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## Haiti, Liberia and Ethiopia (1914–1945): Black Sovereignty in a White World

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### *Abstract:*

In this paper, I explore the interwar experiences of Haiti, Liberia and Ethiopia, the only states governed by people of African descent that were formally recognised in international law. I suggest that their experiences show how a hierarchical international society policed and enforced its internal stratifications through diverse employments of a racialised chronopolitics—not only positing a linear and colonial ‘developmental’ time, but also Fascist-settlerist modernism and a ‘denial of coevalness’ that placed racialised populations outside and beyond the reaches of contemporaneity. For many interwar intellectuals and activists committed to pan-African liberation, the desire for a new global order free from racialised stratifications meant an engagement with sites of black sovereignty that was, by necessity, ambivalent and strategic in its relationship to the politics of time.

### **Introduction**

Between the world wars, three small states found themselves at the edges of a European-dominated international order. Haiti, Liberia and Ethiopia were the only states governed by people of African descent that were formally recognised as sovereign in international law. But despite being members of the League of Nations, each faced an incursion that effectively vitiated its sovereignty. Haiti was occupied by the United States from 1915 to 1934; Ethiopia was invaded and occupied by Italy in 1935; and Liberia was placed under financial receivership, formally investigated by the League, and threatened with occupation between 1929 and 1936. **These incursions sparked widespread protest and led to significant political activity among peoples across the African continent and diaspora.**

Peripheral to the international society that sought to extinguish them, these states became central to global, and especially pan-African, anticolonialism. Many who participated in the nationalist and anticolonial movements in Africa and the Caribbean, including those who took power in the decades following the Second World War, had been deeply affected by their political and theoretical engagement with the interwar struggles of Haiti, Liberia and Ethiopia. It is surprising, then, that the similarities in their experiences **on the periphery of international society** have been so rarely studied.<sup>1</sup>

In this article I examine a range of interwar narratives concerning the porous, contentious and contravened sovereignties of these states. Largely evading the realm of ‘high politics’ (international organisations, law, diplomacy), I focus on a selection of mostly vernacular and now little-studied texts on both sides of the colonial/anticolonial divide: from the attacks on Ethiopia by Italian and American journalists to the book-length defence of Liberian sovereignty by Nnamdi Azikiwe, who would become Nigeria’s first President; and from the **ridiculing of Liberia in the British House of Lords** to the reporting on the US occupation of Haiti in the *Baltimore Afro-American* and the Paris-based newspaper *Africa*. **Notwithstanding their obvious differences, both sets of discourses implicitly shared a view that the experiences of Haiti, Liberia and Ethiopia were fundamentally about race and its role in the world.** If we take that idea seriously, I suggest that it can help us to deepen our understanding of two concurrent processes that are rarely discussed together: on the one hand, ‘the globalisation of

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<sup>1</sup> There are significant literatures on each country, but the only substantive academic accounts which examine them together in relation to interwar black politics are Putnam, *The Insistent Call*; and Ross, “Black Americans and Haiti, Liberia, the Virgin Islands, and Ethiopia, 1929-1936.” Both are centred on African American perspectives. In IR, a general neglect of these states is ameliorated by the important work of Robbie Shilliam on Haiti. See Shilliam, “Race and Revolution at Bwa Kayiman”; Shilliam, “What the Haitian Revolution Might Tell Us about Development, Security, and the Politics of Race”; Shilliam, “Intervention and Colonial-Modernity.” In postcolonial studies there are a number of engagements with Haiti, perhaps most prominently Glover’s *Haiti Unbound*, but far fewer with Liberia and Ethiopia.

international society’;<sup>2</sup> on the other, ‘the raciological ordering of the world’.<sup>3</sup> Key to uniting these two connected processes of global transition and ordering is, I suggest, a particular mobilisation of chronopolitics, or the politics of time.

A study of the chronopolitical valences of writing on Haiti, Liberia and Ethiopia points to the wider co-constitution of race, time and the world in three respects. First, it can add critical depth to the notion of an expanding international society. By pointing to the temporal mechanisms through which colonial difference was able to continue to operate beyond the moment of its international juridical legitimation, a chronopolitics of race can help us understand how we arrived at our formally decolonised—yet deeply stratified—contemporary global order.<sup>4</sup> Second, with respect to postcolonial scholarship, this material can help us to develop a richer and more nuanced understanding of time in relation to colonial and racial difference by indicating the ways in which such difference could be built upon *both* linear or unitary *and* multiple or plural representations and mobilisations of time. Finally, and partly as a result of the first two insights, these narratives disturb the easy distinction that has sometimes been posited between ‘nationalist time’ and ‘diaspora time’. The colonial delegitimation of Haiti, Liberia and Ethiopia on the one hand, and the anticolonial support of those states on the other, shows us a route towards a more flexible and ambivalent understanding of political time in the context of colonial difference, which recognises that a radically ‘heterochronic’ approach has been central to both racial-colonial ordering and to anticolonial resistance.<sup>5</sup>

### *Time, Race and International Society*

A large body of work in the field of international relations (IR) has examined the importance and concomitance of two impassable features of twentieth century global order: the first, decolonisation and the spread of interstate juridical equality (a long process, of course, but one which reached its apex after the end of the imperial age and the expansion of the UN); the second, the forms of international hierarchy, community and affinity that have either endured or found new forms of expression outside, beyond or across this state-based structure.<sup>6</sup> In different ways, both international society (or English school) and postcolonial perspectives have been interested in this convergence. The former has pointed to the forms of international social stratification, especially defined in terms of ‘civilisation’, that have adjudicated entry to a society of states dominated by the West.<sup>7</sup> The latter has highlighted the persistence of colonial and racial demarcation within the international legal, political, economic and social order.<sup>8</sup> My suggestion here is that both perspectives can shed light on the importance of Haiti, Liberia and Ethiopia to international theory, but only by addressing a significant temporal lacuna in the first school and a temporal aporia in the other.

The English school has evinced little interest in temporality (though of course, like other IR schools, it has always been premised upon uninterrogated metahistorical visions.)<sup>9</sup> The standard of ‘civilisation’

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<sup>2</sup> See Dunne and Reus-Smit, *The Globalization of International Society*.

<sup>3</sup> Gilroy, *Against Race*, 6.

<sup>4</sup> On the role of race in the international order see Gruffydd Jones, “Race in the Ontology of International Order.”

<sup>5</sup> Rao, *Third World Protest*, makes a convincing case for the value of ambivalence in a postcolonial ethics. For ‘heterochronic’, see Helgesson, “Radicalizing Temporal Difference.”

<sup>6</sup> For an overarching discussion, see Hurrell, *On Global Order*.

<sup>7</sup> Gong, *The Standard of “Civilization” in International Society*. On the English school, see Buzan, *From International to World Society?*; Linklater and Suganami, *The English School of International Relations*.

<sup>8</sup> For a summary, see Seth, *Postcolonial Theory and International Relations*.

<sup>9</sup> To summarise impressionistically: liberal and classical English school narratives have implied an idealised end point at which the ‘Western liberal order’ or ‘European international society’ will be applied progressively across the world, while realists have situated the theorist at the end of history in a world of undifferentiated political units. As Kimberly Hutchings has written, ‘If liberal democratic peace theory can be read as smuggling the Goddess History back into the frame of *chronotic* time, then the realist conception of the temporality of I politics as repetition of the same reintroduces us to the maenad Fortune.’ Hutchings, *Time and World Politics*,

has been understood juridically and sociologically but not temporally. And the classic work on the topic famously argued that ‘if standards exist in contemporary international society, they are certainly not defined in terms of differences of civilization’.<sup>10</sup> More recently, however, this view has been undermined with the demonstration of an enduring ‘civilising’ impulse within international society and law.<sup>11</sup> That expanded understanding of ‘civilisation’ has converged in key respects with the insights of international legal scholars on the persistence of colonial and racial difference at the core of international law.<sup>12</sup> Moving closer to a perspective which takes seriously race and colonialism pushes us to think carefully about the chronopolitics of ‘civilisation’ within the context of international society.

