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The Father Of Pan-Africanism: Rev. Edward Wilmot Blyden

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Abstract: Rev. Edward Wilmot Blyden was born in the Virgin Islands, was ordained a Presbyterian minister, and became a leader in the Pan-Africanism movement. This paper argues that Rev. Blyden is an important figure within contemporary Black Church Studies because of his sui generis posture towards Islam, Pan-Africanism, and Black Nationalism. The felicitous Pan-African accolades attributed to Rev. Blyden by the Black Church are a result of his novel Afro-centric and inclusive interfaith hermeneutical posture and writings from the period of Reconstruction through the Progressive Era. Rev. Blyden's acceptance of non-Christian faith traditions within a Pan-African context supported and, more importantly, advanced an Afro-centric narrative promulgating non-Christian religions as viable Black religious identity alternatives.

Keywords: Pan-Africanism, Black Nationalism, Black Church and Edward Blyden

Introduction

"How we formulate or represent the past shapes our understanding and views of the present."
— Edward Said¹

Rev. Edward Wilmot Blyden (1832-1912) was an Afro-Presbyterian minister ordained in 1858. He was born in Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas to educated free blacks, Romeo and Judith Blyden, within the Danish West Indies.² When Blyden was born, an arguably opprobrious period within St. Thomas's proud island history, slavery had not yet been outlawed and, in fact, St. Thomas was generally acknowledged as being, "the major slave market in the Caribbean" and "most of the inhabitants of St. Thomas were black slaves."³ Blyden's injurious encounter with *Jim*

¹ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*. (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2012), 4.

² Serafin Méndez-Méndez and Gail Cueto. *Notable Caribbeans and Caribbean Americans: A Biographical Dictionary*. (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2003), 56-59; see also Benjamin Neuberger, "Early African Nationalism, Judaism and Zionism: Edward Wilmot Blyden." *Jewish Social Studies* 47, no. 2 (1985): 151-166.

³ Neuberger, "Early African Nationalism, Judaism and Zionism: Edward Wilmot Blyden," 151-156.

Crow, racial prejudice, bigotry, and biracialism over the course of his life left an indelible impression upon his theological reception and understanding of Christianity.

Today Blyden is acknowledged by a plurality of Black Church ministers as a seminal figure in Pan-African scholarship.⁴ Pan-Africanism, as an Afrocentric inspired movement, encourages black solidarity among people of African descent and, in so doing, historically traces itself back to Blyden. Blyden is considered a progenitor of Pan-Africanism because of his sui generis fusion of Islam, Christianity, and Black Nationalism within the Black Church.⁵

The felicitous Pan-African accolades attributed to Blyden by the Black Church are a result of his novel Afro-centric and inclusive interfaith hermeneutical demeanor and writings penned scholarship during Reconstruction, the Gilded Age, and the Progressive Era. For my scholarly interpretive analysis of Blyden's writing, I defer to Richard Palmer's classic definition of hermeneutics "[as] the science for the hidden meaning of texts as a broad study of understanding that appropriates lived experience, the event of understanding, as its starting point ... In this way, thinking is oriented to a fact, an event in all its concreteness, rather than to an idea; it becomes a phenomenology of the event of understanding."⁶

In *The Call of Providence to the Descendants of Africa in America* (1862), Blyden proffers an inclusive Afro-Christian interfaith textual exegesis of sacred text, one impacting the Black Church's nineteenth century reception, dialogue and understanding of the Other vis-à-vis Christian and Muslim interreligious discourse.⁷ I define the Other in a comprehensive sociopolitical sense where human identity is notably concerned with all manners of similarities and differences and, consequently, these artificial cultural constructs are then in turn politically expressed as unequal dichotomies of power to oppress,

⁴ I inclusively define the term, *Black*, as broadly referring to persons of color who claim any measure of African descent; see F. James Davis, *Who Is Black? One Nation's Definition*. (University Park, Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), ix-xi.

⁵ Marika Sherwood, *Origins of Pan-Africanism: Henry Sylvester Williams, Africa, and the African Diaspora*. (New York: Routledge, 2012): 115; see also Richard B. Turner, "Edward Wilmot Blyden and Pan Africanism: The Ideological Roots of Islam and Black Nationalism in the United States." *The Muslim World* 87, no. 2 (1997): 169-182.

⁶ Richard E. Palmer, *Hermeneutics*. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969), 40-68.

⁷ Wilson J. Moses, ed. *Classical Black Nationalism: From the American Revolution to Marcus Garvey*. (New York: NYU Press, 1996), 188-208.

control, subjugate or harangue the marginalized.⁸

Blyden's unconventional and inclusive interreligious posture towards non-Christian faith traditions, such as, Islam and Judaism drew swift theological ire from his nineteenth century Black Church contemporaries. Many Afro-Christian ministers publicly shared Blyden's racial misgivings regarding the societal evils associated with *Jim Crow*, but they never formally accepted any form of religious conversion away from Jesus as an appropriate theological response to racial injustice. The worldview or *nomos* held by many African American Christians during Blyden's lifetime was unabashedly Christocentric in its religious discernment, orientation, disposition, and temperament.⁹ Therefore, it was quite important for the Black Church to address through active public resistance the moral hypocrisy, pain and oppression of *Jim Crow* within a thoroughly Christian context.

The Black Church: An Afro-American Response to Oppression

The legislatures of the several states enacted laws and statutes, closing the pages of every book printed to the eyes of Negroes; barring the doors of every school room against them! And this was the systematized method of the intellect of the South, to stamp out the brains of the Negro! It was done, too, with the knowledge that the Negro had brain power. There was then no denial that the Negro had intellect. That denial was an afterthought. Besides, legislatures never pass laws forbidding the education of pigs, dogs, and horses. They pass such laws against the intellect of men.

— Rev. Alexander Crummell¹⁰

The *Black Church* is an historical evolution of the linguistic term, *Negro Church*, initially coined by the African American intellectual,

⁸ Stephen K. White, "Poststructuralism and Political Reflection." *Political Theory* 16, no. 2 (1988): 186-208.

⁹ The term '*nomos*' and '*nomoi*' (plural) was coined by Peter Berger to describe the discrete mental processes by which human beings organize their surrounding world. *Worldview* is a contemporaneous linguistic term that is roughly analogous to *nomos*; see Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*. (New York: Open Road Media, 2011), 19-25.

¹⁰ Alexander Crummell, In an Address titled, "The Attitude of the American Mind toward the Negro Intellect," Delivered before the American Negro Academy on December 29, 1887. *Occasional Papers of the American Negro Academy*. Vol. 3, Washington, DC: American Negro Academy. <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/emu.010000158452> (accessed September 3, 2018).

