


RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Tensions on the Railway: West Indians, Colonial Hierarchies, and the Language of Racial Unity in West Africa

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## Abstract

Beginning in 1900, colonial railway departments in Sierra Leone, the Gold Coast, and Nigeria began turning to the Caribbean for skilled labor instead of hiring African workers. When West Indian railway workers began to arrive in West Africa, Africans were indignant, and they voiced their objections in newspapers. West Indians sometimes responded to these grievances with calls for racial unity, yet their appeals were inflected with colonial hierarchies. Such exchanges were centered on railway jobs, but they were also embedded in larger discussions about empire, race, and the legacies of the transatlantic slave trade. I argue that these exchanges reveal the significance of colonial hierarchies and diasporic tensions in the intellectual history of pan-Africanism in early twentieth-century West Africa. The article draws on newspapers and archival research from West Africa, the Caribbean, and the UK.

**Keywords:** West Africa; Ghana; Nigeria; Sierra Leone; African Diaspora; race; West Indians; Pan-Africanism; colonial intermediaries

‘I regret to say’, wrote Frederic Cardew, the governor of Sierra Leone, ‘that drivers and platelayers cannot for many years be expected to be recruited from the Sierra Leoneans and other natives of this Colony’.<sup>1</sup> It was May 1900, and the burgeoning railway departments of British West Africa faced a dilemma. Skilled labor was essential for laying track, repairing engines, and driving locomotives, but colonial officials believed that training Africans to perform these tasks would take too much time.<sup>2</sup> According to Cardew, bringing in more railway workers from Britain was not a viable option either — they were ‘most expensive’ because of their frequent illnesses and high salaries. Cardew’s proposed solution was to turn to the Caribbean, where there were already established railway networks.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>National Archives of the United Kingdom, London (NAUK), CO/267/453, Cardew to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 23 May 1900.

<sup>2</sup>For example, Cardew’s successor, Charles King-Harman, wrote that ‘a native would require from 10 to 15 years training before he could be trusted with an engine’. NAUK, CO 267/459, King-Harman to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 9 Oct. 1901.

<sup>3</sup>The British began building railways in Jamaica and British Guiana in the 1840s to support plantation owners. In Trinidad and Barbados, the British established rail networks in the 1880s. West Indians also worked on railways in Panama and Costa Rica. There is no general history of railways in the Caribbean, but for analysis of this topic, see V. Bulmer-Thomas, *The Economic History of the Caribbean Since the Napoleonic Wars* (Cambridge, 2012), 133–45; V. M. Satchell and C. Simpson, ‘The rise and fall of railways in Jamaica, 1845–1975’, *The Journal of Transport History*, 24:1 (2003), 1–21; and L. Putnam, *The Company They Kept: Migrants and the Politics of Gender in Caribbean Costa Rica, 1870–1960* (Chapel Hill, 2002).

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Fifteen years later, more than 120 West Indians were working on the railways of Sierra Leone, the Gold Coast, and Nigeria.<sup>4</sup> Their presence in West Africa, however, produced significant tensions. African workers were indignant about being passed over for these positions. As one letter writer in Sekondi declared in July 1907, using the pseudonym 'Railway': 'We hope the Government will put a stop to this wholesale importation of West Indians to this Colony, as Asia is for the Asiatics so is Africa for Africans'.<sup>5</sup>

The arrival of West Indian railway workers in West Africa was part of a longer history of 'return' migration from the Caribbean. In the late eighteenth century, for example, the British deported maroons from Jamaica to Sierra Leone via Nova Scotia.<sup>6</sup> A few decades later, in the 1830s, the colonial government in Sierra Leone began hiring West Indians to work as civil servants, mostly from Trinidad and Jamaica.<sup>7</sup> West Indians also came as soldiers with the West India Regiments, fighting in colonial wars in Sierra Leone, the Gold Coast, Nigeria, and elsewhere.<sup>8</sup> Others came to West Africa seeking refuge from the constraints of life in the postemancipation Caribbean, and still others came to West Africa as missionaries.<sup>9</sup> While each migration stream had its own distinct characteristics, they were all linked, to varying degrees, with colonial hierarchies and a narrative of redemption: Africa was a 'backwards' continent and Africans were in need of 'civilizing'.<sup>10</sup> The railway workers who came to West Africa in the early twentieth century embraced elements of this redemption narrative as well. Raised in colonial societies in the Caribbean and educated in colonial schools, they thought of themselves as British and tended to look down on Africans with a sense of paternalistic kinship. What is unique about this group, however, is that their arrival coincided with the expansion of colonial power and a resulting

