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Black Journalism's Opinions About Africa During The Late Nineteenth Century

ALTHOUGH AFRO-AMERICAN journalism had begun in 1827, its biggest period of growth occurred after the Civil War opened the South to black newspapers, and as a more substantial portion of the population became literate. Many of the newspapers started on shoestring budgets, and there was a high attrition rate; by 1890 nearly six hundred black newspapers had been started, and ten years later over one hundred and fifty papers were in operation.¹ By 1890 a hierarchical structure existed among the prominent black newspapers, with several having subscribers throughout the nation. The most prominent were the *Indianapolis Freeman*, *New York Age*, *Richmond Planet*, and *Washington, D.C. Bee*. Their influence also extended beyond their own readership because many small black papers reprinted significant articles from these large presses.

If many of the race leaders followed a policy of studied lack of comment about Africa, the black press might be expected to also follow this policy. Yet, because of their position as a forum of debate for the black community, these papers carried a number of articles and surprisingly large letters about Africa. Africa was of concern to late nineteenth century Afro-Americans largely because, as black political and economic status declined, a significant minority favored emigration to Africa. Concurrently, however, Africa was experiencing its own decline in status as Europeans gained colonial control over many areas of the "Dark Continent." While black leaders of national stature might say nothing, the editors and lesser commentators argued their views about Africa in papers which were relatively free of white notice. Inspection of seven non-religious black newspapers, both large and small and of different

¹ Armistead S. Pride, "Register and History of the Negro Newspaper in the United States, 1827-1950" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Northwestern University, 1950), p. 5; John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom* (3rd ed., New York, 1967), p. 411.

sections of the United States, shows that comment about Africa reached a peak in 1892-1893 when the interest in emigration was highest.²

The amount of comment about Africa, however, did not indicate an identification with or even a favorable concern for Africa. In some cases, articles about Africa might be compared to reprints about any foreign countries which periodically appeared in the newspapers. Black newspapers had stories about such diverse places as Siberia, Argentina, India, and China. Some of the articles on Africa, therefore, were probably considered as "foreign news." Numerous comments about Africa also appeared in letters or editorials criticizing emigration, thus obviously presenting an unfavorable picture of the continent.

The black journalists, similar to the race leaders, were optimists and assimilationists with regard to the future of black people in the United States. That is, they held a firm American self-identity and felt that the Negro problem would be solved when blacks were assimilated into American society. Although newspapers like the *Freeman* protested strongly against lynching and segregation, they emphasized black accomplishments and potential in the United States: "America, the scene of so much suffering and agony on the part of the blacks, has much more of the past reserved in the traditions of the race than Africa can have, and more glory than can come to that benighted land. . . . The onward march of the race [in America] . . . is sure if slow."³ The editor criticized "Africans and other foreigners" for pitying Afro-Americans because of the mistaken notion that, "mobs and lynching are held to be the rule, when really there are but comparatively few of such outbreaks. . . . Far too many do occur but nothing like what the average foreigner thinks." Instead, said editor George Knox, black Americans should emphasize their blessings rather than their complaints.⁴ The *Freeman* abounded in political cartoons showing blacks coming to an auspicious future, and although Knox admitted he was sometimes discouraged, he felt that "beyond and above the clouds glitters ever, a star of hope and promise for the Negro."⁵

Along with their optimism, the journalists exhibited a grand patriotism. The United States was referred to as "the greatest, wealthiest, freest nation on the globe," and black readers were advised that "America, your own fatherland and home, is a thousand, yes, ten thousand times more desirable from every point of observation" than Africa.⁶ Furthermore, the

² The conclusions of this article are based largely upon a page-by-page search of the following newspapers for comments on Africa: *Afro-American Sentinel* (Omaha, Nebraska, 1896-1899); *American Citizen* (Kansas City, Kansas, 1889-1899, circulation 800); *Bee* (Washington, D.C., 1882-1899, circulation 1,000-4,000); *Freeman* (Indianapolis, 1888-1899, circulation 7,000-12,000); *Grit* (Washington, D.C., 1883-1890); *People's Advocate* (Washington, D.C., 1876-1886, circulation 700); and *Planet* (Richmond, Virginia, 1895-1899, circulation 5,000). Circulation figures, where available, are from Ayer's *American Newspaper Annual Directory*, 1893 and 1899 editions. The most important paper, in terms of both circulation and comment on Africa, was the Indianapolis *Freeman*. The New York Age was not searched because its editor, T. Thomas Fortune, made his attitude toward Africa explicit in his other writings and speeches.

