

British Images of West Africa  
Written at Rhodes College

Nathaniel Anson Plemons

Department of History  
Rhodes College  
Memphis, Tennessee

2017

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
Bachelor of Arts degree with Honors for History

This Honors paper by Nathaniel Anson Plemons has been read and approved for Honors in History.

Dr. Ryan Johnson

Project Advisor

---

Dr. Jonathan Judaken

Second Reader

---

Dr. Shadrack Nasong'o

Extra-Departmental Reader

---

Dr. Jeffrey Jackson

Department Chair

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## ABSTRACT

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By

Nathaniel Anson Plemons

The historiography of British-West African relations between the eighteenth and nineteenth century is typically characterized by narratives that center on the imposition of power by British colonizers onto West African colonized. These histories tend to neglect the dynamic nature of British-West African interaction as well as the importance of West African social, political, and economic history in dictating how and when such power was exercised. Because of this neglect, such histories also tend to frame British-West African relations through the anachronistic application of modern conceptions of race and racism. Rather than understand British-West African relations from the mid-eighteenth to the late-nineteenth century as a one-sided imposition of an increasingly virulent racism, there was instead a marked *transition* from a culturalist mindset to what now resembles modern conceptions of race and racism. This transition from one mindset to another was heavily influenced by important economic and political changes in both Britain *and* West Africa throughout this period. Contrasting two sets of case studies elucidates this shift. The first is of British-Fante relations in the slave town of Annamaboe on the Gold coast and the life of Ignatius Sancho in the late eighteenth century. The second, of the life and experiences of West African physicians James “Africanus” Beale Horton and John Farrell Easmon in the mid-to-late nineteenth century. Analyzing and contrasting these case studies enables readers to challenge and problematize a popular historical narrative that currently fails to accurately depict these complex dynamics or acknowledge their change over time.

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## PREFACE:

This work, though it touches upon many subjects, should be principally read as an examination of the shifting attitudes exhibited and preconceived perceptions held by British peoples regarding Africans, particularly those in West Africa, as informed by socio-political and economic contexts, racial theorists/scientists, and imperial philosophers. This will be done through a set of case studies that most clearly embody the perceptions as the cited evidence provided supports during its given historical setting. The analytical tools employed to analyze these images, those of racism and culturalism, will be dissected and examined so as to explore their origins and denote their meaning in the context of this work. This thesis is an original contribution to the surrounding literature because it does not fit neatly into standard historical categories like African, British, or intellectual history. As such, I hesitate to categorize it beyond saying that it belongs next to other works exploring British colonialism in Africa, serving the reader by giving them greater insight regarding the factors that came into play in determining the ways in which British agents perceived West Africa and its peoples between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

## Introduction

The historiography of British-West African relations between the eighteenth and nineteenth century is typically characterized by narratives that center on the imposition of power by British colonizers onto West African colonized. While important, these histories tend to neglect the dynamic nature of British-West African interaction as well as the importance of West African social, political, and economic history in dictating how and when such power was exercised—none of which can be understood by primarily focusing on changes in British historical circumstances. Because of this neglect, such histories also tend to frame British-West African relations through the anachronistic application of modern conceptions of race and racism. As this thesis will argue, rather than characterize British-West African relations from the mid-eighteenth to the late-nineteenth century as a one-sided imposition of an increasingly virulent racism, there was instead a marked *transition* from a culturalist mindset (defined further below) to what now resembles modern definitions of race and racism. It is further argued that this transition from one mindset to another is heavily influenced by important economic and political changes in both Britain *and* West Africa throughout this period. Industrialization, free-trade theory, liberal democracy in Britain, alongside the ending of the slave trade, transition to so called “legitimate” commerce, and the destabilizing effect this had on strong authoritarian and highly militarized polities in West Africa like the Asante are crucial to understanding the transition from culturalist to racist perceptions by the British. Essentially, this thesis will explain how West Africans during most of the eighteenth century could be viewed by the British, if not as equals, then with at least a degree of respect for their social and political organization, and recognition of their intellectual rigor to, in the span of a few decades, being framed as inherently inferior, even in spite of increasing evidence that proved otherwise.

To demonstrate these points, this thesis will first investigate the life and thoughts of Ignatius Sancho, an African born man of letters in metropolitan Britain during the mid-eighteenth century. His life reveals the culturalist attitudes that prevailed in Britain toward West Africans throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Next, Sancho's life will be contrasted to that of the Fante port city of Annamaboe (located in today's Ghana). Annamaboe was a central hub for the West African slave trade, and the Portuguese, Dutch, Danes, and British all established a presence there from the sixteenth century. Looking at Annamaboe in the same analytical frame as Sancho reveals that the British did not control trade at Annamaboe, but were instead subordinate to powerful Fante middlemen—who negotiated with the powerful West African empire of Asante—when it came to trade, especially the slave trade. While the British held contempt for Fante middlemen and leaders, they also displayed a high level of respect for both Fante social and political organization, and intelligence.

In order to demonstrate the sharp transition to racism that occurred by the middle of the nineteenth century (which occurred due to specific political and economic changes in both Britain and West Africa) the life and works of West African physicians James “Africanus” Beale Horton in particular as well as John Farrell Easmon are explored. Both men transitioned between Britain and West Africa throughout the course of their careers, and their lives enable us to once again place Britain and West Africa in the same analytical frame during this period. Their stories demonstrate the emergence of what would be labeled today as modern racism (as opposed to the culturalist attitudes of just a few decades prior) despite the fact that they were significantly more educated, well travelled, and published than men such as Sancho. These case studies, viewed through the analytical lenses of culturalism and racism, serve as excellent examples that underscore this thesis's ultimate questions: 1)



why was there a more acceptant British perception of West Africans during the era of the slave trade than during formal colonialism? And 2) what were some of the most important political, economic, and intellectual factors in both contexts that gave form to these lenses and help explain the transition from one to the other?

Before going further, it is important to define how this thesis is using the terms “racism” and “culturalism” as analytical tools. Without a doubt, there are many different ways to define and understand both, however this thesis deploys them in a specific manner relative to the economic and political changes that took place in Britain and West Africa between 1750 and 1900. As such, it is important to provide a clear definition of these terms for two reasons: first, because a significant portion of this thesis is concerned with rebutting the anachronistic application of the term “racism” when analyzing British-West African relations, especially prior to the colonial period; and second, because the concepts of “race” and its contingent “racism” are incredibly politically charged in contemporary conversations. While it is certainly necessary to have these conversations, to apply our contemporary understanding of “racism” to the past, in order to test the morality and veracity of past ideas, can often do more harm than good. This is the case because deploying racism in an anachronistic manner blinds us to the importance of British-West African relations, West Africans as dynamic historical agents, West African economic and political changes, and how Britain and the British negotiated with and responded to these changes. West Africans, as is often assumed, were anything but passive victims throughout the vast majority of the history of British-West African relations.

Both racism and culturalism as used in this thesis are borrowed from the late George M. Fredrickson’s fantastic work *Racism: A Short History*. Racism, an incredibly charged term, is understood in this thesis as being composed of two parts. First, it originates from a

mindset that focuses on the idea of an *unbridgeable, permanent*, and (perhaps most importantly) *undesirable* difference existing between the racializing “us” and the racialized “them” that marks “them” as intrinsically inferior or flawed. Second, this idea of difference provides “us” with a motive and/or rationale for using “our” power advantages (be they political, economic, or otherwise) to treat the othered<sup>1</sup> peoples in such a way that would be considered cruel or unjustifiable if it were applied to “us.” These parts are based on a foundation that holds racializers and the racialized as being unable to coexist in the same society, except perhaps on the basis of domination and subordination. Additionally, this foundation denies that an othered individual can overcome the difference(s) cited by the racializer as the rationale for discriminated against them. “Racism, therefore, is more than theorizing about human differences or thinking badly of a group over which one has no control. It either directly sustains or proposes to establish a *racial order*, a *permanent* group hierarchy that is believed to reflect the laws of nature or the decrees of God.”<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, it is important to note that in the Western context, Fredrickson’s definition of racism is explicitly defined as such so as to avoid conflating concepts of race with concepts of racism. He does this because there are numerous instances of racism that occur in contexts divorced from Western conceptions of biologized race. One of the primary examples he puts forth is the treatment of Jewish *conversos* (converts to Christianity) in fifteenth and sixteenth century Spain. The persecution of Jews under the doctrine of *limpieza de sangre* (purity of blood) shifted the basis of the discrimination that Jews had

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<sup>1</sup> When I use the term othering, I am referring to any action by which an individual or group becomes classified in another’s mind as “not one of us” in either a racial or cultural fashion. Typically this is done by defining a group or individual by identifying characteristics in different groups or individuals as negative characteristics that the original group or individual does not possess. A straightforward example would be the idea that “we” are better than “them” because our “\_\_\_\_\_” is superior. Consequently, culturalism and racism can be understood as forms of othering, the difference of course being whether the individual being othered can bridge the perceived gap between being part of “them” and becoming one of “us.”

<sup>2</sup> Frederickson, George M., *Racism A Short History* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2002). 5, 9. Frederickson’s Emphasis.

experienced in medieval Europe. Prior to the implementation of this doctrine most Jews were, according to Fredrickson, persecuted based on religious (and therefore cultural) difference. The Inquisition, however, believed that the mass conversion of Jewish people to Christianity in the late fifteenth century was insincere, done primarily to avoid expatriation under anti-Semitic legislation. According to Frederickson, “both doctrinal heresy and enmity toward Christians became seen as the likely, even inevitable, consequence of having Jewish blood... to the extent that it was enforced, the Spanish doctrine of purity of blood *was undoubtedly racist.*”<sup>3</sup>

Clearly, racism can exist without modern conceptions of biologized race. However, this thesis contends that the term, as understood by both its above and modern colloquial definitions, cannot be consistently applied to British-West African relations in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. This is in no small part due to the *unique* roles played by philosophical and scientific/pseudoscientific inquiries into a biologized conception of race in the formation of late nineteenth century British racial ideology. The forerunners to these larger inquiries had only recently begun, and certainly had yet to be popularized to the point of influencing the perceptions of the British people in a way that could be pointed to as a coherent racial ideology. Instead, the evidence supports culturalism (defined further below) as a clearer lens through which to analyze several aspects of British-West African relations before 1850.

Of course, discussions of British racism and its origins remain necessarily contingent on the development of Western ideas of race in their own right. Nancy Stepan’s *The Idea of Race in Science: Great Britain 1800-1960* gives us an excellent definition of race as to be understood in a historical context:

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 31-33. My emphasis.

The word ‘race’ was given a great variety of meanings in the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It was used to refer to cultural, religious, national, linguistic, ethnic and geographical groups of human beings... to direct my attention to one particular usage of the word would mean ignoring most of what was understood to comprise the scientific [and philosophic] literature on the subject... As a historical strategy I have found it best to take the word to mean whatever scientists [and philosophers] have decided it to mean.”<sup>4</sup>

This understanding allows for us to more effectively explore images of race in culture and science in the past, rather than fruitlessly test the morality and veracity of past ideas against those of the present.

Culturalism, as applied in this thesis, can be understood as: 1) an inability or unwillingness to tolerate cultural difference and/or 2) the discrimination and othering of a person based on cultural difference. However, this intolerance and/or discrimination can be *genuinely* and *completely* overcome through a person’s willing assimilation into the culturalist’s society and the internalization of that society’s norms. Deeper discussions of racism and culturalism will inform the case studies that are central to this thesis to help highlight the appropriateness (or inappropriateness) of the terms use when evaluating a given context.<sup>5</sup>

Finally, there are instances when this thesis refers to the concept of material advantage. By this it is meant the ability to consistently gain the upper hand in economic exchange for the sake of affording favorable access to material goods, be they finished or otherwise. The desire to attain material advantage is perhaps the primary motivator for British colonial incursion into and control over West Africa from the mid-nineteenth century. Therefore, the use of the terms culturalism, racism, and the political and economic factors that influenced their development serve as an exploration of the “justifications” employed by the British to obfuscate the base nature of their deeper motivation: avarice.

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<sup>4</sup> Stepan, Nancy, *The Idea of Race in Science: Great Britain 1800-1960* (Hamden, Archon Books, 1982). xviii

<sup>5</sup> Fredrickson, *Racism*. 6-7.

For example, a particularly prevalent misconception surrounds British-West African relations during the slave era—the popular narrative that the British landed in West Africa and through dominance, both physical and mental, acquired slaves to work plantations established in the Americas. Instead of this popular perception, historians of late have demonstrated numerous times that a complex political and socio-economic relationship based on trade and commerce existed between British and West African elites through compromise and mutual understanding based on the concurrent enhancement of their wealth and power. This relationship can be clearly seen in the interactions of the British, Fante, and Asante in and around the town of Annamaboe from the early eighteenth century to the unilateral abolition of the slave trade in 1807 by the British. Annamaboe during this period existed almost entirely under the control of Fante elites, who consequently had the upper hand in nearly all of their dealings with British traders. British traders who engaged with Fante middlemen did not view them through the lens of a coherent racial ideology that would come to dominate European perceptions in the late nineteenth century. Although several *theories* of race and hierarchy had emerged as early as Bernier's in 1684, at the time of British-Fante trading relationships they primarily manifested in a sort of quasi-acceptant culturalism, on both sides. As such, it was possible for an African like Ignatius Sancho and several others like him to become successful in European society in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Sancho landed in Britain at an early age, and was educated there during the mid 1700's. Near the end of his life he became a wealthy London merchant and well-respected writer of articles and letters, collections of which lend insight as to what it was like to be an urban African in Britain at this time. A case study of British-Fante interaction in Annamaboe coupled with an examination of the life and thoughts of Ignatius Sancho provides a sort of

“snapshot” of British relationships with and perceptions of Africans up through 1807.

Consequently, this section of thesis demonstrates how the application of the term “racism” is inappropriate when trying to understand these relationships, failing to capture their dynamics in an accurate manner.

However, Sancho and Annamaboe, viewed through a lens of culturalism, can be powerfully contrasted to a separate “snapshot” more accurately viewed through racism slightly over a half a century later. The industrial revolution in Britain created a heightened desire for increased access to raw goods, and advances in technology. In particular, weaponry and naval transit provided them the means to act on these desires. This coincided with a time when West African states were experiencing some of their greatest internal social, political and economic changes (because of the destabilizing effects of the ending of the slave trade and transition to “legitimate” commerce) providing the British with unequalled opportunities to implement formal colonial mechanisms for the sake of material advantage. However, incursion for the sole purpose of material gain by the late nineteenth century would not have withstood moral scrutiny without the implementation of an ideology that could reconcile liberal democratic ideals with amplified colonial aggression. A concept of colonial paternalism emerged, framing Africans as “cognitive children” in need of a “benevolent parent” to civilize them through the introduction of European concepts of science, culture, and socio-political structure à la Kipling’s “White Man’s Burden.”<sup>6</sup> This joined with social (and by extension racial) Darwinism, which provided a divisive racial/pseudoscientific framework with which to discuss and coalesce preexisting *ideas* of race theory, generated the racist *ideology* needed to effectively other Africans.

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<sup>6</sup> In this instance I am using the term anachronistically, as the poem was not published until 1899. It is simply a convenient and accurate way to frame my argument.

The life of James “Africanus” Beale Horton serves as a perfect case study to examine this transition. Horton was a British-trained West African doctor and successful army medical officer who practiced between the 1860’s and 1880’s. During his own time he experienced and wrote about the coalescence of racialized philosophy and science into a “hardened” racism. He wrote several books and published a compendium of letters which served to rebut claims of African inferiority, detail his life story, and relay his experiences with the transition from culturalism to racism in Britain and on the Gold Coast. Unfortunately, his work received very little attention and even less consideration from its intended audience. Horton continued to articulate his fears of Africans losing the ability to achieve his same level of success through the end of his life. Horton’s fears are powerfully realized and demonstrated by the events surrounding the racially motivated dismissal of Dr. John Farrell Easmon from the post of Chief Medical Officer of the British West African Colonies in 1893.

By comparing the context of Annamaboe and Sancho through the lens of culturalism and relative to the economic and political contexts of Britain and West Africa, with that of Horton and the generation of West African physicians that followed him, this thesis charts the evolution of British relationships and perceptions of West Africans from culturalist “tolerance” to colonial racism. In doing so, it challenges and problematizes historical narratives that fail to accurately depict the complex relationships, agencies, and, dynamics that informed British-West African relations, and how those relationships changed over time.

## Chapter One: Ignatius Sancho

The most obvious example of an outstanding and highly successful African in Britain during the eighteenth century period is Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa. His 1789 autobiography, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*, was a significant factor contributing to the creation of the Slave Trade Act in 1807, which abolished the African slave trade for Britain and its colonies. As important as Equiano is as a historically puissant African figure in the abolitionist movement, not to mention eighteenth and early nineteenth British society in general, he has begun to loom rather overlarge in that venue, obscuring the fact that many Africans had achieved high levels of success in Britain during this time period.<sup>7</sup>

One less studied than Equiano would be Ottobah Cugoano. Taking the name John Stuart after his baptism, he was an African abolitionist and natural rights philosopher from Ghana who was active in England in the latter half of the eighteenth century. Captured in present-day Ghana and sold into slavery at the age of 13, he was shipped to Grenada in the Lesser Antilles, where he worked on a plantation. In 1772 he was purchased by an English merchant who took him to England, where he was taught to read and write, and was freed following the ruling in the *Somerset Case*, which held that, based on the Cartwright Decision of 1569, there was no common law basis for slavery on English soil. While working for artists Richard and Maria Cosway, he became acquainted with British political and

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<sup>7</sup> Equiano, Olaudah. *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, Or Gustavus Vassa, The African: Written By Himself*. London, 1789. Accessed August 22, 2016. <https://archive.org/stream/theinterestingna15399gut/15399.txt>.



cultural figures that prompted him to join the Sons of Africa, an active group of African abolitionists in England during the latter half of the eighteenth century. His 1787 *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Human Species* stands as one of the first tracts published by an African demanding the abolition of the slave trade. In it, Cugoano argued that every man in Britain was responsible in some degree for slavery and that the country should 'set an example' and be the first to abolish the trade. He wrote, "is it not strange to think, that they who ought to be considered as the most learned and civilized people in the world, that they should carry on a traffic of the most barbarous cruelty and injustice, and that many think slavery, robbery and murder no crime?" No real record of Cugoano's life exists after the publication of this work.<sup>8</sup>

A similar analysis could be made of the life and accomplishments of Anton Wilhelm Amo. Amo was born in Awukena in the Axim region of present-day Ghana, but at the age of about four was taken to Amsterdam by the Dutch West India Company. According to Abraham, some accounts say that he was taken as a slave, while others claim that he was sent to Amsterdam by a preacher working in Ghana. Regardless of the circumstances, he was eventually given as a "present" to Anthony Ulrich, Duke of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel.

Amo was baptized (and later confirmed) in the palace's chapel during his stay. He grew close to the Duke, becoming treated as a member of his family. The Duke later funded his education at the Wolfenbüttel Ritter-Akademie (1717–1721) and at the University of Helmstedt (1721–1727) afterward. Amo went on to the University of Halle, enrolling in its law school directly after graduating from Helmstedt. He finished his preliminary studies

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<sup>8</sup> Cugoano, Ottobah. *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery*. London, 1787. Accessed April 3, 2017. <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eccodemo/K046227.0001.001/1:5?rgn=div1;view=fulltext> AND Gunn, Jeffrey. "Creating a Paradox: Quobna Ottobah Cugoano and the Slave Trade's Violation of the Principles of Christianity, Reason, and Property Ownership." *Journal of World History* 21, no. 4 (2010): 629-56. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41060853>

within two years, his dissertation being: *The Rights of Blacks in Europe*. For further studies Amo moved to the University of Wittenberg where he studied a wide variety of subjects (including logic, astronomy, theology, politics, and medicine) and mastered six languages (English, French, Dutch, Latin, Greek, and German). His medical education in particular was to play a central role in much of his later philosophical thought.

In 1734 Amo became the first African to earn a Doctorate in Philosophy in Europe. His thesis (published as *On the Absence of Sensation in the Human Mind and its Presence in our Organic and Living Body*) argued against Cartesian dualism in favor of a broadly materialist account of the person. He accepted that it is correct to talk of a mind or soul, but argued that it is the body, rather than the mind, which perceives and feels. Amo returned to the University of Halle to lecture in philosophy under his preferred name, Antonius Guilelmus Amo Afer, gaining tenure in 1736. From his lectures, he produced his second major work in 1738, *Treatise on the Art of Philosophising Soberly and Accurately*, where he developed an empiricist epistemology very close to but distinct from that of philosophers such as John Locke and David Hume. In it he also examined and criticized faults he found in the philosophical practices of his contemporaries such as intellectual dishonesty and dogmatism.

In 1740 Amo took up a post in philosophy at the University of Jena, but while there he experienced a number of changes for the worse. The Duke had died in 1735, leaving him without his long-standing patron and protector. That coincided with social changes in Germany, which was becoming intellectually and morally narrower and less liberal. Those who argued against the secularization of education regained ascendancy over those (such as Christian Wolff, who once came to Amo's defense) that campaigned for greater academic and social freedom.

Displeased with the changing academic and social environment, he decided to return to the land of his birth. He set sail on a Dutch West India Company ship to Ghana via Guinea, arriving in about 1747. His life from then on becomes incredibly difficult to track. According to at least one report, he was taken to a Dutch fortress, Fort San Sebastian, in the 1750s, possibly to prevent him sowing dissent among his people by disputing the slave trade. The exact date, place, and manner of his death are unknown, though evidence supports his having died at Fort Chama in 1759.<sup>9</sup>

Our analysis, however, focuses on the life and letters of a black Briton who only became the subject of significant study in the past two decades. Ignatius Sancho, far from being as politically active as Equiano or Stuart or an academic like Amo, makes for a fascinating study not because of some sort of unique or highly popularized event that occurred in his life, but rather because of how largely mundane his life was in comparison. The study of his life and letters is unique and relevant because, through it, we are allowed a glimpse into a Black Briton's effort to come to terms with his assimilation into the culturalist society of Britain during the slave era of the mid to late eighteenth century.

The first known person of African descent to cast a vote in a British election, have an obituary published in the British press, and to be published in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, Sancho's relative obscurity in historical study prior to recent scholarship certainly prompts confusion. Though a compendium of his letters exists (the most recent edition being released in 1994), one struggles to find mentions of him beyond a sentence here or footnote there. One source that has maintained a consistent presence in the study of Sancho's life and thoughts (beyond that posthumously published compendium of *Letters*) is

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<sup>9</sup> Abraham, William. *The Life and Times of Anton Wilhelm Amo*. *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* 7 (1964): 60-81. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41405765>

the biography of him written by Joseph Jekyll Esq. first included in the 1803 edition republished by Sancho's favorite son, William. Sancho was born in 1729 on slave ship headed to the West Indies from the Gold Coast. His mother died of illness shortly after his birth and his father threw himself into the sea, preferring suicide to a life on enslavement. His owner, not having a place for an orphaned child, named him Ignatius and brought him back to England in 1731, where he was sold to three sisters (the names of which have yet to be found). Surnaming him Sancho for an alleged similarity to Don Quixote's squire, they believed that an "African's ignorance was the only security for his obedience" and tried to deprive him of an education. Despite this, Sancho taught himself how to read and write in moments of solitude. At some point in his childhood he met the Duke of Montagu, who was so impressed with his intelligence and self-driven nature that he aided him in his quest for literacy and gave him books from his personal library. After discovering Sancho's self-education, the sisters threatened to send him back to the West Indies. Horrified, he ran away to the Duke's manor, where he was taken on as a servant.

