CHAPTER 6

Black Religion and Black Nationalism

If it be here shown beyond reasonable doubt . . . that the ancient Egyptians, Ethiopians and Libyans . . . were the ancestors of the present race of Ham, then the Negro of the 19th century may point to them with pride; and with all who would find in him a return to racial celebrity, when in the light of a Christian civilization, Ethiopia shall stretch out her hands unto God.

Rev. Rufus L. Perry,
ex-slave Baptist pastor of Brooklyn, N.Y.,

Almost from the beginning of slavery in the New World, a process of repatriation and colonization back to Africa made it possible for a few slaves, who by one means or another had secured their freedom, to return to their homeland from South America and the Caribbean, and later from the English colonies in North America. The reverse movement facilitated the development of an early relationship between blacks in the New World and those who remained in Africa. During the Revolutionary War thousands of slaves who escaped to the British forces, or who had been liberated by loyalists, made their way to Canada and Nova Scotia, to the West Indies, or to the coastal areas of the South American mainland. Some of them later recrossed the Atlantic to take up their lives again in West Africa.¹

John Kizzel, an escaped slave from South Carolina who became a minister and built a church in Sierra Leone, sailed from Nova Scotia at the end of the Revolutionary War with a group of American slaves and developed a prosperous settlement in the British colony. In 1818 Kizzel met Samuel J. Mills and Ebenezer Burgess, agents of the American Colonization Society (ACS), He conducted them to Sherbro Island, where it was decided to erect the first Sierra Leonean settlement of the society.²

The relationship between African-Americans and Africa was, of course, first established by the African slave trade itself. New England rum manufactured from the sugar and molasses of the West Indian
plantations was exchanged for slaves in the markets of West Africa. The captives were shipped across the Atlantic and sold for the sugar cane and molasses they were enslaved to produce, beginning the whole process over again. By the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century, this triangular commercial relationship was providing a network of contact and communication between Africa and the Americas that laid the foundation for the spiritual and intellectual exchange that was to follow under the sponsorship of black Christians on both sides of the Atlantic—the vision of African-African American solidarity projected by men such as Garvey and Du Bois.

One of the first persons to take advantage of the connection was Paul Cuffee, a New Bedford shipowner. Cuffee was a member of a small group of blacks in Massachusetts who made contact with the Free African Society of Philadelphia and founded the first African Baptist and Methodist churches in Massachusetts and Rhode Island. Inspired by African Methodism and his own talent for commercial ventures, Cuffee undertook a mission to Africa. It was his intention to colonize West Africa with American blacks who could not only carry out an evangelistic project among their non-Christian relatives, but would also lay the foundation of commerce between Africa and America that would compete with and finally bring an end to the slave trade. In 1815, at his own expense, he took nine families and thirty-eight other persons to Sierra Leone to begin the realization of his dream of bringing Christian civilization and businesses owned and operated by blacks to the motherland. Influences flowing from men such as Captain Cuffee, from the missionary aspirations of the new black churches in the United States and the West Indies, from political developments and anti-slavery agitation on both sides of the Atlantic, circulated back and forth and generated quite early a spirit of incipient black consciousness and anti-colonialism more than a hundred years before what came to be known as the Pan-African movement against colonialism.

Black religion and the newly independent churches played an important role in these developments. The emergence of black nationalism in America and Africa cannot be understood apart from the zeal of believers to christianize the land of their ancestors and to open up an administrative and communications network between churches for the promotion of Christian missions in both Africa and the Caribbean.

From the early effort of former slaves to establish a Christian settlement and mission in the British colony of Sierra Leone, churchmen from the United States and West Africa turned their eyes to Africa as an object of evangelization. They intended to win Africa not only for Africans, but for Christ, by mass emigrations from the West and by forging bonds of friendship and collaboration between Africans and African Americans. This dream, as we shall see, was never shared by the majority of American blacks—especially those in the free states of the North who
were rapidly becoming acculturated to the values and loyalties of white America—but it continued to plague the consciousness of the descendants of the slaves well into the twentieth century and is inseparable from the rise of black nationalism in the United States, the islands of the Caribbean, and on the continent of Africa itself.

THE AMERICAN COLONIZATION SOCIETY

Whatever the motives of the ACS and other white-controlled colonization schemes, it must be conceded that these early efforts of whites, many of them sincerely motivated by Christian missionary zeal, opened up for blacks the whole issue of emigration. It helped to forge a connecting link between emigration, Christianity, and black nationalism. The Reverend Samuel Hopkins, a former slaveowner of Newport, Rhode Island, first conceived of the idea of black emigration to Africa in 1759. Feeling that some “remuneration was due Africa” for the plunder of its people, Hopkins devised a plan to educate some free blacks and send them back to bring the blessings of Christian religion and civilization to their unfortunate brothers and sisters. The ACS grew out of this plan and was to play a central role in the founding of Liberia in 1822. The ACS was always controversial among both whites and blacks in the United States, but it cannot be doubted that the society gave impetus and continuity to the idea that black Americans had a contribution to make to the awakening of Africa, and that Africa and not North America was the natural homeland of black people.

To be sure, the motives of the southern supporters of the idea of colonization were suspect from the beginning. The presence of free blacks in the United States presented both southern slaveholders and northern politicians with an irritating and anomalous situation. Theoretically the natural increase of free blacks threatened white hegemony in the North and slavery in the South. In the North the specter of black franchise and competition for industrial jobs was combined with racial prejudice. In the South whites feared black inundation and a consequent rebellion of slaves. The very existence of a community of free blacks, such as in Charleston, Richmond, and New Orleans, reminded those who were still in bondage that slavery was not a natural and necessary condition of all blacks, and “uppity,” querulous free blacks represented a potential seedbed of conspiracy and insurrection. The problem of what to do with the blacks was, therefore, conveniently if fraudulently solved by the idea of African or West Indian colonization in either Africa or the West Indies. Both those whites who favored slavery and those who were genuinely opposed to it found common cause in the proposal to remove this source of embarrassment and danger and salve their consciences about Africa at the same time.
In the very year that the AME Church was founded in Philadelphia, a group of white citizens representing several states and including some of the most distinguished men in America gathered in Washington to organize the ACS. In an atmosphere charged with both guilt feelings and noble aspirations the colonizationists plotted what many of them had come to believe was the ultimate solution to the American race problem. But through either stupidity or self-delusion, the manner in which the argument was framed aroused more fear and resentment among northern blacks than the support that might otherwise have been forthcoming from them. Leon F. Litwack writes concerning the crisis that was precipitated:

One month after the organization of the Colonization Society, approximately three thousand Negroes crowded into Philadelphia’s Bethel Church to give their reply: the colonization scheme violated professed American principles, it sought to stigmatize the free Negro population, and it countenanced the perpetuation of human bondage and encouraged it by seeking to remove the free blacks. Under these circumstances, it deserved to be repudiated by all Negroes, who should, instead, reaffirm their determination never to part voluntarily from their enslaved brethren.

It should be understood that Richard Allen and the African Methodists who followed him were not so enamored of their situation in the North that they were unwilling to entertain any thoughts of renouncing American citizenship. The convention of 1830, which was dominated by Allen and other black churchmen, strongly recommended emigration to Upper Canada. Many who were opposed to the ACS, such as James Forten, the wealthy sailmaker and abolitionist of Philadelphia, were concerned about the future of Africa. They were privately of the opinion that the day would come when blacks would have to separate themselves from their oppressors and return to their native land.

It was the arrogance of the whites, their miscalculation of the self-esteem of free blacks and their feeling of solidarity with the slaves, rather than aversion to the idea of emigration that made black leaders repudiate the ACS. It was the talk of “Negro inferiority” and “degradation,” the obvious attempt by the colonizationists to dodge the question of the immorality of slavery, and the overenthusiastic participation of the slaveholders themselves in what purported to be a benevolent scheme, that turned the free communities in the North against the colonization proposal. They were well aware of the illogic of whites wanting to do “a great good” for a people they despised while continuing to hold their relatives and friends in chains. They shared their suspicions with their abolitionist friends, such as William Lloyd Garrison, and finally disabused them of the idea that such a scheme could ever be made compatible with antislavery.
The expulsory laws of Ohio in 1829 and the desirability of securing a place for fugitives outside the United States infused the first National Negro Convention with emigrationist sentiment. The convention rejected the ACS because its leaders suspected the real motives of the colonizationists, but the notion that it would be good to consider emigrating to some part of the world that was free from the curse of slavery was upheld. What those who attended the meeting at Mother Bethel church resented was the coercive, high-handed methods of the whites—who once again wanted to speak and act for blacks. Although they recognized the need of many to be relocated “in a land where the laws and prejudices of society will have no effect in retarding their advancement to the summit of civil and religious improvement,” they refused to be settled “in any place which is not the object of our choice.” In general, they also objected to emigrating to Liberia or Haiti, “believing them only calculated to distract and divide the whole colored family.”

After the white abolitionists of the North were convinced that black leaders were staunchly opposed to the Colonization Society, they abandoned it. Some of them, misunderstanding the real point at issue, then began to escalate their own campaign against African emigration, ridiculing blacks who favored it in succeeding years. In such a way well-meaning white friends exercised, in a backhanded manner, considerable influence over blacks who thoughtfully considered selective emigration but did not wish to appear to be betraying white friends and the grand cause of abolishing slavery in the United States.

However, there was ambivalence about the subject throughout the nineteenth century. If northern blacks had not been so convinced that the abolitionists could deliver what they promised without acrimony, and if they had not been so squeamish about offending Garrison and other friends, it is possible that some modified form of emigrationism may have caught on in the North as it did in many parts of the South. Black church leaders could never quite divorce their desire to carry the gospel to their brothers and sisters in the West Indies and Africa from a candid recognition of the intolerable condition of black life in America and the chance that there might be a better life abroad. Despite their public opposition to the idea of running away from the challenges at home, the missionary implications of the offers held out by the ACS and other state and local colonization groups continued to intrigue many.

Transatlantic travel was expensive and difficult to arrange. No less so was the founding of a settlement and church once the emigrants arrived at their destination. The newly independent churches, which had become the focal point of cultural activity and community organization, had little means with which to plant Christian colonies in Africa or anywhere else. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Allenites, for all their criticism of the
colonization movement, could still justify utilizing it as an instrument for helping to relocate those who wanted to cut the umbilical cord and answer the Macedonian call from Africa.

