

DECOLONIZING BLYDEN

by

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(Under the Direction of Diane Batts Morrow)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to “decolonize” Edward W. Blyden, educator, diplomat, and black nationalist, by isolating three of his most controversial and contradicting ideologies—race, colonization, and religion—within the context of his “multiple consciousness”: the Negro, the American, and the African. Historians criticize Blyden for his disdain for mulattoes, pro-colonization and pro-imperialist stance, and his idealistic praise of Islam. The inaccuracy of these ideologies has received considerable attention by Blyden historians. The objective of this study is not to add to the criticism but to demystify and deconstruct Blyden’s rhetoric by analyzing the substance and intent of his arguments. Concentrating on his model for a West African nation-state allows more insight into the complexities of his thought. Studying the historical environment in which Blyden formulated his ideologies provide a more in-depth analysis into how his multiple consciousness evolved.

INDEX WORDS: American Colonization Society, Edward W. Blyden, Colonialism, Colonization Movement, Colorism, Emigration, Liberia, Multiple Consciousness

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: MULTIPLE CONSCIOUSNESS

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness. . . . One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife,—this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better truer self.¹

W. E. B. Du Bois eloquently characterized the constant social and psychological plight of the African American. By the turn of the twentieth century, most blacks lived with a dual identity—one black, the other American—and struggled to maintain some sort of equilibrium without the demise of one or the other. This paradox Du Bois defined as a “double-consciousness” manifested itself in the political, social, psychological, intellectual, and spiritual world of all African Americans. Indeed, Du Bois echoed the sentiments of most African Americans of his time. This ideal crossed the Atlantic during the nineteenth-century African colonization movement as African Americans who sought to escape the imposition of a double-consciousness subsequently constructed a third level of consciousness, the African, to adapt to their new environment.

In the same vein as Du Bois, the complex and controversial mind of Edward W. Blyden maintained a “triple-” or “multiple-consciousness”: the spiritual and intellectual development of a distinct Negro, American, and African identity merged into one politically, socially, and psychologically sound individual. My use of the word Negro, or black-consciousness, is no lapse in political correctness. Blyden stressed the significance

¹ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, ed. John Edgar Wideman (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 8-9.

of this term as a symbol of racial purity in order to differentiate “pure” blacks from so-called mulattoes. His American- or Westernized-consciousness led him to embrace both the colonization movement and European imperialism in Africa. However, Blyden’s African-consciousness embraced African traditions and customs during a period when Americo-Liberians often dismissed their ancestral culture. Indeed, Blyden’s methods appeared radical, contradictory and controversial then and even now. The intent of this study is to demystify and deconstruct Blyden’s rhetoric within the context of his multiple consciousness.²

In 1887, Blyden expressed the multiplicity and complexity of his ideals with the London release of his magnum opus, *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race*, a collection of his ideals from speeches, essays, articles, and pamphlets he organized into one book. Blyden presented a strategy for the vindication of the Negro race which included African assimilation of both an Islamic and a European colonial infrastructure, which he believed would hastened the development of a unified African nation-state. He simultaneously argued for the inclusion of traditional African customs and cultures and an ideology of racial purity which led to direct conflict with the prominent mulatto elite in Liberia.

In *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race*, Blyden expressed his controversial views on the significance of race and the need for colonization. In general, he argued that the various races around the world remained “distinct but equal.” That is, no race existed as superior or inferior to another. However, he stressed the need for racial purity and his ideal of the “pure” Negro which subsequently omitted mulattoes. Blyden also called for

² Three notable biographies of Blyden used in this study are: Edith Holden, *Blyden of Liberia: An Account of the Life and Labors of Edward Wilmot Blyden, LL.D. as Recorded in Letters and in Print* (New York: Vantage Press, 1966); Thomas W. Livingston, *Education and Race: A Biography of Edward Wilmot Blyden* (San Francisco: Glendessary Press, 1975); Hollis R. Lynch, *Edward Wilmot Blyden: Pan-Negro Patriot, 1832-1912* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967).

the colonization of Africa, solely by “pure” African Americans, under the protection and guidance of the American Colonization Society. Blyden believed that Western values and culture retarded the spiritual and intellectual development of African Americans. He argued that Christian blacks could never educate themselves because they learned by imitating white society. Similar to Du Bois, he argued, “From the lessons he every day receives, the Negro unconsciously imbibes the conviction that to be a great man he must be like the white man.” Blyden referred to this type of Christian black, not as “the comrade of the white man, but his imitator, his ape, his parasite.” He continued, “To be himself in a country where everything ridicules him, is to be nothing—less, worse than nothing.” Blyden found that religion formed the root of the problem, not Christianity per se, but in how Europeans presented the faith to black worshippers.³

In *Christianity*, Blyden also juxtaposed the flaws of Christian missionaries versus the more progressive Muslims in Africa. According to Blyden, Muslims proved to be more sensitive to African customs while the Christian evangelists remained ignorant or condescending towards the indigenous culture. Christianity, Blyden argued, did not wield the same influence in Africa as Islam despite centuries of contact with the indigenous population, primarily because of the slave trade. He believed that Africans equated the English language with “profligacy, plunder, and cruelty, and devoid of any connection with spiritual things.” The Arabic language, however, existed among the Africans as “the language of prayer and devotion, of religion and piety.” Indeed, African Muslims’ “unreasoning adherence to their faith has not been influenced by the disease of European casuistry.” Blyden called for well-trained, highly educated, open-minded and imaginative

³ Edward W. Blyden, *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race* (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 1887), 37, 277. Cited as *CINR*.

missionaries in Africa. He contended, however, that if Africans continued to reject Christianity, Islam remained a more “civilized” alternative to African “paganism.”⁴

The impact of *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race* in 1887 was monumental. Blyden demonstrated to a skeptical audience that, if given the opportunity, a black man could articulate his thoughts beyond the intellectual capacity of the most prominent scholars, black or white. Blyden’s ideals, manifested in his seminal work, catapulted him to fame and admiration throughout the Western world. But for most modern scholars his inability to enact his ideals remains his lasting legacy.

Historian Lamin Sanneh’s description of Blyden best epitomizes the sentiments of most historians: “Blyden’s ideology was a turbulent, inconsistent amalgam of colonization, civilization, and indigenization, with a Pan-African element thrown in to ratchet up the whole scheme to an abstract nationalist plane.”⁵ In an attempt to demystify Blyden’s rhetoric, the main chapters of this study center on the most controversial elements of his ideology—race, religion, and colonization—and the local and international environment from which he wrote. In essence this is not exclusively a story about E. W. Blyden but also about the racism that existed among African Americans, African colonization, and European colonial aspirations from the perspective of an educated African who wrote in the midst of these opposing forces. Similar to Du Bois’s “double-consciousness,” I divided Blyden’s ideals into three separate spheres or his “multiple-consciousness.”⁶

⁴ Blyden, *CINR*, v, 68-69.

⁵ Lamin Sanneh, *Abolitionists Abroad: American Blacks and the Making of Modern West Africa* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 232.

⁶ The following scholars criticized Blyden’s premise: M. Yu. Frenkel, “Edward Blyden and the Concept of African Personality,” *African Affairs* 77, 292 (July 1974): 277-289; Thomas W. Livingston, *Education and Race: A Biography of Edward Wilmot Blyden* (San Francisco: Glendessary Press, 1975); Hollis R. Lynch, *Edward Wilmot Blyden: Pan-Negro Patriot, 1832-1912* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967); V. Y.

In the first chapter I argue that Blyden's hatred towards mulattoes had more justification than historians are willing to admit. His "Black" or "Negro-consciousness" stressed racial purity and subsequently omitted mulattoes from his definition of blackness. Historians condemn Blyden for his racist attitude towards mulattoes, which permeated his political and personal life. The fact remains, however, that during the nineteenth century *colorism*—black-versus-mulatto prejudice—existed in the United States, the West Indies and Liberia. Blyden constructed his pure-Negro ideology as a response to the dominant mulatto caste that existed in Liberia and white racial purity rhetoric. Historians like Lynch and Livingston explain that Blyden's reaction to the mulattoes, a group he labeled as "the mongrel element," occurred because of paranoia and jealousy. These historians criticize Blyden's inability to reach a compromise with the mulattoes in Liberia as one of the main reasons for his lack of success as an administrator. This assertion leaves the reader with the false impression that the mulattoes had no fault in the situation, when in reality they acted just as ruthlessly as Blyden did to them. Mulattoes remained at the top of the color caste system in Liberia because of trade along the coast. In actuality, the color question veiled other issues such as political and racial affiliation. Blyden's failure to appease the mulattoes in Liberia is reflective of the disunity among black people around the world, not just embodied in one man.

The second chapter deals with Blyden's "American" or "Westernized consciousness" and how he utilized Western patronage. As previously stated, he believed that colonization by African Americans and Europeans could hasten the development of

Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988); Lamin Sanneh, *Abolitionists Abroad: American Blacks and the Making of Modern West Africa* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

his West African nation-state. Blyden supported European colonialism in Africa because he believed that the most advanced societies in the world existed in the West and he intended to copy their economic and political model for West Africa. He felt that Africans benefited from the nation-building infrastructure Europeans could provide. Blyden also supported African American colonization under the auspices of the American Colonization Society (ACS). This chapter covers the broader debate in the black community over colonization which stemmed from the birth of the ACS in 1817.⁷ The debate ended for Blyden at the turn of the century when he (temporarily) conceded defeat by proclaiming that African American colonization would occur in approximately three hundred years. Lynch and Livingston documented his travels to America to promote colonization but they only vaguely discuss where he fits into the intellectual debate among other black leaders.⁸

The final chapter deals with Blyden's "African-consciousness" or the role of the African in the development of his ideal West African nation. Blyden emphasized the need to maintain traditional African cultures and customs. Historians criticize this contradictory position because Blyden did not embrace African traditions in his personal life and promoted European colonialism which threatened the cultural foundation he sought to protect. This chapter also deals with the religious and more egalitarian components of Blyden's ideologies. Historians in the past have paid little attention to Blyden's egalitarianism. Also, the chapter explains why Blyden concentrated more on the spiritual and psychological development of the African through Islam, while he supported

⁷ One significant source for documented discourse, in America and Africa, regarding colonization is free black newspapers from the nineteenth century: *Freedom's Journal* (1827-1829), *The Colored American (Weekly Advocate)* (1837-1841), *The North Star* (1847-1851), *The National Era* (1847-1860), *Provincial Freeman* (1854-1857), *Frederick Douglass Paper* (1851-1859), and *The Christian Recorder* (1861-1902).

⁸ Livingston, *Education and Race*, 196.

European imperialism. Blyden saw in Islam the psychological strength needed to avoid the negative effects of Europeanization that occurred through Christianization. Blyden praised Islam for being more progressive than Christianity; however, he came to this conclusion based on his interactions with Muslim Africans in the hinterland. He witnessed their spiritual, social and personal devotion to Islam and attempted to instill these attributes into all “pure” Christian blacks in Liberia.

My intent is to view Blyden through his multiple-consciousness and look beyond his contradictions and analyze the *model* he attempted to construct. He drew from the European political and economic system, Islamic spiritual discipline and social development, and the traditions and customs of the indigenous African. Each he believed, if harnessed correctly, enabled the establishment of a prominent West African nation-state. This study does not merely address Blyden’s ideologies; it is also an examination of key issues such as colonization, colonialism, and *colorism* in the nineteenth century, while studying how and why Blyden chose his controversial views. The template for analyzing Blyden’s multiple consciousness is first to study the environment in which he developed his consciousness; next, to analyze his rhetoric through the lens of his “model” for his West African nation-state; finally, to demystify and to deconstruct his ideology to extract the meaning or intent behind his thought. Again, the presented ideologies are his most controversial, primarily because scholars contend that they are tactless, inaccurate or illogical. Historians debate over the significance of Blyden as one of the founders of Pan-Africanism and black culturalism. Most concentrate on his failure to implement his ideals and his pro-European stance which has tarnished his legacy. The ultimate goal of

this study is to *decolonize* Blyden and concentrate on the impact of his ideals, rather than focusing on their relative success through the benefit of hindsight.

CHAPTER 2

BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS

In 1869, Blyden wrote a private correspondence to a Board member of the New York State Colonization Society. He elaborated on the importance of black racial purity which centered on removing mulattoes from the racial classification of blacks. Blyden characterized mulattoes as physically and psychologically unfit to play a productive role in the development of Liberia. He claimed mulattoes could not handle the inclement weather and rigorous labor, as opposed to “pure” blacks. Blyden also drew attention, by name, to numerous deaths of influential colored Liberians and commented, “What has become of the half and three-fourths white *protégés*? . . . So far as physical health and vigor are concerned, I would rather take my chance here as a pure Caucasian than as a mongrel.”⁹

He argued that the susceptibility of mulattoes to diseases, such as malaria, hindered their productivity as emigrants and native-born Liberians. “Mulattoes born and brought up in America, if they can pass through the acclimating process, stand the climate much better than those born here, but only by engaging in as little physical or mental labour as possible. . . . This will account in part for our want of enterprise and progress here.” Blyden attributed Liberia’s lack of economic and political success to the indolence of mulattoes. He shaped his appeal on the basis of black racial purity through the omission of biracial people stating, “The friends of the Negro in America must learn

⁹ Smithsonian Institute, Annual Report, 1870. Hollis R. Lynch, ed. *Black Spokesman: Selected Published Writings of Edward Wilmot Blyden* (New York: Humanities Press, 1971), 187-9.

to believe that the Negro can exist and prosper without the aid of white blood in his veins.” He concluded, “The Negro is being taught to respect himself, and soon he will think it no honour to mingle his blood with that of the Caucasian, Indian, or Mongolian.”¹⁰

The rhetoric used in the letter to the New York Colonization Society illustrates the main components of Blyden’s “black consciousness” or his colorism. I define colorism as black-versus-mulatto discrimination on the basis of skin color. Similar to racism between blacks and whites, colorism is the foundation of Blyden’s black purity ideology—the exclusion of mulattoes from the social definition of “blacks.” Colorism existed in Liberian society under a color caste system that exhibited social, economic, and political dominance of mulattoes over blacks. As Lynch observed, “This division became institutionalized socially in masonic clubs, and politically, into two parties.”¹¹

Blyden developed his black consciousness within the context of the dominant culture. That is, he created his ideology as a direct response to the stigma implied against blacks by white efforts of racial purification. Thus, Blyden coveted his blackness with pride: he embraced Negroid features that Western society despised such as a broad nose and full lips; he exploited the Hamitic myth, referring to the Negroid features of the Sphinx; he also rejected the racist contention that designated mulattoes, a reference to the mule, to the black race. Indeed, Blyden embraced the term “Negro” because it symbolized black purity and the deletion of mulattoes. According to Blyden, the categorization of mulattoes as black implied that African blood tainted “pure” European blood. He argued, “For by prejudice the nondescript progeny is consigned to our side,

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Lynch, *Pan-Negro*, 38; Frenkel, “African Personality,” 280.

even if they are three-fourths or seven-eighths white, and thus involve us in an inextricable ‘muddle.’”¹²

Historians criticize Blyden for his racial ideology often labeling him as “either incredibly naive or vicious” for his contempt of mulattoes.¹³ I argue that there is more depth to his arguments than asserted by historians. In an effort to “decolonize” Blyden this chapter not only unravels the complexities of the “color question” among Americo-Liberians in their political and social struggles but it also attempts to isolate the motivating factors that led Blyden to develop his color consciousness, such as aggression by mulattoes to maintain the status quo and even domestic issues with his wife and family.

Indeed, Blyden’s environment remains pivotal to his response to colorism. As Livingston vaguely states, “The ‘class of public officials’ was ‘bright’ or ‘light’ or ‘mulatto,’ and the first four presidents of Liberia were all partly white.” In Liberia “partly” emblemized the ambiguity of colorism. Although a color caste system existed other determinants outside of skin color added to the definition of “black” or “mulatto” such as class, racial, and political affiliation. Contested color designations further complicate the problem. For example, one person might characterize herself as black, while another person considers that individual mulatto. For the sake of clarity references to terms such as “black political party” or “mulatto elite” connote the phenotype of the dominant party, not the entire group. For example, the “mulatto elite” consisted primarily of mulattoes and their dark-skinned supporters.

¹² Smithsonian Institute, “Annual Report,” 1870. Lynch, *Black Spokesman*, 187-9.

¹³ Livingston, *Education and Race*, 197.

Blyden's disdain for mulattoes had devastating ramifications. It divided blacks and mulattoes in Liberian politics and society and ultimately led to the nation's first coup d'état in 1871. I argue that Blyden constructed his ideology as a response to mulattoes who sought to secure their position atop of the color caste system. Analyzing the most salient and controversial component of Blyden's black consciousness, his colorism or disdain for mulattoes, provides further insight into the complexities of race and color in Liberia.

Blyden was born on August 3, 1832 to free "pure" black parents, Romeo and Judith Blyden, whose lineages traced back to the Igbo people of eastern Nigeria. Born into relative privilege in the predominately Jewish, and English-speaking section of St. Thomas, Blyden attributed his desires for religion and literature to his mother, a seamstress and school teacher who paid for his primary and private tuition. While living in the Dutch West Indian colony, Blyden became the pupil of the Reverend John Knox of the Dutch Reformed Church in 1845. Blyden had previously returned to St. Thomas with his family after spending two years in Porto Cabello, Venezuela, where he learned to speak fluent Spanish.¹⁴ He later joined a literary society known as the St. Thomas Athenaeum. This book club boasted a membership of 121 members and provided volumes of literature in various languages. Blyden attracted the attention of his teacher by writing biblical essays and preparing exegeses of Knox's sermons.¹⁵ Indeed, Blyden's intellectual capabilities enabled him to attract the patronage of benevolent whites, who assisted in his religious and educational pursuits. Knox suggested Blyden pursue theological studies at his alma mater, Rutgers.

¹⁴ Lynch, *Pan-Negro*, 3-4.

¹⁵ Livingston, *Education and Race*, 17-21.

After Rutgers denied Blyden admission to their Theological College in 1850, he spent several months in New York City where he contemplated returning to St. Thomas and ending his pursuit of higher learning.¹⁶ While in America, Blyden made the acquaintances of several white people, including John B. Pinney of the New York Colonization Society and Walter Lowrie of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions. Impressed by Blyden's intellect, Pinney and Lowrie convinced him to attend Alexander High School in Monrovia as a student and a missionary. Blyden chose "to accept the offer of the New York Colonization Society to furnish me a passage to Liberia, in hopes to enjoy the advantages of the Alexander High School, then beginning its noble work."¹⁷

In October 1851, Blyden enrolled at Alexander High School, recently established under the auspices of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions. Prior to its official opening, he took private lessons under Princeton graduate and school principal, the Reverend David A. Wilson. Blyden's intellectual potential impressed Wilson as much as it had Knox. Wilson commented on the prospects of his new student. "He is a promising youth. He is modest, respectful, of a kindly disposition, of good natural talents, & attainments quite beyond his years—attainments, too, chiefly self-acquired." He continued, "I point him out as the one most likely to render valuable assistance to the School. If I am not greatly mistaken, he will make an able minister, & if not an able teacher, at least one competent to fill my place."¹⁸ Indeed, Blyden made an immediate impression, as he had in other places, when he arrived in Monrovia.