<sup>4</sup>NAUK, CO 741/1, 'List of appointments, increments, reductions, and leave'. Colonial officials in other parts of the British Empire relied on similar labor migration schemes to build railways. Between 1895 and 1908, for example, 40,000 Indians came to East Africa to work on the Uganda Railway. On these migrations, see S. Aiyar, *Indians in Kenya: The Politics of Diaspora* (Cambridge, MA: 2015); T. R. Metcalf, *Imperial Connections: India in the Indian Ocean Arena, 1860-1920* (Berkeley, 2007); and R. G. Gregory, *Quest for Equality: Asian Politics in East Africa, 1900-1967* (New Delhi, 1993). A small number of Indian railway workers also came to northern Nigeria, though in 1909, one official described this initiative as 'an expensive failure'. NAUK, CO 96/488, 'Natives of India for West African Railways'. See also National Archives of Nigeria, Ibadan (NAI), N 1250/1919, 'Recruiting of East and West Indians for Nigerian Railway'.

<sup>5</sup>Letter to the editor from 'Railway', *The Gold Coast Leader*, 27 July 1907, 4.

<sup>6</sup>R. Chopra, *Almost Home: Maroons between Slavery and Freedom in Jamaica, Nova Scotia, and Sierra Leone* (New Haven, 2018); K. Bilby, *True-Born Maroons* (Gainesville, 2005); M. C. Campbell, *Back to Africa: George Ross and the Maroons, from Nova Scotia to Sierra Leone* (Trenton, NJ, 1993).

<sup>7</sup>N. Blyden, *West Indians in West Africa, 1808-1880: The African Diaspora in Reverse* (Rochester, 2000); A. Nicol, 'West Indians in West Africa', *Sierra Leone Studies*, 13 (1960): 14-23.

<sup>8</sup>B. Dyde, *The Empty Sleeve: The Story of the West India Regiments of the British Army* (St. John's, Antigua, 1997). For a first-hand account of the West India regiments, see Major A. B. Ellis, *The History of the First West India Regiment* (London, 1885).

<sup>9</sup>C. A. Banton, *More Auspicious Shores: Barbadian Migration to Liberia, Blackness, and the Making of an African Republic* (Cambridge, 2019); W. E. Wariboko, *Ruined by 'Race': Afro-Caribbean Missionaries and the Evangelization of Southern Nigeria, 1895-1925* (Trenton, NJ, 2007). In addition to scholarship on the Caribbean, there is also a growing literature on African diaspora 'returnees' from North and South America. See, for example, N. Blyden, *African Americans and Africa: A New History* (New Haven, 2019); L. Lindsay, *Atlantic Bonds: A Nineteenth-Century Odyssey from America to Africa* (Chapel Hill, 2017); A. Byrd, *Captives and Voyagers Black Migrants across the Eighteenth-Century British Atlantic World* (Baton Rouge, 2008); J. T. Campbell, *Middle Passages: African American Journeys to Africa, 1787-2005* (New York, 2007); K. Gaines, *American Africans in Ghana: Black Expatriates in the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel Hill, 2006); and J. L. Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion: Tradition, Transnationalism, and Matriarchy in the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé* (Princeton, 2005).

<sup>10</sup>There was also overlap between these streams. For example, John Bryan Small of Barbados travelled to the Gold Coast with the West India Regiment in the 1860s and then returned in the 1890s as a missionary with the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. On Small, see S. E. Greene, *West African Narratives of Slavery: Texts from Late Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Ghana* (Bloomington, IN, 2011), 194-5; and W. L. Yates, 'The history of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church in West Africa, Liberia, Gold Coast (Ghana) and Nigeria, 1900-1939' (unpublished PhD thesis, Hartford Seminary Foundation, 1967), 95-113.

period of transition among the Western-educated elites in the old coastal towns of British West Africa.<sup>11</sup>