Quickly rising through the ranks of the manor's staff, Sancho served the Montagu family through both Duke and the Duchess's deaths. He received a £70 bulk sum from the will and a £30 annuity, but ended up wasting the majority on cards and women, once going so far as to lose his shirt at a cribbage game. For a brief period he became an actor in an attempt to earn money but eventually returned to the Montagu manor to serve the next generation. He stayed and started a family after marrying Ann Osborne, a West Indian woman, in 1758. He stayed on the Montagu's staff until 1773, when he had no choice but to quit due to complications of gout and obesity compromising his ability to fulfill his duties. During his service he saved the money from his annuity and upon his retirement used it to

become a grocer in Westminster. He lived and worked there with his family until his death in 1780, caused by an incident of severe illness fatally complicated by his gout and obesity.<sup>10</sup>

Jekyll, however, went beyond simply recounting the details of Sancho's life, using his death as a platform from which to preach against the small but growing undercurrent of racialized thought that had begun to flow in the British mind. Jekyll insisted "he who could penetrate the interior of Africa, might not improbably discover Negro arts and polity, which bear little analogy to the ignorance and grossness of slaves in the sugar-islands, expatriated in infancy, and brutalized under the whip and task-master."<sup>11</sup> As one might note, Jekyll's insistence on environment, not personhood, on *nurture*, not *nature*, is indicative of the culturalist attitudes that were still the lens used by the British mainstream in examining other peoples right at the turn of the nineteenth century. To underscore his point (and perhaps give it the weight of scientific backing), Jekyll included a long excerpt of an article published by Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, a highly prominent figure in racial theory at the turn of the nineteenth century, in a German medical journal in the 1790's. Seemingly combatting notions of the biologized thought that had yet to come in vogue for several decades, Jekyll included and highlighted Blumenbach's assertion that "Negroes, in regard to their mental faculties and capacity, are not inferior to the rest of the human race." Blumenbach explicitly mentions Sancho as an example of the mental acuity of Africans in a "properly civilized environment," a statement that not only further emphasized the importance of concepts of culturalism as employed by British and overall European perceptions Africans at this time, but also the popularity experienced by Sancho's letters after his death in 1780.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Edwards, Paul, ed., and Rewt, Polly, ed., *The Letters of Ignatius Sancho* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 1994). 22-24.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

Select letters written by Sancho reveal much concerning his thoughts as regards to the perceptions of Africans in the eighteenth century and, more specifically, to his experiences as a fully assimilated African in a culturalist society. Sancho, an affable man, made his presence known since his days as a servant in the Montagu household. He had a great interest in charity work, often calling on the good will of his friends to help those in need, whether they needed food, money or, in one specific instance, clothing.<sup>13</sup> This interest in aiding others did not end upon taking up a career as a Westminster grocer after his retirement. In a letter to a certain Mr. Browne Sancho can be seen writing a letter of recommendation for a particularly talented African servant seeking employment in an upper tier household after years of serving a middleclass family.<sup>14</sup> Sancho also made friends with popular figures of the day. For example, he became friends with Giardini, a famous composer, impresario, and virtuoso violinist at the time that often gave Sancho free tickets to his performances.<sup>15</sup>

Sancho, beyond being a charitable and popular busybody, was also a particularly proud patriot. We can find evidence of his great interest in the rebellion of the American colonies and his faith in the Crown's military might in some of his later letters. In a letter to a Mrs. Cocksedge he wrote,

“the defeat of Washtub's army – and the capture of Arnold and Sullivan with seven thousand prisoners – thirteen countries return to their allegiance. All this news is believed – the delivery of her Majesty is certain Pray God the rest may be as certain... and *the British empire be strongly knit in the never ending bands of sacred friendship and brotherly love!*”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Letter from Sancho to Mr. James Meheux, September 17 1768 AND Letter from Sancho to Mr. James Meheux September 20 1768 IN *Ibid.*, 39-40.

<sup>14</sup> Letter from Sancho to Mr. Browne August 12, 1775 IN *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>15</sup> Letter from Sancho to Mrs. H- April 9 1778 IN *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>16</sup> Letter from Sancho to Mrs. Cocksedge November 5 1777 IN *Ibid.*, 114. Emphasis mine.

Here we can see Sancho excited about the defeats of George Washington at Long Island and Brandywine Creek as well as the capture of General John Sullivan and Benedict Arnold prior to his betraying the colonial army. This excitement, desire to see the colonies return to the Crown, and faith in the power of the British empire offers explicit evidence of Sancho's sincere investment in British culture and society. Put otherwise, it is highly doubtful that one who lacks such investment in their society would, of their own unprompted accord, so openly and enthusiastically support that society's efforts at quelling a rebellious region. That his excitement turns into troubled concern as the war drags out for longer than he had anticipated only underscores this wholehearted investment in Britain.<sup>17</sup>

Of course, the more immediately relevant portion of Sancho's letters as pertains to our discussion of culturalism lies in those that reveal his experiences as a black Briton in the culturalist society of the mid to late eighteenth century. At times there have been readings into his letters that claim any mention of race, explicit or supposedly implicit, serves as a critique on eighteenth century British society. The largest example of this would be of the interpretations made by some concerning a letter he wrote in 1777, where he describes a day out with his family. In it, he says, ““We went by water – had a coach home – were gazed – followed, &c. &c. – but were not much abused.” That last line has been taken as being indicative of some sort of racial abuse having taken place, but one of the editors of this edition noted that anyone riding a coach in London at this time was more often than not subjected to a degree of mockery by street urchins for their own amusement. If the tone of the letter as a whole is taken into account it is fairly clear that Sancho does not seem offended by the interaction but instead rather amused.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Letter from Sancho to John Spink, Esq. June 16 1780 IN *Ibid.*, 240

<sup>18</sup> Letter from Sancho to Mr. Rush August 27 1777 IN *Ibid.*, 104

Many other letters, however, do not take such a jovial tone and can instead be read with an eye for subtle sarcasm and satire. In a letter to the aforementioned Mr. Browne Sancho writes,

“I thank you for your kindness to your poor black brethren – I flatter myself you will find them not ungrateful... I have observed a dog will love those who use him kindly – and surely, if so, Negroes, in their state of ignorance and bondage, will not act less generously, if I may judge them by myself.”<sup>19</sup>

Though a literal reading of the text might simply find the letter to be thankful, when considered in a more nuanced fashion it shows more than a little resentment that such an analogy is possible, reminding Browne of the inhumanity and domination that necessarily underlies the master/slave relationship.

Sancho’s hatred of slavery can be seen throughout his letters. In one written to a certain Mr. Fisher thanking him for lending Sancho several books concerned with the cause of abolition, he writes,

“That upon the unchristian and most diabolical usage of my brother Negroes – the illegality – the horrid wickedness of the traffic – the cruel carnage and depopulation of the human species – is painted in such strong colours that I would think (if duly attended to) flash conviction – and produce remorse in every enlightened and candid reader... I wish each member of each house of parliament had one of these books.”<sup>20</sup>

Though this letter is uncharacteristically frank in its address of slavery it is at best milquetoast when compared to the one written in response to the son of one of his good friends serving in the Indian colonial service. Responding to the letter, he wrote

... you speak (with honest indignation) of the treachery and chicanery of the Natives... you should remember from whom they leant these vices. The first Christian [read: European] visitors found them a simple, harmless people – but the cursed avidity for wealth urged [them] to such acts of deception that the poor, ignorant Natives soon learnt to turn the knavish and diabolical arts... upon their teachers.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Letter from Sancho to Mr. Browne July 18 1772 IN Ibid., 54

<sup>20</sup> Letter from Sancho to Mr. Fisher January 27 1778 IN Ibid., 121

<sup>21</sup> Letter from Sancho to Mr. Jack Wingrave March 12 1778 IN Ibid., 126-128



This belief in the supposedly innate nature of mendacity present in colonial peoples was one that Sancho was quick to point out as false. As Sancho observed from personal encounters with locals from the area and the writings of Britons who had made first contact with these people, the deceit that had come to be associated with them was a largely learned behavior.

The most damning portion of the letter, however, occurred in the following paragraphs, where Sancho asserted

“I say it is with reluctance that I must observe *your* country’s conduct has been uniformly wicked in the East-West-Indies – and even the Coast of Guinea [gold coast]. The grand object of English navigators – indeed of all Christian navigators – is money – money – money... In Africa, the poor wretched natives – blessed with the most fertile and luxuriant soil, are rendered so much the more miserable for what Providence meant as a blessing: - the Christians’ abominable traffic for slaves – and the horrid cruelty and treachery of the petty Kings – encouraged by their Christian customers – who carry them strong liquors... and powder – and bad fire-arms – to furnish them with the hellish means of killing and kidnapping.”<sup>22</sup>

This paragraph, a condemnation of the British engagement in the slave trade that could easily be applied to the interactions of British, Fante, and Asante slavers in Annamaboe, is perhaps the clearest condemnation of the slave trade offered in Sancho’s letters. Viewing this letter through the lens of culturalism, perhaps the most striking feature of the letter is Sancho’s use of the word “your” at the beginning of the paragraph. As we have noted, Sancho was a British patriot to the end of his days, willfully remaining in Britain for the entirety of his life and actively supporting the British cause during the American Revolution. By referring to Britain as “*your* country” while writing to Wingrave, Sancho disassociates himself from Britain, effectively denying his investment in the nation or its culture out of shame and anger due to its involvement in the “unchristian and most diabolical usage of [his] brother Negroes.” This letter marks the sole point in the

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid. My emphasis.

compendium of letters where he explicitly renounces his British identity, consequently marking the only time in which he refuses to assimilate and bypass culturalist prejudice.

The letter, however, is far from being vitriolic in its entirety. In reading the entire piece it is abundantly clear that Sancho cares for his friend's son and wishes him the best. He reminds him to "read your bible" twice over, statements that reaffirms Sancho's Christianity since he is advising a young man to keep it in mind and, additionally, provides evidence toward his sincere investment in the religious aspect of British culture. He also recommends educative reading material in a postscript. That Sancho believes in the power of self-education is, of course, unsurprising given how well it served him in his life. He tells him "the mind, my dear Jack, wants food... why then should not one wish to increase in knowledge as well as money? His recommendations, classic works of history and literature, would serve Wingrave well as weighty tomes that would challenge his mind and force the development of his intellect.<sup>23</sup>

That Sancho deeply values the circumstances that allowed for him to escape slavery is made abundantly clear in a letter he wrote to Julius Soubise, a fellow black British servant. Soubise, however, squandered his fortunate happenstance by becoming a criminal – he raped one of the Duchess of Queensbury's maids.<sup>24</sup> Sancho, writing to Soubise after he had been exiled as punishment for his crime, wrote, "Happy, happy lad! What a fortune is thine! Look round upon the miserable fate of almost all of our unfortunate colour – superadded to ignorance, - see slavery, and the contempt of those very wretches who roll in affluence from our labours." For Soubise to throw his privileged position away through the commission such a repugnant crime struck Sancho as incredibly foolish and sickening.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Letter from Sancho to Mr. Meheux July 23 1777 IN Ibid., 96.

<sup>25</sup> Letter from Sancho to Mr. Soubise October 11 1772 IN Ibid., 51.

That we have access to these letters at all is more than likely due to the solicitations of Edmund Rack, a Quaker abolitionist who had read some of Sancho's letters in the past.

Writing to Sancho in 1779, Rack wrote,

I am fully persuaded that the great God... regards the natives of Africa with equal complacency as those of this or any other country; and that the rewards annexed to virtue will accompany it in all ages and nations, either in this life, or in a future happier world which is to come... The sentiments [your letters contain]... may convince some proud Europeans, that the noblest gifts of God, those of the mind, are not confined to any nation or people, but extended to the scorching deserts [a word used in the eighteenth century in the way modern readers would use the word "wilderness"] of Guinea, as well as the temperate and propitious climes in which we are favoured to dwell.<sup>26</sup>

Simply put, Rack believed that Sancho's incredibly eloquent and passionate speech would do credit to Africans in the mind of Europeans, helping to allay the contemporary culturalist and inklings of racist presuppositions that had come to color their perceptions. Sancho, fortunately for us, assented and, through several editions printed through the centuries, have survived to reach us today.

Culturalism, rather than racism, more appropriately informs our conceptions of the lives of black Britons in the eighteenth century, particularly those like Ignatius Sancho who have not occupied the historical limelight until recently. Anachronistic applications of racism and racist conceptual frameworks do not only obscure and distort the lives of both prominent and common black Britons in the eighteenth century. They make the existence of such men and women nearly impossible to conceive. How could one understand the life and thoughts of a black Briton at this time, much less believe in the possibility of such a person being able to become a noteworthy public figure looked up to and accepted by other Britons, if one presupposes that the British already believed in a racial ideology that posited Africans as being innately and immutably inferior to themselves? It cannot be done, at least not without

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<sup>26</sup> Letter from Edmund Rack to Ignatius Sancho April 20 1779 IN *Ibid.*, 158.

a healthy dose of cognitive dissonance or misunderstanding of racism's basic structure. It is only through a lens of culturalism that we can clearly see the portrait of Ignatius Sancho, an educated, self-driven man who willfully and wholeheartedly assimilated into British culture in order to gain acceptance. This concept allows us to more carefully consider how Sancho, as a black Briton, could be a sincerely proud British patriot and active participant in British society while simultaneously condemning the slave trade and those who participated in it.

## Chapter Two: Britain and West Africa: Trade Partners

### Context

Before we move on to the region where Sancho was criticizing British action, a bit of context may serve to elucidate some of the actions taken by the Fante, Asante, and British in Annamaboe. As previously mentioned, many popular histories of today incorrectly posit that the British imposed their will on West African peoples, forcing them into slavery and justifying it with an anachronistic application of racism informed by a sense of innate British biological superiority. The reality the situation, put forth by numerous scholars, was that many Europeans, particularly those with New World holdings, provided a demand for a product, slave labor, which West African elites were interested in supplying for the sake of profit.<sup>27</sup> This was possible because “the institution of slavery... was of considerable antiquity in Africa” and as such “it was no dramatic leap to sell slaves outside the community.”<sup>28</sup>

This is not to say that the European demand for slavery was merely an outside market to which African elites’ sold a product. Quite on the contrary, the European demand for slavery in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was massive, due in no small part to a need to compensate for dwindling Amerindian populations and the inability and/or unwillingness of most Europeans to travel to the Americas in order to work the plantations and mines present there. As such, competition for the ability to sell slaves to European slavers was quite high, “the major political consequence of [which] was the creation of centralized, essentially mercantilist states... [between which] wars were often fought deliberately for [the sake of capturing] slaves.”<sup>29</sup> The creation of slave raiding bands was also

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<sup>27</sup> Reid, Richard J. *A History of Modern Africa: 1800 to the Present*. (Oxford: John Wiley & Sons Limited, 2012). 24.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 26.

common in this period, in which groups of raiders would attack communities and bring captured men, women, and children to the coast to sell them to passing slave ships.<sup>30</sup>

A specific example of this would be the role played by the slave trade between the English, Dutch and the warring Denkyira and Asante states in what is now Ghana. The Asante, taking advantage of changes in European trading relations after the consolidation of the Kingdom of Kongo (in what is now modern day Angola) began capturing Denkyira gold mining sites and people in the 1690's in an attempt to capitalize on the increased presence of English and Dutch traders along the Gold Coast. The Asante, drawing on their own political justifications based on alleged Denkyira brutality toward civilians, began consolidating their power in the region. The Asante, having won a decisive battle in 1701, permanently shifted power relations to ensure their prominence along the Gold Coast. Those that did not ally with the Asante were captured as slaves and sold to the English and Dutch to both solidify trade relations and permanently dispense with their adversaries by sending them away from the continent, a process the Asante referred to as "eating the land."<sup>31</sup>

Despite the rapidly growing market share in the slave trade occupied by Europeans, West Africans were not participating in an extraverted economy by any significant stretch. While the slave trade with Europe was certainly a considerable historical force at this time, African polities, not only in the West, but all parts of the continent were engaged with trade on the communal, regional, and at times continental scales. Trade between neighbors and villages was common, as agricultural development allowed for people to participate in labor specialization and purchase goods and services through trade and barter. Long distance

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Mccaskie, T. C. "Denkyira In The Making Of Asante C. 1660–1720." *The Journal of African History* 48, no. 01 (2007): 1-25. Accessed September 8, 2016. JSTOR.

economic exchange was not uncommon either, as caravans delivered goods to and fro for hundreds of miles along established trade routes.<sup>32</sup>

Though difficult to find, there are some first-hand trade records that show the ways in which British and West African slavers engaged in the slave trade in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. One noteworthy account comes from English trader James Barbot, which details his company's trade engagements with an unnamed king who ruled a large portion of the New Calabar river in what is now modern Nigeria. In it, he describes the king as having

“had a great esteem and regard for the whites, who had greatly enriched him through trade” and showing no signs of fear or deference on his part toward them, which signified his being on equal if not superior footing with the British trade agents.<sup>33</sup> The king only accepted iron bars and brass rings as payment for the slaves that he was selling, refusing to accept “wrought pewter and tankards, green beads, and other goods.”<sup>34</sup>

The reasoning behind this was that the West Africans involved in the trade were more than astute enough to realize that the pewter, beads, and other miscellaneous goods being offered to them were nothing more than useless trinkets lacking any real value. As such, they only accepted payment in the form of iron bars and brass rings, materials that were difficult to acquire in that region which could then be melted down and made into tools and weaponry that would give the group both economic and military advantages over others in the region.

The members of the unnamed African group were shrewd traders in more ways than one. Though illiterate, they used that fact to their advantage, often “taking offense” to or mocking a gift that was offered to them and using it as an excuse to “misremember” the terms of a previous agreement as being in favor of their trade interests, forcing the English

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<sup>32</sup> Getz, Trevor R. *Cosmopolitan Africa, C.1700-1875*. New Edition ed. Oxford University Press, 2012. 68.

<sup>33</sup> Barbot, James. "A Voyage to New Calabar River in the Year 1699." Cengage.com. January 1, 1699. [http://college.cengage.com/history/primary\\_sources/world/voyage\\_1699.htm](http://college.cengage.com/history/primary_sources/world/voyage_1699.htm). Accessed December 1, 2016.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

to either accept their terms or leave empty-handed. One can observe this when Barbot writes that “[The King’s brother] was a sharp black... perpetually making objections against something or other and teasing us for this or that [gift]... they did not have the art of reading and writing, and *we therefore are forced to stand to their agreement.*”<sup>35</sup>

Finally, it is prudent to note that the Africans trading with Barbot in 1699 engaged in non-slave trade as well. According to Barbot’s account, prices were set as

Sixty king’s yams, one [iron] bar; one hundred and sixty slave’s yams, one bar; for fifty thousand yams to be delivered to us. A [large cask] of water, two rings. For the length of wood, seven bars, which is dear, but they were to deliver it ready cut into our boat. For one goat, one bar. A cow, ten or eight bars, according to its size. A hog, two bars. A calf, eight bars. A jar of palm oil, one bar and a quarter.<sup>36</sup>

Though the specific content of and prices set in this trade are not of great interest, what is important to note is that the existence of this and other accounts of non-slave trade delegitimize the idea that West Africans were over-reliant on the slave trade and struggled to adapt to “legitimate” trade after the British abolition of the trade in 1807.

There are also accounts that discredit the idea that Africans were always grateful for the presence of European traders. For example, there is a letter that was written by Nzinga Mbemba, or Afonso the First of the Kingdom of Kongo, in which he petitions the King of Portugal to restrict his merchants and missionaries in Kongolese territory. There is a very telling passage in which he states that

[The Kongolese] people, keenly desirous as they are of the wares and things of your Kingdoms, which are brought here by your people, *and in order to satisfy their voracious appetite, seize many of our people, freed and exempt men*, and very often it happens that they kidnap even noblemen and the sons of noblemen, and our relatives, and take them to be sold to the white men who are in our Kingdoms...we need from those (your) Kingdoms no more than some priests and a few people to reach in schools, and no other goods except wine and flour for the holy sacrament...[as well as] two physicians and two apothecaries and one surgeon, so that they may come with their

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid. Emphasis mine.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.



drugstores and all the necessary things to stay in our kingdoms, because we are in extreme need of them all and each of them.<sup>37</sup>

This passage is an excellent example of the phenomenon that Reid demonstrates above, in which Africans desirous of European goods and services began to form slave-raiding parties in order to create and fuel an underground slaving industry. Afonso I, observing this phenomenon, petitioned the King of Portugal to stop exporting luxury goods to his territory. Instead, he requested that he only provide medical professionals, teachers, and priests so that he may be able to care for the bodies, minds, and souls of the Kongolese people. Of tangential interest, one can note the Afonso I's desire to facilitate the conversion of his people to Christianity through his request for priests and materials necessary for the sacrament of communion. Perhaps this serves as an indicator of Afonso I's realization that converting to Christianity was an important aspect of winning over and further cultivating European sympathies, but this is, of course, nothing more than an educated guess.

### Annamaboe

With that general contextualization and the lens of culturalism in place we can view the image of Annamaboe in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in a more accurate light. Randy J. Sparks' incredible work *Where the Negroes are Masters: An African Port in the Era of the Slave Trade* serves as a primer for those who wish to gain a greater understanding of a port in which the reality of the slave trade as it occurred on African soil is most clearly revealed. Annamaboe, the "Key to the Gold Coast," was originally a simple stopping point for goods moving to and from the interior that served as a port from which West Africans would contain European colonial desires while still allowing for them to engage in trade.

