

# Pan-Africanism and West African Nationalism in Britain

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**Abstract:** This article outlines some aspects of the history of West Africans in Britain during the colonial era in the first half of the twentieth century. In particular it focuses on the emergence of West African nationalism in Britain and highlights some of the political activities of those African sojourners abroad, who were also temporarily part of the diaspora. Their political organizations, especially the West African Students' Union and the West African National Secretariat, were influential in West Africa and throughout the diaspora and reflected changing political identities, consciousness, and historical conditions. Most important, they show that West Africans developed and maintained their own distinctive political aims, consciousness, and ideologies, while at the same time contributing to and being influenced by those of the diaspora. These aims and ideologies also reflected the particularities of political and social conditions in Britain, conditions that were shaped by the African presence itself. West African nationalism provided a distinctive philosophy and orientation even for West Africans' pan-African activities. Indeed they saw the future of Africa and the diaspora as determined by political and other advances in the West African colonies.

**Résumé:** Cet article retrace quelques uns des aspects de l'histoire des Africains de l'Ouest en Grande Bretagne pendant l'ère coloniale de la première moitié du vingtième siècle. Nous nous penchons en particulier sur l'émergence du nationalisme ouest-africain en Grande Bretagne et mettons en relief certaines activités politiques de ces africains en séjour à l'étranger, qui firent également momentanément partie de la diaspora. Leurs organisations politiques, plus particulièrement la West African Students' Union (Syndicat des étudiants ouest-africains) et le West African National Secretariat (Secrétariat national ouest-africain), exercèrent une influence

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*African Studies Review*, Volume 43, Number 1 (April 2000), pp. 69–82

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en Afrique de l'Ouest et dans toute la diaspora, et reflètent un changement des identités politiques, des consciences et des conditions historiques. Par dessus tout, elles mettent l'accent sur le fait que les Africains de l'Ouest développèrent et maintinrent leurs propres et distincts buts politiques, consciences et idéologies, tout en contribuant en même temps à ceux de la diaspora et en étant influencés par eux. Ces buts et idéologies reflétèrent également les circonstances particulières des conditions politiques et sociales en Grande Bretagne, des conditions qui furent façonnées par la présence africaine elle-même. Le nationalisme ouest africain offrit une philosophie et une orientation distinctives, même pour les activités panafricaines des Africains de l'Ouest. En effet, ils considérèrent l'avenir de l'Afrique et de la diaspora comme déterminés par les avancées politiques et autres dans les colonies ouest africaines.

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The history of the African diaspora in Britain can be traced back to the Roman period, but current documentary evidence suggests that it was only from the sixteenth century onward that Africans regularly visited or resided in Britain. From this time, western Africa and its peoples in particular became closely linked with Britain through the trans-Atlantic slave trade and subsequently, when large parts of what came to be referred to as West Africa were conquered and placed under British colonial rule.<sup>1</sup>

During this entire period of slavery and colonial rule West Africans have been compelled through various circumstances to leave their homeland and sojourn in Britain. Some, like the famous eighteenth-century British residents Olaudah Equiano and Ottobah Cugoano, had to endure the forced migration of slavery and the slave trade before their eventual liberation. Others were compelled to journey to Britain to seek employment or educational opportunities lacking in their homelands. Today the famous African residents of the eighteenth century are generally seen as Africans of the diaspora, credited with contributing to the creation of the early ideologies of resistance to slavery, colonialism, and racism that were necessarily developed throughout Africa and the diaspora. They are less often seen as West Africans from the continent, exiles residing in Britain, or seen in terms of their original national identities (Igbo, Fante, etc.)<sup>2</sup> The distinction that might be made between Africans in the diaspora and those from the continent does, of course, require very careful consideration, not least because many Africans combined both statuses. More important, such Africans, as sojourners abroad, were often able to play a pivotal role in the development of the politics of resistance to slavery, colonialism, and European imperialism that had developed since the eighteenth century.