W.E.B. DuBois, in 1903.¹¹ The modern-day usage of the expression *Black Church* is predominately used to characterize those select Afro-Christian denominations that were marginalized in the nineteenth century by a white American society hostile to people of color.¹² I define people of color as a historically “complex and nuanced racial signifier” that when deployed is used to delimit, circumscribe and exclude particular individuals and racial groups who are not white from achieving agency.¹³

Blyden as an esteemed cleric affiliated with the Black Church reacted in a pacifistic manner to the nineteenth century proliferation of *Jim Crow* laws, court decisions, and social regulations handed down by an imperious white populace bent upon codifying and instantiating black exclusion from all forms of American citizenship.¹⁴ Blyden never engaged in active resistance (fight), a course of action chosen by the majority of the Black Church—against American segregation. Instead he chose voluntary self-exile to Africa and, in so doing, he accepted flight (passive resistance) as his oppositional response to the American moral and legal injustices promulgated through *Jim Crow* laws.¹⁵

The African American endeavor to secure racial justice, agency, and equality resulting from discriminatory laws impelled a certain dissenting group of the Black Church, such as the *Back-to-Africa*

¹¹ W.E.B. DuBois, *The Negro Church: Report of a Social Study Made under the Direction of Atlanta University*; Together with the Proceedings of the Eighth Conference for the Study of the Negro Problems, held at Atlanta University, May 26th, 1903 (Atlanta: Atlanta University Press, 1903), ii.; see also Barbara D. Savage, “W. E. B. DuBois and ‘the Negro Church.’” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 568 (2000): 235-249; see also Phil Zuckerman, .ed., *DuBois on Religion*. (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2000), 2-6.

¹² Historical Afro-American Christian Denominations include: National Baptist Convention, National Baptist Convention of America, Progressive, National Convention, African Methodist Episcopal Church, African Methodist Episcopal, Zion Church, Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, Church of God in Christ, and select Afro-Catholic Church parishes; see Benjamin E. Mays and Joseph W. Nicholson. *The Negro's Church*. (New York: Arno Press, 1969). Originally published in New York: Institute of Social and Religious Research, 1933. 214-215.

¹³ E. Patrick Johnson. *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 3.; see also Devon W. Carbado and Mitu Gulati. *Acting White? Rethinking Race in Post-Racial America*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013),1-20.; see also Reni Eddo-Lodge, *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race: The Sunday Times Bestseller*. (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017), ix-xii; see also Ellis Cashmore and James Jennings. *Racism: Essential Readings*. (London: SAGE Publications, 2001), xiii-xv.; see also Richard Rothstein. *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*. (New York: Liveright Publishing, 2017), vii-xvii.

¹⁴ C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya. *The Black Church in the African American Experience*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 92-93.

¹⁵ Thomas W. Livingston. *Education and Race: A Biography of Edward Wilmot Blyden*. (Berkeley: Glendessary Press, 1975), 90-196.

contingent which Blyden led, to consider with sobriety the possibility that African Americans should repatriate themselves to Africa. Blyden problematically asserted that increased knowledge of Islam induced blacks to become better Christians because, "Mohammedans may learn much from Christians, and yet remain Mohammedans; that Christians have something at least to learn from Mohammedans, which will make them not less but more Christian than they were before."¹⁶ Blyden's unconventional religious posture created significant theological dissension within the ecclesiastical ranks of the nineteenth century Black Church which sought to robustly resist *Jim Crow* within America.¹⁷

Blyden died in Sierra Leone bereft of the institutional support of the Black Church. Such was likely an outcome of his fickle moral judgment to not ally himself with his fellow Black Church ministers in actively confronting racism during *Jim Crow*.¹⁸ Historian, Robin D.G. Kelley, convincingly argues that America during *Jim Crow* was a, "profoundly undemocratic society," where blacks, "lived and struggled in a world that resembled, at least from their vantage point, a fascist or, more appropriately, a colonial situation," and, as a consequence, within the social imagination inhabited by Blyden racial segregation, intolerance and prejudice figuratively functioned as the biblical (*Book of Exodus*) moral flight impetus for the Afro-American migration to Africa.¹⁹

Blyden as an Afro-Zionist was zealously adamant in his conviction that America proffered no rose-colored future for people of African descent. This is why he embraced a Hebrew Bible narrative similar to

¹⁶ The *Back-to-Africa* movement, also known as *Black/Afro Zionism*, originated in the nineteenth century and advocated that all African Americans return to the land of their ancestors, Africa; see also Kenneth C. Barnes. *Journey of Hope: The Back-to-Africa Movement in Arkansas in the Late 1800s*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 182.; see also Edward W. Blyden. *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race*. (London: Whittingham & Co. 1st Edition 1887; 2nd Edition.1888), 73-74.; see also Stephen Middleton. "The Fugitive Slave Crisis in Cincinnati, 1850-1860: Resistance, Enforcement, and Black Refugees." *The Journal of Negro History* 72, no. 1/2 (1987): 20-32; see also Kevin Shillington., ed. *Encyclopedia of African History: A - G*. (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2005), 259-261.; see also Hollis R. Lynch, "Edward W. Blyden: Pioneer West African Nationalist." *The Journal of African History* 6, no. 3 (1965): 373-388.

¹⁷ Nikki L.M. Brown and Barry M. Stentiford. *The Jim Crow Encyclopedia: Greenwood Milestones in African American History*. (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2008), 398-399.

¹⁸ Hakim Adi and Marika Sherwood. *Pan-African History: Political Figures from Africa and the Diaspora since 1787*. (London: Routledge, 2003), 11-15.

¹⁹ I define the linguistic term, *social imagination*, in the discreet sociological sense promulgated by C. Wright Mills. He argues that possessing a social imagination is having the ability to "grasp the interplay between man and society, biography and history, of self and world."; see also C. Wright Mills. *The Sociological Imagination*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 4.; see also Robin D.G. Kelley. "We Are Not What We Seem: Rethinking Black Working-Class Opposition in the Jim Crow South." *The Journal of American History* 80, no. 1 (1993): 75-112.

that of the Israelites vis-à-vis Egypt. Black Zionism is closely derived from the same root impulse, historical motivation, and passion as Jewish Zionism, the moral desire of an oppressed people to seek “freedom” in its most expansive and broadest sense. As a result, Afro-Zionism very much advocates for black emigration to Africa.²⁰ Blyden’s affection for the Jewish people, “[I have] the deepest possible interest in the current history of the Jews—especially in that marvelous movement called *Zionism*,” affirmed his inclusive interreligious position.²¹

The continent of Africa for Blyden figuratively represented both a physical and spiritual Israel or promised land which could deliver blacks from the racial animus brought about by *Jim Crow*. Unlike Blyden’s problematic response concerning Afro-American escape to the continent of Africa, the endemic color-line discrimination perpetrated by whites against Afro-Americans during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era prompted a majority of Black Church ministers to adopt a defiant tone and posture. For example, Alexander Crummell asserted, “we must resist the attempt to make us a caste of servants in the land.”²² The Black Church as a discrete body sought to actively defy white oppression by remaining within America and thereby continuing the fight for racial justice by all means possible.