First contacted by the Portuguese in the fifteenth century, the amount of gold available from

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<sup>37</sup> Mbemba, Nzinga (Afonso I). "Letters to the King of Portugal." Stetson.edu. July 6, 1526. Accessed April 2, 2015. <https://www2.stetson.edu/secure/history/hy10430/afonso.html>. Emphasis mine.

the town and its surroundings prompted the Portuguese to build a castle nearby in Elmina as a sort of fortified trade station. Though the Dutch seized the castle and had removed the Portuguese from the region by 1642, the Portuguese had played an immense role in establishing relations between Annamaboe and European traders. Through the introduction of Christianity and the creation of trade languages from a hodgepodge of various European and West African tongues, the Portuguese laid a cultural and linguistic foundation upon which European and West African traders could construct productive economic relationships. Prior to the rise in demand for slaves in the beginning of the eighteenth century Annamaboe typically provided inferior quality gold when compared to that of the interior, seemingly condemning the port to be nothing more than a site of import and export. In fact, so many goods were stored in the town warehouses that Annamaboe became a net *importer* of slaves so as to keep up with the demand for labor.<sup>38</sup>

This changed when the Asante began a series of expansionist wars at the beginning of the eighteenth century, an example being the aforementioned war with the Denkyira. The Asante, flush with captives, took them to Annamaboe and sold them to the Fante, the group that had control over the port and its immediate surroundings. This swollen supply of slaves coincided with a time when European powers with colonial holdings in the West Indies and Americas began to need more slaves to replace the rapidly dwindling Amerindian population. In exchange for these slaves, the Fante (and bargaining through them, the Asante) demanded access to New World crops like maize, which grew more rapidly and provided a more instant source of carbohydrates than local grains like sorghum or millet. Additionally, and as seen with Barbot, these groups demanded iron and brass so as to create more effective agricultural tools and sturdier, more deadly weaponry. Most slaves would be

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<sup>38</sup> Sparks, Randy J. *Where the Negroes are Masters: An African Port in the Era of the Slave Trade* (Harvard: Harvard University Press 2014). 8-11.

sold to European slavers, but a significant minority composed of the highest quality slaves was kept to clear tropical forest and work the land to produce New World crops.

A sort of positive feedback system formed here, which propelled Annamaboe from a backwater port to being an immensely powerful player along the Coast. Maize served as a fast growing, easily planted, nonperishable, easily transported carbohydrate source. The Fante and Asante, well fed on this new crop, were able to expand their population. This larger, better fed population would allow the Asante to campaign against their neighbors, seizing more land and captives to both sell to Fante slavers and clear/work their newly acquired land. The Fante, purchasing these surplus slaves, would then sell them to Europeans at a premium for iron, brass, and grain, as well as alcohol and luxury goods. The metals would then be processed into weaponry to be used by the Fante and Asante military in campaigns, as well as agricultural implements to more effectively plant new world crops. The process would then repeat for larger effect. Though fascinating, what is most important for a reader to note is that this process was, by and large, an *internal* dynamic. Though the Europeans involved in the trade served as the supply of material goods and buyers of slaves, the actual political and socio-economic factors at play were entirely in the hands of Fante and Asante elites.<sup>39</sup>

While many European powers present in the area had forts, they were primarily used to safeguard their tenants and goods from African and European raiders who might try to steal them, *not* to enforce their will. The British, being the only European power that had a fort in the city proper, developed the closest European relationship with the Fante. Many traders settled there, or at least took local wives during their several-year posts as representatives of British business interests. These marriages served to solidify cultural

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 16.

relations and mend gaps that would occur as one side tried to take advantage of the other, and vice versa. The Fante women in these relationships gained access to employment, education, money, and trade not only for themselves but for their friends and families. The Englishmen, in return, received access to sex, cheaper food and shelter (the Fante regularly charged a premium for Europeans seeking food and board in town), healthcare, and cultural insight. The children that resulted from these “country marriages” were often sent to Europe to receive an education and became professionals, typically returning to find employment in Annamaboe or else remaining in the country they had received an education from.

Children also played a large role in British-Fante trade relations. The pawn system was employed as a means through which Fante merchants could receive credit and goods in advance from British traders. In exchange for this, the Fante merchant would leave one or two of their children as collateral with the Briton, who would take the children as slaves if the Fante merchant did not uphold their end of the bargain. These children typically learned English and gained insight into English culture during their stays on board British ships, which they would relay back to their fathers to provide them with a trade advantage. However, the Fante often abused this system. These merchants regularly abandoned many children and, consequently, the British lost money on these unfaithful ventures. Unsurprisingly, relations between the groups grew frosty whenever these incidents occurred. Relations grew so damaged after a period in which several of these bad-faith transactions occurred that the British temporarily abandoned the fort in 1730, both to save money and punish the Fante for abusing the credit advanced to them.<sup>40</sup>

During the mid-to-late eighteenth century, which was the peak of Annamaboe’s activity as a slave port and its interactions with British merchants, two figures loomed large

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 28.

in its socio-economic and political structure: John Corantee and Richard Brew. Corantee, Annamaboe's leader from the mid 1740's to his death in 1764, was a Fante who had received an education in England prior to his ascendancy. Realizing the necessity of keeping both the English and Asante at bay if the Fante were to maintain their position as professional middlemen and the owners of the town, Corantee devoted significant resources to developing the town's militia. In particular, he struck deals with British merchants that made sure he, and through him his militia, would be given primary access to British weaponry, particularly muskets and cannonry. He also had this force devote significant time to keeping trade routes between the town and the interior clear, figuratively and literally. This was, no doubt, due to the number of navigable pathways and rivers in the immediate area being so limited as to become a valuable resource worth maintaining and fighting for.

Corantee's most important skill, however, was his political savvy. Oftentimes he would take advantage of his knowledge of one European interest and use it to play them against another. Most notably, Corantee sent his sons Bassi and William Ansah to France and England, respectively, where they were educated and treated as nobility throughout their stay. While Bassi provided valuable information on the French, the British curtailed its usefulness by shelling the town during the War of Austrian succession as punishment for the Fante interacting with their economic competitor, permanently damaging Franco/Fante relations. William, on the other hand, had a far more interesting story that would come to serve his father well as a bargaining chip.

William, after returning to Annamaboe to visit his family, was to return to England as his father's representative given his familiarity with the British and their culture he had acquired and internalized during the years he spent there receiving an education. The captain of the ship he was on, however, kidnapped him. William was taken to the Caribbean where

he was sold as a slave. The English, upon learning this news, rushed to the colony where William was being held and freed him, (rightfully) fearing his father's wrath and the closing of trade in Annamaboe. Upon William's return to England he was hailed as a sort of celebrity, with the story of his escape becoming the matter of articles and gossip. He had his portrait taken and published in several newspapers, with the news of his baptism making the front page as well. Corantee took advantage of this snafu immediately, using it as an excuse to raise taxes excised on British merchants to unprecedented levels.<sup>41</sup>

Viewing this incident through the lens of culturalism, it is clear that William must have overcome a significant portion of whatever culturalist prejudices may have been held against him for his origins. How else could his meteoric rise to fame in British popular culture, not to mention his ability to become an accepted resident treated as befit a foreign noble, be explained? Certainly not through a framework of racism, which would fault him for his physical appearance so heavily as to erase the importance of any of his accomplishments, trials, or associations. Instead, through his genuine adoption and internalization of British cultural norms, he was able to become a beloved celebrity and effective African diplomat in eighteenth century Britain. While this does not undo or excuse any sort of bigotry or discrimination that British people may have perpetrated against Africans at this time, it certainly contradicts any narrative that holds racism as the sole lens through which the majority of British people viewed Africans at this time.

Returning to Annamaboe, the only man that seemed to have sway over Corantee (particularly after this incident) was Richard Brew, an Irishman and Royal African Company (RAC) officer. He arrived in West Africa in 1745, stationed in a town further inland from Annamaboe called Tantunquerry. While there he became intimately acquainted with Asante

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 37-67

and Fante cultural norms, making him a uniquely talented individual in that he was able to effectively communicate and bargain with all three primary groups concerned with the trade in Annamaboe. Leaving Tantunquerry in 1753 after a fall out with the RAC, Brew went to Annamaboe. While there, he met and married John Corantee's daughter that same year, and three years after became the British governor of the town after his predecessor's death. Through the combination of this close familial relationship and his cultural expertise, Brew became one of the few men capable of standing up to Corantee, often acting as an intermediary between Corantee and whatever Asante or English agent that acquired that service from him. <sup>42</sup>

Between these two figures and the positive feedback loop that existed due to the slave trade, Annamaboe quickly went from a small port to being known as a consistent provider of high-quality slaves. The vast majority (~3/4) of these slaves were captured during Asante expansionist wars, but of course not all of them were enemy combatants. Many of these people were simply peasants who had been in the wrong place at the wrong time, and were thus exempt from the (now highly problematized) War Captive theory that had begun to gain traction as a justification for slavery (when slavers even bothered to justify their actions).<sup>43</sup> The other quarter largely consisted of prisoners from the Coastal region that had committed one crime or another and were being shipped off as slaves for punishment. Finally, many children were simply kidnapped. After conquering an area, the Asante often imposed a tribute system in which the conquered people were made to send a given number of slaves to the Coast in order to secure relative peace, a process that allowed the Asante to maintain a consistent flow of slaves without having to constantly go to war.

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 68-120.

<sup>43</sup> Robert Bernasconi and Anika Maaza Mann, "The Contradictions of Racism: Locke, Slavery, and the Two Treatises." IN Valls, *Race and Racism*

Upon arriving to Annamaboe the slaves, exhausted and in poor condition after journeying for several hundred miles, were sold to the Fante and typically given plenty of food and rest so that they would be in peak condition while being inspected by British slavers. The primary brokers, known as gold takers, would take slaves to the ships where they would inspect goods and the quality of gold used by the British to pay for the slaves. As seen in the Barbot incident, many of these gold takers would often twist deals to their advantage, feigning illiteracy and/or forgetfulness to secure a better deal for the seller and, consequently, a larger commission for the sale. These tricks, used to keep the balance of trade heavily in Fante favor, were frowned upon if used too often, as the British would not hesitate to blockade the port if they felt they had been ill used one too many times. Those slaves that were not sold were typically killed, as the cost of caring for them was not seen as a worthwhile investment.

In terms of the goods brought to Annamaboe by the British, gold was the region's currency (hence the brokers being called gold takers). However, the real interest of the Fante and the Asante, as previously mentioned, was that of ore and grain to further cement their advantage on the Coast. Beyond that, rum and tobacco were the most popular imports, with these two goods constituting over 90% of inbound luxury goods brought to port. Though expensive to produce and ship, the high quality and consistent supply of slaves provided by the Fante and Asante made it more than worthwhile in the eyes of British slavers.

The British, however, could not compete with the amount of rum and tobacco supplied by American slavers. These slavers, supplied by the Rum Men of Rhode Island, made the exchange of rum for slaves the exclusive function of their business. Through them, American revolutionary ideas came to the port. Influenced by these ideas of liberty spread (rather ironically) by American slavers, the Fante became resentful of the British presence in



the town, particularly regarding their repeated attempts to monopolize trade in the region. Consequently, the Fante began stating that, even if the British *might* gather the force required to actually effectively hinder open trade with other nations, the Fante would rather sever all ties than maintain allegiance. Unsurprisingly, by the 1790's the relationship between the British and Fante was tenuous at best.<sup>44</sup>

Four events came, one following the next, which threw Annamaboe from its pedestal in the beginning of the nineteenth century. First, the death of Richard Brew near the end of the eighteenth century deprived the town of its most influential mediator, the sole person capable of keeping Asante, Fante, and British elites in check on his own. Second, near the end of the century numerous events arose that disrupted trade, putting parties ill at ease. These included the American revolution pulling the majority of British and American slavers away from the town for several years, Fante/Asante conflicts blocking the flow of slaves and goods to and from the interior, and a rise in the typical disputes between captains, Fante slavers, and gold takers that would hold ships over for weeks beyond their intended date of departure due to these other factors. Third, in 1804 and 1805 a series of riots broke out due to an altercation between British soldiers and Fante townspeople, resulting in the lower half of the town being consumed by flames at the peak of the incident. This was complicated by an Asante siege that took place in 1806. The Asante, tired of dealing with the Fante as middlemen, decided to assault the town in a bid to acquire direct access to British slavers. After they killed nearly two thirds of the inhabitants, the Fante surrendered. They were now, for the most part, to be sold in the same harbor that they had sold tens of thousands of people over the past century. <sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Sparks., 145-185

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 200-220.

Finally, and most acutely, the British abolition of the slave trade in 1807 brought the gears of Annamaboe's economy to a screeching halt. Over night the product that an entire region had built the bulk of its economy and infrastructure around experienced not a drop but a complete cessation of demand. Moreover, the British would not let anyone approach the Coast for the purposes of buying slaves, fighting those who did and releasing whatever slaves had been captured in regions like Freetown. Forts, which had originally been stores for goods, particularly slaves, now enforced the ban. The Asante, only a year into their tenure, became extremely frustrated, asking, "If [the British] find [slavery] bad now, why did they find it good before?" The Asantehene (the Asante ruler) of the time "did not deem it plausible that this obnoxious practice should have been abolished from motives of humanity alone."<sup>46</sup> No satisfactory answer could be given, save that the British made the decision to end the trade unilaterally. For there to be trade, both partners must be willing to participate. Without British participation or permission to conduct the slave trade with other powers, Annamaboe, built on the backs of slaves, lost their primary buyers and fell into ruin.

Though Annamaboe's fall back into relative obscurity was caused primarily by a one-sided decision made by the British, the interactions that occurred between the Asante, Fante, and various European powers during the town's peak level of economic activity in the eighteenth century serve as an incredible poignant foil against which the misconstrued notion that holds the slave trade as being unilaterally controlled by British slavers imposing their will on West African victims can be seen as practically groundless. In reality, the slave trade was largely controlled by those who had access to the Interior and kept watch of the Coast, preventing European incursion and dictating the terms of trade – West African elites. In the case of Annamaboe, it is clear that the Asante and Fante constituted these dominant

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 229.

former parties with the British composed the deferential latter. Through political savvy and military might the Asante and Fante controlled the details of the slave trade, demanding useful products like iron and grain to solidify their position in exchange for high quality slaves acquired through conquest and tribute. The British complied with these demands, seeing them as worthwhile investments.

Clearly, this relationship did *not* exist as a one-sided imposition of power justified through an anachronistic application of a racial ideology that presupposed a sort of innate superiority. What instead comes into view is an economic relationship based on the mutual acquisition of power and wealth through compromise where both parties regard one another as culturally distinct though not so much as to be *innately* and therefore *immutably* different, somehow unable to trade as equals. Evidence of this cultural compromise and coexistence comes into view when observing the “country marriages” that took place between the British and Fante based on mutual benefit, the respect with which important guests were treated regardless of whether they came from England or Annamaboe, and the genuine interest taken by members of either party in the cultural practices of the other. While the lens of racism would obscure and distort this image, the more apt lens of culturalism brings it into sharp focus, illuminating details that would serve not only to better inform us of what happened then but would more deeply contextualize the coalesce of a coherent racial ideology less than a century later.

## Chapter Three: Drs. James “Africanus” Beale Horton and John

### Farrell Easmon

#### Horton, a Life

Lets look at a second “snapshot” taken in a similar area about sixty or seventy years after the first. In it, we’ll first examine the life and thoughts of Dr. James “Africanus” Beale Horton. Horton’s experiences form an excellent image in which we can observe the change in British perceptions of West Africans during the mid-to-late nineteenth century from lenses of culturalism to those of racism. Christopher Fyfe, in his work *Africanus Horton: West African Scientist and Patriot*, has written Horton’s definitive biography with the available source material. The following summation of Horton’s life experiences are only made possible through his work, and it is doubtful that a better biography could be written without the exposure of heretofore undiscovered or undisclosed primary documents.

Born James Horton to James and Nancy Horton in 1835, Horton spent the first years of his childhood in Gloucester village just outside the border of Sierra Leone as a member of the Igbo group. Nine years later a missionary named James Beale came to recruit bright young students for a Grammar School he and fellow proselytizers were starting in Freetown. James was so talented that Beale took him on with a full ride scholarship, as without it he would not have been able to attend. Once in Freetown, young James decided to model himself after William Fergusson, a fellow West African who got his MD from the University of Edinburgh and served as a British Officer for several years before serving as the governor of Freetown in the early to mid 1800’s. He entered the school in May 1845, which focused its education on instilling the protestant values of discipline and character as the foundation on which its students were to build their characters and careers.

In January of 1853 Horton graduated and went to the Fourth Bay Institute to become a minister. However, both he and his instructors believed that he was not well suited for the vocation – his instructors said he was too “impulsive, quick-witted, and self-assertive” to be a pastor. Later that year the Deputy Secretary of the War Office in London, Benjamin Hawkes, made a call for West African medical students. This was done in the hopes that, after receiving a medical education, they might have a better handle on how to confront tropical diseases as locals of the area, as most British physicians grew too ill too quickly to make decent progress into their research. However, Hawkes acknowledged that these students would experience immense difficulties during their stay in Britain. Recognizing the shift in attitude that was taking place, Hawkes wrote, “They will under any circumstances, have immense difficulties to contend with in the *prejudice of this country against the Negro race*. As the sons of Merchants and treated by the Govt [sic] throughout as Gentlemen *half of these difficulties will be overcome.*”<sup>47</sup>

This acknowledgment that, even with their being assimilated members of the culture, the fact of that students’ race would make their lives difficult implies an implicit understanding of the shift from a “soft” to a “harder” racism even in this middling stage of the transition. To think of it in a rather stunning context, Ignatius Sancho would have had an easier time being accepted in the 1760’s than these West African students would have had a hundred years later in a supposedly more liberal and progressive era!

Horton went to England in July 1855, adopting name Beale in honor of the man who took him from a village in the middle of nowhere and set him on the path to become a medical student. He spent three years at Kings College and one at Edinburgh in the process of earning this degree, as it allowed for him to attain his M.D. two years earlier than most

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<sup>47</sup> Fyfe, Christopher. *Africanus Horton 1835-1883: West African Scientists and Patriot* (London: Oxford University Press 1972) 20-30, 28, 29. My emphasis.

other tracks at the time, which demanded six years of study. Horton graduated with honors in April 1859, where he registered as James Africanus Beale Horton as a gesture signifying a sense of immense pride in his origins. He was commissioned as an assistant surgeon on September 5, 1859 with a salary of £182.1 per year, with an increase to £237.5 after ten. Though this may seem low, his real income was much higher due to the British military paying the cost of his practice as well as the entirety of his costs of living. Additionally, Horton was able to greatly supplement his income by engaging in private practice in his off time, an activity that was not only sanctioned but encouraged by his superior officers as a way for officers and soldiers to more effectively establish a bond with the community they were stationed in.<sup>48</sup>

Horton was first stationed in Annamaboe, which had deteriorated from its glory days at the turn of the nineteenth century and reverted back to its status as a go between for British merchants and West African elites based in the interior. Soon after his arrival he became fairly disliked by several of his comrades because he took duties seriously in an outpost that, now fairly unimportant after the abolition of the slave trade and of slavery in general, had performed its duties perfunctorily for years. Often this dislike would result in his being ostracized, mocked, or even being falsely accused of performing at a sub-par level. Horton, leaning on the discipline instilled during his childhood education in Freetown, withstood these because, as he wrote to his dear friend and former landlord Reverend William Venn, “If I should give way thousands of those here who are hostile to the plan will have grounds to complain, they will use every means to dissuade you and the government from going on in that noble Cause which is fraught with blessings for Africa.”<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 21-37.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 42.

This period of time also marked the beginning of officers trying to bar new non-white physicians from entering the West African corps. They tried to exclude Indian and African physicians by stating that they could not serve in the north due to their “natural constitution,” a claim that was no doubt based on the idea of fixed natural types coming into vogue during the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>50</sup> This, of course, proved unconvincing, with superior officers countering with questions about the suitability of white doctors serving in the south. The “solution” was to instead attack the “respectability” of non-white officers, stating that English soldiers and settlers would be uncomfortable with and/or unable to have full confidence in a non-English, not to mention non-white, doctor. Fyfe includes a quote from saying something nearly identical. Lord Herbert in a Parliamentary Debate said, “We know that Englishmen have not the same confidence in an Italian or German doctor –to say nothing of an Indian doctor...”<sup>51</sup>

This rather backwards way of alienating African physicians played itself out on multiple occasions in Horton’s life. The most notable of these was arguably when the Principal Medical Officer of the Gold Coast, Dr. Charles O’Callaghan, acted on the sentiment contained in Lord Herbert’s statement when he was asked to evaluate Horton’s abilities to effectively work with locals. O’Callaghan stated that Horton

“did not possess the confidence of the European community nor even the confidence of the native community in the Territory in the same degree as the European medical officers... The freemen of the tribes of this Protectorate are a proud and highbred race, and they regard the natives of Sierra Leone especially with a distrust and barbaric aversion of which but a faint conception can be entertained in England.”<sup>52</sup>

Though Horton escaped unscathed thanks to his consummate performance in the field, the evaluation irreparably damaged the West African Physician project. He attempted to have

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<sup>50</sup> A phenomenon that will be discussed more extensively in a later section.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 48

several people attest against it, including a wealthy descendent of Richard Brew in Annamaboe, S.C. Brew, who stated “I can only say that the person who advanced such a statement must know next to nothing of the Coast as such is diametrically opposed to the truth.” Despite these and other testimonials, the West African Physician initiative was put on an indefinite hold.<sup>53</sup>

Of course, life went on. In 1861 Horton met and married Fannie Marriete Pratt, a wealthy Igbo woman, in 1862. He had a daughter with her but, tragically, Fannie died of illness in 1865 while Horton was away at a different station. Becoming absorbed in his work, Horton noted the publication of Cpt. (later Sir) Richard Burton’s *Wanderings in Africa*. This report, combined with the popularization of a biologized, innatist conception of race led to a Parliamentary inquiry in 1865 concerning value of West Africa, with the conclusion that it would be in Britain’s best interests to slowly cede control to local governments before ultimately pulling out. This inquiry inspired Horton to advocate political independence for West Africa, particularly Sierra Leone, and to defend these attacks against his race in his book *West African Countries and Peoples: British and Native*, which will be examined in the coming pages.

The chain of command accusation was leveled at Horton once more during the later 1860’s. Horton, attempting to become more politically important for the sake of making his dreams for West African a reality, applied to an administrative position. He was turned down despite his overqualified résumé due to superior officers internalizing the fear of Horton’s being black affecting the integrity of the chain of command and their interpreting his cover letter as boisterous and self-important.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 41-50.



Regardless of whether or not Horton would have occupied his desired position, the Anglo-Asante war ruined his aspirations for West African independence. The war was painted as a racial victory by newspapers, written from a perspective of racial pride and determinism that not only “proved” white soldiers *could* win wars in the African bush, but that they were *destined* to due to the growing belief in race as the ultimate factor in the determination of history. Parliament took a renewed interest in the area in light of their surprisingly quick victory and scraped the 1865 resolutions. As a result the Gold Coast Colony was created and placed under the jurisdiction of the protectorate, thereby ending any bids for independence during the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Abandoning this interest, Horton turned his attention turned to medical tracts, producing several works on disease and parasites as well as effective ways for British Medical Officers to treat them. In 1875 he was promoted to surgeon major at £438 a year and married Selina Beatrice Elliot, a member of Freetown’s old money. No longer being subject to transfer orders, Horton became involved in local society and entrepreneurship, opening a mining company after predicting the diamond and gold rushes, using connections made during his travels to get mining permits from various rulers. He retired from the service on December 4 1850 to focus on family and business. Unfortunately, he died relatively young of disease on October 15, 1883, only fifty years old.<sup>55</sup>

#### Horton: Scientist & Political Philosopher

While an examination of Horton’s life experiences can in and of themselves make for an interesting study, it is the thoughts that he puts forth in his 1868 treatise that really offer a glimpse into the transition of British perceptions of West Africa and Africans from being view through a lens of culturalism to one of racism. The work’s full title, *West African*

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 108-149.

