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During the mid-nineteenth century, European attempts to colonize the Niger River basin region of West Africa were common. Reasoning for these pursuits ranged from evangelization to the desire for trade opportunities; but one particularly pressing motive of many European nations was to put an end to the participation of the region's tribes in the slave trade.¹ The opinions of the native Africans and their homeland from the eyes of most Europeans were known before the time of these expeditions and are still well known today, as they went on to dictate generations of suffering for African peoples. Where the natives stood on the matter of these invaders is lesser discussed, however two African intellectuals during the mid-nineteenth century, Dr. Edward Wilmot Blyden and Reverend Samuel Ajayi Crowther, documented their reactions. Though Blyden and Crowther both shared concerns for the wellbeing of the natives in West Africa, their concerns differed greatly, as did their reactions to the ever-increasing presence of Europeans in this region, from which we can draw the conclusion that though born in the West Indies, and having led a relatively western lifestyle, Dr. Blyden identified more with West African natives than Reverend Crowther did.

Reverend Samuel Ajayi Crowther, a Nigerian native, spent much of his life working with European missionaries who shared his goal of spreading Christianity within Africa; he thought this was the best way to enhance the lives of the natives.² Another successful African

¹ James Frederick Schön, *Journals of the Reverend James Frederick Schön and Samuel Crowther, who, Accompanied the Expedition Up the Niger in 1841, on Behalf of the Church Missionary Society. With Appendices, and Map* (London: Hatchard and Son, 1842), xix.

² Samuel Crowther, *A Charge Delivered on the Banks of the River Niger in West Africa* (London: Seeley, Jackson & Halliday, 1886), 6.

intellectual, Dr. Edward Wilmot Blyden, was a well-educated Liberian, born in the West Indies, who went on to work as an author, professor and diplomat; also contributing to the establishment of Liberia as country.³ According to African historian and professor Toyin Falola, he is arguably best known for being the founding father of African Nationalism.⁴ In addition, historian Robert W. July notes that Blyden outright denied that the white race was superior to any other race, contrary to what he had been taught from the time he was a child.⁵ Following the same theme, Ghanaian historian and politician A. Adu Boahen discusses Blyden's deep love for Africa and its people, shown in one instance in a speech he gave at Freetown in 1893, calling the African race "a great race- great in its vitality, in its power of endurance and its prospect of perpetuity."⁶ Also attesting to Blyden's desire to serve his fellow Africans is historian Hollis R. Lynch, who commented on Dr. Blyden's persistence in reaching out for things that would better the lives of those living along the Niger River.⁷

Boahen discusses the difference between the views of Blyden and Crowther, noting a direct contrast in their views regarding religious changes in Africa. Unlike Reverend Crowther's opinion that Europeans were needed to bring religious reformation to this region, Dr. Blyden felt that only the natives themselves had the power to change their religious practices, if they so

³ Robert W. July, "Nineteenth-Century Negritude: Edward W. Blyden," in *The Journal of African History* 5, no. 1 ed. R.A. Oliver and J.D. Fage (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1964), 74.

⁴ Toyin Falola, *National and African Intellectuals* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2001), 39.

⁵ Robert W. July, "Nineteenth-Century Negritude: Edward W. Blyden," in *The Journal of African History* 5, no. 1 ed. R.A. Oliver and J.D. Fage (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1964), 75.

⁶ A. Adu Boahen, *African Perspectives on Colonialism* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 22.

⁷ Hollis R. Lynch, "Edward W. Blyden: Pioneer West African Nationalist" in *The Journal of African History* 5, no. 1, ed. R.A. Oliver and J.D. Fage (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 378.

chose.⁸ He goes on to say that Blyden believed the European missionaries were unable to relate to the natives or to understand their desires as a race well enough to have a successful and meaningful impact on their religious views.⁹ Falola discusses Blyden's response to the persistence of missionaries in the basin, stating that the constant pressure of Christianity did more harm than good for natives, hurting their view of both God and nature.¹⁰

Falola writes of the ways that Dr. Blyden used the stereotypes placed on Africans to lift them up, instead of allowing them to have a negative effect;¹¹ Boahen discusses another instance in which Blyden acted as a voice for the indigenous peoples; when he claimed that Africans wished to preserve their traditions while simultaneously creating a bond with Europe in the hopes of benefitting from this relationship.¹² We can speculate that the benefits they were seeking would include Agricultural and technological advancements in hopes of increasing their standard of living.