With the obvious success of the English repatriation program for liberated and fugitive slaves and freed West Indian blacks—which eventuated in the establishment of Sierra Leone as a British crown colony in 1808—and with rising missionary fever in the ACS as more churches and prominent clergymen took an active role, the twin interests of missions and colonization oscillated back and forth in the minds of many church leaders. It was not easy to decide what was best. Although the majority continued to be skeptical about colonization, there was enough interest in what may be called “missionary emigrationism” to keep the colonization societies alive and kicking into the twentieth century.

Four years after the AME Church was founded, one of its ablest ministers, Daniel Coker of Baltimore, sailed for Africa with the help of the ACS as the first black Methodist foreign missionary. Although he was not officially commissioned by the AME Church, he nevertheless “carried the unanimous consent and good will of his brethren.” Coker’s destination was the island of Sherbro, a part of Sierra Leone where the Colonization Society planned to develop the first American settlement.

Coker accompanied the first group of slaves to be sent by the society. In the company was a group of free blacks who, like Coker himself, had hopes of finding greater freedom and opportunity in Africa than in the beleaguered free communities of the United States. Before the ship landed at Campell, the brilliant and controversial minister had organized a church among the eighty-nine colonists aboard and was conducting worship services in accordance with the Discipline of the AME Church. Like the self-styled missionary John Kizzel who preceded him with another party of ex-slaves, Daniel Coker saw colonization not only as a bid for independence and opportunity for America’s oppressed blacks, but as a part of God’s plan to bring the Christian faith to the land of his ancestors through the ministry of a black church.

Mills and Burgess, emissaries of the ACS, had been helped by John Kizzel to locate a site for the settlement in 1817. Two years later they accompanied Coker and the little group of pioneers back to the area. The choice of location proved to be an unfortunate one because of the frequent inundation of the low-lying terrain. An epidemic broke out in the group, nearly wiping it out and taking the lives of the two white agents. Coker suddenly found himself heir to the responsibilities of the two officers of the ACS and decided to lead the survivors back to mainland Sierra Leone, where he later settled and built a church in Freetown. The resolute spirit and commitment of this man who almost became the first bishop of the AME Church may be gleaned from a remarkable letter he sent back to the Colonization Society:
We have met trials; we are but a handful; our provisions are running low; we are in a strange heathen land; we have not heard from America, and know not whether provisions or people will be sent out; yet, thank the Lord, my confidence is strong in the veracity of his promises. Tell my brethren to come; fear not; this land is good; it only wants men to possess it.  

The attitude of the first African Americans to colonize Africa was unquestionably one of condescension and paternalism. The Africans were regarded as a degraded race in need of nothing so much as the salvation and superior virtues others could bring. As unpalatable as such arrogance would be today, this was the missionary spirit of the time; black and white churchmen shared it alike. Daniel Coker and others believed it was nothing less than God's grace that had brought the black American church into an independent status and one of its great purposes was to return Africa's sons and daughters to their true homeland, in order to save the souls of millions who languished in darkness. As presumptuous as such an attitude was, it was nonetheless motivated by a sincere dedication to service, a wide compassion for the plight of Africa, and a willingness to take up the vocation of suffering for its redemption.

In a letter from Campeslar to a friend in Baltimore, Coker eloquently expresses his deep tenderness and humanity toward his African brothers and sisters, and the hope he shared with other Christians for the day when "Ethiopia would soon stretch forth her hands unto God" and become one of the great nations of the world:

The millions in this land, are the thousands in America, and the thousands unborn are deeply interested in it. Oh! my dears, what darkness has covered the minds of this people. None but those who come and see, can judge. You would be astonished to see me traveling in the wilderness, guided by a little foot path, until, coming suddenly upon a little town of huts in the thickets; and there, to behold hundreds of men, women and children, naked, sitting on the ground or on mats, living on the natural productions of the earth, and as ignorant of God as the brutes that perish. You would see them coming round me, shaking hands, (but very different from our way of shaking hands) and gazing on me, and spreading a mat, and offering me of such food as they live upon. In a word, they are friendly and kind. Such is their conduct, that any one who loves souls would weep over them, and be willing to suffer and die with them. I can say, that my soul cleaves to Africa. . . . I expect to give my life to bleeding, groaning, dark, benighted Africa. I expect to pass through much, if I should live. I should rejoice to see you in this land; it is a good land; it is a rich land, and I do believe it will be
a great nation, and a powerful and worthy nation; but those who break the way will suffer much.\textsuperscript{13}

Another early black missionary effort in Africa was the work done by Reverend Lott Carey (1780–1828), a slave preacher from Richmond, Virginia, who took the second shipload of colonists from the United States to Liberia in 1821. Carey founded churches that were supported by the Baptists of Richmond. In 1815 he had organized the original African Missionary Society of Richmond and raised seven hundred dollars for its work. Six years later he sailed for Liberia, arriving before the agent of the ACS. His gifts were soon recognized by all, and he was appointed vice-governor. He later served as governor during the absence of Governor Jehudi Ashmun from the colony. The Baptists of Richmond, with whom he kept in close contact, were stirred by the prospect of missionary emigrationism in Africa, despite Carey’s open criticism of the ACS. Carey became the symbol of African American involvement on the continent and of the independence and self-reliance of black missionary endeavor.

Like Samuel Hopkins, the Quaker pacifist Benjamin Lundy, who influenced the young William Lloyd Garrison to join the abolition movement in 1828, had an early interest in missionary emigrationism. It was Lundy who encouraged Bishop Allen to establish a branch of African Methodism in Haiti, where Lundy had already started a colony of free blacks from the United States.\textsuperscript{14} In 1824 Haiti became the first official mission field of the AME Church. At the invitation of President Jean Boyer, two thousand emigrants settled in the new black republic. Many of them were members of Allen’s own Bethel church in Philadelphia. With the assistance of Reverend Scipio Beans of the Baltimore conference, they built St. Peter’s church at Port-au-Prince and selected Richard Robinson as their first pastor.\textsuperscript{15}

By 1830 the black Methodists had mission congregations at Port-au-Prince, Samana, and Santo Domingo. Here again we have some indication of the foreign mission interest of the independent churches and the convergence of the spirit of missions with that of emigrationism in the nineteenth century. The spread of African Methodism in several parts of the Caribbean, and the consequences of that development for intensifying fraternal relations between the West Indies and the United States, is a matter requiring careful study. But there can be little doubt that African Methodism and the outreach of black Baptist churches and missionary societies in North America contributed to pride and self-determination throughout the area.

In British possessions, such as Barbados and Jamaica, where the former Georgia slave Reverend George Liele founded the first Baptist church in Kingston in 1782, black congregations helped to create a climate for rebellion in the early nineteenth century by developing new
forms of leadership based upon church government among the slaves. The leaders of the insurrections in Demerara in 1823 and Jamaica in 1831 were strongly supported by church members. In all likelihood, blacks were emboldened by reports of AME involvement in the Denmark Vesey revolt of 1822. The Akan slave, Kwame, who led the revolt in Demerara, was first deacon of Bethel chapel in the town, and many of the participants in the 1823 uprising were members of that chapel. The revolt in Jamaica was known as the “Baptist War.” The reference is to the native Baptists who evolved from the Liele congregations. Monica Schuler writes, “it is clear that in both Demerara and Jamaica, the slaves had detached the London Missionary Society and Baptist church organizations from missionary control, and used them as organizations of social protest.”

The news of slave revolts and the part played by Baptist and Methodist church members in instigating them encouraged blacks on the mainland and in the West Indies to shake off their chains and support one another. Christian missions and emigrationism thus worked hand in hand to foment unrest and a desire for independence throughout the Caribbean as well as the southern region of the United States.

The planting of congregations from the United States was widespread. Before the end of the nineteenth century, AME missions had been established in Haiti, Cuba, Jamaica, Antigua, the Virgin Islands, Tobago, Barbados, and Trinidad. There were also mission points in the Bahamas and Bermuda. From about 1850, missionaries from the African Methodists labored at Paramaribo, Dutch Guiana, and at Georgetown, British Guiana. When Marcus Garvey traveled throughout the Caribbean and Central America preaching the gospel of black nationalism and the “Back to Africa” movement, he found some of his most sympathetic audiences among black Baptists and African Methodists whose families had emigrated from North America in the previous century, or whose congregations were influenced by those denominations and had taken pains to cultivate pride in their African heritage and a spirit of self-reliance.

The early missionary movement of the black denominations to Africa and the Caribbean should not be regarded as an expression of what we today call black nationalism. Even efforts linked with emigration and promoted by the ACS were not primarily political in nature, or related to a self-conscious rejection of American values and civilization. It is true, of course, that some of the first black preachers who took the gospel to foreign parts and encouraged others to follow had visions of a better life than blacks found anywhere in the United States. Yet their primary concern was not to found a black nation free of slavery, poverty, and racism, but the inauguration of a great evangelistic mission to heathens who happened to be black and among whom the proud African Methodist and Baptist traditions could take root and flourish.
After the Civil War, Edward W. Blyden, a Presbyterian, Henry M. Turner of the AME Church, Theodore Holly, an Episcopal bishop, and Lucius H. Holsey, a bishop of the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church, became powerful advocates of black separatism. They attempted, without notable success, to propagate a kind of religious black nationalism in the Caribbean and Africa. Their efforts bore fruit in the first third of the twentieth century, but whatever success they enjoyed cannot be attributed to the support they received from either their respective denominations or from the public at large.

The fact is that neither colonization nor foreign missions were effectively developed or promoted by the African American churches. To have instituted a strong and well-financed missionary program in Africa would have required considerably more resources than these struggling churches had available after taking care of urgent needs at home. The white colonizationists, having committed a strategic error in their approach to emigration, were never in a position financially, or in terms of influence, to generate much enthusiasm for Liberian emigration among the churches. Nor were they able to demonstrate the kind of effective nation-building in Africa that might have encouraged greater response from the denominations. The fiasco of naïve, broken promises, and stranded emigrants destroyed any real possibility for a mammoth encampment of black America at the doorstep of the colonization societies.¹⁸

The white churches, for their part, had the money and should have had the vision to undergird the development and expansion of black missionary activity overseas as one way of making a rather safe contribution to black freedom and independence. But it rarely occurred to white American Christians that what they hoped to do for Africa could have been done to better purpose for both Africans and African Americans by the black churches of the United States and the Caribbean. Torn with theological and sectional strife during most of the nineteenth century and having segregated their black constituencies or dismissed them to black denominations, the white churches studiously avoided giving anything more than paternalistic charity at the local parish level to black Christians. For the most part, they ignored what the black denominations were trying to do in both the United States and the overseas mission field.