In postcolonial scholarship, the politics of time has long formed a central concern. But an aporetic divergence has emerged between two perspectives, which Stefan Helgesson has perceptively labelled ‘the Chakrabarty option’ and ‘the Fabian option’.<sup>13</sup> To simplify, the former perspective criticises Western unitary or linear time and affirms in its place ‘heterotemporality’, while the latter challenges temporal multiplicity or asymmetry as itself a mode of colonial rule that operates through an allochronic ‘denial of coevalness’ between the West and non-West. In their critiques of nationalism, postcolonial scholars have tended to favour ‘the Chakrabarty option’, suggesting that linear and unitary approaches to time are central to nationalism and its ills while attributing to non-nationalist forms of political affinity a constitutively diverse, multiple and plural approach to time—think, for example, of Duara’s ‘national time’ versus Goyal’s ‘diaspora time’.<sup>14</sup> Scholarship on race has grappled with a similar aporia, on the one hand seeing unified global time as formative of racial difference, on the other seeing race as assigning differential temporalities to populations and marking the racialised with an inescapable ‘stagnation in time’.<sup>15</sup>

In the following pages, I suggest some ways in which a study of interwar Haiti, Liberia and Ethiopia can be relevant to these questions. Their experiences shed light on the evolution of race as a regime of global classification during the interwar years, when international society was characterised by a paradoxical imperative to expand the use of race as an ordering regime while grappling with its increasing fragility as a scientific and hegemonic discourse.<sup>16</sup> Out of that turbulence and the supervening war emerged our globalised international society, whose promises of formal juridical equality are contradicted by its enduringly deep fractures and vertiginous stratifications. It has become common to state that race endures as one of those hierarchies.<sup>17</sup> But the precise manner in which it does so—the ways it interacts with and helps to constitute the institutions, regimes, laws and norms of global order—has been less clear. Neither has the vexed question of resistance to race, and perhaps especially the role of the state and nationalism within that resistance, been adequately resolved. Haiti, Liberia and Ethiopia’s interwar experiences suggest how race emerged not as an unfortunate excrescence of international society, but as constitutive of global order and its inherent stratifications.

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13. For more on temporality in IR, see Agathangelou and Killian, *Time, Temporality and Violence in IR*; Hom et al., *Time, Temporality and Global Politics*; Stockdale, *Taming an Uncertain Future*.

<sup>10</sup> Gong, *The Standard of “Civilization” in International Society*, 23.

<sup>11</sup> See especially Keene, *Beyond the Anarchical Society*; Keene, “The Standard of ‘Civilisation’, the Expansion Thesis and the 19th-Century International Social Space.”

<sup>12</sup> Alexandrowicz, *The Law of Nations in Global History*; Anghie, *Imperialism, Sovereignty and the Making of International Law*; Koskenniemi, *The Gentle Civilizer of Nations: the Rise and Fall of International Law, 1870-1960*. This perspective has been developed by the Third World Approaches to International Law (TWAIL) group. See Chimni, “Third World Approaches to International Law.”

<sup>13</sup> He convincingly argues that this antinomy is derived from two problems in postcolonial metahistorical critique: firstly, the conflation of time and culture (which potentially reproduces cultural relativism); secondly, a simplified view of Western modernity as singularly premised upon linear progress.

<sup>14</sup> Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation*; Goyal, *Romance, Diaspora, and Black Atlantic Literature*, 15.

<sup>15</sup> On Lévi-Strauss’s grappling with this, see Helgesson, “Radicalizing Temporal Difference”; for ‘stagnation’, see Olender, *Race and Erudition*, xix.

<sup>16</sup> The interwar entrenchment of racially-oriented immigration policies in Western countries, especially the US, is indicative of this trend.

<sup>17</sup> Indicatively, see Winant, “The Modern World Racial System.”

## Haiti

Woodrow Wilson's invasion of Haiti on July 28, 1915, inaugurated a nineteen-year occupation of the republic that endured until 1934, running through five successive US administrations.<sup>18</sup> The occupation was, as Brenda Gayle Plummer has written, 'unprecedented in its duration, the racism that characterised U.S. behaviour in the black republic, and the brutality associated with pacification efforts.'<sup>19</sup> The initial intervention was legally entrenched by means of a treaty, passed by the US Senate in February 1916, whose stipulations included the financial oversight of Haiti by US officials and the settlement of all foreign claims. A brief peasant insurgency was defeated by late 1915. Meanwhile, the Haitian legislature was disbanded for twelve years, and a new constitution—for the first time permitting foreigners to own land in Haiti—was approved through a Marine-sponsored plebiscite in which it is likely that less than five percent of Haiti's population was permitted to vote.<sup>20</sup>

The occupation of Haiti was accompanied by a vigorous chronopolitical discourse on the impossibility of its sovereignty and the resultant necessity of a civilising tutelage. As long-standing symbol of otherness and racial threat in white American discourse, Haiti had always found itself the subject of both fascination and fear in what Césaire call 'the white world'.<sup>21</sup> In chronopolitical terms, Haiti's indisputable republican modernity was typically undermined through the idea of racial atavism, which suggested that the island's racial makeup had propelled it backwards in time, either to a pre-sovereign moment or, at best, to a 'halfway point between what we call the jungle and what we call civilization', as William Faulkner's *Absalom! Absalom!* (1938) put it.<sup>22</sup>

The popular American journalist Lothrop Stoddard furnishes a useful case study of such writing. His first book, *The French Revolution in San Domingo* (1914), based on his Harvard dissertation, drew on the example of Haiti to warn about the threat of weakening global white hegemony and to insist on the impossibility of black sovereign government.<sup>23</sup> Narrating the revolution, Stoddard wrote elegiacally that 'White San Domingo has become only a memory, and the black state of Haiti makes its appearance in the world's history'. As Shannon Riley has pointed out, this was 'a palimpsestic formulation' that saw a world-historical blackness as fundamentally threatening to whiteness.<sup>24</sup> In *The Rising Tide of Color* (1920), Stoddard again argued that Haiti represented the 'first real shock between the ideals of white supremacy and race-equality; a prologue to the mighty drama of our own day. It also shows what real race-war means.'<sup>25</sup> Haiti and Liberia were examples, he wrote, of how the 'black race has never shown real constructive power' because the black 'man', 'when left to himself, as in Haiti and Liberia, rapidly reverts to his ancestral ways.'<sup>26</sup>

This way of thinking and writing about Haiti had a long lineage in Anglo-American thought, of course, dating back to the revolution itself and the writing of Edmund Burke and Lord Brougham. In 1896, the British historian James Anthony Froude had written an influential work arguing that '[t]he Negro never rose of himself out of barbarism ... when left free, as in Liberia and Hayti, he reverts to

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<sup>18</sup> On the occupation, see especially the landmark study by Schmidt, *The United States Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1934*. Other studies include Plummer, *Haiti and the United States*; Dash, *Haiti and the United States*; Renda, *Taking Haiti*; Castor, *L'occupation américaine d'Haïti*. On specific aspects of Haitian life, intellectual activity, and resistance under the occupation, see Pamphile, *L'éducation en Haiti sous l'occupation américaine 1915-1934*; Pamphile, *La Croix et Le Glaive*; Millet, *Les paysans haïtiens et l'occupation américaine d'Haïti, 1915-1930*; Shannon, *Jean Price-Mars, the Haitian Elite and the American Occupation, 1915-1935*.

<sup>19</sup> Plummer, *Haiti and the United States*, 101.

<sup>20</sup> Schmidt, *The United States Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1934*, 99.

