivated by the prospect of surviving their indenture and acquiring land of their own, most servants remained poor and continued to work outside their contractual obligation for wages rather than eventually acquiring land. A typical indenture lasted anywhere from four to seven years; after which, he would be free to purchase his own land. Once acquired, he could then obtain his own servants if he so chose. This was the common practice in the early stages of the English colonies. Yet, this would change as the demand for labor increased. No longer were Black servants subjected to “short-term” contracts; instead, they became bonded for life. The transition from indentured servitude to eventual chattel slavery had a profound effect on the increasing Black population living in the colonies. At the epicenter of this new forced labor system were Blacks who, at one time a fundamental part of colonial life, were now the pariahs of colonial society. The conditional changes brought about by this transition also had its effect on Whites as fewer became indentured.

3.3 Cultural divide

From 1640 to 1680 the population of enslaved Africans rose as more and more were arriving into the British colonies. This signifies the period when the status of Blacks in the colonies became codified and slavery became a mainstay in the colonies. Prior to this period, the question of whether or not Blacks held the status of slave, indentured, or both has no definitive

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127 The debate among historians on whether or not Blacks were indentured servants continues to this day. Several arguments to suggest the ambiguous nature of this subject follows.
answer. From the arrival of the first “twenty or so” Africans to Jamestown in 1619 up to 1640, insufficient documentation exists that clearly defines their role in the colonies. Some historians such as Oscar Handlin argues that they were indeed indentured and were identified and treated as such while Bernard Bailyn asserts that Blacks, prior to 1640, held an indeterminate legal status because they did not hold contracts and that their social status was unclear. And Winthrop Jordan maintains that not until 1640 was there “very little evidence to show how Negroes were treated,” but evidence does suggest, he continues, that after 1640 “that some Negroes were in fact being treated as slaves, at least that they were being held in hereditary lifetime service.” Whether or not Blacks in the Chesapeake colonies held the position of indentured servant, slave, or both is ambiguous at best. But where historians do agree is that in 1640 the Virginia legislature set a precedence regarding the legal status of Blacks that would forever change the lives of bondspersons in colonial America.

On July 9, 1640, three servants: a Scotsman named James Gregory, a Dutchman called Victor, and a “negro” by the name of John Punch ran away to Maryland. All three men were captured and returned to Hugh Gwyn. For their punishment, it was so ordered by the Virginia court that all three receive a “punishment of whipping and to have thirty stripes apiece.” Both the Dutchman and the Scotsman had their indentures extended one full year whereas John Punch was ordered to serve “his said master or his assigns for the time of his natural Life here or elsewhere.”


129 Winthrop D. Jordan and Institute of Early American History and Culture (Williamsburg Va.), White over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550-1812 (Chapel Hill: Published for the Institute of Early American History and Culture at Williamsburg, Va., 1968), 73.

130 H. R. McIlwaine, ed. Minutes of the Council and General Court of Colonial Virginia, 1622-1632, 1670-1676, with Notes and Excerpts from Original Council and General Court Records, into 1683, Now Lost (1924) (Richmond, Va: The Colonial Press, Everett Waddey Co., 1924), 466.
This decision made John Punch the first African to be legally enslaved in Virginia notably setting the legal precedence of lifetime servitude for Blacks on North American soil.

Warren Billings concludes that prior to the 1660s, although Virginia lawmakers gave slavery statutory definition, the English were ambivalent toward their relationship with Blacks.\(^{131}\) This point of view would change as the population of Blacks in the colonies increased – an increase brought about by a growing need for labor and the introduction of England into the trans-Atlantic trade. In 1640 there were an estimated 150 Black persons in Virginia whose status again was uncertain. By 1648 this number had doubled to 300; however, in just twenty-three years their numbers had risen to 3,000.\(^{132}\) From 1648 to 1671 the population of Blacks in Virginia grew one-thousand percent. This growth was not by natural means, but rather through importation. With this massive influx of Blacks into the colonies, brought about by the aid of the English trading companies, the status of Blacks was codified and their legal status became more definitive. This solidified the transition of Blacks from indentured to hereditary lifetime servants to eventual chattel slaves. This change caused a shift in the attitudes of Whites creating a racial paradigm that would last for centuries to come.

Established in 1660, *The Company of Royal Adventurers Trading to Africa* became a legitimate company and a formidable competitor on the coast of Africa. Decades prior, England began to shift from coastal raiding to the creation of viable trading companies for the purpose of gaining a profitable foothold in the African trade and legitimizing their ventures. Unregulated methods of trade ceased when Queen Elizabeth granted English merchants their first charter on


May 3, 1588. Yet, under this charter England’s endeavor in the African trade was met with limited success. In 1618 James I created the *Company of Adventures of London Trading into Parts of Africa* with the majority of the enslaved disembarking in the Caribbean. Another company was created during the reign of Charles I called the *English African Company*. Receiving its charter in 1631 it too had little success and met its demises after being absorbed by the English East India Company in 1658, or some twenty-seven years later. A 1660 charter granted the *Company of Royal Adventurers Trading to Africa* “land and the adjacent islands on the west coast of Africa from Cape Blanco to the Cape of Good Hope, for a period of one thousand years.” And although the trading for and the enslavement of Africans was practiced, it was not included in their initial charter. The intended trade was, "(redwood, hides, elephants' teeth)…and the encouragement of the undertakers in the discovering the golden mines and setting of plantations there." In 1663 the name was changed to the *Company of Royal Adventures of England Trading into Africa* to which their charter included the trading in human cargo. But because of “Warrs, and other casualties,” the Company suffered great losses to the point where "there remained not sufficient [capital] to manage said trade." It was then subsequently replaced by the *Royal African Company* in 1672. The RAC would hold a temporary, yet substantial, monopoly in the Atlantic trade.

The RAC received its charter with permission to import enslaved Africans to “all his Majesties American Plantations which cannot subsist without them." According to Edward and Walvin, two years after the charter was enacted, “Negro Servants were to be grouped in a

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134 Ibid., 9.
135 Quoted in, Zook, 10.
137 Ibid., 6.
Royal Proclamation with ‘Goods or Merchandise.’” And by 1701 an Englishman was able to designate Africans in his will as goods and chattels.\textsuperscript{138}

After 1698, the RAC was no longer \textit{the} premier importer of enslaved Africans to the New World; however, they continued to import Africans \textit{en mass} until 1731 when, in an attempt to promote a more “humane” trade, the RAC began to focus solely on trading ivory and gold. In 1752, its charter was revoked and replaced by the \textit{Company of Merchants Trading to Africa}, which took a more pro-slavery posture.\textsuperscript{139} England openly continued the slave trade until it was officially abolished in 1807. From the establishment of England’s first fort in 1618 to their “official” abolition of the slave trade in 1807, the majority of those captured on the west coast of Africa were sent to the Caribbean to work the sugar plantations, but large numbers were also sent to mainland North Americas causing a significant increase in their population. Between 1607 when the Virginia colony was settled and 1650, there were 100 enslaved Africans transported to the Chesapeake, as Table 1 indicates. From 1651 to 1700, that number increased to approximately 12,100. And from 1701 to 1750, roughly 84,000 disembarked in the Virginia and Maryland colonies alone.\textsuperscript{140} The chart also shows that after 1650 Africans were being brought into the Northern colonies with their greatest influx being from 1726-1750.

\textsuperscript{140} This substantial increase in numbers was due to the \textit{Royal African Company}’s attempt to substantiate the increasing demand for labor.
(Table 1.1): Enslaved Africans disembarked in Mainland North America, Twenty-five year Averages, 1501-1750.

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So how did this growth in the Black presence affect the colonist? A. Roger Ekirch’s Bound for America, sheds some light on how the English colonists’ view of Blacks began to change as the colonies began the transition from indentured labor to slavery. He noted, “…with the transition to slavery in the [British colonies], social peace gradually arrived, according to several studies, as race, not class, separated the privileged from the unprivileged. Black Africans, associated in white eyes with savagery and sin, came to occupy positions of
unremitting degradation.”¹⁴¹ Winthrop Jordan argues that the attack on the well-being of Black in the colonies began with its transition to slavery. He writes that, “Blacks were singled out for special treatment in several ways which suggest a generalized debasement of blacks as a group.” He went on to say that, “Significantly, the first indication of this debasement appeared at about the same time as the first indications of actual enslavement.”¹⁴² The transition from indenture to lifetime servitude to eventual chattel slavery marked another epoch in the history of America. This transition gave rise to literary discussions that centered on the “negroes” in colonial America.

In 1759 Adam Smith’s “Theory of Moral Sentiments” was published. In it, he excoriated American colonists on their treatment of enslaved Africans in America:

There is not a negro from the coast of Africa, who does not, in this respect, possess a degree of magnanimity, which the soul of his sordid master is scarce capable of conceiving. Fortune never exerted more cruelly her empire over mankind, than when she subjected those nations of heroes to the refuse of the jails of Europe, of wretches who possess the virtues neither of the countries which they go to, nor of those which they come from, and whose levity, brutality, and baseness, so justly expose them to the contempt of the vanquished.¹⁴³ [italics added]

In 1764 essayist and pamphleteer Arthur Lee responded to Smith’s castigation by proposing what he believed to be an accurate account of enslaved Africans, and of the colonies which chiefly employ them. In reference to those residing on the African coast whom Smith described

as “heroes.” Lee objected to this term and declared the African race to be the “most detestable and vile that ever the earth produced.” In addition to describing them as lacking in both discipline and courage, Lee claimed that Africans “[suck] the blood of their enemies;” and that they are prone to “ripping open the teeming womb, and dashing the infant against the stones, in view of the agonized mother.” This, he continued, is done in order to "satiate their savage appetite for blood.” He concluded by writing that these "most horrid barbarities, [are] in violation of every sentiment of justice, humanity, or magnanimity.” Having never travelled to the African continent, Lee relied on the “observations” of others to support his views of Africans. Prefacing his comments with “we read, with horror…” signifies this. He also extensively quotes the works of others, including Baron de Montesquieu, to support his position. "Cruelty, cunning, perfidy, and cowardice" are the characteristics he subscribed to the African. Character traits, indistinguishable according to Lee, between those Africans in Africa and those in the colonies. Although Lee is known for his anti-English sentiment and his objections of the slave-trade, his words speak of an attitude that was indicative of the day; even by those who opposed the institution of slavery itself.

John Woolman, another premier opponent of slavery, commented on those individuals “who believe in a righteous Omnipotent Being” and questions how they can be so accepting of the institution. He indicated that it was because the “Ideas of Negroes and Slaves are so interwoven in the Mind” that it would be difficult for them to garner any natural affection in their favor. Woolman also believed that Whites held a “higher Station, and enjoy[ed] greater Favours than [Blacks]”, but when Whites were granted these “gifts” by God, they were “intended

145 Ibid., 11-15.
for good Ends.”

According to Woolman, Blacks were seemingly “far from being our Kinsfolks...[and] of so vile a Stock” that in the common esteem would naturally hinder any type of friendship. Yet, in contrast, he does remark that there are *some* that were found to have an “agreeable Disposition and sound Understanding” which was a good foundation for a true friendship between Whites and Blacks. Woolman concludes with the following:

> They have neither Honours, Riches, outward Magnificence nor Power; their Dress course, and often ragged; their Employ Drudgery, and much in the Dirt: they have little or nothing at Command; but must wait upon and work for others to obtain the Necessaries of Life: So that, in their present Situation, there is not much to engage the Friendship, or move the Affection of selfish Men. But such who live in the Spirit of true Charity, to sympathize with the Afflicted in the lowest Stations of Life, is a Thing familiar to them.\(^\text{148}\)

Woolman’s anti-slavery position is clear. But what is also clear is his view of Blacks as he holds them at an inferior position to Whites.

In his book, *The Natural History of North Carolina*, resident and colonial observer of the southeast, John Brickell, noted the *increasing* population of Blacks in the country. Distinguishing those brought in from Guinea from “the great Numbers” born in the colonies he remarked that colony born Blacks are more “industrious, honest, and better Slaves than any brought from Guinea; this,” he continues, “is particularly owing to their Education amongst the Christians, which very much polishes and refines them from their barbarous and stubborn Natures.”\(^\text{149}\)

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\(^{148}\) Ibid., 305.

context of colonial society. “The very perverse nature of this black race seems to require the harsh treatment they generally receive” so echoed the sentiment of Bernard Roman in his *Concise Natural History*.150 “Treachery, theft, stubbornness, and idleness” marked the attitude of Roman who also argued that, “these qualities are natural to them and not originated by their state of slavery.”151 And future president, Thomas Jefferson, commented on the “real distinctions which nature has made” among Blacks and Whites living in the colonies. The differences in skin color being the most obvious as he continued articulating on their inferiority in reasoning and their “dull, tasteless, and anomalous” imagination.152

The belief by White colonists that Blacks were inferior to themselves was a near universal attitude throughout the colonies. But there were also individuals who perceived Blacks as a threat to society in general and this fear spread rapidly as time progressed. In an effort to contend with the perceived threat, “Slave codes” were enacted as a means of controlling the “treacherous and cruel nature” of the enslaved and “to keep them in Subjugation.”153 Laws regulating the status and treatment of Blacks had been in existence as early as 1640, but became more regulatory by the eighteenth century. Black codes were not only used to substantiate existing laws defining slaves as “chattel” thus “making the prospect of manumission almost impossible,” they also gave an already antagonistic slave owner the freedom to do to the enslaved what he (or she) pleased without fear of repercussion so long as they (the slaveholders)

151 Ibid., 105.
could “justify” their actions.\textsuperscript{154} Justification however was usually needed only in cases where slave-owners murdered the enslaved and even then, by law, the owners were protected. He could simply state that the slave had “resisted” and in the process of “correcting” them, they were killed. This is documented in the Virginia slave code of 1705:

\begin{quote}
If any slave resists his master...correcting such a slave, and [if he/she] shall happen to be killed in such correction...the master shall be free of all punishment...as if such accident never happened.\textsuperscript{155}
\end{quote}

Additionally, the only liberties afforded any bondsperson were those given to him by his owner.

Harsh laws regarding slavery were also used as a means of placating the ingrained fear among the colonists that the severe nature of this “peculiar institution” would incite rebellion amongst the enslaved to which they would soon “overcome the Christians.”\textsuperscript{156} It was a fear which Brickell express in his \textit{Natural History}, he writes:

\begin{quote}
Notwithstanding the many severe Laws inforced [sic] against them, yet they sometimes use and Rebel against their Master and Planters, and do a great deal of mischief, being both treacherous and cruel in their Natures, to that mild Laws would be of no use against them when any favourable Opportunity offered of executing their barbarities upon the Christians, as hath been too well experienced in Virginia, and other Places, where they have rebelled and destroyed many Families.\textsuperscript{157}
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{155} Virginia. and William Waller Hening, \textit{The Statutes at Large : Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia, from the First Session of the Legislature, in the Year 1619 : Published Pursuant to an Act of the General Assembly of Virginia, Passed on the Fifth Day of February One Thousand Eight Hundred and Eight}, 13 vols., vol. 3 (Richmond: Printed for the editor, 1819), 447-462

\textsuperscript{156} Brickell, \textit{The Natural History of North-Carolina with an Account of the Trade, Manners, and Customs, of the Christian and Indian Inhabitants. Strange Beasts, Birds, Fishes, Snakes, Insects, Trees, and Plants, &C. Illustrated with Copper-Plates. By John Brickell.}, 273.

\textsuperscript{157} Ibid., 273.
Slave codes reinforced the idea that Africans sold into slavery were henceforth the property of another for the remainder of their natural lives. It meant that for the majority of the enslaved, there was little to no hope in the possibility of obtaining their freedom. And although manumission was something few would live to experience, it did not mean that there were not significant numbers of “free” Blacks in the colonies. In fact, when the first census was taken in 1790, there were approximately 59,000 free Blacks living in America, east of the Mississippi.\(^{158}\)

And just like their enslaved brethren, they too had to contend with laws directed specifically toward them.

