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**Ideas of Africa and the African Presence in
the Early Twentieth Century**

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Ideas of Africa and the African Presence in the Early 20th Century

Mamadou Diouf

This paper grew out of a seminar I co-taught with Jinny Prais. The seminar was intended to present students with primary documents about how Africa was imagined and re-imagined in the context of the early twentieth century world.

To begin my discussion, I selected opening remarks that are somewhat of a meditation on three intersecting events: (1) A monument erected on top of a volcanic hill in the westernmost, Atlantic African city, Dakar (**Photo 1**) (2) Ngugi wa Thiongo's last book, *Something Torn and New. An African Renaissance* (2009), and Henry Louis Gates opened on "the Ending the Slave Trade" in the April 23, 2010 issue of the *New York Times* (3):

Designed to compare with and challenge the Statue of Liberty, the 52-meter high African Renaissance monument represents an "African family," an allegory of Africa's renaissance after centuries of domination, crisis and poverty. It was inaugurated on the 3rd of April 2010 by President Abdoulaye Wade. Twenty African heads of states were present. At the inauguration, due to delays in the ceremony, Aimé Césaire's play, *La Tragédie du Roi Christophe*, a narrative about the insane authoritarian dictatorship of Christophe in Haiti, was interrupted.

While a pioneering example of artistic expression, the monument has ignited controversy across Senegal, continental Africa, within the African Diaspora writ large, particularly within intellectual, developmental and artistic circles worldwide. Indeed, the piece begs several questions that are central to these raging debates, including: What are the artist's intentions? What possible narratives and/or multiple readings does this piece provoke against its implicit history of, for example, Pan Africanism and African Renaissance around which its narrative is seemingly constructed? And, how might we interpret and assess/analyze the entire repertoire of histories and stories upon which the monument is built relative to the texts, scholarly production, and legacy of activism of the early 20th century?

- Ngugi wa Thiongo's *Something Torn and New. An African Renaissance* (2009) explores the "dismemberment of Africa in "two halves", between the continent and its Diaspora, following the Berlin conference that literally fragmented and reconstituted Africa into British, French, Portuguese and German, Belgian, and Spanish territories. His project is precisely to *re-member* the dismembered body and the cultures of Africa. Nowhere is such project more compelling than in one of the oldest and best stories of remembering from African mythology, that is, the Egyptian story of Osiris, Isis, and Horus) who planted "the seeds of communal renewal and self-confidence" in order to "decolonize the African mind and modernity" (ix). He writes that [W]herever they went, in their voyages of land, sea, and mind, Europeans subplanted their own memories by custom and practice whenever they traveled. In his book *The Idea of Africa*, V. Y Mudime, writes, "[T]he geographic expansion of Europe and its civilization... the world to its memory" (7). Ngugi continues: "The African eagle can fly only with remembered wings. Re-membering Africa will bring about the flowering of the African renaissance; and African modernity will play its role in the globe on the reciprocal egalitarian basis of give and take, ultimately realizing the Garveysian vision of common humanity of progress and achievement 'that will wipe away the odor of progress prejudice, and elevate the human race to the height of real godly love and satisfaction' (Marcus Garvey) (98).

- Henry Louis Gates op ed on "the Ending the Slave Trade" in the April 23, 2010 issue of the *New York Times* revisiting the cause of the dismembering of Africa and questioning through reparations the conditions of possibility of the remembering of the two halves, the continent and the African Diaspora.

This paper seeks to examine how Black intellectuals and artists (African American and African) engaged with their own exclusion from universal History in the early twentieth century. What framework did they develop in order to restructure the universal History¹ in order to accommodate their inclusion? What competing narratives of the universal emerged from their efforts to decenter world-history written from the

¹ Universal history refers here to Western understanding of History as defined by Hegel's "World-history"

vantage point of Europe? It aims at understanding the role of Africa in their discussion and historical methods, in this case world-history, the cyclical nature of history, the grand narratives, and non-national history, that they adopted to restore Africa to universal history and humanity. It identifies, describes and analyzes two different intellectual approaches—Atlantic and African—to Africa and world history. African Americans and Africans are engaging both, but at different moments, and according to changing circumstances that are specific to the contexts in which they were constructing usable pasts. Using similar resources, in this case evidence of African civilization, customs, and culture derived from the social sciences, both groups, as with the West, sought in Africa ways to reassert their authority, in the African American case as citizens of the United States and active members of the international “community of nations”, and in the African case as citizens of empire.

History is a contested and colonized terrain. As Ranajit Guha argues in his book *History at the Limits of World-History*, Western historiography is an act of expropriation whereby non-Western peoples are excluded from the universal narrative of history, and, in turn, humanity. Hegel’s concept of World-history, the history of state affairs, was a powerful weapon; it excluded the nations and peoples of the “oriental realm” on the basis of their having not matured into statehood². In the early twentieth century, Africans and people of African descent sought to contest their exclusion from this history. Many did so by adopting the view that “time moved in cycles,” and all civilizations, including African, were subject to periods of advancement and decline³. This “Gibbonesque theory of historical cycles within which civilizations thrive, wither, and topple, with a dash of divine will thrown in for good measure,” challenged the Hegelian view of History as confined to the nation-state and provided room for another approach to universal history – world history – in which Africa and its Diaspora could be accommodated. For Africans and people of African descent living and traveling within the Atlantic world (that includes the Atlantic enclaves along the coast of West Africa), this view was politically motivated and strategic, as it allowed them to include Africa in the history of humankind, which, in turn, enabled them to insist on their own

² R. Guha, *History at the Limit of World-History*. New York, Columbia University Press, 2000, 39.