The tragedy of black American missionary outreach in the Caribbean and Africa during the nineteenth century was its neglect by the churches themselves. The predominantly white denominations were relatively affluent and, in a spirit of ecumenism and fraternal cooperation, could have helped, but they looked the other way with their noses in the air. Although the black denominations wanted to maintain a healthy missionary enterprise outside the country, their aspirations far exceeded their ability to do so. It was not altogether because of a disaffection vis-à-vis missionary emigrationism among the free blacks of the North. By the
time of the Civil War almost every leader of consequence favored or was at least open to the idea of colonization in Africa or the Caribbean, and Christian missions were thought to be the noblest and the best method for African colonization. It was rather that there was never sufficient money and personnel to demonstrate that missionary emigrationism was realistic for the churches and that it could succeed without an enormously increased investment of time, energy, and money.

The work initiated by Daniel Coker, Lott Carey, and others could not be adequately supported with missionaries and settlers from the United States, or given sufficient funds to develop its full potential without greater help from the white churches than they were prepared to give. The demands upon the nickel and dime collections in the churches of the blacks were overwhelming. Normal requirements for building national denominations and strengthening home missions to care for the steadily mounting tide moving northward and into the southern cities drained off both personnel and funds. As a result the work so auspiciously begun in West Africa went begging most of the century.

At the New York annual conference of the AME Church in 1853, Bishop Willis Nazrey, a great promoter of African missions, proudly reminded his brethren that their church had as much responsibility in Africa and the West Indies "as any other Christian Church upon the face of the globe." However, it took the practical-minded Bishop Daniel Alexander Payne to bring the African Methodists back to reality by citing the formidable problems of establishing missions in foreign lands and caring for them without money. The recognition of black responsibility, he said, was no guarantee of the ability to perform it. Such was the sad acknowledgment of the impossibility of carrying on an elaborate program of foreign missions at a time when even wealthy white denominations were having problems with such work.

The fact that most black ministers and their denominations did little to foster the emigration fervor prior to Emancipation does not mean, however, that religion played no significant role in the rise of black nationalism and Pan-Africanism. Quite the opposite is true. A black theology of missionary emigrationism and racial destiny evolved from the aggressive thrust of black folk religion toward liberation from slavery and an African homeland. This inchoate, unofficial theology gradually took the initiative from the churches and laid the groundwork for Garvey, Padmore, and others of the twentieth century who were less dependent upon the institutional church. This way of thinking about God and black destiny was by no means unrelated to the vision of young Hezekiah Grice, the man who started Allen thinking about colonization. It was also expressed by Willis Nazrey, and other churchmen who were basically orthodox in their understanding of the faith, but possessed great racial pride and black consciousness.
MARTIN R. DELANY

The most intellectual expression of this rudimentary black theology of the antebellum period came from someone who was not a clergyman, but a prominent physician and journalist, Martin R. Delany. Delany represented a small group of nonclerics who were products of the church, but less conservative than either their pastors or the black integrationist laity who catered to Garrison. Although Delany said that he “had rather be a Heathen freeman, than a Christian slave,” he was nevertheless an African Methodist and a lay theologian of rare insight and ability.

Martin R. Delany was born in 1812, the son of free blacks, in Charleston, West Virginia. His parents fled from persecution and settled in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, where he was educated until moving to Pittsburgh in 1831. There Delany began the study of medicine and commenced publication of The Mystery—later converted into a journal of the African Methodists. From 1847 to 1849 he worked with Frederick Douglass in publishing the North Star in Rochester and in 1849 entered Harvard Medical School. Although he opposed the Colonization Society, Delany became a proponent of black emigration and was active in the Negro Convention movement, where he had close association with the prominent churchmen of the day. His outstanding contribution to black nationalism was a book published in 1852, The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States, Politically Considered. It was sharply attacked by the white abolitionists for its advocacy of colonization. When Delany took measure of the fact that he was losing the support of those who were working for abolition, he ordered sales stopped. This did not, however, keep him from being a theoretician of black nationalism and emigrationism until his death in 1885.

Notwithstanding his nationalistic leanings and belief that white Protestants were the cruelest oppressors of the blacks, Delany was an ardent supporter of the missionary outreach of Christianity. He believed that Protestant missions were the most important gift of Europe and America to Africa, and that they would eventually bring a “purer and higher civilization” to that continent. But he also believed that missionaries should be “homogeneous in all the natural characteristics, claims, sentiments, and sympathies—the descendants of Africa.” That is to say, he favored sending black missionaries to Africa. His problem with religion in the black community was that the churches, too imitative of the pietism of Protestant evangelicalism, were giving blacks the impression that they were in miserable conditions because of their immorality, and that what was necessary for salvation was “being good” like the “best” white people.

This exaggerated moralism and emulation of whites was never, in fact, central to black folk religion, although it could certainly be found
in the mainline black churches. Delany, for all his erudition and sophistication, was closer to the realism and wisdom of folk religion than to the churches. It was sheer nonsense to him, and bad religion, to believe that God would prosper whites, but placed blacks in the condition in which they found themselves “for not half the wickedness as that of the whites.”

Delany reasoned that the right use of religion required an understanding of its function and limitations as ordained by God himself. He thereby extrapolated a theological principle from folk religion that was not unknown to the American pragmatist and agnostic Benjamin Franklin—“God helps those who help themselves.” Unlettered black Christians have always believed that those words were found in the Bible and were the essence of the Christian religion. They have agreed essentially with Delany that it is foolish to try to gain equality and the power to elevate a people by praying for it. The universe is governed by spiritual, moral, and physical laws, each restricted to effectiveness within its own sphere of operation. Hence, said Delany, a spiritual blessing is to be prayed for, a moral good sought by exercising one’s sense of justice, and a physical end requires the use of might and muscle.24

Delany recognized the crucial significance of the church in lifting and ennobling the masses. But he faulted the church for teaching an excessive otherworldliness that expected spiritual means to equip the folk to compete with whites in the moral and physical areas of life. God, said Delany, did not provide mystical solutions for the hard problems of power and self-realization, nor did he expect blacks to accept white definitions of reality when those definitions presumed white jurisdiction over black progress. Thus, more than any other person of his period, he anticipated and developed one of the major emphases of black theology:

We are no longer slaves, believing any interpretation that our oppressors may give the word of God, for the purpose of deluding us to the more easy subjugation; but freemen, comprising some of the first minds of intelligence and rudimental qualifications, in the country. What then is the remedy, for our degradation and oppression? This appears now to be the only remaining question—the means of successful elevation in this our native land? This depends entirely upon the application of the means of Elevation.25

The “means of Elevation” had to be in strict conformity with the laws governing politics and economics. Delany’s rationalistic analysis of the situation led him to the conclusion that self-effort, plus what he called “attainments,” and finally emigration, were the only means sufficient for equality and social progress.

Delany helped to clarify the cultural vocation of the black church during the 1850s—particularly its responsibility with respect to the continent
of Africa. He was a member of the famous African Civilization Society, a group of very able men founded in 1858 with the explicit purpose of bringing about "the civilization and christianization of Africa and of the descendants of African ancestors in any portion of the earth, wherever dispersed." In 1861 he was influential in reformulating the purpose of the society to include the encouragement of selective emigration of persons "practically qualified and suited to promote the development of Christianity, morality, education, mechanical arts, agriculture, commerce and general improvement."26

Delany considered several possibilities for mass emigration from the United States. At first he favored colonization in Central America or East Africa. But later, after leading an exploration of the Niger Valley in 1859, he settled upon selective emigration to West Africa. Henceforth, his life and labors were devoted chiefly to that objective.

Throughout his career he retained an explicit theology of racial redemption, which he shared with such distinguished divines as Bishop James T. Holly and Alexander Crummell. It was essentially an understanding of God as liberator—a God who was calling oppressed blacks out of the land of their captivity to a place that he had appointed for them and their posterity forever. This was a salient contribution of an elite group of churchmen to the formulation of a theological perspective that explicated the subtle and clandestine meaning of much of the preaching and many of the spirituals of the folk religious tradition. It never became the official, recognized theology of any major black denomination, but had its systematizers and propagators in both black and white denominations. It was a theology of racial destiny achieved by struggle against the powers of evil—powers once represented by the mysterious forces of nature and spiritual beings that African religious specialists and early plantation preachers sought to control or manipulate. Those powers were now understood to represent and be operative in social and political events, but no less violent and intractable.