America: Being Black in the Time of Jim Crow

From the lessons he every day receives, the Negro unconsciously imbibes the conviction that to be a great man he must be like the white man. He is not brought up—however he may desire it—to be the companion, the equal, the comrade of the white man, but his imitator, his ape, his parasite. To be himself in a country where everything ridicules him, is to be nothing—less, worse than nothing ... Every intelligent Negro, in the land of his exile, must feel that he walks upon the face of God’s earth a physical and moral incongruity.²³

Christianity during *Jim Crow* religiously subjugated many Afro-Americans into adopting a subaltern status within America. In many

²⁰ Neuberger, “Early African Nationalism, Judaism and Zionism: Edward Wilmot Blyden,” 151-156; see also Eric J. Sundquist, E.J. *Strangers in the Land: Blacks, Jews, Post-Holocaust America*. (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2009), 135.

²¹ Harold Brackman, “Jews, African Americans and Israel: The Ties That Bind.” *Simon Wiesenthal Center/Museum of Tolerance* (2010): 2.

²² Gregory U. Rigsby, ed., *Alexander Crummell: Pioneer in Nineteenth-Century Pan-African Thought*. (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1987), 166.

²³ Blyden, *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race*, 44.

churches, African Americans were not permitted to worship with whites on Sunday. Many white Christians attempted to deny blacks any Christian agency. White Christian ministers posited the *Jim Crow* inspired racial imbalance as a Divine Act of God. They used scripture verses such as Ephesians 6:5, "slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as you obey Christ" and Titus 2:9, "tell slaves to be submissive to their masters and to give satisfaction in every respect; they are not to talk back" to support their racial convictions.²⁴ Black inferiority was legitimized in church pulpits. One white minister asserted, "there is a vast difference between them and us, as great as white is from black, and no sort of device can conceal this. The black skin, the flattened nose and kinky hair are hated by the blacks themselves, and every one of them would change to white people if they could. I do not blame them for this but let us remember that this difference in race is the work of God and not of man."²⁵

Black Church ministers, like Blyden, astutely observed how traditional American Christianity, as authoritatively represented by the white Christian Church establishment, attempted to obfuscate the structural inequalities and realities ascribed to *Jim Crow*. The American Christian Church through its shrewd deployment of a prejudicial religious model *celestializing* racial discrimination, segregation and bigotry rendered its Eurocentric brand of Christianity as spiritually normative, cosmic, dominant and beyond reproach.²⁶

²⁴ Donald G. Mathews, *Religion in the Old South*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), xv-xvii and 151-52.; see also Janet D. Cornelius, *Slave Missions and the Black Church in the Antebellum South* (Columbia, University of South Carolina Press, 1999), 2.; see also Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America, *New Revised Standard Version Bible: Catholic Edition*, copyright © 1989, 1991 and 1993. The Bible has the imprimatur of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (September 12, 1991) and the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (October 15, 1991).

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians+6%3A5&version=NRSVCE> and <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=titus+2%3A9&version=NRSVCE> (accessed September 3, 2018).

²⁵ Rev. John Moody McCaleb was a white Christian minister who did missionary work in the Far East; see John M. McCaleb, "Mission Letter." *The Japan Daily Mail*, November 30, 1895, 587-588.

<https://books.google.com/books?id=KRVDQAIAAJ&pg=PA588&ots=jRc7EyVnn9&dq=McCaleb%2C%20J.%20M.%20Mission%20Letter.%20The%20Japan%20Daily%20Mail%20C%201895&pg=PA587#v=onepage&q=McCaleb,%20J.%20M.%20Mission%20Letter.%20The%20Japan%20Daily%20Mail,%201895&f=false> (accessed September 3, 2018).

²⁶ I define the linguistic term, *celestialization*, in the Marxist sense elucidated by Roger Keesing in his critique of Clifford Geertz's *The Interpretation of Cultures*. Keesing asserts the anthropological model attributed to Geertz disingenuously disguises and mystifies the structural inequalities and realities ascribed to power and privilege within human culture—Geertz interprets the prevailing dominant social order as normative and beyond reproach; see Roger M. Keesing and Andrew Strathern, *Cultural Anthropology: A*

Afrocentrism, Black Nationalism, and Emigration

According to historian James Sweet, *Afrocentricity* was a nineteenth century intellectual idea first coined by W.E.B. DuBois in his proposed *Encyclopedia Africana*. Afrocentricity it is an Afro-American inspired ideology defiantly created in response to *Jim Crow*.²⁷ As corroborated by African Studies scholar, Molefi Kete Asante, "Afrocentricity is a frame of reference wherein phenomena are viewed from the perspective of the African person. The Afrocentric approach seeks in every situation the appropriate centrality of the African person."²⁸

The actual linguistic term, *Afrocentric*, per Sweet, "has a long and often misunderstood history." DuBois audaciously communicated to his African American audience how his proposed *Encyclopedia Africana* would be "unashamedly Afro-centric" in focus.²⁹ Sweet furthermore contends that "Afrocentrism has remained remarkably durable over the past two hundred years."³⁰ Asante resurrected the powerfully provocative term in his seminal 1988 work, *Afrocentricity*, injecting new energy, allure and vitality into a classic DuBoisian approach to examine people of color and their descendants.³¹

Afrocentricity as currently deployed within the academy advocates the affranchising notion of a noble black heritage and personality distinctly Africanist in character. It is predominately concerned with propagating Afro-American self-determination, self-respect and black agency. According to Ama Mazama, Afrocentrism generally renounces, opposes and masks white (Christian) European religio-cultural influences while accentuating a proud pan-Africanist ideology steeped in black nationalism.³²

American black nationalism as promulgated by Blyden arose from a nineteenth century injurious Black Church encounter with *Jim Crow*. The

Contemporary Perspective (San Diego: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1998), 296-298.

²⁷ James Sweet, "Afrocentrism." *Encyclopedia of African-American Culture and History*. *Encyclopedia.com*. <https://www.encyclopedia.com/history/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/afrocentrism> (accessed September 3, 2018).

²⁸ Manning Marable and Leith Mullings, ed., *Let Nobody Turn Us Around: Voices of Resistance, Reform, and Renewal*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009), 547.

²⁹ Sweet, "Afrocentrism."

³⁰ *Ibid*.

³¹ Molefi K. Asante, *Afrocentricity*, (Trenton, Africa World Press, 1988), 1-126; see also Wilson J. Moses, *Afrotopia: The Roots of African American Popular History*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 2.