³ Clare Corbould, *Becoming African Americans: Black Public Life in Harlem, 1919-1939*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009, 59.

role in the past and future of human history. It was a critique of the linear evolutionary history of the Enlightenment, and one that was made decades before Prasenjit Duara's similar critique of the historiography of postcolonial nations⁴.

This presentation is about exploring the genealogy of this ongoing discussion and the intellectual and political resources mobilized and circulated regarding the location of Africa in the universal narrative and in the international stage, focusing on a critical moment, the first 50 years of the 20th century. It's about how Africa became an intellectual object for African Americans and Africans constructed by means of re-interpreting the "vogue nègre" (Photos 4, 6,);

"negrophilia" (Photos 7, 8, 9) and of the early anthropological texts and how these texts and images are selected picked up and reframed to shape the universal narrative of human history and contribution to humanity. The main areas of intervention were, History, War, Man and the new science of man, Civilization and Modernity, music, Art and dance, Africa as an object of studies: African, African American and Diaspora studies.

This moment includes: the end of the 19th century with the scramble for Africa; the height of new imperialism, and the reconstruction in the US; the moment of the Russian revolution and World War I; the interwar period and the emergence of modernism in art; the emergence of the new sciences of Man; the development of international feminist movements; the Second World War and the development of Nazism; the twilight years of the European empires and the beginning of decolonization and the civil rights movement in the United States

Beginning in the late nineteenth century and throughout the twentieth century Africans and people of African descent met in cities around the world in Africa, Europe and the Americas. Their time spent in these cities brought them into dialogue with each other. The various political and cultural movements they created led to the formation of international networks and public and private spaces in which they imagined "Africa" using concepts exclusively associated with Western political modernity, such as

⁴ Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation*.

universalism, notions of citizenship and subjecthood, and civil society, legal equality and justice.

These concepts have often been viewed as western inventions, and as critical political tools used by Europe to colonize the non-western world. While it cannot be denied that they carry the burden of colonial history and oppression, colonized peoples were active participants in the development and elaboration of these concepts.

African Americans were among the first to experience and respond to a need for “Africa” to exist in the world; they seek an African presence/identity (a kind of turning Africa into a resource) that they can use to make claims about their inclusion in the world, in human history, meaning citizenship, civilization and modernity, at the beginning of the 20th century. They invented Africa to carve out a space for all Black people. At this time, the only way for African Americans to include themselves in the human family was to recycle Africa back into the universal narrative (of history). They invent Africa to then reinsert it (and all black people) into world history. Africans living abroad join this afro-American/European discussion. They use and draw from both “Africas” – and develop the idea of Africa in new ways to suit their own agendas within the empire.

African Americans took hold of and used the European vogue noire (**Photo 6**), a movement in which Africa was represented, but much more as an object to be used by Europeans in their own story about World War I, imperial greed, the Machine, and so on. Their turn to Africa was not meant to be about recycling Africa back into the universal narrative of history. Europeans experienced a need for “Africa”- but this Africa functions more as an object that they can use to rethink and revitalize their own position and civilization. The European project was about using Africa only insofar as the Black primitive continent can help them reinvent the west. The African American discussion that pulls in part from the European one is also about “Africa”, as an idea, an object, a presence in the world and an identity – but not to repair African American culture or history, but to be used to validate African American claims to being included in world history.

Nevertheless, the movement did yield a new archive about African history, civilization and argued strongly against the understanding of Africa in the late 19th

century. This new archive and understanding of Africa, and the new opportunities it introduce into the public sphere for thinking about Africa in a positive --- was used by African Americans. Africa is figured prominently in this quest. As Clare Corbould observes in her exploration of the Harlem Renaissance period, for African and diasporic people throughout the Atlantic, Africa was vital to their anti-racial and anti-colonial crusades. In the nineteenth century, Africa as a physical territory provided African Americans with an opportunity to demarcate an alternative space within which to build their lives, and thus played a key role in their ideological and rhetorical fight against slavery in the United States⁵.

In this presentation, I am less interested in how Africa is reworked within this moment; my concern lies with how African Americans and later Africans intervened in the vogue noire discussion of Africa and used the information available in the service of their own projects. African Americans are the first to use this archive to make their claims about “Africa” and to reinsert Africa into world history. Du Bois engaged in a dialogue with the vogue noire using the knowledge it produced to begin his own project – the Pan African movement - to bring a new framing to Africa within the “community of nations” international debate, to imagine a new epistemological, political and cultural territories for black people.

In the early part of the 20th century, Africans, residing in Atlantic enclaves and in European metropolises entered into the discussion, and also drawing on vogue noire and using the openings provided from this movement to their own advantage within the colonial empires. They began contributing to the reinvention of Africa at an international level.

At this point, it is critical to note that Africa as an identity is really a production (at least initially) of African Americans. What we hope to open up for discussion during this conference and hopefully the book to follow is: how Africans are using the invention of Africa (or Africa as it has been reconstituted in the international world – the world of black internationalism and the European world of vogue noire – the world of artists and so on searching for a solution to the West). How are they drawing upon the

⁵ *Becoming African Americans: Black Public Life in Harlem, 1919-1939*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009, 59.

idea of Africa as a kind of resource to negotiate their claims within the imperial and colonial situation?