<sup>21</sup> Dash, *Haiti and the United States*, 1; Césaire, *The Collected Poetry*, 69.

<sup>22</sup> Quoted in Godden, "Absalom, Absalom!, Haiti and Labor History," 686. See also Balthaser, *Anti-Imperialist Modernism*, 118–46.

<sup>23</sup> Stoddard, *The French Revolution in San Domingo*.

<sup>24</sup> Riley, *Performing Race and Erasure*, 109.

<sup>25</sup> Stoddard, *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World-Supremacy*, 227.

<sup>26</sup> Stoddard, 100–101.

his original barbarism.<sup>27</sup> Madison Grant, the popular and influential American eugenicist (and Stoddard's chief mentor) had also invoked Haiti as a case of where the collapse of white rule had seen the country's inhabitants 'revert almost to barbarism'.<sup>28</sup>

These tropes were extremely common among Americans involved in occupation of the island. For Robert Lansing, a chief architect of American Haiti policy and the US Secretary of State from 1915 to 1920: 'The experience of Liberia and Haiti show that the African race are devoid of any capacity for political organization and lack genius for government. Unquestionably there is in them an inherent tendency to revert to savagery and to cast aside the shackles of civilization which are irksome to their physical nature.'<sup>29</sup> For Josephus Daniels, Secretary of the US Navy, 'the Haitians [*sic*] are like negroes in the South', who should not be given free food even in times of famine.<sup>30</sup> For Littleton Waller, an officer in the United States Marine Corps: 'Thes [*sic*] people are niggers in spite of the thin varnish of education and refinement. Down in their hearts they are just the same happy, idle irresponsible people we know of.'<sup>31</sup> For Eli Kelley Cole, a US Brigade Commander: 'No matter how much veneer and polish a Haitian may have, he is absolutely savage under the skin and under strain reverts to type.' He added: 'What the people of Norfolk and Portsmouth would say if they saw me bowing and scraping to these coons—I do not know'.<sup>32</sup>

Haiti's sovereignty was, then, discursively delegitimised through the association of race with pre-sovereign avatism—a close correlative of the 'Fabian option' that I have discussed above in terms of its evident 'denial of coevalness' which clearly drew upon the power of race to consign populations to 'a stagnation in time'. But this was made more complex by the idea of regression, since it was often accepted that at one point—under the rule of its white slave-owners—Haiti had truly been 'modern'. This racialised narrative about Haiti provided the discursive basis for an occupation that framed itself throughout as a civilising and modernising mission, seeking to rationalise Haiti and bring it into the modern world. Transnational black engagements with interwar Haiti were also compelled to grapple with its temporality. They did so, in large part, through a strong emphasis on the contemporaneity of Haiti (and by extension its sovereign coevalness with other states), often alongside diverse explorations of Haitian history as constitutive of world history and therefore of modernity.

There is already an extensive literature examining C. L. R. James's *The Black Jacobins* (1938) and Toussaint L'Ouverture (1934), as well as Aimé Césaire's long-standing engagement with island, which he had visited in 1944.<sup>33</sup> But Black Atlantic print circuits, especially in the US and France, are also revealing on this point. Whereas initial reactions in African American newspapers to the occupation muted and even supportive, no doubt in part due to the pressing atmosphere of wartime censorship, reporting became systematically more critical throughout the 1920s.<sup>34</sup> Though previous studies have emphasised the effect of the Cayes Massacre in 1929 in transforming African American attitudes to the occupation,<sup>35</sup> reporting on Haiti began to shift much earlier, from around 1919.<sup>36</sup> By 1920, the Harlem-based militant Hubert Harrison was writing in the *Negro World* a scathing indictment of what he called 'the bloody rape of the republics of Hayti and Santo Domingo ... being perpetrated by the bayonets of American sailors and marines, with the silent and shameful

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<sup>27</sup> Quoted in Sherwood, *Origins of Pan-Africanism*, 28.

<sup>28</sup> Spiro, *Defending the Master Race*, 242.

<sup>29</sup> Schmidt, *The United States Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1934*, 62–63.

<sup>30</sup> Schmidt, 69.

<sup>31</sup> Schmidt, 79.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> For example Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity*; Wilder, *Freedom Time*.

<sup>34</sup> For supportive articles, see "Speaking of Haiti," *The Chicago Defender*, September 4, 1915, 8; C. Brown, "Little Haiti and Her People: Conditions Are Such That The Country Could Be Made A Paradise—American Occupation Will Help," *Afro-American*, April 8, 1916, 4.

<sup>35</sup> Putnam, *The Insistent Call*, 59–61.

<sup>36</sup> For example, Brenda Gayle Plummer has demonstrated, in *Haiti and the United States*, the centrality of material and journalistic networks between African Americans and Haitians for the emergence of a critical African American perspective on the occupation.

acquiescence of 12,000,000 American Negroes too cowardly to lift a voice in effective protest or too ignorant of political affairs to know what is taking place'. Under the acerbic title 'The Cracker in the Caribbean', Harrison emphasised the historicity of Haiti in order to emphasise its subjection, demanding how 'we Africans of the dispersion can let the land of L'Ouverture lie like a fallen flower beneath the feet of swine?'<sup>37</sup>

Central to this emphasis on Haiti's contemporaneity was a drawing of connections between the occupation and the struggles of those of African descent elsewhere, contributing to a relational picture of a global racial order that saw black struggles as unified in an anticolonial present. African American newspapers began to emphasise the 'Southern' and 'white' dimensions to the US occupation<sup>38</sup> and to connect the suffering of Haitians to the travails of African Americans. In May, 1919, the Baltimore *Afro-American* pointedly reported a tirade by a US Senator against the League of Nations, in which Reed had centred the objection that 'colored countries' would be able to outnumber 'white' countries and had mocked Liberia as a 'joke nation', and Haiti as a country of 'baby killers and creatures of the forest'.<sup>39</sup> The next year, the newspaper referenced 'the white southerners who are occupying Haiti',<sup>40</sup> and began to describe some of the atrocities of the occupation.<sup>41</sup>

In March 1921, a striking example of this contemporaneity emerged when the *Crisis* published an open letter to President Warren G. Harding, which allied three domestic demands (the right to vote, to 'travel without insult', and an end to lynching) with 'freedom for our brothers in Haiti'.<sup>42</sup> Two months later, the *Chicago Defender*, which had previously supported the occupation, published an article sympathetic to the Haitian delegates in Chicago who had come 'with a report of the atrocities and outrages committed by the American forces'.<sup>43</sup> Haitian delegations continued to receive sympathetic coverage.<sup>44</sup> By May 1930, the *Afro-American* was attributing the occupation straightforwardly to 'the ancient U.S. theory that a Negro has no rights which a white man is bound to respect'.<sup>45</sup> In Paris, meanwhile, the Cayes Massacre of 1929 spurred the black radical press into providing urgent commentary and reflection on Haiti's situation. The black nationalist *La Race Nègre* insisted on the legitimacy of Haitian sovereignty by adopting a rhetorical strategy of insisting that Haiti carry out state-like functions on behalf of black peoples—such as suggesting that Haiti come to the assistance of Ethiopia in 1935,<sup>46</sup> or administer a mandate over Cameroun instead of the League of Nations.<sup>47</sup>

The reactions to the occupation of Haiti in *La Race Nègre* reveal an excoriation of the US occupation and a defence of Haitian sovereignty premised upon an insistence of Haiti's contemporaneity as a modern state that was being made *pre-modern* and de-industrialised by the occupation, thus precisely subverting the official 'civilising' rhetoric surrounding the occupation and its temporal premises. Its insistence on Haiti's ability to carry out state-like functions for African peoples represented an assault on the idea of temporal atavism, pointing instead to Haiti's unequivocal modernity and contemporaneity and its synchronous relationality to the struggles of the African continent and diaspora.