The history of Africans in Britain shows that there has been a very important relationship between the growing political consciousness of

those Africans who sojourned abroad, even if only temporarily a part of the diaspora, and the development of the political consciousness of their compatriots in Africa. It was often while they were in Britain, or because they were in Britain, that their political awareness was sharpened and their political training began. Important networks were established linking those overseas in Britain and those in the continent with the wider diaspora, and there has been a dialectical transfer of ideas and influences (Adi 1998). West Africans in Britain, whether we consider them part of the diaspora or not, have certainly been influenced by their experiences in Britain, and their contact with other Africans and those of African origin. Of course they have themselves often been influential, particularly in the development of a wider pan-African politics and consciousness. It should not be forgotten that they have also made their contributions to the development of radical, working-class, and anti-imperialist politics in Britain. Indeed there is a long tradition of these political contributions, ranging from Equiano's membership in the radical London Corresponding Society in the eighteenth century to Desmond Buckle's lifelong membership in the British Communist Party in the twentieth.<sup>3</sup>

West Africans' political identities and their political consciousness have changed over time and according to specific historical conditions. A pan-African consciousness, for example, can be seen in the writing and activities of Equiano, Cugoana, and other "Sons of Africa" in the eighteenth century.<sup>4</sup> In the twentieth century, West Africans' political identity has sometimes been subsumed under a general pan-Africanism, which in the early part of the century sometimes manifested itself as Ethiopianism. But it was also often seen in terms of an identification with a West African "nation," or in terms of an affiliation with the polities created by colonialism itself, and of course with a more narrow ethnic nationalism (often disparaging called "tribalism"), depending on the period and the historical conditions.

The intention of this paper is to outline some aspects of the history of West Africans in Britain during the colonial era in the first half of the twentieth century. In particular, it will focus on the emergence of West African nationalism in Britain and highlight some of the political activities of those African sojourners abroad, who were also temporarily part of the diaspora. Their political organizations, especially the West African Students' Union and the West African National Secretariat, were influential in West Africa and throughout the diaspora and reflected changing political identities, consciousness, and historical conditions. Most important, they emphasize the fact that West Africans developed and maintained their own distinctive political aims, consciousness, and ideologies, while at the same time contributing to, and being influenced by, those of the diaspora. These aims and ideologies also reflected the particularities of political and social conditions in Britain, conditions that were shaped, among other things, by the African presence itself (Adi 1998).

## West African Students

Many of the West Africans who have sojourned in Britain have been students. Even in the eighteenth century, West African rulers and merchants and their business partners in Britain found it mutually advantageous to educate African children, especially males, in Britain, and each party strove to maximize advantage from this arrangement. British commercial, political, and "humanitarian" interests also hoped that by means of a "good Christian education," West African students, who might eventually become political rulers or leaders, would be influenced to govern according to "plans more or less similar to those inculcated in them in England" (Shylton 1977:53). Thus began attempts to develop a class of Africans who would be sympathetic to the interests of the British ruling class, attempts which were very much in evidence during the twentieth century.<sup>5</sup>

West African students from those areas that were ultimately to become the British colonies of Nigeria, the Gold Coast, Gambia, and Sierra Leone continued to come to Britain for schooling and higher education during the nineteenth century. Most, but not all, came from wealthy families and were often those who were destined to be influential future political leaders and thinkers.<sup>6</sup> One of the most prominent was the Sierra Leonean James Africanus Beale Horton, who graduated from Edinburgh University in 1859. The writings of Horton, together with those of Edward Blyden, did much to establish the notion of West African nationalism that was to become extremely influential among many West African intellectuals during the twentieth century (Langley 1973:37–38, 111).

African students were often as much educated by the prevailing social conditions they found in Britain as they were by the formal education they received. Racism and prejudice were constant reminders, if any were needed, that Africans, whatever their background, were often considered merely second-class citizens in Britain. Such problems were, of course, greatly exacerbated by the rise of imperialism and the partition and conquest of Africa at the close of the nineteenth century. It was these two problems in particular, colonial rule and racial discrimination in its many forms, that led Africans to form their own organizations and to combine with others in Britain to find ways to tackle common problems.

## Pan-Africanism and Ethiopianism

Many of the organizations formed in the early part of the twentieth century with an African membership were pan-African in character. During this period, some Africans did on occasion organize themselves separately to campaign over specific grievances.<sup>7</sup> Generally they allied themselves with all those of African descent who faced similar problems. One of the first modern political organizations was the African Association, formed in Lon-

don in 1897 by the Trinidadian Henry Sylvester Williams. It was formed “to facilitate friendly intercourse among Africans in general” and “to promote the interests of all subjects claiming African descent, wholly or in part.” The African Association, which included several prominent West African members, was responsible for convening the first pan-African conference held in London in 1900 (Fryer 1984:280).