*Countries and Peoples, British and Native with the Requirements Necessary for Establishing that Self Government Recommended by the Committee of the House of Commons, 1865; And a Vindication of the African Race*, very clearly present Horton's goals he hopes to accomplish in this book without ever having to open its cover. Its title page, something normally not worthy of significant consideration, has in its some aspects that are worth noting. First, Horton signs the work as "James Africanus B. Horton, M.D." followed with a string of titles and associations, including "Staff Assistant-Surgeon of H.M Forces in West Africa, Associate of King's College, London, Member of the Institute of D'Afrique in Paris," among others. More interesting, however, is the quote he includes from an emperor of Russia (he does not give a name on the title page, but it is later attributed to Peter the Great) saying, "Africa ought to be allowed to have a fair chance of raising her character in the scale of the civilized world."<sup>56</sup>

Horton's use of Africanus, of course, denotes his pride in being a native West African, but it is the stream of qualifications and the quote from an authority figure that really grab one's attention. Considering the direction in which Horton had (correctly) predicted British perceptions would shift due to the rise of racial science informing colonial paternalism and his personal experiences with the beginnings of such things, it requires no stretch of the imagination to believe that Horton included these things in an attempt to sway would-be readers to continue to read his work despite its opposing the cultural (or should we say racial?) trend of the day. The page ends with a dedication to aforementioned Reverend Henry Venn, who boarded Horton during medical school and eventually became a sort of father figure and lifelong correspondent to the physician.

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<sup>56</sup> Horton, James Africanus Beale. *West African Countries and Peoples, British and Native with the Requirements Necessary for Establishing that Self Government Recommended by the Committee of the House of Commons, 1865; And a Vindication of the African Race* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2011).

Horton neither wastes time nor pulls punches even in the opening page of his preface, writing that a small section of England

“Who, although they have had undeniable proofs of the fallacy of their arguments, and inconsistency of their statements with existing facts, have formed themselves into an association (*sic* Anthropological Society) to rake up old malice and encourage their agents abroad to search out the worst possible characteristics of the African, so to furnish material for venting their animus against him. ‘Its object,’ as has been stated, ‘is to prove him unimprovable, therefore unimproved since the beginning, and, consequently, fitted only to remain a hewer of wood and drawer of water for the members of that select society.’”<sup>57</sup>

Simply put, Horton calls out those, particularly members of the Anthropological Society, who scavenged bits of science and philosophy to create a racial ideology for doing exactly that.

It is also worth noting Horton’s reference to Joshua 9:23 at the end of the quoted passage. The text of the King James Bible here reads “Now therefore ye are cursed, and there shall none of you be freed from being bondmen, and hewers of wood and drawers of water for the house of my God.” One of the many pre-modern “justifications” of slavery that were employed was the idea that African peoples, the alleged descendants of Ham or Canaan, were the people referred to in this verse. Many believed that dark skin was the physical marker of this “curse of Canaan” and that, as such, white Christians were justified in the enslavement of black “pagans.” While the slave trade had been abolished in 1807 and slavery in 1833, some still made use of this passage to somehow justify a belief in the innate superiority of European over African peoples.<sup>58</sup>

However, Horton betrays a reader’s expectations if that reader expected for Horton to reject paternalism outright alongside biologized and innatist conceptions of racial difference. The following quote, taken from the page opposite the one above, reads:

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<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, i.

<sup>58</sup> Fredrickson, *Racism*, 47.

“I do not for a moment attempt to prove that, as a whole, *a race whose past generations have been in utter darkness, the mental faculty of those whose ancestors has never received any culture for nearly a thousand years, could attempt to compete successfully in their present state with one whose ancestors have successfully been under mental training and moulding for centuries.* To think so would be to expect an ordinary- bred horse to have equal chances with a thorough-bred one. But I say that the African race, as exemplified by the results of enterprises in West Africa, if put in comparison with any race on the face of the globe, whether Caucasian, Mongolian, Teutonic, Celtic, or any other just emerging from a state of barbarism, as they are, will never be found a whit behind. But to draw deductions by comparing their present state with the civilization of the nineteenth century is not only absurd, but most unphilosophical.”<sup>59</sup>

To understand why Horton believed this one need only consider his upbringing and education. He believed that all that was good in his life came from his experiences with British people and culture: he was taken from his small village to Freetown for a subsidized education, traveled to England where he was able to attend and graduate from medical school at the top of his class, then return to West African as a colonial medical officer. All thanks to the interest of James Beale and the British military. With this in mind, is it really a surprise that Horton still bought into culturalist beliefs and a generally linear theory of societal progress? Of course not. Horton considers that European, particularly British, culture is the ultimate goal for all peoples to attain. As such, Horton believes that Africans are not currently at that point of development nor can they compete on the same global political or economic scale at that point in time. However, he adamantly rejects the notion that Africans lack the *ability* to improve and that, when exposed to the same culture and education as Europeans alongside being offered the opportunity to advance themselves they are equally as capable as any European, if not even more so. He signs the preface “Africanus Horton, M.D., Staff Assist. -Surgeon, Native of Sierra Leone,” the assertion of his native status existing as a simultaneous signal of pride in his origins and challenge to those who

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<sup>59</sup> Horton, *West African Countries and Peoples*, ii-iii. My emphasis.

might say the success Horton had achieved existed out of the supposed range of Africans at that time.<sup>60</sup>

Though *West African Countries and Peoples* is primarily a work concerned with outlining a plan for West African self-governance, it is the first part, Horton's "Vindication of the African race," that most concerns this study. He begins by asserting that forms of culture and governance do exist in the region, stating that though they rule with a form of "extreme despotism" these West African nations and polities possess "as truly a political government as that of France or England..." with adjudication, structured governments, and trade with surrounding polities. That being said, Horton holds to his contentions in the preface, stating that he believed these polities functioned in an extremely backward manner in several instances. According to Horton, illiteracy was the overwhelming norm in these areas, resulting in the populations' sense of history and culture becoming limited to the stories told by elders, necessarily obfuscated by the time removed from the events and the universal failings of human memory. Moreover, these areas had no real or efficacious scientific or medical practices as an additional result of their illiteracy. Horton, a devout protestant, also took issue with the fact that these regions were primarily mostly "pagan." When they were Christianized these areas rarely practiced in full, instead amalgamating Christian tenants and stories with those of with prior beliefs.<sup>61</sup>

The impetus for the project as a whole was, of course, the aforementioned resolutions passed by Parliament in 1865. The final portion of these resolutions, made after considering the "evidence" put forth by racial scientists in light of the decades of difficulty colonial officers had experienced in West Africa regarding establishing economic equality with local trade powers, read,

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., viii.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 4.

... The object of our policy should be to encourage in the natives the exercise of those qualities which may render it possible for us more and more to transfer to them the administration of all the Governments, with a view to our ultimate withdrawal from all, except, probably, Sierra Leone.<sup>62</sup>

Horton seized upon this resolution and choice memoranda from colonial officers as the justifications for engaging in this project to prove that his proposals, far from being abnormal or unsubstantiated, had in fact been in consideration for some time. For example, he quotes the Administrator of the Gambia's, Colonel D'Arcy, report from 1865 as support and indicating a highly qualified opinion that supports idea of equal African capability.

D'Arcy, after several years of serving in the area, concluded

I cannot see in the African any incapacity for civilization... If Adam Smith's theory is pronounced Orthodox, that it is to the principle of parsimony we owe our capital and... our comforts and enjoyment, we certainly have this desideratum in the African, who is for the most part a parsimonious citizen, ambitious to arise in the world... As it takes three generations at home to make an English gentleman, so likewise does it take three generations to make an intelligent, well-educated African gentleman.

As it had been seen in the past (such as with Barbot, the gold takers, and, as will be later discussed, the palm oil brokers), even those groups that were illiterate seemed to be in possession of incredible memories as well as formidable negotiation and mathematical skills, particularly as related to trade. These skills, untrained in the eyes of British observers, seemed to D'Arcy to be the foundation upon which an "intelligent, well-educated African gentleman" could be built.<sup>63</sup>

After these brief remarks to justify the legitimacy of his project, Horton immediately dives into his vindication. He opens this portion of his argument by forcing British readers to consider how absurd it is to judge West African progress on the same plane as British

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 22.

without considering their context in a passage that is at once emotionally evocative and logically persuasive, stating

Fancy a lot of slaves- unlettered, rude, naked, possessing no knowledge of the useful arts – thrown into a wild country, to cut down the woods and build towns; fancy these ragged wild natives under British, and consequently, civilized influences, after a lapse of a few years becoming large landowners, possessing large mercantile establishments and money, claiming a vote in the legislative government, and giving their offspring proper English and foreign education; and dare you tell me that the African is not susceptible of improvement of the highest order, that he does not possess in himself a principle of progression and a desire of perfection far surpassing many existing nations – since it cannot be shown in the world’s history that any people with so limited advantages has shown such results within fifty years.<sup>64</sup>

Simply put, how dare the British judge West Africans as being incapable of advancing when, in only fifty years, they had progressed from the earliest stages of “barbarism” to nearing the British on the other end of the scale of civilization in certain areas of the region? To claim such would not only be counterfactual but laughably ridiculous.

Moreover, West Africans had progressed more rapidly in terms of becoming civilized under the influence of the British than the British did under the influence of the Romans. With this in mind, even if the above accusations were true it would be hypocritical of them to judge West Africans for their supposedly slow progress. Quoting Cicero in his work,

The ancient Britons went about most scantily clothed; they painted their bodies in fantastic fashions, ‘ offered up human victims to uncouth idols, and lived in hollow trees and rude habitations,’ As regards to the amount of development of their intellectual and moral faculties, we are told... that the ugliest and most stupid slaves came from England; and so degraded were to Britons considered in Rome, that he urges Atticus, ‘not to buy slaves from Britain on account of their stupidity and their inaptitude to learn music and other accomplishments.’... The tone in which Caesar speaks of [them] is no less contemptuous, for he calls them ‘ a nation of very barbarous manners;’ he says that ‘most people of the interior never saw corn, but live upon milk and flesh and are clothed with skins... in their domestic habits they are as degraded as the most savage nations. They are clothed with skins, wear the hair of their heads unshaven and long, but shave the rest of their bodies, except their upper lip, and stain themselves a blue colour with wood, which gives them a horrible aspect in battle.’<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 25-26.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 30-31.

Horton quotes these damning accusations from great men of the Roman Empire in an attempt to underscore this hypocrisy. Were the British to be judged by the Romans in the same way that they had come to judge West Africans there can be little doubt that the Romans would perceive them as being similarly innately unimprovable. The British “inability” to comprehend a cultural or intellectual education was thus meant to hit uncomfortably close to home for British readers who would then be forced to consider the way in which they had been viewing West Africans in parallel.

Similarly, Horton cites the more recent rise of the Russian empire from darkness after escaping the rule of the Golden Horde. The nation, previously being considered just as barbarous as those of West Africa, had just come into its own less than a hundred years prior to *West African Countries and Peoples*’ publishing. Horton writes,

A century ago it would have been just as miraculous to read a tolerable Russian composition, as it would be at this day to find the same phenomenon in Haussa [sic] or at Timbuctoo [sic]; and speculators who argue about races, and despise the effect of circumstances would have had the same right to decide the fate of all the Russians, from the inspection of the Calmuc [sic] skull, as they imagine they now have to condemn all Africa to everlasting barbarism, from the head, the colour, and the wool of its inhabitants.<sup>66</sup>

Beyond the hypocrisy of historical circumstance, Horton also takes issue with the fact that many of these racial thinkers had heretofore ignored the realities of the slave trade and its deleterious impact on West African peoples. He writes

Now it must be acknowledged that the damaging influences to which the negro race has for centuries been subjected, have not been favourable to the improvement of their condition, nor in any way raising their minds to a higher species of cultivation; trampled under foot by perpetual despotism, enslaved from one generation to another, inhabiting the most wretched hovels that it is possible for humanity to exist in, deprived of every means of education or of witnessing the arts and sciences, pent up as it were within the circumference of their own towns and villages, *not daring to travel even a few miles without an escort for fear of being captured and sold as slaves*, can there be the least doubt in the minds of the unprejudiced that their present unimproved

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 65-66.



condition is the natural sequence of the operation of these powerful demoralizing reagents?<sup>67</sup>

The slave raiding phenomenon that had plagued the region since the early eighteenth century, described by Barbot, decried by Afonso I and Sancho, and largely inflicted by Asante expansionist campaigns as a way to rid the region of possible rebellion, was a critical aspect of development (or the perceived lack thereof) that Horton knew was not being properly considered. The discounting of environmental factors, particularly those of the slave trade and the consequent slave raiding that took place, is a critical error of those that Horton is arguing against.

In his argument against those that refused to consider environmental factors as relevant to the development of each race, Horton believes that one need only “treat men like beasts and you will make them such.” If a European can be made “indifferent, abject, servile, and brutish” in captivity after an extended period of time, how can one judge a people as being inherently flawed that have been subjected to such conditions for centuries on end? With this in mind, Horton believes that many things that he perceives as problematic aspects of West African culture and development are not inborn but are instead a result of their having been subject to slavery. The fear of travel and mistrust of outsiders that resulted from the slave raiding phenomenon left these groups unexposed to a “proper” cultural and intellectual education. This, in Horton’s opinion, bred a sort of insular backwardness that fed on itself when isolated, insular groups grew more backward and unwelcoming as they become further and further removed from the mainstream.<sup>68</sup>

After this more general set of refutations Horton goes on to engage with a set few examples of what he considered to be particularly problematic racial theorists of his time. M.

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 35. Horton’s emphasis.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 51.

Prunner Bey, whose memoirs had been the standard “definition of Africans,” had in fact only been based on his travel through a small portion of Egypt. Dr. James Hunt, the founder of the Anthropological Society of London that Horton directly attacked in his opening page, is simply dismissed as a fraud. According to Horton, Hunt was not even worth the effort of specifically rebutting since his work was simply “borrowed from the writings of men who are particularly prejudiced against the Negro race” and “absurdly pro-slavery.”<sup>69</sup>

The figure that he engages with most thoroughly, however, is Dr. Carl Vogt, a German scientist and physician who rejected the idea of humans as evolving closely in a monogenist fashion and, instead, posited that humanity developed into separate evolutionary branches millennia ago, a typical polygenist assertion. Amongst his numerous refutations of Vogt’s works one stands out as being particularly interesting. Near the beginning of his critique of Vogt Horton claims that he unfairly compared the “worst” example of a “Negro” skull (an Australian local) to that of “the best possible example of the Caucasian race, a brilliant German mathematician.” Though this is clearly meant as a defense of Africans, to the modern reader it is more interesting as an indicator that Horton was still a scientist of his time. What we might see as pseudoscience today was still regarded as legitimate scientific practice in that time. That Horton makes the assertion that the craniological comparison made by Vogt is unfair, not that the fact that his use of craniology is itself bunk, is the most we can expect from a scientist of the late nineteenth century.<sup>70</sup>

Horton, as he mentioned in his preface, is also quick to note instances where Vogt and others act in a self-contradictory fashion. For example, he notes that Vogt, despite his assertions the Africans were inferior to Europeans, was forced to admit that both Africans and “mulattoes” were superior in one passage. Horton includes this quote, which read

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 36-37.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

There are,' he says, 'about 100 Europeans in the land; amongst these there are many excellent fellows, but *it is an unpleasant confession to make – the other appear to me inferior to the Africans, native as well as mulattoes.* The possibility of such a thing had never reached my brain. At last, in colloquy with an old friend on the Coast... in *intellect the black race is palpably superior*, and it is, in fact, advancing along the path of civilization... the *grown up native* of Sierra Leone is dreaded on the rest of the coast; he can examine a witness in the police court as well as any lawyer in England. It is certainly impossible for an imbecile to do this."<sup>71</sup>

Horton goes so far as to reveal that even Vogt's physical evidence on which he bases his work is flawed. His work, stolen from other anthropologists, claimed that black skulls developed along simian lines, with the frontal and coronal sutures closing first followed by the posterior. Only whites, according to Vogt, closed the posterior first and the frontal and coronal later. This, he claimed, was indicative of blacks being either a separate branch of development (polygenesis) or else their having stopped developing earlier along the evolutionary path (monogenesis). Horton rejects this claim as false, writing that of the literal thousands of black people he had examined "exactly 0 per cent" exhibited simian developmental trends. Horton, moreover, contends that none of his previous refutations are even worth the consideration that he gave them in the prior pages them. This is because both Blumenbach and Pritchard (both of whom Horton cites) established that there were no real differences in the cranial capacities of the different races.<sup>72</sup>

Horton closes out the first portion of his book with a section dedicated to the proposition of two ideas that were inspired by his experiences as a West African physician trained and invested in British traditions of science, medicine, and culture at large. First, He proposes the development of a medical university to be established in West Africa for Africans to gain a medical education and become medical officers, citing a letter from

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 41. Horton's emphasis.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 46-48.

himself to the Secretary of War where he lays out the following reasons for going through with it.

Horton begins with the contention that British officers typically only remain stationed in a given area, much less in the region, for approximately a year. This, he claims, is due to the inability of British officers on the whole to properly acclimate to the area both culturally and physically. The area is too hot and humid, the officers are more susceptible to disease, and they are unable to make significant inroads with local communities due to a lack of a common cultural base. Due to these shorter stays, British officers do not have the time or motivation to develop an interest in the area or its people. More importantly, they do not have the time to conduct meaningful research into tropical diseases, the largest reason the majority of them leave the region, if they make it out alive at all. Nor would they be able to take the time, if they even had the ability, to explore the areas surrounding their outposts in search for natural resources that could be researched and made use of.

African officers, however, would be native to the area. This, according to Horton, means that they would be more accustomed to the environment and diseases that lay within it. While obviously not immune to these diseases, this would help them to last much longer at their stations since they would not be as susceptible to issues of climate or disease carrying vectors given their lifelong exposure. Moreover, they would be more familiar with the people and the surrounding area, allowing them to have greater access to and understanding of the area so that they can more effectively administrate and conduct medical research. Finally, this familiarity with the area and its people could extend to the search for untapped natural resources.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

Secondly, Horton highlights his home of Sierra Leone (despite the 1865 resolution's reservations concerning letting the highly valuable colony become self-governing) as a prime area ready to progress. The area had a long-standing relationship with European powers that stretched back to the fifteenth century, where the Portuguese established first contact between local groups and European explorers to found a slave trade outpost. The British wrested Portuguese control of the area in 1780s, attempting to establish a colony that failed due to colonist's dying to disease. Unable to make use of the territory in that fashion, British administrators then moved slaves from Nova Scotia to the area, particularly Freetown. These slaves were provided with an education funded by the Sierra Leone Company in the hopes of creating a strong merchant economy run by these black transplants. This plan worked so well educated that there was often tension between black colonists and British administrators, but they got on well enough to keep the region prosperous. Freetown became a site of adjuration after 1807 for smugglers who broke the abolition of the slave trade. Freed slaves recaptured from these smugglers were often sent to Freetown to start new lives.

A civil suit in 1829 in which an Ibo man was awarded damages after being assaulted by a British soldier confirmed the status of Sierra Leone residents as not just subjects but *citizens* of the crown that were to be afforded the same rights and protections as any Englishman, at least in a de jure sense. Fyfe contends that the loyalty these African citizens had to the crown did *not* in any way imply servility or self-hatred, but rather a great sense of pride and self-respect given their rapidly rising political, social, and economic status in such a short period of time.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Fyfe, *Africanus Horton*, 1-13.

This area, rapidly progressing from a state of “barbarism” to civilization (at least in Horton’s perspective), indicated its worthiness as the vanguard of African nationalism. The population contained a large portion of merchants with an interest in the full practice of protestant Christianity, trade, government, and the education of their children, not to mention a large interest in European culture (books, newspapers, architecture, etc.). This group, in Horton’s mind, coupled with the officers trained in the institution he wished to establish in the area, would form the ruling class that would raise the entirety of the region to a civilized status as well as serve as a launch point for spreading civilization to the rest of West Africa.<sup>75</sup> Ever the culturalist, however, Horton believed that a strong hand would be needed at first in order to implement these plans beyond Sierra Leone. In that vein, he wrote “in the government of a semibarbarous race... a little despotism is absolutely necessary... having this object in view – the material advancement of the people.”<sup>76</sup>

In that vein Horton repeats what many racist environmentalists had stated regarding African labor. Specifically he was concerned that it would be difficult to motivate them to work as hard as they would need to in order to rapidly achieve progress. He wrote

In England the laboring class has always great external pressure to bear upon them, demanding both their moral and their physical strength; whilst the same class in Africa has little or no external pressure to bear on them. In England the food of the peasant is compound, expensive, and very scarce; in Africa the food is simple, cheap and plentiful. In England the peasant is compelled by the state of civilization and the necessity of the climate to procure clothing, which entails a greater outlay and a necessity of increased labour; but in Africa the climate is so hot and uniform that the peasants go about half naked, and therefore have little or no expense for clothing. Now with all these local advantages on the side of the African peasantry can it be a matter of surprise that they confine themselves almost entirely to the cultivation of produce sufficient for their yearly consumption? Can it be a matter of surprise, I say, that the English peasant labours infinitely more than the African peasant? In the one case the land supplies the peasant abundantly, whether he works hard or not; on the

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<sup>75</sup> Horton, *West African Countries and Peoples*, 59-62.

<sup>76</sup> Fyfe, *Africanus Horton*, 81.

other, starvation awaits him if he does not work hard, and should he not pay dearly with his utter strength and skill, he is sure to fall to utter destitution.<sup>77</sup>

The rest of the work is primarily concerned with laying the foundations for implementing self-government in the West African region, complete with several drafts of constitutions that he believed would be particularly useful for these new governments to utilize in establishing their sovereignty and administering the basic functions requisite of any Western-style government. He ends the work with a quote from the Liberian poet Hillary Teague, charging his readers to consider what lies ahead of them. It reads, “you are to give the answer whether the African race is doomed to interminable degradation – a hideous blot on the fair face of creation, a libel upon the dignity of human nature; or whether they are capable to take an honourable rank amongst the great family of nations.”<sup>78</sup>

The work, both on its whole and in particular its first part, make for a fascinating study in that it provides a window into the mind of a West African experiencing the British transition from quasi-acceptant culturalist to colonial racist lenses when considering West African peoples and polities. Horton, a highly successful and intelligent physician who benefitted from the benevolent culturalist paternalism he had experienced up through his education at Edinburgh, saw the coalescence of early racial theory, paternalism, and more contemporary discussions of race rooted in evolution and eugenics occurring before him. *West African Countries and Peoples* and its segment concerning the vindication of Africans in the minds of scientists and the British populace in general, though informed by a profound sense of culturalism, served as Horton’s attempt to stem the tide of racism and break apart the coalescence of this racial ideology informed by biologized, innatist conceptions of race before it began to shape colonial policy in his homeland.

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<sup>77</sup> Horton, *West African Countries and Peoples*, 220.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 246.