During his first decade in Liberia Blyden edited the *Liberia Herald*, published the pamphlet, *A Voice from Bleeding Africa*, and instigated the first Liberian expedition into

¹⁶ Holden, *Blyden of Liberia*, 22-3.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ (Oct. 1, 1851). As quoted in Holden, *Blyden of Liberia*, 30.

the unexplored hinterland, under the administration of President Stephen A. Benson (1856-1864).¹⁹ In October of 1858, the Presbytery of West Africa, organized the previous year, received Blyden who “after a very protracted and thorough trial . . . was unanimously admitted to the ministry.” He later became officially ordained in January 1860.²⁰ While working for the Presbyterian Church of Monrovia, Blyden tutored other candidates for ordination, such as Hopkins W. Erskine.²¹ As Wilson predicted, Blyden became Principal of Alexander High School in 1858.²² By 1861, he left this position to become Professor of Classics at the newly established Liberia College.

Blyden’s intelligence, ambition and amicable personality enabled him to flourish as a member of the religious and intellectual community in Liberia, the West Indies and America. Prior to the 1860s, he never publicly expressed his hatred for mulattoes which renders it difficult to pinpoint exactly when it developed. A three-tier racial caste system existed in St. Thomas and Blyden further observed that blacks tended to perform the brunt of arduous labor while Europeans and mulattoes lived in relative ease in Porto Cabello. The elevated status of mulattoes may have carried over to Liberia when he encountered a similar racial hierarchy with mulattoes at the top of the Americo-Liberian social structure.²³ However, Blyden never expressed sentiments against mulattoes while in the West Indies, America, and his first decade in Liberia.

The closest friction Blyden had with the status quo occurred at an 1857 address during Liberia’s annual celebration of its independence, in which he criticized Liberians

¹⁹ The expedition reached approximately 280 miles to the Mandinka kingdom of Kwaña. Lynch, *Pan-Negro*, 42 n. 37.

²⁰ As quoted in Holden, *Blyden of Liberia*, 52.

²¹ Livingston, *Education and Race*, 41.

²² *African Repository* 45, no. 10 (Oct. 1869): 298.

²³ Livingston, *Education and Race*, 18-9.

for their foreign dependency, materialism, moral decadence and cultural disregard for the indigenous population. But he directed this critique to all Liberians, black and mulatto. Upon his arrival in Liberia a black versus mulatto division did exist both socially and politically, but as Lynch suggests, Blyden “was always anxious to promote unity.”²⁴ Nevertheless, by the 1860s, Blyden developed his color consciousness and unleashed a flurry of anti-mulatto rhetoric at the population he deemed responsible for corrupting the political interests of dark-skinned blacks and the lower-class. Blyden sought to eliminate the actual presence of mulattoes in Liberia by restricting their emigration and attacking their political hegemony with his own “pure” black political party. This tension subsequently led to the first overt signs of hostilities among Americo-Liberians on the basis of color. Although, the color hierarchy existed prior to his emigration to Liberia, Blyden became the main protagonist of black-mulatto conflict.

Two major political parties emerged in post-independent Liberia: the True Liberian Party, later named the Republican Party, and the Old Whig Party. The former represented the elite class and remained dominated by the mulattoes. Common Liberians became the constituents of the latter. The exclusive nature of the Republican Party centered on both race and class. The majority of the party consisted of mulatto merchants and property-owners, while their educated dark-skinned supporters remained the minority. This group manipulated politics through patronage and nepotism which effectively consolidated key political positions for members of their party. The mulatto elite contended that darker-skinned blacks managed inclement weather far better than

²⁴ Lynch, *Pan-Negro*, 20-1.

light-skinned blacks, thus their participation as laborers in agriculture proved to be more “natural” than mulattoes destined for office positions in the government.²⁵

Americo-Liberians, whenever possible, opted for government positions, not primarily for higher wages but the lucrative possibilities that existed. For example, customs officials often skimmed as much as two-thirds of the revenues before it reached the government treasury. Politicians often enacted bills for their own personal benefit at the public’s expense. The corrupt bureaucracy remained more rigid because of the relatively ineffective position of the executive branch. The president, whose term of office lasted only two years, did not possess the political muscle to reform the government, even if desired. As a collective group, local politicians exhibited more power over the presidency primarily because his tentative position remained contingent on the support of these individuals for re-election.²⁶ Thus an oligarchy or merchant aristocracy existed in Liberia, in which the political elite—wealthy, educated, primarily traders—maintained their supremacy at the expense of the commoners and natives. As scholar A. Karna observed, “The official classes now regarded themselves as patricians, while the masses or common people . . . were looked upon as plebians in the Old Roman sense.”²⁷ Because mulattoes dominated the political scene, Blyden found only one group culpable for the dysfunctional bureaucracy. “The men who have done most to corrupt the country by using public moneys—for selfish purposes . . . have been half-breeds.”²⁸

²⁵ Amos J. Beyan, *The American Colonization Society and the Creation of the Liberian State: A Historical Perspective, 1822-1900* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1991), 97; Lynch, *Pan-Negro*, 38.

²⁶ Yekutiel Gershoni, *Black Colonialism: The Americo-Liberian Scramble for the Hinterland*, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1985), 18-9.

²⁷ As quoted by Beyan, *Creation*, 97.

²⁸ Blyden to Coppinger (Oct. 19, 1874). Hollis Lynch, ed., *Selected Letters of Edward Wilmot Blyden* (Millwood, NY: KTO Press, 1978), 174-175.

In an address before the Maine State Colonization Society in 1862, Blyden made his first public statement expressing his disdain for mulattoes, when he commented that “there is more Negro hate in those men than they are aware of.” He made reference to mulattoes who publicly opposed the colonization scheme. With a bit of sarcasm he advised, “I am not by any means blaming those who, availing themselves of their complexion, can escape the indignities in this land of caste. Nature has given them that advantage, and they should use it. And those who are ‘blue-eyed’ enough and ‘fair’ enough with Saxon blood, should go, as many have already done, altogether with the whites.”²⁹ Blyden argued that prominent mulattoes had ulterior motives for ridiculing the colonization movement. “They cling to the side of their father. . . . They have no inward consciousness and no outward demonstration of power and efficiency on the side of their mother.” Blyden remained convinced that mulattoes consciously and subconsciously chose to side with their white “father” over the interests and productivity of their black “mother.” This belief caused him to view mulattoes with such contempt and formulated his color consciousness.³⁰

For Blyden, the thought of mulattoes “choosing sides” against the black race, their “mother,” for the white race, “their fathers,” emphasized the need for their removal from the black race. He contended that “there is no people in whom the desire for race integrity and race preservation is stronger than in the Negro.” He believed racial pride to be an inherent quality of the black race and the true arguments lay in the methods of preserving racial integrity and efficiency. For Blyden, denial of one’s race equated removal from that race. He contended that “If a man does not feel it [racial integrity]—if it does not rise

²⁹ Address before the Maine State Colonization Society (June 26, 1862). Lynch, *Black Spokesman*, 16-7.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

up with spontaneous and inspiring power in his heart—then he has neither part nor lot in it [and] . . . much better be left unconvinced.”³¹ Blyden argued that nature enabled the mulattoes to distance themselves from the black race and “her” struggles. He conceded that “they have a right to do so. But all we beg of them is, to let us alone.”³²

Blyden rarely spoke publicly about his opinions of mulattoes, probably because of the advice of his friend William Coppinger, Secretary of the American Colonization Society (1864-1892).³³ In December of 1850, Coppinger escorted Blyden to the *Liberia Packet*, the vessel that began his journey to Liberia. As Blyden reminisced many years later, “You will remember that you accompanied me when I passed through Philadelphia, a boy. . . . I was in great fear of being seized for a slave under the operations of the Fugitive Slave law.”³⁴ Coppinger knew that Blyden’s resentment towards mulattoes had the potential to cause conflict between blacks and mulattoes, which is probably why the Secretary suggested they remain private. The frequent correspondences between the two men spanned several decades. The significance of Coppinger is that he enabled Blyden to vent his frustrations over both public and private issues.

Blyden had his own specifications for the class of emigrants sent to Liberia, the most ardent of which revolved around color. He held strong convictions against mulatto emigration to the black Republic warning Coppinger that “you should advise mongrels wishing to emigrate to Liberia that it would be better for their own sakes for them to remain in America, at least not to come to Liberia.”³⁵ Despite the numerous political and

³¹ Blyden, *CINR*, 122-3.

³² Address before the Main State Colonization Society (June 26, 1862). Lynch, *Black Spokesman*, 16-7.

³³ William Coppinger served as Secretary of the Pennsylvania Colonization Society prior to his appointment to its parent organization, the American Colonization Society.

³⁴ Blyden to Coppinger (Sept. 13, 1884). As quoted in Holden, *Blyden of Liberia*, 25.

³⁵ Blyden to Coppinger (April 1879). *Records of the ACS*, vol. 19, pt. 1.

social contributions made by mulatto politicians, clergymen and abolitionists in the United States, Blyden contended that intellectual mulattoes presented no benefit for the development of Liberia. “Keep the [Frederick] Douglasses, [John M.] Langstons, [Charles B.] Purvises with you—where they prefer to remain.” He believed that “pure” blacks needed leadership from their own kind. “Send us if you can, the [Henry H.] Garnets, the [John B.] Reeves, the [William J.] Wilsons and in a few years we will show you an African nation of some power and usefulness.”³⁶

By arguing that Liberia did not need any mulatto leadership, Blyden essentially excluded a significant portion of the skilled and educated black population, a small minority during this period, who also labored for the improvement of the race. This mulatto element no doubt had the potential of providing a significant impact on the development of the young Republic. However, despite their contributions to black enlightenment, Blyden still appealed to the ACS to “keep that class of people in America. There may be good men among them who would labor for the Negro, but as a rule, they are destroyers.”³⁷

Blyden impressed his views upon other important black figures who observed the existence of a color caste system in Liberia and subsequently constructed similar ideals and their own color consciousness. In a letter to Coppinger, Blyden attached a copy of a correspondence written by John H. Smyth, close friend and United States Minister to Liberia. Smyth responded to an inquiry from a St. Louis dentist who requested information about emigrating to Liberia. In the letter, Smyth echoed sentiments against the emigration of mulattoes that paralleled Blyden’s own rhetoric:

³⁶ Blyden to Coppinger (Oct. 19, 1874). Lynch, *Selected Letters*, 175.

³⁷ Blyden to Coppinger (June 1876). *Ibid*, 214.

To contribute successfully to the up building of a race it is necessary that you be one of the race—that you be a Negro, pure and simple. If you be a gentleman of mixed race, your instincts will be partially those of the race of which the consciousness of the larger portion of the blood of that race predominates in you. . . . You will discover a prejudice in yourself for which you may not be able to account, but which will make you unhappy in Africa, and, as far as you are concerned, retard its progress toward civilization, and you would be what too many have, perhaps unconsciously been, a stumbling block to my race.³⁸

Despite the psychoanalytic probe into the consciousness of biracial emigrants, Blyden commented, “I consider the above letter excellent, and I trust that the spirit of it will be observed by the Society in all future emigrations.” Such an extreme letter to a prospective emigrant illustrates how the intensity of Blyden’s colorism began to spread among other prominent blacks. In their attempts to filter emigration by insisting that the ACS send only “pure” black or dark-skinned emigrants, Blyden and his supporters possibly hindered the flow of colonization by both mulattoes and blacks with their stern rhetoric. Nevertheless, for Blyden’s nation-state “model” the type of citizens, “pure” black, remained an essential component. Before closing the letter Blyden hastened to add that “Smyth says that he has not heard from the dentist since.”³⁹

Blyden’s criticism of mulattoes who chose to side with their white “father” over their black “mother” may provide the source of his hatred towards mulattoes. Because they had the opportunity to “choose,” Blyden deemed those who embraced white interests over black as traitors. This influenced Blyden’s contention that potential mulatto leaders could never be of valuable assistance to the progress of Liberia. This became a bold stance because the number of educated blacks proved to be a minority. It is no wonder that tensions arose between supporters of his ideology and the biracial leaders who already resided in the Republic. Blyden’s ideology of black purity through the

³⁸ Blyden to Coppinger (April 17, 1879). *Records of the ACS*, vol. 19, pt.1.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

omission of mulattoes became so fervent that it eventually hindered the progress of the Republic in coming years. He subsequently collaborated with a small number of prominent blacks, such as Smyth, whose rhetoric often paralleled his own color consciousness, thus substantiating a small yet formidable opposition to the mulatto elite. A clash between Blyden and the mulatto opposition became inevitable.

In 1871, an article in the *New York Tribune* titled, “Liberia Not Prospering” set off shockwaves within the settler community, especially among the Liberian elite. The newspaper cited the observations of “a gentleman . . . whose official position has given him the opportunity for exact knowledge of the present condition of Liberia.” With embarrassing detail the correspondent reported on the deteriorating political and social conditions of the Republic. The article noted that political quarrels within the Republic intensified during the recent presidential election. “President Roye, the successful candidate [and] present incumbent, took charge of the ballots . . . and declared himself elected for four years. . . . The opposition, however, were successful, their candidate, ex-President J. J. Roberts, receiving an almost unanimous vote. Both Roye and Roberts insist upon being President, and there is every danger of a conflict.”⁴⁰

Amidst the tension between rival parties, the paper accused the Republic of perpetuating a caste system. “The question of color has been raised by H. W. Dennis, agent of the American Colonization Society, . . . President-elect [J. J.] Roberts, and other mulattos, who do not like to see a full-blooded negro at the head of the Government.”⁴¹

The article exposed the internal political and social conflicts, the product of colorism. As an independent black nation, positive global opinion justified Americo-Liberians’ claims

⁴⁰ *New York Tribune* (New York), 9 June 1871.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

to “civilization” and elevated Western status. The correspondent in Liberia remained anonymous, which did not prevent speculation.

The *Tribune* article infuriated one of Blyden’s staunchest political opponents, Henry W. Dennis. Born in Snow Hill, Maryland, Dennis emigrated to Liberia at the age of six. His notable political positions included service in the House of Representatives, also as its speaker, and Secretary of the Treasury (1874). In 1851, the year of Blyden’s emigration, the ACS appointed Dennis as its agent, a position which he held until his death in 1876.⁴² His name appeared in the *Tribune* article as one of the “mulattos, who do not like to see a full-blooded negro at the head of the Government.”⁴³ Dennis immediately contacted William Coppinger regarding the alleged culprits behind the piece. “I feel satisfied that the Rev. Dr. Pinney is the author, and that his correspondents in Liberia . . . are Blyden, Gibson, Warner and Crummell, all four of whom are strongly prejudice [against] . . . light people.” According to the ACS agent, Blyden’s issue with color became noticeable at Liberia College. “It would require a great deal of writing to recount to you the many things said and done by these men to bring about hostile feelings on the part of the blacks against the light people.”⁴⁴

Dennis explained that “the first manifestation of it was in 1866-7 by some of the Professors against Roberts.”⁴⁵ J. J. Roberts, an octoroon, was by far the most popular Liberian of his time. He distinguished himself from other prominent Liberians primarily

⁴² D. Elwood Dunn and Svend E. Holsoe, *Historical Dictionary of Liberia* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1985), 57.

⁴³ *New York Tribune* (New York), 9 June 1871.

⁴⁴ H. W. Dennis to Coppinger (Aug. 22, 1871). *Records of the ACS*, series 1B, vol. 15, pt. 2. Dennis likely referred to the Reverend John B. Pinney, the white Presbyterian minister and executive member of the ACS and New York Colonization Society who assisted Blyden in his emigration to Liberia; Garretson W. Gibson, future President of Liberia (1900-1904) and Liberia College (1892-1896); Daniel B. Warner, former President of Liberia (1864-1868) who Blyden served under as Secretary of State; and the Reverend Alexander Crummell, professor at Liberia College and Blyden’s closest contemporary.

⁴⁵ H. W. Dennis to Coppinger (Aug. 22, 1871). *Records of the ACS*, series 1B, vol. 15, pt. 2.

because of his superior leadership during wars and treaties with the natives that enabled the expansion of Liberia's coastline. After nearly twenty years of colonial rule under white ACS agents, Roberts became Liberia's first (and only) non-white colonial governor in 1841 and the first President of the Republic after establishing its independence in 1847. As an educated, wealthy emigrant engaged in coastal trade and active in both the political and cultural life of the nation, Roberts epitomized the Liberian elite. He became the first President of Liberia College in 1862.⁴⁶

While serving as college president, Roberts chastised Blyden and other professors for frequent absences from the College. Blyden apparently interpreted this as an act of color discrimination on the part of Roberts. According to Dennis, it became evident that "a deep feeling of prejudice against the President of the institution [existed] on account of his color." He maintained that Blyden did not hesitate to express his opinions of mulattoes with the faculty. "Professor Blyden during those times, and frequently since, would speak freely with one on the subject of his feelings against the light people and especially against Mr. Roberts."⁴⁷

Disputes over the location of Liberia College took place that further divided the black- and mulatto-dominated camps, led by Blyden and Roberts respectively. Blyden, Crummell and then President Stephen A. Benson argued that the College should be established in the interior at Clay Ashland, away from the distractions of coastal city life in Monrovia and more accessible to the indigenous population. Meanwhile, mulattoes such as Roberts argued for Monrovia because most mulattoes lived there and the location

⁴⁶ Beyan, *Creation*, 88, 91.

⁴⁷ H. W. Dennis to Coppinger (Aug. 22, 1871). *Records of the ACS*, series 1B, vol. 15, pt. 2.

along the coast heightened real estate values and the prestige of the College.⁴⁸

Furthermore, the merchant elite feared that moving from the coast would jeopardize their middleman status between European and native traders.

The dispute over the College's location emphasizes the complexities of the color question and the difficulty in classifying one as "black" or "mulatto." For example, Benson and Warner preceded Edward Roye as Presidents of Liberia but Roye is considered the first full-black President of the Republic. Indeed, Benson's affiliation with the mulatto-dominated Republican Party complicates the matter because he politically opposed J. J. Roberts, an octoroon. Furthermore, Benson received the 1855 nomination for the presidency because of his "darker" skin, which probably did not eliminate him as a "mulatto" because his opponent during that election was the dark-skinned Roye.⁴⁹ Thus, by affiliating with Blyden, a staunch opponent of mulattoes, Benson became a part of the "black" opposition, at least regarding the location of the College.

The issue is further complicated by Dennis who held Blyden responsible for the *Tribune* article. "My dear Sir, Mrs. Blyden informs me that it was reported in Liberia that I had written to America against you. Nothing can be more false. . . . I should let my hand wither or my tongue cleave to the end of my mouth before I would write or utter anything that would interfere with the respect which any foreigners might entertain for a small community of my race struggling for position."⁵⁰ Despite Blyden's assurances Dennis never trusted him, and rightfully so. For Blyden never trusted Dennis and always held strong convictions that he "sought to damage me on what he called the 'caste

⁴⁸ Livingston, *Education and Race*, 66.

⁴⁹ Dunn, *Historical Dictionary*, 26.