For much of the nineteenth century, intellectuals in Sierra Leone, the Gold Coast, and Nigeria had embraced the ideals of the ‘civilizing’ mission and had encouraged the spread of Christianity and Western institutions. Some had also embraced the notion of providential design — the idea that God had preordained the transatlantic slave trade so that enslaved Africans and their descendants could learn under a ‘superior’ race and then return to the continent, bringing ‘civilization’.<sup>12</sup> Edward W. Blyden, who followed this path from the Caribbean to West Africa, was a major proponent of providential design.<sup>13</sup> The rise of a ‘new imperialism’ in the late nineteenth century, however, accompanied by more rigid lines of racial thinking, sharply curtailed political and economic opportunities for Africans. In response, intellectuals such as Joseph Casely Hayford, Kobina Sekyi, and Mojola Agbebi promoted new forms of cultural nationalism based around ‘African’ identity and racial unity.<sup>14</sup> These figures helped to establish ‘Native’ churches, created new political organizations and newspapers, and some also jettisoned their Christian names and Western clothing. They still called for the uplift of Africa, but now turned away from Europe as a source of redemption, centering their political aims instead on African-based initiatives. And, while some continued to view West Indians and African Americans as a ‘vanguard’ of progress, most were adamant that Africans should lead such initiatives.<sup>15</sup> Blyden himself questioned his earlier thinking and asserted that Africa’s ‘regeneration’ should align with African institutions and come under African leadership.<sup>16</sup> In this context, tensions between Africans and West Indians over railway jobs became embedded within larger discussions about empire, race, and the legacies of the transatlantic slave trade. Moreover, as Railway’s letter to *The Gold Coast Leader* indicates, these tensions spilled over into the flourishing newspaper cultures of West Africa.

<sup>11</sup>This article is focused on railway workers, but West Indians took on many other roles in the British colonial governments of early twentieth-century West Africa, including customs agents, agriculture instructors, prison guards, teachers, postal workers, and sanitary inspectors. French colonial governments in West and Central Africa followed a similar pattern of recruitment. On Caribbean administrators in Africa, see P. Janzen, ‘Atlantic intermediaries: empire and Black internationalism between the Caribbean and Africa, 1880–1940’ (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Wisconsin–Madison, 2018); V. Hélénon, *French Caribbeans in Africa: Diasporic Connections and Colonial Administration, 1880–1939* (New York, 2011); and C. E. Ray, *Crossing the Color Line: Race, Sex, and the Contested Politics of Colonialism in Ghana* (Athens, OH, 2015), especially ch. 2.

<sup>12</sup>This thinking also drove emigration initiatives such as the American Colonization Society and took hold in the African Methodist Episcopal Church. On these initiatives, see L. Sanneh, *Abolitionists Abroad: American Blacks and the Making of Modern West Africa* (Cambridge, MA, 1999); and C. A. Clegg, *The Price of Liberty: African Americans and the Making of Liberia* (Chapel Hill, 2004). On providential design more generally, see R. T. Vinson, *The Americans are Coming!: Dreams of African American Liberation in Segregationist South Africa* (Athens, OH, 2012); J. Sidbury, *Becoming African in America: Race and Nation in the Early Black Atlantic* (Oxford, 2007); and St. Clair Drake, *The Redemption of Africa and Black Religion* (Chicago, 1970).

<sup>13</sup>In an 1862 speech, for example, Blyden declared: ‘We call it, then, a Providential interposition, that while the owners of the soil have been abroad, passing through the fearful ordeal of a most grinding oppression, the land, through entirely unprotected, has lain uninvaded. We regard it as a providential call to Africans every where to “go up and possess the land”’. Blyden, ‘The call of Providence to descendants of Africa in America’, in H. R. Lynch (ed.), *Black Spokesman: Selected Published Writings of Edward Wilmot Blyden* (London, 1971), 27.

<sup>14</sup>For analysis of this period of transition among the ‘intelligentsia’ of West Africa, see P. S. Zachernuk, *Colonial Subjects: An African Intelligentsia and Atlantic Ideas* (Charlottesville, 2000); P. O. Esedebe, *Pan-Africanism: The Idea and Movement, 1776–1991* (Washington, D.C., 1994); and J. A. Langley, *Pan-Africanism and Nationalism in West Africa, 1900–1945: A Study in Ideology and Social Classes* (Oxford, 1973).

<sup>15</sup>Y. Gershoni, *Africans on African-Americans: The Creation and Uses of an African-American Myth* (New York, 1997), especially ch. 3.

<sup>16</sup>On Blyden’s ‘transformations’ and his philosophy of the ‘African Personality’, see H. N. K. Odamtten, *Edward W. Blyden’s Intellectual Transformations: Afropublicanism, Pan-Africanism, Islam, and the Indigenous West African Church* (East Lansing, 2019).