Ethiopianism was another early form of pan-Africanism popular among both African and Caribbean students in Britain. There was an Ethiopian Association in Edinburgh in the early part of the century and an Ethiopian Progressive Association (EPA) was formed in Liverpool in 1904. The EPA, formed “to further the interest and raise the social status of the Ethiopian race at home and abroad,” seems to have been relatively short-lived, but it did attempt to contact both W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington in the U.S. It included professionals as well as students and at least one South African member as well as those from West Africa and the Caribbean.<sup>8</sup> The EPA clearly saw itself as part of a much wider pan-African world (Adi 1991:583 n.9).

Political writing by West Africans in the early part of the century also often concerned itself with aspects of Ethiopianism. In 1908, the young Nigerian student activist Bande Omoniyi wrote *A Defence of the Ethiopian Movement* in support of the struggles of Africans throughout the British empire and those in South Africa in particular. Omoniyi was as concerned with events in the colonial state of Nigeria as he was with pan-African issues. His untimely death at the age of twenty-eight occurred while participating in political activities in Brazil.<sup>9</sup> J. E. Casely Hayford, a student from the Gold Coast and a future leader of the National Congress of British West Africa, had his autobiographical novel *Ethiopia Unbound* published in 1911 (Jenkins 1985). The novel gives us some idea of the political concerns of West Africans in Britain at that time. In their activities and writing, West Africans in the early part of the century were most usually concerned with “matters of vital importance concerning Africa in particular and the Negro race in general.” They wished to raise the status of the African and Africa; to extol the glories of the African past; to combat the color bar and the virulent racism of the period; and to voice their protests about the imposition of colonial rule. Their stay in Britain often served to heighten their awareness of such political issues, often as a result of the racism they encountered, but also because they came into contact with a wider range of political ideas.<sup>10</sup> A vital part in forming their political consciousness was played by the emergent pan-African press in Britain and elsewhere as well as by the press in West Africa itself. Their sojourn abroad also provided the opportunity for joint protest action with other Africans and all those of African descent.<sup>11</sup>

Attempts to form distinct African student organizations were first made during the First World War. An African Students' Union was formed in 1916, and the same year a West African Christian Union was established in

London. Both were short-lived, and in the period following the war and throughout the early 1920s it was the pan-African oriented African Progress Union and subsequently the Union of Students of African Descent that were the most influential organizations in Britain, although their activities were mainly confined to London.<sup>12</sup>

Even before the First World War, the attempts by Africans and others of African descent to organize to combat the consequences of colonialism and racism had come to the attention of the British government and other interested parties. Pan-Africanism and anticolonialism, in whatever form, had to be combated. At the same time, measures to shield Africans from racism had to be taken if Britain's imperial interests were to be maintained. If the dignity of the "British race" was to be upheld, African men also had to be shielded from the supposedly subversive effects of contact with British women. From this time on, more concerted efforts were made by defenders of the empire to control and monitor the activities of African students (Adi 1998).

The politics of West Africans in Britain was therefore also shaped by their relationships with government and especially with the Colonial Office, the department responsible for overseeing colonial rule. Initiatives by the Colonial Office, and other defenders of the empire, designed to monitor the students' activities and closet them away from what were seen as "subversive" influences were in existence throughout the colonial period. One of the most interesting was the provision during the 1930s of a student hostel called Aggrey House that was partly financed by the Carnegie Foundation, owing to the impecunious state of the Colonial Office, which also tried to hide its own involvement in the scheme. When the aims of the Colonial Office were exposed by the students, who had already opened their own hostel, the whole affair turned into a cause célèbre. It served to radicalize the students, not least by encouraging them to seek the support of the very "subversive" elements so much feared by the Colonial Office. On other occasions the Colonial Office and the defenders of the empire were more successful in their attempts to influence the activities of African students through financial means. But they often had to do so by recognizing some of the political demands that were made on behalf of Africans both in Britain and in the colonies.<sup>13</sup>

## **West African Nationalism**

During the 1920s West African student activists began to consider forming their own separate organizations. This was partly as a consequence of a concern that the pan-African organizations did not fully represent their interests. At the same time West Africans in Britain were also responding to a growing political awareness in the West African colonies and the emergence of a peculiarly West African nationalism. It was these developments

in West Africa that had led to the formation of the National Congress of British West Africa (NCBWA) in Accra, in the Gold Coast, in 1920.<sup>14</sup>