Initially, the African American vision of Africa was strongly influenced by an evangelical Christian vision of Africa as a land of heathens needing conversion. African Americans such as Martin Delany presented themselves as self-sacrificing missionaries gone to Africa to redeem a continent and a people buried in darkest ignorance. At the same time, they saw it as a land in which they could find freedom from racial oppression. Consequently, the debate on Africa among African Americans beginning in the mid-nineteenth century revolved around the question of black American emigration to Africa, with Fredrick Douglass loudly declaring his opposition to emigration in favor of integration into American society, and Martin Delany, Henry Highland Garnet, and Alexander Crummell strongly advocating the relocation of African Americans to West Africa (as well as to parts of central America and the Caribbean).⁶

Despite their colonial packaging, emigration programs and expeditions, facilitated connections between Africa and its Diaspora.

It was not until the end of the nineteenth century, with the rise of ethnology, that a more positive image of the cultures of the continent was constructed by anthropologists and reinterpreted in a comparative framework in which black intellectuals located the historical trajectory of their community against that of the West. Ferris and Du Bois benefited substantially from the shift in thinking about Africa in the Western world that began at the end of the nineteenth century with the work of Leo Frobenius and Franz Boas. Their ideas, while still marginal in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, intersected with and informed the work of Du Bois and Ferris, and eventually gained greater traction and legitimacy in the popular press and academy during the years leading up to and after the First World War. The view that race and culture were mutually constitutive, despite Boas's efforts to disentangle these two concepts, remained the dominant understanding of race during the pre-war years. In science and in popular literature and art, the depiction of Africans as "savage" and "primitive" continued, though the critique of Western civilization that developed after the war did help to increase the credibility and distribution of more positive theories

⁶⁶ Hollis Lynch, *The Search for a Homeland*

and images related to the continent.⁷ The war weakened the dominant pro-imperialist vision of the West as the only representation of civilization and thus created room for the possibility for other expressions of civilization to be recognized and valued. Africa, once labeled the “dark continent,” became a resource for artists, intellectuals, students, and statesmen in the west as they sought to repair what was perceived to be an ailing civilization overtaken by imperial greed, industrialization, and war.⁸

James Clifford describes the artistic, musical, literary, intellectual, and scientific productions of the period as representing “negrophilia,”⁹ which he defines as a “multivalent aesthetic and cultural phenomenon” in which Africa was re-imagined through visual and plastic arts, as well as within popular material and mass culture. Negrophilic productions and the new modes of aesthetic, philosophical and cultural representation promoted by “European primitives” valorized and authorized African civilization, art, music, and dance, all of which were deemed capable of rejuvenating a sterile, “overcivilized, moribund and decadent” Western civilization.¹⁰ African musical and art forms, associated with purity, natural authenticity and spontaneity of expression, had a profound influence on Europeans and were, for some, the reason for new explorations of Africa, not necessarily as a space to control, but as a continent and people in which to re-discover inspiration, hope, and human spirituality. As French

⁷ Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of the Species by Means n of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* (1859) and *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871); Count Joseph Arthur, *Essai sur l'Inégalité des Races* (1853).

⁸ Petrine Archer-Straw, *Negrophilia. Avant-Garde Paris and Black Culture in the 1920s*. London, Thames and Hudson, 2000.

⁹ Clifford, James. “Negrophilia.” in *A New History of French Literature* edited by Denis Hollier and Howard Bloch. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Cambridge University Press, 1989, 901-908. The word is also used in its French form “nérophilie” in the title of the last chapter of his book, *La Peintur Française (1905-1914) et l'Art nègre* (Paris, 1968) by Jean Laude and by the curators of the exhibition *White on Blacks: Images of Blacks in Popular Culture. An Exhibition of the Negrophilia Collection* (Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam, December 1989 – August 1990). The term “vogue nègre” is also used in relation to interest in Africa and African society during the interwar period. Carole Sweeney. *From Fetish to Subject: Race, Modernism, and Primitivism, 1919-1935*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger Publishers, 2004; Brent Edwards. *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003.

¹⁰ Mark Antliff & Patricia Leighten, *Cubism and Culture*. London, Thames & Hudson, 2001. See also Carole Sweeney. *From Fetish to Subject: Race, Modernism, and Primitivism, 1919-1935*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger Publishers, 2004, 4.

anthropologist and writer Michel Leiris¹¹ wrote in 1939, “[i]n jazz, too, came the first appearance of Negroes, the manifestation and the myth of black Edens which were to lead me to Africa and, beyond Africa, to ethnology.”¹² Leiris was not the first to link art to science, as Clifford notes, “postwar negrophilia permeated and linked the domains of music, art, anthropology, literature, and dance.”¹³

Ethnology, anthropology, sociology, linguistics, and cultural morphology—the new sciences of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century—re-imagined African societies and cultures as spheres of reason and sophisticated aesthetic sensibilities.¹⁴ The research of Leo Frobenius, Franz Boas, Bronislaw Malinowski, Maurice Delafosse, among others provided evidence of African civilization—political and social organizations, states and legal institutions, and systems of justice—and insisted that Africans were civilized even when judged according to European standards. The combination of academic and artistic productions in which Africa was being rethought (not always in a positive light) that constituted negrophilia, helped to generate a more positive attitude about Africa in the West, but also a new archive of Africa from which Africans and people of African descent could assemble a useable past and put forward a new vision of Africa to the world.

Indeed, the mid-to-late nineteenth century into the early twentieth was an exciting and transformative period in African studies; a time in which debates about the history and civilization of Africans and their contribution to human history were revisited and debated anew. Much of the debate on ancient Egypt that took place in the late nineteenth century drew upon resources from an earlier time period, the 1820s and 30s when scholars such as Count Volney, Abbé Grégoire, and Thomas Bowdich¹⁵ suggested that ancient Egypt was a Black civilization. Their evidence was overshadowed

¹¹ M. Leiris was (with Marcel Griaule) an important member of the Dakar-Djibouti Mission (1931).