### 3.4 Black and free: On the middle ground

Higginbotham and Kopytoff describe colonial Virginia as the "mother of American slavery and the leader in the gradual debasement of Blacks through its institution of slavery." Being one of the first colonies to enact laws prohibiting interracial marriage and interracial sex, the Virginia legislatures formulated a legal definition of race, advocated and endorsed concepts of racial purity, and created the foundation of racism in America that would last for centuries to come.\(^{159}\)

In 1668, with respect to tax exemption for free Blacks, the Virginia Assembly declared that they “ought not in all respects to be admitted to a full fruition of the exemption and impunities of the English.”\(^{160}\) This stipulation proved to be a standard accepted by all the colonies concerning those regarded as free Blacks. In 1699, Virginia law makers imposed an act

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that rendered the emancipation of any "negro or mulatto slave...nugatory unless the emancipator would send his freedman out of the country within six months from the time of his emancipation."\textsuperscript{161} The penalty for non-compliance was the apprehension and selling of said bondsperson. This law was enacted to strengthen the institution of slavery by curtailing the activities of benevolent slaveholders. A 1717 Maryland anti-miscegenation law stated that any "free negro or mulatto" who so intermarried with "any white woman." shall become \textit{a slave during life.} This law extended to "any white man" who intermarried with any "negro or mulatto woman" so that she too would be enslaved.\textsuperscript{162} A 1740 South Carolina law persecuted any free Black person who would \textit{"harbour, conceal or ENTERTAIN} a runaway slave, or a slave charged 'with any criminal matter'... [he or she] shall be ordered by the justice \textit{to be sold at public outcry}.\textsuperscript{163} And according to Jordan, between 1722 and 1740, when an enslaved person obtained their freedom in South Carolina, they were barred from the colony.\textsuperscript{164}

In North Carolina, a 1777 act prohibited manumission outright except those specifically permitted by the governor and Council for \textit{"meritorious service to be adjudged of and allowed by the County Court."} All manumitted "mulattoes" and "negroes" must first be granted a license from the court stating such. Those who are set free and do not have in their possession said license, it shall be lawful for "any freeholder in [the] state to apprehend and take up such slave...deliver him or her to the sheriff...and the sheriff shall commit all such slave to the jail...and the court of the county shall order all such confined slaves to be sold, during the term,

\textsuperscript{161} Quoted in, George M. Stroud, \textit{A Sketch of the Laws Relating to Slavery in the Several States of the United States of America}, (Philadelphia: Kimber and Sharpless, 1795-1875), 150.
\textsuperscript{162} Ibid., 19.
\textsuperscript{163} Ibid., 16.
\textsuperscript{164} Jordan and Institute of Early American History and Culture (Williamsburg Va.), \textit{White over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550-1812}, 123.
to the highest bidder."¹⁶⁵ In 1801, Georgia’s state legislature passed a law disallowing the manumission of any enslaved persons without the express permission of the state. Any person doing so "shall forfeit for every such offence two hundred dollars…[while] said slave or slaves so manumitted and set free, shall be still to all intents and purposes as much in a state of slavery as before they were manumitted."¹⁶⁶

Having to contend with such laws left Blacks who were legally “free,” standing on the middle ground of American society. They were free in the sense that they were no longer enslaved, but not free to the extent that they were equal among Whites. In an effort to curb the manumission of “too many Negroes,” as noted, colonial legislators initiated laws with this specific aim in mind. But the anti-manumission laws would become virtually ineffective during the post Revolution era as more and more Blacks were obtaining their freedom. Additionally, England’s abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade would threaten the institution of slavery in its entirety.¹⁶⁷ Whites would have to find other means to deal with the ever-growing free Black population.

Many Blacks fought bravely in the American Revolution and the post-revolutionary era brought about a rapid increase in the free Black population particular in the northern states. It is estimated that as many as 5,000 Blacks fought on the side of the Continental Army while a significant number of others fought for the British.¹⁶⁸ By the end of the eighteenth century, England had outlawed the slave trade which significantly curbed the influx of enslaved Africans into the colonies. This in conjunction with an increase in the manumission of enslaved Blacks

¹⁶⁵ Quoted in, Stroud, A Sketch of the Laws Relating to Slavery in the Several States of the United States of America., 148.
¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 147.
¹⁶⁷ England enacted the Slave Trade Act of 1807 which set out to abolish the slave trade within its empire while encouraging other European nation to do the same.
after the Revolution had Whites shifting their focus more so on the ever-growing free Black population throughout the Union. One such response was the establishment of the *American Colonization Society* in 1816. Their objective was to immigrate free Blacks to Africa. And although many did actually colonize Liberia, there were many more who stayed behind. Those who stayed faced an onslaught of castigation from those Whites who still held on to the ideology that Blacks were inferior at best and at worse, less than human. Yet nothing brought to light the question of what is to become of the growing free Black population than what transpired after the 1831 Southampton, Virginia slave revolt. Led by Nat Turner, the insurrection resulted in the deaths of fifty-five White men, women and children.

   The 1831 Nat Turner Rebellion, as it would later become known, elevated the FAT (Fear, Anxiety, and Tension) of Whites throughout the Union. Virginia’s response to the insurrection was swift. In addition to executing those deemed responsible, many more Blacks were murdered by vicious mobs. Almost immediately the issue of what to do with the enslaved and free Black population became a matter of precedence. It was widely known that the revolt was led by enslaved Blacks, but it did not take Virginians long to begin conceptualizing the responsibility of free Blacks and their “role” in inciting unrest among the enslaved. One focus of their distrust was on Black preachers and anyone who either taught enslaved Blacks to read or distributed any literature deemed subversive. Virginia legislature considered Black preachers "the most active…in stirring up the spirit of revolt" and therefore they must be “silenced.”169 A bill was enacted prohibiting Black (and White) preachers from conducting religions services for enslaved Blacks without written permission by the latter’s master or overseer.170 Yet the issue of shared

responsibility was not limited to preachers alone; for the entire free Black population was considered a potential threat to the public good and very culpable provocateurs. What followed was a desire by many to remove all free Blacks from Virginia.

On January 27th 1832, just five months following the Turner’s rebellion, a bill was introduced to the Virginia House of Delegates providing for the removal of free Blacks from the commonwealth. At the request of the assembly, the governor of Virginia was to apply to the "general government" for the procurement of "a territory or territories beyond the limits of the United States, to which the several states may remove the whole, or any part of their coloured population."171  BILL No. 7 aptly stated that:

Be it enacted by the general assembly, That all persons of colour within this commonwealth, who are now free, or who may hereafter become free therein, shall, in the manner, in the order, under the limitations, and with the exceptions, herein after provided, be removed from this state, to Liberia, or such other place or places, on the western coast of Africa.172

When the removal of over 47,000 free people of color was not deemed prudent, the Virginia legislators continued creating harsher “slave codes” and “black laws” to deal with both the enslaved and free Blacks within its borders. Soon, other southern states followed suit. How they responded and the laws they enacted should come as no surprise. An 1839 Maryland law stipulated that "no free negro or mulatto, belonging to or residing in any other State, shall come into this State."173  For those free Blacks already residing in the state who appear to "have not the

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173 General Assembly (Laws), 1839, MdHR 820921-1, 2/2/6/15, Vol. 66, p. 36.
necessary means of support” or prove themselves to be of “good and industrious habits” could be readily enslaved. In Delaware, an 1832 act prevented free Blacks from possessing firearms. Moreover, the state prohibited Blacks from meeting after ten o'clock. An 1831 law forbade free Blacks from immigrating into the state of Tennessee while in Georgia, measure were taken to deny giving credit to free Blacks without the express permission from their guardian. And finally, an 1836 South Carolina law prohibited the employment of free Blacks as salesmen in any house, store or shop used for trading. However, it was the increased FAT of those in the “free states” that prompted local residents to advocate for stricter laws in an effort to curb the proposed influx of “fleeing” Blacks emigrating from their respective states. Local legislators used the print media to “get the message out” concerning free Blacks and the consequences that they felt would arise from such actions initiated by southern slave states.

Then Senator of Ohio, Darius Lyman, submitted a report to the Observer and Telegraph regarding "the colored people of Ohio." A select committee appointed by the state's governor, as part of its "investigation" into the possible mass influx of free Blacks into Ohio precipitated by stricter laws in Virginia and other southern states that may follow suit. Although the report centers on urging the state to enforce the laws already in existence regarding the exclusion of

174 General Assembly (Laws), 1839, MdHR 820921-1, 2/2/6/15, Vol. 66, 38; Those who were sold "to the highest bidder" served "in the capacity of a slave" for one year. After which they had "ten days" to show themselves to be of "good and industrious habits." Anyone not fulfilling this requirement would be sold back into slavery "and in a like manner in each and every successive year thereafter."
175 Cromwell, "The Aftermath of Nat Turner's Insurrection", 231.
176 Ibid., 231-2.
177 Ibid., 231-2.
free Blacks into Ohio, it also speaks to the general attitude of the committee regarding the free Black population by noting:

The existence in any community of a people forming a distinct and degraded caste, who are forever excluded by the fiat of society and the laws of the land, from all hopes of equality and social intercourse and political privileges, must, from the nature of things, be fraught with unmixed evil.\textsuperscript{178}

At the time, the population of free Blacks in Ohio was approximately 9,600 out of a total population of about 938,000.\textsuperscript{179} Even in such small numbers (about 1\% of the population) they were deemed a threat to the White residence whereas “the evils arising from their residence amongst us are seriously felt, and especially where they are congregated in considerable numbers in the larger towns.” The committee went on to say that anyone who chose to associate themselves with free Blacks or advocated on their behalf would essentially become social outcasts losing their standing and protection “against vicious conduct.” And, due to their isolation and deprivation, free Blacks could only amount to beggars and thieves being so "deprived of the highest motives to honest industry" thus burdening the community and filling the jails with "criminals of the most hopeless description."\textsuperscript{180}

The message to the White citizens of Ohio was clear: “further and more effective measures” will be taken in executing existing laws that exclude a people whose “residence

\textsuperscript{178} “Free Blacks in Ohio,” \textit{Observer and Telegraph}, February 02 1832.
\textsuperscript{179}Michael Haines and Social Explorer, eds. "Census 1830, T19. Age (Free Colored Population); Ohio," (Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research, 2013);"Census 1830, T25 Race (Total Population); Ohio," (Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research, 2013).
\textsuperscript{180} “Free Blacks in Ohio.”
amongst us is degrading to themselves, and fraught with evil to the community." The basis of this proclamation stemmed from the Southampton uprising. According to Ohio residents, in states like Virginia and its neighboring state Maryland, the rebellion "rendered their situation intolerable" and emigration "almost a matter of necessity." The probability that similar measures will be taken in other southern states will push "hundreds of thousands of free blacks" toward the free states with the majority emigrating to Ohio. The report urges the state to implement measures that will "avert [this] impending evil of the first magnitude…against the intrusion amongst us of a rejected and dangerous population." Finally the committee had this to say about the Black population:

Whether this feeling be right or wrong, reasonable or unreasonable, it is not the province of this committee to inquire; that is a question for the abstract philosopher and metaphysian. For the purposes of legislation, it is sufficient to know, that the blacks in Ohio must always exist as a separate and degraded race, that when the Leopard shall change his spots and the Ethiopians his skin, then but not 'till then may we expect that the descendants of Africans will be admitted into society, on terms of social and political equality.\textsuperscript{181}

An article posted in the \textit{Carolina Observer} January 24, 1832, discusses a possible resolution to the anticipated “influx of ignorant, indolent and depraved” free Blacks into the state of Pennsylvania. The state’s legislature expressed their concern that "Virginia and Maryland…expelling their free black population from their respective States" would be most dangerous to the peace, rights and liberties of [its] citizens," and "undermine the fundamental principles of the Republic." Therefore, a committee was instructed to explore the possibility of

\textsuperscript{181}Free Blacks in Ohio.
passing a law to “protect the good citizens of this commonwealth against the evils arising from the emigration of free blacks from other States into Pennsylvania.”\textsuperscript{182}

And lastly, the nominal position held by free Blacks is signified in an article published by \textit{the Northern Christian Advocate}. In an attempt to explain why there was such a disproportionate number of Black convicts in the prison system in relation to their population in the state of New York, the paper’s editor submitted that the “mental and moral training of our colored population is neglected in their youth” and although state laws allow the children of free Blacks to "attend our common schools…misguided public sentiment excludes them; and as no provision is made for colored schools, they are virtually shut out from the privileges of education altogether."\textsuperscript{183} Clearly the observation made here is on the exclusion of the free Black population from educational opportunities.

### 3.5 Conclusion

In 1625 there were twenty-three Africans in Virginia whose legal status could not be determined. This of course is based on the absence of evidence to the contrary. Whether or not they were a part of a budding system of labor that denied them their livelihood and kept them in servitude ad infinitum, or whether they were part and parcel of the indentured labor scheme has yet to be determined. However historical documentation does point to a transition period when the indenture labor system was on the decline and burgeoning slave labor system emerged in its place. The foundation of this system was those Africans who were systematically thrust into it, undoubtedly, against their will. This transition, evidence also shows, marked a new epoch in the relationship between Blacks and Whites in colonial America. As the population of enslaved

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\textsuperscript{182} “Free Blacks,” \textit{Carolina Observer} 1832.
\textsuperscript{183} Quoted in, "Crime among Free Blacks," \textit{Dover Gazette & Strafford Advertiser} 1845.
Africans increased a dramatic shift could be seen in the attitude among Whites toward Blacks. Where documentation regarding Blacks in colonial America scarcely exists prior to this transition period, copious records can be found focusing specifically on Whites whose opinions of Blacks was less than favorable. The same can be said regarding free Blacks. At the close of the American Revolution and the establishment of an independent American confederation, the population of free Blacks was on the rise. In an effort to control the activities of this section of society, laws were enacted. Although these laws stymied the accomplishments and potential prosperity of a number of free Blacks, many still managed to prosper. Additionally, newspapers and other publications promoted the perpetuation of negative images of Blacks. Therefore, in an effort to counter the attack on their humanity, educated Black individuals began creating their own lines of communication with anyone willing to embrace them. This was done through the creation of their own newspapers. The establishment of Black newspapers proved invaluable in altering how Blacks perceived themselves and how they were perceived by Whites. Through their newspapers Black elites presented a more positive, and undeniably a more accurate, perspective of Black people. Additionally, Black publications projected positive image about the African continent itself. The next chapter, in part, will discuss how the news media was used to counter the negative perceptions of Blacks by incorporating a discourse on Egypt and Ethiopia thus giving the continent of Africa historical significance. No longer could African-Americans (and those of the diaspora) be defined as descendants of an uncivilized people with no history. The next chapter will also look at the development and progression of Ethiopianism and how it was also used to counter the typical race-bound discourse regarding Africans, African-Americans, and others of the diaspora.
4  THE ETHIOPIAN ETHOS IN AFRICAN AMERICAN THOUGHT

We wish to plead our own cause. Too long have others spoken for us. Too long has the publick been deceived by misrepresentations, in things which concern us dearly, though in the estimation of some mere trifles; for though there are many in society who exercise towards us benevolent feelings; still (with sorrow we confess it) there are others who make it their business to enlarge upon the least trifle, which tends to the discredit of any person or colour.

- Freedom's Journal, 1827

4.1 Introduction: A shared awareness

It is well known that African Americans and Africans have a shared history. It is a history that is common among all people of the African diaspora. Upon further study, a discussion has surfaced regarding how Black-Americans have viewed Africans over the centuries as the cultural gap between the two has widened. In, Race against Empire, Penny M. Von Eschen seeks to identify those important figures (political leaders, intellectuals, journalists, etc.) who have articulated the bonds between Black-Americans, Africans, and all oppressed peoples. In relationship to how Black-Americans viewed Africans, she points out that “African Americans shared a common history with Africans and all peoples of African descent had long been an important part of African American thought.”

As indicated in chapter 2, the name Ethiopia has double meanings. On the one hand, in its ancient meaning Ethiopia meant all countries south of Egypt where Black people lived across Africa. On the other, in its modern meaning, the term is limited to the country of Ethiopia in the Horn of Africa. The following discussion focuses on the African American identification with modern Ethiopia. In this regard, Fikru Gebrekidan’s text centers on the relationship between Black Americans of the “New

World” and Ethiopians, noting that their relationship transcends a mere psychological preoccupation. In Bond without Blood, he declared that, “East Africa and the black Atlantic, despite great physical distances, continue to impact each other’s awareness through migration, religion, secular culture, as well as through a shared history of anti-colonial activism.”

This chapter seeks to demonstrate that the majority of African Americans, particularly during the turn of the twentieth century used the print media to exploit the connection between themselves and Africa. A discourse on the histories of ancient Egypt and Ethiopia emerged in an effort to place Africa and Africans in a positive light thus, to a certain degree, empowering them. And although this was the initial objective, what eventually developed was something much more profound.

### 4.2 African American print media and Africa

As part of its ongoing mission to present a more accurate portrayal of Blacks in America and those of the African diaspora, African-American publications consistently produced newspaper articles, commentaries, and exposés acknowledging Ethiopia and Egypt as symbols of Black achievement. For abolitionists, Ethiopia was seen as a symbol of freedom that would someday arrive for millions of Blacks held in bondage. For the faithful, it was the “Cradle of Christianity” and it was a Christian empire that was home to the Ark of the Covenant. The biblical verse “Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God” personified the possibility that the entire Black race would someday embrace Christianity. And for Christians and non-Christians alike who held the achievements of Black persons in high regard, the print media was

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an opportunity to offer a viewpoint that ran counter to the typical race-bound discourse on Africa, Africans and those of the diaspora.

