

4. *Martin R. Delany and Robert Campbell in West Africa*

Though they were enslaved in Britain's thirteen colonies, many kidnapped Africans and their American children still hoped for repatriation across the Atlantic. And especially when talk of "liberty or death" grew among the white colonists, slaves continually pressed the glaring irony of their own literal need for emancipation. For example, in the winter of 1773, the slave "Felix" submitted to Boston authorities an abolitionist petition that offered a stark contrast between the colonists' personal investment in North America and the slaves' abject dispossession: "We have no Property. We have no Wives. No Children. We have no City. No Country."¹ For "Felix," freedom was not merely the absence of enslavement. Rather, he understood the need to belong *somewhere* in order to articulate that freedom in the bosom of family and community. This question of belonging arose yet again a few months later in a joint petition by the slaves Peter Bestes, Sambo Freeman, Felix Holbrook, and Chester Joie. Without any expectation that free Blacks might live and prosper in the same society that had enslaved them, they informed Boston's colonial government that they would seek all "peaceable and lawful attempts to gain our freedom," so as to return to West Africa: "We are willing to submit to such regulations and laws, as may be made relative to us, until we leave the province, which we determine to do as soon as we can from our joint labours procure money to transport ourselves to some part of the coast of Africa, where we propose a settlement."² Though very few Africans and Creole Blacks would achieve this ambition, in 1776 two Rhode Island slaves named John Quamine and Bristol Yamma used the proceeds of a

winning lottery ticket to purchase their freedom, declaring their intent to sail as Christian missionaries for what is today the Ghanaian city of Anomabo on the African Gold Coast. Quamine, in particular, sought a long-awaited reunion with the wealthy father who had originally handed him over to a white man “for an education among the English.” But before they could arrange a transatlantic voyage, both men became engulfed in the American Revolution, never to be heard from again.³ Finally, in 1811, Paul Cuffee (1759–1817), a freeborn mixed-race merchant and sea captain from Westport, Massachusetts, sailed one of his own ships to Sierra Leone to investigate possibilities for Black American emigration. Encouraged by what he saw, Cuffee returned to the United States, and in 1815 he successfully landed thirty-eight Black passengers at Freetown. He died two years later before he could relocate a second emigrant group, thereby ending an all-too-brief period of Black autonomy over African repatriation. Instead, the newly founded and white-run American Colonization Society (ACS) would dominate African repatriation from the time of Cuffee’s death into the early twentieth century.

Behind the society was a coalition of white abolitionists who argued that Blacks would never find equal status, even if slavery were abolished, and pro-slavery advocates who feared the growth of a free Black population in the South. Both groups saw West Africa as the target destination, and after securing a \$100,000 contribution from Congress, in 1821 the ACS sent out its first shipload of free Black emigrants on the *Elizabeth*. After a two-year sojourn in Sierra Leone and great loss of life to tropical fevers, the settlers finally landed on the coast just south of the British colony, establishing what would become in 1847 the Republic of Liberia, the second Black nation after Haiti.⁴ Yet despite what appeared to be success, the majority of free Blacks in the United States deeply distrusted the society, in part because reports from disillusioned settlers contradicted the organization’s propaganda. Indeed, there was the great difficulty of establishing subsistence farming in Liberia’s rocky soil; the appallingly high mortality rate due to malaria, yellow fever, and other ailments; and the supplies the ACS provided settlers that were insufficient to last until the harvest of their first crops.⁵ Repeatedly, settlers complained about the shortage of basic building necessities such as iron nails and metal wire. Though they sought to stretch their rations by bartering with indigenous populations for extra food, settlers often lacked the alcohol and tobacco so highly prized by those with whom they hoped to trade. Some transplanted Blacks abandoned altogether any hope of earning a living by legitimate means and, in a stunning role reversal, embraced slave trading. As for those emigrants who sought to “civilize” and convert local Kru, Mandingo, Grebo, Vai, Gola, Kissi, Mende, Bassa, Mano,

Gio, Krahn, Dey, Gbandi, Belleh, and Kpelle peoples, the result was inevitable disputes and eventually open warfare.⁶ Not surprisingly, anti-emigration Blacks seized upon the violence between settlers and the indigenous populations to declare Liberia's absolute unsuitability, casting the ACS as a white organization that cared little for the settlers' lives and collective welfare. Caught between stories of extraordinary hardship in Liberia, on the one hand, and the unyielding nature of American white supremacy on the other, many Blacks still clung to the hope of migration, albeit to some alternate destination. But while some considered Mexico, the British West Indies, or Canada, the question of West Africa lingered, to be officially engaged yet again in 1858 by Martin Robison Delany, the Black Philadelphia physician, radical abolitionist, journalist, race philosopher, and early Black Nationalist.

Determined to establish an autonomous Black settlement in West Africa as far away from Liberia as he could manage, Delany began a series of practical steps toward securing land in what is now Nigeria.⁷ First, at the 1858 Negro Convention on emigration in Chatham, Ontario, Delany proposed a three-year exploration of the territory north of Lagos, which missionaries and explorers had been calling Yorubaland. Enthralled by reports of friendly native inhabitants and expanses of uncultivated land, Delany saw the region as ideal for the settlement of educated, enterprising Blacks anxious for self-determination. Regarding his as a high purpose for the benefit of the race, Delany named himself chief commissioner of the proposed expedition, enumerating would-be companions including "Robert Douglass, Esq. Artist, and Professor Robert Campbell, Naturalist, both of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, one of the United States of America to be Assistant Commissioners." Delany also included on his list "Amos Aray, Surgeon; and James W. Purnell, Secretary and Commercial Reporter, both of Kent County, Canada West." True, he had made the briefest of inquiries among these men and, in the case of Campbell, he had bypassed altogether formal contact. Regardless, declaring this team to be a "Scientific Corps," Delany proposed at the convention "a Topographical, Geological and Geographic Examination of the Valley of the River Niger, in Africa, and an inquiry into the state and condition of the people of that Valley, and other parts of Africa, together with such other scientific inquiries as may by them be deemed expedient, for the purposes of science and for general information."⁸ Convention attendees had come to discuss emigration destinations in the Americas, and though they gave Delany's proposal an appreciative nod, they steadfastly refused his request for funding. Undaunted, Delany merely scaled back the expedition from three years to nine months, then set about pressing his commissioners into fundraising.



FIGURE 4.1. Martin R. Delany as a major in the 54th Massachusetts Colored Infantry Regiment, 1865. (Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library)

In the end, only the Jamaican teacher Robert Campbell responded in the affirmative, and by 1859 the two men departed from New York—Delany heading straight to Liberia and Campbell taking a detour to London. After reuniting in or around Lagos, they set out for Abeokuta, where they negotiated with the local Egba to obtain land.⁹ Once they gained space for a settlement, both men departed to Britain for extensive speaking tours to raise funds. Ironically, despite his hard work and enthusiasm for African repatriation, Delany never made it back to Nigeria. With few American supporters for his project and the United States heading into civil war, Delany turned his efforts toward the recruitment of free Black men to join the 54th Massachusetts Colored Infantry Regiment (figure 4.1). After a brief return to the United States, Campbell

settled in Lagos permanently in 1863. Despite their very different paths, in 1861 Delany and Campbell managed to publish individual exploration narratives covering their African journey: Delany's *Report of the Niger Valley Exploring Party*, "a Topographical, Geological and Geographic Examination of the Valley of the River Niger," and Campbell's *A Pilgrimage to My Motherland*, covering "the state and condition of the people of that Valley," in particular the Egba of southern Nigeria.

Today, most students of nineteenth-century African America acknowledge the existence of Delany's *Report* as a part of his larger body of work but turn their attention to his more philosophical articulations of an early Black Nationalism. This traditional emphasis places Delany within a genealogy of radical Black thought carried into the twentieth century by Marcus Garvey, Malcolm X, the Black Panthers, and other advocates for Black power and self-determination. This deliberate turning away from Delany's only encounter with West Africa finds legitimacy in the fact that, during and after Reconstruction, he spent his life agitating for full Black citizenship in the United States. Meanwhile, those few scholars who have paid attention to Campbell note his West Indian origins and his relocation to Lagos but set off his time in the United States as nothing more than a brief stop along an otherwise British nineteenth-century imperial trajectory.¹⁰ Nonetheless, the intersection, however brief, of Campbell's path with that of Delany provides an example of how early Black West Indians and African Americans might have shared and shaped each other's visions of Africa as home.

For one thing, they would not have interpreted West Africa from the same perspective, raising questions about the different connotations of *American* and *West Indian* as cultural categories in this period. Despite having spent time in the United States, the light-skinned Jamaican Robert Campbell would have carried with him an understanding of class and color politics shaped by British imperialism, even as he recognized the common oppressions and experiences he shared with Black Americans. How did Campbell's bitter experiences in the United States compare to and contrast with his equally bitter, but differently modulated, negotiation of Black, white, and colored status in Jamaica? Initially, Campbell attempted to return to Abeokuta, to make good on the concessions provided by the treaty with the Egba. However, under pressure from the British, the Egba backed away from the original agreement. Campbell then had no choice but to settle in Lagos, which had just been annexed by the British. As it had done in Sierra Leone, Britain put in place a small cadre of educated West Indians and Christianized West Africans to help run the new colony. In many ways, then, Campbell "returned" not so much to "Mother Africa" as to an all-

too-familiar British colonial stratification, with the few whites in the colony at the top, followed by a tiny group of Christianized and, in a few cases, highly educated elite comprising immigrants from the British West Indies, Sierra Leone, and even Brazil. There was also a plethora of antislavery, white-run American and British missionary societies, including the Church Missionary Society and the Methodist Missionary Society, both of which included Afro–West Indians, Afro-Britons, African Americans, and Christianized Africans among a smattering of key white European agents on the ground. On the bottom rung of the social ladder were local African converts apprenticed to their Western-educated compatriots. True, there were great differences between colonial Jamaica and colonial Lagos, but Campbell’s negotiation of life in his new African home would have been among a specifically immigrant diasporic population, united as much by their desire to “develop” Africa as by their experience of British colonialism.