It is perhaps something of a paradox, therefore, that the first African organization to emerge in these conditions was not a pan-West African one, but the Nigerian Progress Union (NPU). The NPU was cofounded in 1924 by a Nigerian law student, Ladipo Solanke, and a Jamaican, Amy Ashwood Garvey, the estranged wife of Marcus Garvey. The NPU reflected the concerns of the growing number of Nigerian students in Britain and was clearly influenced by the ideologies and politics of the emergent West African nationalist organizations such as the NCBWA. It marked a transition from the extensive pan-African concerns of the earlier organizations to the initially more limited and narrow focus of those such as the Gold Coast Students' Association and the West African Students' Union (WASU) that emerged during the 1920s.<sup>15</sup> The NPU also had pan-African aspirations, regularly contributed to the African American journal the *Spokesman*, and in 1925 published an "Open Letter to the Negroes of the World." For the NPU it was Nigeria that was at the center of the pan-African world. It was viewed as a country "full of immense possibilities" and "undeveloped sources of wealth" that might one day become a "mighty Negro empire or republic." Such thinking reflected the fact that during the colonial period, Africans from the continent were also trying to reclaim their homeland, not just from themselves but for all those throughout the diaspora.<sup>16</sup>

The founding of WASU in 1925 was directly influenced by the visit to Britain of one of the leading members of the NCBWA, who urged the students to forge a West African unity that would mirror that established by the NCBWA in West Africa.<sup>17</sup> The WASU aimed "to afford opportunity exclusively to West African Students...to discuss matters affecting West Africa educationally, commercially, economically and politically, and to cooperate with the NCBWA."<sup>18</sup> During the next thirty years, although other West African organizations were formed, the WASU would become the main African organization in Britain, a training ground for future political leaders and an important anticolonial force in its own right. It did not completely move away from a pan-African orientation, but in its early years was ideologically attached to the notion of West African nationalism and the aspiration for a West African nation (Olusanya 1982:19).

The idea of a West African nation did not suddenly emerge in the 1920s. Horton and Blyden had both attempted to develop this concept, which reflected the strivings of the emergent West African bourgeoisie to develop their own polity. Colonial rule itself and the beginnings of anti-colonial agitation had also in some ways fostered the idea of a united West Africa. This had been further developed by the addition of various elements of cultural nationalism, which initially was the main ideological response of the West African merchants and professionals to the onset of colonial rule. The students saw themselves as the vanguard needed to form a West African nation, and their activities "as helping to create a healthy

national sentiment throughout West Africa.” However, they also saw West African unity as important for the whole continent, as the basis of pan-African unity. As WASU’s president explained: “You cannot make a nation of Africa, but by securing unity in West Africa, and by securing rights in the western portion, you thereby raise the general standard of African welfare and lay down an ideal of life which the African in the east and south will strive to realise. If Africans are to survive, West Africa must become a nation, it must unite under the sentiment of national progress.”<sup>19</sup>

The quest for a West African “nation” was the main subject of two important publications by West Africans during this period, Solanke’s *United West Africa at the Bar of the Family of Nations* (1927) and J. W. de Graft Johnson’s *Towards Nationhood in West Africa* (1928). Both writers presented a spirited defense of Africa’s past but also looked toward the future “of a free Africa . . . stepping into her rightful place as a unit in the powerful army of the human family” (de Graft Johnson 1971:vi).

During the 1930s, the WASU established its own branches throughout the four British colonies in West Africa. These subsequently formed the nucleus of the influential anticolonial “youth movements” in both Nigeria and the Gold Coast. In some ways, West African politics in Britain was a major influence on anticolonial politics in West Africa. In addition, the WASU acted as a lobbying organization for a variety of West African political and economic interests and bombarded the British government with its own demands for colonial reform.<sup>20</sup>