Reverend Crowther saw his country as needing a saving grace and believed that evangelization and the introduction of proper industry under the guiding hands of Europeans were the answers to African's problems, and that they would put an end to the negative connotations that came with the country's name. These ideas are shown in his words to fellow missionaries when talking about the Niger River region; "Instead of becoming a highway for

⁸ A. Adu Boahen, *African Perspectives on Colonialism* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 22.

⁹ Adu A. Boahen, *African Perspectives on Colonialism* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 22.

¹⁰ Toyin Falola, *National and African Intellectuals* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2001), 38.

¹¹ Toyin Falola, *National and African Intellectuals* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2001 38-39.

¹² Adu A. Boahen, *African Perspectives on Colonialism* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 26.

which to convey light, life, and liberty into the heart of the country, it should present as it were an impassible barrier to their introduction, and thus keep the people and country still in the darkness of superstition, ignorance, and vice...”¹³

Relative to the perspectives of his white, European counterparts, Reverend Crowther viewed the lifestyle of the natives along the Niger to be primitive and sacrilegious.¹⁴ He comments on this most harshly when referring to the tribes that refused to accept Christian missionaries, assuming that these tribes were prone to iniquitous activities such as stealing and violence, as he records in his journal while traveling along the Tshadda River; “Their propensity to pilfer became manifest from their rude familiarity.”¹⁵ The conversion of African Natives living in the Niger River Basin appears to be at the forefront of Crowther’s concerns, as he felt that the African Indigenous Religions being practiced were “heathenish”¹⁶ and being rooted in “foolishness” and “ignorance.”¹⁷ He believed that the introduction and acceptance of Christianity by these natives would lead to prosperity and advancement coming to this region.¹⁸ The Reverend speaks of the indigenous peoples as if they were misguided and led to believe that their

¹³ Samuel Crowther, *A Charge Delivered on the Banks of the River Niger in West Africa* (London: Seeley, Jackson & Halliday, 1886), 7.

¹⁴ Samuel Crowther, *Journal of an Expedition Up the Niger and Tshadda Rivers Undertaken by Macgregor Laird in Connection with the British Government in 1854* (London, U.K.: Church Missionary House, 1855), 125.

¹⁵ Samuel Crowther, *Journal of an Expedition Up the Niger and Tshadda Rivers Undertaken by Macgregor Laird in Connection with the British Government in 1854* (London, U.K.: Church Missionary House, 1855), 125.

¹⁶ Samuel Crowther, *Journal of an Expedition Up the Niger and Tshadda Rivers Undertaken By Macgregor Laird in Connection with the British Government in 1854* (London, U.K.: Church Missionary House, 1855), xvii.

¹⁷ Samuel Crowther, *Journal of an Expedition Up the Niger and Tshadda Rivers Undertaken by Macgregor Laird in Connection with the British Government in 1854* (London, U.K.: Church Missionary House, 1855), xvii.

¹⁸ Samuel Crowther, *A Charge Delivered on the Banks of the River Niger in West Africa* (London: Seeley, Jackson & Halliday, 1886), 6.

traditional practices and ways of worship were legitimate; when, in reality, their views were a tangled and distorted version of Levitical¹⁹ practices, rooted in purity but having deteriorated over time, resulting in the practices he found them to be participating in.²⁰ This defense of native practices sets Reverend Crowther apart from the white Europeans with whom he was associated.

Having his own desires to bring improvement to the lifestyles of the Niger River natives, Dr. Blyden worked closely with the Royal Geographical Society of London, describing the Niger River Basin and noting the potential it held for the British and especially the African natives living there.²¹ Dr. Blyden's report on this expedition, which was called the expedition to Falaba,²² shows that saw this partnership with the Geographical Society as a chance to try and bring advantages to the people of the Niger River and the surrounding region.²³ Dr. Blyden comments extensively on the possibilities that the land offered; from the vast agricultural potential to the ideal land for the installation of a railroad system.²⁴ He provides this in a manner

¹⁹ Relating to the Book of Leviticus in the Old Testament which described Levitical law and practices.

²⁰ Samuel Crowther, *A Charge Delivered on the Banks of the River Niger in West Africa* (London: Seeley, Jackson & Halliday, 1886), 20.