In the last decade or so, there has been a surge of research on print culture in colonial Africa.<sup>17</sup> This scholarship has emphasized newspapers as sites of creativity and invention, power and violence, translation and circulation. Newspapers in colonial Africa were also often nodes in larger networks, linking intellectuals and activists from across the continent and around the world. Building on this impressive scholarship, this article considers how Africans and West Indians used newspapers to debate the ‘importation of West Indians’ to British colonies in West Africa. Following Stephanie Newell, I treat these texts not as ‘mirrors’ of the authors alone, but rather as ‘rhetorical positions mediated by local ideologies, beliefs, and power structures’.<sup>18</sup>

Central to the newspaper debates about West Indian railway workers were ideas about colonial hierarchies and the language of racial unity. Most West Indian railway workers, even as they encountered racism at the hands of Europeans, continued to see themselves as civilizers, as ideal models for Africans to learn from. Africans, meanwhile, asserted that they were more than capable of skilled labor — they simply needed more access to education and training. Some Africans also inverted West Indian claims of superiority and, drawing on the surrounding discussions, suggested that it was West Indians who needed to learn from Africans. Such exchanges emerged from specific colonial contexts in West Africa, but they also moved beyond ‘local ideologies’ and ‘power structures’. I argue that these exchanges reveal the profound impacts of colonial hierarchies and diasporic tensions on expressions of pan-Africanism in early twentieth-century West Africa. The article begins with an overview of the motivations behind recruiting West Indian railway workers, continues with a discussion of the intellectual climate in early twentieth-century West Africa, and then closes with the story of a controversy that unfolded in Nigeria between February and March 1915.

## Recruitment

When Frederic Cardew suggested hiring West Indian railway workers in May 1900, it was not the first time he had turned to the Caribbean. In 1894, the Anglican Bishop of Sierra Leone, Ernest Ingham, had proposed a trip to the Caribbean to recruit West Indian missionaries. The trip was guided by Ingham’s belief in the ‘providential design’ of the transatlantic slave trade, and Cardew had strongly supported Ingham’s proposal.<sup>19</sup> In fact, Cardew’s endorsement of the trip reveals his thinking about relationships between West Indians and Africans:

I believe the repatriation of West Indian Africans in the Protectorate even in the small numbers which may be expected under the Bishop’s scheme will have a beneficial and civilizing effect on the aboriginal natives and that better results may be expected from their efforts than from those of a like number of Sierra Leone natives, the mass of whom it appears to me, if I may judge from the tone of the public press, have not that sympathy for their fellows in the interior which is required for civilizing as well as christianizing work.<sup>20</sup>

Six years later, in 1900, Cardew directed this same thinking towards the railways of Sierra Leone. In his mind, it was not only that West Indians were more experienced than African workers, less likely

<sup>17</sup>See, for example, D. R. Peterson, E. Hunter, and S. Newell (eds.), *African Print Cultures: Newspapers and their Publics in the Twentieth Century* (Ann Arbor, 2016); S. Newell, *The Power to Name: A History of Anonymity in Colonial West Africa* (Athens, OH, 2013); and J. Glassman, *War of Words, War of Stones: Racial Thought and Violence in Colonial Zanzibar* (Bloomington, IN, 2011).

<sup>18</sup>Newell, *The Power to Name*, 7.

<sup>19</sup>Upon his return to Sierra Leone in 1895, Ingham declared: ‘We may read a very clear Providence also in the manner in which, after generations of bondage in the West Indies, these Africans are now in a position of comfort, knowledge, and independence that, but for this bondage, never could have been theirs’. ‘Bishop Ingham’s mission to the West Indies’, *The Lagos Weekly Record*, 2 Nov. 1895, 4–5. It is also noteworthy that Ingham was born in Bermuda to a white, aristocratic family.

<sup>20</sup>NAUK, CO 267/413, Cardew to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 7 Dec. 1894.

to fall ill than Europeans, and could be paid lower salaries than Europeans.<sup>21</sup> Cardew also believed that this scheme was part of God's plan to 'redeem' Africa. Such thinking resonated in West Indian society. Those who left to work in West Africa typically had some education and sought to express a middle-class, British identity, which included adopting colonial, paternalistic attitudes towards Africans, even as many were also attracted by the idea of Africa as a diasporic homeland. There were also economic motivations for leaving West Indian colonies. Emancipation had done little to change social and economic barriers, and white elites imposed harsh labor laws to ensure the continued stratification of British colonies in the Caribbean.<sup>22</sup> In light of these circumstances, West Indian workers relied increasingly on migration around and away from the Caribbean to find work.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, Cardew's plan made little headway. His repeated requests, alongside the appeals of Francis Waller, the general manager of the Sierra Leone railway, were not enough to convince the colonial governments in the Caribbean to release workers. The demand for skilled labor was high there as well. Eventually, in October 1902, British Guiana sent two engine drivers to Sierra Leone, Reginald Best and Joseph Daly.<sup>24</sup> Four months later, another engine driver came from British Guiana, Simon Gill, along with John Hercules of Trinidad.<sup>25</sup>