³² Ama Mazama, "The Afrocentric Paradigm: Contours and Definitions." *Journal of Black Studies* 31, no. 4 (2001): 387-405.

lynching of innocent black men, women, and children led Blyden to creatively assert a "position of a linear connection [existing] between Egyptians and African Americans" and "repeating the [black nationalist] argument that Egypt spawned Greek civilization."³³ Black nationalists, like Blyden, "mobilized Homer, Herodotus and the Bible to prove that Pharaonic Egypt was Black," and, in so doing, Blyden shrewdly understood the sociopolitical need to reconstruct Greek civilization as being "derived from Egypt ... in short, from Africa."³⁴ I define the discrete linguistic term, black nationalism, in a manner similar to that first promulgated by Kenyatta Fleming, "[as] an ideology that promotes black autonomy and control of black institutions that ultimately seeks the establishment of an independent black nation-state."³⁵ Fleming labels the first period within black nationalism as *Classical Black Nationalism* which originated in the 1800s with Blyden.³⁶

Blyden as an ardent proponent of African American national and cultural identity unceasingly advocated black pride, unity and self-determination because he believed black nationalist thinking elevated black consciousness and self-esteem, and, given these points, was spiritually rooted within a vibrant Pan-Africanist nomos that was audaciously and defiantly black.³⁷ According to Judson M. Lyons, in Blyden's many writings he passionately and unequivocally "insisted on the equality and the uniqueness of black people. He felt they should not waste time mimicking Europeans ... Africans should concentrate on perfecting their special gifts. For these ideas, Blyden has been called the father of African nationalism."³⁸

Teshale Tibebu asserts that black nationalism arose within nineteenth century America because of the peculiar etymology

³³ Sweet, "Afrocentrism.," see also William F. Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 1-16.; see also Christopher Waldrep, *Lynching in America: A History in Documents*. (New York: NYU Press, 2006), 1-25. see also James H. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2011), 1-29.

³⁴ Neuberger, "Early African Nationalism, Judaism and Zionism: Edward Wilmot Blyden," 151-156; see also Edward W. Blyden, Archives of Brigham Young University. *The Significance of Liberia: An Address Delivered in the Senate Chamber*. Monrovia, Liberia. (Liverpool: John Richard & Sons Publisher, 1906).
<https://archive.org/details/significanceofli00blyd> (accessed September 3, 2018).

³⁵ Kenyatta J. Fleming, *The History of Black Nationalism and Internal Factors That Prevented the Founding of an Independent Black Nation-State*. (Atlanta: Clark Atlanta University, 2008), iii.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Moses, *Afrotopia: The Roots of African American Popular History*, 131; see also Mazama., "The Afrocentric Paradigm: Contours and Definitions," 387-405.

³⁸ Judson M. Lyons, "Edward Blyden: Liberian Independence and African Nationalism, 1903-1909." *Phylon* (1960-) 41, no. 1 (1980): 36.

associated with the distinct linguistic terms, *African*, *Negro*, and *Africa*. Tibebe argues the aforementioned grammatical units of language used during *Jim Crow* were artificially fabricated "at the lower deck of the transatlantic slave ship," and, as a result, "the only name assigned to the captives on those European ships was as foreign as it was racial and totalitarian: *African*. Those on the upper deck of the slave ship were the Europeans, in contrast with those whom they kept in shackles in the lower deck, whom they called *Africans* or *Negroes*."³⁹

Blyden and Black Zionists posited that the continent of Africa as the authentic fountainhead of black spirituality and, as such, people of white European descent were covertly identified as the foreign interlopers and obstructionists to black self-enfranchisement, liberty, freedom and pan-African development.⁴⁰ Blyden's Zionist and nationalist sympathizers sought physical isolation and distance from nineteenth century *Jim Crow* through a mass exodus to Africa and, in so doing, they espoused a problematic black escapist mentalité favoring passive resistance to human oppression. Blyden's anguish concerning black-white race relations within the nineteenth century was a direct result of him witnessing the "enslavement, exploitation, discrimination and degradation of blacks in the Americas."⁴¹

Race Relations during Jim Crow

Blyden was in spiritual despair because blacks within nineteenth century white America were abject "victims of poverty, prejudice and discrimination" and, consequently, he felt miscegenation of any sort between blacks and whites was fraught with dangerous peril.⁴² He believed that African American self-respect precluded racial mixing. Blyden asserted, "America must learn to believe that the Negro can exist

³⁹ Teshale Tibebe, *Edward Wilmot Blyden and the Racial Nationalist Imagination*. (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2012), 4-5; see Marcus Rediker, *The Slave Ship: A Human History*. (New York: Penguin Group, 2007), 41-72.; see also Vumbi Y. Mudimbé, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), ix-xii.

⁴⁰ Robert W. July, *The Origins of Modern African Thought: Its Development in West Africa During the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2004), i-xi; see also Tibebe, *Edward Wilmot Blyden and the Racial Nationalist Imagination*, 31-32.

⁴¹ Neuberger, "Early African Nationalism, Judaism and Zionism: Edward Wilmot Blyden," 151-156; see also Edward W. Blyden, *The Origin and Purpose of African Colonization. A Discourse Delivered at the 66th Anniversary of the American Colonization Society*, Washington, D.C., January 14, 1883 Archives of The Johns Hopkins University Sheridan Libraries. <https://archive.org/details/originpurposeofa00blyd> (accessed September 4, 2018).; see also July, *The Origins of Modern African Thought: Its Development in West Africa During the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, iv-viii.

⁴² Raymond L. Hall, ed., *Black Separatism and Social Reality: Rhetoric and Reason*. (Elmsford: Elsevier Science, 2013), 4.

and prosper without the aid of white blood in his veins. Now that slavery is abolished in America, and the blacks are being educated, it is to be hoped that all good men will discourage as far as possible miscegenation."⁴³ Repatriation back to Africa presented itself to Blyden as the only viable sociopolitical solution for black cultural preservation within nineteenth century *Jim Crow* America.⁴⁴

In supporting emigration to Africa, Blyden also advanced a problematic doctrine of black-white racial separation that preserved "the homogeneity of the races and their cultures" and, in so doing, he exhibited a peculiar form of Afro-Christian spirituality immanently hostile to biracialism and mixed-race marriages.⁴⁵ He ardently maintained, "Africa is not just about the past—it contains the solutions to the ideological crisis of our [modern] industrialized world. There is a second scramble for Africa going on, not for material wealth (though that still continues) but for our culture and way of life, our understanding of the environment, our spirituality. On urban frontlines all over the world: In America, Europe and Africa itself, Africans must awake to the realization that our disintegrating culture is the key to the future of the whole world. All Africans must at the deepest possible level, seek out, regain, rejuvenate, re-create and re-live African lives and customs. It is not, as some might think, a return to the past, it is a return to the wholistic future of humankind."⁴⁶ Blyden desired Africa to be wholly free of all non-African (i.e., European) influences.

As an ardent advocate of black emigration to Africa, Blyden was confident that the physical and spiritual salvation of African Americans lay with permanent resettlement within Africa and, as such, unconditionally entailed conscious acquiescence to the following three black nationalism-oriented presuppositions:

1. Freedom and sovereignty from all forms of white European power, influence and culture

⁴³ Smithsonian Institution, *Report of the Board of Regents, Volume 21* "Letter from Blyden to Professor Henry of the Smithsonian Institution: On Mixed Races in Liberia." (Washington: Smithsonian, 1870), 388.

⁴⁴ Teshale Tibebe, *The Antinomies of Edward Wilmot Blyden: Providence, Progress, and the Project of Black Racial Nationalism* (May 2, 2013). <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2259768> (accessed September 4, 2018).

⁴⁵ Christiane Fioupou, ed., *Seuils: Les Littératures Africaines Anglophones*. (Toulouse: Presses universitaires du Mirail, 2000), 89.