The prevalence of African-American publications and the subject matters they conveyed strongly suggest that the hearts and minds of many Black Americans were linked to Africa as early as the mid-nineteenth century. However, because a large portion of the information stemming out of these publications reflected a connection between African Americans and Africa does not in any way suggest that prior to this Blacks in America – free or otherwise – were in some way disconnected from their ancestral homeland. On the contrary, from the earliest arrivals Blacks in America have maintained a link with their African heritage. Through the amalgamation of traditional African religion intermixed with Christianity; from their creole language, to their music and dance, African Americans to some degree have always maintained some semblance of their “Africaness” even during times when their birthright was under attack.

The establishment of the first Black publication, the *Freedom’s Journal*, laid the foundation for other Black publications as the *Journal* openly and without trepidation moved to reinforce the binding ties of brotherhood by challenging its readers to think about Africans and place them in a positive light while simultaneously using its influence to inspire both the enslaved and free Blacks in America. African-American print media, by focusing on the historical accomplishments of Ethiopia’s glorious past, created a “love-affair” for an envisioned Ethiopia (*Éthiopie imaginer*). As mentioned, in both Christian and secular societies, Ethiopia became a symbol not only of Black achievement, but their potential. This culminated into a growing concern among African Americans for the tangible Ethiopia (*Éthiopie réelle*). In 1896, when Italy attempted to colonize Ethiopia, the only independent African nation, African-
American publications followed Italian aggression against Ethiopia closely and offered their commentary as events unfolded.

4.3 Challenging the claims of an uncivilized Africa

In 1827, Peter Williams, Jr. co-founded the Freedom's Journal. Its objective was to create a publication devoted to the "dissemination of useful knowledge among our brethren, and to their moral and religious improvement." In the face of the continual debasement of Black people spurred by the so-called mainstream media, the Freedom's Journal also sought to "vindicate our brethren, when oppressed" and to present "useful knowledge of every kind, and every thing that relates to Africa."\(^{187}\) And although the journal did not focus exclusively on the African continent, a substantial portion of its subject matter did. The publication embraced any progressive perspective of the continent and published those outcomes accordingly.

On April 6, 1827, an article titled “The Mutability of Human Affairs” recounts a time when “Egypt was in her splendor, and the only seat of chivalry, science, arts and civilization.” The columnist referenced the historical accounts of Herodotus and others who wrote about Egypt and Ethiopia (Kush, located in the northern part of modern Sudan) and how they described the two regions as similar in features and doctrines. The author then references the work of Egyptologist Henry Salt (1780-1827). Salt’s travels to Ethiopia prompted the discovery of several monumental remains which bore “a strong resemblance to those engraved on the sarcophagi of Egyptian mummies.” Referring to himself as a “descendant of Cush (i.e. Kush),” the writer reflects on his own visit to the country and mourns over the present degradation and

condition of a people, who, "for more than one thousand years, were the most civilized and enlightened," but have fallen so far from their glorious past.\textsuperscript{188} He then announces that:

Believing that we have sufficiently proved to the satisfaction of every unprejudiced mind, that the Egyptians and Ethiopians were of one colour, and possessed a striking similarity of features; were equally civilized and had the same rites of religious worship.\textsuperscript{189}

On December 5, 1828 an article published under the title of, “Original Communications.” The article places ancient Ethiopia in the context that it had spread its influence throughout the world. It also mentions how Egypt received its knowledge from "those black Africans in the south.” The author refers to the biblical mention of Noah’s grandson Cush and that he himself was Ethiopian from which the term Cushite was derived. According to the commentary, the Cushites were not only an advance civilization – establishing the first Government and the first great city – but they also settled in countries as far west as Spain and as far east as Japan where "Negro settlements are present, scattered throughout the mountains of that country." In closing, the author suggests that the world owes a debt of gratitude because "they gave to Africa, and through her to Europe and America all the wisdom of the Egyptians; while they scattered over Asia the Arts of weaving, dying, the management of silk and cotton, and the culture of the vine.”\textsuperscript{190}

In the biblical tradition, Cush (as referenced by the columnist) was the eldest son of Ham who himself was a son of Noah. It is customarily considered that Cush is the progenitor of the people of the “Kingdom of Kush” an ancient African nation along the Blue and White Nile just

\textsuperscript{188} “Mutability of Human Affairs,” Freedom’s Journal, April 20 1827.
\textsuperscript{189} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{190} “Original Communications,” Freedom’s Journal, December 5 1828.
south of Egypt. According to folklore, all Black persons descended from Ham. The author uses this point to support his argument that the Kingdom of Kush is an ancient Black civilization. This article and those that precede it are looking to establish an evidence-based connection between the two ancient civilizations – one Black and the other whose origin is still, to this day, under debate. Connecting the well-known ancient civilization of Egypt with the not-so commonly known ancient civilization of Ethiopia would undoubtedly enhance its prestige and therefore do the same for Black people.

Other African-American publications would follow suit. The North Star, The Christian Recorder and others embrace the idea of Ethiopia and a symbol of Black achievement. On March 16, 1849, the North Star, an anti-slavery newspaper published by the abolitionist Frederick Douglass, reran a commentary that was originally printed two months earlier in The Practical Christian. The article, simply titled “Ethiopia,” speaks highly of the nation as “one of the most pleasant, healthy countries in the world” belonging to a people who possess “innocence and intelligence.” It also mentions Ethiopia as being “Protected by Providence with institutions as good if not superior to [those of the U.S.].” In 1861, The Christian Recorder, the oldest existing Black periodical in America, published a piece titled, “Chapters on Ethnology, Chapter IV” in which the subject was the national characteristics of Egyptian Negros. The commentary, which was one in a series of articles tracing the origin of mankind, explored the idea that “the ancient Egyptians were real negroes [and] of the same species with all the natives of Africa.” The article’s purpose was to present irrefutable evidence that the original inhabitants of Egypt

191 This misnomer has been common within Western society for generations. Although the Bible does give reference to a curse set upon Canaan (the son of Ham) by Noah, the account does not attach the curse to any particular “race” of people. This narrative has been used to explain the origin of the varied “races” that exist throughout the world.
were no different than the Africans of the sub-Sahara — or the so-called “black” Africans. By using Ethiopia as a model, the author suggested that, “If this be true, (that [Ethiopians and Egyptians] were of the same race,) and we succeed in proving that the Ethiopians were negroes, it must follow as a consequence that the Egyptians were negroes also.”

The Frederick Douglass Paper, established after the merger of the North Star and the Liberty Party Paper in 1851, ran an item titled “The African Race.” This commentary focused on a speech delivered to the Mechanics' Institute in 1855 by a “colored gentleman from America.” His lecture centered on the history and literature of the African race, whereby he “gave a brief account of the ancient people of Ethiopia…and brought forward historical evidence to prove that Ethiopia, or Nubia, was the birthplace of religion, literature, and civilization, which had spread from thence to Egypt and Greece.”

Finally, in 1865 William Lloyd Garrison’s abolitionist newspaper, The Liberator, printed a poem written by a “Miss Lizzie” in which she celebrates the ratification of the 13th Amendment. Her connotative use of Ethiopia as the embodiment of freedom is observed when she concluded that “Ethiopia no longer stretcheth forth her hands in vain; On the demon of Rebellion she hath- left bar servile chain.”

Miss Lizzy concluded her poem with a somewhat modified reference to Psalms 68:31: “Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God.” Among African Americans, the biblical verse embodied the idea that Black Africans and those of the diaspora would someday be elevated to a higher level on the plane of human dignity within global society. How they would get there was open to interpretation. Yet the subject, Ethiopia, would remain constant as representing all

Black Africans in Africa and abroad. So readily embraced was the term Ethiopia that a movement emerged from which its name was derived. That movement was called Ethiopianism.

4.4 Stretching their hands unto God

The acclaimed poetess Phillis Wheatley was one of the first African-American literati to incorporate Ethiopia in her work and ascribe the term to include all Black people of the diaspora. In 1767, at the age of fifteen, Wheatley wrote a poem titled, “To the University of Cambridge in New-England.” In it, she addresses the university students and speaks as one who has “left [her] native shore…to embrace the Father of mercy.” Wheatley does not hesitate to let her readers know that the author of the poem is of African descent as she refers to herself as an “Ethiop” – "An Ethiop tells you 'tis your greatest foe.” Here, Wheatley is not proclaiming that she is from Ethiopia since her native land is in West Africa. Rather she is ascribing the term Ethiopia as a reference to all people of African descent. A decade later, her contemporary, Jupiter Hammon, referred to her as an “Ethiopian Poetess;” a term which he subsequently bestowed upon all Black people in his work, “An Evening’s Improvement.” In this writing, Hammon reflects on a probable response by Whites regarding the efforts of benevolent Christians to convert Blacks to Christianity. He noted that “others may object and say, what can we expect from an unlearned Ethiopian?” To which he responded, “Does not the raising of Lazarus give us a fight of our sinful natures?...[and] is not this a simile of our deadness by nature?” Yet to bestow a more telling use of the term in its earliest usage one must refer back to the Ethiopian Poetess herself. In a

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197 Jupiter Hammon’s poem titled, ”An Address to Miss Phillis Wheatly [sic], Ethiopian Poetess, in Boston, Who Came From Africa at Eight Years of Age, and Soon Became Acquainted with the Gospel of Jesus Christ” was written on August 4, 1778. For further details, see Gene Andrew Jarrett, ed. *The Wiley Blackwell Anthology of African American Literature*, vol. 1, Blackwell Anthologies (Wiley & Sons, 2014); and Jupiter Hammon, ”Address to Miss Phillis Wheatley (1778),” in *Early Transatlantic Writing Project* (1778).

198 “An Evening’s Improvement,” in *Early Transatlantic Writing Project* (Hartford, 1783), 11.
1774 letter addressed to Reverend Samuel Hopkins of Newport Rhode Island, Wheatley not only included Ethiopia as a cognomen for all Blacks, but incorporated Psalm 68:31 as a befitting passage to explore the subject of African redemption. Wheatley expressed her conviction that Africa could be redeemed through the efforts of Christian missionaries. She believed the promotion of “this laudable design” was foretold by the Prophets and that she hopes “that which the divine royal Psalmist Says by inspiration is now on the point of being Accomplish’d, namely, *Ethiopia Shall Soon Stretch forth her hands Unto God*” [emphasis mine].

What Wheatley believed to be “laudable design” was a sentiment that was shared throughout Christendom. On the one hand, Africa was in need of redemption because it was assumed to be a continent of “heathens”; and on the other, Christianity could save these lost souls through its missionary work. The term *Ethiopia* signified in Wheatley’s case – as it had in prior instances – all Black Africans. Additionally, the Christian nation of Abyssinia (Ethiopia) was viewed as the symbol of God’s work in Christianizing an African state and therefore the land of Abyssinia, in part, represented the possibilities of the continent as a whole. Hence, the biblical verse was interpreted to mean that *all Africans shall soon* embrace the Christian faith, which they have not yet done. So in light of this, it became the mission of many Christian sects to adhere to the “word of God” and embark on missions to redeem the “lost souls of Africa.”

The beginnings of missionary work in Africa far exceeds the scope of this study; however the following sections will examine Africans and African Americans who created their own churches so that *they* may redeem their own brethren. Both African and African-American Baptists and Methodists created what could be easily deemed an “Ethiopian Ethos” as they developed their churches separately while incorporating a singular concept of *Ethiopianism* that

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bonded them to their African heritage. George Liele, Andrew Bryan, Mangena Maake Mokone, Nehemiah Tile and others laid the foundation for this early social movement among Black Christians.

George Liele was born on a Virginia plantation to Nancy and Liele Sharp (so named after their owner Henry Sharp). When George earned his freedom, he changed his surname to Liele, after his father. Liele senior was a devoted Christian and was known by both Blacks and Whites to be a person who "knew the Lord." George spent his early years being moved from place to place. He claimed to have a "natural fear of God" which moved him to lead a conscientious and chase life. He would later learn that in accordance to God's words, he was not saved but instead condemned as a sinner before God and could only find salvation through the merits of Jesus Christ. He continued to limit his religious engagement to earnest prayer and attending church services up to the time of his baptism circa 1778. After his official conversion to the Baptist faith, George began "to discover his love to other negroes, on the same plantation with himself, by reading hymns among them, encouraging them to sing, and sometimes by explaining the most striking parts of them." He was ordained, on a probationary basis, which accorded him the privilege to minister on different plantations. This made George the first African American licensed by the Baptist Church to preach in America. Some years later, George

200 John Rippon, "The Baptist Annual Register ... Including Sketches of the State of Religion among Different Denominations of Good Men at Home and Abroad," (London1793), 332.
201 Ibid., 332.
202 George states in his letter that after his baptism by the Reverend Matthew Moore, he remained a member of his church for another four years "till the vacuation." It is presumed logically by John Rippon (the addressee) that Liele is referring to the evacuation of the British from Savannah, Georgia 1782. See, John Rippon, "The Baptist Annual Register.", 333.
203 Rippon, 333.
obtained his freedom. As a free man, he continued to work for the Sharp family until Henry Sharp’s death. After which, he left with a contingent of British soldiers heading to Jamaica.

To pay for his trip, George agreed to be an indentured servant to a British colonel named Kirkland who had fronted the money for his voyage. After his indenture ended, George began preaching. In September 1784, in a "small private house to a good smart congregation," George Liele, with aid of "four brethren from America" formed the island's first Baptist church in Kingston, Jamaica. His congregation soon grew to about three hundred and fifty members "of the poorer sort" with the majority being the enslaved – none of whom could become members "without a few lines from their owners of their good behaviour towards them and religion." Additionally, he had "a few white people among [his congregation]."

In a series of correspondences, George appealed to his fellow Baptists in England for support in the completion of their first chapel: "And, Rev. Sir, we think the Lord has put it in the power of the Baptist societies in England to help and assist us in completing this building, which we look upon will be the greatest undertaking ever was in this country for the bringing of souls from darkness into the light of the Gospel." Subsequently, in a letter dated January 12th, 1793, George thanked the society for their efforts in aiding in the completion of the chapel: "Our Meeting-house is now covered in and the lower floor was completed the 24th of last month…I am not able to express the thanks I owe for your kind attention to me, and the cause of God."

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204 It is not known exactly when Henry Sharp granted Liele his freedom; however sources concur that it was a few years before Sharp’s death. See John W. Davis, "George Liele and Andrew Bryan, Pioneer Negro Baptist Preachers," *The Journal of Negro History* 3, no. 2 (1918); E.A. Holmes, "George Liele: Negro Slavery's Prophet of Deliverance," *Baptist Quarterly* 20, no. 8 (1964); George Liele et al., "Letters Showing the Rise and Progress of the Early Negro Churches of Georgia and the West Indies," *The Journal of Negro History* 1, no. 1 (1916).

205 Rippon, "The Baptist Annual Register ... Including Sketches of the State of Religion among Different Denominations of Good Men at Home and Abroad," 334; nearly a decade later, the church built its first chapel in 1793. See, Holmes, "George Liele: Negro Slavery's Prophet of Deliverance," 345.

206 Rippon, "The Baptist Annual Register ... Including Sketches of the State of Religion among Different Denominations of Good Men at Home and Abroad," 334-5.

207 Rippon, 336-7.
was in this letter, and after the completion of the building did George refer to himself and his congregates as Ethiopians: "My brethren and sisters in general, most affectionately give their christian love to you, and all the dear lovers of Jesus Christ in your church at London, and beg that they, and all the other churches, will remember the poor Ethiopian Baptists of Jamaica in their prayers" [emphasis mine].\(^208\) Clearly, George is referring to Ethiopians as Blacks people. He is doing this to differentiate his church from that of the “white” church within the Baptist ministry and to call special attention to his church and its causes. One cause in particular, was to “instruct the people of my own colour in the word of God.”\(^209\) George’s statements bear witness to his desire to create a separate church for his people the “Ethiopians.” Before his death in 1828, Liele’s legacy would carry on through the efforts of his congregates; some of whom started their own churches. One of his more outstanding followers was Andrew Bryan.

Andrew Bryan was born in Goose Creek, South Carolina in 1737. Born to enslaved parents, he, along with this wife Hannah, were owned by Jonathan Bryan. After relocating to Savannah, Georgia, Jonathan allowed George Liele to visit his plantation and minister to the enslaved. It was during this visit that Liele baptized Andrew Bryan. Not long after Liele's departure did Andrew begin ministering to other enslaved Blacks on nearby plantations. Landowner, Edward Davis, "indulged [Andrew] and his hearers to erect a rough building on his land, at Yamacraw, in the suburbs of Savannah."\(^210\) After a very troublesome start, brought about by intense resistance and persecution by some Whites, Andrew and his followers lost the use of the building. However, this setback was remedied by his master Jonathan Bryan, who

\(^{208}\) Rippon, "The Baptist Annual Register ..., 541-2.
\(^{209}\) Ibid., 333.
\(^{210}\) Ibid., 340.
allowed Andrew and his congregant the use of his barn. Andrew continued to minister until he purchased his freedom soon after his master’s death.  