¹² Clifford, James. “Negrophilia.” in *A New History of French Literature* edited by Denis Hollier and Howard Bloch. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989, 902.

¹³ Clifford, James. “Negrophilia.” in *A New History of French Literature* edited by Denis Hollier and Howard Bloch. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989, 902.

¹⁴ Especially the works of Leo Frobenius, Maurice Delafosse, Carl Meinhof, and Arnold van Gennep, and the Mission Dakar-Djibouti and the Frobenius expeditions.

¹⁵ *An Essay on the Superstitions, Customs and Arts Common to the Ancient Egyptians, Abyssinians and Ashantees*. Paris, J. Smith, 1821.

by the research and writing of Jean-François Champollion (French classical scholar, philologist, orientalist, and decipherer of the Egyptian hieroglyphs). Champollion argued the people of ancient Egypt were not black and did not come from the Sudan, but were white and originated from the Mediterranean. His view, strongly backed by France and Great Britain, was the “official” perspective on ancient Egypt, at least until the early twentieth century.

African Americans were among the first to recover the work of Volney, Grégoire, and Bowdich, and to re-open the debate on ancient Egypt and black peoples’ contribution to human civilization.¹⁶ This process began as early as 1879 with Martin Delany’s *Principia of Ethnology; The Origin of Races and Color with an Archeological Compendium of Ethiopian and Egyptian Civilization*, and continued in the work of Jesse Max Baber, William Henry Ferris, and W.E.B. Du Bois. In *The African Abroad*, Ferris revisited and re-circulated the work of Volney and Grégoire, and augmented their arguments with the research findings from leading ethnologists, historians and sociologists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Du Bois would also engage this literature in his book, *The Negro* (1915), his first attempt at writing a history of black people. Du Bois is the most representative of the black intellectual and activist community of the period under consideration. In the preface to *The Negro*, W.E.B. Du Bois’s first attempt to write a history of African peoples in the context of world history, he wrote:

The time has not yet come for a complete history of the Negro peoples. Archaeological research in Africa has just begun, and many sources of information in Arabian, Portuguese, and other tongues are not fully at our command; and, too, it must frankly be confessed, racial prejudice against darker peoples is still too strong in so-

¹⁶ Jesse Max Barber, *The Negro of the Earlier World: An Excursion into Ancient Negro History*. Philadelphia, n.d.; Martin Delany, *Principia of Ethnology; The Origin of Races and Color, with an Archeological Compendium of Ethiopian and Egyptian Civilization from Years of Careful Examination and Enquiry*. Philadelphia: Harper and Brother, 1879; Pauline Hopkins, *Of One Blood: Or, The Hidden Self*. First published serially in *The Colored American Magazine*, 1903; William Henry Ferris. *The African Abroad or his Evolution in Western Civilization: Tracing his Development under Caucasian Milieu*. New Haven: Tuttle, Morehouse & Taylor, 1913. This genealogy is reconstructed from Kevin Gaines’s discussion of African American engagement with ancient African origins in his book *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996, 108-11.

called civilized centers for judicial appraisalment of the peoples of Africa. Much intensive monographic work in history and science is needed to clear mooted points and quiet the controversialist who mistakes present personal desire for scientific proof.

Nevertheless, I have not been able to withstand the temptation to essay such short general statement of the main known facts and their fair interpretation as shall enable the general reader to know as men a sixth or more of the human race. Manifestly so short a story must be mainly conclusions and generalizations with but meager indication of authorities and underlying arguments. Possibly, if the Public will, a later and larger book may be more satisfactory on these points.¹⁷

Du Bois's project, which began with the publication of this essay in 1915, would be swept up and rearticulated within the context of the post-World War I years, a period of reexamination and reevaluation of civilization and humanity as well as the cultural and moral values associated to them.¹⁸

Du Bois produced two revisions of his original essay: *Black Folk, Then and Now: An Essay in the History and Sociology of the Negro Race* in 1939, and *The World and Africa: An Inquiry into the Part which Africa has Played in World History* in 1946. Africa's absence from a "World-history"¹⁹ narrative, Du Bois argued in 1946, was not for lack of evidence, but was an intentional omission and conscious erasure of Africa from World-history and from humanity; an omission performed largely in the service of European imperial expansion and accumulation of wealth; it justified the enslavement, colonization and exploitation of Africa and Africans. The new sciences of "man and society" of the interwar period, most notably ethnology and anthropology, marked the commencement

¹⁷ Du Bois, W.E.B. *The Negro*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1915, xxix.

¹⁸ S. Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930); Mary Louise Roberts, *Civilization without Sexes. Reconstructing Gender in Postwar France*. 1994.

¹⁹ "die Weltgeschichte" and in English "World-history" is used here with hyphenation to emphasize its status as a concept rather than as a descriptive term. Hegel inherited this term no doubt from Enlightenment thinkers; however, he elaborated the concept and endowed it with substantially new content until "World-history" became synonymous with "Reason in History." This view of history removes "the phenomena that constitute the world and its historicity" of any specificity. R. Guha, *History at the Limit of World-History*. New York, Columbia University Press, 2000, 2.

of a “more complex ethnographic engagement with black culture” and introduced a wealth of information about Africa and African societies²⁰

These literatures would enable Du Bois to successfully revise *The Negro* and to present in *The World and Africa* less a comprehensive history of “the Negroid peoples,” and more “as a statement of their role in human history from pre-historic to modern times.”²¹ *The World and Africa* was, therefore, a political intervention that employed the new studies of the interwar period to contest a philosophy of history born out of a desire to authorize European imperialism and its “mission to civilize”.²² It actively sought to return Africa to World-history (and humanity).