During the late 1920s and 1930s, African students became increasingly aware of the plight of other African residents in Britain. Significant numbers of African workers, mainly seamen, resided in London, in the major port cities such as Liverpool and Cardiff, and elsewhere throughout Britain. Through such organizations as the Negro Welfare Association (NWA) and the League of Coloured Peoples, African students became more closely linked to the concerns and struggles of African workers and their children and joined with others in the diaspora to confront the common problems of racism and the color bar. One of the responses of the African students to the color bar was to establish their own hostel in London. Known as Africa House, this became a meeting place, restaurant, and center of anticolonial activity for all those concerned with African and its future. It was one of the first African centers to be established in Britain and for WASU was of major significance. As one member explained: “It is not enough for us to fight in the colonies for freedom. It is of the utmost importance that in the heart of the empire we own and man a Hostel which will fight for our cause on the spot and give the lie to traducers of the race whenever they say that we have no capacity to manage our own affairs.”<sup>21</sup> Africa House was seen as a symbol of African achievement but also as “a symbol of West African Nationalism . . . , a miniature West African Federal State under the management of a miniature West African Federal authority know as WASU” (Adi 1998:63).

In the course of such activity the WASU, which soon included nonstudent members, became very much more than a students' union.<sup>22</sup> It became influenced by the range of political philosophies that existed in Britain and throughout the diaspora. In the late 1920s it became temporarily connected with Marcus Garvey and some of the tenets of Garveyism. Then during the 1930s many students came under the influence of a radical and Marxist influenced pan-Africanism, particularly as a result of the activities of the Trinidadian former Communist George Padmore, the Sierra Leonean activist Isaac Wallace Johnson, and organizations such as the International African Service Bureau. Other organizations such as the Communist-led NWA, an affiliate of the League Against Imperialism, were also influential. Communism gradually became an increasingly influential ideology among African students and some African workers in Britain, partly as result of the pan-Africanist approach of the Profintern's International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers and its publication, *Negro Worker*. In the late 1930s Desmond Buckle, a former medical student and a leading member of the Gold Coast Students' Association, became the British Communist Party's first African member. By the 1950s the British Communist Party created a special West African branch in London to accommodate the growing number of African supporters (Adi 1995)

Although wider pan-African concerns were a constant influence on the political ideologies, activities, and consciousness of West Africans in Britain, West African interests were for the majority nearly always paramount. West African nationalism continued to pervade the thinking of the members of WASU and other West African organizations even during the 1950s, when the process of decolonization in individual colonies sometimes made it difficult to maintain such an orientation. During the 1930s however, it was anticolonial politics in the individual colonies that gradually assumed greater importance, particularly as a consequence of the emergence of the various youth movements. In Britain, differences of interest and orientation regularly surfaced between those from the Gold Coast and Nigeria in particular, and were not entirely overcome until the late 1930s (Adi 1998: 65,73–74).

### **Nationalism and Pan-Africanism**

In the late 1930s and during the Second World War, international events such as the Italian invasion of Ethiopia created the basis for greater pan-African unity. At the same time there was a growing expectation that after the war major political changes would be made in Britain's colonies.<sup>23</sup> There was a strong West African involvement in such pan-African initiatives as the London conference on "African Peoples, Democracy and World Peace" in 1939, the founding of the Pan-African Federation in 1944, and the preparations for the Manchester Pan-African Congress in 1945. Clear-

ly there was a growing concern among African organizations in Britain to formulate policies for the postwar world that would place Africa and the diaspora at the center of international affairs.<sup>24</sup>

Paradoxically however, it was during the post-1945 period that the notion of West African nationalism again assumed some prominence due to the activities of the West African National Secretariat (WANS). The founding of the WANS in 1945, following the historic Manchester Pan-African Congress, demonstrates the complexities and contradictions inherent in the political consciousness of Africans in Britain. The congress itself grew out of the particularities of the Marxist influenced pan-Africanism that had developed during the 1930s and highlighted the political militancy and optimism of Africans and their organizations in Britain. West Africans were prominent throughout the proceedings, and Kwame Nkrumah and Wallace Johnson both played a leading organizational role. However, as soon as the congress had concluded, Nkrumah, Johnson, and others formed the WANS. This relatively short-lived organization continued the tradition of some of its predecessors. It aimed to work both among organizations within West Africa, "with a view to realising a West African Front for a United West African National Independence," and "amongst the peoples and working class in particular in the imperialist countries," to educate them about West Africa's problems.<sup>25</sup>