³ *Freeman*, February 19, 1898, p. 4.

⁴ *Ibid.*, April 1, 1899, p. 4.

⁵ *Ibid.*, January 19, 1895, p. 1.

⁶ *Ibid.*, April 1, 1893, p. 4.

assimilationist editors were proud of their positions as civilized Americans and eager to integrate themselves into the white man's world. The *Freeman* consistently held the opinion that:

. . . The white man is an incentive, a model. To be as he, is the Negro's ambition. . . . Contact with superior civilization has fixed the aims and hopes of American negroes, of whom every breath is tainted with a desire to lose their identity or racial classification. A racial evolution is on, with amalgamation as the goal. . . . We for one have nothing to urge against being brought here. We rather glory in the fact. What we have escaped by being absent from Africa, tongue can never tell.⁷

To the assimilationists, American citizenship was the goal of a hard-fought struggle. In a letter to the editor of the *Freeman*, an Iowa reader addressed Pan-Africanist blacks, saying, "The whites deprived and denied us of our American name for over two hundred years because of our color, now for God's sake don't keep denying that we are Americans."⁸ Black writers challenged the theory that Africa was the "natural home" of the blacks and therefore that they should emigrate by asking white Americans if they were prepared to return to Europe as their natural home and by asserting that anyone's natural home is the place where he himself was born.⁹ The *Kansas City American Citizen*, its very title indicative of its identity, asked, "Why should we emigrate in order to fully obtain what has been proclaimed for us, equal rights as American citizens?"¹⁰ Many of those who expressed themselves in the black newspapers would have shared the pride expressed in a letter to the *Washington Bee* in 1892: "I am an American citizen, born on American soil . . . and I don't feel myself any less an American than a descendant of Europe. . . . The progress that our people have made . . . surpasses that of any race or people upon the globe."¹¹

One of the most prominent Afro-American journalists, a man so influential and active that his career united the two roles of editor and race leader, was T. Thomas Fortune. Born in Florida as the son of a mulatto Reconstruction legislator, Fortune was almost white in appearance. He attended Howard University, and in 1879 he moved to New York as a teacher and newspaper reporter. It was in the 1890's that Fortune made his name as editor of the *New York Age*.¹² He represents a classic example of the assimilationist anti-emigration black journalist.

Fortune saw white ideals as the central focus of American life, and deprecated separatist black culture as "absolutely unattainable in a

⁷ *Ibid.*, September 20, 1890, p. 4; May 21, 1898, p. 4; May 27, 1899, p. 4.

⁸ *Ibid.*, December 31, 1892, p. 1.

⁹ *Ibid.*, April 27, 1895, p. 3.

¹⁰ *American Citizen*, September 29, 1899, p. 1.

¹¹ *Bee*, January 23, 1892, p. 1.

¹² Richard Bardolph, *The Negro Vanguard* (New York, 1959), p. 97. Curiously, by the 1920's an older and more discouraged Fortune reversed his nineteenth century ideas and joined Marcus Garvey in his separatist emigration scheme.

country where Anglo-Saxon ideals of literature and art and everything else predominate." The good aspects of black ways of life, he held, would be absorbed into the dominant white society.¹³ Within the context of his assimilationist thought, he felt that emigration would be tantamount to "asking a coequal heir to abandon his portion of the estate," since it involved blacks giving up their American inheritance.¹⁴

The black journalists attempted to revive the hope for a bright future in America, and they also presented an unfavorable image of Africa. Whether this negative image was inspired by their attempt to curtail emigration sentiment or by their assimilationist attitude toward America which rejected empathy with Africa is impossible to discover. But the close relationship of the two positions is undeniable.