RACE, GENDER, AND EXPLORATION

Beyond Liberia, a handful of nineteenth-century Black American men and women went abroad to investigate new possibilities for establishing home, not just for themselves but also for their larger communities. These travelers usually returned to the United States with “ocular proof,” gathered by way of a personal account of what they saw at some new destination. This was the case with Nancy Prince (Jamaica); Mary Ann Shadd Cary (Ontario in British Canada); Prince Saunders, Thomas Paul, and James T. Holly (Haiti); and James Monroe Whitfield (Central America). Many of these Black travelers published letters and narratives, while also delivering public lectures that covered, to varying degrees, the customs and manners of local inhabitants; practical details about soil, agricultural conditions, and climate; the prospects for woodcutting and the rearing of livestock; and existing local governments that might either aid or impede the growth of a free Black community. The useful information they disseminated helped educate their audience while also binding them to that audience, thereby solidifying the basis of their public authority, regardless of their gender. Though one was American and the other Jamaican, as Black men Delany and Campbell were similarly in search of “ocular proof” regarding the prospects for settlement in the Niger Valley. They engaged in the same project of community education for the purpose of resistance. However, by employing a genre—that is, the exploration narrative—which during and after the European Enlightenment was focused on observation for the purpose of producing empirical “science” about peoples and places beyond Europe, Delany and Campbell were

claiming for themselves a form of knowledge production traditionally employed by whites in both the United States and Europe when they argued for the inferiority of darker-skinned populations. What was at stake for Campbell and Delany in appropriating this genre as they worked to elevate themselves as Black men via the representational mechanisms enabled by exploration—an activity that, according to Mary Louise Pratt, Adriana Craciun, and Janice Cavell, routinely celebrated white male heroism?¹¹

The ambitious migration project envisioned by Delany and Campbell went hand in hand with their display and celebration of a Black male agency that prized competency, practicality, mental dexterity, physical bravery, education, and, in particular, a presumed innate racial affinity with Africans that whites could never attain. Also, in adopting the stance of explorers, Delany and Campbell deliberately sought to make themselves legible to American and British whites engaged in both abolition and the expansion of Christian mission on the African continent. In so doing, they highlighted on a world stage the talents and self-determination of civilized and educated men of African descent in the age of slavery. Both men understood Africa not just as a future home but also as the basis of their intellectual and moral authority in the eyes of the world. From this perspective, to borrow the words of literary historian Robert Levine, the *Official Report of the Niger Valley Exploring Party* and *A Pilgrimage to My Motherland* were unquestionably “nineteenth-century ‘narratives of masculinity’” that “inevitably became narratives of personhood” for Delany and Campbell.¹² If I take Levine’s meaning correctly, then, in the nineteenth century Black men could and did claim for themselves various aspects of white Victorian gender norms, regardless of whether whites saw them as deserving of consideration as men. Additionally, as has often been argued of Martin Delany, Frederick Douglass, William Wells Brown, Henry Highland Garnet, and James Forten, to name but a few leaders, ambitious and capable nineteenth-century Black men imagined themselves as “representatives” of their race. In other words, they saw themselves as men of integrity, piety, propriety, chivalry, bravery, and intellectual achievement—all qualities that white supremacists argued Blacks were constitutionally unable to embody.

According to Mary Louise Pratt, though the heroic act of exploring “unknown” lands had traditionally been the province of white aristocrats and military officers, as time went by the conventional exploration narrative evinced a flexibility that enabled a range of possibilities, such that men of humbler station might cast themselves in the role of heroes. Indeed, even the idea of “hero” became more flexible. According to Pratt, in Mungo Park’s 1799 *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa*, the Scottish explorer positioned himself as a self-effacing

traveler who not only related what he had seen with his own eyes but also described firsthand the personal horrors he experienced at the hands of Africans. Park's heroism emerged not through any form of aggression, but through his own stunning perseverance.¹³ Later in the nineteenth century, David Livingstone, a member of the London Missionary Society and the author of *Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa* (1857), among other texts, presented himself as the survivor of the wild animal attacks and deadly diseases of central Africa, showing a willingness to sacrifice himself in the name of Christian mission. According to Adriana Craciun, by Livingstone's time white explorers had become "consumer product[s] of the early tourism and travel industries developing in the nineteenth century age of empire," a point exemplified by the rise of Welshman and American Civil War veteran turned *New York Herald* journalist Henry Morton Stanley. (Stanley's claim to international fame rested on his 1872 *How I Found Livingstone: Travels, Adventures, and Discoveries in Central Africa*.)¹⁴ By the second half of the nineteenth century, white narratives about the African continent constituted what writer and explorer Winwood Reade termed "African literature." As Felix Driver reminds us, in 1873 Reade even created a map of the continent celebrating previous explorers. Published in his *African Sketchbook*, Reade's otherwise blank map of the African continent superimposed the names of white explorers on all topography that had been verified by observation.¹⁵

A cartographic memorial to his forebears, Reade's map imagined no room for the actual inhabitants of Africa, their experiences, or their version of events. Additionally, says Driver, all explorers, including Reade, would have "relied heavily on the assistance of European missionaries, traders and officials, as well as many unnamed African servants and porters. But few of the latter received much of Reade's attention, in literal contrast to his collection of books, 'brought out not as furniture, but as friends.'"¹⁶ As Adriana Craciun has observed, eighteenth-century explorers usually acknowledged a great variety of sources, including native informants, Arab scholars, and mapmakers at home. According to Craciun, the knowledge of all of these individuals came together in the production of what were essentially multidisciplinary works covering climate science, botany, zoology, linguistics, and ethnography. But from the Enlightenment onward, these crucial human contributors were subordinated to the ideal of the singular white hero who increasingly came to embody the role of multidisciplinary scientific expert. Thus, the Victorian white male hero signified not just bravery and physical toughness but also (at least on paper) an extraordinary, even all-powerful intellect that could marshal together broad bodies of knowledge at the drop of a hat.¹⁷ And yet, as Craciun urges, rather

than accepting this hero as a solidified role with a fixed set of characteristics, we must still press the question “What is an explorer?” That is, we must theorize rigorously the rise of that hero as a historically contingent, ongoing process of self-making. Craciun aligns with Mary Louise Pratt in suggesting that the very model of white explorer-hero celebrated and romanticized by the late nineteenth and early twentieth century might have been somewhat more pliable and more adaptable in the first half of the nineteenth century. If so, then we have to consider to whom and for what reasons this category of manhood might have been available.

No doubt Delany and Campbell gravitated toward the exploration narrative because the genre had a long-standing transatlantic pedagogical function. They used the genre to support their authority as Black male leaders of an entire migration movement that might redeem both Blacks of the New World from second-class citizenship and African peoples from their “heathen” ways. Consequently, the projection of Black male authority went hand in hand with the production of an idealized Black homeland, and vice versa. Additionally, in investigating the feasibility of a settlement, Delany and Campbell simultaneously followed a set of well-rehearsed rules for the collection and evaluation of scientific information. As Pratt and others have long argued, the exploration narrative functioned as a key technology of empire, as successive white male explorers collected crucial data on everything from edible flora to little-known mountain passes to arid plains, watering holes, river valleys, climatic anomalies, and newly discovered animals, conveying their observations not only in print but through lecture tours and widely disseminated maps and illustrations. Ironically, Delany and Campbell also collected valuable firsthand cultural and linguistic information about indigenous populations—that is, all the key information one might need to establish a colonial beachhead. Though their goals were not identical to those of white explorers, once they had completed their tour of Nigeria, Delany and Campbell engaged in the same type of publicity-making speaking tours as their white counterparts. When they arrived in London, Campbell was invited by the Royal Geographical Society to publish a paper summing up his observations, while Delany was asked to deliver a presentation at a membership meeting of the society. Their respective exploration narratives were also read and commented upon by British reformers such as Henry Venn and by perhaps the most prolific white explorer of the Victorian age, Sir Richard Francis Burton.

In the end, even though Delany never returned to West Africa and Campbell ended up as a member of the colonial elite in British Lagos, did their exploration narratives contribute to the larger white and Western masculine project

for the consumption of Africa? For one thing, their experience in Nigeria as racialized subjects would have been different from that of a white explorer, since they discovered a world where whites were not only very scarce but also seemingly powerless to command.¹⁸ In Nigeria, everyone had Black skin, whether they were rulers, soldiers, traders, farmers, blacksmiths, fishermen, or weavers. Indeed, West Africans and not Europeans controlled every community, every manufacturing center, and every military body. Perhaps for the first time in their lives, then, both men would have been surrounded by an emotionally invigorating display of unadulterated Black power. Evidence of this alternate sensibility surfaced in the treaty Delany and Campbell negotiated “with the native authorities of” Abeokuta, an important inland city founded by refugees of internecine warfare. Both men reproduced this treaty in their narratives. According to “Article First” of the treaty, “the King and Chiefs on their part agree to grant and assign unto the said Commissioners [Delany and Campbell], on behalf of the African race in America, the right and privilege of settling in common with the Egba people, on any part of the territory belonging to not otherwise occupied.” In exchange for land, settlers were expected “to bring with them . . . intelligence, education, a knowledge of the arts and sciences, agriculture, and other mechanical and industrial occupations, which they shall put into immediate operation by improving the lands and in other useful vocations.”¹⁹ Though the document promoted the so-called civilizing mission, establishing American Blacks as the projected engine of progress, it also paid homage to the fact that nothing could go forward without the full agreement and cooperation of the Egba. This condition alone elevated the treaty as an anticolonial document.

Perhaps not coincidentally, the story of the treaty in each narrative contrasted sharply with the American Colonization Society’s story of first contact with local West Africans of what eventually became the colony of Liberia. The society’s own pamphlets reported that when the settlers finally made it to the Liberian coast in 1821, the white ACS agent Eli Ayres, along with Lieutenant Robert Stockton from the US warship *Alligator*, went on shore to negotiate with the Bassa chieftain, “King Peter,” for land that later become Cape Mesurado. According to the ACS’s official story, surrounded by “savage beasts with muskets” and “native barbarians . . . gaping with wonder,” Ayres and Stockton felt things deteriorating once the Bassa realized that an American settlement would disrupt their lucrative share of the Atlantic slave trade. Faced with escalating indigenous hostility, Stockton drew one of his “pistols [and] pointed it at the head of the king, while raising his other hand to heaven [in an appeal for] protection.” Instantly “King Peter flinched before the calm courage of the white man”; miraculously, all were suddenly “awed and subdued . . . while

their chiefs began to listen with respect to advances and proposals now made to them.”²⁰ Supporters of the ACS at home understood these events as the triumph of white civilization over African barbarism, but from that moment on, Liberia’s early history would be marked by armed resistance from the Bassa, Dey, Krahn, Mandingo, Grebo, Gola, Mano, Kru, and Mende peoples. Such was the case in 1822, when a coalition force organized by the Bassa, Dey, and Gola twice attacked that initial ACS settlement at Cape Mesurado. This violence was still in evidence some twenty years later when, in an 1840 letter to his former Virginia master, James Hartwell Cocke, Peyton Skipwith related how he and a particularly vengeful party of settlers unleashed a vicious attack upon an indigenous village. The battle left many Africans dead, including a chief. As the remaining villagers fled, they attempted to bury their deceased leader, but the Black American settlers dug up and then mutilated the corpse. According to Skipwith, the leader’s “head was taken from his body and . . . made an ornament in the Hands of . . . Governor Buchanan.” At an earlier point in the same letter, Skipwith muses, “it is something strange to think that those people of africa are calld our ancestors[. I]n my present thinking, if we have any ancestors they could not have been liked these hostile tribes in this part of africa for you may try and distell that principle and belief in them and do all you can for them and they still will be your enemy.”²¹ By the time Liberia gained independence from the ACS in 1847, such attitudes were widespread among many of Skipwith’s fellow settlers. Ten years later, at the same time Delany put forward his ambitious exploration project in Chatham, ever-present tensions between settlers and indigenous peoples boiled over when Liberia’s tiny sister republic, Maryland-in-Africa, completely succumbed to a joint Grebo and Kru rebellion. Unable to protect itself, Maryland-in-Africa turned to Liberia for aid, eventually agreeing to a protective annexation and then complete absorption.²²