The aims of the WANS make it clear that it saw itself very much in the vanguard of the struggle for "absolute independence for all West Africa," but also in the struggle to unite West Africa as "one country." At a time when proletarian internationalism and pan-Africanism, on the one hand, and narrow political and ethnic nationalism, on the other, seemed to be becoming more prevalent among West Africans, it may appear strange that the notion of West Africa as one country would again become popular.<sup>26</sup> However, what was new and dynamic about the WANS's conception was that West African nationhood was seen in terms of a West African "Soviet Union" which would stretch as far as Kenya and the Sudan in the East and include not only British colonies but French and Belgian as well. Thus one of the most significant features of the WANS's West African nationalism was its socialist character, no doubt influenced by the links that Nkrumah and many other West Africans had established with the communist movement in Britain.<sup>27</sup> The WANS believed in a united West Africa "irrespective of artificial territorial divisions," but never divorced itself from Africans from other parts of the continent or the diaspora. It saw West African unity and independence as the basis for the wider unity and independence of the entire African continent (Langley 1973:364).<sup>28</sup>

This article cannot present a full picture of the concerns of West Africans and their organizations, nor their changing political objectives and affiliations. What it has tried to do is to emphasize the importance of West African concerns in relation to pan-African or diasporic ones. Of course, there were occasions when West Africans emphasized their colonial

status and identity and joined not only with those from Africa and the Caribbean, but also with individuals from India, Burma, and other parts of Asia, as occurred at the two Subject Peoples' Conferences in London in 1945.<sup>29</sup> Africans in Britain also played an important role in international organizations such as the International Union of Students and World Federation of Democratic Youth. They also contributed to political life in Britain as well as being influenced by it. In this regard, WASU even had its own parliamentary committee with a membership of Labour Party MPs. Many other Africans joined the major and some minor political organizations, including the Communist Party. But throughout all this activity, dominated as it was by the overriding need to combat racism and end colonial rule, West Africans never lost sight of the need to advance their own particular regional interests. Although they were often influenced by and contributed to the wider diasporic political identity and aims of pan-Africanism, West African nationalism provided a distinctive philosophy and orientation even for their pan-African activities. Indeed, they saw the future of Africa and the diaspora as being determined by political and other advances in West Africa.

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## Notes

1. For a general history of Africans in Britain, see Killingray (1994) and Fryer (1984)
2. The terms "Afro-Briton" and "Afro-British" seem to have become popular among those who write about the African personalities in Britain in the eighteenth century. See for example Edwards (1994) and Carretta (1999). Interestingly, Cugoano refers to himself as both a "native of Africa" and a "native of the Gold Coast"; Equiano styles himself "the African." Both Equiano and Cugoano clearly describe their original national identities.
3. For more information on West Africans and the British Communist Party, see Adi (1995:176–95).
4. "Sons of Africa" was the name by which Equiano, Cugoano, and other African abolitionists collectively referred to themselves.
5. The vast majority of sub-Saharan African students in Britain were from West Africa. As late as 1945 there were only sixty-five students from East Africa in Britain and nearly a thousand from West Africa.
6. For further information about West African students in Britain see Olusanya (1982); Carey (1956); Political and Economic Planning (1955); Animashawun (1963); Garigue (1953); Esedebe (1978, 1982); Rich (1987); Langley (1973); UNESCO (1994); and Jenkins (1985).
7. In 1902, for example, concerted action by West African medical students at Edinburgh University persuaded the dean of the faculty of medicine to write

to the Colonial Office about the openly discriminatory policies of the West African Medical Service, which barred from appointment those of “non-European parentage.” See Adi (1994:108).