On January 19, 1788 Andrew Bryan’s church was constituted by the renowned Abraham Marshall who pronounced that “upon examination into the experiences and characters of a number of Ethiopians, at and adjacent to Savannah, it appears that God has brought them out of darkness into the light of the Gospel, and given them fellowship one with the other: believing it is the will of Christ we have constituted them a church of Jesus Christ, to keep up his worship and ordinances.” The following day Bryan’s church was ordained by the same: “This is to certify, that the Ethiopian church of Jesus Christ at Savannah, have called their beloved Brother Andrew to the work of the ministry. We have examined into this qualifications, and believing to be the will of the great Head of the church, we have appointed him to preach the Gospel and administer the ordinances, as God in his providence may call.”

The adaptation of the term “Ethiopia” did not only apply to African Americans. In southern Africa, a movement emerged that would bring two distinguished churches together: the Ethiopian Church of South Africa and the African Methodist Episcopal Church. The Ethiopian church adopted the name Ethiopia to mean, just as in America, all Black persons in Africa and those of African descent. Likewise, the biblical passage (Psalms 68:31) became something much more profound. It was eventually interpreted as prophesy of the eventual elevation and emancipation of the entire Black race. This “new” perspective would become labeled by twentieth century historians as “Ethiopianism.” However, in its earliest and most

211 Rippon, "The Baptist Annual Register ..., 341.
212 Ibid.
213 Ibid.
214 Williams Scott notes that the earliest usage of the term "Ethiopianism," as it applied to African-American theology and ideology, began in the late 1960s. See Scott’s article in the International Journal of Ethiopian Studies, Vol. 1, no. 2; and Colin Grant, Negro with a Hat : The Rise and Fall of Marcus Garvey and His Dream of Mother Africa (London: Jonathan Cape, 2008), 40-1.
unadulterated form, “Ethiopianism” was a separatist movement that began in the 1880s by discontented Black missionaries in Southern Africa. What emerged was the union that created an even stronger bond among African Americans with their ancestral homeland.

4.5 The birth of Ethiopianism

During the latter part of the eighteenth century and as part of an ongoing civilizing mission, Christian missionaries from Europe went to South Africa to proselytize to the indigenous population in the region. And although similar evangelizing crusades had emerged in the area prior, the missionary movement of 1799 had the most profound effect upon the indigenous population. It was here that the seeds of discontent were planted causing African missionaries to secede from the Wesleyan Church and formulate their own evangelical paradigm called Ethiopianism.

In 1799, the Dutch Reformed Church (NHK) established a missionary society called the Southern African Society for Promoting the Extension of Christ’s Kingdom. Their objective was to pursue missionary work among Black communities in order to help those who are “situated in the vicinity of those parts which still lie wholly under the power of the prince of darkness.”

In 1804, under the auspices of the NHK, the South African Society opened its first house for public worship and within fifty years there were an overwhelming number of mission stations virtually covering southern Africa. The success of the missionary effort depended greatly upon African evangelists and their ability to aid European missionaries in carrying their message of

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216 This quote was taken from a letter given to a Dr. John Van der Kemp by the London Missionary Society urging White missionaries in South Africa to begin proselytizing in Black communities. The letter inspired the Dutch Reformed Church to create the South African Society for Promoting the Extension of Christ’s Kingdom for that specific purpose. For additional details see Chirenje’s chapter titled, “Missionary Activities and the African Response, 1792-1892” in Ethiopianism and Afro-Americans in Southern Africa, 1883-1916.
spiritual redemption to the outermost regions of the district. As guide and interpreter, the
African evangelist was indispensable yet, he was not considered equal among his associated
White parishioners. This hindered the placement of African missionaries in positions of
responsibility causing many to separate from the church completely. A key figure and
forerunner of the movement was Reverend Nehemiah Tile.

Despondent over its lack of diversity and blatant racial discrimination, Reverend Tile
separated from the Wesleyan Methodists Church in 1883 to start the Thembu National Church.
This marked the first serious secession from the Wesleyan Church.\textsuperscript{217} Nearly a decade later in
1892, Reverend Mangena Maake Mokone also broke ties with the Wesleyans. His reasoning
was similar to Tile’s in that racial discrimination drove a wedge between him and the church. In
fact a disheartened Mokone was quoted as saying, “This separation shows that we cannot be
brothers.”\textsuperscript{218} Unequal pay and the denial of fringe benefits to Black ministers and a host of other
discriminatory practices moved Mokone to establish a separate church he called the Ethiopian
Church of South Africa. This was the first separatist church to incorporate “Ethiopia” in its title.
The term \textit{Ethiopia} was used along with \textit{Ethiopianism} and the two were not, as J. Mutero
Chirenje explains, confined to the Kingdom of Ethiopia alone; instead, they were used “in the
Graeco-Roman and biblical sense, namely, that Africa was the land of black people (or people
with ‘burnt faces’)” and in essence included all the then-known countries of Africa.\textsuperscript{219} Reverend
Mokone’s Methodist background and the inclusion of “Ethiopia” in the name implies that he was
indeed aware of the biblical passage that “Ethiopia would soon stretch out her hands unto God”
and used the term as a reference to all African people with “burnt faces.” And later, when

\textsuperscript{217} J. Mutero Chirenje, \textit{Ethiopianism and Afro-Americans in Southern Africa, 1883-1916 / J. Mutero Chirenje}
\textsuperscript{218} Quoted in, ibid., 43.
\textsuperscript{219} Ibid., 1-2.
African-American missionaries travelled to Southern Africa to begin their own proselyting mission, the Ethiopian church readily embraced them. In fact, African-American missionaries of the African Methodist Episcopal Church quickly associated themselves with the Ethiopian Church of South Africa marking a spirited collaboration between the two.

The history of the AME Church dates back to 1787 after Richard Allen, a preacher of the Orthodox St. George Methodist Episcopal Church, withdrew his membership because his fellow White parishioners took it upon themselves to segregate Allen and other Black congregates:

We had not been long upon our knees before I heard considerable scuffling and low talking. I raised my head up and saw one of the trustees…having hold of the Rev. Absalom Jones, pulling him up off of his knees, and saying, ‘You must get up--you must not kneel here.’ Mr. Jones replied, ‘wait until prayer is over.’ [The trustee]--said ‘no, you must get up now, or I will call for aid and I force you away.’ Mr. Jones said, ‘wait until prayer is over, and I will get up and trouble you no more.’ With that he beckoned to one of the other trustees…to come to his assistance. He came, and went to William White to pull him up. By this time prayer was over, and we all went out of the church in a body, and they were no more plagued with us in the church. This raised a great excitement and inquiry among the citizens, in so much that I believe they were ashamed of their conduct. But my dear Lord was with us, and we were filled with fresh vigour to get a house erected to worship God in. Seeing our forlorn and distressed situation, many of the hearts of our citizens were moved to urge us forward; notwithstanding.220

The confrontation prompted Allen and others to form their own distinctively African congregation. In 1816 delegates throughout the North assembled to form the African Methodist Episcopal Church where "any person, regardless of his color, could enjoy the worship of God

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with freedom from restriction or segregation." The newly organized AME Church elected Richard Allen as their spiritual leader and under his guidance, the church enjoyed tremendous success. Over the years, its influence spread throughout the northern states of Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, and elsewhere. Although the church had some pockets of free Blacks members below the Mason-Dixon Line, it wasn’t until the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 did the church embark on its first missions to the South. By 1866 AME churches could be found in South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Tennessee and Alabama. In fact, the Christian Recorder published a letter written by a “colored” soldier stationed near Goldsboro, North Carolina. Titled “Letter from the 1st U.S. Colored Troops;” it mentions God as an “all-wise Providence [who] has extended his rod with his distinguishing hand” to Ethiopia, while Ethiopia, in return, “shall soon stretch out her hands [to God] and have the knowledge of all the arts and sciences of an enlightened country.” Additionally, U.S. “colored” troops were referred to as “the true and brave sons of Ethiopia.”

The influence of the AME Church continued and it wasn’t long before its sway had transcended the Atlantic and spread to Southern Africa. African Methodism would come into direct contact with the South African “Ethiopian” movement already in progress. The founder of

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221 Richard R. Wright, Carter Godwin Woodson, and Association for the Study of African-American Life and History, The Encyclopaedia of the African Methodist Episcopal Church : Containing Principally the Biographies of the Men and Women, Both Ministers and Laymen, Whose Labors During a Hundred and Sixty Years, Helped Make the Ame Church What It Is : Also Short Historical Sketches of Annual Conferences, Educational Institutions, General Departments, Missionary Societies of the Ame Church, and General Information About Historical, Theological, Sociological, Legal and Other Matters Concerning African Methodism and the Christian Church in General, 2nd edition. ed., 5.
222 Ibid., 5.
223 The first editor of The Christian Recorder was the Reverend M. M. Clark, who was one of the first college graduates in the A.M.E. Church.
225 “Reflections," The Christian Recorder, March 4 1865. This comment was made by a Mr. W.A. Freeman of the “22d U.S. Colored Troops” of Chapin Farm, Va. in his discourse about his fallen comrades of the 22nd.
226 As early as the 1820s, African Methodism also had a foothold in West Africa.
the Bantu Women’s League, Charlotte Manye, played a pivotal role in these two organizations coming together.\textsuperscript{227}

During the early 1890s Manye was a member of the “African Jubilee Singers.” The group was modeled after the “McAdoo’s Virginia Concert Company and Jubilee Singers” and was managed by Orpheus McAdoo. Born in North Carolina, McAdoo led the ensemble on a successful tour throughout Britain, “performing in front of Queen Victoria and to packed houses in almost every major city.”\textsuperscript{228} They traveled to South Africa and after a brief stint in America, the troupe met its demise due to internal tensions and financial mismanagement by the tour’s British promoters. The company was officially disbanded in 1895. Their misfortunes were short lived however as some of its members were encouraged to attend the Wilberforce University in Ohio. Founded in 1856, the university is the oldest private historically Black university in the United States and during the latter part of the nineteenth century, the leading center of learning for all AME Church institutions. In 1895, Charlotte Manye became one of its premier students.

While attending Wilberforce, Manye wrote a letter to her sister Kate Manye in Johannesburg, South Africa about her experiences at the university. She included some background information on the AME Church which incited the curiosity of her uncle and head of the Ethiopian Church, Reverend Mokone. Mokone then wrote a letter to Bishop Henry McNeal Turner.\textsuperscript{229} Turner’s reply led to a series of exchanges that prompted him to travel to South Africa. The visit was a complete success. In March, 1896 at the third annual conference of the Ethiopian Church, it was decided that the South African Church of Ethiopia would officially

\textsuperscript{227} The Bantu Women’s League is known presently as the African National Congress Women’s League.
\textsuperscript{229} At the time, Turner was head of the AME Church.
affiliate itself with the African Methodist Episcopal Church in America. Reverend James Dwane was sent to the U.S. to negotiate the affiliation and on June 19, 1896 the Ethiopian Church of South Africa became the Fourteenth District of the AME Church.  

The association of the Ethiopian Church with the AME Church merged the physical and the spiritual while moving African Americans even closer to their African brethren. And as the church continued its role in keeping the hearts and minds of countless Blacks focused on Africa, the print media would continue to play its important role of informing its readers about Africa. However, this time it wasn’t Africa’s past that the media focused on. Instead, it was its present. Colonialism in Africa was at its highest stage and the survival of Africa’s last bastion of sovereignty was at stake. The independent state of Ethiopia (Abyssinia) was in crisis. External and internal forces had the nation on the brink of collapse. With the resolution of its internal problems at hand, Ethiopia still had to face Italy which was involved in colonial expansion. It was the Italian drive for colonizing the last independent African country that led to the first Italian-Ethiopian War in 1896.

4.6 The sleeping lion awakes

The first Italo-Ethiopian War was rooted in the dispute over the Massawa seaport that escalated into a bloody battle between Ethiopian and Italian forces. Ethiopia’s decisive victory at Adwa demonstrated that not only could an African nation stand up to European colonial aggression, but it could also defeat it on the battlefield.

The Massawa seaport is located on the east coast of Africa in present day Eritrea. It became a focal point for trade in East Africa after the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, which connected the Red Sea trade with that of the Mediterranean. Both Egypt and Britain held

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“possession” of this port. Under the “Hewitt Treaty” in 1884 (the leader of Ethiopia at this time was Emperor Yohannes, 1872-1889) who allowed unrestricted access to the port for his assistance in aiding both Egypt and Britain in their ongoing conflict with the Mahdist movement in the Sudan. Yohannes also believed that he would be granted custody of the port once Egyptian forces were evacuated from Massawa. However, when Yohannes had a cache of weapon delivered to the port, the weapons were not allowed to pass through. This infuriated the emperor. Not only did he protest the restriction, but he wrote a letters to the British monarchy as a demonstration of his frustration, “I am keeping the treaty. I have not broken it. [It] is a disgrace to break a treaty.” Nonetheless, it was apparent that his access to the port was limited. Tensions grew even higher when in 1885, after Egyptian forces were vacated from the port, Italy moved in to occupy it. This was done under the pretext that Ethiopia could not secure the safety of Italian citizens.

In 1883, a “research expeditions” made its way toward the Ethiopian highlands. On route they were massacred. And although the tragic killings did not take place on Ethiopian soil, Italy blamed Ethiopia for not providing adequate protection for the expedition – protection usually afforded them. According to Jonas, the slayings were “to discourage such exploratory voyages, which inevitably led to larger and more permanent incursion.” These types of forays by colonial powers were not uncommon. In 1875 the Free Citizen reported that a company had been created in Berlin whose objective was to set up a “permanent settlement” in southern Abyssinia. The purpose of this “scientific expedition” was to explore the unexplored and to

"develop the commerce of the country." The report went on to say that the true objective of the company was “more commercial than scientific”\textsuperscript{234}

For Yohannes, it must have been apparent that the 1883 expedition was not scientific in nature but in fact a survey for potential colonization. Italy’s objective was indeed to colonize parts of east Africa just as other European nations had done before.\textsuperscript{235} The Berlin conferences of 1884/5 led by the German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck would attest to this. The purpose of these meetings was to gather European nations together to essentially “carve up” the African continent for colonial aspirations. Italy was one of the countries in attendance. As explained earlier, Italy used the massacre of its citizens as justification for occupying Massawa. Once the port was seized, the stage was set for Italy to begin its encroachment into Ethiopian territory.

As Italy began moving further inland they established a fort at Sahati. It soon became apparent that Yohannes was aware of Italy’s plans since the emperor sent his most trusted and fierce warrior, the famous Ras Alula to deal with the incursion. The Ethiopian army laid siege upon the fort, but were unable to repel them. However, the tide would change when the Ethiopian forces received word that more Italian soldiers were on their way to Sahati. Alula intercepted them at Dogali. A battle ensued and the Italians were defeated. The news sent shockwaves throughout Italy: “In Italy, shock was followed by speeches, prayer vigils, and memorial masses.”\textsuperscript{236} The massacre was seen by most Italians as an act of barbarism but Yohannes saw it as a fight to protect Ethiopia’s sovereignty. With vengeance in their hearts, the Italians wanted nothing more than to defeat Yohannes and bring Alula to “justice.” To help

\textsuperscript{234} “African Explorations,” The Free Citizen October 16 1875
\textsuperscript{235} It should be noted here that Italy was the “late comer” to the colonial land grab in Africa.
\textsuperscript{236} Jonas, The Battle of Adwa, 42.
them in their endeavor, they turned to someone who could be considered as powerful as Yohannes; and if not more powerful, certainly as cunning. The Italians turned to Menelik.

Menelik was the king of the autonomous kingdom of Shoa since 1865. At that time Ethiopia was divided into regions, two of which had their own kings, who acknowledged the sovereignty of Emperor Yohannes. Menelik wanted nothing more than to rule over all Ethiopia and the only person standing in his way, as he saw it, was Yohannes. The Italians turned to Menelik and began constructing side deals in order to gain his favor. At the same time, Menelik was strengthening his position to eventually oust Yohannes. The emperor was aware of this and on at least one occasion attempted to reach out to Menelik but to no avail. Menelik was consolidating his power in the south and no one or nothing was going to stop him. Accordingly, while Yohannes was contending with the Italian forces in the north, Menelik had his eyes on Yohannes’ crown. As Italian troops began to enter the Tigray province, the home base of the Emperor, Yohannes moved to intercept them. To his dismay, the Muslim forces from the Sudan invaded Western Ethiopia. The Muslim forces of the Mahdist State of the Sudan (1885-1898), looted the famous city of Gondar, the major commercial center of northern Ethiopia. Emperor Yohannes decided to deal with the Mahdist force before facing the Italians. During the skirmish with the Mahdist force in 1889, Yohannes was mortally wounded. He was succeeded by his young son, Mangasha as Emperor. King Menelik knew that the young Mangasha was weak and that he would have little difficulty usurping the throne, which he did. While Mangasha was on his way to continue the northern campaign his father started, Menelik captured his troops and Mangasha quickly surrendered and ceded his birthright to Menelik recognizing him officially as the Emperor of Ethiopia.238

The Italians believed that this shift in power was in their favor. They had essentially “groomed” Menelik for the position and now sought to reap the fruits of their labor. Menelik and the Italians struck a deal called the “Treaty of Wachale” in 1889. On the surface, it appeared that both nations were on one accord. They were not. The agreement would unravel whatever ties they seemingly had.