The newspaper condemnations of Africa usually begin with a recital of the hazards of the tropical climate. A missionary in Sierra Leone wrote to the *Freeman* about his difficulties in keeping healthy, saying "Africa is a sickly country. One can die here without any effort whatever. Oh, the African fever is simply awful."¹⁵ Henry Stanley's explorations in Africa were given full publicity, and his reports presented a rather frightening picture. In one such report, he described the Congo as having:

. . . briars and thorns abundant; lazy creeks, meandering through the depths of the jungle . . . ants and insects of all kinds, sizes and colors, murmuring around; monkeys and chimpanzees above, queer noises of birds and animals, crashes in the jungle as troops of elephants rush away; dwarfs with poisoned arrows securely hidden . . . standing poised, still as dead stumps, rain pattering down on you every other day in the year; an impure atmosphere, with its dread consequences, fever and dysentery; gloom throughout the day, and darkness, almost palpable, throughout the night. . . . The aborigines are wild, utterly savage, and incorrigibly vindictive. The dwarfs—called Wambutti—are worse still, far worse. . . . The gloom of the forest is perpetual.¹⁶

With such descriptions, it is easy to see why many Afro-Americans wished to avoid any association with Africa. One of the most terrifying aspects of Africa which the black newspapers reported was cannibalism. In 1892, when an exhibit on Dahomey was planned for the Chicago World's Fair, the *American Citizen* predicted that, "the king and his cannibals will come over . . . and here the wild orgies of the Ivory Coast will be renewed and repeated in the presence of an admiring multitude."¹⁷ The *Freeman* often published cartoons showing Africans as cannibals, articles describing human sacrifice and the consumption of infants and

¹³ *Liberia*, II (November, 1897), 65.

¹⁴ T. Thomas Fortune, "Will the Afro-American Return to Africa?" *A.M.E. Church Review*, VIII (April, 1892), 390.

¹⁵ A. L. Ridgel letter, *Freeman*, August 5, 1893, p. 2.

¹⁶ *Freeman*, May 4, 1889, p. 7.

¹⁷ *American Citizen*, September 30, 1892, p. 1.

slaves.¹⁸ One article spoke of the cannibals of central Africa, "who are numbered by millions," but said those along the Niger River "are some of the worst cannibals in the world . . . [and] are among the most degraded of human beings." This article quoted the British explorer Harry Johnston on the shocking nature of these cannibals, who wore human bone jewelry and placed human skulls around their villages.¹⁹ Other articles condemned the twin evil to cannibalism, the slave trade, and referred to it as "the inhuman practices that are in operation daily in the Dark Continent."²⁰

While emphasizing derogatory aspects of Africa, the newspapers seldom mentioned the highlights of African civilizations. They were usually content to accept without question the interpretations of Africa presented by European explorers.²¹ In 1888, the *A.M.E. Christian Recorder* stated that, "loyalty to Africa, patriotic loyalty, in the heart of the American Negro is almost unnatural."²² One Afro-American, on tour with a concert company in South Africa, identified more with the English colonists than with the Africans.²³ Another black correspondent wrote: "What if our thirty-first grandfather was born in Africa? The rest of our relatives and ourselves were born in America. . . . As a race we are unable to tell what country in Africa we are from. The colored people who inhabit this country are . . . American."²⁴

The most extreme indicator of a lack of identity with African people or cultures was probably the position which some Afro-American journalists took toward imperialism. During the late nineteenth century, European colonialists were spreading their control over large areas of Africa. In 1895 T. Thomas Fortune spoke in defense of imperialism. Although he criticized some of the cruelty involved in the European colonization, Fortune saw the westernization of Africa under colonial rule as a commendable action. With imperialism, he predicted, "The physical and mental forces now dissipated in tribal wars, in savage methods of industry, will give place to peaceful administration of government and to concentrated methods of industry."²⁵ He looked forward to a revolutionary change, with the substitution of Western culture in place of the traditional ways of life:

Never in the history of mankind has a continent been so rapidly subdued and its waste places made the habitation of civilized governments and its savage inhabitants brought into contact and under the control of civilization. . . . The vast population of Africa will be brought under Christian influences in new forms of government and habits of thought and of conduct. The whole life of the people will

¹⁸ *Freeman*, February 16, 1889, p. 3; see also July 26, 1890, p. 5; October 4, 1890, p. 8; April 23, 1892, p. 7; May 21, 1898, p. 7; April 8, 1899, p. 3.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, August 11, 1888, p. 2.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, March 20, 1897, p. 4.