²¹ Edward W. Blyden, "Report on the Expedition to Falaba, January to March 1872. (With an Appendix Respecting Dr. Livingstone)," in *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of London* vol. 17, no. 2, ed. The Royal Geographical Society of London (London, UK: Edward Stanford, 1872), 117.

²² Edward W. Blyden, "Report on the Expedition to Falaba, January to March 1872. (With an Appendix Respecting Dr. Livingstone)," in *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of London* vol. 17, no. 2, ed. The Royal Geographical Society of London (London, UK: Edward Stanford, 1872), 117.

²³ Edward W. Blyden, "Report on the Expedition to Falaba, January to March 1872. (With an Appendix Respecting Dr. Livingstone)," in *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of London* vol. 17, no. 2, ed. The Royal Geographical Society of London (London, UK: Edward Stanford, 1872), 121.

²⁴ Edward W. Blyden, "Report on the Expedition to Falaba, January to March 1872. (With an Appendix Respecting Dr. Livingstone)," in *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of London* vol. 17, no. 2, ed. The Royal Geographical Society of London (London, UK: Edward Stanford, 1872), 121-122.

that seems to appear favorable to the British both financially and politically; however, based on his life's work and his propensity to advocate for the people in this region, we can infer that his true motives were to bring progress to them and to prove the true potential that Africa held. Contrary to this description of the Niger basin, Reverend Crowther comments on the unhealthy conditions of the area while traveling along the Niger and Tshadda Rivers in the 1850's.²⁵

We can add to the inference made regarding Blyden's motives in cooperating with the British by citing his consistent requests for them to make efforts to protect the native tribes from the "krugbahs,"²⁶ or warriors, that terrorized them.²⁷ While Blyden was advocating for the protection of natives, Reverend Crowther comments only on the safety of the European explorers and missionaries traveling along the Niger. He speaks of a specific event while traveling along the Tshadda River when a group of natives of the Dulti tribe, who had not been receptive of conversion discussions, approached their boat; "...an attempt [by natives] to stop the boat was sufficient for the explorers to get out of the midst of these people with all speed."²⁸ Though Dr. Blyden takes a friendly and optimistic tone in his report to the Geographical Society of London, his tone when discussing the presence of Europeans in this region is quite different; also serving

²⁵ Samuel Crowther, *Journal of an Expedition Up the Niger and Tshadda Rivers Undertaken by Macgregor Laird in Connection with the British Government in 1854* (London, U.K.: Church Missionary House, 1855), 11.

²⁶ Edward W. Blyden, "Report on the Expedition to Falaba, January to March 1872. (With an Appendix Respecting Dr. Livingstone)," in *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of London* vol. 17, no. 2, ed. The Royal Geographical Society of London (London, UK: Edward Stanford, 1872), 122.

²⁷ Edward W. Blyden, "Report on the Expedition to Falaba, January to March 1872. (With an Appendix Respecting Dr. Livingstone)," in *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of London* vol. 17, no. 2, ed. The Royal Geographical Society of London (London, UK: Edward Stanford, 1872), 122.

²⁸ Samuel Crowther, *Journal of an Expedition Up the Niger and Tshadda Rivers Undertaken by Macgregor Laird in Connection with the British Government in 1854* (London, U.K.: Church Missionary House, 1855), 125.

as evidence for his motives in working with the Europeans in this specific instance. Reverend Crowther's motives for working with the British are shown to be of a different nature, as he consistently discusses the dire need for outside intervention within Western Africa.

When comparing Crowther and Blyden's views of the uncolonized Niger River region of Africa, there is a clear rift between the two. Although Blyden communicates with the British formally, even proposing opportunities for colonization, there is evidence of ulterior motives in his participation with them. We also see his tone to be overly optimistic, with the likeness of a sales-pitch for the potential the Niger basin held; "...it would be impossible to estimate the vast results, agricultural, commercial, and political..."²⁹ This evident support of the well-being of the Niger River basin's natives proves representative of his attitude toward them.

Reverend Crowther's disposition and language regarding Africa is distinctly different from Dr. Blyden's. Crowther seems to embrace a more European mindset, specifically of its natives. As previously noted, he condescendingly considered their way of life to be primitive and barbaric, claiming that their only hope for salvation was Christianity.³⁰ He even goes so far as to talk about the natives as individuals who would eventually prove to be easily persuaded, stating outright that they harbored a desire to be associated with Great Britain and that they wanted to be like their fellow natives who had already converted to Christianity.³¹ These differences in tone

²⁹Edward W. Blyden, "Report on the Expedition to Falaba, January to March 1872. (With an Appendix Respecting Dr. Livingstone)," in *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of London* vol. 17, no. 2, ed. The Royal Geographical Society of London (London, UK: Edward Stanford, 1872), 122.