In sharp contrast to the deadly struggles facing settlers in Liberia and Maryland-in-Africa, the treaty signed by Delany and Campbell with the *alake* (king) of Abeokuta affirmed the mutual benefits that were to accrue from the arrival of American settlers. According to the fourth article, “The laws of the Egba people shall be strictly respected by the settlers; and, in all matters in which both parties are concerned, equal numbers of commissioners, mutually agreed upon, shall be appointed, who shall have power to settle such matters” (OR, 78). That Delany and Campbell made a point of stressing these particulars signaled their commitment to an alternate repatriation plan where Africans were willing hosts, where settlers and Africans would find common ground, and where mutual respect would triumph over violence. With such a landmark agreement in hand, there still remained what proved to be insurmountable

challenges: recruiting immigrants, securing funding for transatlantic passage and the construction of farms and other means of self-sustenance, and, finally, contending with Britain's attempts to outmaneuver any non-African trade competitors in Lagos and its hinterland. Still, at least on paper, this imagined moment when Africans would welcome "back" the descendants of the first slaves became a literal and figurative process whereby Delany and Campbell might considerably alter the identity of male explorer, because of their experiences as African diasporic subjects.

In what follows I offer separate analyses of the exploration narratives by Delany and Campbell, with particular emphasis on how each appropriated and redefined for himself the category of *explorer* in relation to a shared belief that indigenous West Africans were racial brothers and sisters and that the African continent was their logical birthright. Both men clearly drew on different aspects of the white male explorer-hero stereotype, and therefore each employed particular narrative conventions to characterize their relationship to the landscape, to West African manners and customs, and to the internecine warfare they encountered on their tour of Nigeria. Of particular importance was each man's understanding of himself as simultaneously a national, racial, and—in the particular case of the Jamaican Campbell—imperial subject. Notably, Delany and Campbell appear to have divided up the larger task of writing about their journey. Delany's narrative focused on practical scientific questions of climate, soil, the nature and treatment of disease, agriculture, and native flora and fauna. On the other hand, Campbell addressed almost exclusively the traditional "customs and manners" discussions, expounding on the character, physique, clothing, family, dwellings, daily life, and political structures of the Yoruba and the Egba. This bifurcation of the larger narrative purpose necessarily shaped not only the significance of what each had to say but also their respective self-presentation to transatlantic audiences.

One goal in this chapter is to tease out the ways in which Martin Delany and Robert Campbell worked to shape the transatlantic discussion of West Africa's future and, by extension, what they imagined as the fate of the African. Indeed, through their collaboration and within their respective narratives, Delany and Campbell extended and elevated forms of Black male agency within an interracial transatlantic abolitionist context. At the same time, as abolitionists and pro-emigrationists, Delany and Campbell attempted to map out the practical means by which Nigeria might enable a group of self-sustaining free Black migrants to carry out their own plans for working with local Africans. Both men felt that only Blacks (specifically those who were morally upright and educated) had the right to go into West Africa and proselytize, that only Blacks could be

sensitive to African needs, and that only Blacks had a real interest in creating a strong and unified Black nation that would eventually take its place among the world's great civilizations.

NOSTALGIA AND ROOTEDNESS IN DELANY'S

OFFICIAL REPORT

Seven years before he visited Nigeria, Delany envisioned "A Project for an Expedition of Adventure, to the Eastern Coast of Africa." Framed within his larger treatise *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States* (1852), this prospectus likely served as the genesis for the eight-man scientific expedition Delany would propose at the 1858 emigration convention in Chatham. However, in 1852, his emphasis lay with East rather than West Africa—perhaps to avoid having anything to do with Liberia, perhaps to get as far away from the United States as possible, or perhaps both. According to the prospectus, eight men were to set out "on an expedition to the EASTERN COAST OF AFRICA, to make researches for a suitable location on that section of the coast, for the settlement of colored adventurers from the United States and elsewhere. Their mission should be to all such places as might meet the approbation of the peoples of South America, Mexico and the West Indies, &c."²³ Delany continues:

The Creator has indisputably adapted us for the "denizen of *every soil*," all that is left for us to do, is to *make* ourselves "*lords of terrestrial creation*." The land is ours—there it lies with inexhaustible resources; let us go and possess it. In Eastern Africa must rise up a nation to whom all the world must pay commercial tribute.

We must MAKE AN ISSUE, CREATE AN EVENT, and ESTABLISH A NATIONAL POSITION for OURSELVES; and never may expect to be respected as men and women, until we have undertaken, some fearless, bold, and adventurous deeds of daring—contending against **every odds**—regardless of every consequence.²⁴

In Delany's concept of this Black nation, neither indigenous East Africans nor the Indian Ocean slave trade are in evidence, creating the illusion of blank, unoccupied land open and accessible to Black American settlers, enabling them to become giants of global commerce rather than the objects of trade under slavery. In proclaiming African American rights to apparently unclaimed land, Delany tapped into both diasporic fantasies of African "return" and the idea of ex-slaves and the freeborn as the inheritors of the earth, with East Africa presenting "the greatest facilities for an immense trade with China, Japan,

Siam, Hindoostan, in short all of the East Indies—of any other country in the world.” For Delany, successful Black nationhood would be expressed through regional financial power, at the level of Dutch, British, French, and Portuguese commercial interests in southern Africa and Southeast Asia during the rise of early European colonization.²⁵ In this moment, Delany most resembled white American and European imperialists, as they too envisioned an “Africa” without Africans. His ideas also adhered to the traditional nineteenth-century imagining of nation building: “the claims of no people, according to established policy and usage, are respected by any nation until they are established in a national capacity”—a “capacity,” he argued, that must arise out of a Black (and presumably male) desire for “adventure,” which we might interpret as trials and tests of bravery, ingenuity, and adaptability.²⁶ In Britain and France, white male explorers also employed the idea of adventure to confirm their superiority. In Delany’s prospectus for a Black East African empire, he envisioned a way not only to prove Black male equality with white men but also to demonstrate to his Black audience that they had the capacity for greatness. There was indeed more at stake in the pursuit of adventure than just successful global commerce.

In the opening pages of his *Official Report of the Niger Valley Exploring Party*, Delany makes clear just how unrelenting attacks could be on the character and capability of any free Black man who dreamed of such great feats. In his preface to the narrative, Delany recounts that in 1854, the Pittsburgh *Daily Morning Post* railed against attendees of the Colored Convention held in Cleveland on the topic of “national emigration.” The *Post* reported in a derisive tone that under Delany’s guidance, a special committee had drawn up “a plan for Emigration to countries where [Black Americans] can enjoy political liberty, and form nations ‘free and independent’” (OR, 34). Taking a pro-ACS stance, the *Post*’s editorial essentially blasted any relocation site in the Americas, including the West Indies, Central America, and parts of South America. According to the *Post*:

If Dr. D[elany] drafted this report, it certainly does him much credit for learning and ability; and cannot fail to establish for him a reputation for vigor and brilliancy of imagination never yet surpassed. It is a vast concept of impossible truth. The Committee seem to have entirely overlooked the strength of the “powers on earth” that would oppose the Africanization of half the Western Hemisphere.

We have no motive in noticing this gorgeous dream of “the Committee,” except to show its fallacy—its impracticability, in fact, its absurdity. No sensible man, whatever his color, should be for a moment deceived by such impracticable theories.

On the African coast already exists a thriving and prosperous Republic [of Liberia]. It is the native home of the African race; and there he can enjoy the dignity of manhood, the rights of citizenship, and all the advantages of civilization and freedom. (OR, 35)

By including these attempts by the white press to condemn Black American self-determination, Delany reminded his readers of the contempt with which, even in the North, their independent activism was regarded. Yet both Delany and his keenest readers knew that regardless of the *Post's* attempt to declare the Americas off-limits, antislavery Britain had already set aside land in Ontario to accommodate runaways and free Black people who wanted to live on truly free soil.²⁷ Delany himself, along with free African American families such as the Shadds of Delaware, had relocated by 1858 to Chatham and Buxton, two small towns just across the US border from Detroit. Additionally, the Cleveland convention committee's plan for migration to alternate territories in the hemisphere made sense, given that some Black Americans had already migrated to Haiti and to the British West Indies. Upon gaining independence from Spain, the former colonies Mexico, Nicaragua, and Colombia had abolished slavery, making these new nations equally suitable as destinations. With these possibilities available, the goals of the Cleveland convention would not have seemed a "gorgeous dream" to its Black audience. Thus, Delany's use of the newspaper excerpt at once confirmed white refusal to believe in the ability of African Americans and underlined his faith that Black efforts were already yielding fruit. For the rest of the *Official Report*, then, descriptions of West African flora and fauna represented a body of information independently verified by a member of the audience's own community and, in particular, someone who understood the migrant experience personally. In this, Delany operated as part of a broader pool of Black community leaders working to expand options for all Black Americans.

Britt Rusert has stressed Delany's keen interest in nineteenth-century science, enumerating him as one of several early African Americans who left "a vibrant and artful archive of Black engagements with natural science, engagements that built evidence against regimes of scientific racism, but also sought to mobilize forms of popular science with no particular connection to the science of race . . . in the production of an expansive imaginary of and for emancipation."²⁸ Indeed, if we think of Delany's profession as a medical doctor, his publications such as *Principia of Ethnology: The Origin of Races and Color* (1879), his fascination with astronomy as noted by Rusert, his keen interest in comparative anatomy, and the multiple roles he embraced as geographer, botanist,

climatologist, and ethnographer on his Nigerian expedition, it is clear that the entire enterprise would have been a test of all his intellectual faculties, not to mention his physical stamina. Therefore, Delany would have seen himself articulating an expanded model of Black masculinity that was certainly physically hardy but also erudite, inquisitive, and intellectually ambidextrous—that is, more than qualified to achieve full dominion over all “terrestrial creation.” Certainly, in section VIII of the *Official Report* Delany places himself within the growing pantheon of white explorers of the African continent, in particular the two feted Scotsmen Hugh Clapperton (1788–1827) and David Livingstone (1813–73). Delany cites not only Clapperton’s *Journal of a Second Expedition into the Interior of Africa, from the Bight of Benin to Soccatoo* (published posthumously in 1829) and Livingstone’s *Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa* (1857) but also the American Baptist missionary Thomas Jefferson Bowen’s *Central Africa: Adventures and Missionary Labors* (1857).²⁹ Though he counts himself among their company, as a Black man with an African grandfather whom family legend reported to have been christened Shango after the Yoruba *orisha* or demigod of thunder, Delany implied a proprietary claim over West African territory rooted in racial identity.