⁴⁶ Blyden, *The Origin and Purpose of African Colonization. A Discourse Delivered at the 66th Anniversary of the American Colonization Society*; see also July, *The Origins of Modern African Thought: Its Development in West Africa During the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, 208-233.

2. The formal establishment of a fully independent African nation bereft of white European character or substance
3. Societal adoption, support, and embrace of Africanist norms, customs, attitudes and indigenous faith traditions that was unambiguously black in nature⁴⁷

Many nineteenth century white Christian scientists such as Francis Galton, Joseph Arthur de Gobineau, Franz Pruner, and Herbert Spencer, during *Jim Crow* believed in prejudicial racial distinctions and, by so doing, argued blacks belonged to a dissimilar human species that was inferior in terms of human evolutionary development and, consequently, "were made unequal by God."⁴⁸ Curiously, Blyden because of his problematic racist-oriented notions concerning the "natural enmity between races" and "racial purity" agreed with such bizarre white racist propaganda and, as a result, he accepted such problematic hominoid differentiation based upon skin pigmentation.⁴⁹ Blyden vociferously asserted that "the African is a spiritual and ministerial race. The European is an imperial and conquering race. He is by calling the statesman, the soldier, the sailor, the policeman of humanity. The Negro is the protégé, the child, the attendant, the servant, if you like, of this dominant race." In statements such as this, Blyden confusingly advanced contentious sociocultural and anthropological constructions of race.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Edward W. Blyden, "The Negro in Ancient History" in *Repository*, XLV (1869), 161-172; see also Frenkel, M. Yu. "Edward Blyden and the Concept of African Personality." *African Affairs* 73, no. 292 (1974), 283-284; see also Edward W. Blyden, *Hope for Africa: A Discourse on the Three Needs of Liberia*. (London: C.M. Philipps Printers, 1908), 5; see also Lynch, Hollis R. *Edward Wilmot Blyden: Pan-Negro Patriot, 1832-1912*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), 248-252.; see also Edward W. Blyden, "Africa for Africans," *Fraser's Magazine*, August 1878, 178-196.

⁴⁸ Rutledge M. Dennis, "Social Darwinism, Scientific Racism, and the Metaphysics of Race." *The Journal of Negro Education* 64, no. 3 (1995): 243-52; see also Frenkel, "Edward Blyden and the Concept of African Personality," 277-289; see also Smedley, Audrey. "The History of the Idea of Race ... and Why It Matters." This paper was presented at the conference *Race, Human Variation and Disease: Consensus and Frontiers*, sponsored by the American Anthropological Association (AAA) and funded by the Ford Foundation. The conference was held March 14-17, 2007 in Warrenton, Virginia. *The American Anthropological Association* (2007), 1-9; see also Gustav Jahoda. *Images of Savages: Ancient Roots of Modern Prejudice in Western Culture*. (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2015), 51-128; see Wulf D. Hund, and Alana Lentini. ed., *Racism and Sociology*. (Münster: LIT Verlag Fresnostr, 2014), 23-68.

⁴⁹ Frenkel, "Edward Blyden and the Concept of African Personality," 279.

⁵⁰ Nathan I. Huggins, Martin Kilson and Daniel M. Fox. ed., *Key Issues in the Afro-American Experience*. (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971), 233-258; see also Edith Holden, *Blyden of Liberia: An Account of the Life and Labors of Edward Wilmot Blyden, L.L.D., as Recorded in Letters and in Print*. (New York: Vantage Press, 1967), 698-891; see also Frenkel, "Edward Blyden and the Concept of African Personality," 279-281.

Blyden viewed racially mixed persons as a religious and social abomination. His biographer, T. W. Livingston noted that "Blyden was very much a product of his time, seeing cultural differences explained in terms of biological causation."⁵¹ Blyden argued that "mulattoes are not part of the Negro race any more than the Negro is a part of the Caucasoid race and Mongoloid race."⁵²

The public reception of Blyden's problematic mixed-race nomos by the nineteenth century Black Church was at best, lukewarm, because Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. DuBois, and other luminaries within the African American community were widely recognized as the biological children of black mothers and white fathers.⁵³

Edward Blyden: Father of Pan-Africanism

During his youth spent in St. Thomas, Blyden developed close intercultural ties with the "four hundred strong Jewish community which produced such expatriate luminaries as Impressionist painter Camille Pissarro," and, by so doing, "struck up a youthful friendship with David Cardoze. Later as a rabbi, Cardoze taught Blyden the rudiments of Hebrew which he then subsequently mastered."⁵⁴ Blyden's positive interreligious childhood experiences on St. Thomas profoundly influenced his inclusive Pan-African interfaith stance towards other religions and enabled him to be theologically open to the possibility of other religions as spiritually analogous to Christianity. Therefore, it is not a coincidence that Blyden's 1898 publication of *The Jewish Question* was dedicated to his dear Jewish childhood friend, Louis Solomon.⁵⁵

Unlike his nineteenth century Black Church ministerial counterparts, many of whom had no encounters with other faith traditions outside of Christianity, Blyden's positive childhood interreligious experience with Judaism left him intellectually curious

⁵¹ Livingston, *Education and Race: A Biography of Edward Wilmot Blyden*, 109; see Lynch, Hollis R. *Selected Letters of Edward Wilmot Blyden. The Caribbean, Historical and Cultural Perspectives*. (Millwood: KTO Press, 1977), 321-423; see also Elise Lemire. "Miscegenation": *Making Race in America*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 1-10; see also Frenkel, "Edward Blyden and the Concept of African Personality," 279-281.

⁵² John S. David, *The American Colonization Society: And the Founding of the First African Republic*. (Bloomington: iUniverse, 2014), Chapter XV.

⁵³ Gregory Stephens. In *On Racial Frontiers: The New Culture of Frederick Douglass, Ralph Ellison, and Bob Marley* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 108.

⁵⁴ Brackman, "Jews, African Americans and Israel: The Ties That Bind," 4.