News of these arrivals soon travelled to the Gold Coast, where the governor, Matthew Nathan, began enquiring himself about West Indian railway workers. Like Cardew, Nathan pointed out that this would 'undoubtedly tend to economy, less sickness, and greater continuity of service'.<sup>26</sup> Several years later, the general manager of the Gold Coast railway, W. E. Smith, added that hiring West Indians would allow the colonial government to 'make far better and quicker headway with the native employees'.<sup>27</sup> In Smith's mind, as with Cardew and Ingham, West Indians were uniquely qualified to teach African workers. They had just enough familiarity with European technology and institutions, and just enough familiarity with 'native' thinking. Yet the initiative still failed to gather momentum, leading one exasperated colonial official in London to comment: 'This question has been raised again and again'.<sup>28</sup> Five West Indian railway workers did end up coming to the Gold Coast in 1908 but one of these returned to the Caribbean almost immediately due to health issues, highlighting the falsity of the claim that West Indians were better suited to the climate of West

<sup>21</sup>For British officials, one of the main motivations for hiring West Indian workers was their belief that West Indians would be more resistant than Europeans to illnesses in West Africa. In a 1912 Colonial Office file, for example, one official declared: 'There is no reason to suppose that a negro from the West Indies will not enjoy the same health in West Africa as a native of the Coast, so far as records go'. NAUK, CO 96/521, note in file on West Indian railway staff in the Gold Coast, 23 Sep. 1912.

<sup>22</sup>F. W. Knight, *The Caribbean: The Genesis of a Fragmented Nationalism* (3rd edn, Oxford, 2012); T. C. Holt, *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor, and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832-1938* (Baltimore, 1992).

<sup>23</sup>On Caribbean labor migrations during this period, see, for example, J. Flores-Villalobos, *The Silver Women: How Black Women's Labor Made the Panama Canal* (Philadelphia, 2023); J. L. Giovannetti-Torres, *Black British Migrants in Cuba: Race, Labor, and Empire in the Twentieth-Century Caribbean, 1898-1948* (Cambridge, 2018); and Putnam, *The Company They Kept*. Like those who migrated around the Caribbean, many of the West Indians who worked in West Africa sent remittances back to their families.

<sup>24</sup>Both Best and Daly signed five-year agreements at £120 p.a., significantly lower than the £220 and £250 paid to European engine drivers. Upon completion of this five-year term, they had six months of leave and could apply for re-engagement if their service was satisfactory. NAUK, CO 272/80, Sierra Leone Blue Book 1903; NAUK, CO 267/499, Colonial Secretary of Sierra Leone to Crown Agents, 15 Nov. 1907; NAUK, CO 267/616/5, R. R. Best retirement file.

<sup>25</sup>NAUK, CO 272/80, Sierra Leone Blue Book 1903; NAUK, CO 295/490, Hercules pension file, 13 Feb. 1914.

<sup>26</sup>NAUK, CO 96/409, Governor of the Gold Coast to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 26 Aug. 1903. Alfred Lyttleton, Secretary of State for the Colonies, also kept Nathan informed about the arrivals of West Indian railway workers in Sierra Leone: 'It has occurred to me that you may be unaware that West Indian drivers have now been tried for some time on the Sierra Leone Railway, and that you may wish to make enquiry as to the success of the experiment'. Public Records and Archives Administration Department, Accra (PRAAD), ADM 1/1/153, Lyttleton to Nathan, 16 Nov. 1903.

<sup>27</sup>NAUK, CO 96/455, W. E. Smith to the Gold Coast Colonial Secretary, 21 Jan. 1907.

<sup>28</sup>NAUK, CO 96/455, Colonial Office notes on correspondence regarding West Indian employees in the Gold Coast Railway staff, 6 Feb. 1907.

Africa than Europeans.<sup>29</sup> That same year, about 50 ex-soldiers from a disbanded West India Regiment in Sierra Leone began working on the Nigerian railway. None had any railway experience, however, and the majority soon returned to the Caribbean.<sup>30</sup> According to one official in Lagos, these ex-soldiers were not 'of particular ability'.<sup>31</sup> Thus, in the first decade of the twentieth century, the West Indian presence on the railways of West Africa remained minimal.