⁵⁰ Copy of a letter from Blyden to H.W. Dennis. Dennis to Coppinger (Sept. 9, 1871). *Records of the ACS*, series 1B, vol. 15, pt.2.

question.”⁵¹ Blyden’s assertion had substance because Dennis always contended that “he has been the cause and instigator of much evil among us. He has been the champion in the doctrine of caste and has done what he could to arouse all black-skinned men against light and colored men.”⁵²

The relationship between Blyden and Dennis further exposes the nuances of the color question. Dennis sent a refutation to the editor of the *Tribune* to clarify his position on the whole caste issue. In doing so, he described the complexities of the color caste in Liberia. In reference to the article he wrote, “It seems, from the construction of the paragraph to have been the design to have the public to believe that I am a mulatto, which I am not.” He clarified that “my father was a full blooded negro, a black man; my mother though of light complexion, was of negro parents.”⁵³ Dennis exemplifies the nuances of colorism, especially within the context of Blyden’s racial ideology.

Blyden made references to the “cliquish” nature of the mulattoes. However, members of this clique did not consist of biracial members exclusively. Dark-skinned blacks also benefited from the caste system, despite the dominance of mulattoes. Blyden himself, a member of the elite, also had mulatto allies,⁵⁴ as his close relationships with Presidents S. A. Benson and D. B. Warner, “who has been my constant friend,” attests.⁵⁵ Both men, not dark-skinned, possibly had similar complexions to Dennis or lighter—if Dennis was indeed three-fourths black or higher. According Dennis’s statement “black-skinned men against light and colored men” refers to “pure” black versus quadroon and

⁵¹ Blyden to Coppinger (June 9, 1876). Lynch, *Selected Letters*, 217.

⁵² H. W. Dennis to Coppinger (May 6, 1871). *Records of the ACS*, series 1B, vol. 15, pt. 2.

⁵³ H. W. Dennis to the Editor of the *New York Tribune* (Aug. 5, 1871). *Records of the ACS*, series 1B, vol. 15, pt. 2.

⁵⁴ Blyden appointed R. A. Sherman, a prominent mulatto, to the Board of Trustees of Liberia College in the early 1880s. Livingston, *Education and Race*, 124, 138.

⁵⁵ Blyden to Rev. John C. Lowrie of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions (Jan. 15, 1875). Lynch, *Selected Letters*, 183.

octoroon mulattoes. However, the issue is further complicated with the “colored men” who could “pass” for either black or mulatto.⁵⁶

Apparently, Blyden’s definition of “mulatto” incorporated any black—possessing a drop of European blood—who impeded the development of the black race. Of course, this included those who opposed his political ideals, as with the case in the debate over expansion into the hinterland. Blyden further reasoned that “pure” blacks who remained passive to the color caste system did so because of their previous conditioning. “When they come here, the poor blacks accustomed to the rule of white men in America, very soon allow the mulattoes to acquire an unnatural and mischievous ascendancy, thinking as they always pretend, that they love Africa.”⁵⁷

Within the ranks of the Liberian political elite dark-skinned blacks did prosper, although not as proportionate as mulattoes. The “mulatto elite” to whom I refer does not connote the political dominance of exclusively biracial Liberians. The existence of mulattoes at the top of the color caste occurred, in part, because of circumstance.

The Liberian elite consisted of those who benefited from several factors: education, skills, emigration with previous capital, and access to foreign assistance. The success of most emigrants remained contingent on these variables. Those who emigrated during this period consisted primarily of the free black and formerly enslaved. The elevated status of mulattoes over blacks in America improved their chances of reaching elite status in Liberia. As seen with Blyden, educated dark-skinned blacks also became a part of the upper-class. Once in Liberia, the elite tended to solidify their political, economic, and social position. A color line did exist but without tension. Blyden became

⁵⁶ H. W. Dennis to Coppinger (May 6, 1871). *Records of the ACS*, series 1B, vol. 15, pt. 2.

⁵⁷ Blyden to Coppinger (Oct. 19, 1874). *Ibid*, 177.

one of the primary agitators of colorism, primarily because the elite tended to be mulatto. However, Benson and Dennis illustrate how other components such as class, political, and racial affiliation played a factor, but the most apparent distinction became color. The fact that Blyden and his allies stood in direct opposition to the political interests of the elite, who tended to be mulatto, justified his claims to his supporters when the opposition struck.⁵⁸

In 1864, Benson came under charges of misappropriation of public funds which Blyden and his supporters viewed as an attempt by the mulattoes and their supporters to remove one of their political foes. Matters took a terrible turn in 1865 when Benson suddenly died because of stress from the charges. His death solidified in the minds of the black elite that the mulattoes had killed a good man behind trumped up charges to prevent movement into the interior.⁵⁹

The tensions with Roberts led Blyden's friend Alexander Crummell, Professor of English and Modern Languages, to offer his resignation to the Boston Board of Trustees of Liberia College, which they accepted.⁶⁰ Thus a division occurred between the professors at the College on the basis of color. As previously stated, prominent blacks often held multiple positions in the relatively small intellectual community of Liberia.

⁵⁸ The 1850 U. S. Census is the first of its kind to distinguish between blacks and mulattoes. That year the census recorded in the United States 3,204,313 slaves: 2,957,657 blacks (92%) and 246,656 mulattos (8%). The census also recorded 434,495 free African Americans: 275,400 blacks (63%) and 159,095 (37%) mulattos. In most slave states across the country mulattoes had a disproportionate advantage over blacks relative to the free-slave ratio, most notably in places along the coast such as Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi and South Carolina. The most apparent is Louisiana which mulattoes represented 19,835 of the 244,809 (8%) slave population versus 14,083 of the 17,462 (81%) of the free population. The census illustrates the significance of color in relation to freedom for African Americans. William Loren Katz, ed. *Negro Population of the United States, 1790-1915* (Arnos Press, 1968), 211; Ira Berlin, "The Structure of the Free Negro Caste in the Antebellum United States," *Journal of Social History* 9, no. 3 (Spring 1976): 300.

⁵⁹ Lynch, *Pan-Negro*, 42, n. 38.

⁶⁰ Livingston, *Education and Race*, 66, 137.

Therefore, the tensions between Roberts and Blyden no doubt carried over into the political forum.

In 1866, Blyden wrote a letter to Alexander Crummell that provides some insight into the political climate that resonated from Liberia College. He referred to a conversation with the Secretary of the Treasury who advised him “when matters come to a crisis, knock down and drag out.” According to Blyden, the Secretary expressed his discontent with the mulattoes stating “There is a terrible conflict . . . ahead between the black and the confounded bastards.”⁶¹ Like the Secretary, Blyden displayed contempt for the exclusive nature of the mulattoes, which he argued went against the political and social interests of dark-skinned Liberians. “There can be no harmony hereafter between the professors and the president of Liberia College and his ‘clique.’” He emphasized the severity of the political situation and the significance of the color question, “a question which unless soon settled may bring upon this country the scenes that have been enacted in Haiti.”⁶²

Historians often label Blyden as paranoid and unjust in his criticisms of mulattoes; however, in the environment leading up to 1871, both parties warrant censure.⁶³ The conflict with Roberts and the debate over the location of the College demonstrates how Blyden’s anti-mulatto and pro-hinterland ideologies, which led to the black-mulatto tension, received the growing support of other prominent blacks. Blyden argued that the coastal region, where most of the Liberian settlements stood, corrupted both Americo-Liberians and Africans. Therefore, the Republic needed to expand into the interior. The merchant elite, the majority mulattoes who acquired their wealth as coastal

⁶¹ As quoted by Blyden. Blyden to Alexander Crummell (April 14, 1866). Lynch, *Selected Letters*, 72-73.

⁶² Blyden to Alexander Crummell (April 14, 1866). Lynch, *Selected Letters*, 73.

⁶³ Livingston, *Education and Race*, 135-6.

traders, sought to hinder Blyden, and his supporters' efforts to expand into the hinterland by any means necessary.

The political tactics used by the mulatto elite—charges against Benson—further divided the two parties and, in the minds of his supporters, solidified Blyden's claims of the maladaptive nature of the mulatto element. His emphasis on restricting mulatto emigration occurred partially because the presence of additional colored politicians hindered his attempts to expand the Republic into the hinterland and gain control of the government. After Benson's death, it became evident to Blyden and his supporters that they had to overthrow the political dominance of the mulatto elite.

Blyden's political ideology did include the elevation of the social status of women. In 1861, he traveled with Alexander Crummell to Europe in an effort to secure funds for the construction of a girls' seminary school in Liberia. While in London he met with prominent humanitarians who supported his cause.⁶⁴ Although unsuccessful in receiving funds at Edinburgh, Scotland, where he addressed the United Presbyterian Synod, Blyden remained an ardent proponent of female enlightenment. "I cannot see why our sisters should not receive exactly the same general culture as we do." Blyden's democratic stance also included some republican sentiment. "We need not fear that they will be less graceful, less natural, or less womanly; but we may be sure that they will make wiser mothers, more appreciative wives, and more affectionate sisters."⁶⁵ Blyden considered egalitarianism towards women an essential component for the Republic and also a mark of cultural development.

⁶⁴ Lynch, *Pan-Negro*, 26.

⁶⁵ Blyden, *CINR*, 89.

In 1872, Blyden participated in an expedition into the hinterland, where he encountered the Muslim city of Billeh, on the Scarcies River. At this “sort of University town, devoted altogether to the cultivation of Mohammedan learning,” Blyden discovered that among the “several hundred young men; there is also a class of girls.” He considered this a sign of progress stating, “I had witnessed of capacities and susceptibilities utterly inconsistent with the theory that dooms such a people to a state of perpetual barbarism.”⁶⁶ In 1882, Blyden proudly announced that Jenny Davis, a former principal at a school in Missouri and “a Christian lady of education and culture, in this country, longing to labour in the land of her fathers, has been appointed as first Principal” of the newly opened female department at Liberia College.⁶⁷ Indeed, Blyden cherished the contributions of women, viewing their inclusion as a positive step towards vindicating the black race. His wife, Sarah, however, had her own suspicions of Blyden’s interests in female enlightenment. As Livingston commented, “Her husband’s interest in female education apparently angered Sarah, for she suspected his roving eye.”⁶⁸

Outside the political arena, personal issues at home had their own melancholy effect on Blyden’s consciousness. In 1856, while a student at Alexander High School, he married Sarah Yates, a mulatto born in Richmond, Virginia who emigrated to Liberia from Toronto in 1852. She was the niece of B. P. Yates, vice-president in the S. A. Benson administration and a prominent mulatto.⁶⁹ In a personal letter, Blyden expressed his grievances caused by his domestic situation. “I live among an unsympathizing

⁶⁶ Edward W. Blyden, “Report on the Expedition to Falaba, January to March 1872. (With an Appendix Respecting Dr. Livingstone)” *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of London* 17, no. 2 (1872-1873): 118.

⁶⁷ Delivered at the Anniversary of the ACS (Jan. 1883). Blyden, *CINR*, 103.

⁶⁸ Livingston, *Education and Race*, 49, 84-5, 129, 157.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 41.

people—and I regret to say an unsympathizing family.” He continued, “Uncongenial, incompatible, unsympathetic, my wife makes the burden of my life sore, very sore and heavy.” He compared his political strife with the mulattoes to his domestic situation commenting, “I am persecuted *outside*, but more *inside*. . . . I feel like making my escape to the interior and never allowing myself to be heard from again.” Blyden’s disappointment with his mulatto wife and family no doubt manifested outside of the home and influenced his ideology, perhaps contributing to his disdain for mulattoes.⁷⁰

Sarah, however, had good reason for her skepticism. In 1871, Blyden’s opponents stirred rumors about his relationship with the wife of his good friend and political ally President Edward James Roye.⁷¹ Blyden had shown more attention to Roye’s wife than previous first ladies, primarily because she was the first “pure” black spouse of a Liberian president.⁷² This sudden shift in personality, however, led to stories of infidelity between Roye’s wife and Blyden. One such rumor alleged that “Mr. Roye was looking in a box among some old papers, when he found a letter that had been written to his wife, by the Rev. Professor E. W. Blyden, showing that an . . . intimacy existed between them. This led to the discovery that they had been intimate since 1868, and that she had allowed him all the privileges of a husband.”⁷³ The story of infidelity itself, whether true or not, served its purpose for Blyden’s political opponents who sought to tarnish his public image. As Livingston asserts, “his relationships with ladies, young girls in his ‘private’ classes and others, were the subject of rumor and scandal.”⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Blyden to Rev. John C. Lowrie of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions (Jan. 15, 1875). Lynch, *Selected Letters*, 183.

⁷¹ Lynch, *Pan-Negro*, 49.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 52.

⁷³ William M. Davis to Coppinger (June 3, 1871). *Records of the ACS*, series 1B, vol. 15, pt. 2.

⁷⁴ Livingston, *Education and Race*, 67.

In 1876, stories began to circulate that Blyden was having another affair. He became smitten with Anna Erskine, the teenage daughter of the Presbyterian minister Hopkins W. Erskine, whom Blyden had previously instructed for his ordination. Anna proved to be a refreshing contrast to Sarah in Blyden's eyes: intelligent, ambitious, industrious and, most important, "pure" black. His interest in Anna escalated during their private lessons where she studied Latin, French and Arabic languages. Intrigued by her intellect, warm nature and desire to work among the natives, Blyden, a Presbyterian minister, escaped from the trammels of his domestic life and entered into an illicit liaison with his pupil.⁷⁵

Blyden initially denied rumors of any infidelity; however, in 1876 Anna fled to Sierra Leone and gave birth to the first of their five children: Rakiatu Theodora Aliena, Nemeta Carolina, Isa Cleopatra Ayesatu, and Amina Judith Anna.⁷⁶ The amalgamation of Christian and Muslim names, as Livingston observed, "evidencing his pro-Muslim inclinations,"⁷⁷ emphasized Blyden's interests in Islamic and native culture, which reflects why he justified his ongoing relationship with Anna by endorsing polygamy. He explained, "It may appear strange to the average man that there is a spiritual side to polygamy. Yet on second thought it must be so. In this, as in other matters, evil be to him who evil thinks."⁷⁸ Blyden's domestic situation is pivotal when studying his consciousness. It provides further insight into the motives behind the man, which perhaps reveals the source of his constant travel, industrious nature, and racial ideology.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 111-2.

⁷⁶ One child died at an early age without a name. Ibid, 158-9.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Edward Wilmot Blyden, *African Life and Custom* (London: African Publication Society, 1908; reprint, 1969), 84.

Blyden's children from Sarah proved to be a disappointment. They did not exhibit the same intellectual capacity as their father. As Livingston observed, "Their few letters to the various American mission and colonization boards are replete with spelling and grammatical errors." Their eldest daughter abandoned her racial and religious ties—at least Presbyterian—by becoming a Baptist and marrying a "Hindoo."⁷⁹ After Columbia denied him admission into its College of Physicians and Surgeons, Edward, Jr. ended his educational pursuits and became an elevator operator in New York. Another daughter suffered from epilepsy which "probably strengthened Blyden's belief in the biological disaster of 'race mixture'" or miscegenation.⁸⁰

Blyden professed, "My wife seems entirely improvable. She is of the mind and temperament of the people around her." He complained, "I have but three or four persons who sympathize with me and to whom I am at liberty to communicate my inward sorrows. . . . Such men as Ex-President Warner, who has been my constant friend, and he often consoles me by saying that if I were blessed with domestic comfort, I could not do the amount of work which I am able to accomplish."⁸¹ In 1893, Sarah and her daughters moved back to the United States. Blyden continued his relationship with Anna for nearly forty years, until his death.

Historians often equate Blyden's egalitarianism towards women as a means to fornicate. As Livingston insinuates, "Blyden threw himself with conspicuous energy into praise and edification of Liberian womanhood."⁸² What is distasteful about this comment is that it yields to a superficial analysis of the democratic nature of Blyden's ideology.

⁷⁹ As quoted in Livingston, *Education and Race*, 157.

⁸⁰ Quoted by Livingston, *Education and Race*, 157-8.

⁸¹ Blyden to Rev. John C. Lowrie of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions (Jan. 15, 1875). Lynch, *Selected Letters*, 183.

⁸² Livingston, *Education and Race*, 38.

Blyden's efforts to educate, and thus empower, women is viewed as an attempt at sexual gratification. This disregards his sentiment that the inclusion of women exhibited signs of cultural and racial enlightenment. Historians focus on Blyden's illicit relationship with Anna Erskine as confirmation of his womanizing. However, they overlook that Blyden became smitten by Anna because she exhibited all the attributes that Sarah had not. And for a man of Blyden's ambition and intellectual abilities, these qualities proved to be a necessity. Blyden loved Anna and not his wife. This is illustrated by the fact that the two remained together for over thirty years until his death.⁸³

On May 5, 1871 a "mulatto-incited mob"⁸⁴ gathered in the streets of Monrovia. The focus of the mob's aggression centered on Edward Blyden. Up until this point, Blyden had spoken publicly about his hatred towards mulattoes only once—at the address before the Maine State Colonization Society in 1862. With the tension between blacks and mulattoes at its zenith, his private letter to the trustee at the New York State Colonization Society became public knowledge when it appeared in an annual report of the Smithsonian Institute titled, "On Mixed Races in Liberia." Coppinger unwittingly mailed a copy of the Smithsonian report to Henry W. Dennis—ACS agent and staunch opponent of Blyden.⁸⁵

When the article appeared in Liberia "a mob of some twenty men . . . went to Blyden's house in broad day, dragged him out from under his wife's bed, put a rope around his neck, and forced him to go in that shameful manner through the most public streets down to Mr. Roye's house. . . . 'Tis said that Mr. Roye paid or offered to pay that

⁸³ Anna Erskine remained in Freetown where she taught at Muslim schools from 1886 to 1926. She died in 1932. Livingston, *Education and Race*, 159.

⁸⁴ Lynch, *Pan-Negro*, 53.

⁸⁵ Livingston, *Education and Race*, 81.

mob two hundred dollars to do that illegal act.”⁸⁶ Apparently a vengeful President conspired with an infuriated mulatto elite and orchestrated the attack on Blyden. That a man of the cloth committed adultery and during the process of mob “justice,” hid “under his wife’s bed” provided the Republicans with the political leverage they needed to humiliate Blyden.⁸⁷ The attack on Blyden escalated the ongoing tension between the black and mulatto political parties which subsequently led to the coup of 1871.

Blyden historians agree that a color caste system did exist in Liberia but fail to interpret how Liberians themselves distinguished between “black” and “mulatto.”⁸⁸ That is, the fine line that separates one from being labeled as black or mulatto often remained contingent on other issues such as class, political and racial affiliation of both the designator and the designatee. Blyden’s colorism attacked mulattoes as a group because of their political and economic dominance and their lack of racial integrity and loyalty. He considered the latter an essential component of the black race. But on an individual level, Blyden often waived his color sentiments for light- or lighter-skinned blacks who agreed with him politically, primarily because he equated his political goals with vindicating the black race. These brown or mulattoes who supported Blyden received his friendship. However, light- or lighter-skinned blacks who disagreed with his political philosophy became “mulattoes,” thus affiliated with the “flaws” of the broader group.

Blyden’s goal of relocation into the hinterland stood at odds with the Liberian elite who gained their wealth along the coast. Because the majority of the elite happened to be mulatto, Blyden became an agitator of colorism. A color line did exist, though not

⁸⁶ William M. Davis to Coppinger (June 3, 1871). *Records of the ACS*, series 1B, vol. 15, pt. 2.

⁸⁷ Lynch, *Pan-Negro*, 53.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 38; Frenkel, “African Personality,” 280; Livingston, *Education and Race*, 69.

as rigid, but Blyden's rhetoric veiled the political and class implications of a dark-skinned Liberian elite.