The focus of this perspective was the biblical revelation of the justice of God who "put down the mighty from their seats and exalted them of low degree" (Luke 1:52), who gathered the scattered children of Israel under Nehemiah and helped them to build the wall of Jerusalem—"because the people had a mind to work" (Neh. 4:6). Martin R. Delany believed in such a God. His conviction that God had decreed greatness for blacks and that they could claim a glorious future only by their own power is sung with lyrical passion in his writings:

The time has now fully arrived, when the colored race is called upon by all the ties of common humanity, and all the claims of consummate justice, to go forward and take their position, and do battle in the struggle now being made for the redemption of the world. Our
cause is a just one; the greatest at present that elicits the attention of the world. For if there is a remedy; that remedy is now at hand. God himself as assuredly as he rules the destinies of nations, and entereth measures into the "hearts of men," has presented these measures to us. Our race is to be redeemed; it is a great and glorious work, and we are the instrumentalities by which it is to be done. But we must go from among our oppressors; it can never be done by staying among them. God has, as certain as he has ever designed anything, has designed this great portion of the New World, for us, the colored races; and as certain as we stubborn our hearts and stiffen our necks against it, his protecting arm and fostering care will be withdrawn from us.27

By the time of the publication of his Official Report of the Niger Valley Exploring Party in 1861, Delany had shifted his sights from Nicaragua and New Grenada as possible sites for a colony to West Africa. In Lagos, Nigeria, he found a black Christian community that strengthened his belief in the divine election of African Americans for a special work in Africa, for which an enlightened and inspired church would be the vanguard. As he wrote as early as 1852:

"Princess shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God." With the fullest reliance upon this blessed promise, I humbly go forward in—I may repeat—the grandest prospect for the regeneration of a people that ever was presented in the history of the world. The disease has long since been known; we have found and shall apply the remedy. I am indebted to Rev. H. H. Garnet, an eminent Black clergyman and scholar, for the construction, that "soon," in the Scriptural passage quoted, "has reference to the period ensuing from the time of beginning." With faith in the promise, and hope from this version, surely there is nothing to doubt or fear.28

The outbreak of the Civil War prevented the execution of Delany's grandiose plan for emigration and the redemption of Africa. During the war his energies were concentrated on the recruitment of black soldiers for the Union. He was commissioned a major in the medical corps and postponed his dream of emigration until the war could be won against slavery. After discharge he worked for the Freemen's Bureau during the Reconstruction period. Although the war revived his hopes that justice could be secured in the United States, those hopes were once again dissolved in the acid realities of the post-Reconstruction era, the Compromise of 1877, and the Supreme Court's repeal of the Civil Rights Act of 1875 only two years before he died.
ALEXANDER CRUMMELL

Another great champion of missionary emigration and theologian of black liberation was Alexander Crummell, an Episcopal clergyman whose life also spanned the Civil War period. Crummell was born in New York in 1819, and one of the friends of his boyhood was the New York abolitionist Presbyterian, Henry Highland Garnet. After being refused matriculation at General Theological Seminary, the leading seminary of the Episcopal Church, Crummell studied privately in Boston for the priesthood and in 1844 was ordained in Philadelphia.

Throughout his life he was a brilliant spokesman of black pride and solidarity. In his early years he was one of the best-known supporters among black intellectuals of colonization and nationalism. He went to Liberia in 1853 as a missionary under the encouragement of supporters of the ACS even though, like Delany and others, he had been highly critical of its operations.

In preparation for his work in Africa, Crummell went to England and received a degree from Queen’s College, Cambridge. It was at Cambridge that he matured as a scholar and developed a viewpoint on racial advancement that adumbrated the Du Bois theory of the “Talented Tenth.” Crummell advanced the idea that black intellectuals had a special responsibility and leadership role in church and community. As the first president of the American Negro Academy, which he helped to organize shortly before his death in 1898, he helped to blaze the path for scholarship and the study of black life and culture, which many talented persons who gathered around Howard University in Washington, D.C., were to follow.

After spending twenty years in missionary and educational work in Liberia and Sierra Leone, Crummell returned to the United States in 1873, somewhat less visionary and optimistic about mass emigration. He became rector of the fashionable St. Luke’s Episcopal Church in Washington and enjoyed in that setting a national pulpit for his controversial views regarding the advancement of blacks. Like Booker T. Washington, Crummell had little confidence in political agitation, although he consistently demanded civil rights for blacks. His major interest was in self-help, industrial education, and racial solidarity. He spoke out strongly for what he called “the Social Principle”—the natural law of association that “binds men in unity and brotherhood, in races and churches and nations”—without which, he believed, no nation or people could hope to achieve greatness.

As a minister, Crummell’s primary concern about Africa rested upon his conviction that the message of Jesus Christ had to be preached in all the world, as the Lord himself commanded. African colonization, however much he objected to the way some of its advocates promoted it, was
for him one of the means by which "God’s beneficent providence" chooses to work for the propagation of the gospel among all nations, and particularly among the heathen kinsfolk of American blacks. It was through the efforts of blacks to bring Christianity and civilization to Africa (and also to South America and the Caribbean) that they would be able to prove to the world that their "previous condition of servitude and the color of their skin" had no effect upon their capacity for progress and nobility of character. When blacks question the responsibility they bear for the destiny of Africa, they only reveal their lack of self-respect and pride. Liberia was the "land of their fathers," and the shame that many evidently felt because of their African origin, or that of their ancestors, was unworthy of intelligent people obliged to face the fact that America could never be their true home—that "all men hold some relation to the land of their fathers."

Alexander Crummell was one of the first black theologians to question the theology of totalistic agape, with its emphasis upon the unconditional love of the enemy, by speaking of self-love as a Christian principle that oppressed blacks must espouse if they are to cast off their chains and rise to equality with the white nations of the world. African Americans should not emigrate to Africa, said Crummell, merely for philanthropic reasons, but because of the natural desires and ambitions of people who have regard for themselves and the acquisition of power to accomplish something worthy of a great nation. Thus he wrote in 1860:

I am referring to that sentiment of self-regard which prompts to noble exertions for support and superiority. I am aiming at that principle of SELF-LOVE which spurs men on to self-advantage and self-aggrandizement—a principle which, in its normal state and in its due degree, to use the words of Butler, "is as just and morally good as any affection whatever." In fine, I address myself to all that class of sentiments in the human heart which creates a thirst for wealth, position, honor and power.\(^30\)

Such advice from a clergyman was a telling blow to the cloying pietism of the missionaries and subservient black preachers who taught people to humble themselves under the yoke of "Jesus, meek and mild" while whites claimed the glory and riches of this world that were created for all to enjoy. Christianity for Crummell was a religion for tough-minded, enterprising persons who developed their natural energies, skills, and "worldly talent" to serve their own needs first, precisely because only so could God, who had brought them out of bondage for that purpose, use them to serve the needs of others.

Thus, early in his career, Crummell developed ideas pointing toward the legitimate secularity of black faith and the institutionalization of the church as an agency in which secular and religious purposes coalesced.
The sacred and profane roles of the church were united in the promotion of economic and social progress through self-help and the execution of a civilizing and humanizing mission to the world. This was, in fact, a further extension of the concepts around which the first Free African societies, fraternal orders, and cultural organizations in black churches were founded, and a theme that runs through the quasi-religious black nationalism of the twentieth century.

Crummell's critique of the churches of his period had to do with their excessive moralism and refusal to take seriously the challenge of the mission to Africa. Throughout his life he had lingering doubts about the ability of African Americans to shake off the psychological encumbrances of the experience of slavery and rise to the stature of the manhood and womanhood that characterized the essential quality of true religiousness:

But I say it deliberately, that the difficulties in the way of our brethren doing a goodly work for Africa, are more subjective than objective. One of these hindrances is a want of missionary zeal. This is a marked characteristic of American black Christians. I say American, for from all I hear, it does not characterize our West Indian brethren; and the infant church of Sierra Leone is already, in sixty years from its birth, a mother of missions. This is our radical defect. Our religion is not diffusive, but rather introversive. It does not flow out, but rather inward. As a people we like religion—we like religious services. Our people like to go to church, to prayer-meetings, to revivals. But we go to get enjoyment. We like to be made happy by sermons, singing, and pious talk. All this is indeed correct so far as it goes; but it is only one side of religion. It shows only that phase of piety which may be termed the "piety of self-satisfaction." But if we are true disciples, we should not only seek a comforting piety, but we should also exhibit an effective and expansive one. We should let our godliness exhale like the odor of flowers. We should live for the good of our kind, and strive for the salvation of the world.³¹

EDWARD W. BLYDEN

A younger contemporary of Martin Delany and Alexander Crummell was the West Indian propagandist of emigrationism, Edward Wilmot Blyden. Blyden was born in St. Thomas in 1832 and came to New York in 1847. Like Crummell he was discriminated against by a white institution of higher education and the incident undoubtedly influenced his life as an ardent champion of black nationalism.

In 1850 he went to Liberia as a missionary. From 1881 to 1885 he was the president of Liberia College, where he distinguished himself as the
leading Christian educator and scholar of West Africa. George Shepperson calls Blyden the “pioneer theorist of the African personality” and the outstanding example of the “three-way process” that bound together the intellectual contributions of militant black leaders of the United States, Africa, and the Caribbean in the evolving Pan-Africanism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.  

Blyden was widely traveled. He lectured to black and white audiences at some of the leading colleges and seminaries in the world. Between 1872 and 1888 he visited the United States eleven times, speaking in behalf of Africa and the solidarity of the black people, and maintaining contact with the leading intellectuals of his day. In the early years of this century he devoted himself to the study of the African past. With Carter G. Woodson and W.E.B. Du Bois, Blyden helped to create the black history movement in the United States.  

Perhaps even more than Delany and Crummell, Blyden’s writings represent a self-conscious and systematic development of the seminal theology that gave spiritual substance and inspiration to black nationalism and Pan-Africanism. He was convinced that Liberia was the place God had chosen for the stolen race of Africans in the Americas, and he spent many years trying to persuade the leaders of the church in the United States to sponsor Liberian emigration.  

Like many others of the time, Blyden seems to have had no special problem with what today would be regarded as a misguided black American cultural and political imperialism in Africa. His understanding of the place of African Americans in the Heilsgeschichte of black faith justified such a position and made it the cornerstone of his theology. By means of their enforced sojourn with the Anglo-Saxon race in the New World, God had bequeathed to the blacks in North America and the Caribbean a cultural superiority over the native African, precisely for the purpose of lifting the veil of darkness from their less fortunate brothers and sisters and opening up the continent of Africa to modern civilization. At first Blyden believed that the native Africans were so tractable “that it would be a comparatively easy matter for civilized, Christianized Black men to secure all the land to Christian law, liberty and civilization.” In this regard his early thinking was almost identical with that of Paul Cuffee and others who had assumed a providential relationship between Christian missions and the economic and political development of Africa by Afro-Americans.  

Today organized Christianity is often criticized by black intellectuals because of its involvement with governmental and commercial interests in the oppression of Third World countries. It is no wonder that many find it difficult to understand the esteem in which radical protagonists of black nationalism such as Blyden, Delany, Crummell, Garnet, Walker, and other nineteenth-century intellectuals held the Christian religion. It is, however, necessary to observe that, for all its defects, Christianity
provided what was the only familiar and coherent body of moral and ethical principles available to most of those leaders for organizing a distressed and undisciplined people. As practical men of affairs, they would not permit black chauvinism to prevent them from using the Christian faith as an instrument to serve their own purposes even as it had so well served the economic and political fortunes of the civilization of which they were the most recent and favored beneficiaries.

Blyden, much like Crummell, did not consider himself orthodox in the narrow sense of most American evangelicals. He felt a greater theological affinity to the nonconformist luminaries of New England Protestantism—the Channings, Parkers, and Emersons, all of whom, he believed, were more reliable as friends and allies than the camp-meeting evangelists and sanctimonious clerics of the mainline denominations.