Although some readers imagined Nigeria as a disease-ridden land overtaken with rank vegetation and warlike “savages,” Delany reveals instead a tame near-paradise, stocked with all the necessities to enable settler success: “The whole face of the country extending through the Aku region or Yoruba, as it is laid down on the large missionary map of Africa, is most beautifully diversified with plains, hills, dales, mountains, and valleys, interlined with numerous streams, some of which are merely temporary or great drains; whilst the greater part are perennial, and more or less irrigating the whole year, supplying well the numerous stocks of cattle and horses with which this country is so well everywhere provided. The climate is most delightful” (OR, 70). Ironically, in keeping with many of the white narratives he evokes, Delany addresses the landscape and its properties (i.e., soil depth, mineral content, forestland) first, before moving on to its human inhabitants, in particular the local craftspeople who run the “blacksmiths’ shops” and “iron smelting works,” producing iron, brass, copper, and zinc (OR, 71). Decisively rejecting the stereotype of indolence often ascribed to Africans by white explorers, Delany underscores the Nigerians’ self-determination and productivity, nicely bringing them in line with the kind of African Americans he hoped to attract to his yet-to-be-established settlement. Yet another subversion of the white explorer’s gaze is evident in Delany’s vivid rhetorical flourish of unfurling the “missionary map of Africa” (OR, 70). Bending over the map, side by side with his Black reader as it were, in lieu of

impenetrable jungles and miasmatic swamps Delany conjures up a bird's-eye view of rolling hills and dales—hardly the vision of the “White Man’s Grave” that haunted the British imagination regarding the west coast of Africa. Likewise, his delineation of a manageable West African world differs considerably from reports of Liberia, with its stifling heat and humidity, thick forests, stony soil, and hostile ethnic groups. Indeed, “civilized” by African industry and local commerce, Delany’s Nigeria beckons rather than repels.

Still, we must assess Delany’s co-optation by the very practice of exploration and its unavoidable cultivation of an imperial worldview. That Delany sees Nigerians in need of Christianity and “civilization” is a given. At the same time, simply by employing and reproducing the analytical technology available to him at the time—namely, the missionary map and the narratives of Clapperton, Livingstone, and company—Delany (and perhaps that Black reader by his side) comes dangerously close to sounding like an Anglo-European. Ironically, the very quality that made a “missionary map” especially comforting to the white Western viewers was its tendency to simply erase from sight anything that would complicate the civilization of the heathen and the expansion of an empire of Christ. As Ruth Kark has argued, maps commissioned specifically by missionary associations projected a set of assumptions about local inhabitants that (not surprisingly) did not reflect the views of Africans on the ground. Some maps, for example, highlighted various towns and villages not for their importance to local inhabitants but for their direct usefulness to European missionary plans. So, according to Kark, if an important market city had a strong Muslim presence that would prohibit Christian proselytizing, that city might either be de-emphasized or altogether erased from the map, in favor of smaller towns and villages deemed more hospitable to the creation of a mission station.³⁰ In terms of his daily negotiation of nineteenth-century Anglo-European masculine ideals, Delany prided himself on his ability not merely to handle but to own this technology. Ironically, though, as with most whites from the Americas and Europe, he used the missionary map in the way it was meant to be used—for the invention of the specific version of West Africa he needed to find. Indeed, Delany’s commitment to his singularity of vision was that he failed to mention that he and Campbell left Nigeria at the start of the Ibadan-Ijaye War (1861–62). Rather, with his opening scene of gentle hills and meadows, Delany invites his Black American audience to experience their potential homeland through his eyes, making clear that his goal is not the enslavement and exploitation of the indigenous peoples of Nigeria but rather the empowerment of the Black settler. And as the representative of this settler, throughout his text Delany acts as the keeper and mediator of specific knowledge for the benefit of

his people, doling out, when necessary, basic facts about West African plants, crops, and domesticated animals, all of which miraculously appear to be perfect counterparts to the plants, crops, and domesticated animals of the American Northeast. In Delany's assessment, every risk, from impenetrable vegetation to devastating heat to nonarable land, could be contained, in part because the technology he was using (e.g., the map, narratives by other explorers) was simply not designed for truth telling. As a Black American explorer, then, does Delany merely replicate the same attitudes and blind spots within traditional exploration literature?

In the same way, Delany tries to minimize malaria, but his *Official Report* still evinces a flutter of anxiety on the topic. By cross-referencing Delany's narrative with Campbell's *Pilgrimage*, we discover that Delany did indeed contract malaria and that he was plagued with recurring illness throughout the expedition. Notably, Delany first sets foot on African soil in Liberia, having taken a merchant ship owned and operated by Americo-Liberians on their way from New York to Monrovia. As with almost all ACS migrants, he likely contracted malaria or a similar "acclimatizing fever" from a mosquito bite received aboard ship in the harbor or soon after disembarking. After recovering somewhat, Delany proceeded from Liberia to Lagos, apparently without incident, and then to Abeokuta. Recalling their travels together, Campbell reported frequent stops to allow Delany to rest, indicating that the latter continued to struggle with fever. Instead of focusing on his own illness, however, Delany depersonalizes the experience of fever so as to introduce his readers to what he suggests is the real underlying condition—namely, fear of change:

The first . . . impressions of the coast of Africa are always inspiring, producing the most pleasant emotions. These pleasing sensations continue for several days . . . until they gradually merge into feelings of almost intense excitement. . . .

[After the onset of] febrile attacks, . . . nausea, chills, or violent headache [the patient experiences] "*a feeling of regret that you left your native country for a strange one; an almost frantic desire to see friends and nativity; a despondency and loss of the hope of ever seeing those you love at home again.*"

These feelings must be resisted, and regarded as a mere morbid affection of the mind at the time. . . .

It is generally while laboring under this last-described symptom, that persons send from Africa such despairing accounts of their disappointments and sufferings, with horrible feelings of dread from the worst to come.

When an entire recovery takes place, the love of the country is most ardent and abiding. (OR, 64)

In his discussion of African fever, Delany did not so much eliminate the possibility of death as reframe it in the more familiar context of what nineteenth-century Western medicine regarded as *nostalgia*, or homesickness. According to the prevailing medical view, nostalgia was a disease of the mind that exhibited a range of symptoms, including fever, hallucinations, loss of appetite, extreme lethargy, dizziness, despondency, and a general wasting away where the patient essentially loses the will to live. By making this statement, Delany reminded his reader that he was a physician by training and, in his expert opinion, there was little difference between the symptoms of a tropical fever such as malaria and the condition called nostalgia. This collapsing of one disease with another suggested that one's recovery from tropical fever had everything to do with the will and desire to transfer allegiance from the United States to the ancestral homeland of Africa.

In fact, malaria, dengue fever, and yellow fever killed one out of every three foreign visitors to the West African coast, prompting the Black American newspaper editor Mary Ann Shadd Cary to declare in 1852 that Africa was "teeming . . . with the breath of pestilence, a burning sun and fearful maladies," all of which led unmistakably to "moral and physical death."³¹ In 1855, Delany himself described Liberia, sight unseen, as "the tide-swamp of the coast of Guinea, . . . a national Potter's Field, into which the carcass of every emigrant . . . would most assuredly moulder in death."³² In the midst of his own struggles with tropical fever, Delany must have feared his own death, provoking an understandable terror at the prospect of expiring thousands of miles away from his family and friends in Chatham. Having survived this ordeal, Delany theorized African homecoming as a mental struggle (evidenced by external symptoms) that, once overcome, enabled a figurative rebirth in the ancestral homeland. Let us be mindful here of David Anderson's useful suggestion that we have to understand the concept of "home" for those nineteenth-century patients afflicted with nostalgia. According to Anderson, "Home is, and means, so much more than any particular place; home is a conglomeration of memories and senses, it is the knowledge and familiarity of locale; home articulates belonging and our feelings toward its setting and surroundings proffers comfort and assurance."³³ In his description of the disease process, Delany theorized that tropical fever and nostalgia were one and the same and that would-be settlers already had within their grasp the means to survive—namely, the ability to let go of a "particular place" (America) in favor of intangible "memories and senses"

(Blackness as African ancestry). As for the centrality of “knowledge and familiarity of locale,” Delany’s expedition proved the value of existing exploration literature and mapmaking for giving potential settlers everything they might need.

Also implied here is Delany’s careful distinction between what he imagined to be a Black settler’s experience of fever and that of the white explorer. In almost all white-authored African exploration narratives, loss of life to tropical fever looms large, underscoring a traditional association of fever with the untamed nature of a “savage” land. The occasion of white death in these narratives—and particularly the recounting of the deaths of previous European explorers in a particular location—justified the notion that Africa had to be civilized so as to bring nature under proper human control. Yet regardless of real or imagined conquest, at least until there was a better understanding of what caused these diseases (and that came toward the end of the nineteenth century), Europe remained the site of white belonging. By conflating nostalgia with tropical fever, Delany’s *Official Report* picked up where white narratives of African exploration left off—namely, through his insistence that survival of malaria or yellow fever confirmed an emotional knowledge of African belonging. Thus, if white explorers such as Park or Livingstone became heroes because they braved the backwardness and disease of the African continent, Black Americans could become heroes when they embraced in body and mind the disease process as re-affiliation. Looking back to Delany’s 1852 “Project for an Expedition” and what appeared at first to be a somewhat naive call to “adventure,” we might well ask if the acute physical and mental suffering brought on by fever symbolized in the *Official Report* the character-defining tests of self-control and endurance required for the success of Delany’s great African enterprise.