It is the political, scientific, and cultural changes of the early years of the 20th century that enabled Du Bois to finally realize his project to write Africans back into history. The successive iterations of Du Bois’s endeavor are significant. This period was a time of intense political, cultural and scientific revision of European empires and with this of structures of government as well as understandings of human nature based in European cultural and civilizational references.

By the end of the Great War, empires had rapidly deteriorated. The Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires had collapsed, and the Bolshevik Revolution brought about the dissolution of the Russian Empire. Only the British, French, and U.S. empires survived along with an emergent militaristic Japanese empire. Unable to provide world stability, these powers sought new forms of global governance; the form that it would take was a pressing question. Several options existed—though all seemed to involve some degree of self-determination. Cooperation between nations and empires and within empires dominated imperialist and internationalist agendas. National self-determination, by no means a new concept, was re-authorized by President Woodrow Wilson at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 and would come to play a defining role in the quest for a new world order. A wide range of political, social and cultural

²⁰ Clifford, James. “Negrophilia.” in *A New History of French Literature* edited by Denis Hollier and Howard Bloch. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989, 904.

²¹ Du Bois, W.E.B. *The World and Africa: An Inquiry into the Part which Africa Has Played in World History*. New York: International Publishers Company, 1965, forward, viii.

²² Such an abstract process is “brought about by the logic of *Aufhebung*, that is, “the act of superseding” whereby “denial and preservation, i.e., affirmation, are bound together.” R. Guha, *History at the Limit of World-History*. New York, Columbia University Press, 2000 2.

movements seized the concept and recycled it within their own agendas to establish right to self-government; a development that posed difficulties to the remaining empires.²³

These respective movements for national self-determination were facilitated by the increasing social and political mobility that empires had engendered as goods, capital, people, information, and ideas crossed borders more easily with the assistance of the telegraph, telephone, steamship, radio, cinema, and automobile.²⁴ As increasing numbers of people diversely located in the world met in cities and exchanged ideas, shared experiences, and articulated connections between themselves and their multiple geographies, new political, social, artistic, intellectual movements and academic fields emerged. Among them: Garveyism, Harlem Renaissance and the New Negro Movement, Négritude and Présence Africaine (and other Ethiopianisms and black nationalisms), socialism, communism, cultural nationalism (towards the end of the period), feminism, anti-fascism, anti-imperialisms, and anti-colonialism. Some of these movements, inspired by the Bolshevik Revolution and the prospect of national self-determination, proposed alternative visions for a new political order to the one imagined by the statesmen of the four remaining powers, while others used this period of uncertainty to launch their own campaigns for social and political rights. By the 1930s, men and women associated with these various movements helped support strikes around the world. Their members took part in the anti-fascists movements and spoke in opposition to racism and violence in the U.S. and against the Italian invasion of Ethiopia.

Emerging alongside and in dialogue with these movements were developments in the realm of art, social science, and popular culture. The violence and devastation of war left many people wondering about where imperial greed would eventually lead the world and humanity. Western conceptualizations of civilization and humanity that had excluded Africa²⁵ and asserted European superiority over the “darker races of the

²³ Manela, Erez. *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism*. Oxford UP, 2007.

²⁴ Iriye, Akira. “Beyond Imperialism: the New Internationalism,” *Daedalus*, Spring 2005.

²⁵ Most notably, G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World-history*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1982; *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991 and *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1977.

world" advocated by scientific racism²⁶ and new imperialism of the late 19th century²⁷ were reexamined. Artistic, musical, literary, intellectual, and scientific productions, identified by James Clifford in an essay as representing "negrophilia"²⁸ sought in Africa a solution to an ailing western civilization, and, in some cases, challenged its supremacy, singularity, and authority. Their efforts to find in Africa a "premodern history" that would serve as a "blueprint for a specifically modern future" brought new knowledge and representations of Africa and Africans into the public sphere.²⁹ Before the war, western civilization maintained an authority as the measure of civilization; it appropriated the right to study, label, and define non-western cultures, and in particular African cultures and societies.³⁰ Africans were labeled "savage" and "primitive" and their humanity was questioned. Nineteenth century philosophical and scientific views shaped by popular stereotypes of black people defined Africans as primitive. As part of a global discussion about humanity and civilization that took place after the war, these images of Africa and Africans, began to change, and in some cases dramatically. Within postwar negrophilia, a "multivalent aesthetic and cultural phenomenon" that encompassed visual and plastic arts as well as popular and mass culture, Africa was re-

²⁶ Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of the Species by Means n of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* (1859) and *Tthe Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex n* (1871); Count Joseph Arthur, *Essai sur l'Inégalité des Races* (1853).

²⁷ The term new imperialism denotes a period of colonial and imperial expansion by European powers and Japan and the United States during the late 19th and early 20th century. It refers to a period of unprecedented rivalry between empires that led to the scramble or Africa and the "civilizing mission." Hobsbawm, Eric. *The Age of Empire, 1875-1914*. New York: Vintage, 1989.