## Ethiopia

<sup>37</sup> Quoted in Harrison and Perry, *A Hubert Harrison Reader*, 239.

<sup>38</sup> The US Army was not desegregated until the 1940s, and the occupying marine force in Haiti was all-white. Renda, *Taking Haiti*, 53–56.

<sup>39</sup> "More Colored Nations Than White Ones," *Afro-American*, May 30, 1919, 1.

<sup>40</sup> "30,000 Blacks Occupy Rhineland: Americans Criticise French For Sending Colored Troops Into White Country; Frenchman Replies, Asks America Why Uncle Sam Sent White Troops Into The Black Republic Of Haiti," *Afro-American*, May 7, 1920, 1.

<sup>41</sup> "Airplanes Used To Kill Haitians," *Afro-American*, October 22, 1920, 2.

<sup>42</sup> Detweiler, *The Negro Press in the United States*, 146.

<sup>43</sup> "Haitians Say U. S. Made Them Suffer," *The Chicago Defender*, May 14, 1921.

<sup>44</sup> "Haitian Denounces American Invasion," *New Journal and Guide*, Feb 4, 1922, 3.

<sup>45</sup> "Get Out of Haiti," *Afro-American*, July 26, 1930, 6.

<sup>46</sup> Ludovic-Morin Lacombe. "Haiti: Son Devoir Envers L'Ethiopie," *La Race Nègre*. Jan-Feb 1936.

<sup>47</sup> Spiegler, "Aspects of Nationalist Thought Among French-Speaking West Africans, 1921-1939," 237.

Ethiopia's occupation began soon after Haiti's ended.<sup>48</sup> When border skirmishes, provoked by Italy, erupted at Wal Wal in December 1934, Ethiopia appealed to the League of Nations for assistance. But Britain and France, then concerned with the threat of German rearmament, showed little interest. A secret British report in June 1935, which was procured by the Italian government, found scant reason to defend Ethiopian sovereignty;<sup>49</sup> meanwhile, the agreements signed between Mussolini and the French foreign minister, Pierre Laval, in January 1935, included a surreptitious recognition of Italian primacy in Ethiopia.<sup>50</sup> President Roosevelt expressed sympathy with Ethiopia but did not invoke the Kellogg–Briand Pact of 1928, to which both Italy and Ethiopia were signatories. The long-planned Italian invasion finally came on October 3, 1935, without a declaration of war, and was marked by advanced methods of violence that included the use of aerial bombing (as in Haiti) as well as mustard gas. Ethiopia was incorporated into the short-lived Africa Orientale Italiana.

If Haiti was imagined in atavistic terms as having 'regressed' after the end of white rule, then Ethiopia during the Italian invasion was the subject of a chronopolitical discourse that represented the country in settler-colonial terms, as an ancient but dying civilisation that was being catapulted into the modern world through an act of violent colonial replenishment. Though this language was distinctly Fascist in its focus on modernisation, speed, power and will, it also drew heavily upon a lineage of the 'extinction discourse' that was linked to European, and especially 'Anglo-Saxon', settler colonialism.<sup>51</sup> A deep sympathy for the future Italy wished to build in Ethiopia was expressed in books and articles written by non-Italians across the White Atlantic.<sup>52</sup> This writing represents another chronopolitical approach to racialised sovereignty that was, in key ways, quite at odds with that which was mobilised against Haiti.

Consider the work of William Watts Chaplin. A white American war correspondent who arrived in Ethiopia on a ship carrying Blackshirts and the Italian general Pietro Badoglio, Chaplin's reporting began with a paean to Italian modernisation in Eritrea, where 'the roads grow visibly' in a stunning feat of engineering.<sup>53</sup> Chaplin fêted 'the civilizing influence of Mussolini's men'.<sup>54</sup> 'Determined whites', he explained, were 'spreading the gospel of cleanliness and health and justice by peaceful argument where possible, by force of arms where that is considered necessary'. Ethiopians were 'savage blacks'<sup>55</sup> and 'wild creatures',<sup>56</sup> while Italian colonizers 'remind one of America's early settlers who went about their daily tasks with a rifle ever at hand lest the redskins suddenly descend on them'.<sup>57</sup> Ethiopian music, meanwhile, was reminiscent of 'the swan song of savagery, the death rattle of barbarism' in the face of 'the white man's civilization'.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> There is a significant literature on the Italo-Ethiopian War and its international ramifications. For an overview, see Steiner, *The Triumph of the Dark*, chap. 2; the excellent volume by Strang, *Collision of Empires*; Mallett, *Mussolini in Ethiopia, 1919-1935*; Bahru Zewde, *History of Modern Ethiopia, 1855-1991*, chap. 4. Also useful are Ben-Ghiat and Fuller, *Italian Colonialism*; Harris, *The United States and the Italo-Ethiopian Crisis*; Mack Smith, *Mussolini*. On the role of the Catholic Church, see Ceci, *Il papa non deve parlare*.

<sup>49</sup> Harris, *The United States and the Italo-Ethiopian Crisis*, 10.

<sup>50</sup> Mallett, *Mussolini in Ethiopia, 1919-1935*, 27; Strang, *Collision of Empires*. See also Watt, 'Document: The Secret Laval-Mussolini Agreement of 1935 on Ethiopia'. For a discussion of the impact of sanctions, see Ristuccia, *1935 Sanctions against Italy*. On hopes for a pan-coloured alliance against Italy, see Clarke III, 'An Alliance of the "Colored" Peoples: Ethiopia and Japan'. On the relationship between Japan and Italy, see Hedinger, 'Universal Fascism and Its Global Legacy. Italy's and Japan's Entangled History in the Early 1930s'.

<sup>51</sup> See Brantlinger's excellent study of this discourse, *Dark Vanishings*.

<sup>52</sup> There is an absence of scholarly literature on the 'White Atlantic', but there are tantalising references to it in Mills, "Unwriting and Unwhitening the World," 210; Stam and Shohat, *Race in Translation*, xv.

<sup>53</sup> Chaplin, *Blood and Ink*, 29.

<sup>54</sup> Chaplin, 39.

<sup>55</sup> Chaplin, 47.

<sup>56</sup> Chaplin, 51.

<sup>57</sup> Chaplin, 35.

<sup>58</sup> Chaplin, 106.

Chaplin was scarcely alone in imagining that Italy's invasion, genocidal ambitions and attempted settlement of Ethiopia (as well as of Libya) heralded an alternative future of renewed settlerism, in which 'lesser races' would be swept aside by more powerful ones. Recent scholarship has shown how Italian colonisation in Africa became an explicit model for the future-oriented policy of the Third Reich in Eastern Europe, with high-ranking Nazi officials closely studying Italian interwar colonialism in Africa, an expansionist policy which they saw as 'the quintessence of fascist modernity.'<sup>59</sup> Neither was Chaplin alone in seeing similarities between Italy's occupation of Ethiopia and the history of the US. The New York correspondent of *Il Corriere della Sera* wrote that the US was likely to support Italy, given its experience with 'the primitive psychology of the colored race', and compared Ethiopia's admission to the League of Nations with the emancipation of enslaved African Americans, which, he wrote, had not been enough in seventy years to change the 'semi-barbarism' and 'incurable immaturity' of that community. Segregation in the US showed that 'America knows the Negro well and understands how to treat him ... Now,' he added, 'many Americans are curious to know if, as would be logical, one could institute a Jim Crow diplomatic car on the international train which leads to Geneva.'<sup>60</sup>