Dr. John Farrell Easmon

Of course, following the Anglo-Asante war the pleas made in Horton's work went unheard and he subsequently abandoned the project. Following the war the British were inspired to publish numerous works that emphasized the might and power of the British culturally, militarily, and racially. These works, when written in the West African context, left out the majority of African groups and players, with those few that were included being relegated to smaller roles that de-emphasized their involvement and abilities. This revisionism extended to their contemporary present in the form of who was selected for administrative positions. Slowly but surely the posts with the most responsibility and least oversight were became reserved for British officers. Consequently, African officers found themselves struggling against a glass ceiling which obstructed them in even more restrictive ways than the claims made by colonial officers regarding the alleged lack of respect these non-white officers would experience made years prior.<sup>79</sup>

Perhaps one of the clearest incidents in which this occurred was in the drama surrounding Dr. John Farrell Easmon in the 1890's that Adell Patton relates to us in his book *Physicians, Colonial Racism, and Diaspora in West Africa*. A native of Sierra Leone, Easmon was born in Freetown on June 30, 1856. Following a similar path to Horton's, Easmon earned his M.D. from University College London as a successful West African transplant. While there he was extremely academically successful, winning six gold and silver medals (three of each), including the Liston Gold Medal for Clinical Surgery. After graduating, Easmon gained the L.M. and L.K.Q.C.P. from the King and Queen's College of Physicians

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<sup>79</sup> Patton, Adell Jr. *Physicians, Colonial Racism, and Diaspora in West Africa* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1996.) 94.



in Ireland (now the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland) and an M.D. with distinction from the Université libre de Bruxelles.

Easmon's distinguished academic career received attention from his uncle, Sir William MacCormac, who offered him a position as an assistant house surgeon in England. Easmon turned the offer down and returned to Freetown, where he opened a practice on No. 2 East Street in the Settler Town district. Perhaps due to the amount of attention he received or an attempt to further his career, Easmon moved to the Gold Coast in 1880. It was there that he would establish himself as an eminent West African doctor.

While there he accepted a position as an Assistant Colonial Surgeon in addition to opening another private practice in Accra. Notably, he released a brochure while there in 1884 that mapped out the symptoms and a treatment plan for blackwater fever, a particularly deadly and misunderstood disease. His popularity increased among native and European residents and, when he applied as a colonial medical officer in Sierra Leone, the governor of the Gold Coast recommended to the colonial government that Easmon remain on the Gold Coast where he was needed. This resulted in his eventual appointment to CMO (chief medical officer) of the Gold Coast in 1893, a position he served until 1896 as the first and last West African CMO of the region.

Though he was successful, the incident that precipitated his downfall involved the appointment Dr. Walter Murray, an accomplished English medical officer, in 1894 as a district commission. In doing so, Easmon passed over Dr. B. W. Quartey-Papafio from Accra because, despite his professional competency, he had a record of disrespect for authority that Easmon refused to tolerate in his department. One might fairly assume that this was done at least in part to ensure that the negative British presuppositions regarding

the efficacy of an African in higher positions of the chain of command that affected Horton could not be aimed at him.

Quartey-Papafio sued Easmon, claiming that he had an ethnic bias against Africans that were not natives of Sierra Leone. Additionally, his family smeared him in *The Gold Coast Chronicle*, a paper that they owned and operated. Soon after, while the incident was still a hot topic in local gossip, Governor William Maxwell, member of the Anthropological Society (the very society that embodied and sought to spread the racist ideology that Horton fought against) came into power. Maxwell, biased against Easmon from the beginning as an African authority figure, canceled a station change that Easmon had mandated and refused to talk to him in person. Instead he went through his secretary, saying

Inform the Chief Medical Officer that I consider it [distasteful] to place Dr. Waldron [the West African Physician that Easmon was planning on sending to a new station] at Accra, or, as the sole physician, at any station where a European lady is resident and that this view is to be acted on when determining his destination when he returns from leave.<sup>80</sup>

In other words, through this incident Maxwell was attempting to establish a clearly racist precedent that white women were not to be treated by black doctors if it could be possibly helped. This was done for no reason beyond the fact that the doctor was black, with no reference to his skills as a physician whatsoever.

The feud between the two grew unsurprisingly sour. Maxwell eventually had Easmon fired on the grounds that his suit from Quartey-Papafio and the *Gold Coast Chronicle's* concurrent smear campaign had sullied the office's reputation, that he had continued private practice when he was required to leave it behind due to his position as CMO, and that he had stock in a rival newspaper of the *Gold Coast Chronicle*, the *Gold Coast Inquirer*, which gave him an alleged conflict of interest. This unjustified firing and the feud leading up to it

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 115.

was the final mark that indelibly sullied the image of medicine as an opportunity for West Africans to advance socio-economically.<sup>81</sup>

As important as this one incident is as both the catalyst for a shift in West African perceptions of government and medical service as well as highlighting the extent to which a racial ideology had pervaded British perceptions, one cannot divorce it from the context in which it developed. The ability for West Africans to attain socio-economic mobility through the medical profession had begun to decline directly after it had begun to gain prominence during the 1850's. A combination of drugs being developed (e.g. anti-malarial quinine) to treat tropical disease and the aforementioned economic realities of an oversaturated medical market existing in a depressed economy in Britain and Europe in general shifted the sights of newly graduated British M.D.s to African colonies. Unable to get the British jobs they desired (and many unable to get jobs in the first place), these newly graduated M.D.s saw the colonies as places in which they could establish a practice. While there, they could acquire enough money and build a high enough reputation to return to Britain, where they could then reinsert themselves into its highly competitive market as serious contenders. This saturation of British doctors, combined with the ever-growing list of racist policies as exemplified by Governor Maxwell's decree concerning African doctors being unable to serve in areas with European women if it could possibly be helped, created a market that was clearly designed for the material advantage of these British doctors at the expense of West African ones.<sup>82</sup>

These long-term negative developments, punctuated by Easmon's unjustified firing, served to dissuade West Africans from pursuing government service or a medical education. Why should they bother to travel overseas for several years only to return and subject

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 95-122.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 19-20.

themselves to racist policies that prevented them from entering their home market in an attempt to practice the very profession they had devoted themselves to? As a result many West Africans turned away from the field and toward other professions instead, preferring private practices to government service, as the government that had once sought to bring West Africa its conception of “civilization” now seemed bent on keeping them in a state of subjugation simply on the basis of their physical appearance and the imagined differences in morality and mental acuity that came with it.

In light of these brief studies it becomes abundantly clear that Horton’s dream of a West African Medical Corps serving a self-governing community of West African nations was not simply overlooked but purposefully smothered. West African physicians, despite once being recruited for their race, were now effectively unable to practice even at home despite the fact that they had been trained in the *same institutions* with the *same rigor* as their British counterparts.

## Chapter Four: Backward “Progression” and Highlights of Early

### Racial Theory & Philosophy

The “progression” between our first and second images seems incredibly counterintuitive. Though progressive historical narratives have been complicated time and again most people, scholars included, tend to believe that racial relations, at least on the grander scale of generations and centuries, have improved over time. Why, then, does there seem to be such a larger sense of acceptance in the eighteenth century than there does in the nineteenth? How could such a massive step backward take place, and when can we more accurately use the word racism to describe the situation? That is an incredibly multifaceted question, which requires an in-depth examination of the socio-political and economic realities that shaped these situations. While this thesis will give a brief overview of some of these factors in the coming pages, this study ultimately concerned with the shift in attitude that British peoples had toward West Africans. As such, it will take the pulse of racial theory and the philosophy that began to support it during these timeframes to survey some of the most prevalent “justifications” employed by British peoples to rationalize their culturalist and racist views of Africans. That is, when they even bothered attempting to justify their actions in the first place.

As previously mentioned, some have posited that West African traders and states at large experienced great difficulty in adapting from slavery to a more “legitimate” commerce. This claim is of course problematic, as it is based on the assumption that West Africans had not been able and/or willing to engage in the trade of non-slave goods prior to this point. It would be ridiculous to argue against the fact that adjustments in economic infrastructure had to be made in affected areas after 1807, particularly in regions like the Gold Coast and towns

like Annamaboe that had invested heavily in the slave trade and suffered immensely at its abolition. However, to claim that all West African polities suffered immensely and irreparably after 1807 is similarly nonsensical. West African nations, particularly those located along directly along the Coast, became an important source of raw goods used during the second industrial revolution. According to Getz,

[African contributions] were primarily in three areas. The first was the production of primary resources such as cotton and wool, which fed the factories of Britain. The second was industrial materials, including lubricants and gums used in the production process. The third was crops consumed by European workers and managers, such as coffee, tea, spices, and tobacco.<sup>83</sup>

Of these contributions, however, perhaps the most important was the providing of African indigenous oilseeds such as those of the ground nut (or peanut) and of palm that were processed in order to provide the lubricants and lighting oil that European factories needed in order to function.<sup>84</sup> The trade in palm oil in particular serves as an excellent example of European-African exchange that undermines the idea of the supposed difficulty in transitioning to “legitimate” commerce. Firstly, some African peasants, previously unable to settle due to the threat of being captured in the slave trade, were finally able to settle down and engage in agricultural practice. A few of these new farmers were able to capitalize on the palm and groundnut oil boom and as such raise their socio-economic status through bootstrap entrepreneurial efforts.<sup>85</sup> Secondly, the roads, rivers, and other infrastructure that had been previously rendered navigable by the efforts of men like John Corantee that were utilized to transport slaves from the interior to the west coast were readapted to deliver shipments of palm oil from inland producers to the coastal brokers. The relationship between these brokers and oil producers was not unlike that of the Fante gold takers and

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<sup>83</sup> Getz, 75.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 77.

Asante slave raiders, who developed an economic system that would proved mutually economically beneficial while keeping the balance of trade heavily weighted in West African interests through the restriction of British merchant activity to the coast.<sup>86</sup> Thirdly, African traders were able to utilize their familiarity with the land and people in such a way as to maintain their advantage in trade relations. Again mirroring the situation in Annamaboe, Martin notes,

European traders had... to conform to African trading organization... So effective were the methods used for transporting palm oil to the coast that European traders, in this period, had little desire [or ability] to penetrate inland to the market of the producers.<sup>87</sup>

This inability to penetrate the interior irritated British traders, who felt cheated by their inability to have any real effect on the prices of African goods. The fact this state of affairs had persisted since the earliest days of the slave trade only added fuel to the fire.

As Britain and West Africa entered the nineteenth century trade relations between the two regions grew strained. It is important to note that not all situations were as agreeable as those that existed between the British and Fante in Annamaboe. For the most part, British traders in the Gold Coast such as Andrew Swanzy never became ordinary citizens. In a collection of remarks on his stays in West Africa during the early and mid-nineteenth century Swanzy notes that

As these transactions [between the British and locals of the Gold Coast] were very considerable and attended with much risk, great care was necessary in selecting the [merchants]... the consequence was that the resident English merchants, though few in number, were generally men of education and ability.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Lynn, Martin. "African Brokers and the Growth of the Palm Oil Trade." In *Commerce and Economic Change in West Africa: The Palm Oil Trade in the Nineteenth Century*, 60-68. First ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997. 60.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Swanzy, Andrew. *Trade on the Gold Coast: Remarks on Trade in West Africa, With and Without British Protection* (London: Ann Eccles & Son, 1874). 4.

As such, they quickly caught on to the fact that African brokers were giving them the short end of the stick when it came to making trade agreements. In a telling passage Swanzy relates an opinion commonly held by British traders in the Gold Coast, stating that

Gradually, a number of partially educated natives were admitted to the same advantages as the resident English traders... these men soon proved themselves, with some few exceptions, quite unworthy of the confidence reposed in them, partly from ignorance, but principally from extravagance, most of them became insolvent *having in the meantime driven away the English traders by ruinous competition...* Experience of the native African has convinced me at the present *that he requires a more stringent rule than the European.*<sup>89</sup>

The phrase “ruinous competition” could be taken to mean the general trend of the British being at the mercy of West African merchant demands or the more specific abuses of trust that often took place, such as in the Fante abuse of the pawn system in Annamaboe. Either way, it is clear that Swanzy believed West African traders were a malevolent force when it came to the perceived fairness of dealings and proposed that they needed to be controlled. This control would specifically be over the prices that African goods could fetch on the foreign market, which would allow for British traders to receive payment for their goods that they would find more acceptable. The only way in which British traders like Swanzy could institute such stringent market controls, however, would be to dictate them through colonial domination. Advances in technology, particularly weaponry, coupled with a time of intense socio-political and economic instability in the region due to the mfecane gave the British the means and opportunity to act on these desires.<sup>90</sup>

How, though, could the British *justify* taking control of West African markets and nations? Conquest for the sake of material advantage would never pass moral muster, as the

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid. Emphasis mine.

<sup>90</sup> Mfecane: a time of great strife in the history of Africa’s southern peninsula, in which a great drought in 1816 destroyed the majority of agricultural fields and grazing grounds and resulted in a period of widespread chaos and warfare among indigenous ethnic communities over what little remained that lasted between 1816 and approximately 1840. These displaced peoples traveled up the Eastern coast, forming raiding parties that further displaced other groups in a domino effect that came to affect the vast majority of nations and polities on the continent. See Reid and Getz for a deeper exploration into the mfecane’s effects.



British needed to justify upholding liberal democratic ideals at home while simultaneously engaging in aggressive colonial expansion. The answer lies in a shift in the European intellectual tradition from positing that Africans were simply another people to a belief in imperial liberalism, paternalism, and the intrinsic superiority of the European intellectual and political traditions over African equivalents. In order to gain a greater understanding as to how this shift in thought arose, however, it is necessary to understand the imperial theorists whose theories were published both before and during this shift in thought.<sup>91</sup>

#### Highlights of Early Racial Theory & Philosophy

At this moment, it is necessary to remind the reader that it is a mistake to believe that this is meant to be an all-encompassing discussion surrounding the development of a racial ideology in Britain. While these thinkers are discussed because they put forth some of the most widely read and cited versions of the below ideas, they are simply a handful of the many that contributed to both the culturalist perspective and the coalescence of a racial ideology in Britain in the mid to late nineteenth century. Mounds of books have been, are being, and will be produced concerning this complicated subject. This discussion is simply meant to provide a general context for the roles played by early racial theorists and philosophers in the development of this ideology and to make the reader aware that such developments were, in their general spirit, inarguably relevant to this occurrence.

According to Stepan, Western philosophy and science was, in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, largely rooted in Christian monogenism that held all of humanity as the special children of God.<sup>92</sup> De jure, this meant that all men were equal. De facto, however, the contention was that while all men were *spiritually* equal, temporal reality did not

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<sup>91</sup> For more on the underlying political and socio-economic factors behind British colonial incursion in Africa, Getz and Reid provide an excellent starting point.

<sup>92</sup> Stepan, *The Idea of Race*. 8.

necessarily conform to this standard.<sup>93</sup> If this were true, why is it that Africans make up the overwhelming majority of slaves during this period? While there were many justifications employed for slavery during the premodern era, Fredrickson puts forth the Curse of Ham/Canaan in Joshua 9:23 as a particularly significant example. The text of the King James Bible reads “Now therefore ye are cursed, and there shall none of you be freed from being bondmen, and hewers of wood and drawers of water for the house of my God.” Many believed that dark skin was the physical marker of the curse and that, as such, white Christians were justified in the enslavement of black pagans.

Though this is one of the earliest explicitly racist doctrines we can find in British West African relations, Fredrickson contends that it does not precisely fit his definition of racism despite its reliance on a physical marker. This is because temporal European society in the Middle Ages through the late eighteenth century was largely hierarchical in nature. He writes,

In a society in which inequality based on birth was the norm for everyone from king down to peasant, ethnic slavery and ghettoization were special cases of a general pattern – very special in some ways – *but still not radical exceptions to the hierarchical premise*. Paradoxical as it may seem, the rejection of hierarchy as the governing principle of social and political organization, and its replacement by the aspiration for equality *in this world* as well as in the eyes of God, had to occur before racism could come to full flower. <sup>94</sup>

Racial theory was at its infancy during these stages and was understood in terms of the Aristotelian “Great Chain of Being.” This theory, as described by Stepan, held that all organic beings existed on a ladder of infinite gradation which progressed from the simplest and weakest of organisms to the strongest and most complex. Humanity however, given its special religious status, was perceived as existing so far above all other beings that it did not occupy a rung on the ladder that could be said to be even proximate to other organisms.

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<sup>93</sup>Fredrickson., 4.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid., 47. First set italic emphasis mine. Second set of italic emphasis Fredrickson.

With the emphasis placed on the spiritual equality of all men and the acceptance of immutable hierarchy as a fact of life many believed it unnecessary to rank humanity in a more specific fashion.<sup>95</sup>

François Bernier, a French physician and traveller from the late seventeenth century, is often credited as the first person to use the word “race” in a sense that can be related to its modern denotative and connotative sense. In his 1684 work *A New Division of the Earth by the Different Species or Races which Inhabit It*, Bernier made one of the first documented attempts to classify humanity into “races” based on physical characteristics. In his words,

“... although in the exterior form of their bodies, and especially their faces, men are almost all different one from the other... still I have remarked that there are four or five species or races of men in particular whose difference is so remarkable that it may be properly made use of as the foundation of a new division of earth.”<sup>96</sup>

For us to find a system that began to more explicitly mention the intangible aspects that came to be associated with race, we need to go forward half a century and across the North Sea to Sweden. Carl Linnaeus, or Carolus Linnæus, was a botanist, zoologist, and physician credited as the father of the system of binomial nomenclature, which modern scientists employ when classifying various flora and fauna. In 1735 he published the first edition of his *Systema Naturae*, the work that contained the system of binomial nomenclature. In it he made a decision that few, if any had made before: his division of races (Americanus, Asiaticus, Africanus, and Europeæus) ascribed physical *and behavioral* characteristics to each race based on their customs. Americanus were “reddish, choleric, and erect; hair black... wide nostrils... obstinate, merry, free... regulated by customs.” Asiaticus were “melancholy, stiff; hair black, dark eyes... severe, haughty, avaricious... ruled by opinions.” Africanus were “black, phlegmatic... hair black, frizzled... nose flat... *crafty, indolent, negligent... governed*

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<sup>95</sup> Stepan, *The Idea of Race*. 8.

<sup>96</sup> Bernier, François, *A New Division of the Earth by the Different Species or Races which Inhabit It* 1684 IN Robert Bernasconi, ed., and Tommy Lee Lott, ed., *The Idea of Race* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing 2000). 1-4.

*by caprice.*” Finally, Europeæus were “white, sanguine, muscular... eyes blue, gentle... *inventive... governed by laws.*”<sup>97</sup> Though there was no explicit ranking present in the work the implicit message was obvious, particularly in the contrast that existed between the comparison of the behaviors of the Africanus and the Europeæus; Europeans had a mental and moral superiority when compared with the “negligent” African “governed by caprice” due to their being a part of a more highly developed culture. Another significant first would be Linnaeus’ inclusion of human beings with other primates under the heading Anthropomorpha, marking the annexation of humanity into the overall Great Chain of Being.

In 1777, German philosopher Immanuel Kant would come to agree Linnaeus’ belief that racial characteristics were influenced by their surroundings in his short piece “Of the Different Human Races.” This work supported the environmental conception of human development, which held that each race had developed as a product of its surroundings, both physical and cultural. Kant believed that the “native land” of the African was a harsh place that, if survived, could amply provide for its inhabitants. As such, “... these factors account for the origin of the Negro, who is well-suited to his climate, namely, strong, fleshy, and agile. However, because he is so amply supplied by his motherland, he is also lazy, indolent, and dawdling.” Kant also attempted to provide a chronology of what he believed was the order in which the races developed, which went as such:

- 1) “Lineal root genus: White of brownish color.” Lost to time
- 2) “First race: Noble blond (northern Europe) from humid cold
- 3) “Second race: Copper red (America) from dry cold
- 4) “Third race: Black (Senegambia) from humid heat
- 5) “Fourth race: Olive-yellow (Asian-Indians) from dry heat”

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<sup>97</sup> Smedley, Agnes, *Race in North America: Origin and Evolution of a Worldview* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1999). 164. Emphasis mine.

His description of Africans, no doubt influenced by a reading of Linnaeus' depiction in his *Systema Naturae*, coupled with the environmental explication for the development (or lack thereof) in the "African race" would be one that would come to haunt British-West African relations in various forms from the mid-1800s through the height of colonialism.<sup>98</sup>

Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, a German physician, naturalist, physiologist, and anthropologist, took the work of the three men above and in 1795 published *On the Natural Variety of Mankind*. This work, which was held by scientists and philosophers in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to be the brightest star in the disjointed constellation of early race theory, was very influential in cementing the idea of environmentally influenced racial development at the turn of the nineteenth century. He rejects the notion of being able to draw a distinct line between one group of humanity and the next from the outset, opening the work by stating, "*Innumerable varieties of mankind run into one another by insensible degrees... no variety exists... so singular as not to be connected with others of the same kind by such an imperceptible transition, that it is very clear they are all related.*"<sup>99</sup>In other words, if all human beings are connected biologically then any differences between the races boil down to geography, culture and behavior, *not* some sense of innate ability/disability. This is not to say that Blumenbach did not believe in distinct physical categories of race or that he did not believe that, at a cultural level, all races occupied the same level of sophistication or power. Blumenbach agreed with Bernier in terms of number as well as with the placement of Caucasians as the progenitor of humanity, with other races placed in relation to their variance from it as follows:

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<sup>98</sup> Kant, Immanuel "Of the Different Human Races" 1777 IN Bernasconi and Lott, *The Idea of Race*, 17-20.

<sup>99</sup> Blumenbach, Johann Friedrich *On the Natural Variety of Mankind* 1795 IN Bernasconi and Lott, *The Idea of Race*, 27. Blumenbach's emphasis.

Ethiopian <- Malay <- Caucasian -> American -> Mongolian<sup>100</sup>

He was also the first person to use the term Caucasian to refer to white Europeans. This usage was derived from his experiences with the people of the Caucasus Mountains in Georgia, which he believed were the most beautiful and perfect examples of white Europeans. The fact that general races could be identified, however, did not mean that human beings comprised separate species. While physical differences and commonalities could be identified between these groups, there was nothing that suggested an *innate* ability/disability to make mental or moral progress if any given human was exposed to and accepted the proper [read: European] civilizing influences. On a biological level, Blumenbach also believed that a strong marker of the interconnectedness of the human race was the ability for any two human beings to procreate and produce viable offspring, something that most species distinct from one another are incapable of doing. This led Blumenbach to conclude that “no doubt can any longer remain but that we are with great probability right in referring all and singular as many as varieties of man as are at present known of one and the same species.”<sup>101</sup>

Though these and several other racial theorists laid the groundwork on which scientific racism would be built, they were not themselves racist in the way that this thesis understands the concept. This is because the differences in races, at this point, were primarily considered to be factors of the physical environment that race inhabited over a period of millennia. Any differences in the perceived mental or moral qualities of each race were seen primarily as differences in *nurture* due to the environment in which a person or group was raised, not a biologically innate and therefore immutable difference in their *nature*. This being the dominant scientific perspective, the ability of the British to enforce their will

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 37

and begin making colonial incursions in India, Africa, and the New World were *not* perceived as being the products of an innate biological superiority but, as put by Fredrickson, “the fruit of acquired *cultural* and technological advantages,” an assertion that Horton would have wholeheartedly agreed with.<sup>102</sup>

Reexamining the above theories, going by the definitions of culturalism and racism that were discussed in the introduction, and remembering our first image of Sancho and Annamaboe, it is apparent that the perceived differences between the races of man seemed to the British at this point to largely exist as factors of environment and, by extension, culture.