²⁸ Clifford, James. "Negrophilia." in", *A New History of French Literature* edited by Denis Hollier and Howard Bloch. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Cambridge University Press, 1989, 901-908. . The word is also used in its French form "négrophilie" in the title of the last chapter of his book, *La Peinture Française (1905-1914) et l'Art nègre* (Paris, 1968) by Jean Laude and by the curators of the exhibition *White on Blacks: Images of Blacks in Popular Culture. An Exhibition of the Negrophilia Collection* (Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam, December 1989 – August 1990). The term "vogue nègre" is also used in relation to interest in Africa and African society during the interwar period. Carole Sweeney. *From Fetish to Subject: Race, Modernism, and Primitivism, 1919-1935*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger Publishers, 2004; Brent Edwards. *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003.

²⁹ Carole Sweeney. *From Fetish to Subject: Race, Modernism, and Primitivism, 1919-1935*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger Publishers, 2004, 5.

³⁰ Clifford, James. "Negrophilia." in *A New History of French Literature* edited by Denis Hollier and Howard Bloch Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989, 901-908.

imagined as a space capable of rejuvenating a dying western civilization.³¹ Africans and people of African descent became a critical to the discussion while Africans themselves entered the debate on their own terms.

Negrophilia valorized and authorized African art, music, and dance in new ways. In the aftermath of a divisive and violent war, jazz became a “sign of allegiance,” and hope for a “dying civilization,” of a “humanity blindly submitting to The Machine.” Jazz had a profound influence on Europeans and was, for some, the reason for new explorations of Africa, not as a space to control, but as a continent and people to find inspiration, hope, and human spirituality in. It had this effect on Michel Leiris³² who wrote in 1939, “(i)n jazz, too, came the first appearance of Negroes, the manifestation and the myth of black Edens which were to lead me to Africa and, beyond Africa, to ethnology.”³³ As James Clifford notes, Leiris was not the first to link the two, in fact, “postwar negrophilia permeated and linked the domains of music, art, anthropology, literature, and dance.”³⁴ European writers such as Blaise Cendrars used African myths and blended modern and primitivized forms within a single text.³⁵

The new sciences of the late 19th and early 20th century, ethnology, anthropology, sociology, linguistics, and cultural morphology explained African cultures and argued that Africans were civilized. As with artistic and literary movements, many of the studies associated with these sciences looked to Africa as a source of renewal to help heal the psychic scars and the pessimism about the condition of western man, and to guide a traumatized postwar Europe.³⁶ Studies provided evidence of African civilization—of their political and social organizations, states and legal institutions, and systems of justice. These studies suggested that Africans had all of the elements of civilized society and culture; they were not a primitive and irrational people without

³¹ Carole Sweeney. *From Fetish to Subject: Race, Modernism, and Primitivism, 1919-1935*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger Publishers, 2004, 4.

³² M. Leiris was (with Marcel Griaule) an important member of the Dakar-Djibouti Mission (1931).

³³ Clifford, James. “Negrophilia.” in *A New History of French Literature* edited by Denis Hollier and Howard Bloch Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989, 902.

³⁴ Clifford, James. “Negrophilia.” in *A New History of French Literature* edited by Denis Hollier and Howard Bloch Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989, 902.

³⁵ Blaise Cendrars’s *The End of the World 1919; The Creation of the World 1923*.

³⁶ Especially the works of Leo Frobenius, Maurice Delafosse, Carl Meinhof, and Arnold van Gennep, and the Mission Dakar-Djibouti and the Frobenius expeditions.

history. All of the reasons that Hegel had listed for excluding sub-Saharan Africa from History—as a space without history, state institutions, or cultural logic—had to be revised in the face of the new evidence and arguments about Africa that emerged within the new sciences of the period.

Du Bois's political and intellectual work on the continent began with the publication of his monograph, *The Negro*, in 1915 (which he described as a short general statement on the history of the Negro peoples). *The Negro*, inspired by a Franz Boas lecture that Du Bois attended at Atlanta University in 1903, drew upon the latest research in the social sciences to provide a brief history of the continent.³⁷ Du Bois, along with Ferris and Carter Woodson, seized the image of Africa developing within the work of Boas and Leo Frobenius and celebrated within the negrophilia movement to demonstrate a black contribution to humanity, and to legitimate their own claim for citizenship within the context of the United States. The research they produced was a "more complex ethnographic engagement with black culture" and introduced a wealth of information about Africa and African societies.³⁸ These literatures gave African and African American thinkers the building blocks from which history, political history could be written and citizenship claims made. As Leopold Senghor said commenting on Leo Frobenius's work in the 1920s, Frobenius had "given Africa back its dignity and identity."³⁹ Many African students studied with anthropologists such as Malinowski. Jomo Kenyatta wrote *Facing Mount Kenya* as part of Malinowski anthropology seminar he took in 1938,⁴⁰ and Du Bois's African history project was inspired by a Franz Boas lecture he attended at Atlanta University in 1903.⁴¹ These sciences helped establish this idea of Africa⁴²: a continent that had something to offer the world, something more than

³⁷ Du Bois, W.E.B. *Black Folk Then and Now*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

³⁸ Clifford, James. "Negrophilia." in *A New History of French Literature* edited by Denis Hollier and Howard Bloch. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989, 904.

³⁹ Citation needed.

⁴⁰ Gikandi, Simon. "Pan-Africanism and Cosmopolitanism: The case of Jomo Kenyatta," *English Studies in Africa* 43, 1, 2000, 3-27.

⁴¹ Du Bois, W.E.B. *Black Folk Then and Now*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. .

⁴² It could be interesting to compare the interwar period "idea of Africa" with V. Y. Mudimbe's discussion of the same issue in his *The Idea of Africa*. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1994.

raw materials and labor; it had culture, art, music, dance, and spirituality, all things that could nourish and reinvigorate the Western world.