The final source of Blyden's colorism came from his domestic situation. Blyden's disdain for his wife and family fueled his contempt and construction of his racial ideology. Blyden's rhetoric on the inferiority of mulattoes originated with his disappointment with Sarah, a mulatto, and their children. Blyden took solace in the arms of another "pure" black woman, which made him vulnerable to further attacks by his political enemies. What historians fail to realize is the possibility that Blyden actually fell in love with another woman because he clearly did not love his wife. Blyden's domestic problems no doubt motivated his racial ideology, treks into the hinterland and activity in Liberian politics.

Blyden's black consciousness became a response to white society's theory of racial purity. He countered this theory by constructing his own black purity ideology. Blyden's rhetoric distanced itself from mulattoes because, he argued, as a group they consciously benefited from their elevated position that nature afforded. In his attempt to create a sense of racial pride, Blyden subsequently caused divisions among blacks along color lines when in actuality politics and class played a more pivotal role. Regardless, the political motivations of all Liberians, black and mulatto, inevitably hindered the development of the black Republic.

Although, an investigation by the Presbytery of West Africa found him innocent of adultery—with Roye's wife—historians still label Blyden as womanizer primarily because of his relationship with Anna.⁸⁹ In actuality, the mulatto elite probably

⁸⁹ Hollis R. Lynch, "Native Pastorate Controversy and Cultural Ethno-Centrism in Sierra Leone 1871-1874," *Journal of African History* 5, no. 3 (1964): 399 n. 15.

approached Roye, after the publication of the Smithsonian article, with allegations about Blyden and his wife in an effort to divide and conquer, and avenge. The whole incident reveals the cunning of Blyden's political enemies, which enabled them to divide the two leaders of the black opposition and reinforced his disdain for biracial people until his final days. As Blyden commented, "When I am dead—write nothing on my tombstone but . . . 'He hated mulattoes.'"⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Feb. 16, 1912. As quoted from Lynch, *Pan-Negro*, 139.

CHAPTER 3

AMERICAN/WESTERN CONSCIOUSNESS

The second division of Edward Blyden's multiple consciousness consists of his "American" or "Western consciousness" — "this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity."⁹¹ Three basic components constitute Blyden's Western consciousness: Americanization, colonization and colonialism. The first, Americanization, focuses on the essential nature of Blyden's, and African Americans', westernization. I argue that pro-colonization, anti-colonization and anti-American Colonization Society (ACS) rhetoric used by African American leaders illustrate the inherent qualities of the Americanization of blacks.

The first half of this chapter focuses on the establishment of the ACS and the response of the black intellectual community. African American leaders from across the North gathered at the Bethel Church in Philadelphia in 1817 to protest against both the colonization scheme and the white, slaveholding ACS. Protests occurred across the country in the form of pamphlets by prominent blacks such as David Walker, and anti-colonization meetings, whose minutes black newspapers reported for their African American readers. A small minority of prominent blacks, such as Martin Delany, opted for emigration but not under the auspices of the ACS, because of its condescension towards African Americans. Free blacks, such as Edward Blyden, and the formerly enslaved chose emigration through the controversial ACS. The rhetoric used to justify

⁹¹ Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 8-9.

their position on colonization reflected fundamental Western and American values: democratic principles, republican ideologies and biblical language. Black leaders who affiliated themselves with American or Western civilization internalized these components, which provide background into the essential nature of Blyden's Western consciousness.

The second-half of this chapter analyzes Blyden's attempts to acquire Western patronage. Colonization under the auspices of the ACS and a European protectorate for his nation-state model include the tangible components of Blyden's Western consciousness. He argued that only the ACS had the necessary means of transporting African Americans to Liberia. Just as fervently, Blyden insisted that a European or American colonial power would hasten the physical development of his nation-state, by providing the political and economic knowledge of nation building essential for the solid and functional infrastructure for his West African state. Blyden argued that a colonial power also provided the necessary protection against the imperial interests of other European nations.

Historians criticize Blyden severely for his pro-colonization and pro-imperialist stance. The purpose of this study is not to contribute to the previous historiography that focuses on the apparent inaccuracies of Blyden's ideology, but to provide substance to them. In an attempt to "decolonize" Blyden, I argue that the intangible and tangible components of his Western consciousness played a significant role in his decision to incorporate Western patronage. First, his "American" consciousness internalized Western values—republican, democratic, Christian—that in effect he, like other blacks, viewed himself through the same lenses as other (white) Western citizens. In essence, their skin

color had no significance, in their eyes, as a group who believed in the inherent principles of human rights. Therefore, as American citizens and Christian followers, nineteenth-century African Americans such as Blyden viewed these Western “structures”—system of government, the Church, democratic principles—as essential components to vindicating their race.

A westernized Blyden sought to re-establish these components in West Africa. Blyden believed that in order to institute these Western values in Africa, Western assistance became a necessity. By the early 1860s, it became evident that Liberia lacked the personnel and nation-building knowledge needed for creating a functioning government. Also during this period, European colonial interest intensified. As a small black Republic surrounded by European colonial powers, Blyden believed that the protection of a Western power would deter the colonial aspirations of other European countries. In effect, Europeans existed as a necessary evil, for Western patronage became an act of necessity for developing and protecting Blyden’s West African nation-state.

Early nineteenth-century America experienced an ongoing development of progressive reform manifested in utopian-like religious, political and social societies and organizations.⁹² The formation of these associations transcended racial boundaries as African Americans sought to obtain political and social rights affirmed so eloquently by American patriots in the Declaration of Independence.⁹³ This era of reform provided the

⁹² After the War of 1812 Americans established hundreds of religious-based reform societies such as the American Temperance Union, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, the American Peace Society, the American Sunday School Union, the American Education Society, and the American Society for Meliorating the Condition of the Jews, to name a few. P. J. Staudenraus, *The African Colonization Movement, 1816-1865* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), 12.

⁹³ Organizations such as the Free African Society, the African Benevolent Society, the New York African Society for Mutual Relief, the New York African Marine Fund, and the African Methodist Episcopal Church, to name a few. Colin A. Palmer, *Passageways: An Interpretive History of Black America Volume I: 1619-1863* (New York: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1998), 212-5.

catalyst for progressive-minded individuals who strived to remedy society's most salient problems. One such dilemma for European Americans included the burgeoning "uncivilized" free black population whom they deemed lacked moral and religious restraint. For African Americans the issue remained the omnipresent racism that limited their political, economic, and social mobility to a quasi-free status in the North and slave in the South. White anxiety over the prospects of a democracy that included blacks, coupled with the African American struggle for civil rights and civil liberties, culminated in a controversial solution: African colonization.

For most African Americans colonization symbolized a scandalous plot by the planter elite and racist politicians to remove blacks from their homeland. More than the removal itself, the reasoning for colonization provoked black retaliation. The belief that despite centuries of contact with white civilization, blacks remained inherently incapable of assimilating Western morals and values infuriated African Americans. In particular the black elite, who embraced the ideals of Western culture, sought to counter the colonizationists' efforts and more specifically their rhetoric. Those who opposed colonization did so because of the premise of black inferiority, not merely colonization itself. Indeed most prominent blacks internalized a superiority complex, similar to whites, against native Africans but also struggled with an inferiority complex as members of a stigmatized race. In an attempt to assimilate into the dominant culture free blacks drew attention to the conditions, rather than supposed inherent flaws, of their race. In actuality, African Americans agreed with white society that a "heathen" element existed in Africa that needed "civilizing." The argument levied by black leaders against colonization became more of an issue of justifying their rights as American citizens than vindication

of the race. That is, black leaders structured their arguments using republican rhetoric, implying that the transgressions against their race contradicted democratic values and Western principles. Thus, African Americans used debates about colonization to establish themselves as “civilized” in the eyes of dominant society.

Before studying the discourse among prominent black leaders, it is important to analyze the background of the colonization movement from the European American aspect and the significance of the American Colonization Society. White efforts to remove blacks from dominant society date as far back as the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In 1691, the Virginia colonial legislature prevented legal emancipation without the removal of manumitted Africans from the colony.⁹⁴ The Reverend Samuel Hopkins of Rhode Island proposed the voluntary emigration of manumitted slaves to West Africa for evangelical purposes in 1773.⁹⁵ In *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1787) Thomas Jefferson proposed that slaves “should be colonized to such place as the circumstances of the time should render most proper . . . ; to declare them free and independent people . . . ; and to send vessels at the same time to other parts of the world for an equal number of white inhabitants; to induce whom to migrate hither.”⁹⁶ Outside the United States, in 1787, the Committee for the Black Poor, a philanthropic society based in London, sent approximately 350 black emigrants to Sierra Leone which later became a British colony in 1808.⁹⁷ British colonization efforts in West Africa inspired the Reverend Robert

⁹⁴ Penelope Campbell, *Maryland in Africa: The Maryland State Colonization Society, 1831-1857* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1971), 3.

⁹⁵ Tom W. Shick, *Behold the Promised Land: A History of Afro-American Settler Society in Nineteenth-Century Liberia* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1977), 4-5.

⁹⁶ Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, ed. William Peden (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1955), 138.

⁹⁷ Staudenraus, *African Colonization Movement*, 8-9.

Finley, a prominent Presbyterian from New Jersey, to orchestrate a similar colonization movement in the United States.⁹⁸

In December 1816, a meeting took place among some of the country's most influential businessmen, politicians and clergymen at the Davis Hotel in Washington D.C. Influenced by Finley and led by congressman Henry Clay, men such as Judge Bushrod Washington—George Washington's nephew, Francis Scott Key and Daniel Webster met to solve the "Negro problem" that plagued the United States.⁹⁹ The following year a new benevolent organization appeared on the political scene christened "The American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour in the United States," also known as the American Colonization Society (ACS). The ACS sent its first agents and colonists to West Africa in 1820, at Sierra Leone, and eventually established its settlers further south at Cape Mesurado. By 1822, the colonists established their new settlement, Monrovia, after President James Monroe, and subsequently named their colony Liberia.¹⁰⁰

The ACS influenced the political and social institutions of Liberia from abroad by implementing a system rooted in paternalism. Southern slaveholders held prominent positions in the ACS which made the colony's dependence on American assistance during its turbulent years often mirror the master-slave relationship on the plantation.¹⁰¹ In the United States the ACS held a tenuous position during its early years because it had to maintain its political balance between abolitionists and pro-slavery advocates. In order

⁹⁸ Besides establishing the ACS, Finley briefly served as president of the University of Georgia before his death in 1817. Staudenraus, *African Colonization Movement*, 33.

⁹⁹ Other members of the ACS included James Madison, James Monroe, General Andrew Jackson, John C. Calhoun, and Elias B. Caldwell. *First Annual Report of the American Colonization Society* (1818), 11.

¹⁰⁰ Staudenraus, *African Colonization Movement*, 27-28.

¹⁰¹ Beyan, *Creation*, 87.

to obtain funding for the colonization project, society officials adopted numerous facades to persuade its respective audiences.

In the North, colonizationists presented emigration as a more judicious form of emancipation; in the South, the removal of the free black population prevented potential slave insurrections; moralism appealed to the more progressive-minded individuals as colonization reportedly hastened the spread of Christianity and assisted in the demise of the slave trade from its African source. In order to deal with such complexities the ACS assisted in the establishment of auxiliary or state colonization societies that utilized “traveling agents” who campaigned stringently at the local level.¹⁰²

The ACS presented colonization as a more benevolent form of emancipation. “How have the descendants of Africa been brought to the shores of America? By the most nefarious traffic that ever disgraced the annals of man. . . . May we not, by a gradual and persevering exertion, restore Africa that portion of her race among us that shall be liberated?”¹⁰³ According to the Society, colonization gave the repatriates the opportunity of “civilizing” their African cousins. “Every emigrant to Africa is a missionary carrying with him credentials in the holy cause of civilization, religion, and free institutions. . . . They will be received as long lost brethren restored to the embraces of their friends and their kindred, by the dispensations of a wise Providence.”¹⁰⁴ The religious overtones and egalitarian language contradicted the pro-slavery sentiments of the founding members who owned slaves.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² States such as Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Mississippi established their own colonization societies that eventually sought autonomy from the ACS, which is further discussed in chapter two. Staudenraus, *African Colonization Movement*, 108-9; 237; 242.

¹⁰³ *First Annual Report of the ACS* (1818), 9.

¹⁰⁴ *The Tenth Annual Report of the ACS* (1827), 22.

¹⁰⁵ Large slaveholders held higher positions in the ACS hierarchy than small slaveholders. Beyan, *Creation*, 13.

In the South, the ACS targeted free people of color in order to justify the need for colonization. The presence alone of free blacks represented danger to the social structure. In a letter published in the Society's first annual report, South Carolina congressman Robert G. Harper stated that "the free people of color are a nuisance and burden. They contribute greatly to the corruption of the slaves, and to aggravate the evils of their condition, by rendering them idle, discontented, and disobedient."¹⁰⁶ Henry Clay, future president of the ACS, asserted that "of all the classes of our population, the most vicious is that of the free coloured. It is the inevitable result of their moral, political, and civil degradation. Contaminated themselves, they extend their vices to all around them, to the slaves and to the whites."¹⁰⁷ Slave insurrections such as the Haitian slave revolt led by Toussiant L'Ouverture (1790s), Gabriel Prosser (1800), former slave Denmark Vesey (1820), and Nat Turner's Rebellion (1831), all substantiated the slaveholders' fears.¹⁰⁸

The rhetoric used by the ACS proved to be contradictory. African Americans, although ill-equipped and unprepared to accept civilized culture in the United States, became ideal "missionaries" to spread the same values abroad that could not be obtained at home.¹⁰⁹ The inconsistencies, however apparent, emphasize how ACS officials used egalitarian language of uplifting and civilizing a downtrodden black race through the expansion of Christian morals and republican values. "It is not this Society which has produced the great moral revolution which the age exhibits. What would they, who reproach us, have done?" And the rhetoric included democratic language typical of the time period. "If they would repress all tendencies towards Liberty and ultimate

¹⁰⁶ *The First Annual Report of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour of the United States* (1818), 16. Further referenced as the Annual Report of the ACS.

¹⁰⁷ *The Tenth Annual Report of the ACS* (1827), 21.

¹⁰⁸ Lockett, "Abraham Lincoln and Colonization," 429.

¹⁰⁹ Beyan, *Creation*, 4.

emancipation, they must do more than put down the benevolent efforts of this Society. They must go back to the era of our Liberty and Independence, and muzzle the cannon which thunders its annual joyous return.”¹¹⁰

African American opposition to colonization proved to be just as rigorous and at times paralleled the language used by the ACS. Free blacks in the North asserted their desires for liberty and racial equality by creating black newspapers, free black networking societies, and literature that attacked the institution of slavery. The repatriation of black Americans to Africa proved one of the most pertinent issues that black leaders addressed. The egalitarian rhetoric of the American Revolution—liberty, equality, and fraternity—resonated in the thoughts and prayers of America’s free black and slave communities. Although the majority of African Americans dismissed the idea of emigration, the colonization movement still proved to be a divisive issue among black leaders who sought to validate the black race in the eyes of a white dominant culture at home and abroad.¹¹¹

Once established, the ACS met with an instant backlash from the black community, most notably from David Walker. In his *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World* (1829), Walker, a radical abolitionist from Boston, became one of the most charismatic opponents of the colonization scheme. “Do the colonizationists think to send us off without first being reconciled to us? Do they think to bundle us up like brutes and send us off . . . ? Have they not to be reconciled to us, or reconcile us to them, for the cruelties with which they have afflicted our fathers and us?”¹¹² Walker also argued that

¹¹⁰ *The Tenth Annual Report of the ACS* (1827), 22-3; Beyan, *Creation*, 4.

¹¹¹ Palmer, *Passageways*, 212-213.

¹¹² David Walker, *David Walker’s Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*, ed. Peter P. Hinks (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 71.

America, not Africa, remained the home of African Americans. “Do they think to drive us from our country and homes, after having enriched it with our blood and tears, and keep back millions of our dear brethren, sunk in the most barbarous wretchedness?”¹¹³

Walker embodied the nationalist sentiments of African Americans who believed they held as much, if not more, entitlement to America as whites. A letter written by African Methodist Episcopal Church Bishop Richard Allen to Walker also echoed this sentiment: ““This land which we have watered with our *tears* and *our blood*, is now our *mother country*, and we are well satisfied to stay where wisdom abounds and the gospel is free.”¹¹⁴ Because the ACS emphasized the colonization of free blacks but not the enslaved, African colonization symbolized for free blacks the abandonment of their enslaved brethren, thus linking colonization with the perpetuation of the institution of slavery.

Walker used harsh language towards blacks who chose to emigrate. “Will any of us leave our homes and go to Africa? . . . Those who are ignorant enough to go to Africa, the coloured people ought to be glad to have them go, for if they are ignorant enough to let the whites *fool* them off to Africa, they would be no small injury to us if they reside in this country.”¹¹⁵ Samuel Cornish, co-editor of *Freedom’s Journal*, echoed Walker’s sentiments, “Any coloured man of common intelligence, who gives his countenance and influence to that colony, further than its missionary object and interest extend, should be considered as a traitor to his brethren, and discarded by every respectable man of

¹¹³ Walker, *Appeal*, 71.

¹¹⁴ Quote from a letter written to Walker by Bishop Richard Allen, African Methodist Episcopal Church. Walker, *Appeal*, 60.

¹¹⁵ See footnote. Walker, *Appeal*, 67.

colour.”¹¹⁶ Black leaders did not consider black missionaries who intended to “civilize” or spread Western culture as traitors, only black emigrants.

Walker also used strong apocalyptic language centered on biblical scripture. “Will not those who were burnt up in Sodom and Gomorrah rise up in judgment against Christian Americans with the Bible in their hands, and condemn them?”¹¹⁷ Although he directed most of his criticisms towards slaveholders, he gave an apocalyptic warning to even benevolent whites warning, “Some of you are good men; but the will of my God must be done. Those avaricious and ungodly tyrants among you, I am awfully afraid will drag down the vengeance of God upon you. When God Almighty commences his battle on the continent of America, for the oppression of his people, tyrants will wish they never were born.”¹¹⁸ His use of fiery language shows how Walker internalized the significance of Christianity, one component of Western civilization, to the extent that “his” God sought revenge for the transgressions of European Americans. Furthermore, Walker combined his rage against the status quo with using the same republican rhetoric against white colonizationists. “Compare your own language . . . extracted from your Declaration of Independence, with your cruelties and murders inflicted by your cruel and unmerciful fathers and yourselves on our fathers and on us—men who have never given your fathers or you the least provocation!!!!!!”¹¹⁹

Walker’s fiery *Appeal* articulates several interesting points. First, African Americans viewed the United States as their entitlement. Their kinship with their

¹¹⁶ Samuel Cornish and John Russwurm co-edited *Freedom’s Journal*, the first African American newspaper in the United States. Established in 1827, newspaper collapsed in 1829 after the two became divided over the issue of colonization. As quoted in Walker, *Appeal*, 70, 127.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*, 61.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*, 49.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*, 78-9.

enslaved brethren past and present, coupled with the republican ideologies, made America their home both politically and emotionally. Second, the religious overtones used by Walker, the belief that “my God” sought revenge for “his people,” highlights, not the fact that religion was important to African Americans, but how essential religion was in the language used to argue against colonization. The rage that Walker displayed evolved from the inability of whites to view and treat blacks as Christians, and as Americans.¹²⁰

The issue at hand centered more on citizenship than solely on race. This is not to say that African Americans did not identify with their race; however, white infringements of black rights as citizens galvanized black opposition. In major cities across the North free blacks gathered as one voice to strike down the ACS and its auxiliaries. Their voices echoed through independent organizations such as black newspapers and anti-colonization meetings that sought to establish their rights as Americans.