It was in reaction to this discursive as well as material assault on Ethiopian sovereignty that the invasion on October 3, 1935, was met with an unparalleled counter-mobilisation across the African continent and diaspora. In Paris, black, colonial and left-wing organisations set aside their differences and created a black-led popular front;<sup>61</sup> in London, the George Padmore and C. L. R. James-led International African Friends of Abyssinia was formed, the League of Coloured Peoples entered a newly radical phase, and Sylvia Pankhurst's influential *New Times and Ethiopian News* was set up;<sup>62</sup> across West Africa, 'Hands off Abyssinia' committees were set up, relief funds were collected, and mass demonstrations held;<sup>63</sup> in Cape Town and Durban, black dockworkers refused to handle Italian goods;<sup>64</sup> in the Caribbean, there were mass petitions, vocal public meetings, and riots;<sup>65</sup> in the US, the Pan-African Reconstruction Association began trying to raise volunteers for Ethiopia, while African American groups in Harlem organised the Provisional Committee for the Defense of Ethiopia, drawing thousands to their rallies.<sup>66</sup> Kwame Nkrumah, recalling the moment he heard of the invasion as a young student in London, wrote that 'it was almost as if the whole of London had suddenly declared war on me personally.'<sup>67</sup> For W. E. B. Du Bois, writing at the time: 'Black men and brown men have indeed been aroused as seldom before.'<sup>68</sup>

For black writers across the world, the destruction of Ethiopia's sovereignty elicited a temporally polyvalent anticolonial discourse. One set of engagements confronted directly the prominent language of Fascist-settlerist modernism, undermining the linearity and profanity of that discourse with a language saturated with religious symbolism, circularity and historicity. This is especially evident in much of the poetry about the war written by African American poets, including Langston Hughes, Owen Dodson and Marcus B. Christian. To take one example, the African American poet J. Harvey L. Baxter produced a volume of sonnets dedicated to the war, *Sonnets to the Ethiopians and Other Poems* (1936). As Jon Woodson has written, Baxter presented the conflict in this collection 'as a war between two competing modes of time—poetic time and linear time ... The Fascists exist in the dromomatic, futuristic present in which time is always speeding up and running out. Fascist time is linear, concrete, profane, and ahistorical; opposed to it is the scared, mythical time of the prophetic

<sup>59</sup> Bernhard, "Hitler's Africa in the East," 2–3.

<sup>60</sup> Quoted in Harris, *The United States and the Italo-Ethiopian Crisis*, 45.

<sup>61</sup> Spiegler, "Aspects of Nationalist Thought Among French-Speaking West Africans, 1921-1939," 265.

<sup>62</sup> Asante, *Pan-African Protest*, 45; Bush, *Imperialism, Race and Resistance*, 222–26.

<sup>63</sup> Asante, *Pan-African Protest*.

<sup>64</sup> Featherstone, "Black Internationalism, Subaltern Cosmopolitanism, and the Spatial Politics of Antifascism," 1412.

<sup>65</sup> Ewing, "Caribbean Labour Politics in the Age of Garvey, 1918–1938," 36.

<sup>66</sup> Harris, *African-American Reactions to War in Ethiopia, 1936-1941*.

<sup>67</sup> Nkrumah, *The Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah*, 22.

<sup>68</sup> Du Bois, "Inter-Racial Implications of the Ethiopian Crisis," 88.



and ritualistic mode of reality ... Baxter's poetic time is paradoxical, circular, eternal, and transcendent.<sup>69</sup>

But not all writing by black authors on Ethiopia evoked circular and transcendent temporalities. Another set of arguments saw Italy's invasion as tearing the façade off the interwar international society, revealing a still-bifurcated global order, divided by a Manichean racialisation, in which European colonial conquest and settlement in Africa remained tacitly acceptable. This argument contributed to the expression of a widespread and deep cynicism about the prospects of solidarity between Europe and Africa. It also fed into a reconceptualisation of the political affinities of Africans and African-descended peoples—in West Africa, the Caribbean, Britain, France, and the US—as standing alongside the other subjects of a European-dominated racial order, thereby facilitating forms of pan-Africanism, nationalism, and a strong proto-Third Worldism. Crucially, this perspective carried a vision of anticolonial *simultaneity* across what W. E. B. Du Bois called 'the whole colored world', a necessary response to a discursive assault on Ethiopia that was both future- and past-oriented.

This writing was especially evident across West Africa, where, as S. K. B. Asante's exceptional study *Pan-African Protest* has shown, the invasion was 'among the main influences in the awakening of racial and political consciousness', a turning point at which 'unequivocal demands for self-determination began to be made and signs of militancy began to appear'.<sup>70</sup> Criticisms of the colonial regime became markedly more hostile, while the West African press 'underwent a great transformation, becoming less parochial and more pan-African in content'.<sup>71</sup> Asante shows convincingly that the Ethiopian crisis formed a 'period of political incubation'<sup>72</sup> which had a decisive impact on the political views of post-1945 African leaders, who had seen Ethiopia as 'the shrine enclosing the last sacred spark of African political freedom, the impregnable rock of black resistance against white invasion, a living symbol, an incarnation of African independence'.<sup>73</sup> Nnamdi Azikiwe's *West African Pilot* lamented in August 1938 that 'if Abyssinia had not believed every declaration in the covenant of the League of Nations, Italy would assuredly not have met her unprepared'.<sup>74</sup> The *Sierra Leone Weekly News* derided 'The League of European Brotherhood, miscalled "League of Nations," ... let it die! Its seventeen years of existence have been seventeen years of stagnation and insincerity, such as a sickly world has never seen before and never cares to see again'.<sup>75</sup>

The idea of the invasion as stimulating in the present new forms of solidarity among the victims of a global racial order was carried over into a proto-Third Worldism. An essay on the crisis by W. E. B. Du Bois argued that '[t]he black world' knew that the invasion was 'the last great effort of white Europe to secure the subjection of black men.' But Italy's victory, he warned, would be 'costly' because 'the whole colored world'—'all that vast mass of men who have felt the oppression and insults, the slavery and exploitation of white folk, will say: "I told you so!"'<sup>76</sup> Joel Augustus Rogers, the prominent Jamaican historian, expressed a related view in his influential pamphlet *The Real Facts About Ethiopia* (1936). Seizing upon and inverting the white supremacism of Stoddard, whom he cited as a 'far-seeing thinker',<sup>77</sup> Rogers framed the Ethiopian crisis as the latest instance in a long saga of European or 'white' domination over the rest of the world, emphasising the historical lineage of racialised colonialism in contrast to both Fascist claims to temporal novelty and the claims of the institutions of interwar order to have superseded earlier forms of colonial violence and expropriation.

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<sup>69</sup> Woodson, *Anthems, Sonnets, and Chants*, 167.

<sup>70</sup> Asante, *Pan-African Protest*, 172.

<sup>71</sup> Asante, 53.

<sup>72</sup> Asante, 190.

<sup>73</sup> Asante, 17.

<sup>74</sup> "Negroes and Black Liberia," *West African Pilot*, August 2, 1938.

<sup>75</sup> "Rambling Talks," *SLWN*, May 9, 1936.

<sup>76</sup> Du Bois, "Inter-Racial Implications of the Ethiopian Crisis," 88.

<sup>77</sup> J. A. Rogers, *The Real Facts About Ethiopia*, 2.