The railways continued to expand, however, and by 1912, the need for skilled labor was increasingly important. Francis Waller, now the deputy general manager of the Nigerian Railway, bemoaned the 'shortness of native skilled labour' in his annual report and complained that 'only a small proportion trained in the workshops show any signs of becoming skilled artisans'.<sup>32</sup> Waller asserted that the only way to keep the railway network running at a reasonable cost was to recruit 200 workers from the Caribbean.<sup>33</sup> Herbert Morcom, general manager of the Sierra Leone Railway — and one-time assistant traffic manager of the Trinidad Railway — echoed Waller's sentiments in 1913: 'We continue to be very short of native skilled labour ... I am proposing, with a view of getting over the difficulty, the employment on agreement of West Indian mechanics commencing next year'.<sup>34</sup> Waller made new enquiries with the colonial governments in the Caribbean, but still, by the end of 1913, there were just seven new West Indian railway workers in Nigeria; six from Trinidad and one from Jamaica.<sup>35</sup> Undeterred by this meager outcome, Waller petitioned the Colonial Office for permission to recruit the 200 railway workers himself.<sup>36</sup> In early 1914, officials in London were finally convinced that 'the natives' were simply not of 'the desired quality' and they granted Waller permission for his recruitment tour. One even pointed out the fortuitous timing: 'The completion of the Panama Canal should have released a considerable number of coloured West Indians with some education and training—so now is the time to try to get them'.<sup>37</sup>

Waller made his first stop in Barbados, arriving there on 15 June 1914. Accompanying Waller was C. D. Blades, one of the railway workers from Trinidad who had begun working in Nigeria the previous year.<sup>38</sup> Recruitment did not begin smoothly. The day after their arrival, *The*

<sup>29</sup>C. H. Grant, who returned to Trinidad because of poor health shortly after arriving in the Gold Coast, wrote that he was 'unable to carry out the terms of the agreement owing to the climate'. NAUK, CO 96/474, Grant to Crown Agents, 7 Sep. 1908. The other four men were W. E. Carter, R. E. Dick, H. Hackshaw, and V. S. Roberts. NAUK, CO 295/444, Acting Governor to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 28 Mar. 1908.

<sup>30</sup>NAUK, CO 583/10, A. S. Cooper to Director of Railways & Works, 2 Dec. 1913; M. Mason, 'The history of Mr. Johnson: progress and protest in northern Nigeria, 1900-1921', *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 27:2 (1993), 212n16. According to C. D. Blades of Trinidad, who worked in Nigeria, 'some fifty or sixty men were taken on by the Lagos Railway' in 1908. NAUK, CO 583/27, Blades, 'Experience of a West Indian on the Nigerian Railway', *The Barbados Advocate*, 17 June 1914.

<sup>31</sup>NAI, N 389/1913, note from W. S. Evans, Assistant Secretary, in a file on West Indian railway workers from the Lagos Colonial Secretary's Office, 7 Mar. 1913.

<sup>32</sup>NAUK, CO 657/1, Nigeria Annual Report on the Railway, 1912.

<sup>33</sup>NAUK, CO 583/10, Governor of Nigeria to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 10 Feb. 1914.

<sup>34</sup>NAUK, CO 270/45, Sierra Leone Annual Report on the Railway, 1913. Morcom worked in Trinidad from 1899 to 1907, when he transferred to deputy general manager of the Gold Coast Railway. In October 1912, the Colonial Office appointed him general manager of the Sierra Leone Railway. National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago, Port of Spain (NATT), CSO 3653/1907, Administrator of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 19 June 1907; NAUK, CO 272/89, Sierra Leone Blue Book 1912.

<sup>35</sup>These were Josiah F. Ward, Charles C. Neptune, Milton A. Fairley, Albert E. Donawa, Abraham A. Warner, and C. Darlington Blades, all from Trinidad, and Amos S. W. Shackelford from Jamaica. NAUK, CO 583/4, Governor of Nigeria to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 14 July 1913.

<sup>36</sup>Waller had a bigger goal, however: he arrived in the Caribbean with 500 copies of blank West Indian agreement forms. NAUK, CO 583/22, Crown Agents to Under Secretary of State, 4 June 1914; NAUK, CO 583/10, Governor Lugard to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 10 Feb. 1914.

<sup>37</sup>NAUK, CO 583/10, Colonial Office notes on the question of using West Indians on the railways in West Africa, 10 Feb. 1914.

<sup>38</sup>NAUK, CO 583/27, Waller to A. J. Harding, Colonial Office, 22 June 1914; NAUK, CO 583/27, Waller to Under Secretary of Colonies, 28 June 1914.