During the mid-antebellum period African American newspapers, written for blacks by blacks, levied their opinions and also documented the activities of anti-colonization meetings held by African Americans in the North. One particular paper, the New York-based *Colored American*, edited by Samuel E. Cornish, documented the discourse at several anti-colonization conferences. Congregants stated their positions on colonization, the ACS, and state societies with similar democratic zeal: “The views and plans of the American Colonization Society and its auxiliaries, although professing to be for our benefit, we consider as opposed to our welfare, at variance with our sentiments heretofore known and expressed, and against all moral principles of TRUTH, JUSTICE,

¹²⁰ Ella Forbes, “African-American Resistance to Colonization,” *Journal of Black Studies* 21, no. 2 (Dec., 1990): 216.

AND HUMAN LIBERTY.”¹²¹ In 1841, “one feeling and one principle seemed to pervade the meeting” of black anti-colonization supporters who assembled in response to a recent Maryland Colonization Convention. “On the altar of our ruined prospects and blasted hopes, we should swear unceasing, uncompromising war against expatriation in every form and shape.”¹²²

At another rally, in 1839, the paper reported the sentiments of participants who linked colonization with enslavement stating, “that where our opinions are known, the blighting influence of that unhallowed offspring of slavery cannot, so successfully be exercised against us.” Their arguments also centered on political and religious language. “We, therefore . . . do deliberately and unanimously enter our protest *against the scheme* [colonization], as *anti-republican, anti-christian* and *anti-humane*.”¹²³

An anti-colonization convention in Albany, NY illustrates the connection between anti-colonization language and biblical analogies when one observer quoted the Rev. George Storrs’s comment, “My prayer to God is, that the American Colonizationists might desist from their oppressive system before they were colonized as were the Egyptian colonizationists, (into the Red Sea.)”¹²⁴ The language used in black newspapers such as the *Colored American* and anti-colonization meetings not only highlights black opposition to the colonization scheme, but more importantly stresses how the context of biblical and republican analogies and ideologies defined the opposition’s rhetoric.

¹²¹ As quoted in *Colored American* (New York), December 15, 1838., [database on-line]; available from <http://www.accessible.com> (Item #4399).

¹²² As quoted in *Colored American* (New York), July 3, 1841., [database on-line]; available from <http://www.accessible.com> (Item #16894).

¹²³ *Colored American* (New York), January 12, 1839., [database on-line]; available from <http://www.accessible.com> (Item #4474).

¹²⁴ As quoted in *Colored American* (New York), July 17, 1841., [database on-line]; available from <http://www.accessible.com> (Item #16936).

For African Americans the 1850s remained the most turbulent decade of the antebellum period. Westward expansion, inspired by the ideal of Manifest Destiny, brought the issue of slavery to the forefront of American politics. Two decisions extended the grasps of Southern slaveholders beyond the Mason-Dixon line and reiterated to blacks their second-class status: the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 that enabled the retrieval of runaway slaves in the North and the Dred Scott decision of 1857 where Chief Justice Roger Taney concluded that blacks “had no rights which the white man was bound to respect.”¹²⁵ The rigid political climate brought the fear of enslavement to E. W. Blyden and other free blacks which strengthened the appeal of emigration.¹²⁶ During the 1830s and 1840s black negativity towards colonization reached its peak; however, during the 1850s, sentiment in favor of emigration surged in comparison to the previous two decades.¹²⁷

Black opposition to the Society and its auxiliaries did not always indicate opposition to the scheme. African Americans actually proposed emigration as early as the late-eighteenth century in New England.¹²⁸ The first emigrationist, Paul Cuffe, financed his and 38 other African Americans’ voyage to Sierra Leone in 1815.¹²⁹ Some of the staunchest opponents of colonization, such as Richard Allen and Samuel Cornish, briefly held pro-emigration sentiments.¹³⁰ John Russwurm, a Jamaican-born mulatto and co-editor of the *Freedom’s Journal*, changed his stance on both colonization and the ACS

¹²⁵ As quoted in Palmer, *Passageways*, 190-3.

¹²⁶ Lynch, *Selected Letters*, 15.

¹²⁷ Miller, *Black Nationality*, 93.

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, 3; Palmer, *Passageways*, 199.

¹²⁹ After its inception, Cuffe assisted the ACS prior to his death in 1817. Dunn, *Dictionary of Liberia*, 52-3.

¹³⁰ Miller, *Black Nationality*, 270.

and became governor of Maryland in Liberia.¹³¹ Indeed, African American disdain for colonization derived from their contempt for the ACS because of the condescending language used at its inception. As historian Tom Shick observed, “Colonization had become an anathema to the antislavery movement. Afro-Americans, considered colonization to be a vicious scheme designed to perpetuate slavery by removing the bondsman’s natural ally from America.”¹³² The displacement of civil liberties during the 1850s increased African American desire for emigration but not through the ACS. One of the most famous proponents of emigration and staunch critic of the ACS was Martin Delany.

Martin Delany gained notoriety with his 1852 release of *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States*. Motivated by the enactment of the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 and his dismissal from Harvard Medical School because of a racist petition, Delany changed from abolitionist to emigrationist.¹³³ He attacked the ACS stating, “We look upon the American Colonization Society as one of the most arrant enemies of the colored man. . . . We believe it to be anti-Christian in its character, and misanthropic in its pretended sympathies.”¹³⁴ He and other black anti-ACS/pro-emigrationists proposed colonization to other locations outside of Liberia such as Haiti, Canada, Central America, South America, and even the western frontier of the United States.

¹³¹ Russwurm remained governor of the Maryland colony from 1836 until his death in 1851. Dunn, *Dictionary of Liberia*, 151-2; Palmer, *Passageways*, 203.

¹³² Shick, *Behold the Promised Land*, 7.

¹³³ Sanneh, *Abolitionist Abroad*, 170.

¹³⁴ Martin Robinson Delany, *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States* (Philadelphia: Martin Delany, 1852; Reprint, New York: Arnos Press and The New York Times, 1968), 31-2.

Delany not only criticized the ACS but also directed his harshest criticisms at the independent Republic of Liberia. “Liberia is not an Independent Republic: in fact, it is not an independent nation at all; but a poor *miserable mockery*—a *burlesque* on a government—a pitiful dependency on the American Colonizationists.” Delany also criticized the geographical location of the Republic, “being located in the sixth degree of latitude North of the equator, in a district signally unhealthy, rendering it objectionable as a place of destination for the colored people of the United States.” But his most stringent attack came against the Americo-Liberian political elite who remained under the paternalistic rule of the ACS. He criticized the executive office stating, “the principal man, called President, in Liberia, being the echo—a mere parrot of . . . leaders of the Colonization scheme—to do as they bid, and say what they tell him.” He chastised the whole political system in Liberia and claimed it as “a mockery of a government—a disgrace to the office pretended to be held—a parody on the position assumed. Liberia in Africa, is a mere dependency of Southern slaveholders, and American Colonizationists, and unworthy of any respectful consideration.”¹³⁵

The alternative to Africa, Delany argued, at least early in his career, proved to be the Americas. “Where shall we go? We must not leave this continent; America is our destination and our home.”¹³⁶ He believed fugitive bondsmen could immigrate to places such as Canada or Mexico “for surely, he who can make his way from Arkansas to Canada, can find his way from Kentucky to Mexico. The moment his foot touches this land South, he is free.”¹³⁷ As for free blacks, however, the warm climate and fertile soil

¹³⁵ Delany, *Condition*, 169-70.

¹³⁶ *Ibid*, 171.

¹³⁷ *Ibid*, 177-8.

of places such as Nicaragua and New Grenada seemed more appealing.¹³⁸ “The advantages to the colored people of the United States to be derived from emigration to Central, South America, and the West Indies, are incomparably greater than that of any other parts of the world at present.”¹³⁹ Delany stressed to African Americans the importance of leaving the despotism of United States. “Go we must, and go we will, as there is no alternative. To remain here in North America, and be crushed to the earth in vassalage and degradation, we never will.”¹⁴⁰

Delany argued that the necessity for black separation from whites revolved around diminishing political and social rights; however, similar to previous arguments by black opponents of colonization, Delany also argued that African Americans belonged in America. “Our common country is the United States. . . . We are Americans, having a birthright citizenship—natural claims upon the country—claims common to all others of our fellow citizens—natural rights, which may, by virtue of unjust laws, be obstructed, but never can be annulled.”¹⁴¹ His language also echoed religious sentiments. He asserted it “is very apparent . . . that the continent of America seems to have been designed by Providence as an asylum for all the various nations of the earth.”¹⁴² This belief paralleled previous black intellectuals’ who essentially argued beyond race, because “our present warfare, is not upon European rights, nor for European countries; but for the common rights of man, based upon the great principles of common humanity.”¹⁴³ In similar cadence with his predecessors, such as Walker, Delany believed that African American claims to

¹³⁸ Ibid, 188.

¹³⁹ Ibid, 179.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 181.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 48-9.

¹⁴² Ibid, 171.

¹⁴³ Ibid, 172.

the United States centered on the basis of birthrights, unalienable rights as American citizens, and essential rights as human beings. Unlike black abolitionists and missionaries, Delany felt that the need to sever ties with the status quo went beyond merely vindicating his race.¹⁴⁴ “Talk not about religious biases—we have but one reply to make. We had rather be a Heathen *freeman*, than a Christian *slave*.”¹⁴⁵

Delany’s attempts to emigrate even without the assistance of the ACS drew ridicule from the black community. Up until 1848, Delany worked alongside Frederick Douglass as co-editor of the *North Star*. When emigration began to surge at the end of the 1840s Frederick Douglass stated, “So the slaveholding *charm*ers have conjured up their old *familiar spirits* of colonization, making the old *essence* of abomination to flounder about in its grave.”¹⁴⁶ By 1853, with emigration relatively surging, the paper denounced attempts by Delany and other prominent blacks who intended to meet for a National Emigration Convention. The paper remained cynical of the members stating, “We believe the callers of this Convention to be engaged in a mistaken attempt to better their condition; selfishly.” Regardless of the location and African American influence, black abolitionists viewed the scheme in the same light as the ACS. An “attempt to induce our people to emigrate to the West Indies, Central and South America... is nothing less than the old spirit of American Colonizationism in another disguise, by which it would deceive even some of the very elect of our people.”¹⁴⁷ As historian Benjamin Quarles commented, “Because of its colonization sentiment, Delany’s book was not well received

¹⁴⁴ Palmer, *Passageways*, 208.

¹⁴⁵ Delany, *Condition*, 181.

¹⁴⁶ *The North Star* (New York), January 26, 1849., [database on-line]; available from <http://www.accessible.com> (Item #13831).

¹⁴⁷ *The North Star* (New York), September 30, 1853., [database on-line]; available from <http://www.accessible.com> (Item #47341).

by the great majority of Negroes at the time of its publication.”¹⁴⁸ Indeed, Black abolitionists viewed any African American who approved of emigration as a traitor.¹⁴⁹

On May 24, 1859, Delany passed through Monrovia, on his way to Lagos. He received a warm reception from Edward Blyden and other prominent Liberians, who quickly displayed the relative success of the colony. Delany received a tour of the Republic along the coast and to his surprise sugar and coffee plantations adorned the beautiful scenery. Indeed, the 1850s and early 1860s proved to be Liberia’s most productive period. Delany praised the black Republic, despite its dependency on the ACS, after observing its progress. Delany attempted to establish his own independent black nation. The previous year he participated in an expedition into the Niger Valley and later attempted to establish a colony in West Africa with his South Carolina-based Liberian Exodus Company in 1878. The Company intended to establish a link that would facilitate trade between African Americans and West Africa but ultimately failed, much to the approval of Blyden who wanted emigration controlled solely by the ACS.¹⁵⁰

By the time Edward Blyden chose to emigrate to Liberia, in 1851, black intellectuals, such as Walker and Allen, had already set the stage for the debate over colonization. In actuality, the problems among black leaders occurred because of changes in opinion between abolitionism and colonizationism. This distinction divided black leaders such as Cornish, Russwurm, Douglass and Delany. Like most prominent blacks during this period, Blyden viewed the situation of African Americans as a problem, not the cause of inherent racial flaws but the results of political, economic and social

¹⁴⁸ Benjamin Quarles’s quote is located in the editor’s introduction without pagination. Delany, *Condition*, vi.

¹⁴⁹ Shick, *Behold the Promised Land*, 7.

¹⁵⁰ Lynch, *Pan-Negro*, 23-5, 108.

segregation. Among the black elite Blyden found himself in the awkward position of defending African colonization under the auspices of the much maligned ACS and its auxiliaries. He did not back down from the challenge. Blyden directed his anger specifically at the same individuals who criticized the emigrationists, chastised the ACS, and mocked the young independent Republic of Liberia.

Blyden responded to opponents of colonization and the ACS with equal criticism. “The general practice among superficial politicians and irresponsible coloured journalists in this country, is to ignore and deprecate the craving for the fatherland among the Negro population.”¹⁵¹ He continued, “The exiled Negro . . . has a home in Africa. Africa is his, if he will. . . . Those who refuse, at the present moment, to avail themselves of their inheritance think they do so because they believe that they are progressing in this country.”¹⁵² For Blyden, colonization provided the only opportunity for racial stability. He dismissed abolitionists who argued on the basis of racial identity. “There is not a single Negro in the United States on the road to practical truth, so far as his race is concerned. . . . And when he has made up his mind to remain in America, he has also made up his mind to surrender his race integrity; for he sees no chance of its preservation.”¹⁵³ Blyden went against the sentiments of black abolitionists who considered the United States the home of African Americans. His language emphasized that Africa, the “inheritance,” belonged to blacks “exiled” in America. One of his first letters after repatriation articulated this point, “You can easily imagine the delight with

¹⁵¹ Lynch, *Black Spokesman*, 42.

¹⁵² Blyden, *CINR*, 124-5.

¹⁵³ *Ibid*, 126.

which I gazed upon the land of my forefathers—of those mysterious races of men. It is really a beautiful country.”¹⁵⁴

Blyden also responded to abolitionists and emigrationists who mocked the independence of the Americo-Liberians. He emphasized that blacks did not need a white organization such as the ACS to provide the concept or motivation for African emigration. “Long before the formation of the Colonization Society, there were aspirations in the breasts of thinking Negroes for a return to the land of their fathers.” His reference to pioneers such as Paul Cuffe emphasized his belief in the essential nature of black initiative through the guidance of providence, “Just as the idea of a departure from the ‘house of bondage’ in Egypt was in the minds of the Hebrews long before Moses was born.”¹⁵⁵ He believed that blacks had the motivation but whites had the means.

Blyden reasoned that the ACS existed as the most functionally sound organization for relocating black people. He praised its efforts stating, “Both white and coloured are now recognizing the fact that the Society with its abundant knowledge, with its organized plans, is an indispensable machinery.” He continued, “There is evidently, at this moment, no philanthropic institution before the American public that has more just and reasonable claims upon private and official benevolence than the American Colonization Society.”¹⁵⁶ Blyden felt that black emigration under one organization would expedite the colonization scheme. Thus the ACS alone provided the means to population his nation-state.

Blyden considered black opposition to the slaveholding ACS frivolous because “the coloured people of the United States should consider it of little matter, whether the

¹⁵⁴ Letter from Blyden to Walter Lowrie, Secretary of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions (Feb. 1851). Lynch, *Selected Letters*, 20.

¹⁵⁵ Blyden, *Liberia's Offering*, 90-1; Blyden, *CINR*, 100.

¹⁵⁶ Blyden, *CINR*, 112.

motives of African Colonization were good or evil. . . . By their exertions a free and independent nation of coloured men . . . has been established on these long-neglected shores.”¹⁵⁷ Blyden reiterated a common theme of the essentialism of racial pride stating, “The Negro is drawn to Africa by the necessities of nature.” He also remained cognizant of European motives in Africa. He continued, “No natural impulses bring the European hither—artificial or economical causes move him to emigrate.”¹⁵⁸ Blyden’s willingness to accept the ulterior motives of his American and European “nation builders” is a major component of his Western consciousness. He reasoned Western assistance existed as a necessary evil. Because the ACS possessed the necessary resources, blacks should utilize them to their advantage regardless of the motives. This type of mentality contributed to Blyden’s acceptance of colonization and imperialism. In this vein, he understood European impulses in Africa yet underestimated its severity.

Despite his passion for emigration, Blyden knew the unlikelihood of black emigration. In 1863 he stated, “We do not ask that all the coloured people should leave the United States and go to Africa. If such a result were possible it is not, for the present, at least, desirable; certainly it is not indispensable.” He contended, “For the work to be accomplished much less than one-tenth of the six millions will be necessary.”¹⁵⁹ By 1895, Blyden conceded that emigration would take approximately 300 years instead of a few generations.¹⁶⁰

As an agent of the ACS, Blyden often lectured to audiences across the country in major cities such as Washington, D.C., Portland and Maine. During a visit to the United

¹⁵⁷ Lynch, *Black Spokesman*, 10.

¹⁵⁸ Anniversary of the ACS (Jan. 1883). Blyden, *CINR*, 108.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ Lynch, *Pan-Negro*, 135; Livingston, *Education and Race*, 196.

States in 1862, over a decade after his initial departure, he observed and experienced segregation across the North and cringed at the willingness of African Americans to accept their second-class status. He commented on his experience. Blyden felt that the black elite hindered his progress stating, “The masses of all the coloured people are favourably disposed to Liberia; but their leaders poison their feelings, and paralyse all their effort towards that country.” Blyden believed that black leaders instilled the fear displayed by African Americans. Using republican rhetoric he stated, “Is it not better to die free men than live to be slaves? Was it not under the influence of such a spirit that the first settlers of this country braved the rigours and perils of this land of savages? Was it not this spirit that nerved the heroes of the Revolution, when every heart responded to the noble utterance of Patrick Henry, ‘Give me liberty, or give me death?’” Like previous proponents of colonization, he paralleled the tribulations of the Puritan settlers with that of the Liberian colonists. Reflecting on his experience in Washington, D.C., he ridiculed the democratic image of the United States in similar context. “Before I could leave, I was obliged to go to the Provost Marshall, and get a certificate of freedom. He, after requiring me to produce testimonials that I was from Liberia, gave me a written “permishun”—as he spelt the word—to pass to and from Washington. This is ‘The land of the free and the home of the brave’!”¹⁶¹

It is no coincidence that all parties involved in the colonization debate chose to use the same egalitarian and progressive rhetoric that resonated during this period. Prominent blacks such as Blyden viewed themselves less as an oppressed race and more as oppressed *Americans*, endowed by their Creator with unalienable rights regardless of skin color. Free blacks essentially argued more against the racial inferiority premise used

¹⁶¹ Letter to the editor of the *Liberia Herald*, July 5, 1862. Lynch, *Black Spokesman*, 20-3.

by whites than the colonization of Africa by Westerners. In this context, blacks fought to establish their identity as Americans first, blacks second, and Africans last. This is an essential component of Blyden's American consciousness. He deemed Western structures—Christianity, democracy, republicanism—as essential for the development of a West African state, which expanded his American consciousness into a Western consciousness.