The “Treaty of Wachale” consisted of two versions, the Italian version and the Amharic. Amharic was (and still is) the official language of Ethiopia. According to article 17 of the Italian version, Ethiopia was to be a protectorate of Italy. However, this was disputed by Menelik because the Amharic version mentions nothing of the sort. Some historians have argued that Menelik was duped into believing that under this treaty, Ethiopia would remain a sovereign nation. But historian Raymond Jonas, in his book The Battle of Adwa, argues otherwise. He contends that Menelik was aware that Italy wanted to put Ethiopia under its protection. When he sent his trusted advisor and confidant Ras Makonnen to Italy to negotiate the treaty, the term protectorate was reverberating throughout the country in newspapers and other media. Raymond Jonas also argues that Menelik was buying his time to secure what he could from the Italians – guns, ammunition, and even a large loan.\(^\text{239}\) Not until 1892 did Menelik contact Britain and Germany directly. Both countries advised Menelik that because of “Ethiopia’s protectorate status,” all correspondences with them must be done through Italy.\(^\text{240}\) If we are to accept Jonas’ point, then the news from the two colonial powers should not have come as a surprise to Menelik. Yet he was determined in his belief that Ethiopia would remain a sovereign nation and he would do anything, even go to war with Italy, to make certain that his country remained an island of freedom in Africa.

\(^{239}\) Jonas, The Battle of Adwa: African Victory in the Age of Empire, 91.

\(^{240}\) Ibid., 90.
Believing that Ethiopia was now under its protection, Italy established its colony in the northern boundaries of Eritrea and began marching steadily southward to stake their claim. Menelik saw this as a direct violation of the sovereignty of Ethiopia and mobilized his troops north to combat the incursion. The two armies met at Adwa and fought the famous battle of 1896. Almost eighty percent of the Italian force was decimated on the battlefield. Ethiopians won a resounding victory and their country remained the only nation in Africa to defeat European imperialism.

Ethiopia’s victory over Italy temporarily thwarted any further colonial encroachment against its borders. And being the only African nation to do so, it appeared to the faithful that the biblical prophecy had been fulfilled and Ethiopia was indeed delivered through Divine Providence. For others, Ethiopia continued to be that beacon of hope for all the world’s oppressed people. This final section looks at what African-American print media reports regarding the events as they transpired on the continent between Menelik’s army and Italian troops. This section also demonstrates that the concern of African Americans with Ethiopia’s plight was indeed evident and that the print media kept its readers well-informed of the conflict.

4.7 Bringing to conflict to the masses

Raymond Jonas maintains that “African American commentary on Adwa can be difficult to track down” and that Ida B. Wells, one of America’s most preeminent advocates for the liberties of Black persons falling victim to lynching, “passes over Adwa without a word.” “More puzzling,” he continues, “is the silence of African American newspapers of the period, including the Freeman and the Afro-American.”241

African-American commentary on the Battle of Adwa may have been limited in some regard when compared to the mainstream news media, but they were hardly silent on the matter. The Iowa State Bystander, The Washington Bee, the Richmond Planet and The Langston City Herald are just a few of the many Black news publications that reported on the war as it unfolded and its aftermath. Reporters, editors and columnists were just as concerned about the events unfolding in Ethiopia as were mainstream media, if not more so. This concern was a reflection of the African-American readers’ interest in the fate of the Ethiopian nation.

Under the heading “Crispi Talks Peace,” the Iowa State Bystander reported that Italian Premier Francesco Crispi declared that, “no statesman in Europe was desirous of war.” Defending the Treaty of Uccialli, the premier went on to say that the treaty “was made to enable Menelek, with the support of Italy, to succeed King [Johannes] on the throne.” 242 The Washington Bee reported the massacre at Amba Alage where Major Pietro Toselli lost his life in battle as the Ethiopian troops laid siege to his position: "King Menelik’s army numbering about 20,000 men, surprised and surrounding Sunday five companies of Italian troops under Major [Pietro] Toselli at Ambalagi” calling for an Italian Cabinet council to hold a meeting where it was decided to “give Gen. Baratieri the necessary means to crush the Abyssinians." 243 According to reports, Baratieri and his men were held up at Adigrat awaiting the arrival of Menelik’s army. And although the Italian forces had resources in abundance the probability of a campaign at Adigrat drew much concern from Italy as reported by the Iowa State Bystander. The Bystander reprinted a report from Rome that Menelik was preparing to “drive the Italians

242 “Crispi Talks Peace,” Iowa State Bystander August 02 1895.
from Adigrat and bring about an Italian Sedan.” 244 The article makes the comparison between
the commander and chief of the Italian forces, General Baratieri, in Abyssinia, to that of Marshal
Bazaine during the Franco-German [sic] war. 245 Bazaine’s demoralizing defeat at Gravelotte and
his eventual retreat to the city of Metz led, it has been documented, to the defeat of French forces
at Sedan and Prussia’s subsequent victory in the war. The article warns that as events are
unfolding in Abyssinia, Italy must proceed with caution or history will undoubtedly repeat itself.

As the war was unfolding in Abyssinia, Italian citizens – as reported by the Broad Axe –
were elated upon hearing that an Italian cabinet unanimously voted to continue the war effort
adding to the war chest another fourteen million lire. After receiving the news, the crowd was
“heard cheering for the premier, and for Italy and the soldiers, until the whole neighborhood was
greatly excited and highly enthusiastic.” 246 But as the possibility of a peaceful resolution became
less plausible, The Langston City Herald, in one sentence, informed its readers of the increasing
tensions between the two nations: “Peace negotiations between Italy and Abyssinia have been
broken off.” 247 While the Iowa State Bystander reported that Menelik sent a letter to General
Balderissa stating that, "if Italy refused the terms of peace he offered through Major Salsa…he
would hold Major Salsa as a hostage until the letters defining the terms of peace were returned to
him.” 248 Balderissa returned the letter concluding that peace negotiations between the two
nations have been finally ruptured. These few reports demonstrate how closely the Black print
media followed the events in Ethiopia.

244 After Toselli’s defeat at Amba Alage, Italian forces, led by General Baratieri, held up at Adigrat. It was believed
that Menelik would also lay siege to this location but he bypassed it instead. This led the two armies to converge at
Adwa.
246 “War in Abyssinia,” Broad Axe, March 1896.
247 “Peace Negotiations Broken Off,” The Langston City Herald, May 02 1896.
The major turning point in the war was the battle at Adwa. African-American publications reported the outcome of this battle in addition to its aftermath as the Bystander described it as a “crushing defeat” for the Italians. “With a loss of 3,000 [white soldiers] killed;” a number “greater than first reported,” the news caused “rioting and public indignation against the ministry.”249 Both the National Reflector and the Washington Bee gave detailed accounts of the rioting that occurred in Italy as citizens blamed the cabinet and the ill-prepared general for Italy’s loss. “Down with the government and Death to Baratieri!”, so went the crowd as they packed the Chamber of Deputies. Agitation then spread to the countryside with "loud cries for vengeance upon those who have been responsible for the terrible reverse to the Italian armies."250 The mob vandalized buildings and threw rocks at police. They also damaged infrastructure by [tearing] up the railway and [cutting] a number of telegraph wires.” It was also reported that amid the crowds of people shouts of “Long live Menelik! Long live anarchy” could be heard.”251

Another telling article can be found in the Richmond Planet. Titled, “The Black King Secures his Demand;” the editorial reports on the signing of a “new convention” meant to repeal the Treaty of Uccialli and secure Abyssinia’s uncontested independence. Called the 1897 Treaty of Addis Ababa, the agreement assured Menelik that he would be reimbursed for the expense of maintaining Italian war captives. Undoubtedly Italy did not want the new treaty to appear as though they were paying indemnity or ransom to Abyssinia but the Planet would report the story from this very angle: "Menelik declares free all the Italians taken prisoners by the Abyssinians during the recent campaign, but Italy will have to indemnify him for their support while in

249 “Three Thousand Killed,” Iowa State Bystander March 06 1896.
251 “More Rioting in Italy,” The Washington bee, March 14 1896.
captivity” [emphasis mine].\textsuperscript{252} And the \textit{Cleveland Gazette} reported that the negotiation was affective in “solidifying his victory over the Italians” and closes its report by stating, “Most remarkable indeed is the success of this great man.”\textsuperscript{253}

The international implications of the war were also expressed. The \textit{Broad Ax} wrote, “The disaster to Italy in Abyssinia may cause the dissolution of the dreibund” while the \textit{Washington Bee} and the \textit{Iowa State Bystander} printed that the “situation in Italy is affecting the Dreibund” and “the disruption…which was threatened by the defeat of the Italians in Abyssinia, has been strengthened by the promise of Germany to adopt a more friendly attitude toward England.”\textsuperscript{254} This would later change as the world inched ever closer to its first truly global conflict in 1914.

Finally, in a commentary printed in the \textit{Cleveland Gazette}, columnist G. W. Weippiert gave his readers some detailed background information on the conflict and blamed Italy’s misfortunes on the “colonial craze.” He described the Ethiopians as “fierce fighters” and made reference to its Coptic Christian origin and how it was able to remain a Christian Kingdom despite "the great advance of Mohammedanism," which "cut the Copts off from connection with other Christian nations." The article goes on to discuss the succession of rulers beginning with the dethroning of Ras Ali in 1853 by a self-made leader Kassa who "crowned himself 'negus negussie' king of kings, under the name of Tewodros (1855-1867). After the death of Tewodros, it was Yohannes who succeeded to the throne few years later. His death was followed by that of Emperor Menelik who created modern Ethiopia. Detailed background on the cause of the conflict is also mentioned (i.e. the annexation of the Massawa sea port and surrounding

\textsuperscript{252} Jonas, \textit{The Battle of Adwa: African Victory in the Age of Empire}, 316; "The Black King Secures His Demand," \textit{Richmond Planet}, November 28 1896.
\textsuperscript{253} "(No Title)," \textit{Cleveland Gazette}, November 21 1896.
\textsuperscript{254} The Dreibund, or "Triple Alliance" was a defensive alliance that existed between the German Empire, Austria-Hungary, and Italy from 1882 up to 1915; "From Foreign Shores," \textit{Broad Axe}, March 19 1896; "Terse News," \textit{Iowa State Bystander} March 20 1896; "No Fetes on the King's Birthday," \textit{The Washington Bee}, March 21 1896.
From the death of Yohannes to the rise of Menelik to the treaty of Uccialli the article provides much insight on not only the conflict but insightful historical background on the country. Weipplert concludes by writing, "it will be seen that Italy's chances for a successful campaign are very small" – and indeed they were.

Ethiopia’s victory at Adwa had profound consequences that reverberated throughout the world. For Africa, it demonstrated that an African nation could stand against European imperialism. For the African diaspora, Ethiopian victory showed that a Black nation could stand against a White colonial power bent on depriving it of its resources and independence. For Italy, the campaign was a disaster. The country mourned the losses of its soldiers. The general in charge of the Italian forces (Oreste Baratieri) was put on trial and deemed incompetent as he was blamed for Italy’s defeat. Riots broke out in the streets of Italy as word spread of Ethiopia’s victory. Subsequently, Italy’s Prime Minister resigned as its citizens cried out for justice. For Ethiopia, it was a victory beyond victories. It not only demonstrated the strength of the African nation, but also its unity. It was not only a victory for Menelik and his brave soldiers who fought heroically against Italian forces; it was also a victory for all Ethiopians. It took the entire nation to come together to defeat Italy. Factional and regional divisions were set aside as groups who would have normally avoided each other came together as brothers for a common cause. And that cause was for freedom.

4.8 Conclusion

In their effort to counter the claims of an uncivilized Africa, African Americans used the print media to present the accomplishments of Africans by fashioning a discourse on the glorious histories of Egypt and Ethiopia. Expounding on the accomplishments of African people demonstrated not only the potential of Black Americans – being that they are the descendants of
Africans – but also that they were not the product of a barbarous people. Instead, they hoped to relay what they believed was the truth regarding their history and that they descended from an enlightened people. In doing this, a love-affair for an envisioned Ethiopia had developed by both Christian and secular societies. Ethiopia essentially marked a conceptual beacon and point of reference in the struggle for African-American belonging and achievement.

The biblical verse: *Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God*, epitomized the possibility that Black people would someday be redeemed. However, over time redemption was open to interpretation. In Christian society, it meant that like the Christian nation of Ethiopia, the rest of the Continent would also come to know Christianity and therefore be saved. For others, it was seen as a time when Blacks would soon rise to a level of greatness on this earth. The first Italo-Ethiopia war in 1896 convinced many that Ethiopia’s victory over Italy was the *biblical prophecy* being fulfilled and that Africa was in fact moving toward redemptions. This moved African American from a love-affair with an envisioned Ethiopia to ever-growing admiration for the tangible. The nation itself was seen as a vision of hope for the world’s oppressed people. And when that vision was threatened by a second Italian invasion and subsequent occupation by fascist forces from 1936-1945, African Americans went beyond simply reporting the events as they unfolded – they protested *en masse* and many volunteered to fight on the side of Ethiopia. And although not allowed to do so because of legislative regulations, some in fact did.
5 ETHIOPIA, “WE HEAR YOU!”

During the spring of 1935 an Italian contingent, heavily armed with an overwhelming arsenal of machine guns, cannons, tanks, and pursuit and bomber planes, landed on the shores of East Africa via the Suez Canal. Within six months these same forces, now numbering approximately 100,000, pushed their way across the Mareb River – the boundary between Ethiopia and the Italian colony of Eritrea. Italian forces marched into the Northern provinces of Ethiopia and without any official declaration, Italy and Ethiopia were at war.²⁵⁵

Immediately, Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia appealed to the League of Nations for assistance in stopping any further aggression by the Italians. The League responded with threats of economic sanctions and oil embargos against Italy, but Mussolini stood in defiance warning the League that any imposition of sanctions would mean retaliation in kind.²⁵⁶ The League members undeterred, followed through with their threats but it was too little, too late; the Italians had already gathered enough momentum to continue their invasion plan. In the early stages of the campaign, just months after the initial invasion, they were met with fierce Ethiopian opposition. Historian Alberto Sbacchi describes this time as “the darkest period of the war for the Italians.”²⁵⁷ And while it is not completely clear why the Italians altered their tactics, there is one issue that is certain…the nature of the war changed drastically when they began deploying poison gas.

What began as a campaign of colonial possession, degenerated into a brutal affair of wanton destruction. The Italians’ relentless use of asphyxiating gases on unsuspecting Ethiopian

²⁵⁷ Sbacchi, Ethiopia under Mussolini : Fascism and the Colonial Experience, 25.
soldiers and civilians caused an extraordinarily high number of casualties.\(^{258}\) In addition, the fascist regime repeatedly bombed civilian villages and hospitals.\(^{259}\) This sadistic strategy all but assured Italy’s victory.

The world was horrified by the reports that circulated throughout the media. The atrocities inflicted upon the Ethiopians were dispatched consistently during the campaign. For African Americans, the news was particularly troubling for they had long since bonded with the sovereign nation and its long-standing tradition of independence became a symbol for those who held fast to Black pride and freedom. The light of hope that shone so brightly for so long was now on the verge of extinction.

This final chapter considers the relationship between African Americans and Ethiopia and how a long enduring connection between the two culminated into direct action by the former when the latter’s sovereignty was threatened. Focusing specifically on the Second Italo-Ethiopia War of 1935-36, the chapter examines the discourse of prominent individuals and the general public on the subject of the conflict and demonstrates that the war strengthened the existing bond between African Americans and Ethiopia thus securing the bond between them and Africa. Lastly, this chapter will address the role of the church and how it brought the attention of the conflict to the masses as they advocated for a peaceful resolution to the struggle. Additionally, it will address how some religious leaders believed that God would intervene and liberate the “Christian Kingdom of Ethiopia.”

\(^{258}\)_Sbacchi, _Ethiopia under Mussolini_, 37; Paul G. Cassell, "Establishing Violations of International Law: 'Yellow Rain' and the Treaties Regulating Chemical and Biological Warfare," _Stanford Law Review_ Vol. 35, no. 2 (1983), 267; this act was in direct violation of the 1925 Geneva Protocol. Although this was considered a war crime, not one Italian was convicted.

5.1 A most violent year

In late October, 1922, the “Black shirts” marched on Rome. This marked the beginning of fascist rule, and Benito Mussolini’s rise to power. Determined to raise Italy out of the ashes of the First World War and crippling inflation and huge unemployment, Mussolini set out to create an empire reminiscent of Augustus Caesar. But before this could be accomplished, at least in the mind of the Fascist Dictator of Italy, a vendetta for the Italian defeat at Adwa in 1896 must first be settled. Ethiopia must be defeated, humiliated and occupied. With this in the mind of Mussolini, Italy renewed its colonial aspirations with greater vigor than ever before and once again set out to occupy Ethiopia. But unlike the 1896 debacle, the Fascist invaders would come with highly trained soldiers equipped with the latest destructive superior fire power unlike anything the African nation had ever seen.