Ironically, given Delany’s 1855 condemnation of Liberia as a proverbial, swamp-ridden potter’s field swallowing up the corpses of ACS settlers, his refiguration of tropical fever also suggested something of a shift in his presentation of the Black nation. According to the *Official Report*, Delany came down with fever in Monrovia, where he was cared for by the same Americo-Liberians he had previously maligned. Thus his actual recovery (and therefore his reconnection to Africa) took place in Liberia. Though Delany never relinquished his dislike for the ACS, he used the narrative as a means to make peace with individual Americo-Liberian settlers. As a narrative necessarily composed in retrospect, the *Official Report* therefore promoted cooperation rather than conflict between Delany and his Liberian hosts. Ironically, it was Americo-Liberians themselves who ushered him into West Africa: after all, he had booked his passage “on a ship christened *The Mendi*, in tribute to the Sierra Leonean slave rebels of the *Amistad*, owned and operated by three Americo-Liberians.”³⁴ His description

of disembarkation also boded well: “Saturday, July 10.—I landed on the beach at Grand Cape Mount, Robertsport, in company of Messrs. the Hon. John D. Johnson, Joseph Turpin, Dr. Dunbar [the owners of the ship], and Ellis A. Potter, amid the joyous acclamations of the numerous natives who stood along the beautiful shore, and a number of Liberians, among whom was Reverend Samuel Williams, who gave us a hearty reception. Here we passed through the town (over the side of the hill), returning to the vessel after night” (OR, 47). The easy hospitality lavished on Delany by Americo-Liberians belied the complex emotions that must have been at play on both sides in the actual moment, since his hosts were all well aware of Delany’s published and personal views. However, Delany’s representation of his reception suggests an unusual unity of purpose:

At Grand Bassa I held a Council with some of the most eminent Liberians, among whom were several members of the National legislature—the venerable Judge Hanson in the chair. Several able speeches were made—the objects of my mission and policy approved; and I shall never forget the profound sensation produced at that ever-memorable Council, and one of the most happy hours of my life. When the honored judge and sage, sanctioning my adventure, declared that, rather than it should fail, he would join it himself, and with emotion rose to his feet; the effect was inexpressible, each person being as motionless as a statue. (OR, 58)

By referring to these dignitaries as a “noble band of brothers” (OR, 60), Delany implies that his reception in Monrovia was already on its way to being a familial homecoming.

Yet even in metaphorical terms, familial connections could not overcome other problems that, for Delany, made Liberia unlivable. Though Americo-Liberians provided him with lodging and nursed him back to health, and though his tone had softened considerably, Delany still employed Liberia as the negative foil to Nigeria: “The native fever which is common to all parts of Africa, in Liberia while . . . not necessarily fatal (and in by far the greater percentage of cases in the hands of an intelligent, skillful physician, quite manageable), is generally much worse in its character there than in the Yoruba country, where I have been. The symptoms appear to be much more aggravated and the patient to suffer more intensely” (OR, 65). Had Americo-Liberians truly relinquished their connection to the United States? Indeed, Delany directly faulted Americo-Liberians for creating the conditions where tropical fevers might flourish. According to the *Official Report*, because the inhabitants of Monrovia had neither cleared “rank” vegetation from the land nor drained the surrounding mangrove swamps, their inaction enabled a fever-carrying miasma to range over settler

homesteads, resulting in acute illness and death. Indeed, Delany blamed “the [more extreme] character of the disease” in Liberia on the gluttony of Americo-Liberians who, he claimed, were fond of “improper food and drink” (OR, 65). Thus, reports from Liberia of intense suffering brought on by fever suggested (according to Delany) a widespread moral deficiency among the Black nation’s settler-citizens. Add to this the apparently shortsighted and lazy indigenous populations who, “unlike those of the Yoruba . . . cultivate nothing but rice, [cassava], and yams . . . in small patches,” and Liberia would most likely remain a stalled national project (OR, 66). In peevishly criticizing Americo-Liberians for their lack of “public buildings of note” (OR, 59), Delany described Monrovia and the surrounding territory in ways that showcased his apparently more sensible ideas for clearing innumerable acres of land and building paved roads, piers, and grand buildings to demonstrate Black civic and commercial ambition. Given that the resources to achieve such projects were abundantly available (for example, large quantities of stone), Delany underscored once again a failure of will among Americo-Liberians. Consequently, the stage is set in the first half of the *Official Report* to confirm and promote Nigeria as the true site of Black nationhood. At the same time, Delany set himself up as the more knowledgeable Black American expatriate, since he presumed to know more than the Americo-Liberians about managing land to secure general public health and the effective use of natural resources.

Not surprisingly, in the remainder of the *Official Report* Nigeria turned out to be everything Liberia was not. In contrast to Liberia’s lazy indigenous farmers, the Yoruba raised peas “such as are raised for horse and cattle feed in Canada and other parts of America” (OR, 73). According to Delany, “there is little difference between [local yams] and potatoes,” and he argued that “beets, parsnips, and carrots . . . could be successfully raised, if desired” (OR, 74). Just as he conflated tropical fever with nostalgia, Delany seemed to collapse Nigeria with North America, such that hogs, horses, and game birds were virtually the same as American species—so much so that people moving into the Niger Valley would feel as though they had never left the United States. Importantly, in contrast to the ongoing conflicts between Americo-Liberians and indigenous Africans that continued to plague Liberia, Delany described his welcome by the king of Ilorin: “Many, very many were the thanks given me that day by these, my native kinsmen and women” (OR, 76). While his first encounter with Americo-Liberians was cordial enough, Delany described how the king of Ilorin opened his arms to both him and Campbell, because “we were ‘his people’”; this was “a privilege which he never allowed ‘a strange white man,’ who was never permitted to look upon his royal black face publically” (OR, 80). Here

Delany conjured up a native African acceptance of diasporic Blacks that completely revised the traditional white narratives of settler colonialism, ironically exemplified in Liberia.

Delany's dealings with local Yoruba and their cousins the Egba generated both pride and paternalism: pride for the industriousness and systems of government adopted by the communities he encountered, and paternalism because he saw these same Africans as needing improvement. Note, for example, his interaction with the Yoruba trader and political power broker Efunpo-roye Osuntinubu Osumosa, known more simply as Madame Tinubu. According to Delany, "She had promised to place the entire management of her extensive business in my hands, as much advantage was taken of her by foreigners" (OR, 79). Though of humble origin, Madame Tinubu had nevertheless taken advantage of the custom that a woman, regardless of her marital status, had the right to own property and run businesses, keeping the money she made for herself and her children. Known as both a shrewd negotiator and a formidable foe, the twice-widowed Tinubu accumulated great wealth and military power in her heyday, due in part to the fact that at different points she not only controlled much of the region's extremely valuable palm oil trade but also traded in slaves. Though by the time Delany encountered her in Abeokuta the British had successfully diminished her influence, it was highly unlikely that she was an easy and naive target for unscrupulous foreigners.³⁵ In order to cast Madame Tinubu as the naive Victorian female, Delany had to present her as ready to yield power to men—ready for the civilizing influences only Black American settlers could bring. Indeed, his encounter with Tinubu proved the need for settlers, justifying Delany's argument that "a new element" had to be introduced into Nigeria—namely, immigrants "possessing all the attainments, socially and politically, morally and religiously, adequate to so important an end" as the advancement of Africa (OR, 110). In the final pages of the *Official Report*, Delany proclaimed the slogan "Africa for the African race, and black men to rule them," which, while it pronounced a theme that would later guide modern-day Black Nationalists, appeared equally blind to the pitfalls of Black American arrogance that so plagued Liberia (OR, 121). Regardless, Delany's *Official Report* proved both his superior knowledge of Nigeria and his capacity to lead a new settlement.

But did the two—that is, his display of scientific knowledge and his practical assessment for founding a settlement—actually go together in the narrative? There is no question that Delany's preparation for this expedition was intense. He was well read, given the body of information available at the time, and he had obviously obtained whatever maps had been available, perhaps having no idea that they were flawed. Why, then, did he minimize or ignore altogether

the specific dangers settlers would probably face? Like white explorers, Delany projected his own fantasies upon the landscape, though certainly not in quite the way exemplified by Winwood Reade and his map of “African literature,” for example. Delany sought mastery over what Reade called African literature in order to use it for the benefit of Black Americans, without being disrespectful to the authority of the Egba. However, even after undergoing what must have been considerable suffering with malaria, Delany was simply determined to represent Nigeria as the antithesis of Liberia, regardless of the realities.

COLONIAL DISPERSAL IN ROBERT CAMPBELL’S

A *PILGRIMAGE TO MY MOTHERLAND*

Martin Delany and Robert Campbell may have agreed ahead of time to cover specific aspects of their expedition so as not to produce duplicate discussions of the same material. Delany’s *Official Report* largely addressed the physical landscape, disease, agriculture, and climate. Campbell, on the other hand, focused close attention on the ethnic groups he encountered, providing the traditional “manners and customs” descriptions, while dramatizing repeatedly what appeared to be carefully nurtured personal affiliations with a range of Nigerians, some among the ruling class but others just ordinary people he met along his journey. Indeed, to the same extent to which Delany absented himself as a participant in his narrative, Campbell deliberately wrote himself into the action at every opportunity. From this perspective, *A Pilgrimage to My Motherland* reads like a series of picaresque vignettes, as Campbell makes his way from one community to the next, acknowledging the men hired to travel with him (including, at different times, a guide, a cook, and a boy who seemed to have acted as a valet or general servant). In the narrative, Campbell seems everywhere present alongside Africans as they go about their daily activities at home, at the market, during festivals, or, on occasion, during interethnic warfare between neighboring towns. Take, for example, his description of the Egba authorities of Abeokuta, the city near which he and Delany intended to create their settlement. Here Campbell describes a particularly favorable encounter with Okukenu, the city’s Egba alake: “My reception with the King was very cordial. I explained to him the object of my visit to his country, which he was pleased to hear. He observed that for people coming with such a purpose [i.e., from the United States to found a settlement], and for missionaries, he had great ‘sympathy,’ and would afford every encouragement; but some of the people (emigrants from the Brazils, Cuba, and Sierra Leone) who were coming into his dominion, especially traders, gave him much trouble” (p. 170). The new arrivals from Brazil, Cuba,

and Sierra Leone were Christianized former slaves who had moved to Nigeria to advance their commercial interests. Based on the alake's support for Campbell's mission, readers were to assume that an African American contingent of settlers would be more respectful of indigenous authority and thus more to the alake's liking. Schooling his readers in the importance of showing deference to their future Egba hosts, Campbell recalls his subsequent audiences with "the principal chiefs, to explain the object of my visit and to make to each a small present. Though humble, these presents were well received and in every instance a return present of cola nuts . . . or of cowries was given" (p, 171). Throughout his narrative, Campbell rehearses such examples to emphasize the extent to which, whether or not they were "heathens," indigenous authorities had to be respected.