What is peculiar about Blyden's Western consciousness is that he encouraged imperialism during the so-called Scramble for Africa. Blyden supported European colonialism in Africa, often wearing several "masks" in the process. That is, he praised the colonial interests of one Western power after another, depending on his audience. He also exhibited some anti-colonial sentiment but kept them hidden from the public. Blyden asserted that the most advanced societies in the world existed in the Occident and he intended to copy their economic and political models for his West African nation-state. Blyden argued that Africa in general stood to benefit from the nation-building infrastructure presented by Europeans and attempted to persuade a Western power to provide a protectorate for Liberia and its vast hinterland. Under the precepts of maintaining the cultural integrity of the Americo-Liberian and native populations, Blyden became a proponent of European imperialism in Africa.¹⁶²

Blyden's appeal for European patronage began because of conflicts with the colonial powers. During the early years of the Republic, European interests in the region remained at its periphery. By the 1850s, the success of the Americo-Liberian elite rendered the prospects of commerce in the region more enticing. European traders, especially the British, subsequently fomented rebellions among the aborigines ". . . which

¹⁶² Lynch, *Selected Letters*, 331.

has culminated in the present difficulty between the Government of Her Britannic Majesty and this Republic, [and] has inspired them [the natives] with a contempt of our laws, and a disregard of our sovereignty.”¹⁶³ Thus European aggression and native opposition rendered the Republic dependent on foreign assistance.

Indeed, Liberia gained its independence primarily because of various disputes with European merchants along the coast. The most notorious of the European traders remained the British who ignored tariffs and incited native uprisings against the Republic.¹⁶⁴ In 1845, then Governors J. J. Roberts of Liberia and John B. Russwurm of the independent Maryland colony levied a six percent tariff on foreign vessels. The tax became popular among the colonists; however, European traders took exception to such an excise issued by an “experimental” colony that had no sovereignty. Tensions heightened when the British attacked a vessel owned by a wealthy Liberian in response to the seizure of British merchant ships that refused to adhere to the duties. Lack of noticeable assistance from an American government that wished to avoid damaging diplomatic relations with the British and suggestions from the ACS for the black settlers to manage their own foreign affairs prompted the colony to proclaim itself an independent sovereign republic on July 26, 1847.¹⁶⁵ Thus the catalyst for independence proved more a desperate political tactic than a revolutionary objective. As Lynch states, “One of the main reasons for Liberia’s declaration of independence was to achieve the sovereignty necessary to deal with Europeans.”¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³ John F. Dennis, Secretary of the Treasury (Feb. 15, 1871). *Records of the ACS*, series 1B, vol. 15, pt. 2.

¹⁶⁴ Harrison Ola Abingbade, “The Settler-African Conflicts: The Case of the Maryland Colonists and the Grebo 1840-1900,” *Journal of Negro History* 66, no. 2 (Summer 1981): 93, 100.

¹⁶⁵ Beyan, *Creation*, 91-3.

¹⁶⁶ Lynch, *Pan-Negro*, 43.

In 1871, President Edward Roye gambled on a British loan intended for “the establishment of a national banking system, the general education of the masses, [and] the introduction of railroads.”¹⁶⁷ The infamous Roye loan actually hindered Liberia’s progress, proving to be a disaster from the onset. Although he did not negotiate the conditions of the deal in person, as the leader of the Republic it appeared that the British bankers hoodwinked the President. A British firm loaned Liberia £100,000 (\$500,000) at seven percent interest to be repaid in fifteen years in its entirety. The bankers received £30,000 from the loan’s principal “as discount and advance interest.”¹⁶⁸ After the red tape, Liberia initially received £60,000. By the time Roye returned from London, this limited amount dissipated from mismanagement of funds by his political allies.

In all, the Republic received approximately £20,000 yet owed £100,000, not including interests. Thus, Liberia found itself caught in a cycle of borrowing to pay off the loan. As Lynch observed, “the inability to repay the Roye loan and its accumulated interests was to be for long a serious embarrassment to the Negro state.”¹⁶⁹ By 1904, the loan, originally \$500,000, accounted for \$5 million of the country’s \$8 million debt.¹⁷⁰ The debacle of the Roye loan along with its repercussions illustrates the reasoning behind Blyden’s assertion that Liberia needed reform of its infrastructure. The incompetent and unscrupulous nature of government officials rendered Liberia economically indebted to a colonial power whose growing interests in the region rendered the Republic vulnerable.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁷ President Roye’s inaugural address as quoted in Lynch, *Pan-Negro*, 49.

¹⁶⁸ Quote by Lynch, *Pan-Negro*, 50.

¹⁶⁹ Lynch, *Pan-Negro*, 52.

¹⁷⁰ Beyan, *Creation*, 135.

¹⁷¹ Roye to Coppinger (Aug. 1, 1871). *Records of the ACS*, series 1B, vol. 15, pt. 2.

Prior to the enforcement of the decisions at the Berlin Conference, the British forced a settlement of the boundary dispute for 50 miles of coastline once claimed by the Republic. In 1887, Liberia dealt with a similar border dispute with the French, who insisted that any territory not visibly occupied by the Republic remained subject to annexation. Lack of personnel willing to explore, occupy, and create settlements in the hinterland placed the Liberian government in a precarious position. In 1892, the Republic compromised with the French and marked the Cavalla River as the boundary between Liberia and the Ivory Coast. In doing so, the Liberians relinquished approximately 200 miles of coastal strip.¹⁷²

The success of Liberia as an independent Republic looked bleak during the years of the various land and trade disputes, and the Roye loan. As Lynch observed, “It became increasingly obvious that Liberia had neither the resources nor the inclination to become an imperial agent in West Africa.”¹⁷³ Because of African American disinterest in the colonization scheme and internal conflicts, Americo-Liberians found themselves as citizens of a quasi-nation with limited stature among Americans and Europeans. The pressure may have taken its toll even on Blyden who displayed signs of empathy for blacks who chose to remain in America. “I cannot help feeling that many of the colored people in the U. S. are right in opposing any attempt to send them indiscriminately to Africa.”¹⁷⁴ Nevertheless, Blyden did not waver from his commitment to Africa. He responded by attempting to lure an imperial power to assist in the development and protection of his country.

¹⁷² Gershoni, *Black Colonialism*, 33.

¹⁷³ Lynch, “West African Nationalist,” 377.

¹⁷⁴ Blyden to Coppinger (Nov. 15, 1877). Lynch, *Selected Letters*, 266.

While exiled in Sierra Leone, between 1871 and 1873, Blyden attempted to no avail to persuade the British to extend their jurisdiction into the Liberian hinterland.¹⁷⁵ Periodically he sought British support as late as eight months following the Berlin Conference in 1885. Blyden wore an appropriate mask for his European audience. At a lecture in Sierra Leone he commented, “It is a very interesting fact that on the spot where Englishmen first began the work of African demoralization, Englishmen should begin the work of African amelioration and restoration.”¹⁷⁶ Blyden also suggested to the governor of Sierra Leone, Sir Samuel Rowe, that “the tribes in the neighbouring interior of Sierra Leone have been inspired, [and] furnish a most favourable and exceptional opportunity for the enlargement of British jurisdiction.”¹⁷⁷ He assured the governor that the indigenous population craved British expansion into the hinterland.

Blyden also warned that French colonial interests permeated West Africa. “The French are making great efforts to establish a protectorate over the whole of the region of country between Senegal and Timbuctoo, and to cut off British influence from the Mohammedan tribes.” He continued, “Their plan seems to be to control all the Mohammedan tribes, who are the most intelligent, wealthy and powerful in Western Nigritia, and to form a Catholic Mohammedan Empire . . . and thus confine British influence to the comparatively unimportant populations, who are pagan and illiterate.”¹⁷⁸ Blyden preferred the British over the French as a protectorate because of the leniency of

¹⁷⁵ Lynch, *Pan-Negro*, 191.

¹⁷⁶ Lecture at Sierra Leone (April 1884). Blyden, *CINR*, 197.

¹⁷⁷ Blyden to Sir Samuel Rowe, Governor of Sierra Leone (Oct. 22, 1885). Lynch, *Selected Letters*, 351; Hollis R. Lynch, “Edward W. Blyden: Pioneer West African Nationalist,” *Journal of African History* 6, no. 3 (1965): 377-8.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid*; Lynch, “Pioneer West African,” 377-8.

the colonial administration of the former as opposed to the assimilation methods practiced by the latter.

In 1880, Blyden extended the same offer to the Americans whom he proclaimed as the only nation with the capacity to colonize Africa “from the Niger to the Nile—from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean.”¹⁷⁹ On several occasions Blyden spoke, unsuccessfully, to high-ranking government officials, most notably President Rutherford B. Hayes, about sponsoring African American emigrants to West Africa. Blyden eventually turned to the French in 1885. In similar fashion, Blyden claimed that the land in the interior of Africa was ripe for their development. After the Berlin Conference of 1885, the French gained control of the majority of West Africa from Senegal to Lake Chad circumscribing both British and Liberian colonies as Blyden had warned.¹⁸⁰ In 1901, he traveled to the former Liberian region previously annexed by the French in 1892 and praised the colonial administration for incorporating a Western infrastructure while maintaining indigenous autonomy. He compared their efforts to the British stating, “Africans would gladly cooperate with each nation according to the measure in which their systems accord with native ideas and native customs and traditions. And there seems to be more of this conformity in the French methods than in the more rigid and unimaginative system of the Anglo-Saxon.”¹⁸¹ Blyden supported European colonialism, often wearing several masks in the process, but only under the condition that it maintained indigenous culture while implementing a much needed infrastructure.

¹⁷⁹ As quoted by Lynch, “Pioneer West African,” 379.

¹⁸⁰ Lynch, “Pioneer West African,” 379.

¹⁸¹ Blyden’s address before the Liverpool Chamber of Commerce (Sept. 1901). As quoted in Lynch, *Pan-Negro*, 200-1.

Although Blyden argued for a Western infrastructure he also attempted to dissuade European emigration. He argued against establishing his nation state along the coast because “it is well known that a belt of malarious lands, which are hotbeds of fever, extends along the whole of the West Coast of Africa.” He continued, “The unhealthiness of the climate . . . affects injuriously all progress and growth in West Africa to a far greater extent than is generally supposed.”¹⁸² He also warned colonial governments about the prospects of African life. “Many a European visiting this coast returns to his country never to enjoy the vigour of health again. . . . The effect of a residence in this country, generally speaking, is similar to that said to have been produced upon the ancients by a visit to the cave of Trophonius—they never smile again.”¹⁸³ Blyden’s attempt to deter European emigration illustrates how he secretly opposed their colonial presence. Although Blyden’s assertion proved false because of medicine such as quinine, which prevented malaria, it does provide an example of his subtle resistance to European incursions.¹⁸⁴

Blyden continued to argue that “Liberia cannot succeed without the guidance of white statesmanship, European or American.”¹⁸⁵ In 1895, he commented on the British response to the Ashanti rebellion by stating “Nothing is clearer to my mind than that it is the duty of a superior civilization to assist—not to exterminate—in the elevation of the inferior or backward populations of the earth.”¹⁸⁶ Yet while publicly praising European

¹⁸² Blyden, *CINR*, 52-3.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹⁸⁴ Livingston, *Education and Race*, 31.

¹⁸⁵ A letter marked “Private and Confidential” to the editor of the *News and Courier*, Charleston, S.C. (March 8, 1909). Lynch, *Selected Letters*, 490.

¹⁸⁶ J. W. E. Bowen, ed., *Africa and the American Negro...Addresses and Proceedings of the Congress on Africa Held Under the Auspices of the Stewart Missionary Foundation for Africa of Gammon Theological Seminary in Connection with the Cotton States and International Exposition December 13-15, 1895*, 16.

colonial interests, he secretly harbored different sentiments. For example, in a private letter to William Coppinger, Secretary of the ACS, Blyden described his covert ambitions into the hinterland. “With regard to the annexation of Medina, there is no desire or disposition to enter into a contest with England about the matter. We shall, as we are prepared for it, enter [into the] interior territory without its being known to or felt by England.”¹⁸⁷ Blyden also made references to “the French in their wild goose attempts in this part of Africa. . . . [who] proclaim themselves masters of African territory.” Blyden assured Coppinger that “only Liberia can take interior Africa with impunity. The natives recognize her claims as a black nationality.”¹⁸⁸ Indeed, Blyden exhibited multiple faces which he presented to his various audiences. He chose to remain silent about publicly ridiculing the colonial aspirations of the European powers. The question remains when did he wear the mask and for whom? And how much did his “audience” affect his intellectual and multiple consciousness?

The rhetoric used by the proponents and opponents of the colonization scheme illustrate the inherent nature of Americanization. “Resolved, that we are native born Americans; we owe no allegiance to any other country on earth, and according to our magna charta, the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States, we are entitled to the elective franchise and all other rights that are common to American citizens.”¹⁸⁹ Black leaders disagreed on the colonization scheme yet formulated their arguments on the principles of Western values, focusing more on their rights as

Blyden to Dr. Thirkield (Nov. 28, 1895). <http://docsouth.unc.edu/church/bowen/bowen.html> [retrieved June 11, 2005].

¹⁸⁷ Blyden to Coppinger (Dec. 2, 1880). *Records of the ACS*, vol. 19, pt.1.

¹⁸⁸ Blyden to Coppinger (June 20, 1888). *Records of the ACS*, vol. 25, pt.1.

¹⁸⁹ Minutes from an anti-colonization meeting in Ohio quoted in the *Cincinnati Times. Frederick Douglass' Paper* (New York), October 20, 1854., [database on-line]; available from <http://www.accessible.com> (Item #63176).

Christians and American citizens than their racial kinship to the Africans. Blyden attempted to maintain these factors in West Africa but solely under the direction of a Western power. His expectations of the Western powers paralleled African American expectations of unalienable Western values such as the Church and the State. One may infer that the acculturated African Americans knew no other “model” but the Christian, democratic, and republican. This is exactly why Blyden chose a Western power to establish the infrastructure of his nation state model, because that is all *he* knew. Liberia expanded Blyden’s American consciousness into a Western consciousness because the same omnipresent white power that existed in America now included the European colonial powers. Similar to black “exiles” in America who suffered under slavery and discrimination yet embraced the same Western values of their oppressors, Blyden intended to establish Liberia under the only factors he knew that could sustain its development, or hinder it.

CHAPTER 4

AFRICAN CONSCIOUSNESS

After his expulsion from Liberia in 1871, Blyden took refuge in Sierra Leone as a linguist for the Church Missionary Society (CMS).¹⁹⁰ While in Freetown, he founded and edited his own newspaper, which he characteristically named the *Negro* (1872-1873). Prior to his exile, Blyden had emerged as a prominent member of the Liberian elite, holding various positions such as Presbyterian minister, Principal of Alexander High School, Professor of Classics at Liberia College, and Secretary of State under President Daniel B. Warner. In 1869, he received an honorary Master of Arts degree from Lafayette College in Easton, Pennsylvania.¹⁹¹ In 1874, Blyden visited Howard University and also attended a commencement at Lincoln University in Pennsylvania where “the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws was conferred upon him by the trustees at that institution.”¹⁹²

Despite his disdain for mulattoes, Blyden’s prior political experience and intellectual abilities had not diminished his value to the Republic. Upon his return to Liberia, the professor received a surprisingly warm response from the citizens and even his political enemies. J. J. Roberts, now serving his second term as President of the

¹⁹⁰ Hollis R. Lynch, “The Native Pastorate Controversy and Cultural Ethno-Centrism in Sierra Leone 1871-1874,” *Journal of African History* 5, no. 3 (1964): 398-9.

¹⁹¹ The article was an excerpt from the *Christian Recorder. African Repository* 45, no. 10 (Oct. 1869): 298.

¹⁹² “Professor Edward W. Blyden,” *African Repository* 50, no. 7 (July 1874), 218.

Republic and of Liberia College, even offered Blyden a position in his Cabinet as Secretary of State. Blyden declined.¹⁹³

The Republic had fallen on hard times since the coup of 1871. The hardships became noticeable with the debilitating state of affairs at Liberia College. As Lynch remarked, “Roberts’s Presidency of the College had been long and inept, and in his last feeble years, academic activity there sunk to a low ebb.”¹⁹⁴ The subsequent passing of Roberts and eventually Henry W. Dennis, in the respective months of February and June of 1876, marked the end of Blyden’s most powerful opposition. In a letter to Coppinger, Blyden commented on the loss. “It is remarkable that Mr. H. W. Dennis the agent of your Society so soon followed Mr. J. J. Roberts to the grave—to whom he was inseparably wedded—in their death they were not divided.”¹⁹⁵

Indeed, Blyden maintained his suspicions that the two men played a significant role in his demise. “It is supposed that but for the support which Dennis gave to Mr. Roberts, the scandalous proceedings of 1871, could not have taken place.”¹⁹⁶ And for this, Blyden harbored a bitter resentment towards his mulatto nemeses even beyond the grave. He concluded, “Because the Roberts dynasty, in which so many trusted, has collapsed, as it ought to have done long ago. ‘Let the dead bury its dead.’ . . . I trust for the sake of Africa, it is twice dead and plucked up by the roots.”¹⁹⁷

This chapter focuses on the most egalitarian division of Blyden’s multiple consciousness, his “African consciousness” or inclusion of African cultures and customs. Previous historians fail to emphasize the democratic nature of Blyden’s ideology,

¹⁹³ Lynch, *Pan-Negro*, 140-1.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 147-8.

¹⁹⁵ Blyden to Coppinger (June 9, 1876). Lynch, *Selected Letters*, 216.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid*.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid*; Lynch, *Pan-Negro*, 141.

primarily because of his overt hatred of mulattoes. Despite his colorism, Blyden argued that the first step towards vindicating the black race lay with the spiritual and psychological cultivation and unification of both African Americans and native Africans. This stance proved to be exceptional in a Liberian society that deemed indigenous African traditions unworthy of “civilized” status. Blyden, however, viewed education as a means of achieving his goals. He emphasized the need for an appreciation of native culture, language and religion. Blyden also critiqued the inherent flaws of Western culture, in particular its literature and Christian missionaries, which he argued retarded the psychological development of the black race. Blyden envisioned the ascendancy of Liberia as the first reputable black Republic among the ranks of modern society. As President of Liberia College, he chose a more progressive philosophy with the inclusion of the African in his model for a West African nation-state by amalgamating the most salient qualities of both Western and African cultures.¹⁹⁸

At his 1881 inauguration as President of Liberia College, Blyden addressed the significance of the institution in relation to Western society. “A college in West Africa, for the education of African youth by African instructors, under a Christian government conducted by Negroes, is something so unique in the history of Christian civilization, that . . . there will be curiosity as to its character, its work, and its prospects.” Blyden used his address to emphasize the importance of education in the progression of the Republic. “The College is only a machine, an instrument to assist in carrying forward our regular

¹⁹⁸ Lynch, *Pan-Negro*, 149.

work—devised not only for intellectual ends, but for social purposes, for religious duty, for patriotic aims, for racial development.”¹⁹⁹

Despite their struggle for autonomy and enfranchisement, the Americo-Liberians refused to extend equal political and social rights to the native African population, a group whom they sought to assimilate. The foundation of Americo-Liberian disenfranchisement of the aborigines, which Blyden argued against, began during its colonial period. Prominent settlers earned their wealth by acting as middlemen between European traders and native Africans.²⁰⁰ One newly arriving emigrant observed that “the people here from all that I have seen and heard take but little interest in the improvement of the country. They Generally engage in trading with the Natives for Camwood and Pam oil which they barter agane for such things as they need with merchant vessels and neglect almost entirely the Cultivation of the ground.”²⁰¹ Indeed, the colonists imported the majority of their goods from America and whenever possible avoided arduous labor needed for land cultivation. As early as 1828, colonists paid aborigines wages of approximately \$4.00 to \$6.00 per month for domestic and field labor. The Americo-Liberians essentially viewed the aborigines more as servants than actual brethren.²⁰²

By 1841, an elite class of Americo-Liberian families emerged among the settlers who sought to distinguish themselves from the native Africans.²⁰³ This group defined itself by embracing Western customs and culture in nearly every facet of their lives. For

¹⁹⁹ Address delivered by Blyden at his inauguration as President of Liberia College (Jan. 5. 1881). Blyden, *CINR*, 71-2.