The African history movement, however, was not confined to African America, but included Africans from the Caribbean and West Africa. Edward Blyden, a native of St. Thomas who emigrated to Liberia with the assistance of the American Colonization Society after being denied admission to Rutgers University in the United States, was a pioneering figure in the African history movement. His *African Life and Customs*, published in 1908, brought a sociological perspective and holistic approach to the study of African societies. It argued for a deep appreciation of the inherent logic and necessity of African customs and traditions. Blyden's work represents a slightly different trend within the African history movement as manifest within the American context. Blyden was less concerned with documenting the contribution that Africans made to human civilization; rather, he sought to define the "African personality" and establish Africa's right to be judged like any other race for their creation of social, economic, religious, legal, political, and familial patterns that best suited their environment⁴³.

Blyden's argument is an expression of cultural relativism associated with Franz Boas and popularized by the students he trained at Columbia University in the 1920s and 30s. Blyden had a tremendous impact on the ideas of Casely Hayford. His influence is present in *Ethiopia Unbound*, but also in Caseley Hayford earlier study of African institutions, *Gold Coast Native Institutions: With Thoughts Upon A Healthy Imperial Policy for the Gold Coast and Ashanti* published in 1903. While the intellectual impact of Blyden's work on Du Bois and Ferris is less evident, he was in regular communication with African Americans, and was considered a leading authority in the study of Africa and prominent African nationalist. As with most African American intellectuals, Du Bois and Ferris were familiar with Blyden and Casly Hayford work. They traveled within the same black Atlantic network. For example, Blyden, Casely Hayford, Crummell, Delany, and Du Bois were all present at the first Pan-African Congress in London in 1900. Their communication and collaboration did not stop there. In 1903, Casely Hayford sent Du Bois a congratulatory letter for the publication of *The Souls of Black Folk*. In 1909, Du Bois

⁴³ Tracy Keith Flemming, "Negro: Travel and the Pan-African Imagination during the Nineteenth Century," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Michigan, 2010, 55-56.

asked Blyden and Casely Hayford (along with several other well-known people including Franz Boas and Guiseppe Sergi) to serve on the editorial board for the *Encyclopedia Africana*⁴⁴. Ferris mentions Blyden in *The African Abroad* and includes Casely Hayford in his section on “Distinguished Foreign Negroes”⁴⁵.

While the evidence clearly indicates strong linkages between Africans and African Americans during this time period, the approach that these writers adopted in their engagement with their exclusion from the universal narrative of history differed in important and significant ways. Blyden and Casely Hayford (possibly inspired by Boas??) went the path of substantiating African traditions and customs and developing a picture of the “African personality” for the black and white audiences. Like Du Bois and Ferris, they adopted a cyclical view of history and held a similar perspective on the belief that all civilizations are constantly remade through encountering other civilizations. While Africa does have something unique to offer humanity, it cannot be view as entirely original or unique. This view has a strong presence in Casely Hayford’s writing. He believed that all civilizations are the product of a creolization of different cultures; in fact, a civilization’s advancement is dependent upon its ability to borrow from other advanced civilizations in its quest for progress. This does not, however, mean cultural mixing, as both Blyden and Casely Hayford were firm in their view that all civilizations retained a unique personality that, in Casely Hayford’s view, was improved upon through the act of borrowing from other cultures. Ferris offers a very similar view in his discussion of the “Negro-Saxon”.

Ferris believed that the Anglo-Saxon represented (in the early twentieth century) the most advanced of civilizations. Their greatness, however, was not ascribed to a natural or inherent superiority, but to their experience of history. The Anglo-Saxon people had benefited from other civilizations, including African civilizations. Ferris argued that African Americans needed to borrow from the Anglo-Saxons and use their example to advance the race. His valorization of the Anglo-Saxon race had little to do with a love of the white man, but rather a love of the human race. For Ferris, the Anglo-Saxon (purely by chance and the circumstances of history) represented the most

⁴⁴ David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois, Biography of a Race*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1993, 248, 292, 279-80.

⁴⁵ *The African Abroad*, 135.

advanced human civilization in the contemporary moment, and his advancement was a reflection of his learning and benefiting from other civilizations. The African in the Americas, who Ferris suggested be called the Negro-Saxon, could advance beyond the Anglo-Saxon, and was in fact called to do so, by “remaking himself”. The African, as Casely Hayford professed in *Ethiopia Unbound*, was there in the beginning and would lead again. The difference between them, however, as Ferris believed, was that the African in the Americas would lead, and not the African in Africa. Both men, however, went to great lengths to show the contribution that Africa had made to civilization, and its place at the beginning of humankind.

Turning to world history along with examples from other empires, nations and colonies as resources, Casely Hayford, a Gold Coast lawyer and founder of the National Congress of British of West Africa (1919) sought to counter the Hegelian exclusion of Africa from world history in two moves: first to emphasize the importance of African civilizations, and second to adopt the Gibbonesque theory of the rise and fall of civilizations. The first approach is captured in his speeches and writings on Gold Coast native institutions and history.⁴⁶ The second is taken up in his 1911 novel, *Ethiopia Unbound*, in which he argued that all modern societies, including British society, had at some point borrowed from other countries in their development—Africa would be no different in its own national aspirations. His argument for the legitimacy of borrowing and blending various lessons from world civilizations freed Africans to pursue an African modernity and modern nations influenced by Europe, and non-Western peoples including Japanese,⁴⁷ Chinese, Indian, West Indian, and African American. Casely Hayford imagined an Africa that had its own unique culture, and like or any Western nation, was able to claim a part in discussions of universal problems and the future progress of humanity.