Before the rise of fascism, Italy had three poor colonial territories in the African continent. They included Eritrea, Libya and Somalia. But the “jewel in the crown” was Ethiopia. Yet, before Mussolini could capture Ethiopia, he had to proceed with caution. Ethiopia was a member of the League of Nations and an all-out assault against her would cause the League, at least according to its 1919 Covenant, to take action. Additionally, he was not sure how Britain and France would respond to such an engagement. Taking this into consideration, Mussolini struck a deal with France and got a “free hand” to occupy Ethiopia while Britain assured him that they would take a more silent posture. The reasoning was that if either intervened, their actions would push Italy in the direction of Germany thus losing them as

260 Article 11 of the League’s Covenant states: “Any war or threat of war, whether immediately affecting any of the Members of the League or not, is hereby declared a matter of concern to the whole League, and the League shall take any action that may be deemed wise and effectual to safeguard the peace of nations. In case any such emergency should arise the Secretary General shall on the request of any Member of the League forthwith summon a meeting of the Council.” Article 11, League of Nations, Covenant of the League of Nations, 28 April 1919.
an ally. In other words, Britain and France appeased Mussolini. Having the assurance that France and Britain would not interfere, Mussolini’s next move was to test the wherewithal of the League.

By 1930, Italy had established a de facto occupation at the Walwal oasis in the coveted Ogaden region by building a fort and fortifying it with a rather large contingent of Italian troops. However, the area was accorded to Ethiopia by the Italo-Ethiopian Treaty of 1928. The Ogaden soon became an issue of contention as Italy claimed it as Italian-Somali territory while Ethiopia continued to declare it as their rightful land. The fort was located well beyond the treaty limit placing the Italians (and assisting Somali forces) within the Ethiopian border. In 1934, the Ethiopia army attempted to take the region back by mounting their forces just outside the fort and demanding Italy’s withdrawal. At the same time, the Italian forces began to mount their offensive. It is uncertain which side initiated the skirmish as each blamed the other. Emperor Haile Selassie appealed to the League of Nations for assistance, but the League saw no fault in either party. The League moved to approve the Hoare-Laval Plan initiated by Britain and France. The plan would give Italy two large sections of Ethiopia leaving the gap in the middle – the so-called “corridor of camels” – to Ethiopia. This plan was viewed by Emperor Haile Selassie as an insult and was rejected.

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261 Sbacchi, *Ethiopia under Mussolini: Fascism and the Colonial Experience*, 14; the Ogaden is an arid upland region in southeastern Ethiopia, bordered on the north and east by Somalia. It is sparsely settled with Somali nomads. The region was settled by Ethiopia in 1891.

Historian Harold Marcus described the plan as one of “cynical disregard for Ethiopia’s fate…”\textsuperscript{263}

Marcus qualified his statement with the following:

To say that the league was working against Ethiopia's interest would be generous. The council's major powers tried to force humiliating concessions on Ethiopia so that an appeased Italy might then serve the needs of continental politics. Neither France nor Britain understood that to accommodate Mussolini beyond a certain point would destroy the league's credibility, the plausibility of collective security, and European balance of power.\textsuperscript{264}

And as if receiving the blessings of the League, Fascist forces continued their incursion.

Although the battles were hard fought, the technological gap between the two proved too great. The weapons possessed by Ethiopia were at best, riffsles and two or three airplanes. Additionally, of the fighters at Emperor Haile Selassie’s disposal, there was only a fraction who received military training.\textsuperscript{265} This was in stark contrast to Mussolini’s troops. Also, their weapons consisted of standard (latest addition) riffsles, machine guns, tanks, and a weapon that turned the tide of the war in Italy’s favor – mustard gas. Mussolini’s Viceroy, Rodolfo Graziani was authorized by Mussolini to carry out lethal gas attacks. Poisonous [mustard gas] bombs were dropped on unsuspecting soldiers and civilians causing an extraordinarily high number of casualties.\textsuperscript{266}

As Italian troops moved to occupy the Ethiopian capital of Addis Ababa, the Emperor fled to the French colony of Djibouti and from there to Britain where he remained in exile for

\textsuperscript{263} Marcus, \textit{A History of Ethiopia}, 143-44.
\textsuperscript{264} Ibid., 140-41.
\textsuperscript{265} Ibid., 138.
\textsuperscript{266} Sbacchi, \textit{Ethiopia under Mussolini : Fascism and the Colonial Experience}, 37; Cassell, "Establishing Violations of International Law: 'Yellow Rain' and the Treaties Regulating Chemical and Biological Warfare,": 267; this act was in direct violation of the 1925 Geneva Protocol. Although this was considered a war crime, not one Italian was convicted of the crime.
five years. Emperor Haile Selassie again appealed to the League of Nations to help Ethiopia. However, Britain and France, who dominated the League of Nations, imposed token economic sanctions against Italy thus once again exposing the weakness of the League. Mussolini had moved closer to achieving his goal by occupying Ethiopia.

5.2 African American sentiment in historiographical context

Historians have written extensively on the subject of the war in addition to African Americans’ reactions to it. The overall consensus is clear, Black Americans saw the invasion as a threat to not only the sovereignty of Ethiopia, causing many to provide assistance when and where they could, but the conflict was also perceived as a threat to the entire Black race. For example, James Meriwether’s _Proudly we can be Africans_ asserts that in the fall of 1935, when Italy invaded Ethiopia, there was generated a new and more solidified link between African Americans and Africans—a link that prior to this was lacking. Ethiopia’s long-standing tradition of independence became a symbol for those who held fast to Black pride and freedom. Meriwether discusses Ethiopia’s importance to Blacks in America by stating, “For blacks in America, Ethiopia stood as a lonely symbol of black achievement, resistance, freedom, power, and ultimately the last, best hope of African independence.” The desire to “get involved” was overwhelming as “African Americans became the single most important pressure group in the United States pushing the government to act against Italy’s transgressions.”

As African-American newspapers began reporting the tragedies befalling Africa, the _Defender_, the _Daily

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267 Marcus, _A History of Ethiopia_, 130-146; Sbacchi, _Ethiopia under Mussolini: Fascism and the Colonial Experience_, 25.
269 Ibid., 30.
270 Ibid., 28.
World, and the Afro-American called attention, continually, to the Ethiopian crisis referring to Ethiopia as “the cradle of Christianity” and the carriers of the Ark of the Covenant. However, religion played a duel role in African Americans’ involvement and interest in the conflict. According to Meriwether, it either drew Black Americans closer or moved them further away. One the one hand, it offered them hope that God would deliver ALL Africans from oppression and redeem Africa while sparking a greater interest in the welfare of Ethiopia. On the other, it was viewed that Ethiopia’s fate lied in God’s hands so there was no need to help them; “[God] would look after that country and its people.”

Joseph E. Harris’ African-American Reactions to War in Ethiopia, 1936-1941 explores the critical link between the Italo-Ethiopian War and the motivation and reaffirmation of a common historical identity for Africa and its diaspora. Harris points out that “The invasion of Ethiopia ignited an emotional reaction among Africans and among descendants of Africans around the world, strengthening the bonds of pan-Africanism.” The reactions and responses to Italy’s transgressions, according to Harris, were not limited to Africans and Black-Americans. Instead, condemnation was observed by Blacks throughout the world. In places like Saint Lucia, Trinidad, Barbados, and even London, Blacks demonstrated their support and empathy for Ethiopia’s cause. Resolutions were passed condemning Italy, relief funds were created and communities came together to show their continued support.

William R. Scott expressed a connection between Blacks in America and contemporary Africa and remarked how African Americans, at times, did not make a distinction between the country of Ethiopia and the continent of Africa but referred to both as one and the same. In his

271 Meriwether, Proudly We Can Be Africans, 31-2.
272 Ibid., 31.
work, *The Sons of Sheba’s Race*, Scott proclaimed that, “American blacks often perceived themselves as part of an extended Ethiopian nation that stretched from East Africa to the Americas. So deep was their sense of identification with esteemed Ethiopia that black Americans used the term Ethiopian at times as a synonym for all African peoples and sometimes called their organizations by that name or some cognomen.”

Colin Grant asserted in *Negro with a Hat*, that Emperor Haile Selassie was championed as “the messiah the black masses had been waiting for, who was now defying the might of a militarized European power[.] Blacks from around the world were fired by the inspiration of Ethiopian resistance and outraged over the Italian aggression and its merciless use of mustard gas.”

In *Race against Empire*, Penny Von Eschen maintained that from the view of African Americans, WWII was “approached from an anti-colonial perspective and guided by the premise that the struggles of the black Americans and those of Africans were inseparably bound.” It was a war against not only fascism but of colonialism. Ethiopia was viewed as the “last holdout of real independence in Africa.” She emphasizes this point by stating that the war was viewed by Black nationalists “as a skirmish in a race war of Europeans (and Japanese) colonial expansion [and] exposed the indifference of Western nations to what many viewed as a clear fascist attack.” Taking into account these two separate interpretations of the conflict – one racial and the other antifascists – Von Eschen maintains that the “architects of the politics of the African diaspora would successfully bridge and transform these two world views by arguing that

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277 Ibid., 11.
anticolonialism and antiracism were necessary pre-conditions for democracy everywhere.”

So, it can be said, the backlash that stemmed from the Italo-Ethiopia war was not solely a reaction against colonialism and racism, it was a movement to promote democracy as well.

Fikru Gebrekidan’s *Bond without Blood* examines the relationship between African Americans and Ethiopia as one that transcends mere sentiment. Fikru’s work explores the evolution of “Ethiopianism,” constructs the history of the initial phase of Ethiopians and “New World” African encounters, and explores the Italo-Ethiopian war as a milestone in the rise of modern Black Nationalism. By examining the dynamics of contemporary Ethiopianism, he argues that, “East Africa and the black Atlantic, despite great physical distances, continue to impact each other’s awareness through migration, religion, secular culture, as well as through a shared history of anticolonial activism.”

Gebrekidan adds:

> Few world events have aroused New World black interest in Africa as has the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in October 1935. The only experience analogous to the pan-African mobilization of the thirties in support of beleaguered Ethiopia is the worldwide condemnation of apartheid in the second half of the twentieth century. But while the antiapartheid protest spanned over several decades, the hands-off Abyssinia campaign concentrated on the mid-1930s, giving it a higher sense of urgency and momentum.

The significance of this war and its effect on world’s Black population cannot be overstated. The involvement of what he deemed as “New World black interest,” acknowledges the efforts of not just African Americans who took action, but others of the African diaspora.

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280 Ibid., 49.
Blacks from around the world were inspired by the resilient Ethiopians. Resolutions were passed condemning Italian aggression and relief funds were created as communities came together to show their continued support. The following sections focus on African-Americans’ reactions, protests, and involvement in the second Italo-Ethiopian conflict looking specifically at the efforts of Paul Robeson, Langston Hughes, Joel Augustus Rogers, Hubert Fauntleroy Julian, and John C. Robins.

5.3 “Hands off Ethiopia”

Paul Robeson spent most of this time during the 1930s away from the United States. He developed his political consciousness primarily through his travels and independent study. One place in particular was the Soviet Union. Robeson, like others of the Black intelligentsia (Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, and W.E.B. Dubois), travelled to Russia to explore their approach to race relations. Robeson believed that “American blacks as descendants of slaves had a common culture with Russian workers as descendants of serfs.”\(^\text{281}\) This common culture ideology would lead Robeson to embrace certain aspects of the communist philosophy; specifically the idea of the “oppressed class” rising to prominence through revolutionary means.

A vigorous opponent of racism, Robeson would use his celebrity to publically combat oppression wherever he saw it. One such moment arrived when Fascism began to spread and Mussolini’s colonial aspiration in Africa began to emerge with the invasion of Ethiopia.

In a 1936 interview with the *New York Herald-Tribune*, the world renowned entertainer and activist spoke out on behalf of Ethiopia’s struggle against Italy’s offensive. He began by expressing his sympathy for Ethiopia: “Naturally,” Robeson stated, “I am interested in the Ethiopian situation although mine is not a political job. And just as naturally, my sympathy is all

with the Ethiopians.” He also remarked that, “Ethiopia could work out her own problems in time. There is no reason to believe that Italy can work them out for her.” He then predicted, that, “the people of the African continent will seek out their own destiny... [and]...will be free some day.”

During his travels throughout Europe, Robeson followed closely the events in China, Ethiopia and the West Indies: “I have seen and recognized the essential unity of this international fight for democracy and against fascism.”

In a speech given at the Twelfth Annual Herald-Tribune Forum, Robeson mentioned how the outlook of American Blacks had evolved since the fascist invasion of Ethiopia and pressed upon his audience to recognize that the struggles facing Blacks in America are parallel to the struggles faced by the masses of oppressed peoples throughout the world. Robeson truly believed that the liberation of the world’s subjugated people would soon come to fruition.

In a similar vein, noted Black novelist and playwright Langston Hughes openly expressed his views regarding the occupation of Ethiopia and how violently African Americans responded to it. As one of the premier intellectuals of the Harlem Renaissance, Hughes recalled that on 19 March, 1935 when Italy began advancing on Ethiopia, Blacks were “about ready to attack the white merchants in Harlem.” This, he proclaimed, is exactly what happened. After the initial invasion in October 1935, “violent riots destroyed more than $2,000,000 worth of property, [as] hundreds of white store windows were smashed and shelves looted.”

Later, in his address to the members of the Second International Writers Congress in Paris France, Hughes expressed

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283 Gordon, Eugene, “A Great Negro Artist Puts His Fenius to Work for His People.” Sunday Worker, June 4, 1939; quoted in ibid., 127.
284 “American Negroes in the War.” A speech given at the Twelfth Annual Herald-Tribune Forum, November 16, 1943; see ibid., 147.
how democracy in the United States, has been “tainted with race prejudice born of slavery.” He noted how fascism is not an unknown concept among African Americans because of economic and social discrimination. And, he continued, “We Negroes in America do not have to be told what Fascism is in action. We know. Its theories of Nordic supremacy and economic suppression have long been realities to us…and now we view it on a world scale”

Langston Hughes not only expressed Black Americans’ understanding of fascism as he believed it was practiced in the United States, but he also expressed a sentiment that African Americans could now comprehend racial discrimination on a global scale by observing the actions of Mussolini in Ethiopia.

Another noted advocate for the liberation of Ethiopia was Foreign War Correspondent Joel Augustus Rogers. Described as “the only fully accredited American Negro war Correspondent in Ethiopia,” Rogers worked closely with United Aid for Ethiopia and was an important figure in helping to raise awareness about “Italy’s barbarous military tactics.”

J.A. Rogers was born in Negril, Jamaica in 1888. He immigrated to the United States in 1906 and shortly thereafter became a naturalized U.S. citizen. Rogers began his carrier in journalism when he landed a position with Marcus Garvey’s United Negro Improvement Association. As a non-member, he wrote for the Negro World and lectured to local UNIA chapters. “Dissatisfied with the reporting of news by the white press concerning the Italian invasion and occupation of Ethiopia,” Rogers began serving as a war correspondent in Ethiopia for The Pittsburgh Courier newspaper and reported the events as they unfolded. His

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286 De Santis, ed. The Collected Works of Langston Hughes, 221.
287 Ibid.
experience in Ethiopia predates the war. On December 11, 1930, Rogers attended the coronation of the then Ras Tafari (who adopted the throne name of Emperor Haile Selassie) to which he described the event as “so different from anything that the western mind can conceive.” Rogers continued to work diligently to keep African Americans informed about Ethiopia.

In addition to reporting the nation’s current events, Rogers’ correspondences also commented on Ethiopia’s history. For example, in an article titled, “J. A. Rogers Recalls Rich Civilization Of Dark Races In Queen Of Sheba Days,” he began by referencing the Hebrew Bible. He used it to explain that the kingdom of Abyssinia was in all probability a colony of Sheba (or Saba), which was located across the Red Sea in Arabia. And according to the Hebrew tradition, Rogers recalled that the Sheban kingdom was founded by the grandson of Ham, named Cush, the founder of Ethiopia.

The use of biblical references to educate readers on the history of Ethiopia was not uncommon as demonstrated in earlier publications like the Freedom’s Journal and The Christian Recorder. Also, Rogers seemingly employs this dialogue as a reminder to African Americans of the Black heritage of this once great and ancient civilization.