‘For the past four centuries,’ he wrote, ‘the European, or white race, has been colonizing in all the lands of the darker races’—which, since it was ‘happening in the very lands of the colored peoples’, had ‘wounded their pride, aroused their deepest hate, and created in the hearts of darker people, totally unknown to one another a common hostility to white peoples.’<sup>78</sup>

Challenging the view that Ethiopia was not really ‘black’, and thus of no concern to African-descended peoples in the Americas, Rogers insisted that there were really ‘only two varieties of mankind, the black and the white’,<sup>79</sup> a political and material reading of race that grouped all colonised peoples, including, for example, the ‘dark-skinned people of India’,<sup>80</sup> together. ‘The avalanche is on its way,’ warned Rogers, ‘and it will not stop until the last vestiges of the brutal and debasing color-line imposed on the world by the white race shall have been shattered into irretrievable fragments.’<sup>81</sup> A letter in the *New York Tribune* concurred: ‘This is a war of black against white.’<sup>82</sup> So did I. T. A. Wallace-Johnson, the Sierra Leonean Communist militant, who argued during a speech in Sekondi that: ‘[t]he Negro masses of the world have long been in subserviency under the white nations. The present war (Italo-Ethiopian) is designed to open the eyes of the whole Negrodom and lead the Negroes through the path of emancipation from European serfdom.’<sup>83</sup> And the *West African Pilot* wrote that ‘the coloured world will exhibit no sympathy’ for white countries ‘when the time comes’, given the disregard of those countries for Ethiopia.<sup>84</sup>

These invocations of anticolonial simultaneity and solidarity, and of imminent pan-coloured victory, represented a decisive rejection of a racialised international society in which the ‘debasing color-line’ continued to operate its bifurcating logic. Across the African continent and diaspora, a weakening of pro-imperial or nationalist identities could be witnessed at this time alongside a strengthening of alternative solidarities—pan-African, African nationalist, black nationalist, pan-‘coloured’ and Third Worldist. As Robbie Shilliam has put it, ‘advocates of Ethiopianism defend[ed] Ethiopia’s sovereignty as part of their own liberation struggle against ... [the] global colonial order.’<sup>85</sup>

Perhaps the most striking example of the multiple temporal weapons wielded in defence of Ethiopia can be found in a stirring address to the League of Nations by a Haitian general, Alfred Auguste Nemours, which was published in the Paris-based journal *Africa*. Insisting that that ‘[t]he era of colonial wars is over, in Africa just as in America, just as the period of the exploitation of one race by another is also over,’<sup>86</sup> Nemours lambasted the widespread acquiescence to Italy’s invasion as evidence of systemic racism. In place of a Fascist future he invoked an alternative history and teleology, oriented around the Haitian and French Revolutions. And in a captivating sentence he described a powerful sense of anticolonial simultaneity, enabled by communicative technologies, which brought together the dispersed victims of the racial order in solidarity with Ethiopia. ‘[S]peaking in the name of the Blacks of Haiti,’ he said, ‘I know that all the millions of Blacks and men of colour, scattered throughout the world, are observing a minute’s silence to listen to me attentively.’<sup>87</sup>

## Liberia

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<sup>78</sup> J. A. Rogers, 2.

<sup>79</sup> J. A. Rogers, 7.

<sup>80</sup> J. A. Rogers, 2.

<sup>81</sup> J. A. Rogers, 3.

<sup>82</sup> Putnam, *The Insistent Call*, 108.

<sup>83</sup> Asante, *Pan-African Protest*, 124.

<sup>84</sup> “Nemesis Shall Come,” *West African Pilot*, November 9, 1938.

<sup>85</sup> Shilliam, “Intervention and Colonial-Modernity,” 1137.

<sup>86</sup> “Après 35 ans de lutttes contre l’oppression coloniale,” *Africa*, December 1, 1935.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

Unlike Haiti or Ethiopia, Liberia did not experience direct occupation during the interwar period. But its sovereignty came under severe strain in other ways.<sup>88</sup> The only republic on the African continent, its governing class, which was mostly descended from African American settlers, had for many decades engaged in hostilities with the indigenous groups of the country's 'interior', who formed a large majority of the country's overall population. It was only in the 1920s that the central government—after quelling revolts in 1910, 1915, 1918, and 1920—achieved a clear demarcation of the country's borders and established (virtually) complete control over the hinterland.<sup>89</sup> Liberia's government had endured constant financial pressure since the country's independence in 1847. Its rulers turned to the export of indigenous, mostly Kru, labour, agreeing to supply contract workers to the Spanish cacao plantations on the island of Fernando Po. The poor treatment of these labourers made this agreement increasingly unpopular with Liberians during the 1920s and it was terminated in 1927 (though workers continued to be supplied privately to the island.)

That year, the Liberian politician Thomas Faulkner accused the President-elect, Charles King, of using the Liberian Frontier Force to effectively enslave labourers for the financial benefit of a network of government officials.<sup>90</sup> The ensuing scandal received widespread international attention. A Committee of the League of Nations was convened to investigate the allegations. Its report found that slavery as classically understood did not exist in Liberia, but that the shipment of workers to Fernando Po, as well as to Gabon, was carried out 'under conditions of criminal compulsion scarcely distinguishable from slave-raiding and slave-trading.'<sup>91</sup>

Liberia was already subject to an American financial receivership; the League investigation involved serious consideration of turning the country into a territory administered under the League of Nations mandatory system. In 1929, the US threatened Liberia that outside intervention was practically inevitable due to 'the continual disorders, social disintegration and health menace provided by Liberia in its present condition'.<sup>92</sup> Over the next six years, Liberia faced severe financial pressure, repeated requests from Firestone for US military intervention, and attempts to expel it from the League of Nations. It was only in 1935, when President Barclay signed a new agreement with American financial interests, that the crisis was finally averted.

Liberia faced a chronopolitical assault similar in some ways to that of Haiti. The idea that race had propelled these states atavistically backwards in time to a pre-sovereign condition was used in both cases to justify intervention. Given Liberia's peculiar situation, however, there was far more of a focus on the West African republic as parodying a form of sovereignty that existed properly elsewhere: acting it out without achieving it, in particular by failing to achieve 'civilisation', and therefore making a mockery of the institution itself. This led to a chronopolitics of unusual comparative simultaneity. For Henry Fenwick Reeve, who published *The Black Republic* in 1923, Liberia's rulers had failed 'to keep in line with the great civilizing efforts of other Governments on the west coast of Africa';<sup>93</sup> 'the spirit of pomposity runs through the entire warp and woof of their civic life'; they were simply 'incapable of civilized government'.<sup>94</sup> 'The Great Powers,' he warned, 'have

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<sup>88</sup> On interwar Liberia, see the contemporaneous but detailed and accurate account by Buell, *The Native Problem in Africa*, as well as the excellent study by Sundiata, *Black Scandal*. See also Gershoni, *Black Colonialism*; Cassell, *Liberia*. For a political economy view see Kraaij, *The Open Door Policy of Liberia*; Brown, *The Economic History of Liberia* (discussed below). See also M'bayo, 'W. E. B. Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, and Pan-Africanism in Liberia, 1919–1924'.

<sup>89</sup> On the revolts, Indirect Rule, and the Frontier Force, see Sundiata, *Black Scandal*, 5–9. From 1912 to 1927, the Frontier Force was staffed with African American Army officers in an official agreement with the US government. See Rainey, 'Buffalo Soldiers in Africa'.

<sup>90</sup> Buell, *The Native Problem in Africa*, 819–52; Brown, *The Economic History of Liberia*, 174–208; Sundiata, *Black Scandal*.

<sup>91</sup> Christy, 'Pawning of Human Beings in Liberia'. For the House of Lords debate on the matter following the publication of the Christy report, see *Hansard* HL Deb 16 March 1932 vol 83 c913.

<sup>92</sup> Sundiata, *Brothers and Strangers*, 157.

<sup>93</sup> Reeve, *The Black Republic*, 9.