In this the powerful bishops and the prominent though often poorly educated preachers of the established black churches did not follow Blyden and his theologically trained colleagues. Blyden, nevertheless, continued to respect the white missionaries and ministers who, despite the discrepancies of their form of Christianity—of which he studiously reminded them—were the means by which blacks were introduced to the gospel of the Kingdom. "The lessons they have taught us," he wrote in an encomium to American Protestantism, "for their uplifting effect upon thousands of the race, we have no doubt, contain the elements of imperishable truth, and make their appeal to some deep and inextinguishable consciousness of the soul." It may be for this same reason that black religion in North America has remained essentially Christian and attracted, until well into the present century, the fidelity and respect of some of the most radical leaders of the race.

Blyden became one of the most distinguished Presbyterian ministers in the world, although he is still not well known among Presbyterian scholars. His lectures in some of the great churches and theological seminaries in this country have been forgotten, but in his own time they marked him as the outstanding theologian and theoretician of black advancement in the post-bellum period. His association with whites did not prevent him from being an unswerving proponent of "Africa for the Africans," a motto which he or Delany coined and which included African Americans as well as those born on the continent.

One must not be deceived by Blyden's expressed appreciation of the civilizing function of Christianity. He bitterly criticized the white-controlled missions in Africa, particularly because they refused to tolerate the practice of polygamy, and he encouraged the secession of African Christians from the mission churches in order to form their own native churches. In Nigeria his effort to this end assisted in creating, together with Majola Agbebi, the Yoruba Baptist founder of the first independent church in West Africa, the United Native African Church.
Blyden’s interest in the pioneering movement for promoting the study of black history grew out of his attempt to develop a biblical and theological interpretation of the origin and destiny of the race. It was this interpretation of the Christian faith that gave him a platform for his program of emigration to Africa. In a sermon entitled “The Call of Providence to the Descendants of Africa in America,” he took his text from Deuteronomy 1:21:

Behold, the Lord thy God hath set the land before thee: go up and possess it, as the Lord God of thy fathers hath said unto thee; fear not, neither be discouraged.

In typical fashion he proceeded in this sermon to develop what became the central motif of black religion in the latter half of the nineteenth century as black preachers sought to pierce the mystery of the enslavement and suffering of God’s people at the hands of an unrighteous nation. What was the meaning of the forcible removal of the millions of Africans from their native land to these alien shores? How could a positive religious meaning for the present and future be extracted from the desperate situation they faced in America?

These were questions that haunted Blyden and others like him. One of the ways he tried to resolve them was by developing a doctrine of divine providence that could account for suffering as preparation for a great work. Accordingly, it must be that God speaks to us in two ways: by his word and by his providence. In the case of African Americans, he had spoken providentially in the following ways:

First, by suffering them to be brought here and placed in circumstances where they could receive a training fitting them for the work of civilizing and evangelizing the land whence they were torn, and by preserving them under the severest trials and afflictions. Secondly, by allowing them, notwithstanding all the services they have rendered to this country, to be treated as strangers and aliens, so as to cause them to have anguish of spirit, as was the case with the Jews in Egypt, and to make them long for some refuge from their social and civil deprivations. Thirdly, by bearing a portion of them across the tempestuous seas back to Africa, by preserving them through the process of acclimation, and by establishing them in the land, despite the attempts of misguided men to drive them away. Fourthly, by keeping their fatherland in reserve for them in their absence.

Behind this understanding of the operation of divine providence lay a distinctive interpretation of the origin of blacks in the history of peoples that Blyden made the basis for his attack upon the pretensions of white American theology. Many white Christians, fortified by the opinions of
distinguished scholars and church leaders in the South, claimed that the black skin of the African was the dire consequence of the curse that Noah had invoked upon his youngest son, Ham, when he had the indiscretion to look upon the nakedness of his drunken father.

Actually the curse in Genesis 9 was upon Canaan, the son of Ham, who as a result of his father’s sin was to become a “servant of servants” to his brothers—Cush, Mizraim, and Phut—and to his uncles, Shem and Japheth. Inasmuch as the curse was spoken to Ham and the Hebrew word ham meant “hot” and “black,” and further, in view of the inclusion of the people of Ethiopia and Egypt among the descendants of Ham (Gen. 10:6–14), the accepted interpretation of the white scholars was that the blacks were of Hamitic origin and their skin color was divine punishment upon all the races descended from Ham.\(^{36}\)

It was by this interpretation of the Genesis story of the origin of the world’s peoples that black converts to Christianity first learned of the cause of their misery. Even though many preachers discounted such a convenient excuse for black enslavement, many others were too convinced of the absolute reliability of Scripture to dismiss it out of hand. Instead of flatly denying that the Bible was accurate about the Hamitic genealogy of the dark-skinned races, Blyden, Garnet, and others sought rather to reverse the significance of the passage by emphasizing the previous fulfillment of Noah’s malediction and the fact that the regenerating and elevating power of the gospel superseded the judgment of the Old Testament. In other instances they emphasized the positive, even superlative, implications of the Hamitic genealogy.\(^{37}\) This was all the more possible on the basis of a Hamitic hypothesis that recognized the Egyptians and Ethiopians as originally black peoples and their ancient civilizations as the achievements of a Hamitic race.

In accordance with this latter theory, Blyden wrote in 1862:

The all-conquering descendants of Japheth have gone to every clime, and have planted themselves on almost every shore. By means fair and unfair, they have spread themselves. . . . The Messiah—God manifest in the flesh—was of the tribe of Judah. He was born and dwelt in the tents of Shem. The promise to Ethiopia, or Ham, is like that to Shem, of a spiritual kind. It refers not to physical strength, not to large and extensive domains, not to foreign conquests, not to wide-spread dominions, but to the possession of spiritual qualities, to the elevation of the soul heavenward, to spiritual inspirations and divine communications. “Ethiopia shall stretch forth her hands unto God.” Blessed, glorious promise! Our trust is not to be in chariots or horses, not in our own skill or power, but our help is to be in the name of the Lord. And surely, in reviewing our history as a people, whether we consider our preservation in the lands of our exile, or the preservation of our fatherland from invasion, we are compelled
to exclaim: "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us!" Let us, then, fear not the influences of climate. Let us go forth [to Africa] stretching out our hand to God, and if it be as hot as Nebuchadnezzar's furnace, there will be one in the midst like unto the Son of God, counteracting its deleterious influences.\(^{38}\)

**THE HAMITIC HYPOTHESIS**

By searching the Scriptures and the works of historians of antiquity, black preachers and intellectuals at the turn of the century eloquently repudiated the argument that God had forsaken black peoples by permitting them to be enslaved in America. They believed that through the diaspora, Africa was destined to experience a revival of its ancient glories in the name of Jesus Christ. Martin Delany, for example, turned to the writings of the Greek historians, Herodotus and Diodorus Siculus, to prove that the world was indebted to Egypt and Ethiopia for the gifts of an enlightened and progressive civilization.\(^{39}\)

There was no denying the fact that Egypt and Ethiopia were among the earliest and greatest of the ancient civilizations. In Genesis 10:6–20, Mizraim and Cush, the sons of Ham, were said to be the progenitors of the people of Egypt and Ethiopia respectively. By 1860, however, white scholars—particularly the group called the "American school of anthropology"—were loath to surrender ancient Egypt and Ethiopia to black peoples and began to undermine the implications of what seemed so obvious in the Bible and history about the origin of the Africans.\(^{40}\) White biblical scholars and Egyptologists did not return to the original Hamitic hypothesis, but now insisted that the Hamites must have been a white race, and whatever can be found in African societies that is commendable must be traced to the invasion of the "white Hamites" who ascended the Nile valley from Europe and Asia Minor to begin the process of civilization in black Africa.

African American intellectuals and abolitionists persisted in the other point of view. "The ancient Egyptians," declared Frederick Douglass, "were not white people, but were undoubtedly, just about as dark in complexion as many in this country who are considered Negroes." In 1862 William Wells Brown, his fellow antislavery lecturer and friend, contended: "I claim that the Blacks are the legitimate descendants of the Egyptians." Other spokespersons pointed to the fact that the Egyptians called their country Kemet, "the black land," and that this did not refer to the color of the soil, but the color of the people. Similarly, they recalled Solomon's marriage to an Egyptian princess, immortalized in the Song of Solomon 1:5–6, and the clear meaning of Jeremiah 13:23: "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?"\(^{41}\)
Thus, black abolitionist preachers and the intellectuals of the postwar period, undaunted by the ethnology of Louis Agassiz of Harvard and the testimony of many books and pamphlets arguing for black inferiority, stubbornly relied upon what has been an ineradicable feature of black religion in America: an interpretation of Scripture rooted and grounded in the corporate experiences and perceptions of blacks. They identified themselves with the Canaanites, who built great cities across the Jordan and resisted the invading Israelites for centuries; with the Carthaginians, who produced Hamilcar and Hannibal and were related to the descendants of the Canaanites; with Nimrod, the great Cushite hunter and warrior whose might founded cities and conquered others from Babel to Nineveh; but most of all they identified themselves with Egypt and Ethiopia—the two great African monarchies that intrigued them the most and which they believed were the incubators of much of what is called Western culture and civilization.

The great prophecy of Psalm 68:31 became a forecast of the ultimate fulfillment of the people’s spiritual yearning. It is impossible to say how many sermons were preached from this text during the nineteenth century, but we know that Richard Allen, Prince Hall, Lott Carey, Henry Highland Garnet, Alexander Crummell, Edward W. Blyden, James T. Holly, and Bishop Henry M. Turner were all eloquent expositors of Psalm 68:31. They made it the cornerstone of missionary emigrationism both in the United States and Africa.