²¹ *Ibid.*, December 6, 1890, p. 1.

²² Quoted in *African Repository*, LXIV (July, 1888), 102.

²³ Manie G. R. Edwards letter, *Freeman*, October 26, 1895, p. 1.

²⁴ A. O. Smith letter, *Freeman*, December 31, 1892, p. 1.

²⁵ Quoted in Bowen, ed., p. 201.

be revolutionized. . . . The demoralizing heterogeneousness which now prevails over the whole continent will give place to a pervading homogeneity in language, in religion, and in government.²⁶

Furthermore, Fortune had a specific destiny in mind for the new homogeneous Africa. He believed that:

the nationalization of Africa will be along English lines . . . in its language, from the basic point of view, in its system of government and its religion. The English language is the . . . most comprehensive in its use as a vehicle of human thought and expression. The English system of civil government is the best that has been devised.²⁷

Other newspapers encouraged imperialism, as, for example, when the *Freeman* criticized the Dahomeyans as being slave traders and murderers, and complimented the British and French for working to break up the slave trade and trying to "subdue" Dahomey.²⁸

The *Freeman* went even further when it urged that America also should become involved in the partition of Africa. In 1898 it urged the establishment of a joint American-British protectorate over Liberia, saying "It might seem a usurpation of authority, this form of meddling, but the age of philanthropy and high humanitarianism certainly suggests that the engrafting system be employed in defense of phlegmy old Liberia. . . . The Liberians can afford to trust the Americans and the English."²⁹ It was suggested that in its black population America had a ready reserve of officials for a colonial administration, and that if an American colony existed Afro-Americans would have less objection to moving to Africa.³⁰

Some writers who did not directly espouse imperialism favored the conversion of Africa to Western civilization. As early as 1885 the *Freeman* declared:

. . . Africa is our fatherland . . . we must prepare to enter upon the elevation of Africa with other races . . . civilizing our brethren . . . as well as Christianizing them. . . . We must enter Africa with the Anglo-Saxon and help build it up.³¹

Western business was seen as a forerunner of civilization, and it was predicted that, "Commerce will yet bear the torchlight into that benighted Country."³² Journalists like John Edward Bruce, who otherwise cared little about Africa, admired British involvement and fumed that, "something ought to be done without delay and that by enterprising men of our race" to activate American commercial investment in Africa.³³

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 200-01.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 204.

²⁸ *Freeman*, December 17, 1892, p. 2.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, July 16, 1898, p. 4.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, December 13, 1890, p. 4.

³¹ *Freeman*, January 30, 1885, p. 1.

³² *Freeman*, July 4, 1891, p. 2.

³³ *Grit*, May 24, 1884, p. 2.

A strong faith in civilization revealed the influence of social Darwinism. One correspondent from Mississippi assured readers that African savagery would soon be conquered by civilization because, "the notions of primitive life fade away and die when confronted with modern ways. . . . This is a law of evolution."³⁴ The *Freeman* complimented white American missionaries in Africa, saying they were "carrying the gospel banner of peace in the core of savagery itself." However, it looked forward to the material as well as the spiritual conversion of Africa, and anticipated "what the missionaries unaided have so long striven to do, the railway, the telegraph and the steamboat will accomplish, and the dark continent will be at length civilized."³⁵ Beneath this advocacy of political and cultural imperialism lay a deep attachment to Western culture and a derogatory view of African ways of life.

While Afro-American journalists did not invariably advocate imperialism, they sometimes attempted to discourage black emigration by emphasizing the inevitability of European control over Africa. To those potential emigrants whose primary desire was to free themselves from white rule, this argument acted as a strong deterrent. In 1897 the *American Citizen* predicted that within twenty-five years "all of Africa worth the having, will be in the hands of the European nations."³⁶ As a slap to the emigrationists, the *Freeman* reprinted an article on British colonization in Rhodesia and Kenya, with the title: "Will Gobble Africa Sure. The White Man from Europe, and what will Bishop Turner do then?"³⁷ Similarly, it editorialized:

. . . It is only a question of time when the entire continent of Africa will bow to Caucasian dominion. If Afro-Americans are induced to leave our fair America now and pitch their tents amidst savage wilds, they must there succumb to Caucasian power as here.³⁸

The European seizure of Africa was seen as even more inevitable because it was believed that "the natives are supine, allowing the partitioning to go on even without protest."³⁹

It might seem that the journalistic comments were contradictory in their advocacy of imperialism and the recital of the dangers of white control in Africa.⁴⁰ The context in which these attitudes were expressed must always be kept in mind. When imperialism was being discussed favorably the reference was to "primitive savages." The argument against white rule, on the other hand, was directed toward those Afro-Americans who were considering emigration to escape white control. The juxtaposition of these opinions further underscores the lack of

³⁴ G. E. Logan letter, *Freeman*, May 16, 1896, p. 6.