*Barbados Advocate* of Bridgetown published a letter describing the hardships of life in Nigeria from the perspective of a recently-arrived West Indian railway worker.<sup>39</sup> The anonymous letter-writer, 'A Jamaican', was likely Amos Shackelford, who had signed an agreement to work in Nigeria in October 1913 and was from Jamaica.<sup>40</sup> In the letter, Shackelford wrote that 'the batch of station masters who left Trinidad in October last, with the exception of the recruiting agent Mr. Blades, was disappointed over the miserable state of things generally and the high cost of living'. Shackelford emphasized the high prices of food and the discrepancies between the salaries of West Indians and the 'handsomely paid' Europeans appointed to the same positions.<sup>41</sup> Shackelford did not definitively recommend against West Indians coming to Nigeria, but he did make a few suggestions: 'Stick out for from £150 and upwards, also for furnished wooden quarters'. Shackelford also warned about racism and violence at the hands of European colleagues: 'Mr. Neptune, West Indian station master at Menna, was recently assaulted by a European for not raising his hat'.<sup>42</sup>

When Waller read Shackelford's letter in *The Barbados Advocate*, he demanded an interview to smooth things over.<sup>43</sup> The next day, June 17, the newspaper published its interview with Waller alongside job advertisements for railway workers.<sup>44</sup> In the interview, Waller offered his perspective on the 'true' conditions of life in Nigeria. Waller claimed that the cost of living was 'high in imported stuffs [...] but cheap in what in the West Indies constitutes good living, poultry, eggs, fresh beef, etc'. He also declared that the salaries were generous and could 'afford a good workman an excellent start in life'. Regarding violence, Waller stated that his 'employees' received 'all the protection they may need'. In closing, Waller stated that he was offering qualified men in Barbados the opportunity to join an enterprise that was 'taking Nigeria out of savagery fast'. The recruitment of West Indians was thus entrenched in the ideologies of the British Empire — West Indians were apparently skilled and civilized enough to redeem the 'savagery' of Nigeria, but not skilled or civilized enough to merit the same pay as Europeans.

*The Barbados Advocate* complemented Waller's interview with an article written by his recruitment assistant, C. D. Blades.<sup>45</sup> Blades described the geography and climate of Nigeria in glowing

<sup>39</sup>*The Barbados Advocate* was founded in October 1895 by 'crusading editors' Valence Gale and Charles Lynch Chenery. These editors challenged the status quo of crown government and encouraged the development of political parties and trade and labor unions. The newspaper started as a weekly but was a daily by 1914 and gradually became the island's 'newspaper of record'. J. A. Lent, *Mass Communications in the Caribbean* (Ames, IA, 1990), 14–16; H. S. Pactor, *Colonial British Caribbean Newspapers: A Bibliography and Directory* (New York, 1990), 26–7.

<sup>40</sup>NAUK, CO 583/27, 'West Indian employees on Nigerian railways', letter to the editor of *The Barbados Advocate* from 'A Jamaican', Southern Nigeria, Nigerian Railways, Ebute Metta, 4 May 1914, printed 16 June 1914. The letter was anonymous, but Shackelford was the likely author since he was based at Ebute Metta and was the only Jamaican hired the previous year. Shackelford was also closely linked with two other West Indian railway workers, Milton Fairley and Josiah Ward, who wrote similar letters around the same time and sent them to *The Mirror* in Trinidad. The letter from 'A Jamaican' was also published in *The Mirror*. For Shackelford's agreement, see NAUK, CO 137/699, Governor of Jamaica to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 15 Oct. 1913.

<sup>41</sup>Europeans were earning annual salaries upwards of £204, and some up to £350, while the highest paid West Indian station master was earning £138, and that had come only after seven years of service.

<sup>42</sup>Shackelford was referring to Charles Neptune of Trinidad, who was a station master at Minna and had arrived in Nigeria in 1913.

<sup>43</sup>NAUK, CO 583/10, Governor of Nigeria to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 10 Feb. 1914.

<sup>44</sup>NAUK, CO 583/27, 'Interview with Mr. Waller', *The Barbados Advocate*, 17 June 1914. The advertisements called for station masters, signallers, clerks, guards, locomotive fitters, and turners. Shackelford came to Nigeria as a railway clerk, an administrative position based at railway headquarters in Ebute Metta, and earned £96 p.a. Station masters, such as Charles Neptune, Milton Fairley, and Josiah Ward, earned the same salary, but were responsible for managing smaller stations along the railway line. Other West Indians took lower paying positions as booking and goods clerks (£72 p.a.) and guards (£60 p.a.). Those working on locomotives as drivers, fitters, and turners earned higher salaries, between £100 and £120 p.a. Europeans in the same positions earned higher salaries, while Africans earned similar or lower salaries. NAUK, CO 741/1, 'List of appointments'.