Campbell's stance here resonated with his very personal title *A Pilgrimage to My Motherland*, since this was not merely a journey for the production of useful knowledge but a realignment of loyalties, from the fraught contexts of Jamaica and Philadelphia to racial acceptance in the African homeland. To this end, Campbell built on his favorable portrait of the Egba by undermining traditional racist assumptions in both Britain and the United States that Africans favored white skin:

The white man who supposes himself respected in Africa, merely because he is white, is grievously mistaken. . . . One of the chiefs . . . Atambala, was with us one day when a young [white] missionary entered, and passed him with only a casual nod of the head. As soon as he was seated the haughty old chief arose and said, in his own tongue: "Young man, whenever any of my people, even the aged, approaches me, he prostrates himself with his face to the ground. I do not expect the same from . . . civilized men, . . . nevertheless remember always that I shall demand all the respect due to a chief." (p, 172)

In having Atambala speak for himself, Campbell imbued the latter with agency, dignity, and a deep understanding of traditional authority, while suggesting that, for all their "civilization," white missionaries were both ignorant of and arrogant toward local customs. Additionally, the white missionary's discourteousness only threw into sharper relief Campbell's assiduous attempts to respect and honor Egba leaders. Both Campbell and Delany had already noted the presence of CMS agents such as the Reverend Henry Townsend, apparently "an intimate acquaintance" of the alake Okukenu, since the latter allowed Townsend to sit "on an end of his mat" (p, 171). Campbell earlier introduced readers to acting consul Lieutenant Edward Francis Lodder, whose presence

served as a reminder that the British were on site eagerly representing their own agenda—namely, to take advantage of the lucrative trade in palm oil and other agricultural products. However, until the British achieved any final takeover, Atambala's rebuke of the missionary proved the limits of Egba tolerance toward visitors. This incident with Atambala and the badly behaved missionary must also have had an effect on Campbell himself. In Jamaica, and especially in the United States, men of African descent—whatever their color—risked life and limb if they resisted white demands. What must it have been like for Campbell to see an African man in authority, exuding the dignity and presence to lecture a young white man on his bad behavior? The role reversal must surely have been stunning.

To top off these observations, Campbell pointed to the consequences accruing to his own light complexion: "The natives generally at first regarded me as a white man, until I informed them of my connection with the Negro. This announcement always gained me a warmer reception" (p, 171). As both Campbell and Delany would learn, non-Christianized locals categorized non-Africans as "white men" regardless of their skin color, by virtue of their Western clothing, language, and manners, suggesting that the Egba relied on proof of cultural affinity rather than merely falling for appearance or cultural performance. Campbell's negotiation of his skin color in West Africa underscored a sharp contrast to the importance given to mixed-race identity in the British West Indies, where Campbell would have had access to some privilege. In West Africa, however, Campbell highlighted an environment where treating others with respect mattered more than the reputed superiority associated with whiteness in the rest of the Atlantic World. This reversal contradicted the experiences of Campbell's own readers, Black and white, while also stressing the suitability of life in Abeokuta as an antidote to New World racism.

In contrast to Martin Delany, who came to Nigeria only after he was strong enough to leave Liberia, Campbell arrived via packet ship from Liverpool to Lagos, having begun his journey in England on a fundraising mission for the Niger Valley expedition. The traditional route of packet steamers took Campbell to ports that either were already controlled by Britain (for example, Cape Coast Castle, Accra, and Freetown) or had a substantial British presence (Lagos).³⁶ Though unmentioned in the narrative, the steamer's scheduled stops in British colonial territory might have enabled Campbell to make the acquaintance of members of a tiny British West Indian community that had sprung up among the colonial civil servants. (His fellow passengers would also have included West Indians and Christianized Africans.) As Nemata Blyden has shown, at different points these nepotistic Trinidadian and Jamaican immigrants saw

themselves as being above indigenous Africans, above ex-slave converts, and above ex-slave immigrants from Cuba and Brazil. Indeed, as Blyden asserts, their sense of West Indian difference was reinvented and consolidated by and through their active participation in British colonial policy in West Africa.³⁷ Additionally, there was a contingent of West Indian traders, professionals, and merchants in British-controlled ports, such that Campbell would have encountered fellow Anglophone West Indians—if not in great numbers, then certainly as people of some status. It is significant, however, that Campbell refuses to mention any encounters with British West Indians. Instead, in seeking out the Egba and later the Yoruba (who also welcomed him), Campbell rejects literally and symbolically the world created by his white father, for what he hopes will be a full embrace of people on his mother's side.

Campbell's attitude toward local Africans bears comparison to ways in which the latter were often figured in narratives by white explorers, who included indigenous peoples when such revelations served particular narrative purposes. For example, in a famous 1857 lecture delivered at Cambridge's Town Hall, the Scottish missionary David Livingstone described his interaction with various members of the baKwena people, in what is now the modern state of Botswana. Livingstone focused special attention on the chief Sechele because the latter decided, at the missionary's urging, to convert to Christianity. Because of his status as a chief, Sechele was crucial to Livingstone's plan for mass conversion, since he mistakenly assumed that the baKwena were mutely obedient to their leader and would follow his example without protest. As it turned out, Sechele's Christian conversion caused discontent among both his household and his subjects, such that the baKwena chief became Livingstone's *only* convert during the latter's time in southern Africa. Given this failure, Livingstone's portraits of the intractable baKwena transformed them into a convenient foil against which to project his superiority as a white Christian man. For example, during a particularly bad drought, the baKwena justified to Livingstone their belief in a variety of rituals to bring rain:

I endeavoured to persuade them that no mortal could control the rain, and their argument was, "We know very well that God makes the rain; we pray to him by means of medicines. You use medicines to give to a sick man, and sometimes he dies: you don't give up your medicine, because one man dies; and when any one is cured by it, you take the credit. So, the only thing we can do is to offer our medicines, which, by continued application, may be successful." The only way to eradicate such absurdities from the minds of these poor people is to give them the Gospel.³⁸

If in this instance Livingstone makes the baKwena visible so as to provide an appropriate example of why the “civilizing mission” has to be accomplished in Africa, at other points he renders them invisible so as not to interrupt his rumination on the parts of the Kalahari Desert closest to the Zambezi River and its floodplain, and specifically the number of life-sustaining but largely hidden resources that any future European expedition would need in order to survive:

In the Kalahari desert there is not a single flowing stream, and the only water there is found in deep wells; but at certain periods of the year water-melons are found in abundance, upon the fluid of which oxen and men have subsisted for days, obviating thereby the necessity for canning water. Animals are also plentiful; and though they took care to keep out of bow-shot, I found that with my gun I could kill as many as were wanted. In my journey beyond the desert, I met with many antelopes of a kind before unknown to naturalists, besides elephants, buffaloes, zebras, &c.³⁹

The image here is of Livingstone unveiling a deceptively arid panorama to his European reader, pointing out the existence of hidden sources of water and food that would sustain a large caravan. Of course, the source of all this knowledge was none other than the local population upon whom Livingstone would have relied for guidance. Only local indigenous people would have known about the changing availability of food resources tied to the water level at different points in the year. Additionally, Livingstone would have been accompanied by indigenous hunters engaged in their own pursuit of game, allowing him to make the comparison between hunting by “bow-shot” and hunting by rifle. In his narrative, then, the indigenous inhabitants appear and disappear as needed to make Livingstone solely responsible for his “discoveries.”

In striking contrast, Campbell uses his narrative to stage chronologically a slowly emerging familiarity with the Nigerian landscape, akin to a slowly developing awareness of and interaction with local peoples around him. Unlike Livingstone’s self-staged command of the landscape, Campbell at first represents himself as the utterly naive and even terrified outsider. Just after his disembarkation at Lagos, but before he begins the overland journey to Aboekuta, Campbell accompanies Mr. Williams, an indigenous convert who served as translator to the acting British consul Lieutenant Lodder, to see Williams’s farm. Once at the desired rural location, Campbell leaves his host engaged in some planting to wander off in pursuit of a bird he hopes to shoot and stuff as a curious specimen. After gaining his prize, Campbell suddenly realizes he is lost. Stumbling along “for more than two hours” (p, 165), he finally stops to assess his lack of progress: “I . . . found myself in the midst of an almost impenetrable jungle,

the shrubbery and vines so thickly interlacing, that it was with the greatest difficulty that I could break through: the ground too was swampy, and I sometimes sunk nearly to my knees. By this time my friends were as busy seeking me. I never felt more joyful than when I heard their voice in response to my own. From hunger, fatigue, heat of the sun and excitement, I returned home about 2 P.M., with severe headache and fever" (P, 165). Here, Campbell fully acknowledges his otherness as a stranger, and he relies happily on Williams and his associates for transportation home. Indeed, Campbell's sense of alienation takes on a psychosomatic quality, incapacitating him with the symptoms of malaria, suggesting an interesting parallel with Delany's description of similar symptoms in his *Official Report*. By naming Williams as his savior, Campbell pays homage to yet another African guide and host, something that would have been almost unthinkable in a white-authored expedition narrative. The sense, too, of Williams and Campbell as savior and sufferer calling to each other turns the tables on the usual projection of white savior and indigenous heathen. Not surprisingly, after the passage of many weeks during which he traveled from city to city, Campbell presents himself as having acquired a new level of comfort with his surroundings. For example, when a recurring bout of fever incapacitated Martin Delany at the side of the road, Campbell "rode on as fast as possible to find a place at which we could sojourn for the night, and fortunately found a small farm village about four miles further on" (P, 217). Though Campbell also suffers from recurrences of this "acclimitizing fever," for the most part he uses Delany's apparently more frequent lapses in health as a foil for his ability to withstand the new environment, to the point where he capably negotiates the countryside on his own. Whether he had been informed of the location of the village by a local African or not, Campbell turned himself into Delany's savior, just as Williams had saved him.

Still, while Campbell used his narrative to upend colonial racial politics created through imperialism, and though he paid homage to the dignity of both the Egba and the Yoruba, he also sought to establish his own authority at the expense of non-Christian Africans. One could argue that he had not been allowed to express his social identity as a Black man in either Jamaica or the United States, but once in the Niger Valley for the purpose of his expedition, he claimed the ability to inhabit social roles hitherto denied him. This shift had a consequential effect on his narrative voice. Late in the text, Campbell crosses the Ogun River, unexpectedly ending up in the middle of a no-man's-land where hostile parties, including Muslims from the cities Ijaye, Oyo, and Awaye, battled each other, taking prisoners of war. Repeatedly, Campbell falls back on his status as a "civilized" stranger to cross from one enemy's territory

into another, all the while pretending not to understand the inquiries made to him by patrolling war bands. Finally, as he prepares to leave Awaye, “a woman with her son and daughter besought me to permit them to go under our protection” (p, 230). Campbell graciously receives them. But no sooner have they set out on the road than they are met with “two hundred Ibadan soldiers.” The soldiers demand a gift as the price for allowing Campbell and his party to leave unharmed; however, their idea of a “gift” turns out to be the woman and her two children. Campbell immediately rejects their command: “I told them it was impossible for me to leave these people, they had placed themselves under my protection, therefore I could not permit them to be taken away, except with myself also; that they could take my horse, my watch, my money, all I had in short; but I would not permit them to take these people” (p, 231). Eventually, even the soldiers’ commanding officer has “almost a tear in his eye,” declaring, “*Oto, oto, oyibo, molo!* ‘Enough, enough, white man, go on’” (p, 231).