In his own commentary on this crucial biblical text, Bishop Hood wrote in 1895:

But the promise is that princes shall come out of Egypt, and that Ethiopia shall soon stretch forth her hands unto God. Whatever shall become of the two younger sons of Ham, this promise assures us that the two elder sons shall cast aside idolatry and return unto the Lord. That this prophecy is now in the course of fulfillment the Negro Church stands forth as unquestionable evidence. It is the streak of morning light which betokens the coming day. It is the morning star which precedes the rising sun. It is the harbinger of the rising glory of the sons of Ham. It is the first fruit of the countless millions of that race who shall be found in the army with banners in the millennial glory of the Christian Church.42

The black church in the United States, therefore, came to symbolize the ark of safety for the regenerate children of Ham—the “old ship of Zion,” which would ride out the storms of oppression and deliver the sons and daughters of Africa to the Ararat of racial redemption. The mysterious purposes of God in making some of his children black and permitting them to be subjugated and persecuted by the white race was, after all, unfathomable. Some, like Bishop Hood, reasoned that it was because
of the idolatry that had to be stamped out by the present generation under the feet of Christ. Others, like Delany and Blyden, wondered if God had not meant to toughen the black race for some great task in behalf of all humanity. Still others, like T. Thomas Fortune, the editor of the New York Age, held that the theory that God had brought blacks to America in order to evangelize Africa was "so much religious nonsense boiled down to a sycophantic platitude."

The problem of the divine intention continued to perplex black preachers for generations and has never been solved to the satisfaction of most Christians. In fact the problem was transcended by a metaphorical comparison of African Americans with the emancipated Hebrews, and identification with the critical importance of Africa in Judeo-Christian religious history. Many also believed that God had promised something better for those who trusted in him. The despised and despised peoples of Africa, who had been stolen from their homeland, had to be delivered from darkness by the light that shone in the face of Jesus Christ.

The seminal black theology that developed during the nineteenth century was neither superficial nor parochial. It taught that the descendants of the slaves were destined to be delivered not only from bondage to sin, but from injustice, prejudice, and oppression, and would be the means by which millions of their brothers and sisters who remained in Africa would someday be liberated from European colonialism.

The secular emigrationists who later articulated their aspirations in political rather than theological terminology should not be dissociated from this basically religious interpretation of the nature and destiny of the black race. They shared it even when, like Marcus Garvey, they were most critical of the failure of the church to give the leadership required to break away from obsequious adjustment to the American status quo. Emigrationism and the black nationalism that followed disillusionment over Reconstruction and appealed to landless farm laborers who poured into the cities after the First World War, was rooted in an ethos of blackness that, in large measure, had been created by the destiny motif in black religion. To some extent that motif was to be betrayed, but never totally expunged, by conservative forces within the church. It has been, nevertheless, nurtured by successive generations of black religionists and at the close of the twentieth century continues to be a deep undercurrent within the mainstream black churches.

HENRY M. TURNER

Henry McNeal Turner, the vociferous and controversial bishop of the AME Church, was the most consistent advocate of this perspective in the closing years of the nineteenth century. More than any other single individual, Turner not only made a black theology of liberation the core of
his preaching and writing, but also helped to implant the spirit of revolutionary religion in the independent churches of Africa that were taking up the struggle against colonialism and racism in the last quarter of the century. Turner was born free in South Carolina in 1834. For a time he worked on a cotton plantation as a laborer, then later as a porter in a law office where the young clerks, recognizing his intelligence, taught him how to read and write. In 1854 he was ordained by the Methodist Church and traveled all over the South. His life changed dramatically in 1858, when he happened upon an AME congregation in New Orleans and accepted an invitation to go to Baltimore for further training to become an African Methodist pastor.

During his stay in Baltimore before the Civil War, Turner became convinced that America would never do justice to black people and that emigration was the only solution to the race problem. In 1862 he heard an address by Alexander Crummell, and from that day the mission of the church in Africa and the repatriation of African Americans became the two great passions of his life.

His intense interest in emigration did not, however, preclude his enthusiastic involvement in the war—first as an advocate for the use of black troops, and later as a chaplain in the Union Army. After the war he went into Reconstruction politics as a Republican organizer in Georgia. He built a mass base for the party in Georgia and used it as a springboard for his ambitions within the AME Church, but not without difficulty. Like other black preachers of the postwar period, Turner astutely mixed religion and politics to the advantage of both himself and the community—a practice guaranteed to win as many enemies as friends.

By 1876 Turner had attained the powerful position of manager of the AME Book Concern, and his sermons and essays received national notoriety. He was, without question, the leading politician of the southern wing of the denomination and enjoyed an enormous following among the disillusioned and restless African Methodists of the South, many of whom were intrigued by the African emigration movement. With this support Turner was elected the twelfth bishop of his denomination in 1880 over the opposition of conservative northern churchmen who resented his brazenly unpatriotic attitude toward the United States and sharply disagreed with his emigrationism.43

Henry M. Turner was the first to raise seriously the issue of reparations for the years of black slavery and regarded it as necessary for financing the mass removal of blacks to Africa. In an article entitled “The Negro Has Not Sense Enough,” which appeared during his editorship of the Voice of Missions in 1900, he wrote:

We have worked, enriched the country and helped give it a standing among the powers of the earth, and when we are denied our civil and political rights, the fool Negro who has no more sense than
a jackass, yet he wants to be a leader, ridicules the idea of asking for a hundred million dollars to go home, for Africa is our home, and is the one place that offers us manhood and freedom, though we are the subjects of nations that have claimed a part of Africa by conquest. A hundred million dollars can be obtained if we, as a race, would ask for it. The way we figure it out, this country owes us forty billions of dollars, and we are afraid to ask for a hundred million.\textsuperscript{44}

Turner had little respect or affection for this country, although (or perhaps because) he had served as a token black in several positions for the government. \textit{“In this country,”} he wrote, \textit{“white represents God, and black the devil, but little thought is given to the Black man’s future.” He did not believe that every black person would or should emigrate to Africa. What he pleaded for was \textit{“a highway made across the Atlantic: upon which regular social and economic intercourse between Black America and Africa could be carried on and self-reliant, energetic Black people could be permanently settled if they chose to do so.”}\textsuperscript{45}

It was his opinion that blacks needed a place where they could demonstrate their ability to build and govern a nation by themselves—a theater in which young black men and women could express the gifts of the manhood and womanhood denied to them in the land of their birth. As few as a half-million black Christians, he said, could build a new nation in Africa. But he was stringently demanding about the kind of persons who would be equal to the task. Only young men and women of courage, pride, ambition, and resourcefulness would be of any use to themselves or to Africa.\textsuperscript{46}

Although he was a consummate politician, Turner was also a theologian. It was God, he said, who allowed the blacks to be transported to America, but for an inexorable purpose: to be equipped for a great missionary crusade in Africa. In this opinion he followed the view that had been popularized by Crummell and Blyden, and also by his colleague on the bench, AME Bishop R.H. Cain of South Carolina. But in the pages of the \textit{Christian Recorder} and the \textit{Voice of Missions}, powerful mouthpieces for the dissemination of his ideas throughout African Methodism, Turner made it clear that American whites had been disobedient to God’s command by not receiving blacks as brothers and sisters, sharing with them the riches of the nation, and helping them to return to Africa with the education and resources necessary for their mission—the creation of a black nation free of imperialistic exploitation by the nations of Europe which were then dividing up the continent among themselves.

He expressed his most radical views in the \textit{Voice of Missions} between 1893 and 1900 when mounting opposition from within the church removed him as its editor, and in an independent publication called, significantly enough, \textit{The Voice of the People}, which he edited between 1901 and 1907.
Turner’s theology culminated almost a hundred years of black theological reflection on the origin, destiny, and responsibility of blacks to demand their God-given rights in the United States and, at the same time, bring freedom and the Christian faith to Africa. By 1880 he believed that black religion was essentially a protest movement against the disobedient white church that had reduced African Americans to obsequious believers in their own spiritual inferiority and the right of whites to dictate the terms of religious faith.

When an “Observer” in a letter to the Voice of Missions offered the opinion that Turner was “becoming demented” because he taught that “God is a Negro,” Turner replied:

We have as much right biblically and otherwise to believe that God is a Negro, as you buckra or white people have to believe that God is a fine looking, symmetrical and ornamented white man. For the bulk of you and all the fool Negroes of the country believe that God is white-skinned, blue-eyed, straight-haired, projecting nosed, compressed lipped and finely robed white gentleman, sitting upon a throne somewhere in the heavens. Every race of people since time began who have attempted to describe their God by words, or by paintings, or by carvings, or by any other form or figure, have conveyed the idea that the God who made them and shaped their destinies was symbolized in themselves, and why should not the Negro believe that he resembles God as much so as other people? ... Yet we are no stickler as to God’s color anyway, but if He has any we would prefer to believe that it is nearer symbolized in the blue sky above us and the blue water of the seas and oceans; but we certainly protest against God being white at all; abstract as this theme must forever remain while we are in the flesh. This is one of the reasons we favor African emigration, or Negro naturalization, wherever we can find a domain, for, as long as we remain among the whites the Negro will believe that the devil is black and that he (the Negro) favors the devil, and that God is white and that he (the Negro) bears no resemblance to Him, and the effect of such a sentiment is contemptuous and degrading, and one-half of the Negro race will be trying to get white and the other half will spend their days in trying to be white men’s scullions in order to please the whites.47

Bishop Turner’s first visit to Africa took place in 1891 under the authorization of the Council of Bishops. Accompanied by Reverend J. R. Geda, the bishop received an enthusiastic reception in Freetown, Sierra Leone. There he organized the first annual conference on the African continent, with a lay membership of four hundred and five tribesmen. Enraptured by this successful first encounter with the land and people who had been the object of his yearning for so many years, he went on triumphantly to
Liberia. There, following a brief visit with the leading officials in Monrovia, he sailed up the St. Paul River for Muhlenberg and convened the Liberian annual conference on November 23, 1891. His letters back to the *Christian Recorder* were printed together as a pamphlet, and glowed with rapturous reports of the stability and prosperity of the places he visited, the accomplishments of the immigrants from America, and the myriad opportunities available to those who would follow them. “I get mad and sick,” he wrote, “when I look at the possibilities God has placed within our reach, and to think that we are such block-heads we cannot see and use them.”

With the economic and social problems Liberia was experiencing as the influence and funding of the ACS declined, and with adverse publicity being bandied about by his opponents, Turner’s visit to Africa was a strategic contribution to the revival of missionary emigrationism within the AME Church. His exaggerated descriptions of what he found were calculated to make the most of a cause that had been rapidly losing its vitality.