#### Adam Smith and the Impartial Spectator

So what are some of the factors that informed their views, then, if not a biologized conception of race and racism? Again, it seems to boil down to the idea of environment being the primary factor in the development of both physical *and* cultural differences between the races. Though there are a few thinkers we could examine, a surprising figure brought forth by Jennifer Pitt’s *A Turn to Empire* looms large as an influencer in shaping the ways in which the British perceived other races at this time – Adam Smith.

Known primarily for his development of modern capitalist theory in The Wealth of Nations, Smith also wrote extensively on imperialism following the Scottish School of Enlightenment thought. He posited that societies developed in a series of four stages as classified by their mode of subsistence: hunting, pastoral, agricultural, and commercial.<sup>103</sup> The rate at which societies advanced through these four stages was based on a combination of pressures of population growth and universal human capacities and desires (e.g. “the

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<sup>102</sup> Fredrickson, *Racism*, 61. Emphasis Fredrickson.

<sup>103</sup> Smith, Adam. *Lectures on Jurisprudence*. Edited by R.L. Meek, D.D. Raphael, and P.G. Stein. Clarendon Press, 1978. 27-35 IN Pitts, Jennifer, *A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press 2005).

desire to better one's condition") leading to the emergence of more efficient means of providing sustenance, comfort and the improvement of "arts and manufactures," all of which was contingent on the ease with which a society could advance given their environment and available experiences.<sup>104</sup> That is to say, he believed that the differences in the levels of advancement when comparing one society to another can typically be chalked up to one society not being put in a given situation in which they would be forced to develop a rational response to an issue that another society in that specific situation would have to make in order for it to survive. This claim is very important, as it demonstrates a point that is lost in later, racialized theories of racial/cultural difference and empire – that all societies are equally capable of making rational decisions in response to their surroundings. In Smith's words people's "sentiments concerning the particular degree of each quality, that is either blamable or praise-worthy, vary, according to that degree in which is usual in their own country, and in their own times."<sup>105</sup> Smith's belief in the equal rational capacity of members of "less advanced" societies is what makes his system of societal categorization so fascinating. He refused to rank or deprecate members of other societies because it was his opinion that human beings in different situations apply the same faculties to their particular problems and tend to produce solutions of roughly equivalent rationality.

As such, he contended that every society possesses the form of a quality or ideal that, for them, represents the "golden mean of that particular talent or virtue." However, every society was burdened by a personal bias that made it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to realize this, as "No nation is so unfortunate as to think itself inferior to the rest of mankind:

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<sup>104</sup> Smith, Adam. *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*. Edited by R. Campbell and Andrew S. Skinner. Clarendon Press, 1979. 25 IN Ibid., 41.

<sup>105</sup> Smith, Adam. *A Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Edited by D.D. Raphael and A.L. Macfie. Clarendon Press, 1976. 108. IN Ibid.



few are even willing to put up with the claim of equality.”<sup>106</sup> This would lead to a sense of contempt between nations at different stages of development, with those in latter stages being particularly prejudiced against those in early ones. Put forth in his *Essays on Philosophical Subjects*, Smith believed that progressing through each of these phases a matter of material access, stating, “Little else is requisite to carry a state to the highest degree of opulence from the lowest barbarism, but peace, easy taxes, and a tolerable administration of justice.”<sup>107</sup> It is easy for a reader to dismiss this theory of progress as a monocausal or apolitical explanation, but to do that would be to miss Smith’s point. In his opinion the material aspects of progress are what are *necessary* for change; they are not in and of themselves *sufficient* for change. For example, Smith posits that the geography in which a given society is situated plays a large role in either helping or hindering the process of progress through the degree to which it facilitates defense and economic activity. Relating this theory to Britain and West Africa, the abundance of rivers and the varying heights in terrain in Britain lend themselves to trade and defense, while the dense jungle and paucity of navigable rivers have the converse effect on the Gold Coast.<sup>108</sup> John Corantee’s efforts to maintain the roads and rivers to and from Annamaboe, as well as the Asante attempts to capture them, underscore the importance of such things as factors worthy of political and economic consideration in the region.

None of this is to say that Smith did not invoke any value judgments regarding the stage of development that a given society inhabited. While he most certainly did not condemn societies which were not at the commercial level in some sort of racist or condescending way, he did believe that the commercial level of societal advancement was

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<sup>106</sup> Pitts, *A Turn to Empire*, 41.

<sup>107</sup> Smith, Adam *Essays on Philosophical Subjects* 325 IN *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

optimal, particularly regarding the level of nuance that legal codes could engage in, for he believed that “Before we can feel much for others, we must in some measure be at ease ourselves... all savages are too much occupied with their own wants and necessities, to give much attention to those of another person.”<sup>109</sup> It was Smith’s belief that this high level of advancement allowed for cultures to develop a sense of “natural justice.” By this he means that, while individual law codes may have components that can be seen as inequitable and immoral, by comparing and analyzing law codes one can find a vein of “natural justice” – laws and codes which are to be found in the vast majority of nations (e.g. Laws forbidding murder, theft, slander, etc.).<sup>110</sup> Due to the fact that those who exist in a commercial society are more free to consider questions of legality, liberty, and morality, it follows that they would be more able to develop legal codes which capture a more nuanced version of natural law than less advanced societies that are less able to do so due to larger concerns regarding subsistence that commercial societies are no longer as troubled by. This idea of linear progression can be clearly seen in Horton’s adamant belief that Africans, while equally capable of advancement, should follow British cultural models, as that is what he perceived to be the highest state of civilization in *West African Countries and Peoples*.

The care with which Smith treats the judgment of other societies and his reluctance to rank them stems from his moral philosophy. Specifically, he believes that one must consider the view of an “impartial spectator” when looking at a foreign culture, an imaginary person who judges based on the person’s own moral code as developed in their own cultural context but bears neither the person nor their subject any particular good or ill will. This spectator is necessary because “we can never survey our own sentiments and motives, we can never form any judgment concerning them; unless we remove ourselves, as it were, from

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 287.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 45.

our own natural station, and endeavour to view them as at a certain distance from us.”<sup>111</sup> That is, Smith asks for one to consider the other in their (the other’s) context as to better understand their situation. Practices that may rub a Briton the wrong way may be completely sensible from the perspective of an Indian or African. For example, Smith put forth the custom of some Amerindians of molding children’s heads into a square shape, a practice that astonished European explorers with its “absurd barbarity.” At the same time, these Europeans failed to recognize the custom’s similarity to that of European ladies’ usage of corsets - a practice that caused many distortions and diseases in those that engaged in it.<sup>112</sup> It is from this position that Smith contends that one cannot fairly judge another society based on its practices without first judging one’s own society. Reading through *West African Countries and Peoples*, one can note numerous instances in which Horton reminds the reader that, while he believes that a significant portion British culture would serve African interests in terms of advancement, that this does *not* mean that he wishes to eliminate preexisting culture. On the contrary, he wanted for West African peoples to only adopt that which he believed was necessary (namely Western science, medicine<sup>113</sup>, and technology) and allow for any aspect of local culture that did not interfere with these practice to remain.

Putting all of this together forms a more appropriate lens through which to view the image of British-West African relations during the slave era than the one of modern understandings of race and racism that tends to be anachronistically misemployed. This lens is instead constructed by keeping in mind that the disjointed and largely disregarded state of racial science at this point did *not* hold a sense of innate biological difference as being key to understanding race. Instead, it contended that a given race’s environment was the primary

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<sup>111</sup> Smith, Adam, *Theory of Moral Sentiments* IN Pitts, *A Turn to Empire*, 288.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>113</sup> Horton, *West African Countries and Peoples*. 75.

causal factor determining its physical and cultural distinctions. With the role of racial theory supporting cultural differences resulting from environmental factors as the prime differentiator between members of each race, it therefore supported the idea of *nurture* being more important than *nature* in determining an individual's ability.

This lens, hence undistorted by innatist theories of biologically based racial difference, instead relies on theories of cultural difference as the primary factor determining its prescription. The British, placing primacy in the spiritual world over the temporal at this time, believed that it was sufficient to grant “pagan” Africans spiritual equality and that their temporal servitude, justified by several theories including the Curse of Ham/Canaan, was not especially out of place in a world where a steadfast, hereditarily based hierarchy had been the norm since the Middle Ages.

When interacting with non-enslaved Africans, particularly the West African elites with which the British had to bargain with in order to even engage in the slave trade, interactions were informed by an idea of cultural development best described by Adam Smith. The British, additionally influenced by the cultural lean of racial science during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, came to understand West Africans as being a product of their environment, with their physical appearance and cultural quirks being seen as a direct consequence of these factors. It cannot be denied that many British observers posited that these polities and groups occupied an earlier stage of development than they currently did. However, these observers had no choice but to attempt to understand, or at least look past, cultural differences as the result of their being a rational response to the circumstances in which these peoples had been *nurtured* for the sake of economic exchange. West African trade dominance over British merchants during this period, as exemplified in Annamaboe and the experiences embodied by Barbot and Swanzy, would not have allowed

for any other perspective to take significant root. With time or, as future philosophers would contend, a guiding hand the British travellers had no doubt that Africans would be perfectly capable to progress through the stages of development and become “civilized.” It was all a matter of *nurture*, not *nature*. A matter of *culture*, not *race*.

The experiences of Sancho as an assimilated English citizen and of trade dynamics in Annamaboe directly reflect this perception. If it were accurate to use uniformly apply modern concepts of race and racist during this period, the successes experienced by men like Equiano, Cugoano, Amo, and Sancho in Europe would have in all probability never occurred. How could they, if these men and those like them were unvaryingly perceived as innately and indelibly inferior others? They could not. The British would never have become willing trade partners with the Fante and Asante if they subscribed to a racist ideology. How could they accept being forced into one-sided deals by peoples that, despite being innately inferior to them under an ideology of racism, wielded and used their superior power against them? Again, it is extremely doubtful such a situation would have precipitated. It is only by applying the lens of culturalism that these stories and those like them have a chance of coming to light, helping us to unearth histories that defy our preconceptions of the period.

## Chapter Five: The Empire of Enlightenment, Paternalism, and the White Man's Burden

Again, it is necessary to remind the reader that it is a mistake to believe that this is meant to be an all-encompassing discussion surrounding the development of a racial ideology in Britain. While these thinkers are discussed because they put forth some of the most widely read and cited versions of the below ideas, they are simply a handful of the many that contributed to the coalescence of a racial ideology in Britain in the mid to late nineteenth century. Mounds of books have been, are being, and will be produced concerning this complicated subject. This discussion is simply meant to provide a general context for the roles played by imperial philosophers in the development of this ideology and to make the reader aware that such developments were, in their general spirit, inarguably relevant to this occurrence.

That being said, prior to the shift in thought that occurred in the early to mid nineteenth century the word “empire” typically conjured up images of the splendor of Rome. The Enlightenment philosopher Montesquieu, however, believed the Roman Empire merited neither adulation nor emulation. Instead, he saw the glorification of Rome as a grand mistake. In particular, he believed that the idea of “The Pax Romana is a cruel joke...The Romans simply exterminated all the [conquered] citizens.” Put otherwise, Montesquieu believed that the idea that the Romans created a lasting peace throughout the Mediterranean during their time as an empire was, at best, fallacious. The Romans were only able to establish a “peace” because they were utterly unconcerned with the people that they conquered. They went in, pillaged an area of its resources, pitilessly crushed any resistance,

and left whatever remained of the brutalized civilization to fend for itself as the Legion moved on to its next conquest.<sup>114</sup> However, he acknowledges that an

Empire – by definition [the] rule over a great expanse of territory – is (almost) always despotic... Speed in executing [the ruler's] decisions must supplement the distance separating him from his domains; fear must be used to prevent negligence on the part of the distant governor or magistrate.

In other words, the Roman Empire's cruel behavior was almost a necessity. In a time where messages could only travel as fast as the messenger carrying them, utilizing Draconian measures was the only way in which an empire could expect to function and remain a cohesive whole. Behaving in a merciful fashion as an imperial ruler would be equivalent to inviting dissent and rebellion.<sup>115</sup> Finally, Montesquieu makes a case against the economic argument for empire, which contended that by gaining control of colonial holdings empires could seek to increase their overall economic output. Montesquieu argues that the opposite is the case, stating "an empire can be compared to a tree with branches which if they spread too far take all of the sap from the trunk."<sup>116</sup> By this he means that the argument for an empire of economic might holds no water because colonies drain the resources and ultimately the life out of the colonizer's home state. Specifically, the struggle of maintaining control and instituting new laws bleeds the colonizing power of significant financial resources to the point that these expenditures outweigh the revenue that might come from the colonized region. Additionally, paranoia concerning the possibility of rebellion or other colonizing powers seizing control of colonial holdings grows to dominate the empire's political and economic sphere, distracting the governing body from matters of more immediate domestic importance.

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<sup>114</sup> Mosher, Michael. "Montesquieu on Empire and Enlightenment." In *Empire and Modern Political Thought*, edited by Sankar Muthu (London: Cambridge University Press, 2012). 112, 125, 132.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

Montesquieu did, however, become a philosopher through which some imperialists justified the implementation of colonial rule. This happened primarily through the exploitation of two facets of his imperial philosophy. First, he provided the excuse that some areas, primarily those of the Far East, were well suited to harsh imperial rule, writing that

Asia[n] despotism is, so to speak, naturalized... Asia's geography is more favorable to despotic rule. The continent possesses larger and wider plains unbroken by mountains or broad rivers. Conquerors typically never stop until they reach these natural barriers... Absent terror, commands delivered from afar are unlikely to be obeyed.<sup>117</sup>

This postulation, which became known as the concept of Oriental Despotism, was often referred to as a justification for imposing stringent levels of colonial legislation in Eastern (and African) areas, based on the claim that the local people were not only “used to it” but required it. Secondly, and more importantly when considering the developments in British perceptions of West Africa in the 1820's onward, he believed that empires were justified in conquering areas for the sake of enlightening the local population. In his words “A conquest can destroy harmful prejudices, and if I dare speak this way, put a nation under a better genius.”<sup>118</sup> Put simply, Montesquieu left a back door for imperialists to justify incursions into new areas based on the idea that they were spreading a superior way of life and its attendant knowledge. One is more than justified in pointing to Horton's writings in *West African Countries and Peoples* as a prime example of this justification being explicitly put into place, when he writes, “in the government of a semibarbarous race... a little despotism is absolutely necessary... having this object in view – the material advancement of the people.”<sup>119</sup> Overall, though Montesquieu was a fervent critic of imperialism, portions of his

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>119</sup> Horton, *West African Countries and Peoples*. 85.



writings were the seeds from which the larger philosophical justifications for creating empires sprouted.

Adam Smith would echo Montesquieu's argument against empire later, stating

The real futility of all distant dominions of which the defense is necessarily most expensive, and which contribute nothing, either by revenue or military force, to the general defense of the empire, and very little even to their own particular defense... is the subject upon the public prejudices of Europe require most to be set upon.<sup>120</sup>

Building on Montesquieu, Smith believed colonies were only good in that they serve as an ego-boost for the colonial powers that govern them. Colonies, in his words, were “a sort of splendid and showy equipage... [but] if [an] empire can no longer support the expense of keeping up this equipage... it ought certainly to lay it down.” However, ever the realist, Smith admitted, “no nation ever voluntarily gave up dominion over any province, how troublesome soever it might be to govern it.” Predicting the justification of “an empire of enlightenment” being utilized to validate a nation's decision to hold onto its colonies despite their overall negative impact on the nation's economy and political stability, Smith wrote that believing one can simply implement a government and culture wholesale in order to “raise the state” of a society in a lower stage of development is a futile venture. The idea that “[a] man of the system... seems to imagine that he can arrange the different members of a great society with as much ease as the hand arranges the different pieces upon a chess-board” struck Smith as an incredibly poignant exercise in hubris.<sup>121</sup> Again, Horton's writings reflect this reservation regarding the futility of implementing a wholesale culture in a foreign realm. All one could hope for, in Horton's opinion, was that a region would adopt the most useful

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<sup>120</sup> Smith, Letter to John Sinclair October 14 1782. *Correspondence of Adam Smith* Edited by Earnest Campbell Mossner and Ian Simpson Ross (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund 1987) 262. IN Pitts, *A Turn to Empire*, 67.

<sup>121</sup> Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, 627 AND Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, IN *Ibid.*, 48, 69.

aspects of a colonial power's culture (in his opinion, science and medicine) and leave the more social aspects of that culture intact.<sup>122</sup>

British officials were happy enough to subscribe to the theories underpinning culturalist attitudes and the arguments made against engaging in the colonizing process during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. However, after experiencing nearly a century and a half of pent up frustrations concerning their inability to effectively enforce their end of trade relations with West Africans stretching from the experiences of Barbot and Annamaboe in the slave trade to the situations such as what Swanzy described in the Gold Coast with palm oil brokers in the 1810's and 1820's, the British had had enough. With the amount of money flowing from Africa seeming to plateau, Smith and Montesquieu's anti-colonial rhetoric was no longer as popular. Colonialists began looking to imperial theorists such as Burke, Locke, and the Mills to justify their incursion into Africa for the sake of material advantage, much of it being rooted in the idea of Montesquieu's Empire of Enlightenment.

Some thinkers after Smith would take and twist his idea of categorizing societal development. One of the most famous of these men was James Mill. In his then-popular and now-infamous tract *The History of British India* Mill took Smith's non-judgmental four stage theory of societal development and turned it into an axis that ranked societies based on their utility, creating "a scale [on which] excellence or defect" was measured. "Exactly in proportion as utility is the object of every pursuit we may regard a nation as civilized. Exactly in proportion as its ingenuity is wasted on contemptible or mischievous objects... the nation may safely be denominated barbarous."<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Horton, *West African Countries' and Peoples*. 4-8, 75.

<sup>123</sup> Mill, James. *The History of British India*. 3rd ed. Vol. I-II. London: Baldwin, Craddock, and Joy, 1826. 133 IN Pitts, *A Turn to Empire*, 142.

It was not, however, a sliding scale; it was a binary system. For Mill the colonies, particularly India, existed in a state of cognitive infancy that was inextricably linked to their societal development. A direct example would be when Mill writes, “Among children, and *among rude people*, little accustomed to take their decisions upon full and mature consideration, nothing is more common than to *repent of their bargains, and wish to revoke them.*”<sup>124</sup> The experiences of Barbot along the New Calabar River, British slavers with gold takers in Annamaboe, and British merchants with palm oil brokers along the Gold Coast could all serve as “evidence” of Mill’s claim in the minds of British officials. Consequently, it requires no real stretch of the imagination to understand how, with these and other negative economic experiences in mind, British officials might be predisposed to believe Mill’s claims.

Mill justified this claim primarily through the use of individual “examples” of barbarism and citing them as reasons for condemning the given society as being backwards as a whole. For example, Mill viewed the Chinese treatment of women as reason enough to believe them to be “on par with savages.” He even discredited any advances that non-European civilizations had made in terms of art or technology, contending that they were flawed for being different from western versions of the same object or medium.<sup>125</sup> This, of course, ran counter to Smith’s idea of the impartial spectator, who would have responded that these differences of practice and our negative perceptions of them cannot be rightfully considered without first critically examining our own practices.

By deeming colonized peoples to be on the same level of cognitive development as children Mill places Western Europe, primarily Britain, in the position of their parent. As no parent would allow for their child to grow up without guidance, Mill contends that, while

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 167 and 409 IN Ibid., 318. My emphasis.

<sup>125</sup> Mill, James. “Review of M. de Guignes. *Voyages à Péking, Manille, et l’Ile de France, faits dans l’intervalles des années 1784 à 1804.*” *Edinburgh Review* 14, July 1809. 413. AND Mill, *History of British India*. 107, 114-115 IN Ibid., 144-146

simultaneously acknowledging the dangers of colonial financial commitment that Smith and Montesquieu both warn of, Britain should not allow for places such as India, China, and Africa to govern themselves; it was Britain's duty as a strong, civilized, and progressive nation to impose its rule on India and others. In his eyes the expansion of the British Empire would create a "Pax Britannica" during which an incalculable progress might be made in happiness and civilization, writing

The wider the circumference of the British dominion, the more extensive the reign of peace. Did it embrace the whole, and were it supported with any tolerable degree of wisdom, a very considerable period of peace would probably be ensured, during which an incalculable progress might be made in happiness and civilization.<sup>126</sup>

Of course, this is a claim which Montesquieu, the man Mill took the idea of an Empire of Enlightenment from, would have contested as fallacious given his thoughts on Rome. This expansion did not even include governing the conquered peoples with same level of civility and fairness as settlers or metropolitan citizens. Since the Indian, Chinese, and African peoples under British rule were already "used to" despotism (an idea Mill appropriated from Montesquieu's idea of Oriental Despotism) it was fair to treat them as lesser citizens, as "even the utmost abuse of European power is better... than the most temperate exercise of Oriental Despotism."<sup>127</sup> Given his linear perception of progress there is little surprise to be had regarding his belief in forcing "backward" societies toward the "proper" end of the spectrum. When considering his view on the appropriateness of "despotism" in Britain's treatment of its colonies, it seems as if he borrows from Burke's idea of geographic morality, which is to say that it was his view that deciding the appropriate system of morality that one

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<sup>126</sup> Mill, James. "Review of *Voyage aux Indes orientales*, by Le P. Paulin S. Barthélemy, Missionary." *Edinburgh Review* 15, 1810. 372. IN *Ibid.*,

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 371 IN *Ibid.*, 140.

should subscribe to varies based upon one's location.<sup>128</sup> This idea could serve as a justification for behaving in a despotic way abroad despite Britain's liberal form of government at home.

John Stuart Mill, subtler and less vitriolic than his father, shared his judgments regarding colonial societies and the usefulness in perpetuating a dichotomy between "civilized" and "barbarous" peoples. He continued to legitimize Britain's imperial aspirations by setting up a parent-child relationship in which the mentor Britain was to disseminate its supposedly superior knowledge unto its pupil colonies. Mill claimed that many people who lived in colonized areas seemed to lack any "springs of progress" within themselves, while others – particularly the ancient Greeks, Romans, and modern Europeans – who possessed said springs were charged with enlightening the rest of humanity.<sup>129</sup> He goes so far as to say "The greater part of the world has, properly speaking, no history... *this is the case over the whole East.*"<sup>130</sup> This belief of civilization as being defined by the progression of a nation's overall cognitive capacity can be found when he writes that "All respect and fear of England as a nation will be materially weakened in the East... [the fact that] that a government can be really formidable... is a truth which requires *a much higher civilization than that of Orientals to understand or credit.*"<sup>131</sup> Indeed, he believed these societies to be so immature that they were incapable of being "guided to their improvement by conviction or persuasion"<sup>132</sup> – it was only through British coercion and leadership could they be enlightened. In a rather ironic twist it is in Mill's *On Liberty* that we are able to find one of his justifications for paternalism.