³⁰ Samuel Crowther, *Journal of an Expedition Up the Niger and Tshadda Rivers Undertaken By Macgregor Laird in Connection with the British Government in 1854* (London, U.K.: Church Missionary House, 1855), xvii.

³¹ Samuel Crowther, *Journal of an Expedition Up the Niger and Tshadda Rivers Undertaken By Macgregor Laird in Connection with the British Government in 1854* (London, U.K.: Church Missionary House, 1855), xvii.

and language show a clear difference between the way these two intellectuals felt about their homeland.

Dr. Blyden felt very strongly about the ever-increasing European presence in the Niger River region of West Africa in the mid-nineteenth century. His tone when writing and speaking of this issue differs drastically from that in his writing to gain support for the natives. His book “Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race” touches on this topic, and Blyden’s opinion of the Europeans and the impact that they were having on African natives. In this book, he talks about his disdain for the invaders, quoting an unnamed European writer in saying, “The eighteenth century stole the black man from his country; the nineteenth century steals his country from the black man.”³² Evidently his anger with these words, and willingness to leap to the defense of the African race shows his emotional connection to the people of the Niger.

While once writing with optimism about the relationship between Europe and West Africa, fifteen years later Dr. Edward Blyden appears to have come to a conclusion about the implications of this relationship. Instead of wrting about the endless possibilities the Niger River region had to offer for both groups, he lays intense accusations down against Europeans. When talking about European influence over the average African man or woman, Blyden writes that the white men were the “invaders of his country and the protectors of his rights.”³³ Through these words Blyden continues to connect himself to the indigenous peoples in these words. Looking at this evidence, we can conclude that the hopes he had once had for the benefit of Western Africans along the Niger as a result of the new technologies and opportunities provided by the Europeans had been

³² Edward W. Blyden, *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race* (London: W.B. Whittingham, 1887. Reprint, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1967), 337.

³³ Edward W. Blyden, *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race* (London: W.B. Whittingham, 1887. Reprint, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1967), 337.

dashed in the years following his expedition to Falaba and his subsequent report to the Geographical Society of London in 1872.

Blyden's disappointment and anger about the lost potential of a dually beneficial partnership between the two continents is not the only thing he expressed his displeasure with. The words of white men that reinforced the previously created stereotypical misrepresentations of Africans was another subject of discontent for Dr. Blyden. Citing specifically the words of Joseph Thompson; "There is absolutely not a single place where the natives have been left to their own free will, in which there is the slightest evidence of a desire for better things."³⁴ Blyden reciprocated with a defense of the natives referred to in Thompson's remark; he claimed that the regions of Africa untouched by the "Godless Europeans"³⁵ were places uncorrupted by the influence of European colonization.³⁶ Contrary to this belief, Reverend Crowther felt that the influence of European colonization brought an end to the corruption that the lack of Christianity had laid upon Africa. This distinction between the men's views are yet another example of Dr. Blyden's ability to relate to the struggles of the natives.

Through the words of these two intellectuals we observe a small look at the reactions of Africans living in the Niger River basin region during the mid-nineteenth century to the presence of Europeans in their homeland. We are provided two different views from two men who held contrasting views of the natural, unchanged state of West Africa. While both men had the benefit of the region's natives at the root of their thoughts and actions, there is a clear difference between

³⁴ Edward W. Blyden, *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race* (London: W.B. Whittingham, 1887. Reprint, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1967), 342.

³⁵ Edward W. Blyden, *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race* (London: W.B. Whittingham, 1887. Reprint, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1967), 342.

³⁶ Edward W. Blyden, *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race* (London: W.B. Whittingham, 1887. Reprint, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1967), 342.

what Dr. Edward Blyden and Reverend Samuel Crowther saw as beneficial to them. The differences in their reactions to European invaders, the solutions they felt would be the most helpful to the West Africans and the words and actions they used to convey these things all point to the conclusion that Dr. Edward Blyden was more connected to the people of the Niger River than Reverend Samuel Crowther; and perhaps that Crowther connected more to the Europeans invading Africa.