³⁵ *Freeman*, July 11, 1896, p. 4; August 23, 1890, p. 8; see also October 5, 1889, p. 1.

³⁶ *American Citizen*, January 8, 1897, p. 2.

³⁷ *Freeman*, July 1, 1893, p. 3.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, November 18, 1893, p. 6.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, October 12, 1895, p. 4.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, December 26, 1896, p. 4; January 4, 1890, p. 4.

identity between these writers and Africans. "With Africa slipping away piecemeal into the clutches of the land grabbing countries," the *Freeman* could not understand what inducements were held out to emigrants and spoke of:

. . . the whetted teeth of the European nations that have been gnawing at its vitals for a half-century and more, and threaten to shred it still further into endless dependencies . . . that argue no good for the natives. . . . Even Liberia stands feeble . . . ready to expire with the next passing gale. . . . It is to be doubted if Africa after all has a single thing to offer that in any way will tend to lessen the burden of the [American] black man.⁴¹

With these arguments the anti-emigrationists put pressure on dissatisfied blacks not to emigrate. This pressure apparently influenced many, who despaired of any improvement in their condition, not to go to Africa. Alternative plans which promised escape from oppression without the disadvantages of emigration to Africa were devised. In 1895 black newspapers carried advertisements by the Colored Colonization Society promoting migration to California. The advertisements pictured black persecution in the South and asked, "Is there escape from this? Yes! And without going to Africa to starve or die with the fever."⁴² Apparently many blacks who went to Liberia did so mainly to escape oppression rather than to enter a paradise. Although it was certainly an exaggeration, there must have been some accuracy to the claim of the *A.M.E. Christian Recorder* that many emigrants "choose Africa as the excruciating sufferer chooses death, or the man condemned to be hanged chooses the penitentiary."⁴³

One of the fears expressed in the black press concerned the future moral condition of the emigrants. It was predicted that the civilized emigrants, surrounded by savage anarchy, would degenerate to barbarism. One writer pleaded that if Afro-Americans went "to the dark continent where they can practice polygamy, bigamy and everything else that is low and vile, and you will soon see instead of progression, retrogression. . . . Deliver us from any place where our people are any more degraded than they are in this country."⁴⁴ It was statistically impossible, believed one correspondent to the *Bee*, that Afro-Americans in Africa would not deteriorate. He asked, "Will the energy, experiences, learning and education of the few who may lead us there, be sufficient to keep us above that state of degeneracy, . . . superstition and stupidity of forty millions?"⁴⁵ This argument was directed against the emigration theory that blacks should go to Africa to better their condition. The anti-emigrationists not only felt that there was no chance for Afro-

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, July 17, 1897, p. 4; September 23, 1899, p. 4.

⁴² *Ibid.*, March 30, 1895, p. 1.

⁴³ Quoted in *African Repository*, LXIV (July, 1888), 100.

⁴⁴ *Freeman*, November 18, 1893, p. 7.

⁴⁵ W. H. Gaston letter, *Bee*, January 23, 1892, p. 1.

Americans to prosper in Africa, but there was a great chance that they would decline even below the meagerness of their life in the United States.

Although black journalism, in whole, expressed an antipathy toward Africa and led the attack upon emigration, it must be pointed out that there was a minority position. As a forum for debate about Africa, the newspapers received letters to the editor from blacks who favored emigration or involvement with Africa. And sometimes the journalists themselves expressed a positive view about Africa.