Bishop Turner, even more determined to open up Africa and to cement ties between African Christians and the AME Church, returned to Africa in March 1898 on an episcopal visit that was to have far-reaching implications for relationships between Africans and African Americans and the development of nationalism through the independent church movement on the African continent. This time his travels took him to South Africa. Amid great celebration, he held conferences, organized churches, and ordained native ministers—charging them to dedicate their lives to a black church that stood for God, freedom, and independence from the control of whites.

The stage for this development had been set prior to his arrival when a group of singers, brought to the United States from South Africa in 1893, included a Basuto girl, Charlotte Manye, whose uncle was Reverend Mangena M. Mokone, a Wesleyan Methodist who was disaffected with segregation in the Wesleyan mission and had withdrawn to form the Ethiopian Church in Pretoria. When the singers became stranded between engagements in the United States, Reverend Reverdy C. Ransom, an AME minister in Ohio who was to become a prominent bishop and theologian, arranged to have them go to Wilberforce University, where Ms. Manye graduated with honors before returning home. Through letters to her uncle in Pretoria, Charlotte Manye drew the attention of Mokone to the existence of a church “owned and operated” by black Americans—the AME Church. The South Africans requested further information, and after studying the Discipline, the hymnal, and other books concerning the church, decided to unite with the AMEs in the United States. Union was consummated by Turner at the Allen Temple church in Atlanta on June 19, 1896.

Reverend James M. Dwane, one of the Ethiopian Church’s emissaries to the General Conference, was appointed general superintendent in
South Africa. Dwane later withdrew from the church over its failure to provide funds for a school and because of his dissatisfaction with the title of general superintendent. However, he never gave up his belief in the unity of the black church and became a powerful leader of the separatist movement throughout southern and eastern Africa—as well as in the Sudan, Egypt, and Ethiopia.\(^{50}\)

The Ethiopian Church had been foreshadowed by the separatist Tembu National Church founded by Reverend Nehemia Tile in 1884. Tile was accused by the white Wesleyans of "taking part in political matters and stirring up feelings of hostility against magistrates in Tembuland" (South Africa). The Ethiopians followed in this rebellious tradition and took their name from Psalm 68:31, which we have already noted as a favorite text among blacks on both sides of the Atlantic during the nineteenth century.

Originally Ethiopianism was a schismatic movement within the mission churches; it tried to bring black Christians together across tribal and national lines into one independent African church. From the beginning it had an implicit political appeal based upon a growing national consciousness among segregated and abused African churchmen—especially in the industrialized areas of southern Africa. Its antiwhite bias soon aroused the opposition of the colonial governments as well as the embarrassment of white missionaries who began losing hundreds of their converts to the new movement.

James M. Dwane, who by 1896 had successfully challenged Mokone's leadership to become, in effect, the bishop of the Ethiopians, told the African Methodists in Atlanta that "Africans would never allow the white man to ride roughshod over their country. Africans were rapidly imbibing civilized habits and would soon be able to run great civilized governments. Then they would say to the European nations, 'Hands off.'"\(^{51}\)

Nothing could have pleased Bishop Turner more. He devoted his visit in 1898 and his subsequent contacts with Africa to the welding together of this potentially powerful native movement with his own nationalistic aspirations for the AME Church. The Ethiopians, for their part, made remarkable gains under the combined influence of Dwane and Turner. In 1896 the membership was reported to be 2,800. On June 17, 1898, Turner reported a membership of 10,800, and after he reached home word was received that it had grown by another 1,200. By then the church encompassed Cape Colony, the Orange Free State, and the Transvaal.

Although he had formidable opposition, Turner's efforts in behalf of Africa were generally supported by the AME Church in the 1890s. Already in 1892 the bishops of the church, responding to the growing feeling of kinship with Africans, had declared:

Africa is the largest and most important of the fields that lie before us. First, because of the number of persons involved in the work:
second, on account of the relationship that exists between our race and the inhabitants of the Dark Continent; third, because our church is better adapted to the redemption of Africa than any other organization among the darker races for the moral and religious training of the people. . . .

Thereupon followed nineteen specific items dealing with the mission to be undertaken by the AME Church. Item sixteen, for example, called for the formation of an organization that would bring unity among the blacks of North, Central, and South America and would promote their common moral and spiritual uplift. The statement continued:

And then pursuing our onward march for the Dark Continent, we will speak to more than 200 million of men and women, bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh, and say to them, “Arise and shine, for the light of civilization is waiting for thee.”

The affiliation of the Ethiopian Church with the AME Church was the first significant achievement under this policy. The key role of Dwayne was recognized by Turner, who created for him the office of vicar-bishop. Although the episcopacy supported this move, Dwayne ran into difficulty with Bishop W. J. Gaines who raised objection to his holding such a title when he was introduced to the several annual conferences he attended in 1898. Dwayne’s disappointment over the objections raised about his appointment, and the failure of the denomination to send the $10,000 he believed had been promised for Queenstown College, provoked him to schism.

In 1899 he succeeded in leading about thirty Ethiopian ministers out of the AME Church and organized the Order of Ethiopia, which he then placed under the authority of the Queenstown Anglicans. Reverend Julius Gordon, rector of the local congregation, explained the doctrine of apostolic succession to Dwayne and told him that the AME Church could not possibly pass on valid episcopal orders to anyone. Ironically, Dwayne never became an Anglican bishop, and even his appointment as provincial was later withdrawn.

The emergence of revolutionary church movements in Africa as a result of the rebellious spirit inspired by black Christians from the United States went far beyond colonialist expectations. One group that appeared in Natal in the 1890s was the African Christian Union (ACU), which listed some of its officers as residing in America. In a 21-point manifesto the ACU announced that one of its intentions was “to solicit funds [from Europeans] to restore Africans [in America] to their fatherland . . . and to pursue steadily and unwaveringly the policy of AFRICA FOR THE AFRICANS, and look for and hasten by prayer and united effort, the forming of the AFRICAN CHRISTIAN NATION by God’s power and in his own time and way.”

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Shepperson and Price point out that similar developments were taking place in various black communities in the United States. For example, in Richmond, Virginia, in addition to the black Baptists, there were a "host of infinitely less orthodox sects, with their prophets and messiahs, which flourished in the atmosphere of open-air, river baptisms, with their associations of John and the Jordan." In fact many members of the National Baptist Convention, which had been organized in 1895 as the largest black denomination in the world, were themselves very much at home in this chiliastic atmosphere.

Reverend Lewis G. Jordan and Reverend Charles S. Morris, among others, were ardent educators of young black preachers. The church schools of their denomination, in contrast to those of the white northern Baptists, "taught doctrines and inculcated attitudes which some call politely 'racial radicalism,' and others, more bluntly, 'sedition.' In this they anticipated the later trend of independent native schools in Africa."

The influence of American blacks on nationalism among Africans at the turn of the century is best illustrated by the career of Reverend John Chilembwe of Nyasaland, who returned to Africa with Charles S. Morris after studying in the United States. Chilembwe led his people in the ill-fated Nyasaland Rebellion of 1915. He had come under the influence of a remarkable Australian missionary, Joseph Booth, who visited black Baptist churches in the United States for three months in 1895. During this time Booth evidently completed a book, *Africa for the Africans*, which was published in 1897 by the Morgan College Press of Baltimore. It was also during this period that Booth made contact with a pre-Garveyite group in Washington, D.C., and wrote to his daughter on April 9, 1897: "There are many signs that a great work will spring from this side of the ocean also. I am lecturing on 'Africa for the Africans.'"

Young Chilembwe, whom Booth had met at Chiradzulu, British Central Africa, and had introduced to his ideas, accompanied him on this eventful visit to the United States. Both men readily perceived the similarities between the oppression blacks were suffering in South Africa and the situation in America. Moreover, they were well briefed by black preachers they met and talked with in both the North and the South. In Richmond Booth and Chilembwe were even attacked by a mob of young toughs for walking together in the streets and probably because they lived together for a time in the black section of the city.

Chilembwe later attended the Virginia College and Theological Seminary at Lynchburg. There he met many leading black Baptist ministers including Dr. Gregory W. Hayes and Dr. Lewis G. Jordan, secretary of the Foreign Mission Board of the National Baptist Convention, which financed his work in Nyasaland for fifteen years. Radical religious ideas were rampant at the school in those years, and Chilembwe transported them back to Africa where he subsequently founded an independent Baptist denomination. His church became increasingly hostile
to the incursion of Europeans into the Nyasaland Protectorate. On Saturday evening, January 23, 1915, Chilembwe led a revolt in which three Europeans were killed and two wounded. The uprising was overwhelmed in ten days by white settlers. Chilembwe was killed as he tried to escape across the border into Portuguese territory.

**RESISTANCE TO WHITE RULE IN AFRICA**

Religious resistance to white rule began to build up in South Africa, the Belgian Congo, Nyasaland, French Equatorial Africa, Kenya, and in West Africa in the 1880s. It continued with increasing strength through the first half of the twentieth century. The dramatic defeat of the Italians by the Abyssinians at Aduwa in 1896 greatly emboldened the Ethiopianists. The Italian invasion, discrimination in the mission churches, the pressure of the white settlers on tribal lands and traditional ways of life, and finally the influence of the churches of the United States—all these factors worked together to unleash a torrent of antiwhite sentiment and schismatic activity among African Christians.

In South Africa Ethiopian preachers were involved in the Zulu uprisings of 1906. In the Cameroons serious anti-European agitation was led by a rebellious Baptist preacher named Lotin Same. In the Congo, following the First World War, African separatists called for political emancipation and raised their prophets, Simon Kimbangu and Andre Matswa, to the level of black gods—or so it seemed at that time. In 1909 John Msikinya, a dismissed African Methodist preacher, visited the United States and returned to South Africa as bishop of the Church of God and the Saints of Christ, a black American denomination that exists today as an interesting synthesis of Judaic and Christian traditions. Msikinya died in 1918 and his second-in-command, Enoch Mgyima, split the church and organized a new sect called the Israelites, which rejected the New Testament altogether.

**Mgyima’s group saw themselves as followers of the Jewish patriarchs** who, they believed, had been delivered by God from foreign oppressors. In May 1921 the government sent in police to destroy their sacred village, Bullhoek, near Queenstown in the Ciskei. A massacre occurred when the Israelites attacked with swords and spears. One hundred sixty-three members of the sect were killed and one hundred twenty-nine wounded. The incident was widely publicized and worldwide attention focused on racism in South Africa and the repressive policies of the Smuts government.57

In the Transkei another prophet, Wellington Butelezi, who said he came from America, organized a cargo cult. Butelezi told his followers that all Americans were blacks and that they would soon be coming to liberate their brother and sister Africans and put an end to the white man’s rule. He promised that the Americans would arrive in airplanes
and when they landed “the Europeans would be driven into the sea and
the Bantu would not have to pay poll taxes anymore.”