⁵⁵ Blyden, Edward W. *The Jewish Question*. (Liverpool: Lionel Hart & Company, 1898), 5-8; see Michael J.C. Echeruo, "Edward W. Blyden, 'The Jewish Question,' and the Diaspora Theory and Practice." *Journal of Black Studies* 40, no. 4 (2010): 544-65.

about other religions. Blyden, "took deep interest in the prolific mosaic of differences that was Africa. He spoke dozens of African languages, including Arabic, so that he could communicate with Africans in their own tongue ... he never fell into the lazy temptation of collapsing all Africans into the simplistic category of being just one people."⁵⁶

Blyden's dark complexion became a contentious matter when he endeavored to pursue an American theological education. Blyden was denied formal admission to enroll at Rutgers and two other Christian seminaries because, "despite his obvious academic ability, purely on the grounds of his skin color he was refused admission."⁵⁷ Blyden, upon his failure to gain admittance, was contemplating returning to St. Thomas when he came under the influence of Old School Presbyterians, John B. Pinney and Walter Lowrie, who urged him to emigrate to Liberia and thereby continue his theological education at the Presbyterian sponsored school in Monrovia.⁵⁸

The fateful encounter with Pinney and Lowrie, prominent lay members of the Old School Presbyterian Church, introduced Blyden to the Western Foreign Missionary Society movement, and, in so doing, enabled him to eventually become ordained as a Presbyterian minister.⁵⁹ Ironically, the Western Foreign Missionary Society movement was a back-to-Africa missionary movement started by white Presbyterians to send black ministers to Liberia to evangelize indigenous Africans.⁶⁰ Unfortunately, Blyden's meeting with the Western Foreign Missionary Society also indoctrinated him with the subversive goals of the American Colonization Society, a repatriationist group founded by whites opposed to the existence of free blacks within America. As a result, Blyden's problematic sentiments concerning, "race and his increasing antipathy

⁵⁶ Tibebe, *Edward Wilmot Blyden and the Racial Nationalist Imagination*, 17.; see also Hollis R. Lynch, "A Black Nineteenth-Century Response to Jews and Zionism: The Case of Edward Wilmot Blyden." In *Jews in Black Perspectives: A Dialogue*, edited by Joseph R. Washington Jr., (Lanham: University Press of America, 1989), 42-54.

⁵⁷ James R. Lewis and Sarah M. Lewis. ed., *Sacred Schisms: How Religions Divide*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 316; see also Alfred Emmanuel Brimah Worley, "An Historical Analysis of Edward Wilmot Blyden, 1821-1912." *Ph.D. Dissertation*, (Atlanta: Clark Atlanta University, 2015), 11.

⁵⁸ Moses N. Moore. "Edward Wilmot Blyden: From Old School Presbyterian Missionary to Minister of Truth." *The Journal of Presbyterian History* 75, no. 2 (1997): 103-118; see also Robert E. Speer. *Presbyterian Foreign Missions: An Account of the Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication and Sabbath-School Work, 1901), 20-23.

⁵⁹ Wilbert R. Shenk, ed., *North American Foreign Missions, 1810-1914: Theology, Theory, and Policy*. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing., 2004), 138-140.
⁶⁰ Joseph J. Kwiat, ed., *History of American Missions to the Heathen, from Their Commencement to the Present Time*. (Worcester: Spooner & Howland, 1840), 570-577.

against mulattoes," became part of his nomos.⁶¹ Blyden's failed marriage to Sarah Yates, a biracial woman, coupled with his extramarital affair with the biracial wife of Liberia's president, Edward J. Roy, indelibly cemented his personal revulsion and hostility towards mulattos.⁶²

Rev. Blyden: Sixty-Two Years in Africa

During the course of his sixty-two-year career as a black minister, diplomat, academic, journalist and writer advocating black emigration to Africa, Blyden became quite well known within Afro-Christian congregational circles, especially in the South among the poor and disenfranchised for his effective oratorical skills. In fact, "Blyden was such an effective spokesperson for emigration to Liberia that an imposter in Arkansas was able to defraud emigration-minded men and women in Poplar Grove, Holly Grove, and other locales throughout the state" for thousands of dollars simply through his shrewd imitation of Blyden's rhetorical style and emigrationist posture.⁶³ Blyden supported Afro-American emigration to Africa because he earnestly felt other faith traditions, such as Islam, were more amenable to black freedom than American Christianity.⁶⁴ Blyden's profound admiration for Islam was clear. He stated, "Islam is superior to Christianity ... Islam is free from racial prejudices and restrictions ... its people safe from physical destruction."⁶⁵ Blyden believed that Islam was an authentic African religion.

Blyden's acquiescence to the theological possibility of other indigenous Africanist faith traditions, for example, Judaism and Islam as being a suitable spiritual alternative to Christianity matured in his thought when he visited other places outside the continent of Africa. For example, while traveling within Jerusalem in 1866, he is rumored to have

⁶¹ John M. Giggie. *After Redemption: Jim Crow and the Transformation of African American Religion in the Delta, 1875-1915*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 3-22; see also Allan E. Yarema, *American Colonization Society: An Avenue to Freedom*: (Lanham: University Press of America, 2006), 70-73.

⁶² Moore, "Edward Wilmot Blyden: From Old School Presbyterian Missionary to Minister of Truth," 103-118.

⁶³ Edward W. Blyden. *A Vindication of the African Race; Being a Brief Examination of the Arguments in Favour of African Inferiority* (Monrovia: G. Killian, 1857), 1-37; see also Michelle Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny after Reconstruction*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 37.

⁶⁴ Rev. Blyden was mistaken in his theological assumption that Islam disapproved of slavery during his lifetime—slavery was officially disavowed within the Muslim world during the late nineteenth through the mid-twentieth century; see Andrew Rippin. *The Islamic World*. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 45-46.

⁶⁵ Edward W. Blyden. "West Africa before Europe." *Journal of the Royal African Society*. Volume 2, no. 8 (1903): 72-73; see also Turner, "Edward Wilmot Blyden and Pan Africanism: The Ideological Roots of Islam and Black Nationalism in the United State," 169-182.

remarked upon his taking leave of the Jewish homeland, "I left the land with deep regret at the brevity of my brief sojourn in it." Here Blyden demonstrated his tolerant and inclusive interreligious disposition.⁶⁶

In the 1880s, Blyden started to evince signs of disaffection with Christianity with his publication of *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race* in 1888. In this text, he asserted that both Islam and Christianity were positively inclined monotheistic faith traditions with the sub-rosa caveat that he preferred the spirit of Islam to a greater extent than that of Christianity.⁶⁷ Blyden also communicated in writing with his fellow African American pastors how "Mohammedanism [Islam] has left the native, master of himself and of his home," and, consequently, it was a felicitous faith tradition for African Americans.⁶⁸

Blyden's extensive foreign correspondences with his fellow ordained Christian ministers ensured that he was never theologically isolated from the lively nineteenth century religious discourse occurring around him. For example, his numerous visits during the 1890s to Afro-American Presbyterian congregations as illustrated by *The Elements of Permanent Influence: Discourse Delivered in the Fifteenth Street Presbyterian Church, Washington, D. C., Sunday, February 16, 1890*, he reified the African continent as having faithfully preserved Christianity, Judaism, and Islam for all of humanity and, by so doing, he asserted that "progress for Africa was possible if it first revived its foreign relations by getting back its [black] sons and daughters from the Americas."⁶⁹

Unfortunately, Blyden's ministerial disposition towards Christianity in 1901 had irrevocably taken a turn for the worst when he formally accepted a civil servant position with the British government in Sierra Leone as the Director of Islamic Education.⁷⁰ Blyden's official

⁶⁶ Edward W. Blyden. *From West Africa to Palestine*. (Freetown: T.J. Sawyer Publisher, 1873), 200.

⁶⁷ Blyden, *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race*, 277-297.; see also Blyden, *The Origin and Purpose of African Colonization. A Discourse Delivered at the 66th Anniversary of the American Colonization Society*; see also Richard B. Turner, *Islam in the African-American Experience*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 51-59.