<sup>94</sup> Reeve, 46.

no use for a second “Haiti,” or San Domingo on the Continent of Africa, however pure its aspirations may be in theory’.<sup>95</sup> Liberia’s supporters in Africa recognised the power of this discourse. The country’s ‘detractors’ believed that as a ‘Negro Republic’, it ‘could be nothing but a caricature of self-government’, complained the *Sierra Leone Weekly News* in 1928.<sup>96</sup> Even the pan-African pioneer Martin Delaney had described the country as a ‘parody’ and ‘a poor miserable mockery—a burlesque on a government’.<sup>97</sup>

While the pan-African view on Liberia became more supportive,<sup>98</sup> with limited exceptions the white European and American commentators on interwar Liberia employed variants of this language of parody and ersatz.<sup>99</sup> Sidney de la Rue, an American financial administrator who was posted to Liberia, wrote that while there existed there ‘a semblance of the form of government brought from America, ... [i]t is probable that there never was a plan of government less suited to the psychology of the tribesmen than the one under which Liberia has laboured.’<sup>100</sup> The examples of Liberia and Haiti were cited by British colonial administrators, both during the interwar period and after the Second World War, to warn against the consequences of decolonisation in West Africa.<sup>101</sup> And in the House of Lords in 1934, Liberia’s situation was described in the following words: ‘Almost from the very start there has been trouble and no real progress in civilisation has been made. There is a pretentious imitation of American political institutions, but beyond that it hardly goes, and, although we ought to recognise the labours of a few high-minded and patriotic Liberians themselves to improve matters, the position of the country to-day is wholly deplorable.’<sup>102</sup>

This was a decidedly synchronous conception of Liberia’s place in global time, which compared the country to other, ‘real’, states, in order to demonstrate its fundamental incomparability with them. True, it represented a linear and evolutionary vision of state-building and progress. But that vision of history was invoked precisely in order to point to Liberia’s failure to ‘achieve’ statehood. Far from being denied, coevalness was weaponised in the context of a vision of competitive state-building in which sovereignty was sapped from those who failed to keep up. This was a colonial-racial chronopolitics that did not assign Liberia an allochronic ‘stagnation in time’ (the Fabian idea of being trapped in another historical epoch), but a stagnation in the *present*, attributed to its racial limitations.

How did pro-Liberian writers respond? Countering the idea of Liberia as parodying sovereignty in the present—a kind of delegitimising contemporaneity—many of them insisted on the necessity of Liberia ‘succeeding’ as a sovereign African nation, a view which pitched the country forwards into the future. This desire produced significant rhetorical support for violent state-building and colonising processes. Henry Sylvester Williams, the pioneering pan-Africanist, wrote in 1907 that ‘there are 1,500,000 primitive natives’ in Liberia ‘waiting to be brought under the hand of a more improved state of existence.’<sup>103</sup> The strenuous defences of Liberian sovereignty from W. E. B. Du Bois, who had been directly involved in American diplomacy relating to Liberia,<sup>104</sup> echoed the hope that Liberia

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<sup>95</sup> Reeve, 178.

<sup>96</sup> “The Rising Star of Liberia,” *Sierra Leone Weekly News*, June 9, 1928.

<sup>97</sup> Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850-1925*, 35. Delaney reversed his position by 1859, ‘making friendly overtures towards the Liberians.’ *Ibid.*

<sup>98</sup> On Liberia’s role in pan-Africanism, see Harris, *Global Dimensions of the African Diaspora*; Zachernuk and Sundiata, *Brothers and Strangers*; Hickey, “Positive Perspectives on Independent Africa”; Geiss, *Pan-African Movement*; Saha, “The Romance of Nationhood.”

<sup>99</sup> One key exception was Buell’s section on Liberia in *The Native Problem in Africa*.

<sup>100</sup> De La Rue, *The Land of the Pepper Bird*, 209.

<sup>101</sup> ‘Citing the spectre of “independent” Liberia, the “progressive” Governor of the Gold Coast, Sir Alan Burns, warned of the potential “chaos” that would result from white withdrawal without a “long and careful preparation”.’ Bush, *Imperialism, Race and Resistance*, 265. ‘Apart from his personal prejudices, Lord Lugard was influenced in his views by the exploitative and oligarchical character of Negro self-government in Haiti and Liberia.’ Coleman, *Nigeria*, 216.

<sup>102</sup> HL Deb 25 April 1934 vol 91 cc724-5.

<sup>103</sup> Sherwood, *Origins of Pan-Africanism*, 208.

<sup>104</sup> He served in a US diplomatic role during the January 1924 inauguration of President Charles D. B. King,

would, if given time, achieve true comparability with other states. He intervened to prevent the success of Garvey's mission to the country, hoped for black capitalists to invest in Liberia and African Americans to be hired on Firestone's rubber plantations in the country, and strongly defended Liberia during the labour crisis when it was accused of selling its own population into slavery on the Spanish-owned island Fernando Po.<sup>105</sup> West African newspapers expressed similar views. Liberia 'must hew and hack her way forward' to realise herself as a state, argued the *Sierra Leone Weekly News*,<sup>106</sup> which also strongly identified with Liberia's coastal settler elite and fumed against Liberia's indigenous peoples as 'the savage Cossacks of the border-line'.<sup>107</sup> And Nnamdi Azikiwe, in his book *Liberia in World Politics* (1934), insisted that '[t]he pacification of the bellicose tribes is an achievement that cannot be minimized.'<sup>108</sup>

If there was in much of this writing a surprising embrace of the less salubrious aspects of state-building, with echoes of 'subaltern realism',<sup>109</sup> it is important to recognise that many were critical of Liberia's government but also saw the subversion of its sovereignty as hypocritical and motivated by the global colour line. George Padmore, who was famously at loggerheads with his superiors in the Comintern over Liberia, explained to Du Bois in 1934 that 'Liberia has her faults, but since white politicians are no better than black ones, it is our duty to save the "black baby from the white wolves".'<sup>110</sup> Du Bois similarly wrote in 1933 that while 'Liberia is not faultless' its 'chief crime is to be black and poor in a rich, white world; and in precisely that portion of the world where color is ruthlessly exploited as a foundation for American and European wealth.'<sup>111</sup>

Virtually every mention of Liberia during these years in the West African newspapers made a point along these lines. The context to Liberia's problems was seen as 'a general agreement among the white races to keep the black races down; the same spirit which, in the Mediaeval times, unified the nations of Europe into one vast brotherhood of Christendom against non-Christian nations' and which 'still exists in these modern days in the new guise of a confederacy of the white races of the world—Whitedom against Blackdom.'<sup>112</sup> And as the 'Rambler' of the *Sierra Leone Weekly News* argued the same year, Liberia 'has suffered from a great delusion all these years of her existence. She has put nationhood before racehood. So long as she was humoured and tolerated as a "Sovereign State" by the Great Powers, she felt highly flattered and cared not a rush what befell the rest of the Race.'<sup>113</sup> But Liberia had now realised the impossibility of 'nationhood' in a world that continued to be ordered by race and not in fact juridical sovereignty.

The 'Rambler' points to another perspective on Liberia. This was a view which embraced the synchronous contemporaneity with which Liberia was condemned but subverted it by revealing the tragic web of global relationality that kept Liberia weak and impoverished. Such writing was often ambivalent about the possibility of competitive state-building in the context of a radically uneven world. In one article for example, published in August 1931, the *Sierra Leone Weekly News* looked at

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<sup>105</sup> Robinson, "DuBois and Black Sovereignty." These were positions which Du Bois later publicly recanted. He explained: 'I know what European imperialism has done to Asia and Africa; but, nevertheless, I had not then lost faith in the capitalist system, and I believed that it was possible for a great corporation, headed by a man of vision, to go into a country with something more than the mere ideal of profit.' Robinson, 46.

<sup>106</sup> "Present Financial Position of the Republic of Liberia," *SLWN*, May 12, 1919.

<sup>107</sup> "Colony and Protectorate: Can Annexation Be Avoided?" *SLWN*, December 3, 1932.

<sup>108</sup> Azikiwe, *Liberia in World Politics*, 221. Azikiwe's deep interest in Liberia, which he studied in near-obsessive detail, demonstrates the power that the idea of Liberia had over West Africans interested in political freedom.

<sup>109</sup> Ayoob, "Inequality and Theorizing in International Relations."

<sup>110</sup> Derrick, *Africa's Agitators*, 300.

<sup>111</sup> Quoted in Robinson, "DuBois and Black Sovereignty," 43.