On July 20, 1935, Rogers announced that Emperor Selassie cabled The Pittsburgh Courier and “expressed his readiness to accept Aframerican volunteers.” In this same article, he proclaimed that it was the duty of African Americans to help Ethiopia’s cause because all Blacks were part of an "exploited mass" and that Ethiopia "was a symbol, a rallying point of the black race." Rogers denounced the idea that Ethiopians did not recognize racial kinship between...
themselves and Black Americans and that efforts were being made to actively recruit Blacks for Ethiopia’s cause. Two such individuals Emperor Selassie procured were Hubert “The Black Eagle” Julian and John “The Brown Condor” Robinson.

Born in Trinidad and educated in England, Hubert Fauntleroy Julian grew up in Montreal. He emigrated from Canada to the United States in 1921 and at the age of twenty-four he was residing in New York earning his living “performing in aerial circuses” and making “parachute jumps over Harlem.”

In 1924, just three years before acclaimed aviator Charles Lindbergh made his solo nonstop flight from Roosevelt Field in Long Island to Le Bourget Field in Paris, Hubert Julian attempted to make his mark by flying his hydro-airplane, the “Ethiopia I,” from New York to the African continent. The plane was still in sight when it crash landed into the Flushing Bay. Julian would spend the next several weeks in the hospital recovering from his injuries. For the next five years, Julian’s perseverance and continued self-promotion of a solo-transatlantic flight would earn him the nickname “Bronze Lindy.”

In 1930, he traveled to Ethiopia. During an aviation show, he performed an impromptu parachute jump before the Emperor. Haile Selassie was so impressed by his exploits that he employed him as “chief of the Abyssinian air force” and awarded him the "Gold Order of Menelik.”

Unfortunately, things quickly turned sour for the adventurer when, just two days before the Emperor’s coronation ceremony, he crashed the royal plane. These events were highlighted in various sources:

airplane and was stripped of his position. It would be another five years before the aviator would go back to Ethiopia.

In 1935, and without much fanfare, Julian returned to Ethiopia to aid in the defense of Emperor Haile Selassie’s government. After just two months in the country, he was granted citizenship and allowed to "sign up." He was then granted a position to "train 5,000 rookies to fight against Italy." Five years after his uneventful departure one might think that the Emperor would not have placed him in such a position but he did. He also accorded him "a shining revolver, a gilded sword, and three uniforms of a 'commander.’” He was then assigned to a small village in Ambo where he would work as the assistant civil governor.

Hubert Julian made a name for himself not only in the U.S. but also internationally and aided in Ethiopia’s war effort where he could. But despite his accomplishments (and failures), Julian’s spotlight did not shine as bright as his rival John C. Robinson.

Colonel John Robinson, known throughout Ethiopia as the “Black Condor,” was one of Haile Selassie’s trusted lieutenants. Often seen sporting a leather jacket with "the gold order of the Conquering Lion of Judah on the left breast,” Robinson spent thirteen months as Emperor Haile Selassie’s personal aviator, successfully carrying messages and medical supplies under the watchful eyes of Italian fliers.

Born in Carrabelle, Florida in 1905 Robison grew up in the segregated environs of Gulfport, Mississippi. In 1923 he graduated with a degree in auto mechanics from the Tuskegee Institute. In 1929 he became the first African American to manufacture an airplane using

296 “Picture Highlights in Exciting Career of Exiled 'Black Eagle’”, The Pittsburgh Courier, Nov 8 1930.
299 Ibid.
Robinson desperately wanted to pursue a career in aviation and sought to enlist in the military as an aviator but due to discrimination and the irrational belief that Blacks did not make good pilots, his applications were denied. He then applied to several private institutions but they too turned him down. Undeterred, he sought to attend the prestigious Curtiss-Wright Aeronautical University in Chicago which, at the time, was a Whites-only institution: "The white students here would not stand for it. We would lose money if we accepted colored students" one university official told him. Over the course of a year, Robinson would return on numerous occasions seeking admission. He was finally granted a "position" to occasionally assist white students in the classroom in between his cleaning them. Percival Leroy Prattis of The Pittsburgh Courier described Robinson’s position as nothing more than a "flunky."

It didn’t take long before Robinson’s talents began to shine. The White students "came to like him, forgot he was colored, [and] treated him as they would any other young man." By the year's end, he was granted admission. In two years, Robinson became one of the university’s most competent graduates. After graduating he was given the unprecedented position of instructor. Robinson was advised that he could start a class if he could recruit “twenty-five Negro students.” He accepted the challenge and became, for the second time, a

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304 Prattis, "Ethiopian Air Ace Outwits Italian Planes in Battle."
305 The doors of the university still remained closed to Blacks as the University’s invitation was extended to Robinson and Robinson alone. This point was made clear to him by the University's president George Charbuck: "You've made a fine record here, Robinson, the students all like you. If you still want to study aviation, I think we can let you in as a student, just you." [emphasis mine]; quoted in Prattis, "Ethiopian Air Ace Outwits Italian Planes in Battle."
306 Tucker, Father of the Tuskegee Airmen, John C. Robinson, 39.
first in the school’s history – an instructor at an institution that previously would not even admit Black students. By 1931, the university had its first all-Black graduating class.

In May 1934, Robinson set his sights on creating an all-Black advanced aeronautics training program at his alma mater, the Tuskegee Institute. In less than a decade, Tuskegee would serve as the center of Black-flight training during World War II and would pave the way for the emergence of the talented Tuskegee Airmen.307

While Robinson was fulfilling his dream in the United States, a storm was brewing across the Atlantic. In December 1934, Ethiopian and Italian troops clashed at Walwal. News of the skirmish spread quickly and so too did Emperor Haile Selassie’s appeal for international assistance. Wanting to defend Ethiopia against Italian aggression, Robinson contacted the director of the Associated Negro Press to "expressed his desire to help Ethiopia."308 The director then contacted Emperor Haile Selassie’s cousin, Malaku Bayen. Bayen was attending the medical college at Howard University when he relayed to the Emperor, Robinson’s ambition to fight for Ethiopia. In April, the Emperor invited Robinson to come to Ethiopia and on May 2, 1935 he boarded his single-engine airplane and departed Chicago for East Africa.309

As chief courier for Emperor Selassie, Robinson, on more than one occasion, found himself face to face with Italian fighters. On one occasion, while returning from Addis Ababa "with medicine for those wounded in the first air-raid of the Italians," he spotted an Italian bomber and moved in for the attack. The bomber was quickly accompanied by support fighters and he barely escaped with this life.310

307 Tucker, Father of the Tuskegee Airmen, John C. Robinson, 55-57.
308 Prattis, "Ethiopian Air Ace Outwits Italian Planes in Battle."
309 Ibid.
Robinson had been in the thick of the fighting on all fronts, carrying important messages from the Emperor to army leaders. When the Italians bombed the Ethiopian capital Robinson was there. He witnessed the bombing of hospitals and the relentless effects of mustard gas on Ethiopian troops. When he returned to the U.S. he received a hero's welcome. While in front of an estimated 3,000 New Yorkers, Robinson proclaimed that "the Italians have not won Ethiopia, and they face an endless guerrilla warfare." Believing that an attack on the independent nation of Ethiopia by the Italian fascists was an attack on all Black people around the world, these brave souls were not deterred in their efforts to support Ethiopia and her cause.

Concerns were not only expressed by public figures like Paul Robeson, Langston Hughes and others, but by the general public as well. Black and mainstream publications ran articles expressing the world’s discontent with Italy’s belligerence and its reactions to it. African Americans took this information to heart as many took to the streets in mass numbers to protest and demonstrate against what they perceived as a direct threat to the freedoms of the entire Black race. Physical clashes, boycotts, fundraising activities, and recruitment and volunteer efforts were all done to assist Ethiopia against this global crisis.

A report from The Pittsburgh Courier expressed that "if Emperor Haile Selassie's tribal chieftains in Ethiopia are as loyal to him as his racial brethren in Chicago, the 'Lion of Judah' can confidently look forward to a 'solid front' in the war with Italy." The article is referring to the courage of two young ladies: Lillian Rabin, 19 and Eloise Robinson, 24. The two girls, along with thirty other persons, "white and colored" protested outside the Italian consulate. The two

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young ladies proceeded to chain themselves to an iron pole. Over their chest, each girl wore a sign reading "Hands off Ethiopia." The two were eventually arrested.

Similarly, on September 5th, three hundred demonstrators were jailed when they took to the streets in protest. The demonstrators consisted of men and women, both Black and White, who were concerned that the escalating tension between Italy and Ethiopia would bring about a second Italo-Ethiopian war. What began as a peaceful demonstration turned violent as the police department's so-called 'industrial squad' "clubbed, knocked down and [threw] into jail" peaceful demonstrators. Under the guise that the demonstration was communist inspired, police officials used this tactic to alienate public sympathy from those who were arrested.

A New York Times reporter wrote, “Not since the days of Marcus Garvey...have racialists won so large a following on the streets of Harlem.” The concern for the fate of Ethiopia, the reporter continued, was a deep concern for the quarter-million Harlemites of New York. With the exception of Liberia, Ethiopia was “the last independent stronghold of the black man on earth.” Ethiopia maintaining her independence was held by many as key to the sovereignty of the entire Black race moving many to want to defend it with their very lives. For example, at a local [Texas] Fort Worth “negro Y.M.C.A,” Black men protested against the threatened war between Italy and the realm of Haile Selassie by acknowledging that they were willing to “spill their blood on behalf of [their] native land.” Moreover, in Okmulgee, Oklahoma, it was reported that at least one hundred Black men had “signed to fight for Ethiopia in the event of war and that a state-wide recruitment movement was underway. Organizations moved to recruit

volunteers for the Ethiopian army, as leaders boasted of “thousands of volunteers” who “realized that a victory over Italy would result in an immediate improvement of the status of Negroes throughout the world.”317 And, in a scathing letter to the editor, a Mr. Walter H. Rogers excoriates Mussolini for his “unwarranted attack on all the American colored people.” Calling him a "coward tyrant" and labeling him "world's enemy No. 1," Mr. Rogers expressed his desire to fight for the "God-fearing" and "peace loving" people of Ethiopia. "I am willing now to sacrifice my home and life," Rogers declared, "to volunteer today in any Army to fight against [Mussolini]."318 The reported number of "Negro volunteers" was inspiring. In Chicago 8,000 enrolled while Detroit, Kansas City, and Philadelphia had 5,000, 2,000, and 1,500 respectively.319 And for those who wanted to contribute without having to pick up a weapon could do so by providing their time and skills in the name of liberty.

Under the direction of the United Committees for the Defense of Ethiopia, scores of organizations came together to secure funds to purchase field hospital tents, medical and surgical supplies for Ethiopia forces.320 They also rallied to recruit trained nurses, dieticians, physicians and surgeons to devote their services to Ethiopia's cause.

317 “Harlem Ponders Ethiopia's Fate.”
318 Walter H Rogers, "Scores Mussolini's Greed; Will Fight for Ethiopia," The Pittsburgh Courier, Jul 13 1935; Walter Rogers expressed his military prowess by recalling his experiences fighting overseas with the 370th Infantry during World War I. The 370th was a "colored" regiment that consisted of an almost complete complement of Black officers from the highest rank of colonel to the lower rank of corporal. For more information see Emmett J. Scott's, “The Eighth Illinois” in The American Negro in the World War.
319 “'God Save Ethiopia,'” ibid., July 20.
320 The committee comprised of the following organizations: The Medical Committee for the Defense of Ethiopia; Friends of Ethiopia in America; Provisional Committee for the Defense of Ethiopia; Native African Union of America; American League Against War and Fascism; Brooklyn Provisional Committee for the Defense of Ethiopia; International Workers Order; and the American Ethiopian Sympathetic League. Also involved in providing aid to Ethiopia, but not a part of the United Committees, were United Aid for Ethiopia and the Ethiopian World Federation.
Dr. J. J. Jones, chairman of the Friends of Ethiopia was quoted as saying:

There is no dispute about the fact that the hospital, medical and surgical supplies as well as trained scientists in Ethiopia are inadequate to serve the army struggling against an invasion which has made Mussolini the object of world contempt. If we in America desire to help the Ethiopians we can best do so in the direction in which this effort is being made. 321

Members of these organizations saw fascism as "the scourge of present day civilization" and felt the need to provide assistance to those who were suffering under its tyranny. Organizations like the International Negro World Alliance, led by Robert L Ephriam, were created for the purpose of "hammering away the obstacles in the path of true independence for the Negro the world over." It was also reported that Emperor Haile Selassie notified the Alliance that he desired African-American cooperation. As the conflict unfolded, organizations called on "skilled artisans and mechanics to go to Ethiopia." In response to the call, it was reported that "750 men had signed up." 322 Additionally, countless letters were received by the organization from individuals volunteering to fight on the African front because "they realize that a victory over Italy would result in an immediate improvement of the status of Negroes throughout the world." 323 Groups like the John Robinson Defense Fund for Ethiopia and the Joint Conference for the Defense of Ethiopia not only called attention to Ethiopia's plight, but they also held mass meetings intended to raise funds to assist the people of Ethiopia. 324 These African-American-led organizations provided monetary and material aid not only for the preservation of Ethiopia’s sovereignty but also to champion for the freedom of Blacks around the world.

321 "Organizations Band to Give Medical Aid to Ethiopia; Funds Are Being Asked," *Atlanta Daily World*, December 4 1935.
322 "Chicago Girls Are Strong for King Selassie."
323 "U. S. Whites Volunteer for Ethiopian Service."
When Italy’s fascist influence began to spread, the United Aid for People of African Descent provided medical supplies to the Friends of Spanish Democracy. For those who saw fascism as an imminent threat, the battle was now in Spain as the Spanish government and its factions fought against fascist rebels supported by Hitler and Mussolini.

The Abraham Lincoln Brigade, made up of some 2,800 young American men and women volunteers, served as combatants or in the medical services on behalf of the loyalist government. Within this division there were approximately ninety African Americans. The point that around ninety African Americans fought in Spain raises two interesting questions: First, why did so few Black Americans volunteer to fight in Spain while so many came forward to fight in Ethiopia? And second, why were 2,800 Americans “allowed” to fight in Spain while only two were known to fight in Ethiopia? In addressing the first question, Fikru Gebrekidan addresses the reason why Black volunteers were in Spain. He declares that African Americans were there to “settle old scores with Mussolini and fascism.” However, this statement doesn’t address the question of why so few? In order to deal with this query, we must look at the difference between fighting for Ethiopia and fighting against Fascism.

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325 “Spanish Loyalists Receive Supplies Intended to Go to Ethiopia, Report,” *Atlanta Daily World*, March 15 1937; “The American Friends of Spanish Democracy (originally called Friends of Spanish Democracy) was founded in New York City in 1936 by a group of clergymen and intellectuals under the leadership of Roger Baldwin, a member of the executive committee, and Bishop Robert L. Paddock, the chairman. The objective of the organization was to arouse support for the Loyalist government during the Spanish Civil War. By organizing public appeals, petitions and letters of protest and by disseminating information on the situation in Spain, it hoped to counteract the effects of fascist propaganda and bring pressure on the U.S. President and Congress to end the arms embargo in Spain”; from, “American Friends of Spanish Democracy records, 1935-1939.” *The New York Public Library Online Archives*.  
326 Most U.S. volunteers in the Spanish Civil War were initially assigned to the Fifteenth International Brigade, which eventually consisted of four battalions. In February 1937, the volunteers voted to call themselves the Abraham Lincoln Battalion. Volunteers who arrived later joined the George Washington Battalion or the MacKenzie-Papineau Battalions (which were also part of the Fifteenth Brigade). Still others served in the transport group (Regiment de Tren), the medical corps (American Medical Bureau to Save Spanish Democracy), the John Brown Artillery Corps, or other units. Collectively, all the U.S. volunteers called themselves Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade when they returned from Spain; from: “On the Abraham Lincoln Battalion in the International Brigades,” *Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives* [online].
In the U.S., some ninety-seven African Americans volunteered to fight in the Spanish Civil War. This is less than four percent of the total American volunteers that made up the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. Yet in Chicago alone, 5,000 Blacks signed up to fight in Ethiopia; a number over fifty times greater than those who volunteered in Spain. If we are to accept such a number as accurate, why the disparity? Arguably, the answer is that the desire among African Americans to fight for Ethiopia's sovereignty was much greater than their desire to fight against the spread of fascism because they saw the invasion of Ethiopia as an immediate threat upon themselves and that the conquest of Ethiopia would mean the defeat of the entire Black race.