In Kenya, between June 1921 and April 1922, Harry Thuku, leader of
the Young Kikuyu Association, organized a protest against the reduction
of native wages, rising taxation, and the seizure of ancestral lands by
white settlers. Although Thuku was not an ordained minister, he had,
nevertheless, strong religious motivations for making missionaries the
target of his attack and gathering many lapsed Christians into his fold.
His followers were reminded that:

Our God brought the Children of Israel out of the house of bondage
of King Pharaoh . . . and to Him let us pray again, for He is our God.
And also let us have faith since in the eyes of God there is no dis-
tinction of white or Black. All are sons of Adam, and alike before
Him, Jehovah our living God . . . Thou Lord Jehovah, our God, it is
Thou who hast set apart to be our Master and Guide Harry Thuku,
may he be chief of us all.  

According to a study by Joseph S. Coleman, the hand of Blyden and
other black American clergymen in Nigeria was reflected in the political
disorder that broke out among the sectarian groups they had contacted
after 1899. In the Delta region, for example, a movement began about
1914 led by a Nigerian who called himself the Second Elijah. It was
essentially an ascetic Christian sect, but became openly anti-European
when its leader was convicted of sedition.

Another movement that sought to combine Christianity with the tra-
ditional Yoruba religion was called Orunlaism. Its prophet, not unlike
the leaders of African American sects and cults in the ghettos of the
United States, exhorted his people:

Scrap the imported religions. . . . [There can be no] political emana-
tication without spiritual emancipation. . . . Paint God as an
African . . . the angels in Africans . . . the Devil, by all means, in any
color than an African . . . and thou shalt be saved.  

The predominantly white churches of the United States and Europe—and
particularly the Anglicans in South Africa—were not entirely without
some salutary effect upon the growth of African political consciousness.
Their influence was mainly through the schools, despite the fact that
most of the mission schools were racist and paternalistic. But in South
Africa the English missionaries were the first whites to fight against the
enslavement of the aboriginal population. Under the pressure of white
settlers and Afrikaaner domination, they gradually yielded to the appli-
cation of the color bar in the churches as everywhere else. The practice
of some of the Anglican clergy, however, made a contribution to African
freedom and opposition to the prevailing discriminatory customs.
Both John Tengo Jabavu and Reverend Walter Rubusana, two outstanding black politicians in South Africa, were educated in mission schools and received guarded approbation if not a great deal of support from liberal churchmen. Rubusana was ordained by the London Missionary Society in 1884. He received a degree from a black college in the United States and went back to South Africa infected with nationalist sentiments for which the moderate Jabavu had little sympathy.

Thus, the *Zeitgeist* of sub-Saharan Africa at the turn of the century moved in a socio-religious climate favorable to revolutionary change. Such a climate must be attributed to a combination of many different factors, but among them must be included the teaching of Christianity by black and white missionaries, some of whom—such as the radical Joseph Booth and the American-based Watchtower Bible and Tract Society—introduced highly inflammatory elements into the African religious scene: ideas of political freedom and economic justice based on the implications for secular society of a radical evangelism and apocalypticism.\(^\text{61}\)

As yet there has been little research on the effect of American missionary outreach on the development of nationalism and independence in Africa, but there is scattered evidence that the Americans were more sensitive to the injustices of the colonial regimes than were some Europeans. The American mission schools and churches were, of course, less directly related to colonial authorities with whom missionaries from Europe were involved by nationality ties. Moreover, in a few instances the American missions included highly competent black Americans who could identify with the plight of African Christians.

In 1909 ten American denominations and mission boards united in an attempt to get the United States government to use its diplomatic channels to support Reverend William M. Morrison, a white missionary, and Reverend William Henry Sheppard, a black missionary, in a libel trial brought against them by the Belgian *Compagnie du Kasai* in the Congo. Sheppard and Morrison, representatives of the Board of World Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, had for several years given support to the cause of social justice in the Belgian colony. They had incurred the wrath of Leopold’s administrators by protesting the brutalization of rubber workers in the Kasai region.\(^\text{62}\) To these crusading missionaries must go much of the credit for the amelioration of conditions in the Kasai. Their trial and vindication were widely discussed at home and helped to make more Americans aware of the challenges of preaching the gospel in Africa. Sheppard was in great demand as a speaker in black churches all over the country, and many blacks first learned of Africa and its struggle from his lectures and sermons.

The major weight of African American contributions to the African independent church movement and the rise of black nationalism, of course, rests upon the black Baptist, Methodist, and Pentecostal churches in the United States. These churches, by their example as well as anything
else they might have done, helped to introduce African Christians to the free spirit, prophetism, and millennialist passion for liberation in this world and the next, which were fundamental characteristics of black religion in the United States and the Caribbean.

Towering over all others was the figure of Bishop Henry M. Turner, who inspired Mokone and Dwane and implanted African Methodism—with its pride of origin and rich heritage from the days of Allen and Coker—among thousands of questing Africans from Monrovia to Cape Town. Turner was more political than either Crummell or Blyden and, with perhaps the exception of Marcus Garvey who was to come later, had a more profound and lasting influence on Africa than any other leader of the American churches.

In their authoritative work on John Chilembwe, Shepperson and Price appreciatively summarize the place of Turner and other African American ministers in the movement of radical religion in Africa:

Turner was a man full of the concept of the “manifest destiny” of coloured Americans to redeem their unhappy brethren in Africa. After the mid-1890s, American Negroes of like persuasion were to have a growing influence in South Africa and the regions to which it was allied. They added a new nuance to the concept of Ethiopianism, and for many whites in South and Central Africa their schools and colleges in the United States became nests of agitators, American or African Negro, who brought growing elements of political consciousness of a rebellious nature of the African separatist churches, from which, through the influence of the Negro minister, they spread out amongst the masses of the native people who only wanted inspiration and organization to raise them anew against their white masters.  

The nationalistic aspect of black religion in North America, Africa, and the Caribbean has been greatly neglected by scholars. E. U. Essien-Udom is one of the few who gave early recognition to the significance of the church in the development of black consciousness and the demand for racial justice.

For many years the eminent sociologist E. Franklin Frazier commanded respect as the leading authority on black religion in the United States. Frazier had little appreciation of the contribution of the black church to what Delany and others of his time called “elevation.” In recent years a few writers have begun to sense the deficiencies in his analysis, which preceded the height of church involvement in the struggle for human rights during the second half of the twentieth century. Horace Cayton, for example, attributes these deficiencies in his work to the fact that Frazier did not live through the civil rights period and had no opportunity to reassess his perspective on the basis of subsequent events:
Frazier did not live to witness the fervor of the continuing Negro rebellion and the position of leadership which the church and churchmen are taking in it. Perhaps, if he had, his final judgment on the importance and resilience of the Negro church might have been tempered.65

Essien-Udom, however, whose manuscript for Black Nationalism was completed before the civil rights movement reached its zenith in 1963–64, perceived the enmeshment of the church in the web of historical factors leading to the emergence of radical black nationalism in the United States.66 He seems not to be aware, however, of its influence in Africa and the West Indies—the operation of the triangular connection upon the freedom movement in all three areas. St. Clair Drake and a few others have, intentionally and unintentionally, helped to fill that gap.

Essien-Udom asserts that the church gave the black person pride in success, grassroots participation in a national movement, independence from white control, and a physical center for social life in the black community. This is all well and good, but it does not go far enough in light of what we have discussed in this chapter. The black church, as the primary institutional expression of black religion, erected the politico-theological foundation for black nationalism and Pan-Africanism. Not only did it provide the organizational skills requisite for mass movements in the twentieth century; it provided also the spiritual inspiration and philosophical rationale—building blocks for the structure of African and African American solidarity as it developed from the early Du Bois to Malcolm X.

The thrust of missionary emigrationism, the search for roots in the pre-Mosaic history of Israel, the challenge to the ethical interpretation of love and redemptive suffering in white Christianity, the prefigurement of black liberation in the story of the Exodus, the willingness to speculate about the “color” of God and the meaning of a black Christ, and the development of Ethiopianism in Africa and in the Caribbean and North America—all of these developments and tendencies gave inspiration and ideological substance to the evolution of black conscious and nationalism, a heightening sense of racial identity and messianism wherever blacks writhed under the heel of white oppression.

Before the end of the nineteenth century, what began as a theology was secularized as an ideology of political and cultural separatis that reached its most explicit articulation in resolutions of the Pan-African congresses and the philosophy of negritude. But well before that occurred, black ministers and lay persons had drawn cultural and political implications for colonization and self-determination—not from egalitarian ideologies of the Western democracies or from Marxism—but from the Bible and Christian theology as reinterpreted by men and women who believed that the gospel itself contains the most penetrating and provocative justification for racial solidarity and social change.
Read in the light of the policies for the world mission of the church, which most denominations have today, the books, sermons, and editorials on the need for solidarity with Africa sound curiously presumptuous and less than flattering of the ancient cultures and religions of that continent. We cannot, however, doubt the sincerity of those men and women, many of them enslaved with only a modicum of formal education, who tried to bring to the land of their ancestors whatever material assistance and enlightenment their poverty-striken congregations could afford at a time they themselves were struggling for survival. Whatever errors they committed in their estimate of the state of civilization in Africa, or the ability of a Christianity that had been corrupted for ages to correct African deficiencies, must be absolved by their intentions and the grace of the God they trusted to guide them.

We owe something inestimable to them for their teachings about what the church means in terms of self-respect, of meaningful participation in the affairs of the world, and as an institutional base for black enterprise and culture. It was their hope to share these gifts with all in obedience to the command to “go and make disciples of all nations . . . baptizing . . . and teaching,” and especially with those to whom they were bound by a common ancestry and the experience of subjugation by the white people of Europe and North America. In so doing, they demonstrated the power of their conviction that God was using African American Christians of the United States in a special way to help fulfill the promised glory of the Ethiopian people, of whom they considered themselves a privileged remnant, singing their song in a strange land.