⁶⁸ Edward W. Blyden, "Mohammedanism and the Negro Race." *Methodist Quarterly Review*. January (1877): 100-126.

⁶⁹ Edward W. Blyden, *The Elements of Permanent Influence: A Discourse Delivered at the 15th Street Presbyterian Church*. (Washington: Pendleton Printers, 1890). http://www.columbia.edu/~hcb8/EWB_Museum/Influence.html (accessed September 4, 2018).

⁷⁰ J.D.Y Peel. *Christianity, Islam, and Orisa-Religion: Three Traditions in Comparison and Interaction*. (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), 140; see also Ousman M. Kobo. *Unveiling Modernity in Twentieth-Century West African Islamic Reforms*. (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 86.

renouncement of his ecclesial ordination within the Presbyterian Church, occurring soon after his British posting in Sierra Leone, permanently abnegated any hope of ever being welcomed back as an Afro-Christian minister in good standing with the Black Church.⁷¹ While director of Islamic Education in Freetown, Sierra Leone, Blyden also trained many Muslim youth, most of whom became the founders and leaders of the Progressive Islamic Organization and, as a result, he was viewed with increasing skepticism by his Christian colleagues.⁷²

Blyden continued to disparage Christianity within Africa. For example, his statement that "wherever Christianity has been able to establish itself, with the exception of Liberia, foreigners have taken possession of the country, and, in some places rule the natives with oppressive rigor" was not seen as especially supportive of Christian evangelization and served to theologically alienate him from his Black Church contemporaries.⁷³ Blyden's disaffection with Christianity provoked him to remark that "the Mohammedan Negro is a much better Mohammedan than the Christian Negro is a Christian, because the Muslim Negro, as a learner, is a disciple, not an imitator ... the learning acquired by a disciple gives him capacity; that gained by an imitator terminates in itself. The one becomes a capable man; the other is a mere sciolist. This explains the difference between the Mohammedan and the Christian Negro."⁷⁴

Blyden's Black Church colleague, Rev. John Deputie, was greatly alarmed by Blyden's tolerance of Islam. Deputie is reported to have written a warning letter to the governing Presbyterian board responsible for ensuring Blyden's ministerial fidelity to Christian Church doctrine and teaching. Deputie wrote, "from my point of view it appears that he is more interested in the success of Mohammedanism than that of the Presbyterian Church."⁷⁵ Blyden's increasing criticism of Christianity, coupled with his expanding affection of Islam as a substitute religion, paved the way for him to be officially "awarded a medal ('the decoration of *The Imperial Order of the Medjidieh*') by representatives of the Sultan

⁷¹ Prince S. Conteh. *Traditionalists, Muslims, and Christians in Africa: Interreligious Encounters and Dialogue*. (Amherst: Cambria Press, 2009), 74-75; see also Moore, "Edward Wilmot Blyden: From Old School Presbyterian Missionary to Minister of Truth.," 103-18.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ Edward W. Blyden. "Islam in Western Soudan." *Journal of the Royal African Society*. Volume 2, no. 5 (1902): 11-37; see Blyden, *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race*, 354.

⁷⁴ Blyden, *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race*, 44.

⁷⁵ Holden, *Blyden of Liberia: An Account of the Life and Labors of Edward Wilmot Blyden, L.L.D., as Recorded in Letters and in Print.*, 348.

of Turkey.⁷⁶

Despite the speculation within the Presbyterian Church concerning Blyden's "suspected conversion to Islam," he is nonetheless widely credited by many contemporary Black Church historians for having held various prestigious academic and government positions of note within Liberia and Sierra Leone, and, more importantly, he is remembered for having served as the founder and editor of *Negro* (1872), the first explicitly Pan-African scholarly journal within the entire continent of Africa to historically support black nationalism and Christian evangelization.⁷⁷

Black Church Alienation from Rev. Blyden

A majority of the Black Church leaders within the nineteenth century regarded Blyden's interfaith outreach efforts with skeptical indifference at best, because many traditional Afro-Christians regarded non-Christian faith traditions as an impious form of Divine worship that dismembered the triune nature of Christ Jesus.⁷⁸ For example, Rev. Alexander Crummell in response to Blyden's Pan-African assertion of Islam as spiritually analogous to Christianity and, by implication, Muslims being a people worthy of religious respect is said to have caustically remarked:

Everywhere they are the great slave traders. Through the largest tracts of territory, across vast provinces in the interior, their tracks are marked by blood and devastation. I know it is claimed that the Mohammedans are great civilizers in Africa; that their religion serves to supersede the fetishism and the idolatry of pagan tribes, by carrying with them the doctrine of the Divine Unity, and propagating the Koran. And many people are foolish enough to believe this. But the unanimous testimony of travelers and missionaries is that they care more for the sword and the mastery it gives them than for any

⁷⁶ The *Mecidiye Nişanı* (English transliteration: *The Imperial Order of the Medjidieh*) is a Ottoman era Muslim medal instituted in 1851 by Sultan Abdülmecid I of Turkey as a reward for distinguished service on behalf of the Ottoman Empire and Islam; see Moore, "Edward Wilmot Blyden: From Old School Presbyterian Missionary to Minister of Truth," 103-118.

⁷⁷ Lynch, *Edward Wilmot Blyden: Pan-Negro Patriot, 1832-1912*, 68.; see also Crummell, "The Attitude of the American Mind toward the Negro Intellect"; see also Moore, "Edward Wilmot Blyden: From Old School Presbyterian Missionary to Minister of Truth," 103-118.

⁷⁸ Sandy D. Martin, *For God and Race: The Religious and Political Leadership of AMEZ Bishop James Walker Hood*. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), 17-18.

purposes of civilization. All the good they do is but incidental. While they may furnish a small modicum of enlightenment, they flood the continent everywhere with oceans of disaster, ruin, and bloodshed.⁷⁹

Other members of the Black Church community, for example, AME minister Rev. Alfred Lee Ridgel, a nineteenth century Black Church colleague of Crummell, also similarly felt Blyden's sympathetic portrayal of Islam was theologically scandalous because he had, "exchanged Christ for Mahomet. He laid down the Bible for the Koran," and, in so doing, Ridgel was quite polemic in his criticism of Blyden as an apostate Christian minister unfaithfully representing Christ Jesus to his Afro-Christian congregation.⁸⁰ Ridgel's antipathy concerning Blyden's expansive and tolerant view regarding Islam impelled him to exclaim:

The doctor does not well sustain himself in his arguments ... their [impious] church is founded upon the doctrine of polygamy, a crime positively forbidden in the word of God. They teach their blinded followers that such a course of life is right. They take no steps to condemn those baneful sins that are frowned upon by all true Christians. Again, Mohammedanism denies the divinity of Jesus Christ. It styles Mohammed as the superior of the Son of God ... they deny the redemption of the world by the death of Christ; they dispute the plan of salvation, which is the only assurance of eternal rest and happiness. What doctrine could be more erroneous, more detestable to a Christian than a doctrine that disregards the Saviour of the world."⁸¹

Romantic Racialism of Edward Blyden

It is unsurprising that within the historical context of the nineteenth century Black Church that Blyden's interreligious tolerance and support for other faith traditions, such as Islam, was dismissed by

⁷⁹ Alexander Crummell, *Africa and America: Addresses and Discourses*, An Address before the American Geographical Society Delivered in Chickering Hall in New York City (Springfield: Wiley & Company, 1891), 307-323.