²⁰⁰ Beyan, *Creation*, 116.

²⁰¹ Moses Jackson to Elliott West (Mar. 22, 1846). Wiley, *Slaves No More*, 257.

²⁰² Beyan, *Creation*, 115-6.

²⁰³ Some of the most prominent settler families included: the Shermans, Watsons, Barclays, Colemans, Coopers, Dennises, Grimmeses, Howards, Kings, Johnsons, Morrises, Harmons, Horaces, Grigsbys, Rosses, Dossens, Gibsons and the Tubmans. M. B. Akpan, “Black Imperialism: Americo-Liberian Rule Over the African Peoples of Liberia, 1841-1964,” *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 7, no. 2 (1973): 219.

example, prominent Liberians preferred Western clothes to traditional African garbs despite the harsh climate. Elite wore black silk toppers and frock coats, while their women, who embraced Victorian values, dressed in silk gowns in order to distinguish themselves from the natives. Settlers also built one or two story houses or porticoed mansions that resembled the Palladian style of Southern plantations. They favored American food such as butter, cornmeal, bacon and imported American-grown rice as opposed to African crops such as plantain, yams, and palm-oil. Their choice of government for the Republic also reflected the American political system with a president, Senate and House of Representatives.²⁰⁴ Thus, the Americo-Liberians who envisioned a return to their ancestral home subsequently created an exact replica of America in Africa. This proved to be one of the reasons Blyden constructed his African consciousness, as a response to Liberian contempt for native culture.

The Americo-Liberian's exhibited their disdain for indigenous customs by institutionalizing their prejudices. For example, citizenship for natives remained contingent upon their acceptance of Christianity, abandonment of any signs of "paganism," and a clear demonstration of their incorporation of Western values. The fact that these requirements existed in the Liberian constitution made disenfranchisement of the natives more rigid.²⁰⁵ De facto discrimination also existed as Liberians often required natives to enter their homes through the back door. A form of pew segregation occurred as settlers customarily refused seating next to Africans in church.

Native Africans who lived in close proximity to Americo-Liberian settlements proved to be the most susceptible to striving to become westernized, such as the southern

²⁰⁴ Ibid; Livingston, *Education and Race*, 25-6.

²⁰⁵ Gershoni, *Black Colonialism*, 21-2.

Gola people. As opposed to northern Golas who sought to maintain their traditions, Gola people from the south sent their children to live in the homes of settlers in order to acquire the necessary Western values needed for assimilation. These girls and boys, also known as “apprentices,” remained in the homes of settlers until the age of 18 and 21 respectively. Apprenticeship laws, established in 1838, enabled Americo-Liberians to “civilize” natives without the expense of establishing missions in the hinterland. However, only a minute number of native children became westernized while the vast majority remained untouched in the interior.²⁰⁶ As a result, indigenous Africans began to internalize this definition of “civilized” within the context of Western speech, religion and dress. Members of the native population along the coast often sought to “pass” as Americo-Liberians by speaking English, adopting Christianity, and donning Western garb.²⁰⁷

Primarily because of his disdain for mulattoes and rumors of womanizing, Blyden historians rarely emphasize the egalitarian nature of his ideologies. Blyden’s African consciousness proved to be his most democratic. Unlike most Americo-Liberians, Blyden sought the inclusion of indigenous customs and cultures into Liberian society. Upon his return from exile, Blyden urged his fellow citizens to form ties with the various indigenous tribes such as the Mandinka, the Fula and the Hausa peoples.²⁰⁸ “Now, if we are to make an independent nation—a strong nation—we must listen to the songs of our unsophisticated brethren as they sing of their history, as they tell of their traditions.” Although he internalized the same Western condescension as other Americo-Liberians, Blyden took a more egalitarian approach in dealing with the indigenous population than

²⁰⁶ Ibid, 27.

²⁰⁷ Beyan, *Creation*, 157.

²⁰⁸ Lynch, *Pan-Negro*, 141.

his contemporaries. He contended, “We must lend a ready ear to the ditties of the Kroomen who pull our boats, of the Pessah and Golah men, who till our farms; we must read the compositions, rude as we may think them, of the Mandingoes and the Veys. We shall in this way get back the strength of the race.”²⁰⁹ For Blyden, African culture remained essential to the progression of the black Republic. Although he, like most Americo-Liberians, benefited from the labor of the indigenous population, Blyden sought the inclusion of native culture in his nation-state model regardless of its perceived peculiarities.

Indeed, the indigenous population in the Liberian region proved to be diverse. Between 16 and 28 ethnic groups existed in Liberia, divided into three language groups: the Kru (consisting of the Grebo, Half Grebo, Sape, Tie, Krahn, Mamba, and Dey); the Mande (divided into the Mande-Tan and the Mande-Fu)²¹⁰; and the Mel (containing the Kissi and Gola peoples). The most notable groups that surrounded Liberia consisted of the Vai, Grebo and Gola. The Vai, located in both Sierra Leone and Liberia, had an amicable relationship with the Liberians. Most of the Vai converted to Islam, by Dyula traders, and created their own alphabet by 1833. Although, practicing Muslims, the Vai managed a secular form of political division based on traditional patterns.²¹¹

The Grebo, located at Liberia’s eastern border with the Ivory Coast along the Cavalla River, emerged under the auspices of Episcopalian missions in the independent Maryland Colony in 1834. Among the Grebo existed an “educated” class that enjoyed relative assimilation into Americo-Liberian society and even had its own local paper. The

²⁰⁹ Address delivered by Blyden at his inauguration as President of Liberia College (Jan. 5. 1881). Blyden, *CINR*, 91.

²¹⁰ The Mande-Tan are further divided into the Vai, Malinke, and Mende. The Mande-Fu are also divided into Gbunde, Mano, Lamo, Ge, Gio, and Kpelle. Gershoni, *Black Colonialism*, 1.

²¹¹ *Ibid*, 1, 67-8, 74-5. 77, 85.

Gola, located in the western hinterland, controlled the trade routes into the hinterland during the 1840s. The Gola consisted of Northern Gola who maintained their tradition, while the Southern Gola attempted, in vain, to achieve equal status with the Americo-Liberians.²¹²

Because of the diversity and nuances of the indigenous population, Blyden insisted that his egalitarian mentality should be an attribute of all emigrants sent to Liberia. He stressed his wishes in a letter to William Coppinger, Secretary of the ACS, stating, “There can never be any proper or healthful development of national life on that coast without the aborigines. This you must inculcate upon every emigrant whom you send out.” This concept went against the typical mindset of most African American emigrants who intended to purge native culture from the region as a means of “civilizing” the African. However, Blyden argued that “they cannot transplant America to Africa and keep it America still. . . . We shall have America in Africa—but Africanized.”²¹³ Thus Blyden planned to merge both Western and African cultures while sustaining their integrity and most salient attributes.

As President of Liberia College, he proposed to implement a network of schools for the intellectual development of the indigenous population while maintaining, rather than eliminating, their culture. “We are developing a system of common schools, with a College at the head as a guarantee for their efficiency.” Blyden proposed to utilize such schools for the cultivation of the African in every aspect of his or her development. “The educational work is felt to be of the greatest possible importance; education, not only in

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Blyden to Coppinger (July 20, 1871). Lynch, *Selected Letters*, 84-5.

its literary and religious forms, but also in its industrial, mechanical, and commercial aspects.”²¹⁴

He intended to establish these native schools without westernizing its students. “I should propose to conduct the institution in the simplest manner, conforming, as much as possible, to ordinary native (aboriginal) usage in clothing and diet.” The inclusiveness of Blyden’s ideology conflicted directly with the status quo established by the Liberian elite. He intended “to divert the attention [of the natives] . . . from the foolish notion that American European style of living—as to house, food and clothing—is the only one compatible with a Christian civilization.”²¹⁵ Throughout his pursuits to establish higher learning in West Africa, Blyden stressed the amalgamation of both native and Western cultures. He attempted to use education as a means of instilling ethnic pride in Africans but also to counter the condescension of Americo-Liberians against the natives.

Blyden attacked what he considered the source of African American disdain for African culture. He argued that the inherent condescension of modern Western literature contaminated the psychological development of blacks in general. “Nearly all the literature of the land is anti-Negro.” He drew attention to patronizing literature in popular cultural. “Even Mrs. [Harriet Beecher] Stowe is one-sided in her representations of Negro character, always representing the blacks—the Uncle Toms, Topsies, Candaces—as kind and gentle and submissive, and as showing great adaptedness and attachment to the servile condition.” Blyden feared that this “contagion is spreading to the other side of the

²¹⁴ Delivered at the Anniversary of the ACS (Jan. 1883). Blyden, *CINR*, 102-3.

²¹⁵ Blyden to Rev. John C. Lowrie, Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions (May 28, 1874). Lynch, *Selected Letters*, 166.

Atlantic.”²¹⁶ He drew attention to the prose of prominent literary scholars such as Englishmen William Cowper’s *The Negro’s Complaint* which read: “Fleecy locks and dark complexion/Cannot forfeit Nature’s claim.” Blyden also cited the poetry of “poor Phillis Wheatly, a native African educated in America” who wrote: “Remember, Christian, Negroes, black as Cain/May be refined, and join the angelic train.” This brand of literature, though well-intended, perpetuated the ideology of black inferiority. Blyden contended that “the arguments of Wilberforce, the eloquence of Wendell Phillips, the pathos of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, are all in the same strain. . . . For that ‘language’, in some of its finest utterances, patronises and apologises for us.”²¹⁷

Blyden, however, still considered it necessary to incorporate Western literature into school curricula but only those that did not imbibe a prejudice against the black race. For this, he chose the Classics—Greek and Latin—because the wording did not contain disparaging undertones against the African as modern European languages such as English and French had done. Modern linguistics derived from the Classics; therefore, Blyden chose to begin at the core of these languages. “We will resort to the fountain head; and in the study of the great masters, in the languages in which they wrote, we shall get the required mental discipline without unfavourably affecting our sense of race individuality or our own self-respect.”²¹⁸ Blyden’s passion for the Classics is evident in his description of its possible impact on the intellectual development of the African:

He [the African] imbibes the spirit of the writer. His mind enlarges. He learns to form a correct estimate of the merits and defects of composition. His taste is

²¹⁶ An Address before the Maine State Colonization Society (June 26, 1862). Lynch, *Black Spokesman*, 17; Scholar Timothy Powell referred to this patronizing literature, and the rhetoric of “benevolent” institutions such as the ACS, as “sentimental imperialism.” Timothy B. Powell, *Ruthless Democracy: A Multicultural Interpretation of the American Renaissance* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 109.

²¹⁷ Blyden’s inaugural address as President of Liberia College (Jan. 5, 1881). Blyden, *CINR*, 83. Citations of Phillis Wheatley and William Cowper are quote from Blyden.

²¹⁸ Blyden, *CINR*, 85.

quickened, purified, and elevated; and by being obliged to extend his vocabulary as widely as that of the author he translates, . . . he thus acquires a command of language, and enters upon a course of indefinite improvement—a road that leads to the loftiest attainment.²¹⁹

The filtering of Western languages for the consumption and development of Africans proved to be only one essential component of Blyden's nation-state model. He also proposed the inclusion of the various cultures that surrounded the Republic. Blyden argued that Europeanization retarded the mental development of African Americans, Americo-Liberians, and westernized Africans along the coast; however, he sought to incorporate the most salient attributes of Western literature into his West African nation-state. By incorporating native cultures into his model, Blyden also included their language and religion. Blyden contended that the uncorrupted Negro would be found in the hinterland.

In order to sustain a dialogue, rather than a monologue, with the indigenous population, Blyden proposed that at Liberia College “it will be our aim to introduce into our curriculum also the Arabic, and some of the principal native languages—by means of which we may have intelligent intercourse with the millions accessible to us in the interior, and learn more of our own country.”²²⁰ Blyden argued for the necessity of this approach because of the presence of Islam that permeated the hinterland. He observed, “On my return to these parts, after an absence of two years, I notice a marked advance in Mohammedan effort. . . . Mohammedanism is a real missionary force in this country.”²²¹ Blyden made reference to the Mandingo traders who facilitated the spread of Islam into the hinterland where natives, such as the Vey people, embraced it as their religion. He

²¹⁹ Blyden, *Liberia's Offering*, 113.

²²⁰ Delivered at the Anniversary of the ACS (Jan. 1883). Blyden, *CINR*, 88.

²²¹ Rev. Edward W. Blyden, “The Mohammedans,” *African Repository* 49, no. 12 (1873): 376-7.

argued that “if we would silently and quietly, without friction, raise these surrounding tribes; if we would seduce them from the charm of fetichism [*sic*], and wean them from the influence of Mohammedanism, without appearing to interfere harshly with their traditional customs or exposing ourselves to the charge of proselyting;” this enabled Christian missionaries to “teach the English language . . . , our habits of thought and modes of industry.”²²² He contended that a more egalitarian approach to the natives, especially in the hinterland, would hasten their conversion to Christianity. Although, he maintained his commitment to his religion, Blyden often traversed the line between Christian and Muslim interests.

In actuality, Blyden always maintained an interest in merging both European and Arabic cultures. He became infatuated with Islam in 1866 after a trip to Egypt and Palestine. In 1867, Blyden taught himself Arabic and as a professor at Liberia College introduced it in his curriculum.²²³ Between 1874 and 1877, he taught Arabic to Christian students while teaching English to Muslim pupils as Principal of Alexander High School at Harrisburg. During the 1880s, he reintroduced Arabic studies as President of Liberia College, where he frequently hosted Muslim *ulama* and their students. One correspondence in the *Repository* signifies how his influence extended beyond Liberia. “At Professor Blyden’s request, I gave him four of the Arabic [translated] Bibles to take with him to Sierra Leone for some of his Mohammedan friends there, whom he said would be glad to have the Scriptures in that language.”²²⁴ Blyden’s appreciation for Islam

²²² Edward W. Blyden, “The Problems Before Liberia,” *African Repository* 50, no. 8 (1874): 238.

²²³ Lynch, “Pioneer West African,” 376-7.

²²⁴ “Our Monrovia Correspondence,” *African Repository* 50, no. 7 (1874): 221.

enabled him to garner the trust of Muslims in Sierra Leone who allowed the professor to teach English to their children.²²⁵

Blyden held close ties with natives in the hinterland, many of whom practiced Islam. For example, he spoke of a “learned Mohammedan from Kankan, a considerable Muslim town in the far interior,” who visited his home and conversed with him in Arabic. The man also attended one of Blyden’s Arabic classes at Liberia College, which provided his students the opportunity to hear the language from a fluent speaker. Contact with the natives from the hinterland inspired a sense of nationalism and racial unity in Blyden who commented, “While some here—a very few, however—are looking to Europe and America for foreigners to come with their money to make this country for us, many of us are looking to the rich, unadulterated, unemasculated native element, believing that we have here the resources for a large and powerful nationality, if we only avail ourselves of them.”²²⁶ Blyden’s egalitarianism towards the natives coupled with his respect for Islam consequently led to his harsh critiques of the imperfections he observed in his own religion.

In his dealings with Muslim natives in the hinterland, Blyden observed that a relationship based on reciprocity existed between Muslims and their native converts. He criticized the failure of Christian missionaries to duplicate the success that Islam had among the aborigines stating, “West Africa has been in contact with Christianity for three hundred years, and not one single tribe, *as a tribe*, has yet become Christian.”²²⁷ Blyden attributed the lack of conversions to the condescending nature of Christian missionaries

²²⁵ Lynch, “Pioneer West African,” 381.

²²⁶ “A Mandingo Scholar and the Arabic Class in Liberia College,” *Christian Recorder* (New York), February 27, 1869., [database on-line]; available from <http://www.accessible.com> (Item #86718).

²²⁷ *Fraser’s Magazine* (Nov. 1875). Blyden, *CINR*, 21.

in comparison to the egalitarianism displayed by Muslims. He argued that “the religion of Jesus, after eighteen hundred years, nowhere furnishes such practical evidence of cosmopolitan adaptation and power. ‘Christianity is not to blame for this . . . but the Christian nations are.’”²²⁸

Christian missionaries often viewed any visible assimilation of Africans as a testament to the success of the acculturation process. While “supplying the thirsty natives with the waters of salvation,” one such missionary observed the transformation of the indigenous population. “The aborigines in Liberia, especially those in the vicinity of the settlements, are beginning, in imitation of the Americans, to adopt civilized habits of industry.” The proximity of the natives apparently hastened their assimilation. “Many of them, having been brought up in our families as adopted children, could not fail to perceive the superior advantages of civilization to heathenism . . . which they have in turn insensibly conveyed to their besotted countrymen.” Thus, the “civilized” Africans began to spread Western culture to their “heathen” brethren. As a result, “In every town may now be seen the foot-prints of civilization and improvement. They are becoming more tidy in their style of dress—conforming more to civilized tastes and usages. Some are inclined to the use of tea and coffee, and to bury their dead in a *coffin*, instead of a *mat*.”²²⁹ Blyden considered this type of transformation detrimental to the progress of Africans and the black race. He argued that Christian missionaries hindered the psychological development of Africans because they attempted to Europeanize rather than Christianize.

²²⁸ Blyden, *CINR*, 246.

²²⁹ Rev. Thomas E. Dillon, “A Voice from Africa,” *African Repository* 47, no. 10 (1871): 296.

Blyden made a strong case against the maladaptive nature in which European missionaries evangelized people of color. He modified the sentiments of the ancient philosopher Xenophanes of Colophon who argued that humans constructed their deities in ways that exhibited human qualities. That is, if horses, oxen, and lions could sketch their own deities, then *their* Gods would resemble horses, oxen and lions. Similarly, through Christianity, whites constructed *their* God as a “beautiful white man with blue eyes, rosy cheeks, and flaxen hair.”²³⁰ Blyden argued that black people internalized this visualization of a white God and all of his benign attributes. As a result, “the Christian Negro, abnormal in his development, pictures God and all beings remarkable for their moral and intellectual qualities with the physical characteristics of Europeans.” Christianity in effect retarded the psychological and social development of blacks. Instead of envisioning God as a carbon copy of themselves, like other races, blacks visualized their God with European attributes and “deem[ed] it an honor if . . . [they] approximate[d] – by a mixture of his blood, however irregularly achieved.” Blyden stressed, “In this way he loses that ‘sense of the dignity of human nature’ observable in his Mohammedan brother.” He argued that “the Mohammedan Negro has felt nothing of the withering power of caste. There is nothing in his colour or race to debar him from the highest privileges, social or political, to which any other Muslim can attain.”²³¹

Blyden published a letter in his newspaper, the *Negro*, from the Reverend James Johnson, a native pastor in Sierra Leone who echoed similar sentiments.²³² It stated, “In the work of elevating Africans, foreign teachers have always proceeded with their work on the assumption that the Negro or the African is in every one of his normal

²³⁰ As quoted in Blyden, *CINR*, 15.