Playing to the Western conceptualization of the West as rational and the east as spiritual, Casely Hayford argued that the spiritual quality of the East is what will enable

⁴⁶ Casely Hayford’s *Gold Coast Native Institutions* published in 1903 and his speeches published in *Wasu* magazine 1926-28.

⁴⁷ Deeply impressed with Japan, Casely Hayford looked to it as a model for how to assimilate knowledge from other cultures without becoming a “bare imitator.” He was inspired by Japan’s ability to remain distinctively eastern while wearing Western clothing and engaging with Western cultures. Casely Hayford, *Ethiopia Unbound*, 170-2.

it to re-assert its authority in world history and lead humankind into a better future. The novel's main character, West African law student living in London, Kwamankra, tells his English companion, Whitely, a divinity student,

Forgive me when I say that the future of the world is with the East. The nation that can in the next century, show the greatest output of spiritual strength, that is the nation that shall lead the world, and as Buddha from Africa taught Asia, so may Africa again lead the way.⁴⁸

Kwamankra positions Western interpretations of Christianity as one (insufficient) body of knowledge that, if compared and combined with "eastern" spiritual knowledge, could potentially advance humanity's quest for spiritual and intellectual understanding. Likewise, all advancements in human civilization depended upon acts of borrowing, sharing, and comparing information from all human societies. As Casely Hayford argues, the West, despite its claim of omnipotence, had borrowed much of its knowledge from other societies and had adapted its spiritual ideals from the Romans. In the contemporary moment, what the West needed was spiritual knowledge, which Casely Hayford argued could only be found in the East. Without the East, and especially without Africa, he argues, the West could go no further in its pursuit of progress. Africa, as the oldest and youngest (in terms of industrialization) continent, was, he suggested, ideally situated to lead the world to into the future. Africans, he argued, had learned the formula for true progress—respectful study and comparison of all human society's "methods" and the wisdom to blend and carry these lessons into something better.

Many of the ideas expressed in *Ethiopia Unbound* were being developed in other parts of the world. Black intellectuals from around the world were discussing the global race problem, and generating a range of explanations and solutions.⁴⁹ This was a time when a number of non-Western peoples were looking to each other to discover how to assert a distinctive cultural identity that would win them recognition as participants in the advancement of human civilization and world progress. How different groups fitted

⁴⁸ Casely Hayford, *Ethiopia Unbound*, 8-9.

⁴⁹ African Americans, including Du Bois, Booker T. Washington, and especially Edward Blyden had influenced Casely Hayford. Casely Hayford found Blyden more compelling than Du Bois. See *Ethiopia Unbound*, 163.

themselves into the (Western dominated) international community showed tremendous variation, though most groups during this period entered the conversation by forming their own clubs and founding magazines and attending international and imperial conferences as men of learning dressed in the three piece suits. Through these instruments, they professed their right to lead their own “civilizing” missions of their countries (or race) of origin (and sometimes in competition with each other).

In 1911, the same year *Ethiopia Unbound* was published, W.E.B. Du Bois attended the First Race Congress that met at the University of London where he discussed the possibility of “a future world which would be peaceful, without race prejudice,” and a new internationalism that might someday include all of humankind.⁵⁰

The visibility of Africa and Africans in the public space increased during this period. Many African and African American soldiers who fought all over the world, the Balkans, Greece, France,⁵¹ Britain, and Burma, remained in Europe after the war had ended. Advertizing campaigns that displayed African faces and promoted exotic and cleaning products, sports (boxing in particular) and cultural performances as well as world and imperial exhibitions, colonial expeditions, and museums added to this visibility. Imperial exhibitions and museums constituted sites where Africa was being re-imagined.⁵² They sought to collect objects, photographic images of people and landscapes to codify the colonial context and situation, frame colonial references articulating education, travel and leisure to create a “totalizing picture of Africa.”⁵³ Numerous exhibitions were organized in Europe from the 1880s into 1930s. They featured documentary films, live spectacles, and exotic food tasting, and showcased objects and peoples in reconstituted African villages. When combined, these changing representations of black cultures and peoples presented challenges to a pre-war imperial world, the world of new imperialism, and the world of Hegel.

⁵⁰ Du Bois, W. E. B., *The World and Africa* (New York: Viking Press, 1947), 4.

⁵¹ It is estimated that more than 130, 000 West Africans participated in the war on the European fronts. According to Marc Michel, *L'Appel à l'Afrique: Contributions et Reactions à l'effort de guerre en A.O.F., 1914 - 1919*. Paris, Publications de la Sorbonne, 1982, more than 30,000 were killed and a significant number wounded (408) while close to 170,000 were recruited between 1914 and 1918 (410).

⁵² La Croisière Noire, 1924-25 and the Dakar-Djibouti Mission, 1931, Frobenius expeditions.

⁵³ Bloom. Peter J. *French Colonial Documentary. Mythologies of Humanitarianism*. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2008, 90.

From this analysis we see that black and African people have been, at least since the early twentieth century, engaged in a project that can be described as a non-national history very similar to what global historians are pursuing today. While they sought to intervene in world history, their history, particularly in the African case, had a local dimension to it. *Ethiopia Unbound* is both an intervention in the universal narrative of history and a history that is produced for an African audience. In this way, this text complicates global history, reminding us of the ways history, even those histories born out of the global migrations and contacts remain rooted in local contexts and conversations.