Campbell knew full well that the woman and her children would have become slaves, so he struck a blow for abolition and Christianized Black manhood with his roadside defiance. Ironically, the commander’s description of him as a “white man” resonates in the narrative, since Campbell could not (indeed, perhaps desired not to) leave behind his New World identity as a “civilized” person of African descent. At the same time, Campbell’s heroic gesture toward the woman and her children engages the title of his narrative: as a first-time Victorian visitor to his “motherland,” he becomes the Black father figure who *should* protect enslaved African women from capture and eventual transportation in the transatlantic slave trade. In this sense, only in West Africa can Campbell become the Black patriarch that his own white father—and white men of his father’s class in Jamaica—could never be. Interestingly, while Campbell saved the woman and her children, the Ibadan military leader’s sentimental tears mimicked the emotions commonly favored by mid-nineteenth-century transatlantic abolitionists who routinely drew upon scenes of Black mothers and children cruelly separated by slavery, so as to move even the most skeptical Anglo-European heart. As depicted in the narrative, the Ibadan commander responded in correct sentimental fashion by (almost) crying. In fact, crying was exactly the empathetic response required, suggesting that even the most hardened African warrior was capable of fine feelings of sympathy, and therefore of Christian conversion.

This scene hardly suggests equality between Campbell and the commander, and when he does build close relationships with native Africans, Campbell turns to the native convert (think here of Williams, the translator and farmer). In this case, he looks to the brothers Samuel Crowther Jr. and Josiah Crowther,

sons of none other than the former slave turned Anglican bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther. Native missionaries had already moved to Abeokuta by the time Delany and Campbell arrived, but Campbell's positive relationship with the Crowthers turns not only on the experience of shared racial oppression but also on their common experience as British colonial subjects. Samuel Jr. and Josiah were educated in Britain, the former as a doctor and the latter as an industrialist. Though Campbell did not have the advantage of a foreign education, in their formative years the Crowther brothers and Campbell would have lived along similar rhythms of English colonial life, sharing something of a common vocabulary with respect to education and Christian upbringing. His origins halfway around the world in another British colonial setting—in addition to his identity as the son of a Scotsman and a woman of African descent, his initial profession as a printer, and his later work as a schoolmaster—identified him as a member of the colonial elite. Consequently, though the locations and populations were different, Campbell and the Crowther brothers would have recognized each other across the expanse of empire. (These moments of recognition no doubt reminded all three of the overbearing nature of the British, so as to refigure new alliances of resistance among them once Campbell moved to Lagos. Still, Campbell must have viewed Nigeria as relatively “free” from white control compared to Jamaica.)

Campbell's affinity with the Crowthers shows itself during a meeting in a local village square between the brothers and local healers. The description betrays an entanglement of African diasporic connection (between Campbell and the Crowthers) even as it reveals the shadow of elitism toward the “heathens” in the village:

In the afternoon the regulars appeared, clothed in their most costly garments, and well provided with orishas or charms attached to all parts of their persons and dress. In the mean time Mr. Crowther had also prepared to receive them. A table was placed in the middle of the room, and on it a dish in which were a few drops of sulphuric acid, so placed that a slight motion of the table would cause it to flow into a mixture of chlorate of potassa and white sugar. A [cuckoo] clock was also in the room . . . and this was arranged so as to coo while [the local people] were present. . . . Presently the bird came out, and to their astonishment cooed twelve times, and suddenly from the midst of this dish burst forth flame and a terrible explosion. The scene that followed was indescribable: one fellow rushed through the window . . . ; another in his consternation, overturning chairs [and] tables . . . took refuge in the bed-room, under the bed, from

which he was with difficulty afterward removed. It need not be added that they gave no more trouble, and the practice [local healers] sought to break up was only the more increased by their pains. (*P*, 178–79)

The comical triumph of Western science over African superstition affirms Campbell's desired affiliation (as the narrator and traveler) with the forward-looking, Western-trained Samuel Crowther Jr., at the expense of the locals who are imagined to be so ignorant they have to be tricked into accepting the authority of Western medicine. His decision to include this, of all stories, is noteworthy when we consider that after leaving the West Indies for lack of opportunity, Campbell temporarily ended up in Philadelphia as a science instructor. While he had the full support of the white Quakers who hired him to teach in their school for Black youth, Campbell faced ample racism in his attempt to take classes at the University of Pennsylvania toward improving himself as an educator.

Campbell's affiliation with the Crowther brothers is also important because their acceptance of him affirmed his place within this new world of African opportunity, even as he embraced and respected the traditional authority of non-Christians such as the Egba alake in Abeokuta. This sense of uneasy bonding in the narrative is underscored every time Campbell notes being called a white man by an African. While he hastens to point out that, regardless of their race, all foreign Westerners are regarded as white by the Yoruba and the Egba, Campbell also mentions the vast disparity in skin color between himself and the darker-hued Martin Delany. Repeatedly in the narrative, Campbell describes himself as continually forced to declare his racial credentials, since "Africans are not as keen in the recognition of their descendants, as are the Americans of the same class of person" (*P*, 178). Again, as members of an elite colonial class enabled in part by British colonialism, the Crowthers emerged as the acceptable model of the kinds of diasporic authentication Campbell hoped to achieve: "Let any disinterested person visiting Abbeokuta, place himself in a position to notice the manner in which such a person, for instance as the Reverend Samuel Crowther, or even his son of the same name, each a pure Negro, is treated, and he would soon perceive the profound respect with which Africans treat those of their own race worthy of it. The white man who supposes himself respected in Africa, merely because he is white, is grievously mistaken" (*P*, 172). Campbell's use of the Crowther brothers to explain his concept of "worth" was based not on skin color—as distinguished from race—but on their (and his) ability to serve as cultural mediators between non-Christian Africans and Anglo-Europeans.

Although Crowther's account of the 1841 Niger Valley expedition provided an opportunity to reflect on the landscape and populations tied to his preslavery childhood, the fact remained that he was obliged to the Church Missionary Society and to editors willing to reshape his observations to fit institutional purposes. In contrast, Delany and Campbell had neither institutional sponsors nor ready-made white audiences awaiting the publication of their respective narratives. They had financed the expedition themselves, and once they left West Africa, they set out on separate speaking tours to publicize their cause of African repatriation. With the help of the London-based African Aid Society, Delany embarked upon a five-month speaking tour of Britain, covering material that would later form the basis of his *Official Report*. (In fact, his narrative was published in London in 1860 and in the United States a year later.) Though Delany's lectures did not yield the financial contributions he had hoped for, he had nothing to prove to white intellectuals. Validation even came from the Royal Geographical Society, which extended an invitation to Delany to present on his West African expedition at its next meeting. Across the Atlantic, on April 8, 1861, both Delany and Campbell spoke to the African Civilization Society (of which Delany was a founding member) in Brooklyn, New York. According to the meeting minutes, after Delany and Campbell spoke the membership resolved to send Henry Highland Garnet "with a select company to Yoruba, for the purpose of . . . effecting a settlement there."⁴⁰ Of course, any such project faced the same daunting task of fundraising, so nothing came of this idea. Later on, to mark the first anniversary of the African Civilization Society's creation, white abolitionist minister Dr. Joseph Parrish Thompson spoke at an organizational meeting about the promise of Nigeria, citing Delany and Campbell for being among those who had brought vital information about Africa to the public.⁴¹

For his part, Robert Campbell turned his attention not only to speaking engagements but also to his personal plans to relocate to West Africa. After leaving Nigeria, he wrote to the abolition-minded Manchester industrialist Thomas Clegg to purchase a cotton gin for use in West Africa and then made his way back as soon as possible. Especially because the British were involved in their own negotiations with groups such as the Egba and Yoruba, the repatriation plans of Delany and Campbell did not win approval from the government, or for that matter from the CMS. Still, Henry Venn addressed Campbell's *Pilgrimage* in a May 1861 review for the *Christian Observer*. In "West Africa; Viewed in Connection with Slavery, Christianity; and the Supply of Cotton," Venn re-

viewed several publications on the startling uptick in the illegal Atlantic slave trade, as well as the general unreceptiveness of many African “heathen” to Christianity. As a hopeful antidote he quoted from the overwhelmingly positive in-person observations laid out by Campbell in his *Pilgrimage*, and seemed pleased with Campbell’s report of the good character and industrious habits of the peoples who lived in and around Abeokuta. In mentioning Westerners who had recently published findings on Nigeria, he referred to Campbell as “a highly-educated, intelligent gentleman.”⁴² Clearly Venn positioned Campbell alongside key CMS missionary investigators on the ground, including Henry Townsend and Samuel Ajayi Crowther. Such validation by the CMS secretary suggests that, despite his misgivings about the larger scheme, Venn deemed Campbell’s contributions on par with those of white men and that he sought to honor both Black and white contributions to the dissemination of knowledge on West Africa.

Did this mean that Delany and Campbell had reached the apogee of the nineteenth-century white exploration tradition? The answer might lie in a response to both narratives penned by none other than the racist, anti-Semitic explorer Sir Richard Francis Burton. A proponent of polygenesis, Burton showed somewhat less contempt for Muslims and some ethnic groups in British India, but at the very bottom of his schema were Africans and anyone of African descent.⁴³ After Campbell and Delany published their respective narratives, Burton left his post as British consul on Fernando Pó (modern-day Bioko) for his own expedition, retracing many of the routes in Nigeria taken by the American Baptist Thomas Jefferson Bowen and later by Delany and Campbell. His expedition account, *Abeokuta and the Cameroon Mountains: An Exploration*, was published on his return to England in 1863.

Beyond sharing ethnographic and geographic information, Burton’s two-volume work is pointedly aimed at attacking what he sees as the unscientific, sentimental, and missionary-minded accounts of the region by four writers: Sarah Tucker’s *Abbeokuta: or, Sunrise within the Tropics* (1852), Bowen’s *Central Africa* (1857), Mary Ann Serret Barber’s *Oshielle: or, Village Life in the Yoruba Country* (1857), and Campbell’s *A Pilgrimage to My Motherland*. Burton makes quick work of the first three texts, reserving his most scathing attacks for *A Pilgrimage to My Motherland* and for Campbell himself. (And, though Burton does not centrally address Delany’s *Official Report*, the African American comes in for his own excoriation.) The features in *A Pilgrimage to My Motherland* that Campbell most relies upon to imagine his belonging to Nigeria are exactly the targets of Burton’s contempt. Referring to the Jamaican derisively as “a ‘cullud pussun,’” Burton mocks Campbell’s description of Orange Cottage, the home

of his friends the Crowthers, as well as the notion that the Crowthers are the promulgators of British civilization: “‘Orange Cottage, the beautiful residence of the Brothers Crowther,’ as the Pilgrim [Campbell] to his Grandmother’s land is fain to call it. This edifice reminded me of a third-rate training stables in some ultra-Cockney part of England. . . . It is partially painted and wholly hideous, its ugliness being surpassed only by its pretentiousness.”⁴⁴ Ridiculing the notion of “African return,” Burton implies that the only forefathers to whom African Americans should pay homage are white ones. Then he charges Campbell with an “animosity” toward whites by repeating a rumor that while “at Lagos . . . on one occasion, when a European colony in Yoruba was spoken of, he [Campbell] swore with fury that ‘no white man, if he could help it, should ever plant foot in Western Africa.’”⁴⁵ Not content with these attacks in the first volume of his narrative, Burton continues in both the text and footnotes of volume 2 to malign Delany and Campbell for their treaty with the Egba, assuming that they did not understand that according to custom, land in West Africa could not be owned and so could not be sold or given away. Clearly, Burton was angered by any attempt by a Black man to claim the role that he and his fellows had carved out for themselves. Regardless, it was very clear that he had read the narratives by Delany and Campbell in great detail.