²³¹ Blyden, *CINR*, 15.

²³² Lynch, “Pioneer West African,” 382.

susceptibilities an inferior race, and that it is needful in everything to give him a foreign model to copy.” He continued, “The result has been that we, as a people, think more of everything that is foreign, and less of that which is purely native; have lost our self-respect and our love for our own race.”²³³ This observation is a reflection of the Americo-Liberians’ disdain for the African and his or her “peculiar” culture. Blyden believed that Europeanization tainted the social and psychological development of people of color around the world. He did not go so far as to demonize Christianity as the main culprit, but stressed the need to incorporate the Islamic evangelical model that embraced the various customs and cultures of Africa, as opposed to dismissing them as inferior.

Blyden argued that “the attempt to Europeanize the Negro in Africa will always be a profitless task;”²³⁴ in part, because the process extracted the richness of African tradition from its people. Europeanization, through Christianity, resulted in an inferiority complex manifested by African Americans and coastal West Africans. He, like Reverend Johnson, championed Africans who lived in the hinterland because the “civilizing” process had not reached or affected them, primarily because of their location. He praised the efforts of Muslims stating that “imitation is not discipleship. The Mohammedan Negro is a much better Mohammedan than the Christian Negro is a Christian, because the Muslim Negro, as a learner, is a disciple, not an imitator.”²³⁵ Indeed, Blyden sought to utilize the Muslim “model” to establish Christian missions and institutions of higher learning in the fertile region of the hinterland, where he believed his ideal of black racial purity had the most potential to flourish.

²³³ A letter from native pastor Rev. James Johnson in Sierra Leone to Governor Pope Hennessy as quoted by Blyden. Blyden, *CINR*, 64.

²³⁴ *Ibid*, 65.

²³⁵ *Fraser's Magazine* (May 1876). *Ibid*, 37.

The most egalitarian component of Blyden's multiple consciousness involved his "African consciousness" or the inclusion of African traditions and customs for the spiritual and cultural development of the black race. Blyden argued that the foundation of "blackness" existed among the native African population. For a man whose rhetoric revolved around racial purity, Blyden considered the various African cultures, especially in the hinterland, as the core of racial integrity. Blyden's African consciousness is unique in that he, unlike other prominent black intellectuals, resided in Africa, though in a community not of Africa. That is, Liberia existed as an extension of Western society amidst the nuances of a native African population. Americo-Liberians attempted to "civilize" Africans by institutionalizing the westernization process. Blyden, although Westernized himself, sought to sustain African culture in the midst of a society that equated native culture to barbarism.

For a Christian minister of Blyden's stature to display such an affinity for Islam while criticizing Christian methods proved to be controversial. Along with African colonization, the spread of Christianity began as one of the primary motives behind the establishment of Liberia (and Sierra Leone) which supposedly existed as a hub intended to abolish the slave trade from its African source. This concept subsequently implied the elimination of other religious practices such as native "paganism" and Islam which most Christians equated with the facilitation of the slave trade.²³⁶

Historians criticize the inaccuracies of Blyden's assertion of the egalitarianism of Islam as opposed to Christianity. The fact remained that class, ethnic, and color discrimination existed among Muslims. However, the most egregious error that historians

²³⁶ Mohammad Alpha Bah, "The Status of Muslims in Sierra Leone and Liberia," *Journal Institute of Muslim Affairs* 12, no. 2 (July 1991): 464.

emphasize is that Blyden's praise of Muslims overlooked the so-called Islamic slave trade in Central and East Africa. As Mudimbe contends, "His naïve admiration for Islam led him to accept the enslavement of non-Muslim peoples!"²³⁷ Blyden is further criticized because he reasoned that slavery occurred as an act of Providence, which may explain his passivity.²³⁸ However, to levy this criticism one has to question those who practiced Christianity prior to the abolishment of its slave trade. Blyden argued, "When we see so many evils known to be antagonistic to the Christian religion still, after eighteen hundred years, prevalent in Christian lands, why should Mohammedanism be so fiercely assailed?" He continued, "Must we not suppose that, as with other creeds so with Islam, its theology is capable of being made subservient to worldly interests? May we not believe that many of the evils in lands under its sway are due, not to its teachings, but to human passions?"²³⁹

One could question Blyden's theory with his own. He argues that the transgressions affiliated with Islam, should be attributed to the sins of its followers. In this vein, Blyden would have to contend that Muslims are not essentially more egalitarian than Christians. This does not discredit his argument to focus on the professors than the actual faith, whether Islam, Christianity, or native "pagan" religions. Instead of focusing on the errors in Blyden's assertions about the egalitarian nature of Islam, his intent should be addressed.

Blyden argued for a religion that maintained the social and psychological integrity of African Americans and native Africans. The consequences of Europeanizing people of

²³⁷ V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988), 115.

²³⁸ Livingston, *Education and Race*, 187; Lynch, *Pan-Negro*, 196-7.

²³⁹ Blyden, *CINR*, 23.

color resulted in imitation and lack of psychological development and racial pride.

Blyden viewed the opposite effects of Christianity in native Muslim communities he encountered on his various expeditions into the hinterland. Thus, he based his assertions on his own personal encounters with the religion, which happened to be more egalitarian than his encounters with Christian missionaries. One may argue that Blyden's false assertions discredit the validity of his argument. But I argue that his assessment of the "problem" remained accurate despite the fallacies of his "solution."

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study is to “decolonize” Edward W. Blyden, educator, diplomat, and black nationalist by isolating three of his most controversial and contradicting ideologies—race, colonization, religion—within the context of his “multiple consciousness”: the Negro, the American, and the African. Historians criticize Blyden for his disdain for mulattoes, pro-colonization and pro-imperialist stance, and his idealistic praise of Islam. The inaccuracy of these ideologies has received considerable attention by Blyden historians. The objective of this study is not to add to the criticism but to demystify and deconstruct Blyden’s rhetoric by analyzing the substance and intent of his arguments. Concentrating on his model for a West African nation state allows more insight into the complexities of his thought. Studying the historical environment in which Blyden formulated his ideologies provide a more in-depth analysis into how his multiple consciousness evolved.

Blyden’s “black” or “Negro consciousness” evolved from his attempt to distinguish himself as a black man. He thus established an ideology of black racial purity that omitted mulattoes from his classification of the black race. Blyden’s black consciousness manifested itself into colorism. Several factors influenced Blyden’s black consciousness or his colorism. The most tangible included the political corruption and the dominating presence of mulattoes among the Liberian elite. Blyden believed that racial pride defined blackness and those who chose not to identify with blacks should be

discarded from the race. Blyden focused on mulattoes as a group; however, on an individual level he enjoyed the friendship of brown or mulatto allies such as Benson and Warner. His colorism also illustrates how the issue of class and political affiliation became a determinant of color distinction. Blyden considered his brown political enemies “mulatto” and their dark-skinned supporters as brainwashed.

Historians contend that because of his fiery rhetoric and attempts to restrict mulatto emigration, Blyden’s colorism hindered the development of Liberia. His problems at home influenced his rhetoric because his disdain for mulattoes possibly originated with his wife and children. Blyden’s disappointment with his family led him to formulate his eugenic-like ideology about mulattoes. Also, Blyden’s reaction to the color caste system illustrates the complexities of skin color among Americo-Liberians. In particular, people of color who fit both categorizations of “black” and “mulatto.” Blyden’s political affiliations with brown skin or mulattoes such as Benson and Warner emphasizes that the color divide in Liberia revolved around political ties, class distinction, and racial affiliation.

Blyden’s colorism emerged in close relation to his “American” or “Western” consciousness or his Americanization, colonization, and colonialism. I argue that Blyden’s call for Western patronage originated in the inherent nature that African Americans accepted Western values and culture. The condescending language used by prominent white men, such as Jefferson and ACS founders, resonated in the minds of African Americans. One could argue that the desire for racial vindication and Western values occurred as a response to such rhetoric. The construction of the American consciousness by blacks came as a response to negative stereotypes by white society who

considered African Americans essentially unable to appreciate or comprehend the meaning of “civilization.” As a result blacks embraced Western values—Christianity, republicanism, democracy—to distance themselves from social stigmas against their race, mainly the African.

A racial component did exist as black leaders labeled emigrationists as traitors to their race. However, no one from this group protested against the displacement of native Africans because they viewed the indigenous population as uncivilized heathens who needed to be “civilized”—similar to how whites labeled African Americans. As American citizens, blacks deemed it their unalienable right to remain in the United States and enjoy the full benefits of Christianity and democracy presented by white society. Outside of the United States Americo-Liberians sought to establish the same political and social structures. A Westernized Blyden viewed Western patronage as the only viable source for populating and creating the infrastructure for his nation state.

Political corruption along with European imperial aggression hindered the development of Liberia. Economic difficulties by the 1860s and the coup of 1871 crippled the Liberian infrastructure. Meanwhile, Europeans traders along the coast and around Liberia’s borders also placed the Republic in a precarious position. Blyden viewed the Europeans as a necessary evil, as a means of necessity and protection petitioned for a colonial protectorate. It is no coincidence that Blyden supported both Western patronage and native African traditions. Blyden acknowledged the potential of the detrimental psychological effects of westernization—he drew attention to African Americans for this distinction. However, Blyden argued that in order to “civilize” Africans, interaction with Westerners became inevitable. He reasoned that the various

African cultures had the potential of deflecting the Europeanizing component of westernization and colonialism. Blyden also contended that Europeans would not inhabit Africa en masse because of disease and inclement weather. Despite the fallacies in his argument, it illustrates that Blyden provided some resistance to the Europeans.

Blyden separated himself from other contemporary black leaders because he actually maintained a constant dialogue with the indigenous population, often participating in official and personal expeditions into the hinterland. He embraced the complexities of indigenous culture and sought to incorporate their most salient attributes into his West African nation-state model. Blyden argued that natives in the hinterland remained untouched thus unaffected by Europeanization. Because the majority of native Africans in the hinterland practiced Islam, Blyden shaped his perception of the religion based on his interactions with African Muslims.

Blyden's "African consciousness" became his most egalitarian ideology. Historians fail to emphasize his democratic nature, primarily because of his disdain for mulattoes. Blyden praised Islam but remained silent about its transgressions. He constantly traveled into the hinterland, creating a dialogue with the indigenous population, the majority Muslims. Blyden based his assertions on the Muslim activity he experienced in the hinterland of Liberia and Sierra Leone. He was aware of the transgressions of the Islamic slave trade in Africa but attributed them to the actions of individuals and not the religion. Thus, Blyden did not praise the religion, but acknowledged the efforts of the professors of the faith. Although, Christian missionaries immigrated to Africa with benevolent intentions, their condescension led to the Europeanization of Africans. The product became an African that imitated white culture.

This is not a reflection of Christianity but its missionaries whom Blyden sought to reform. He contended that asking one to reject Islam because of its relation to the slave trade became equivalent to asking one to reject Christianity for its centuries of activity in human bondage. This implies that Islam is universally practiced across Africa and denies the fact that natives incorporated the religion into their own traditional culture.

Blyden also sought to reform in Western literature because of the patronizing effects it had on the psychological development of blacks. Blyden intended to incorporate English as a universal language to tie the various ethnicities together. He also argued for aborigines to sustain their own languages. As a westernized African, Blyden sought reform in language, religion, and social ideologies rather than dismissing them. That is, his rhetoric existed as a response to factors detrimental to the enlightenment of the black race: literature, Christianity, and white “purity.” These Western values went unquestioned by broader society.

Blyden is criticized for arguing to Americo-Liberians to embrace native culture yet he never dressed in African garb or lived in African-style housing or even changed his name to an indigenous one. However, Blyden’s *actions* proved quite the contrary. One of the constant problems that hindered the development of Liberia is the inability to populate its hinterland. This occurred primarily because Americo-Liberians refused to incorporate Africans as citizens of the Republic and the lack of personnel willing to trek into the interior on expeditions, establish good relations with the native chiefs, and create and populate settlement communities in the hinterland. Because most of the political, economic, and social activity revolved around the coastal region, primarily because of

trade, most Americo-Liberians sought to remain at the coast rather than to interact on equal footing with their African cousins.

Blyden proved to be the exception. He consistently made trips into the hinterland, established close ties with natives, and even embraced their languages and religion. Instead of attempting to appear “African,” Blyden opted to interact with the aborigines and understand the nuances of their customs and cultures. One can argue that Blyden exhibited westernization and condescension towards the African, which is correct; however, in the context of nineteenth-century beliefs that a Westernized African equated to a “civilized” African, Blyden distanced himself by exhibiting a more egalitarian and broader understanding of his African cousins. After the publication of *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race* in 1887 some blacks donned African garb, or what they deemed to be “African.” Blyden’s actions held more weight than these symbolic gestures. In actuality, Blyden’s African consciousness was not an attempt to appear “African” but to embrace Africans and utilize their attributes for his ideal West African nation-state.

Blyden also equated the plight of the African American to that of the Hebrew slave in the Old Testament and considered the African Diaspora a segment of the “training” for the African race. “The abolition of slavery in the United States was not an isolated phenomenon. It was an important link in the great chain of events which are leading up to the regeneration of Africa.”²⁴⁰ Armed with the knowledge of Christ, he considered black emigration to be the final “link.” Historians criticize Blyden’s belief that slavery occurred as an act of Providence. Lynch argued that Blyden’s “theocratic determinism . . . caused him to maintain ridiculous positions. He had, for instance, consistently argued that it was part of the Providential design that Negroes should be

²⁴⁰ Blyden, *CINR*, 260.

taken to the New World so that they could acquire Christianity and other elements of western culture and civilization.”²⁴¹ Livingston stated, “Paradoxical as it seems for a champion of Negro dignity, Blyden regarded slavery as important a phase in the Negroes’ development as . . . the ancient Hebrews.”²⁴²

As exhibited in the rhetoric utilized by David Walker, Martin Delany, black newspapers, Christian missionaries, and the white-led ACS, Blyden constructed his theocratic determinism within the context of a non-secular environment. Furthermore, Blyden formulated his Providence theory cognizant of human transgressions. “When we say that Providence decreed the means of Africa’s enlightenment, we do not say that he decreed the wickedness of the instruments.”²⁴³ Blyden reasoned slavery’s “blessing” lay, not in the process, but in African Americans acquisition of Christianity.

Historians also chastise Blyden for his racist views against mulattoes, stating that his involvement in the black-mulatto conflicts in Liberia subsequently hindered the development of Liberia. As Lynch contends, “Critics could point to his unwise involvement in Liberian politics [and] his tactless opposition to mulattoes.”²⁴⁴ Frenkel argued that “Edward Blyden clearly played a prominent part in evolving the principles of cultural nationalism. . . . [However,] his ideas about races . . . are often contradictory, hazy and illogical, with strong overtones of mysticism.”²⁴⁵ But Blyden’s colorism did not go unwarranted. By circumstance of their elevated position in America, mulattoes dominated Liberian politics and displayed cunning political savvy to maintain their control. Blyden’s black purity ideology uncovers another peculiarity of the white “purity”

²⁴¹ Lynch, *Pan-Negro*, 79-80.

²⁴² Livingston, *Education and Race*, 188.

²⁴³ Blyden, *CINR*, 338-9.

²⁴⁴ Lynch, *Pan-Negro*, 32, 156.

²⁴⁵ Frenkel, “African Personality,” 289.

which argues that one drop of black blood renders one an African American. This is more peculiar when one considers that an octoroon, who is seven-eighth (87.5%) white, is considered black.

Studying the historical surroundings in which Blyden established his rhetoric is essential when analyzing the man. The foundation of Blyden's multiple consciousness, his environment, proved to be as controversial and contradicting as the professor. Blyden's consciousnesses emerged as a response to his surroundings. The black consciousness prompted him to formulate an ideology, as a black man, in response to racial purity and colorism. His American consciousness imbibed the Christian, republican, and democratic principles which expanded to West Africa. His African consciousness responded to the disregard of native culture by missionaries and Americo-Liberians.

Historians such as Lynch critique Blyden as "essentially a man of ideas, but his attempts to execute them were invariably blundering and unrealistic."²⁴⁶ Livingston contends, "To the end Blyden believed in a kind of 'supermarket theory' of social change: the African could take what he wanted from European civilization and reject the rest."²⁴⁷ When decolonizing Blyden, one must remember that he based his decisions on the goal of vindicating the black race. Beyond his contradictions, Blyden's intent outweighed his faults.

²⁴⁶ Lynch, *Pan-Negro*, 153.

²⁴⁷ Livingston, *Education and Race*, 197.

APPENDIX A
BIOGRAPHICAL OUTLINE²⁴⁸

Aug. 3, 1832	Born in St. Thomas, Virgin Islands
1842-1844	Family lived in Porto Bello, Venezuela
May 1850	Visited the United States; denied admission into a Theological College
Dec. 1850	Emigrated to Liberia
Oct. 1851	Enrolled at Alexander High School, Monrovia
1855-1856	Editor of the <i>Liberia Herald</i>
1856	Published his first pamphlet, <i>A Voice From Bleeding Africa</i>
1858	Ordained as a Presbyterian clergyman and became Principal of Alexander High School
1862-1871	Professor of Classics at Liberia College
1864-1866	Liberian Secretary of State
Jul.-Sept. 1866	Visit to Egypt, Lebanon and Syria
1872-1873	Founder and Editor of the <i>Negro</i> newspaper in Freetown, Sierra Leone, and Government Agent to the Interior
1875-1877	Principal of Alexander High School
1877-1878	Liberian Ambassador to the Court of St. James
1880-1884	President of Liberia College, and Minister of the Interior until 1882
1885	Unsuccessful Liberian Presidential candidate after which he became based in Sierra Leone

²⁴⁸ As cited in Lynch, *Pan-Negro*, xiii-xiv.

1886	Resigned from Presbyterian Church to become “Minister of Truth”
1887	Published <i>Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race</i>
1892	Liberian Ambassador to the Court of St. James
1895	Eighth and last visit to the United States
1900-1901	Professor at Liberia College
1901-1906	Director of Mohammedan Education in Sierra Leone
1906-1912	Retirement mostly spent in Sierra Leone
Feb. 7, 1912	Died

APPENDIX B

LIBERIAN IMMIGRANTS, NINETEENTH CENTURY²⁴⁹

Immigrants from 1822 to 1867

Born free	4,541
Purchased freedom	344
Emancipated, to go to Liberia	5,957
Emancipated, for other reasons	753
Arrived from Barbados, 1865	346
Settled in Maryland County, 1831-1862	1,227
Recaptives, Africans taken from slave ships	
by the United States Navy, 1820-1843	287
by the United States Navy, 1843-1860	5,457

Immigrants from 1865 to 1904

Origins in the United States	4,093
Total	23,005

²⁴⁹ Cited from J. Gus Liebenow, *Liberia: The Quest for Democracy* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987), 19, table 2.

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