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<sup>128</sup> Burke, Edmund. *The Enlightenment and Revolution*. Edited by Peter J. Stanlis. Transaction Publishers, 1993. 30-35 IN Pitts, 92.

<sup>129</sup> Mill, John Stuart. *Collected Works*. Edited by J.M. Robson and R.F. McRae. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963) Vol. 11, p. 313. IN Pitts, 154.

<sup>130</sup> Mill, John Stuart. *Collected Works. Liberty Fund*. <http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/mill-the-collected-works-of-john-stuart-mill>. Vol. 18. Emphasis mine.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., Vol. 30. Emphasis mine.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., Vol. 18.

When he discusses a scheme for minimal interference in the lives of individuals he leaves a caveat, saying that it only applies

“To human beings in the maturity of their faculties... those who are still in a state to require being taken care of by others, must be protected against their own actions as well as against external injury. For the same reason, we may leave out of consideration *those backwards states of society in which the race itself may be considered as in its nonage*... A ruler full of the spirit of improvement is *warranted in the use of any expedients that will attain an end, perhaps otherwise unobtainable*”<sup>133</sup>

In other words, it was Mill’s opinion that everyone deserved to be at liberty to make their own decisions, unless “we” (namely the British government) decided that a person or a group of people was effectively childlike in their behavior and cognitive abilities and therefore unwilling and/or unable to improve without being coerced to do so. If that were the case it was the duty of the British Crown to place said people under its dominion, by force if necessary. His use of the word race in this passage is also worthy of note.

This can be most clearly seen in a set of passages pointed out in Anthony Bogue’s article “‘John Stuart Mill and ‘The Negro Question’: Race, Colonialism, and the Ladder of Civilization.” In his *Considerations on Representative Government* Mill writes that “the problem of character is the determining issue of government... the laws of national character are by far the most important class of sociological laws.”<sup>134</sup> Character, defined as a product of the culture and society in which one is raised, is Mill’s most important consideration when determining the level of societal advancement achieved by a given group. As can be clearly seen in his retort to Thomas Carlyle’s virulently racist article, Mill *does not* consider biology as relevant to the determination of one’s abilities or societal development. Mill contends that “black inferiority” as he perceives it is not inborn and fervently disagrees with idea “that one kind of human being are born servants to another kind.” Instead, the differences in human

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid. Emphasis mine.

<sup>134</sup> Bogue, Anthony “John Stuart Mill and ‘The Negro Question’: Race, Colonialism, and the Ladder of Civilization.” IN Valls, *Race and Racism*, 219.

abilities can be based in an understanding of their environment since “human beings are subject to an infinitely greater variety of accidents and external influences than trees” Mill points to Egypt as the earliest known civilization that in its influence over Greece and Rome can be credited as the progenitor of Western civilization. However, the supposed deficiency in culture and civilization present in African peoples meant that they needed to be placed in a state of tutelage to rise up to the level of European civilization. Until then Mill argues that they should be considered subjects, not citizens.<sup>135</sup> He justifies this by stating “Despotism is a legitimate mode of government in dealing with barbarians, *provided the end be their improvement and the means justified by actually effecting that end.*”<sup>136</sup> This quote clearly echoes the Empire of Enlightenment loophole left by Montesquieu and the rough hand later supported by Horton, and can be seen as a departure from the acceptance promoted by Montesquieu, Smith, and Horton.<sup>137</sup>

The most outstanding quote, however, comes from a portion of his collected works in which he states “The spirit of improvement is not always a spirit of liberty... but the only unfailing permanent source of improvement is liberty, since by it there are as many possible centers of improvement as there are individuals.”<sup>138</sup> This quote, simple in its content, has a massive implication in the way in which it orders the conditions for civilization. It states, in essence, that liberty is a precondition for progress and improvement, as the contributions of many free minds greatly surpass those of a chosen few. Mill believes, however, that civilization and therefore being civilized exist as preconditions for liberty. With this in mind, the autonomy that necessarily accompanies liberty must then be tempered and guided by the

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<sup>135</sup> August, Eugene R., ed., *Thomas Carlyle, The Nigger Question; John Stuart Mill, The Negro Question* (Dayton: University of Dayton Press. Sep 10, 2010). 46-47.

<sup>136</sup> Mill, *Collected Works*, V18. Emphasis mine.

<sup>137</sup> Horton, *West African Countries and Peoples*, 59-62.

<sup>138</sup> Mill, *Collected Works*. V18.

“appropriate” form of society and culture. Therefore, Mill believed that the British needed to civilize Africans in order for them to be able to properly utilize their liberty and subsequently become a progressive society capable of consistent, self-sustained societal improvement.

Though Montesquieu and the Mills’ writings provided a general justification for colonial activity, perhaps the clearest example of citing a philosopher as the basis for colonial incursion to implement material advantage would be those who cited John Locke. His rather peculiar theory of ownership in chapter V of his *Two Treatises of Government*, entitled “Of Property,” while still culturalist provided a justification that British colonizers could employ while occupying “new” lands. In it, Locke writes,

God gave the World to Men in Common; but... it cannot be supposed he meant it should always remain common and uncultivated. He gave it to the use of the Industrious and Rational (and *Labour* was to be *his title* to it); not to the Fancy or Covetousness of the Quarrelsome and Contentious.”<sup>139</sup>

In other words, Locke contends that one does not have the right to consider themselves the owner of a piece of land or property in general unless it is being utilized by a rational person to its highest potential. Many British (and indeed European) colonialists saw this statement as a way to justify their incursion into new areas of Africa because, in their view, the vast majority of the land used in Africa was uncultivated. Africans, not meeting the *cultural* or technological standards of European observers, were not seen as making use of the land to its fullest potential. By Locke’s theory of ownership, it was therefore the right of European colonialists to take control of the land so as to most fully utilize it.

A prominent example of this justification in action would be the incursion of the Boer and British settlers on Xhosa lands in South Africa. When the Dutch Boers landed on the southern-most tip of Africa in the mid-seventeenth century they incorrectly assumed that the land they sought to inhabit was empty and thus began to expand and colonize from their

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<sup>139</sup> Locke, *Two Treatises*, Book Two Section 34. Locke’s emphasis.



provisioning station on Table Bay.<sup>140</sup> Consequently, they came in contact and entered conflict with many Xhosan homesteader groups. Perceiving the land as being undeveloped and as such ownerless in a Lockean sense they began prospecting and settling on lands used for cattle grazing, thereby disrupting an all-important socio-political aspect of the heavily pastoral Xhosan society of the day. These conflicts were usually won by the Boers, gratis military superiority and the introduction of European diseases into South Africa, leading to the affected Xhosa having to choose between either moving further northeast or *culturally assimilating* into this new colonial society as hunters, herdsmen, and servants.<sup>141</sup>

The process of Boer expansionism and economic utilization of assimilated African peoples continued until 1795, whereupon the British seized the southern peninsula during the French Revolution. After subduing Boer resistance the British substituted existing colonial institutions and officials with their own. They instituted the privatization of land holdings (in lieu of cheap public loans) and began granting Africans rights, of particular importance the right of challenging breached labor contracts.<sup>142</sup> Protestant missionaries also came to South Africa, taking up the cause of African rights and creating political pressure that helped lead to the British abolition of slavery in 1830's.<sup>143</sup> These changes angered and alienated the Boers who, no longer able to afford land ownership or paying the newly freed African workers, responded by venturing farther into the interior, further displacing Xhosans who had already been on the run from the mfecane and Shaka's Zulu nation, all for the sake of claiming Lockean "empty land."

While considering all of the above, it is pertinent to note that any notion of human beings being in possession of different mental faculties as a result of biological differences

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<sup>140</sup> Reid, *A History of Modern Africa*, 72.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 74.

was still largely absent at this point in time. The racial theories of Blumenbach, which posited the equality of each race's innate and basic mental and moral capacity (though environment was claimed to impact their development), still stood as the standard of racial scientific thought surrounding the development of races at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Montesquieu's *Empire of Enlightenment*, Locke's theory of ownership, and the Mills' conception of paternalism were all contingent on the premise that it was a human being's *nurture* that determined their abilities and culture, not their *nature*. Put otherwise, one cannot legitimately engage in the creation of an *Empire of Enlightenment* founded on a paternalist framework if the ultimate education and release of the colonized "child" society was impossible due to an innate and immutable defect present within them. Though it was without a doubt based on the idea of ensuring British and overall European material advantage in trade relations, the *Empire of Enlightenment* in Africa was often pursued with the sincere belief that it was African cultural and societal norms that formed them into "cognitive children." Europeans, framing themselves as benevolent colonizer/parents, were the justified in instituting imperial rule, transforming Africans into a "civilized" (read: European) people.

By the mid to late nineteenth century, however, the idea of an "Empire of Enlightenment" that would advance West African societies from "cognitive childhood" to "civilized adulthood" did not pan out in the way that British colonizers had hoped. West Africans were unsurprisingly resistant to the British political, intellectual, and social systems and constructs that colonial administrators had been trying to force feed them – how could one subscribe to the norms of a society which sought to other and therefore attempt to eliminate traditions and societal structures that a people had held dear for generations? British colonizers, convinced that their schools of thought, culture, and policy were the best

the world had to offer, could not help but scratch their heads, unable to understand why their “teachings” fell on seemingly deaf and most certainly unreceptive ears. Were these issues a problem of pedagogical British errors, or was there something *innate* to the locals that made this process seem so difficult, if not at times impossible? With changes in the cultural environment seemingly unable to elicit reciprocal mental or moral change for West Africans and changes to physical environment proving similarly ineffective in eliciting changes in British agents, Blumenbach and his contemporaries’ contentions that environments served as the primary cause of racial difference grew less and less convincing. This frustration with African locals coincided with a large increase in demand for raw materials such as copper, cotton, rubber, palm oil, cocoa, diamonds, tea, and tin to fuel the second industrial revolution – all of which could be acquired in Africa.

The world of nineteenth century Britons had begun to shift away from a mindset that valued spiritual equality over temporal and abandoned the conceptions of fixed hereditary hierarchy as the norm in lieu of a view focused on nationalism, the cultivation of the self, and meritocratic advancement. Consequently, culturalist attitudes that once promoted acceptance through assimilation began to waver. The Empire of Enlightenment, once seen as a project worthy of self-sacrifice for the sake of “raising” other societies to the proper end of James Mill’s scale of excellence and defect, had become a Sisyphean task. Britain grew tired of shouldering the “White Man’s Burden.” But how could the British ethically justify colonizing groups of people believed to be their mental and moral, if not cultural, equals? They would have to separate “their” race from the colonized peoples’ in such a way as to deny this equality and state that this difference was not only innate, but immutably so.

## Chapter Six: Race “Science” and its Role in the British Colonial Context

It is necessary to preface the discussion of racial science’s contribution to the coalescence of a racial ideology in the mid to late nineteenth century with a reminder of Fredrickson’s definition of racism and a brief note regarding the use of the terms pseudoscience and racial science. First, the term racism as defined in the introduction is *not* contingent on ideas of race as we perceive it in the modern era. The satisfaction of two conditions, the belief in *indelible* and *innate* difference and the abuse of power against one group that would be seen as cruelty if used against another, is what counts under this definition. That being said, the development of a racial ideology in late nineteenth century Europe was heavily intertwined the emergence of a biologized conception of race. Though the general definition of racism stands separate from the concept of race, to say that these phenomena did not heavily influence one another in this context is, frankly, absurd. Second, as regards to the terms pseudoscience and racial science in a historical context, Nancy Stepan does an incredible job explaining the ways in which we should view these terms as historians and academics when she writes

Though many of the scientists who studied race in the past were indeed guilty of bias in the collection and interpretation of their data, of failing to consider contrary evidence, and of making hasty or facile generalizations, few of them knowingly broke the accepted canons of scientific procedure of their day. *Most of them were not consciously racist.* Many were instead people of humane outlook, opponents of slavery, decent individuals *who would have been shocked by any charge that they were racists.* Their work is on the whole *not* filled with race hatred. In fact, what makes the history of race science so interesting is that so many of the outstanding scientists of the past believed that biological races were the key to the most pressing problems of the day – the future of the Americas, the fate of the European in the tropics, the extinction of peoples, the role of Britain in Europe. The scientists who gave scientific racism its credibility and respectability were often first-rate scientists struggling to understand what appeared to them to be deeply puzzling problems of biology and human society. *To dismiss their work as merely ‘pseudoscientific’ would mean missing an opportunity to explore something important about the nature of scientific inquiry itself.”*<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science*, xvi. My emphasis.

All of this is to say that, in order for us to understand the nature of racial science and the possible intentions of those that researched it, we must put aside our caricatures of the nineteenth century racial scientist as a malevolent racist doing all within his/her power to foster an ideology of subjugation, close-mindedness, and hate. To effectively understand this darker and highly influential chapter of history we must instead realize and accept an uncomfortable reality – that the men and women who provided the fuel that fired the kiln containing scientific racism did so largely inadvertently. The vast majority of these people were not cartoon villains, but instead lived as ordinary people motivated by a desire to achieve scientific and societal progress in a field that was then considered to be fully legitimate. Dismissing their work as entirely racist pseudoscience only further obfuscates the past. It is only through the patient, careful, and academically neutral study of their work that we can begin to properly formulate an understanding of the theories that formed the a significant portion of racism as we perceive it today.

Finally, what was said in the previous section regarding the intention behind this discussion bears repeating. Again, it is a mistake to believe that this is meant to be an all-encompassing discussion surrounding the development of a racial ideology in Britain. While these thinkers are discussed because they put forth some of the most widely read and cited versions of the below ideas in this context, they are simply a handful of the many that contributed to the coalescence of a racial ideology in Britain in the mid to late nineteenth century through the development of racial “science.” Mountains of literature have been, are being, and will be produced concerning this complicated subject alone. This discussion is simply meant to provide a general context for the roles played by racial theorists and scientists in the development of this ideology, make the reader aware that such developments were inarguably relevant to this occurrence, outline some of the ideas that

surrounded those that Horton was arguing against in *West African Countries and Peoples*, and the some of the ways these developments impacted the lives of Horton, Easmon, and people like them in this context.

With all of this contextualization out of the way, we can begin. Some scientists, though skeptical of the environmentalism posited by Blumenbach, began to propose a different solution that still offered a basic (though low) level of equality to all races. One of them, Dr. James Cowles Pritchard, believed that environmental change had stopped after the development of a certain level of civilization and instead became dependent on a new concept of sexual selection. First put forth in his 1813 *Researches into the Physical History of Man* and reiterated in his 1843 *Natural History of Man*, Pritchard believed that Africans had superior sight, smell, and strength as well as ease of childbirth because the challenging environment they lived in demanded such adaptations. Consequently, mates would be chosen based on physical attributes in order to maximize the potential of their offspring developing said attributes. Caucasians, inhabiting a more temperate and easily habitable climate, were more quickly able to reach a level of civilization that insulated them from the natural world, consequently developing a heightened potential for brainpower because their existence in a more socially based society demanded it. Instead of choosing mates based on the demands of a physical environment, Caucasians would then choose based on societal pressures, such as wealth, power, and intellectual ability. Once Africans had reached the same level of environmental safety and societal stability that Caucasians had, Pritchard believed that a similar change would occur.<sup>145</sup>

Others, of course, were not as considerate. In G. W. F. Hegel's entry "Anthropology" in his 1830 *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* that we find an account

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 38.

linking the mental and moral development of Africans to their race in an incredibly demeaning passage. Hegel writes

Negroes are to be regarded *as a race of children* who remain immersed in their state of uninterested naïveté... The Higher which they feel they do not hold fast to, it is only a fugitive thought... they transfer to the first stone they come across, thus making it their fetish and they throw this fetish away if it fails to help them... they have acquired Christianity [in fragments]... But they do not show an inherent striving for culture. In their native country the most shocking despotism prevails.”<sup>146</sup>

Not only does this depiction include a phrase that readers can immediately connect to ideas of paternalism as put forth by the Mills, but also denies the ability of African peoples to properly grasp religion or, even when exposed to Christianity, to hold fast to its tenets. This assignment of African peoples to a state of eternal cognitive infancy and the emphasis placed on their supposed inability to fully hold to Christianity serves to deny them not only temporal but also spiritual equality.

His portrayal of Caucasians (a term that he took from Blumenbach, of course) is predictably hagiographic, stating that in Caucasians

For the first time mind enters into complete opposition to the life of Nature, apprehends itself in its absolute self-dependence, wrests itself free from the fluctuation between one extreme and the other, achieves *self-determination*, *self-development*, and in doing so creates world-history.”<sup>147</sup>

Clearly, it is Hegel’s view that Caucasian people are the pinnacle of races, self-actualized beings that are destined to shape world history. An implicit train of paternalist logic is also made apparent in this work if these entries in his *Encyclopaedia* are viewed in tandem. If African peoples are “naïve children,” then Caucasians exist as the parents who have transcended childhood naïveté and should guide them into racial adulthood.

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<sup>146</sup> Hegel, G.W.F., “Anthropology”, *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences The Idea of Race*, 1830 IN Bernasconi and Lott, *The Idea of Race*, 40. My emphasis.

<sup>147</sup> De Gorbineau, Arthur. *The Inequality of the Human Races* 1835 IN Ibid., 42.

Five years later Arthur de Gobineau's *The Inequality of Human Races* was even more explicit in its condemnation of African peoples. De Gobineau believed that the first step of becoming a meaningful nation worthy of self-government was the formation of laws as well as the development of commerce and cultural interplay with neighboring peoples. Only making an exception for societies in Egypt and Christian Ethiopia, de Gobineau made condemned the race on the whole as "a part of mankind is *in its own nature* stricken with a paralysis, which makes it for ever unable to take even the first step towards civilization." In effect, de Gobineau goes a step beyond Hegel by biologizing the "inability" of Africans as a whole to develop what European observers would classify as a civilization.<sup>148</sup> We can look back to Horton's confrontation of these theories and those like them in his first section of *West African Countries and Peoples*. While he was without a doubt culturalist in his belief in the superiority of British culture, his "Vindication of the African Race" was written from the very first page to directly challenge and disprove these blatantly racist conceptions of biologized race.

Certain practices had also begun to emerge as part of the attempt to gain a more scientific and biologized understanding of races and racial difference. One of the most popular of these practices was that of phrenology, a precursor of craniology that held the detailed study of the shape and size of the cranium as a supposed indication of character and mental abilities. Its core tenets held that the brain was the center of thought, that the mind existed as "a compound of distinct, innate, and fixed faculties, each of which had its locus in different organs of the brain" (i.e. the belief in the localization of cerebral functions in certain corresponding parts of the brain), and that the shape of the skull had an undeniably

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 46-47. My emphasis.



profound impact on the brain's development.<sup>149</sup> Following these premises it requires no real logical leap to determine that the shape of the skull had an impact on the mental and moral qualities and capacities of the person it belonged to. Consequently, phrenologists believed that their study promised to reveal the true personality and mental quality of both individuals and races as a whole. The problem, of course, is that this study was utterly innatist and typological, allowing for racist practitioners and readers to cite the physical qualities of various races as being scientific justification for classifying one race as innately inferior to another.

The degree to which phrenology and its successor gained popularity among the scientific community at that time is a matter of common knowledge amongst most readers. In an image found in Nott and Gliddon's *Indigenous Races of the Earth* one can view an artistic representation a European head and skull being compared to those of an African and a chimpanzee.<sup>150</sup> Insultingly and unsurprisingly, the authors make a caricature of the African's face and cranial structure in such a way as to be made comparable to that of the ape, not so implicitly stating that an African could be considered intellectually on par with an ape and serve as the link between humanity and the rest of the animal kingdom on the Great Chain of Being. This idea was disseminated into popular culture as well, with Harper's weekly publishing a similar image of an Irishman (referred to as an Iberian), an Englishman, and an African. Its caption read

The Iberians are believed to have been originally an African race, who thousands of years ago spread themselves through Spain over Western Europe... They came to Ireland and mixed with the natives of the South and West, who *themselves are supposed to have been of low type and descendants of savages* of the Stone Age, who, in consequence

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<sup>149</sup> Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science*, 25.

<sup>150</sup> Nott, Josiah C., and George Gliddon. *Indigenous Races of The Earth*. Philadelphia: J.B. Lipponcott &, 1857. 618.

of isolation from the rest of the world, had never been out-competed in the healthy struggle of life, and *thus made way, according to the laws of nature, for superior races.*<sup>151</sup>

In other words, Africans were not simply a lower race, but the *lowest* in the opinion of this article, the bottom tier of the racial hierarchy.

Again, we can remember Horton's work in *West African Countries and Peoples* when we consider the practices of racial scientists at this time. Though he was working against the use of biologized conceptions of race being used to justify racist policies, we saw him having to exist as a scientist of his time. Specifically, we can note the instance in which he argued that Carl Vogt used an unfair example of the "lowest" example of the "black race" to be compared to the "highest" of the Caucasian. Though we now know phrenology and craniology to be bunk, at this time it was still perceived as being scientifically valid. That being the case, Horton's line of argumentation was valid in its context, though strange and backward it may seem today.

Another scientist that took an approach opposite of Pritchard's and more closely aligned to those of Hegel, de Gobineau, and phrenology was Dr. Robert Knox. Sexual selection, in his view, had little to do with the current state of human beings. He claimed that the course of history was no accident. Instead it was the playing out of the inner zoological facets of each race because man exists as an inextricable part of nature. He offered crude depictions of each race in turn as he perceived them. For example, the Saxons (in which he included himself) "invent nothing...have no musical ear... lack genius... and are so boorish and rude that [they] do not know what you mean by fine art." However, no race was without their upsides. Staying with Saxons he found them "thoughtful, plodding, industrious beyond all other races, [and] a lover of labour for labour's sake" with applicative and legal minds. These types had, in his view, existed since each race came into its own and had been and

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<sup>151</sup> Constable, H. Strickland. *Harper's Weekly*, 1899. My emphasis.

would stay unchanged throughout that race's existence. In arguments against proponents of environmental or sexual selection/influence on races, Knox countered with examples of cultural practices that he believed, if environmental factors existed, should have become inborn long ago. For example he asks that, if circumcision amongst the Jewish population and footbinding among the Chinese population had been practiced for centuries, why was it still necessary for infants to have be circumcised or their feet bound, respectively? His answer was that if the environment had ever affected the development of races, the period in which such changes could be made had ended long ago.<sup>152</sup>

This approach to racial science, as exemplified in these and similar works, shows a shift in belief to 1) a graded scale of intrinsic intelligence and capability embedded in animal structures and organization, including humanity 2) the phrenological idea of innate differences existing in the organs of the brains of different races as being impacted by the shape of their respective skulls, measurable through observation and craniological examination, and 3) the rejection of Blumenbach and his contemporaries' environmentalism and the inheritance of acquired characteristics on a grand scale as being relevant to their immediate timeframe. Though these innatist and biologized views of race in racial science had begun to gain steam by the time that the British had grown weary of the culturalist approach to their "Empire of Enlightenment," those that subscribed to such views lacked a scientific framework and system of terminology that would allow for them effectively communicate their ideas in an easily understandable yet seemingly empirically justified fashion.