A few journalists made favorable statements about emigration. This was usually associated with disillusionment about the future of blacks in the United States. The *Southern Age* was said to be "growing pessimistic. It feels that the chances for Negroes of the South engaging in industrial pursuits, are gradually closing. It has quite approached Bishop Turner in theory: 'Sell out and go to Africa.'"⁴⁶ Other editors, while not expressing any identity with Africa, stated their views favoring modified emigration. While editor Edwin Hackley of the *Denver, Colorado Statesman* did not like the idea of mass exodus, he favored "independent, voluntary immigration to Africa, the same as to any other portion of the earth, according to personal choice."⁴⁷ The New Orleans *Southwestern Christian Advocate* felt that "the inferior masses [should] remain here wards of America . . .," but productive blacks should emigrate, "if we are so situated that by going we can do something better for Africa than add to her pauper population."⁴⁸ A reporter for the *Richmond Planet* reasoned a number of advantages for emigrants. The Europeans in Africa, he said:

. . . seem to be doing well and becoming rich. Why cannot colored Americans go there and do the same? . . . It does not cost as much to live there as here; not near the toil or labor is annually required there as in America. No suffering from cold as many of our people suffer here. . . . In Africa there is no such prejudice of color as here.⁴⁹

Sometimes, black newspapers contained articles which expressed a favorable view of Africa. Rarely showing any interest in Africa, the *Afro-American Sentinel* nevertheless printed a syndicated article about the Zulu King Dinizulu, entitled "A Black Napoleon." Although the description of the conquest of the Zulu by the English was presented without comment, the king was referred to as "a man of more than ordinary intelligence. . . . head of a great and war-like line."⁵⁰ The *Freeman* recognized an interest in Africa, and reprinted articles from both European and African newspapers. From the press in Lagos and

⁴⁶ *Freeman*, September 4, 1897, p. 4.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, November 25, 1893, p. 4.

⁴⁸ Quoted in *African Repository*, LXIV (July, 1888), 99.

⁴⁹ "The Rambler" letter, *Planet*, August 1, 1896, p. 4.

⁵⁰ *Afro-American Sentinel*, January 8, 1898, p. 1.

Sierra Leone, articles were republished about religious and social events in West Africa. Other articles were written about Africans who were visiting the United States. In 1892 the editor announced that a special African explorer had been commissioned to write articles, and three years later a headline proclaimed, "the *Freeman* is read on every Continent and brings you news of the Negro from the Dark Continent."⁵¹

Black newspapers occasionally protested against European atrocities upon the Africans. The *Freeman* objected to a British attack against the Ashanti in which the whites, unable to win a military battle, set off a display of fireworks. The West Africans, not being familiar with fire-crackers, panicked at the sight. The *Freeman* commented:

. . . This mode of war-fare on these untutored blacks who are not schooled in the latest sciences is certainly questionable. . . . They should have been given a white man's chance. Gold, gold, is at the bottom of all this. . . . Europe is laughing at the *modus operandi* of the blacks. On calm reflection it is not quite a laughing matter.⁵²

Later, the German explorer Karl Peters was criticized for killing Africans.⁵³ Although the *Freeman's* sense of fairness and right was offended, it is important to realize that the attitude expressed was one of humanitarian sympathy rather than identity. The *Planet* came closer to identification with the Africans when it complimented the bravery of the Benin king,

. . . who killed the English party sent on an expedition as usual to rob the native blacks . . . [and presented] as ringing a message of defiance as any we have ever heard and shows a high order of intelligence. It is a dark, bloody page in the history of Africa, upon which the white man is writing, redeemed only by the luminous characters which tell of the bravery of the black men who are slowly but surely giving away before the march of oppression, whiskey and the degraded civilizing influences of the well-fed conquerors.⁵⁴

This positive view of the Africans and the strong anti-imperialistic position taken differ markedly from many of the statements of the black press.

A few journalists went so far as to indicate a favorable image of small-scale African societies that were not "civilized." A political cartoon in the *Freeman*, entitled "Should the negro emigrate?" pictured Africans as primitive but happy when compared to American blacks suffering the terrible discriminations which they suffered. The first picture contrasted an Afro-American, poor and in rags, with "the wild Negro in Africa," dressed in a grass skirt and enjoying a hunt. The second picture

⁵¹ *Freeman*, August 13, 1892, p. 4; October 26, 1895, p. 1; see also July 4, 1891, p. 2; January 9, 1892, p. 6; October 29, 1892, p. 2; November 19, 1892, p. 1; February 11, 1893, p. 6; June 24, 1893, p. 1; May 26, 1894, p. 6; November 3, 1894, p. 6; January 30, 1897, p. 4; February 18, 1899, p. 7.