8. The thirteen founding members of the EPA included those from South and West Africa and from the Caribbean. Of the five officers, two were from Jamaica, I. A. Johnson was from Sierra Leone, and Kwesi Ewusi from the Gold Coast.
9. Adi (1991:604). It seems that Omoniyi’s early death “from the effects of acute beri-beri” may have been hastened by two short spells in Brazilian prisons.
10. To give just one example of this racism, in 1914 London University’s Graduates’ Club announced that it would operate a color bar and that as a consequence Africans would be ineligible for membership.
11. For some information on the early pan-African press in Britain, see Duffield (1992:124–50).
12. The African Progress Union, formed in 1918, described itself as “an association of Africans from various parts of Africa, the West Indies, British Guiana, Honduras and America representing advanced African ideas in liberal education.” The Union of Students of African Descent grew out of the activities of the West African and West Indian Christian Union. It became particularly popular among West African students following the election of a president from the Gold Coast in 1923.
13. See “The Truth About Aggrey House: An Exposure of the Government Plan for the Control of African Students in Great Britain” in Adi (1998:193–97).
14. On the NCBWA, see Langley (1973:107–95).
15. For further information on the NPU, see Adi (1998:27–32). The Gold Coast Students’ Association was formed in the mid-1920s “to promote and protect the Social, Educational and Political interests” of the Gold Coast and to “encourage common understanding, co-operation and unity among the Gold Coast students in Europe.”
16. The “Open Letter” is reproduced in Adi (1998:189–93).
17. The leading member of the NCBWA was the Sierra Leonean politician Dr. Herbert Bankole Bright.
18. One of the criticisms of the founders of WASU was that they were “segregationists” who put West African unity before pan-African unity, but interestingly the aims of the organization made no specific mention of West Africa and only refers to Africa and “persons of African descent” in general.
19. *West Africa*, September 27, 1926, 49. The geographical boundaries of such a West African “nation” were rarely referred to. Nationalism was, above all else, a political or a cultural-political task centered on the British colonies in West Africa. Led by the NCBWA and its supporters such as the WASU, the nationalists’ aim was to achieve the progress of West Africa and its peoples initially within, but ultimately outside, the confines of the British empire.
20. For some details of WASU’s activities in West Africa, see Olusanya (1982: 98–104). On WASU as an anticolonial pressure group, see Adi (1998:96–101). The WASU carried out a wide range of anticolonial activities. It sent letters and resolutions to the British press and government and held public meetings demanding reforms in the colonies. It established its own parliamentary committee of sympathetic politicians to raise questions and speak in debates in the House of Commons. It also provided leading members for many of the anti-

colonial organizations in Britain's West African colonies. From 1929 to 1932 WASU's secretary-general toured West Africa and held a series of public meetings, which among other things led to the creation of more than twenty WASU branches in the Gold Coast, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone. It was these branches that helped to create the conditions for the emergence of the future nationalist organizations in West Africa, especially the Gold Coast Youth Conference and Nigerian Youth Movement.

21. *Wasu* 4, no. 3 (Sept. 1935): 35.
22. It is impossible to mention all the West African organizations in Britain. Many were founded after 1945, including the Egbe Omo Oduduwa, Nigeria Union, Gold Coast Union, and West African Women's Association. The members of other West African organizations were often also members of WASU.
23. It was during the war years that WASU called for "self-government" for the West African colonies in spite of opposition from other West African organizations in Britain and in Africa.
24. WASU did not join the Pan-African Federation (PAF), which was founded on the initiative of the International African Service Bureau and described itself as "a Pan-African united front movement." The PAF united twelve other organizations including representatives of the West African Youth League and the Gold Coast-based Friends of African Freedom Society. On the Manchester Pan-African Congress, see Adi and Sherwood (1995).
25. Adi (1998:129). For further information on the WANS see also Sherwood (1996:125-59) and Langley (1973:357-69). The other aims of the WANS included: "to foster the spirit of unity and solidarity among the West African territories" and "to work for unity and harmony among all West Africans who stand against imperialism."
26. After 1945 many separate organizations reflecting differing West African political identities emerged, especially Nigerian. These included the Ibo Union and the Yoruba organization Egbe Omo Oduduwa.
27. "West African Soviet Union" was the title of the 1946 publication by Bankole Awooner-Renner, one of the leading members of the WANS. The Colonial Office in particular lamented what it called "the addiction of so many young West African intelligentsia to form communist associations in the U.K." See Adi (1995).
28. One significant aspect of the WANS's policy was its eagerness to unite with those Africans from French colonies. Representatives of the WANS traveled to Paris to hold meetings with African organizations and African members of the French National Assembly. Similar links were established between WASU and organizations such as the Federation d'Etudiants l'Afrique Noire en France and Rassemblement Democratique Africain.
29. Two Subject Peoples' Congresses were held in 1945 organized by WASU, the PAF, the Federation of Indian Associations in Britain, the Ceylon Students' Association, and the Burma Association. The congresses declared that for the people of the colonies, Allied military victory could have no real meaning "if it does not lead to their own liberation from the tentacles of imperialism."