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<sup>152</sup> Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science*, 42.

### The Evolutionary Turn

The key was the shift in biological and overall intellectual frameworks that came with Sir Charles Darwin's 1859 *On the Origin of Species*. Sharply breaking with the Christian contention that it was heretical for scientists to posit the change of species over time, Darwin went forth by stating populations develop over time as a matter of what he understood as natural selection, in which only the most biologically suitable members of a species in a given habitat could successfully mate to the point of shaping that species' traits over time through a system of branch evolution. Moreover, Darwin explicitly included humanity in his analysis due to his being influenced by the abundance of the aforementioned scholarship that contended as much. Basing his classifications largely on these works and personal experiences while aboard the *HMS Beagle*, Darwin found the "lower races" as examples of less evolved or separately evolved humans that had split from the primordial human from which all modern humans had descended from.<sup>153</sup> One of the most influential experiences that informed this decision was a moment where Darwin witnessed an islander cave in the skull of her child with a rock for dropping a basket of fruit that it had been carrying. He also contended, in a manner that echoed James Mill's tendency for condemning an entire society for one perceived flaw, that certain commonalities existed between the islanders he had met and animals he had encountered that supposedly marked them as being closer to animals than Europeans. For example, he found the tendency of some groups to "horde shiny objects" reminiscent of jackdaws compulsively collecting fragments of glass and mirror shards. Their sense of religion was held in question as well, with Darwin

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<sup>153</sup> Darwin, Sir Charles. *The Origin of Species*, 1859. *Literature.org* Accessed February 1 2016. <http://literature.org/authors/darwin-charles/the-origin-of-species/>

comparing their deifying natural forces akin to a dog barking at a gust of wind moving a parasol, believing some sentient ephemeral being had done so.<sup>154</sup>

In 1865 Darwin's cousin Sir Francis Galton, a fellow biologist, was inspired by his theory of evolution. In an essay entitled "Hereditary Talent and Character," he proceeded to apply this theory to human beings.<sup>155</sup> For Galton this step was a logical extension of his cousin's work, for if all animals are subject to the process of evolution, and humans are animals, it follows that the tenets of evolution must apply at least in part to humans. Taking into account the unique asset that is the human intellect, Galton proposed that it was in humanity's best interest as a species to direct the course of human evolution in a *positive* manner. He emphasized the term positive in order to communicate his belief that it was only ethical to explore and implement his findings and theories regarding the application of evolutionary principles to humanity so long as no one was explicitly forbidden or somehow precluded from reproducing.<sup>156</sup> Specifically, the term "positive eugenics" meant the encouragement and incentivizing of "fit" populations (typically those gifted with athleticism, intellect, and/or high birth) to reproduce at a higher rate than the "unfit" in order to increase the overall occurrence of these desirable traits on a societal level. Of course, its inverse existed in "negative eugenics," which sought to discourage or in many cases preclude "unfit" populations (typically the mentally and physically disabled as well as the poor and "unmoral" figures) from reproducing at a rate greater than or equal to "fit" populations so as to reduce the occurrence of these undesirable traits in general.<sup>157</sup> This study eventually became his life's work and grew into the field of eugenics, a term he coined in 1883 to

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<sup>154</sup> Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science*, 54.

<sup>155</sup> Galton, Sir Francis. "Hereditary Talent and Character." *Classics in the History of Psychology*. January 1, 1865. Accessed October 1, 2016. <http://psychclassics.yorku.ca/Galton/talent.htm>.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

describe what he saw as the science of “good birth,” a literal derivation of the Latin root *eu-* (good) and word *genos* (birth).<sup>158</sup> On a grander scale, the application of evolution to the human population represented a critical shift from man as a social being governed by social laws *apart from nature* (therefore being subject to a culturalism that could be bypassed through assimilation) to man as a biological being *dominated by and subject to the laws of nature* (therefore being subjected to an insurmountable conception of racial difference). Succinctly put, if everything, including humanity, can be reduced to functions of science and biology, that means that the concept of a hierarchy of inborn superior and inferior traits that had been applied to other species applies at least in part to humanity, therefore “justifying” the thought that certain groups of human beings are innately superior to others through birth.

Though first regarded with scientific suspicion and societal distaste, eugenics became legitimized in Britain through a number of scientific and socio-political factors in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Weismann Germ theory suggested that traits passed on from one generation to the next were primarily a result of biology rather than environment, and advances in biometric methodology allowed for Galton and his contemporaries to model correlations between physical and mental abilities with heredity with a greater sense of scientific accuracy. Additionally, the rediscovery of Mendelian theories of heredity allowed for hereditary questions to be reduced to simple numerical ratios primarily based on immediate parentage. Together, these discoveries allowed British eugenicists and their supporters to justify claiming scientific legitimacy while enabling them

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<sup>158</sup> Galton, Sir Francis. *Inquiries into Human Faculty and Its Development*. London: Macmillan, 1883. 17. Accessed December 1, 2016. <http://www.mugu.com/galton/books/human-faculty/text/galton-1883-human-faculty-v4.pdf>

to utilize simplistic modeling and omit environmental factors so important to Blumenbach, Pritchard, and their contemporaries as major influencers in the in the hereditary process.<sup>159</sup>

In terms of socio-political justification and societal buy-in for this new biologized conception of racial roles, humanity as being part of the evolutionary process, and being a subject of the greater animal kingdom on the Great Chain of Being, Great Britain was beset by numerous socio-economic ills during the 1880's and 90's. An intense economic depression, kicked off by the Panic of 1873 that resulted from the falling price of silver forcing the US to adopt the gold standard and subsequently destabilize the international currency market, led to a rise in strikes, unemployment, and radicalism as inflation skyrocketed. This led to a consequent growth in poverty, disease, and alcoholism rates despite numerous attempts made by Parliament to alleviate these stresses through social legislation. A concurrent rise in lower class birthrates and decline of middle and upper class birthrates led Britons to fear that they would be overrun by a class that they believed was physically, mentally, and morally "unfit" to adequately rule. The Second Boer War in South Africa catalyzed these fears. The near rout of the British at the beginning of the war at the hands of colonists and, of greater concern to those at home, "natives" frightened Britons with the idea that the compounding social ills and subsequent rise of the "unfit" that they were experiencing at home would lead to the loss of their empire abroad through societal enervation and consequent military and international impotence. With the failure of Parliamentary legislation to bring about efficacious change, many began looking to science, particularly eugenics, to provide a cure for their societal ills that would ensure the longevity and viability of the British Empire at home and abroad.<sup>160</sup> As Patton noted, this depression also contributed to the growing number of British doctors that struggled to find a job at

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 33-39 AND Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science*, 116-117

<sup>160</sup> Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science*, 117-121.

home. This mass of unemployed British M.D.s began looking to the colonies for career opportunities to avoid unemployment. African physicians like Horton and Easmon, though equally (if not even more) qualified than their white counterparts, suffered racist discrimination as a result of the pressures to provide these physicians with jobs. <sup>161</sup>

Darwin became disturbed with what had come of his discovery in its application to humanity. Darwin wrote explicitly on the subject in his chapter “On the Races of Man” in his 1871 book *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*. As the title suggests, Darwin had come to agree with the theories put forth by Pritchard several decades previously, at least to a point. He opens the chapter by stating “It is not my intention here to describe the several so-called races of men; but to inquire what is the value of the differences between them under a classificatory point of view, and how they have originated.”<sup>162</sup> Not particularly concerned with the delineation of the differences between races, Darwin was instead working against those who had begun to use his theories to suggest that the different races were not just different groups of human beings but entirely separate species. He found the entire conversation surrounding race to be muddled due to the lack of consensus surrounding what actually constituted a race in a definitional sense, citing theorists who had posited as few as two and as many as 62 races to underscore his point. Going further, he, like Pritchard, argued that natural selection was not a cause of racial variance, instead believing in sexual selection.

According to Darwin, races developed in human prehistory when men were dominated by instinct and focused on the physical attributes requisite to survival. After the development of intellect and speech, however, sexual selection protected body from change, rendering natural selection largely static as the standards by which humans judged possible

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<sup>161</sup> Patton, *Physicians, Colonial Racism, and Diaspora in West Africa*. 19-20.

<sup>162</sup> Bernasconi and Lott, *The Idea of Race*, 54



mates were based largely in social, rather than physical, means. Another point of argument was that all human beings, regardless of race or societal sophistication, had an interest in the arts and humanities. Even in illiterate societies people danced, acted, sang, told stories, and created art. Additionally, all societies expressed emotions in similar ways. No matter the language, it was possible for one to understand that a person they were with was experiencing strong emotions without having to be told as much – crying, laughter, flushed angry faces, and smiles transcended both racial and cultural barriers. <sup>163</sup>

Another point of interest can be found in a passage where Darwin echoes Blumenbach. Though he believed that “mulattoes” might have slightly lower rates of fertility and/or health than their parents, by no means did they serve as indicators of the inability of the races to effectively combine. Darwin uses the example of the mule as an example of infertile yet effective species crossing, saying, “the common Mule, so notorious for long life and vigor, and yet so sterile, shows how little necessary connection there is in hybrids between lessened fertility and vitality.”<sup>164</sup> Mixed race children, however, were perfectly capable of having children that could be strong and healthy. Were the races actually separate species, the ability for these children to have children of their own would be, at best, extremely rare. Finally, Darwin argued (echoing Herder’s sentiment nearly a century prior) that the strongest evidence for humanity being a single species exists in the point that races graduate into each other.<sup>165</sup> He wrote “the most weighty of all the arguments against treating the races of man as distinct species, is that they graduate into each other, independently in many cases, as far as we can judge, of their having intercrossed.” In other words, members

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 66-78.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>165</sup> Johann Gottfried von Herder, *Ideas of the Philosophy of the History of Humankind* 1784 IN Bernasconi and Lott, *The Idea of Race*, 26.

of each race could resemble one another even in instances where no interbreeding had occurred.<sup>166</sup>

Though his points on the of gradation of races, the omnipresence of the humanities, and the ability for human beings to interbreed were cogent, the one concerning natural versus sexual selection was the one seized upon by racist scientists seeking to cement the differences of race as based in biology. This is because this contention actually supports the idea of fixed racial types, doing so by excluding the improvement of large populations over time past the development of intellect and speech. This allowed racial scientists to claim that physical, intellectual, and moral abilities of each race now existed in an overall stagnant form, if they ever were subject to environmental influences in the first place. The greater takeaway from this is that this contention, given the enormous weight of Darwin's authority as the progenitor of a scientific revolution, allowed for the link between biology and culture to remain intact in the new evolutionary era.

These ideas of racial stagnation gained traction because Blumenbach's environmentalism had been rejected as outdated and unsubstantiated. While modern audiences might reject the findings of these scientists to be unscientific conjecture rooted in racism, Stepan reminds us how incredibly important it is to remember that without the ability to know or understand how environmental factors affect genetics (DNA and RNA only discovered in the mid-twentieth century), there was no credible, observable evidence to support the belief that natural selection was still active in human beings who had advanced beyond the most primordial state of society.<sup>167</sup> That is to say, scientists at this point believed that natural selection only applied through the point of full racial development and the development of human intelligence and speech. After this, humans were believed to have

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>167</sup> Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science*, 86.

transcended the natural selection process as mates were chosen primarily based off of intangible attributes (wealth, status, and cultural factors in general). Fire, clothing, habitation, weapons, and agriculture all seemingly insulated the body and mind from the factors that could be considered as part of the process of natural selection. The preservation of the sick and poor was often cited as evidence of this fact, as in a state of pure natural selection these scientists believed these populations would not exist or, at most, would exist in a much smaller capacity that would not be sustained through more civilized concepts of humanitarian charity.

With the philosophical and scientific underpinnings of racism outlined, the task now is to understand how the two coalesce into a racial ideology. In doing so, Fredrickson believes that it is particularly useful to consider racism as “a scavenger ideology, which gains its power from its ability to pick out and utilize ideas and values from other sets of ideas and beliefs in specific socio-historical contexts.”<sup>168</sup> With that principle in mind it becomes fairly clear that, without the presence of a biologized conception of race, the use of the “Empire of Enlightenment” and the White Man’s Burden as justifications for British colonial incursion for material advantage in West Africa would have quickly lost legitimacy due to the sustained local rejection of British cultural, political, and socio-economic values. Conversely, the development and utilization of a racialized, innatist conception of human difference would have been severely hampered without the presence of a concept of colonial paternalism anchored in geographic morality, a universal scale of societal excellence and defect coupled with conceptions of “rational” property ownership, and the comprehensive belief that the subjugation of a people “used to” despotism was justified in the pursuit of “enlightening” that society. If all human societies and races were seen as culturally and

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<sup>168</sup> Solomos, John and Back, Les, *Racism and Society* (Houndsmills, Basingstoke 1996) 18-19 IN Frederickson, *Racism*, 8.

socially equal or, at worst, respectable and consequently unable to be ethically subjugated, what did it matter if one race occupied a supposedly different branch of human evolution than another?

Through the picking and choosing of various philosophical and scientific theories and findings, colonial authorities (and, through the eventual dissemination of this ideology throughout the populace, citizens of colonial powers in general) could craft a racialized ideology. This *new ideology*, which built on the previous works of early racial theorists and imperial philosophers, combined their *theories* with those of their more contemporary counterparts, served as an ideal means through which to “justify” a racially divided colonial empire.

To give a clear example of how this racialized ideology coalesced consider two of the largest strands of this ideology in tandem: colonial paternalism and a biologized conception of innate and indelible racial difference. By the mid-nineteenth century British observers had largely departed from a culturalist conception of West Africans based in a science that posited racial difference as one primarily based in physical and cultural environment. In other words, they believed in racial difference as being based in largely *external* phenomena. Decades of economic disadvantage during the slave era and cultural non-assimilation in West Africa, India, and the West Indies during the early colonial had jaded British colonialists originally invested constructed an “Empire of Enlightenment.” This frustration, combined with the need to fuel industry at home, made colonialists less likely to sympathize with West African peoples and cultures than they did during the slave era. To relate this assertion in a likely hypothetical, Richard Brew probably would not have moved into Annamaboe and married John Corrantee’s daughter if he had lived during the nineteenth rather than the eighteenth century.

The failure of these officials to implement British culture into West African societies wholesale (a venture Smith predicted would end in great frustration decades prior) made these officials receptive to alternative explanations as to why the locals refused to “progress” along their linear scale of Millsian societal progress despite their role as cultural “parents.” The racial science proposed by men like Knox, de Gorbineau, and Hegel, seemingly justified by Darwin’s theory of evolution and Galton’s application of this theory to human beings, provided these officials (and later British society as a whole) with a new way to justify their project. It was not that their racial “children” were actively *rejecting* their culture, but rather that they were simply *unable* to comprehend it. It was not that there was something wrong with the “*nurturè*” and the way in which the British were providing it, but an *immutable* aspect present in the *nature* of West Africans, cemented in the evolutionary process of natural selection that had seemingly stopped millennia ago, prevented them from comprehending the “lessons” their “parent” had been providing. Consequently it is highly unlikely that Sancho, Amo, Equiano, Cugoano, and other like them would have achieved the same level of political, academic, and commercial success that they did if they had begun pursuing it in the mid-nineteenth rather than the mid-eighteenth centuries.

A conflict, however, comes to mind when one considers the seemingly mutually exclusive properties present in the combination of the Mills’ conception of paternalism and racialized human biology. If one “parent” race was to raise a “child” race on the “scale of civilization” but the “child” was considered to be inherently and immutably lesser, how can it ever be raised to the same level as the “parent?” Moreover, at what point does the “parent” decide that the “child” has been raised as high as possible on this scale and deserves to be released into their racial “adulthood?” Who was to be the arbiter of these decisions?

The answers to these questions: in this new racial ideology there is no arbiter, as each race was composed of myriad members. The “child” race, held to be *innately* and *immutably* inferior to the “parent,” could never be raised to that highest level of society as defined on the scale employed by British colonialists. As such, the “child” was never to be released, instead existing in a state of eternal “tutelage” more aptly understood as subjugation to the “parent” for the sake of maintaining the colonizer’s material advantage in the occupied region at the colonized locals’ expense. Under this ideology of racism, heavily influenced by a belief in a biologized conception of race rooted in innate and inedible inferiority and the systematic abuse of power perpetrated by British colonialists against colonized peoples, occupied West African states would never be seen as worthy of the self-government put forth in the Parliamentary resolutions of 1865. Their people would become and remain indefinitely inferior in the perceptions of British colonial observers.

## Conclusion

Over the course of this study we have examined two British images of West Africa. The first was a “snapshot” of sorts that displayed British-Fante interactions in Annamaboe and the life and thoughts of Ignatius Sancho during the slave era. The second, of the life and thoughts of Dr. James “Africanus” Beale Horton and the incident surrounding the unjustified, racially motivated firing of Dr. John Farrell Easmon. We then analyzed these images through the use of two lenses, those of culturalism and racism as defined by Fredrickson. Moreover, we scrutinized some (though not all) of the more prominent theories of philosophers and scientists that went into the creation of these lenses in an attempt to gain a greater understanding as to how and why they existed (or how and why they did not) and become utilized by British people while regarding West Africa and Africans in the periods that they did. All of this was in service of a final question: why was there such a greater sense of “acceptance” in the eighteenth century than in the nineteenth between Britain and West Africa, and what are some of the ways in which this surprising step backward was “justified” by British colonialists?

What was found was that racism, as it was understood and defined over the course of this work, is a lens that cannot be accurately or unthinkingly applied to the period exemplified by the first two case studies. Modern audiences and studies that would seek to do so either misunderstand or fail to consider the context that necessarily informs the concept’s origins in British/West African relations between the slave and colonial eras in the given regions. Colonial racism, grounded in a biologized conception of racial difference that posited these differences as *innate* and *unbridgeable*, was contingent on the development of colonial paternalism (easily seen in the writings of James and John Stuart Mill) and the coalescence of early racial theories with those of mid-to-late nineteenth century informed by

Darwinian conceptions of evolution and Galtonian eugenics. Without this concept of paternalism, the innate and unbridgeable differences posited by nineteenth century biologized conceptions race would more than likely seen as simply the way in which a given society and people were structured with no real justification existing for imposing colonial dominion for material advantage. Similarly, without a biologized conception of racial difference, those that subscribed to this conception of paternalism would at some point be forced to release their “child” society into the community of nations or else lose the ability to “justify” colonial incursion in such a fashion without a heavy dose of cognitive dissonance. It is through the coalescence of this branch of imperial philosophy and racial theory that a racial ideology could be scavenged and made capable of justifying the consignment of a people to perpetual colonial subjugation disguised as the fulfillment of the White Man’s Burden.

The lens that brings first pair of case studies into focus, then, is that of culturalism. This lens, though still discriminatory in nature, is critically different than the first in that it *sincerely* offers the othered person or people the ability to overcome their discriminated status through the other’s *genuine* assimilation into the culturalist’s culture. As previously noted, several theories that concerned a biologized conception of race had existed as early as the late seventeenth century. However, it is critical to note that these theories, even when they posited racial hierarchies, were largely concerned with the physical differences between races and noted that there was no meaningful difference in the *inherent* mental or moral capabilities of each race. Rather, it was the *environment*, particularly the *culture*, to which an individual was exposed to that determined these facets of personhood and ability. Smith’s theory of societal development, though it certainly ranked societies based their level of development, did not judge those who occupied lower levels as being somehow *innately* inferior to those in the



upper. It instead affirmed the belief that the cultural practices and values of those at any level of society were the most rational responses possible of a given society to their circumstances. Similarly, his conception of the impartial spectator promoted an idea of acceptance, contextual awareness, and self-reflection prior a member of one society making judgments concerning the practices of another.

With this in mind, applying the lens of racism to Annamaboe and Sancho in the slave era and even to the early life of Horton is not only anachronistic but deleterious to the study of this era and its inhabitants. By anachronistically presuming that an innatist biologized conception of racial difference and colonial paternalism uniformly informed British perceptions of West Africans from the eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries, one removes the possibility of these relationships and figures existing. If this conception truly applied to this era, how could the British ever condescend to deal with the Fante and other West African groups, given the great economic advantages they had over British traders? How could Sancho, lacking the political and academic standing of men like Equiano, Cugoano, and Amo, ever become educated and grow to become the first African to vote in a British election or have his obituary published in a British paper? Why would Reverend James Beale have bothered to even consider opening a school in Freetown, much less travel the region and recruit a promising young African student like Horton? The answer, of course, is none of these things could happen if racism could be consistently employed while viewing these and other British-West African relationships during this era. The British would never have accepted their compliant role in Annamaboe, Sancho would never have become a successful head of staff or grocer, and Horton would never have had the opportunity to attend Edinburgh and earn his M.D. The lens of racism, applied in such a manner, serves only to obfuscate these more complex (and frankly more fascinating) realities through the

denial of the relationships that were built between British and West African peoples in this era. To bring this image into sharp focus and reveal the intricate workings and realities present in this period, the lens of culturalism must be employed.

Similarly, the application of culturalism to the study of the second set of studies is equally fallacious. By the late nineteenth century the ideology of racism had coalesced into its hateful whole. As the years progressed there was less and less opportunity for West Africans to advance under British colonialism, no matter how they might try to assimilate into British culture and internalize its social norms. The simple fact of their parentage and the culture in which they were born condemned them in the eyes of British observers, who now perceived them as innately and permanently inferior, unable to ever bridge the supposed gap between their peoples. Culturalism rests on the promise of genuine acceptance in return for assimilation. With no sincere acceptance on offer in this setting, culturalism cannot be said to be present. Racism, based in an indelible, biologically rooted conception of race, cracked and ultimately shattered this lens, replacing its underlying foundation of acceptance with one of unbridgeable difference in the eyes of British peoples perceiving images of West Africa and its inhabitants. Horton, once profiting from being perceived through a lens of culturalism, would never have experienced the racially motivated trials he was subjected to, nor would he have had reason to defend his people against biologized conceptions of race that condemned them to inferiority and subjugation. Easmon, achieving the rank of CMO, would never have had to defend himself against Governor Maxwell or be fired for daring to oppose the establishment of a blatantly racist precedent. West Africa, once simply different, became a lesser alien other, serving as a foil to the “moral and masterful” British Empire, which defined itself through the demonization of those that embodied what it was supposedly not. Chinua Achebe, in his seminal literary critique *An Image of Africa: Racism in*

*Conrad's Heart of Darkness*, conveys the weight of this shift, writing, "Africa is to Europe as the picture is to Dorian Gray – a carrier on whom the master unloads his physical and moral deformities so that he may go forward, erect and immaculate."<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> Achebe, Chinua. "An Image of Africa." *Research in African Literatures* 9, no. 1 (Spring, 1978): JSTOR. Accessed January 5, 2016. 13.

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