⁵² *Freeman*, February 1, 1896, p. 4.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, March 21, 1896, p. 4.

⁵⁴ *Planet*, February 13, 1897, p. 2.

showed an American white supremacist contrasted with smiling primitives enjoying life in their own villages, with the caption, "in Africa, 'tis the laws of nature, and happy results." The third cartoon presented a black American surrounded by cannons labeled, "force," with the statement "the Negro is considered an American, still he must endure the enforcements and hardships." This dismal picture is contrasted with a representation of an African chief sitting on his throne, with the caption, "In Africa, it's one rule and he knows how to obey it."⁵⁵ Although the cartoonist had a stereotyped image of African primitiveness, he nevertheless pictured the Africans as happier than Afro-Americans and implied that their culture might be superior to the black position in the United States.

One paper, the *People's Advocate*, occasionally made statements which showed an open identification with Africa and an appreciation of African ways of life. In 1879, the editor noted his pleasure at receiving the *West African Reporter*, a paper from Sierra Leone:

... We are more than gratified to receive our contemporary from the father land. We should all manifest a lively interest in the growth and development of our kin in these distant shores—their growth and development not necessarily measured by Aryan standards or according to the Anglo-Saxon idea of civilization, but determined by their environment and their own characteristic high possibilities.⁵⁶

A year later, the editor expressed similar ideas when he stated:

... It is gratifying to us to learn that the people of Sierra Leone are making such earnest efforts to educate their children in their own country. For this is far better than to send them away; for when they remain at school in foreign lands [e.g., Europe] they are very likely to learn to love the laws and customs of other nations; and ... they often lose respect for the institutions of their native country. ... When we see these people who are our brethren, so solicitous about educating their children, we think the same is not far distant, when "Ethiopia shall suddenly stretch out her hands unto God."⁵⁷

It must be remembered, nevertheless, that positive images of Africa were relatively rare exceptions to the usual unfavorable presentation in the black press. When editorials are analyzed, it is clear that they reflect an anti-Africa orientation by most black journalists. As a group, Afro-American newspapermen led the attack against emigration and discouraged a feeling of close relations between black Americans and black Africans. Like the race leaders, they had a firm identity as American citizens and presented a negative image of Africa. They felt themselves

⁵⁵ *Freeman*, January 16, 1892, p. 1; the editor obviously did not agree with his cartoonist's opinions, because he added underneath the cartoon caption, "Should the negro immigrate?" the anti-emigration statement, "We think not. America has her drawbacks and unpleasant features, but what of Africa?"

⁵⁶ *People's Advocate*, May 31, 1879, p. 2.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, August 21, 1880, p. 1.

to be civilized men and resented association with an uncivilized land. Many of the ideas of the journalists were reflected in an editorial by the *Freeman*, which stated:

. . . Stability of government or policy are unknown quantities in that far away land; civilization has left its imprints upon the merest verge of that vast bone of contention . . . [and] does not bespeak the vast dark continent which must be explored and known before it can take on a nation's airs—all of these Ethiopia thou lackest woe-fully. . . . In contrast with the African Negro or Africa's inducement, the advantage is here [in the United States]. The American Negro is only sorry that he can not invite all Africa over to enjoy the blessings [of American civilization].⁵⁸

To the successful black journalist looking back to his beginnings as a lowly slave, life in the United States indeed may have seemed promising as compared to the life he could envision for himself and his audience in Africa.

⁵⁸ *Freeman*, July 17, 1897, p. 4. For a more general approach to Afro-American interest in Africa, which shows a more favorable image held by some black people, see Walter L. Williams, "Black American Attitudes toward Africa, 1877-1900," *Pan-African Journal*, IV (Spring, 1971), 173-194. The author is presently engaged in a study of Afro-American church publications' opinions on Africa, and preliminary observations—particularly of A.M.E. Church Bishop Henry Turner's *Voice of Missions* (1893-1900)—lead to different conclusions than an examination of the black secular press.