Interestingly, Burton laid out his own imperialistic proposal for not one but *three* segregated settlements close to what is now Nigeria’s eastern border with Cameroon: a sanatorium for whites recovering from tropical fevers on the cooler slopes of the Cameroon mountains; “a convict station,” peopled with the most incorrigible offenders from Britain; and “a colony, selected from 45,000 negroes who, instead of loafing about Canada—a Canadian once told me that if anything could reconcile him to slavery it was the presence of these fugitives—might here do valuable work in lumber cutting, cacao growing, exporting the fiber and meal of the plantain, and expressing cocoa-nut and palm oil.”⁴⁶ Burton’s comments traced the familiar British habit of moving Black colonial populations, in this case from Canada, to create front-line settlements in West African territories it planned to annex. In terms of his actual journey, Burton ironically traveled almost the exact overland and river routes taken by Delany and Campbell, encountering some of the same individuals, including Williams, the native convert who rescued Campbell from the forest and who still served as a translator for English officials in Lagos. But where Campbell marveled at the dignity of ordinary West Africans, saw room for alliance, and praised native industry, Burton condemned one worthless group of Africans after another, be they the Kru men who manned his canoe or the hospitable local people who provided him food and shelter each night of his expedition.

IT IS UNCLEAR WHETHER Martin Delany read Burton's *Abeokuta and the Camarons Mountains*. More likely he was retooling to contend with a United States at war. Historians have assumed that Delany, faced with the urgency of recruiting for the 54th Massachusetts Colored Regiment and the possibility that the Union might actually defeat the slaveholding South, simply put aside his relocation plans to Nigeria forever. Yet Delany's experiences in West Africa had become a lens through which to see new possibilities, albeit in the United States. While he was still lecturing in Britain in September 1860, one British newspaper reported Delany's descriptions of the commonalities shared by animals and fowl in tropical West Africa and the temperate regions of the United States and Britain. More importantly, his presentation linked the Africans he met to the Egyptians, thereby challenging the popular contemporary theory by the Englishman George Gliddon that Egyptians were white. According to the report, Delany "then gave traits, illustrating the negro's self-respect, and his capacity for the participation of civilized life."⁴⁷ Once he returned to the United States and threw himself into war work, similar content showed up in his speeches during recruitment tours in northern states. This was the case in 1863, when the May 1 issue of William Lloyd Garrison's *Liberator* summarized one of Delany's Massachusetts speeches. According to the abolitionist paper, Delany argued that "American schoolbooks inculcated, notwithstanding recent discoveries, very erroneous notions of [Nigeria] as sandy and barren, the soil unproductive, the air full of pestilence, the vegetation poisonous, the very animals unusually ferocious. All of this was more or less false. . . . He had travelled three thousand miles in the country and had seen it in all its phases of social and moral life."⁴⁸ Delany not only praised the systematic nature of "the African language" (possibly Yoruba?), the *Liberator* reported, but also recited lines of "African" poetry in translation and "reminded his audience of the simple and beautiful extemporaneous song which the negro woman sang over the poor Mungo Park, the traveller, when he sat sorrowing by her tent door, and to whom she supplied, in her womanly kindness, with milk."⁴⁹

Surprisingly, he even defended polygamy as "an old and venerable institution" with "a genuine Oriental origin. Solomon was the arch-polygamist of the world and the Africans who followed his example were no worse than he." According to the news report, Delany went on to state that

women were universally respected in Africa, and the men paid them chivalrous attention. They were not allowed to do any physical labor whatsoever except to draw water; and this they insisted upon as their peculiar right and privilege. This also was an Oriental custom of immemorial

usage; and was frequently alluded to in the Scriptures. . . . Chastity was sacred amongst them, and any one violating or insulting a woman was decapitated. . . .

An African house [owned by a wealthy man] often contained hundreds of women, who were called wives by courtesy. . . . These were daily occupied in spinning, basket-making, weaving cotton fabrics, &c., which they sold in the markets.⁵⁰

As Robert Levine rightly argues, in this speech Delany “was implicitly pointing out the genealogical sources of the moral and social energy that he believed the Black troops would bring to the Union’s war against slavery.”⁵¹ By referencing what he had seen and experienced in West Africa, Delany also sought to validate the origins of Black Americans and the lives of the Africans he had encountered in 1859–60.

Finally, a specific detail from the *Liberator’s* report stands out: to substantiate his authority as an explorer, during his speech Delany appeared in “a long dark-colored robe, with curious scrolls upon the neck as a collar. He said it was the wedding dress of a Chief, and the embroidery was insignia, and had a specific meaning well understood in African high circles. He wore it because he thought it becoming, and fitting the occasion.”⁵² Additionally, Delany “produced a grammar of the [Yoruba?] language, and made quotations from it.”⁵³ Of course, the frontispiece image of Campbell’s *Pilgrimage* (figure 4.2) has him dressed in what appears to be a very similar garment, though that version includes a turban. The donning of “African” clothing and, in Delany’s case, the use of a written grammar confirming the “reduction” of an oral language to writing speak to a colonizing tradition enacted specifically by European orientalists—those European gentlemen (and some ladies) famously described by Edward Said who claimed to “know” the “oriental” subject, whether that subject was Turkish, Chinese, or South Asian. The most famous orientalist to combine linguistic skill and masquerade was again Richard Francis Burton, who in 1853 donned a series of “Arab” disguises so as to pass as a Muslim pilgrim making the Hajj—according to his *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to Al-Madinah and Meccah*, he was able to pull off the ruse. Yet even Burton admitted that a number of Muslim pilgrims saw past his disguises but either did not feel compelled to tell their companions or stopped short of confronting him. In one of the best readings of Burton’s masquerade, Parama Roy argues: “The easy transition [for a white man] between varied identities underwrites imperialism’s avowal of faith in a stable and coherent colonial self that can resist the potential pollutions of this trafficking in native identity. If the colonial self is stable and unassailable,



FIGURE 4.2. Frontispiece portrait of Robert Campbell in *Pilgrimage to My Motherland*, 1861. (Hatcher Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.)

then it should follow . . . that the native self is, like all blank or dark spots on the map, a void, an unscribed and infinitely malleable space. Thus can the native be made over in the image of the colonizer.”⁵⁴ According to Roy, the point of Burton’s masquerade lies in his desire not to become the “inscrutable” oriental but to render the oriental meaningless as a subject, such that whiteness itself becomes the inscrutable or, as she says, the “unassailable” entity.

Delany and Campbell had no plans to invalidate or dishonor their Egba hosts and were not interested in deceiving anyone. Did their postexpedition costuming function as a symbolic reminder of what must have been an astonishing three months in Nigeria?

Nineteenth-century Nigeria had a strong Muslim presence, a fact clearly evident in Delany’s speeches about West Africa and also reflected in both Camp-

bell's choice of costume. Though Delany has very little to say about clothing in his *Official Report*, in *Pilgrimage* Campbell is obsessed with clothing. Consider, for instance, his meeting with Okukenu, the alake: "His body above the loins was nude: otherwise his attire consisted of a handsome velvet cap trimmed with gold, a costly necklace of coral, and a double strand of the same ornament about his loins, with a velvet cloth thrown gracefully about the rest of his person" (p, 170). Then there is the *adelu*, whom Campbell describes as "king of the Yoruba nation": "He was seated under an *acabi*, one of the turret-like arrangements already mentioned, surrounded by his wives, his head reclining on one, his feet resting on another; one fanned him, another wiped the perspiration from his face; one held an umbrella of many colors over his head, and another a small vessel carefully covered up, in which his majesty occasionally deposited his salivary secretions. . . . His dress consisted of a costly tobe and shocoto of the same pattern, both nicely embroidered, a cap of red silk-velvet, and Mohammedan sandals" (p, 215). Is Campbell confusedly processing here some of the cultural evidence of Islam in West Africa? While his descriptions suggest the power and magnificence of West African rulers, the recurring weight of such images of (potential) sexual indulgence, voluptuous clothing, and sluggishness owes much to the same European orientalist discourse promulgated by men such as Burton.

This image from Campbell's *Pilgrimage* also contrasts sharply with a curious moment in the narrative when Campbell most resembles not the returning African son but the European explorer. Repeatedly exasperated by the unreliability of his African porters, Campbell has solicited their cooperation by "lending each carrier a shirt, for so great is the respect entertained for the civilized, that even the assumption of the garb affords protection and the liberty of passing unmolested through a hostile country" (p, 213). Then, toward the end of the narrative, as he argues for the ease with which native Africans might be civilized, he observes that "as soon as any one of these people assumes the garb or other characteristics of civilization, [traditional African laws] cease to exercise jurisdiction over him" (p, 244). Throughout his narrative, Campbell maintains a near-obsession with African clothing and the need to distinguish the "civilized" from the noncivilized, based on who wears shirts and who does not. With "civilized" garb functioning in these stories as a talisman, a fetish object among the Africans, their eagerness to wear Western clothes ironically underscores their lack of civilization. With respect to the frontispiece, we observe a moment of reversal when Campbell sheds his Western clothes, pointing out on the most obvious levels a rebirth, a reinvention from a New World Black subject to a bona fide African. Yet how much does this transformation echo

the tradition of masquerade regularly enacted for centuries by white men in colonial contexts?

The related masquerade of the exotic performed by Delany and Campbell made legible to European and American audiences—and especially to African Americans—not only the “scientific” information they had labored so hard to obtain in West Africa but also their claim to the region which was above that of white Europeans. From Campbell’s point of view, the “new” African self he imagined in the frontispiece portrait of *Pilgrimage* symbolized the triumph of a “new” Africa over the “old” one, thereby fulfilling the fantasy of the son’s return to the motherland. However, as both Campbell and his audience understood intuitively, this romanticized identity would itself collapse in West Africa, because were Campbell to wear such garments in Lagos, he would cease to be the civilized, superior brother. For his part, Delany’s costume might have functioned not just as a prop but indeed as a reminder of his own remarkable journey, in the midst of the Civil War.