⁸⁰ Alexander Crummell, *The Man; The Hero: The Christian! A Eulogy on the Life and Character of Thomas Clarkson: Delivered in the City of New York* (New York: Egbert, Hovey & King Printers, 1847), 31-38; see also Barnes, *Journey of Hope: The Back-to-Africa Movement in Arkansas in the Late 1800s*, 117.; see also Alfred L. Ridgel, *Africa and African Methodism* (Atlanta: Franklin Printing and Publishing, 1896).

<https://docsouth.unc.edu/church/ridgel/ridgel.html> (accessed September 4, 2018).

⁸¹ Ibid.

his religious critics as a form of romantic racialism because of Blyden's problematic assertion that American Christianity conceives of *Jesus of Nazareth* as a Caucasian.⁸² Blyden, as a dyed-in-the-wool black nationalist, "excoriated the white God, represented on earth by a lily-white Jesus," and, consequently, he injuriously racialized the Divine nature of Christ Jesus and, by so doing, theologically alienated himself from his fellow Black Church contemporaries.⁸³

Blyden, as a black nationalist, believed each discrete ethnicity had distinct human characteristics and proclivities unique to their own particular race and, as a result, blacks were born inherently dissimilar from whites. Blyden problematically asserted how, "Africa will be largely an agricultural country ... the world needs such a development of the Negro on African soil. He will bring as his contribution the softer aspects of human nature. The harsh and stern fiber of the Caucasian races needs this milder element. The African Negro is the feminine," and, by so doing, dubiously imbues whites and blacks with gendered anthropological attributes.⁸⁴

The outward racial appearance of African Americans very much mattered to black nationalists like Blyden and, as a result, any biological intermingling between blacks and whites resulting in bi-racial offspring that diluted the phenotypic characteristics and markers customarily associated with Pan-African identity was considered verboten. Blyden felt "on the general race issue I am entirely with the Democratic party ... one drop of foreign blood impairs the integrity and spoils the test," and, in so doing, he made it abundantly clear he abhorred miscegenation.⁸⁵

Blyden's prejudicial views concerning biracial offspring is a very troubling and incomprehensible aspect of his keen intellect because it was in accordance, "with the worst elements of southern white American racism," and, consequently, revealed the acute moral limitations of his Afro-Christian nomos concerning mixed-race people of Africanist heritage.⁸⁶ Blyden felt biracial offspring were not appropriate for African

⁸² Delbert Burkett, ed., *The Blackwell Companion to Jesus* (West Sussex: Wiley, 2011), 394-409; see also Kelly B. Douglas, *The Black Christ* (Maryknoll, Orbis, 1994), 37-48.

⁸³ Burkett, *The Blackwell Companion to Jesus*, 394-409.

⁸⁴ Blyden, *The Origin and Purpose of African Colonization. A Discourse Delivered at the 66th Anniversary of the American Colonization Society*.

⁸⁵ Tibebu, *Edward Wilmot Blyden and the Racial Nationalist Imagination*, 121; see also Moore, "Edward Wilmot Blyden: From Old School Presbyterian Missionary to Minister of Truth," 103-118; see also Abiola Irele, "The Correspondence of Edward Wilmot Blyden (1832-1912)." *Présence Africaine*, Nouvelle Série, no. 114 (1980): 186-96.

⁸⁶ Frenkel, "Edward Blyden and the Concept of African Personality," 279-280; see also Blyden, *Islam and the Negro Race*, 78; see also Lynch, *Selected Letters of Edward*

colonization because, "they [easily] die. The settlements of Careysburg and Robertsport were [populated] mainly by mongrels. They have passed away and Africa is said to be unhealthy because she will not give the same welcome to half-aliens who are sent to her shores, that she does to her own children returning [genetically] uncontaminated from exile [in America]."⁸⁷ Blyden's notorious views concerning the mixture of the races was not embraced by a plurality of his fellow Black Church ministers who, on balance, castigated Blyden's controversial opinions as being self-defeatist.

Conclusion

Blyden's tacit acceptance of non-Christian religions within a Pan-African context supported and advanced an Afro-centric Black Church narrative promulgating other non-Christian faith traditions, for example, Islam, as a viable religious alternative to Christianity.⁸⁸ His inclusive interfaith theological posture however, did not sit well with his fellow Christian detractors such as Alfred Ridgel, Alexander Crummel, and John Deputie and represented an ongoing source of considerable theological tension within the Black Church.⁸⁹ The majority of the nineteenth century Black Church ministers within America disagreed with Blyden's interreligious views and beliefs concerning Africa and, in so doing, they did not perceive non-Christian African religions as ever being authentically black.⁹⁰ For example, Crummell felt Africa was populated by idolatrous people suffering under gross heathenism while also laboring under the abomination of paganism.⁹¹

Blyden, unlike many of his nineteenth century Black Church colleagues however, consciously chose to live with a theologically problematic Afro-Christian identity infused with a peculiar form of black nationalism. As an idiosyncratic Afro-Christian minister at odds with the mainstream nineteenth century Black Church, Blyden felt quite comfortable being spiritually affiliated with a broadminded Afrocentric

Wilmot Blyden. *The Caribbean, Historical and Cultural Perspectives*, 422.

⁸⁷ Lynch, *Edward Wilmot Blyden: Pan-Negro Patriot, 1832-1912*, 53.

⁸⁸ Blyden, *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race*, 277-297.

⁸⁹ Martin, *For God and Race: The Religious and Political Leadership of AMEZ Bishop James Walker Hood*, 19; see also Alexander Crummell, *Africa and America: Addresses and Discourses*, 307-323.; see also Holden, *Blyden of Liberia: An Account of the Life and Labors of Edward Wilmot Blyden, L.L.D., as Recorded in Letters and in Print*, 274; see also Moore, "Edward Wilmot Blyden: From Old School Presbyterian Missionary to Minister of Truth," 103-118.

⁹⁰ Martin, *For God and Race: The Religious and Political Leadership of AMEZ Bishop James Walker Hood*, 18-20.

⁹¹ Association, A.A. *American Anthropologist Journal*. Vol. 104. No. 2. (2002): 544-550.

ideology, worldview and predisposition favoring non-Christian faith traditions as being historically compatible and analogous with Christianity.

The majority of American blacks during *Jim Crow* decided to stay and fight for their freedom within the United States and, consequently, the Black Church ultimately chose not to support Blyden's racist theology, interreligious posture, and, more importantly, his defeatist race relations solution through emigration. The Black Church in rejecting Blyden's approach concerning societal injustice resolutely reaffirms how Christianity is a faith tradition rooted in hope.

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