<sup>112</sup> "Rambling Talks," *SLWN*, September 19, 1931. The most serious white scholarly engagement with Liberia, that of Raymond Buell, evinced a view that was not, in fact, dissimilar. 'Liberians realize that through themselves the negro race is on trial before the world. They feel, with some justification, that the white races have not given them a fair chance to prove their capabilities.' Buell, *The Native Problem in Africa*, 734.

<sup>113</sup> "Rambling Talks," *SLWN*, September 19, 1931.

Liberia in relation to the ‘white civilised nations of the world’. Going beyond a straightforward condemnation of Western hypocrisy, the article explicitly pointed to ‘the tragedy of the situation’ through which Liberia had become part of ‘the grand chain of what is known as the Comity of Nations’, but only in a position of structural weakness due to its ‘poverty’, thereby finding itself ‘a link in the chain of international force of world-wide development.’<sup>114</sup> The adoption of the tragic mode here conveyed a strongly structuralist tone.

The most sustained and complex writing on Liberia from this perspective came from George W. Brown, an African American scholar, whose book *The Economic History of Liberia* (1941) was based on his LSE doctoral thesis.<sup>115</sup> Brown’s economic history was at once a rigorous account of Liberia’s economy in historical perspective—it remains a landmark in the field—and a contemplation of the tragic nature of Liberia’s economic relationship with the rest of the world.<sup>116</sup> He detailed the history of settlement in Liberia, its conflicts with pre-existing coastal communities, and the early attempts to build a system of plantation agriculture in the country in order to explain ‘the inevitable resort to loans and concessions by the Liberian people’.<sup>117</sup> For Brown, the country’s interwar predicament had to be placed within the context of its essentially tragic historical political economy. By 1924, with the granting of the huge Firestone concession, whose effects for indigenous Liberians had often been ‘disastrous’,<sup>118</sup> Brown saw Liberia’s rulers as having become, essentially, a *comprador* elite: ‘the energies of Liberian administrators are largely devoted to collecting interest for foreign investors’.<sup>119</sup>

All the while, the professions of internationalism in the interwar order were, for Liberia, not a strength but a weakness, for ‘Liberia felt that she was defending her very existence against the ever-threatening aggressiveness of stronger neighbours now shielded by that nobleness inherent in the League’s Covenant’—which had not, he pointed out, helped Ethiopia, under Italian occupation at the time of his writing.<sup>120</sup> With its huge Firestone concession, the US continued to see the country essentially as a colony. What of the country’s elite? ‘Obviously the hopelessness of their economic position has not escaped the Liberian rulers,’ Brown wrote. ‘Puppets or pawns in the big game of international finance, they serve as little more than clerks or tellers who pass on to the foreign brokers the contributions from the mass of virile Africans, retaining for themselves little more than is adequate and necessary for sustenance.’<sup>121</sup>

Yet Brown’s characterisation of the country was not entirely pessimistic. He saw a future for it in the indigenous Liberian peasants whom he thought to represent another form of economy and mode of existence. Like the most perceptive editorialising in the *Sierra Leone Weekly News*, Brown’s book was infused with a sense of tragedy—in some ways similar to what David Scott has called ‘the tragic vision in postcolonial time’<sup>122</sup> and what Richard Lebow has called ‘the tragic vision of politics’<sup>123</sup>—characterised by the extreme difficulty of constructing a balanced Liberian economy in a world of predatory capitalism and imperialism. It was, then, something that became common to the postcolonial condition: the difficulty, as Naeem Inayatullah has put it, of realising ‘concrete sovereignty in the face of the external authority of the wealth-producing global division of labour’.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> “The Black Republic of Liberia and the White Civilised Nations of the World,” *SLWN*, August 29, 1931.

<sup>115</sup> Born in Madrid, Missouri, Brown studied at Howard and Chicago universities before completing his doctorate at the LSE. He later married Elsie Kaye, the daughter of a prominent English industrialist, converted to Islam while in Pakistan, and became director of the King’s Mill in Huddersfield. See “Negro Expatriate Runs 900-Year Old Textile Firm.”

<sup>116</sup> See Hopkins, *An Economic History of West Africa*, 2. See also Clower, *Growth without Development*; and Johnson, *Bitter Canaan*.

<sup>117</sup> Brown, *The Economic History of Liberia*, 65.

<sup>118</sup> Brown, 205.

<sup>119</sup> Brown, 195.

<sup>120</sup> Brown, 199, 225.

<sup>121</sup> Brown, 230.

<sup>122</sup> Scott, “The Tragic Vision in Postcolonial Time.”

<sup>123</sup> Lebow, *The Tragic Vision of Politics*.

<sup>124</sup> Inayatullah, “Beyond the Sovereignty Dilemma,” 52.

But for Brown, repeated references in his study suggest that for him, just as for other black writers, it was Liberia's experience of racialisation—its existence as a black state in a hostile white world—that contributed centrally to its tragedy. With the occupation of Ethiopia, Brown observed, Liberia was now the 'last of the Black Governments in the Black Country.'<sup>125</sup> Surrounded by hostile 'white powers', it 'could not stand for an hour against the embittered might of the mechanized war machines of any world power.'<sup>126</sup> The tragedy of Liberia, from its inception to the 1940s, was thus fundamentally a tragedy of the near-impossibility of sustaining a black republic under the relentlessly racialised exigencies of the interwar international society and its attendant racialised bifurcation.

## Conclusion

Haiti, Liberia and Ethiopia were unavoidably modern states—respectively a revolutionary republic, a settler colony and a constitutional monarchy—but their juridical sovereignties during the interwar period were rebuffed through a chronopolitical racialisation that saw them in terms of regression, parody, extinction and failure. I have suggested that their struggles can help to develop our understanding of a stratifying and racialised hierarchy at the core of our globalised international society, and can point towards resolving postcolonialism's temporal aporias by showing us how colonial and racial difference was envisaged chronopolitically with respect to these three states.

The experiences of these states suggests how the globalisation of international society involved a two-track temporality, on the one hand opening the door to a global synchrony of functionally undifferentiated political forms, but on the other employing a chronopolitical stratification which assigned racialised states a status of permanent 'not-yet', unfulfiment and stasis—an extension, then, of the temporality of colonialism, but transposed onto a new political order. For a colonised 'world society', this self-contradictory order necessitated a flexible engagement with the politics of time, whose mobilisation, I think, we can see as a 'practice of power'<sup>127</sup> in relation to global order: a subaltern seizing of the technologies of imperialism (specifically print, travel and literacy) in order to narrate an opposing view of global order. Fundamental to this discursive struggle and to the construction of the counter-narrative was the transmission of texts and arguments across the anticolonial print circuits of the Black Atlantic.

As pan-African writers suggested, the struggles of Haiti, Liberia and Ethiopia to retain their interwar independence point to a conception of race in international society not as a flaw in an otherwise progressive evolution, to be ironed out through the passage of time, but as a keystone around which the 'liberal order' was able to span its most recent and most expansive structure after the dissolution of the colonial empires. If race in the United States 'came into its own with slavery's abolition' then on the international level we might see race as coming into its own with colonialism's abolition. It was in this context that black and pan-African writers grappled with nationalism and its attendant modes of political rhetoric and organisation, alongside its particular temporality.

A racialised chronopolitics continues to structure international society and its regimes of citizenship, bordering, immigration, deportation. But just as in the interwar period, it operates flexibly: we find both a contemporary allochronistic denial of coevalness *and* an 'enforced orientation to the present', a powerful (and violent) denial of the future, of planning and forward-thinking, in the regimes of immigration custody and deportation which structure today's global order.

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<sup>125</sup> Brown, *The Economic History of Liberia*, 225.

<sup>126</sup> Brown, 214.

<sup>127</sup> Hurrell, *On Global Order*, 21.

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