The second question asked why 2,800 Americans were allowed to fight in Spain while only two Americans were known to fight in Ethiopia. Joseph E. Harris argues that it was because the United States had an estimated seventy million dollars invested in Spain and essentially no compelling financial interest in Ethiopia.327 While the United States was adamant in regards to remaining neutral in both wars, this may explain why the government was more diligent in enforcing these restrictions upon American volunteers willing to fight for Ethiopia while seemingly turning a “blind eye” toward American volunteers in Spain. For example when Emperor Selassie cabled the U.S. State Department in which he “welcomed U.S. volunteers,” he was informed of an 1818 law that prohibited U.S. citizens from enlisting or recruiting others, within the U.S. to fight under foreign colors. Anyone found violating this law could be subject to a $1,000 fine and three years in jail.328

With the outbreak of a civil war in Spain, the Roosevelt administration in consort with other members of the global Western community took steps to strengthen their respective non-

327 Harris, African-American Reactions to War in Ethiopia, 1936-1941, 61-2.
intervention policies. In the first of a series of Neutrality Acts, the last being in 1939, the United States placed a mandatory embargo on shipments of munitions to combatants. And although the official policy was non-intervention, the following excerpt alludes to a rather loose policy in regards to U.S. intervention:

The policies of the Roosevelt administration, which sought to enforce a comprehensive ban on the export of munitions to either side of the Spanish conflict, was not necessarily at odds with the deeper desire of Americans to avoid direct entanglement in the distant war…in practice American policy was somewhat more fluctuating, and subject to occasional exceptions. Thus, not only were several thousand American volunteers able to enlist on the Republican side, loopholes in the export ban permitted some matériel of American provenance to be sold to Madrid.\footnote{“Roosevelt’s Policy: Was the United States Truly Neutral in the Spanish Civil War?,” in \textit{History in Dispute}, ed. Kenneth W. Estes and Daniel Kowalsky, \textit{The Spanish Civil War} (Detroit: St. James Press, 2005), 208.}

The Roosevelt administration held fast to their isolationist’s philosophy and continued practice of non-intervention. American citizens were reminded of this when they volunteered to fight for Ethiopia. Yet in Spain, 2,800 Americans were “allowed” to fight against the same fascist regime that plagued the African nation. Of those 2,800, approximately ninety were of African descent. It is correct to assume that many African Americans did not want to see fascism succeed, but the majority did not want to see Ethiopia fall. And not everyone was eager to take up arms against Italy. Many chose the Bible over the bullet. They believed that if God willed it, the Christian nation of Ethiopia would be delivered.
5.4 God’s will be done

Religion played its own part in African Americans’ involvement and interest in the conflict. While sparking additional concerted interest in the welfare of Ethiopia, it also offered the faithful hope that God would deliver all Africans from oppression. Ethiopia’s fate, it was believed, lay in God’s hands as “[God] would look after that country and its people”\(^\text{330}\)

Therefore, organized mass prayers, oral condemnations, and verbal appeals were the basis of cleric participation. While Black Americans took to the streets in protest, volunteered to fight for Ethiopia and took part in the conflict, the church sought other, more peaceful alternatives.

Following a plea by both the Committee for Ethiopia and President Roosevelt, on August 2, 1935, over 1,000 clergymen in the United States agreed to set aside Sunday, August 18\(^\text{th}\) as a day of prayer and protest against war and any acts of aggression against Ethiopia. They also sought to distribute peace petitions in hopes of "[having] at least 100,000 in the hands of American citizens before the end of the week" so that they too would observe this day of peace.\(^\text{331}\)

Although it is not clear on what the clergymen specifically meant by protest, it is clear that they did not mean public demonstrations. While the committee stressed government intervention in Ethiopia, they were against the “recruiting of volunteers and public appeals for funds” on behalf of Ethiopia’s cause. Any public demonstrations, it was thought, violated the aims of the committee's policy.

The Missionary Society of the Third Baptist Church, in response to this appeal, stated that "Aside from extending Abyssinia our deepest sympathy, we shall assist by praying that God


will deliver her from the hands of the oppressor." Because the President of the United States and the Committee for Ethiopia called for ALL Americans to set aside August 18th to pray so that peace may be negotiated between Italy and Ethiopia, the Third Baptist Church, instead, called for "Colored people of the United States [to] go on record by setting aside one day, the FIRST SUNDAY IN AUGUST, as a day in which prayers shall be offered in all churches and homes for the deliverance of these people from the hands of Mussolini." Whether or not there was some conflict or underlining animosity between the Third Baptist Church and the Committee for Ethiopia is not clear; however, James Meriwether notes that all the premier organizations created to aid Ethiopia were centered primarily in New York City and were established and operated by Black Americans with the exception of the Committee for Ethiopia and the American Committee on the Ethiopian Crisis/American Aid for Ethiopia. Both of these organizations, Meriwether states, were interracial and "dominated by white philanthropists, religious leaders, and journalists."333

In Columbia South Carolina, Bishop Noah W. Williams of the AME Church urged his parishioners to continue to pray for Ethiopia in the "terrible, unwarranted attack on this ancient Christian nation by Italy." As member had already spent a day fasting and praying, Bishop Williams emphasized that prayer for Ethiopia should be done "daily" so that "Almighty God may undertake for this sorely oppressed people [and] that the descendants of pagan Rome may be defeated in her cruel war on Ethiopia."334

Visiting Pastor Meldon of the Sixth Mt. Zion Church in Pittsburg held a prayer service for conditions in Ethiopia. "God Save Ethiopia" was his message as he displayed a large map of

332 "Race Churches Protest Aggression of Mad Italy."
Africa before the congregation. His goal was to "increase the great concern which the American Negro has in the Italian Ethiopian situation."³³⁵

A 1935 Pittsburgh Courier headline read, "God Save Ethiopia." The report focused on the tensions between Ethiopia and Italy as Italian troops continued to mount their offensive against the African nation. The report maintained that, "She is 'stretching forth her hands' to God, to humanity and to test the Christian principles of men and women throughout the world." The article focused its readers' attention to the irony that Rome, the "capital of Christianity" is trying to enslave "one of the most ancient Christian nations." The report labeled this attempt pure "heathenism" and "it has divorced the Italians from Christian ethics." Emperor Selassie held a public speech where he declared that he was willing to lay down his life for Ethiopia's independence and that "God is our shield and our buckler against the modern weapons of our enemies of tomorrow."³³⁶

Bishop Noah W. Williams of the AME Church reached out to Emperor Selassie via letter addressing the turmoil facing the nation urging him to "Trust God and give them hell." The Courier reprinted the letter in its entirety in their August 3rd edition. The bishop began by offering his blessings and "resistless help of the Eternal God against the wholly unwarranted selfish and rapacious attack from Italy." It soon becomes apparent that the Bishop is offering the Emperor the prayers and opinions of not only the AME Church, but "the churches of the United States, especially of our ethnic groups, regardless of denominations." United in prayer, all have sat aside special days to pray for the success of "Christian Abyssinia." Bishop Williams closes his letter with the comforting words that, "The Lord God of hosts will be your refuge and

³³⁶ "'God Save Ethiopia'."
strength and you cannot lose with His Help, though the contest, from a human point of view, may be unequal, ‘Trust in God and give them hell.’”

And lastly, African-American cleric James A. Bray, bishop of the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church in Chicago and dubbed by The Pittsburgh Courier as “one of the most scholarly and eloquent men in America,” proclaimed that Italy’s attempt to conquer the Christian kingdom of Ethiopia would cause a “chain of cataclysmic events” that would ultimately lead to the collapse of Western civilization. In addition, he declared, “Italian avarice in East Africa, if left unchecked, would foment a terrible revolt against the West by the world’s long-disinherited colored nations.” These sentiments were expressed often by the clergy during the period leading up to the war. Some also saw the upcoming war as a “fulfillment of biblical prophecy.” It was a war that would result in the global redemption of all Blacks around the world.

Ethiopia’s victory at Adowa during the first Italian-Abyssinia conflict of 1896 helped convince religious devotees that the Ethiopians would once again defeat the Italians and possibly trigger a worldwide redemption of Blacks from White oppression. As the Italians marched into the nation’s capital of Addis Ababa, the faithful insisted that God would ensure Ethiopia’s victory.

5.5 Conclusion

On May 5, 1936 Ethiopia fell at the hands of fascist Italy. The Italian king, Victor Emmanuel III, proclaimed himself Emperor of Ethiopia. For the second time, Emperor Haile Selassie appealed to the League of Nations and for the second time the League proved to be

339 Ibid. 5.
341 Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Italian Somaliland were consolidated into one single state, Italian East Africa.
inept. Over the next several years, in an attempt to dislodge the Italian forces from their homeland, Ethiopians engaged in guerilla warfare. The fascists responded with cruel and unrestrained attacks on insurgents and civilians alike.

In June, 1940, Italy entered World War II on the side of Germany. By September the country had signed the Tripartite Pact, which became known as the Axis alliance. This alliance would mean the demise of the fascist regime as Ethiopia (with the aid of Britain) moved to dislodge Italy from eastern Africa. As fascism weakened so too did Italy’s foothold on the African continent. In 1941, after a successful liberation of his homeland, Haile Selassie regained his rightful position as Emperor of Ethiopia.

As Ethiopia’s sovereignty was under attack, African Americans quickly answered the call. The Second Italo-Ethiopian War was seen as a threat not only to Ethiopia but also to all dispersed Africans around the world. Demonstrations, both peaceful and violent, were carried out in an effort to call attention to conflict. Individuals organized en mass and volunteer to fight on Ethiopia’s behalf. And while public figures openly spoke out against the Italian incursion, it was the masses of “unknown” Black Americans who organized relief effort that provided aid for Ethiopian soldiers. And while some scholars contend that the ties that existed between Black-Americans and Africa began to wane after WWII, I would argue that the connection between the two had not only remained strong but it continued to grow stronger.

6 CONCLUSION

As enslaved Africans were continuously disembarking on English shores, contact between Blacks and Anglo-Europeans became increasingly common. Once regarded as
“oddities” or “curiosities,” Blacks no longer sat on the fringe of English society. Instead, they were now part of an institution of perpetual servitude. The attitude among citizens of England would shift profoundly as they began to racialize Blacks residing in England and those living on the continent of Africa itself. Adjectives like “uncivilized” and “barbaric” had begun replacing the once common descriptions of “gentle” and “loving.” It could be argued that this shift occurred because of the institution of slavery itself – meaning, now that England was actively participating in the slave trade, they instinctively began to define Blacks as less than human in order to justify their enslavement. This argument would be substantial if not for the fact that when England began its active participation in the slave trade, the enslavement of Blacks by Europeans was not a new phenomenon. Since the 1440s, the Portuguese had begun enslaving Africans to work their sugar plantation on the islands in the Atlantic Ocean off the coast of West Africa. Spain was also importing Africans to work in their colonies in the Americas as a response to an impassioned plea by Bishop Bartolomé de las Casas in his letter of 1510 to end the enslavement of the Native Americans – for the purpose of saving them from destruction – and replace them with Africans. During the seventeenth century the Dutch dominated the Atlantic slave trade as the greatest beneficiary of that trade. There were also few Englishmen who clandestinely participated in the slave trade. So by the time Englishmen embarked on the slave trade in a significant way they viewed black Africans as a ready commodity to be bought and sold at their discretion long before the establishment of England’s African trading companies. At the center of this dramatic shift was England’s entrance and eventually dominance of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. This paradigm shift was not a local phenomenon as it also took place in England’s North American colony of Virginia.
The first settlers of Jamestown, as far as records show, did not come into contact with Africans in the Americas until 1619 when twenty or so were brought to the colony by a Dutch ship. They were soon integrated into the labor system, possibly as indentured servants. By the time Englishmen began transporting enslaved Africans to England’s North American colonies, like in England, contact between Black and White people increased relatively rapidly. What emerged was the racialization of Blacks in colonial America and a literature that reflected this. Essayist Author Lee, John Woolman, and John Brickell, are just a few of the eighteenth century writers who typified the attitude of Anglo-American colonists during this era. Their discourse consisted of language reminiscent of the language used by travelers, traders, and others who journeyed to Africa’s west coast and wrote that the African was “unciviliz’d and ignorant.” These men and others like them put in ink their belief that Blacks were inferior. Later, mainstream print media would begin to relay this same racist ideology thus further influencing an ever increasing population. Yet, there were some Black individuals countered white racist ideology by refuting it. One of the ways in which Black elites responded to racialized rhetoric was to create their own publications to dispel the myth of Black inferiority.

The Black print media presented an alternative to what books, essays and particularly, the mainstream print media was publicizing about Black inferiority. It was a movement when Black elites started portraying themselves as active participants within the scope of humanity by countering the rhetoric that depicted them as inferior to their White counterparts. To achieve that goal, Black print media focused on discussing the histories ancient Egypt and Ethiopia in order to “prove” that Black people were indeed civilized while giving the continent of Africa historical significance in the public sphere. What progressed was an even more solidifying connection among Blacks with the African continent and the development of an Ethiopian ethos. In time
African-Americans and those of the diaspora were using the term Ethiopia as a synonym for representing all Black people of African descent. The biblical verse *Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God* became significant as it was viewed by many as a measuring rod for the potential of Blacks throughout the world. The admiration for the envisioned Ethiopia blossomed into an appreciation for the nation of Ethiopia (Abyssinia). And when the country’s sovereignty was threatened by Italy during the First Italo-Ethiopian war of 1896, the Black print media followed closely the events as they unfolded. When Ethiopia’s defeated Italy at the Battle of Adwa, many saw this as a fulfillment of the biblical prophecy. This paved the way for more active and intensified responses from Black Americans during Italy’s second invasion of Ethiopia in 1935-36 destroying the last bastion of Black freedom in Africa.

“Hands off Ethiopia” became a battle cry within the movement that aimed at supporting and protecting Ethiopia against Italian aggression. Demonstrations, both violent and nonviolent, were frequent as people took to the streets in protest. Public figures like Paul Robeson publically criticized Italy for invading Ethiopia under the guise of “helping” the nation sort out its problems. Robeson proclaimed that Ethiopia can work out her own problems and did not need Italy’s help. He also emphasized that, if European nations are allowed to work out their own problems then why should Africans not be allowed to work out theirs.

Langston Hughes openly criticized Italy for invading Ethiopia while at the same time comparing fascism to that of America’s racism essentially arguing that they were similar if not identical. He noted that African-Americans did not have to look across the ocean to see fascism in action…it was happening right there in America. And, what Blacks in America were experiencing at home was comparable to what was happening in Africa abroad. Hughes also called attention to riots that broke out in Harlem when news of Italy’s invasion reached the
United States. He noted that windows were smashed and stores were looted causing more than two million dollars’ worth of damage. In addition to those who spoke out publicly, there were also African-Americans who experienced the war up close and personal.

The War Correspondent J. A. Roger reported the events as they transpired. Rogers volunteered his services because he was unhappy with how the “white press” was reporting the news. His insight into the conflict was invaluable and his accounts were published in the *Pittsburgh Courier*. From the ground, Rogers told of chemical weapon attacks on unsuspecting soldiers and civilians, the bombing of hospitals and other medical facilities, and in the process he facilitated the dissemination of information that moved many to action.

John Robinson (aka the “Brown Condor”) flew missions for the Ethiopian government transporting messages and medical supplies while Herbert “the Black Eagle” Julian utilized his experience as a pilot and asked Emperor Haile Selassie if he could fight on the side of Ethiopia. He was granted citizenship and did. Robinson and Julian were just two Black Americans who knowingly took part in the conflict on the side of Ethiopia. There were many who volunteered to fight on behalf of Ethiopia, but due U.S. government non-intervention restrictions, they could not. There were also African Americans who participated in the Spanish Civil War in 1936 for the purpose of indirectly fighting against Fascist Italy.

African-Americans also formed organizations that assisted those participating in the war effort. *The Friends of Ethiopia* and *Aid for the Defense of Ethiopia* organized efforts to provide medical supplies and hospital tents to the fields. They also moved to recruit nurses, dieticians, and doctors to provide their services for the cause. But not all actions were of the physical nature. Some had a more spiritual flare.
Church organization such as *The Black Methodists Episcopal Church of Chicago* had “calls to prayer” to pray for the safety of Ethiopia. It was also said that Italy’s invasion of Ethiopia would cause a cataclysmic event that would shake up the Western world and cause those of the non-Western world to rise up.

African-Americans saw the conflict as something greater than an attempt by one nation to colonize another. They saw Ethiopia as the last bastion of Black freedom throughout the world. Because of this, some spoke out publically while others took to the streets in peaceful and sometimes even violent demonstrations. Organizations came together to show their support for Ethiopia while Christian groups held them in their prayers. For many, Ethiopia’s defeat at the hands of fascism was a defeat for all Blacks around the world. Yet the story doesn’t end there.

The postwar period encouraged an increased internationalist perspective among African Americans. The anti-colonial movement in Africa, which began shortly after European colonial conquest circa 1880, ranged from non-violent protest to armed resistance. Yes, Ethiopia had regained her independence in 1941 when Emperor Haile Selassie regained his position as sovereign leader of his own country. And how about those remaining African states under imperial dominance? By no means did Blacks believe that the fight for freedom and independence was over – far from it. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, African Americans continued to connect themselves with their African brethren abroad while fighting to gain equality at home. Today, the African continent is free from the colonial shackles of old, only to be replaced by a type of neo-colonialism. African-Americans have made some strides since the *Civil Rights Movement* only to find themselves questioning the civility of those trying disrupt progress. The fight is far from over. Black people around the world will not rest until Ethiopia has stretched out her hands unto God, and God has embraced them.
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