<sup>45</sup>NAUK, CO 583/27, Blades, 'Experience of a West Indian'.

terms. He also listed the details of his 'liberal' agreement: three years of service at £96 per annum, increasing by £6 annually, free quarters, free second-class passages to and from Nigeria, and two months of paid leave after completion of the three-year term. Blades claimed that he 'experienced no difficulty getting into the work' as a station master and that he found it easy to adapt to life in Nigeria. In fact, he extolled the lower cost of living as well as the small community of Jamaicans and Barbadians already in Nigeria. Blades even glorified the opportunity for transatlantic travel and the 'amazing grandeur' of London, where he had stopped en route to Nigeria. Finally, he declared that working in Nigeria was a perfect option for West Indians trying to 'obtain employment or better their positions and prospects in life'. In the end, the combined efforts of Waller and Blades yielded just 13 recruits from Barbados, three of whom were in poor health and were quickly disqualified.

In June and July 1914, Waller and Blades proceeded to Trinidad and then British Guiana, where they encountered more negative publicity. Shackelford had also sent a copy of his letter to *The Mirror* in Port of Spain and the newspaper published it shortly before Waller and Blades's arrival.<sup>46</sup> *The Mirror* also published two other letters describing the difficulties West Indians encountered in Nigeria.<sup>47</sup> In the first, Thomas Davis offered a 'word of warning': 'Be not deceived by any oily and honey tongued, smiling man who will speak golden words in your ears.... You will find as soon as he reaches Nigeria that he is Chamelion-like; and when friction arises it will be easier to take a trip to Saturn or the Moon in these days of aeroplane than to see any of the would be gods of Nigeria'.<sup>48</sup> Continuing on the deceptive tactics of Waller and Blades, Davis stated: 'The hook will be full baited, and that dangerous hook will not be seen until it has begun to do its worst'. Like Shackelford, Davis also warned about the conditions of life in Nigeria: 'Don't think that preparations are being made on the railway for you. If you come, you run the risk of having to live in a little grass hut, with a grass mat for protection'. Finally, Davis, like Shackelford, commented on colonial racism: 'You will run the risk of having to stay in bed for days without medical aid, though the Doctor may be only 100 yards off; for you will certainly hear the words, "I did not come here to attend to any black man"'.<sup>49</sup>

The second letter, from 'Junior Lieutenants', likely Josiah Ward, was harsher.<sup>50</sup> Ward explained that he had 'hurriedly' written the letter to warn 'all the boys' at the main railway stations in Trinidad that West Indians in Nigeria were 'all suffering hardships, inconveniences, and worst of all indignities'. Ward especially emphasized racism in northern Nigeria, where he was working: 'I have to go hatless nearly all day to avoid having to take it off every minute to most of the white men here'. He added that his 'booking clerk some days ago got a few cane strokes on the head (in the office mark you) for not removing his hat to a Lieutenant who came in the office'. Finally, Ward explained that if he 'retaliate[d] on the white man', the punishment was 'jail and flogging on the naked skin in the open market place'.

<sup>46</sup>NATT, CSO 7452/1912-1926, 'A Jamaican', letter to the editor of *The Mirror*, 18 June 1914.

<sup>47</sup>*The Mirror* was a daily newspaper founded in Port of Spain in 1898 by Richard Richardson Mole, an English expatriate. This 'reformist' paper was popular among the emerging middle class and 'positively reported the activities of the black and mixed-race radicals and intellectuals', including the affairs of Henry Sylvester Williams's Pan-African Association. B. Edmondson, *Caribbean Middlebrow: Leisure Culture and the Middle Class* (Ithaca, NY, 2009), 30-1; B. Brereton, R. Cobham, M. Rimmer, and L. Winer, Introduction to S. N. Cobham, *Rupert Gray: A Tale in Black and White*, L. Winer (ed.), (Kingston, Jamaica, 2006), xxi-ii; Pactor, *Colonial British Caribbean Newspapers*, 115.

<sup>48</sup>NATT, CSO 7452/1912-1926, Thomas Davis, letter to the editor, *The Mirror*, 18 June 1914, 2.

<sup>49</sup>There is no 'Thomas Davis' in any files on the Nigerian Railway. The name was likely a pseudonym for Milton Fairley, one of the six men from Trinidad who joined the Nigerian Railway in 1913. In fact, in a 1914 letter to the general manager of the Nigerian Railway, Fairley made a nearly identical complaint about medical care: 'Instead of a qualified Dr., though one lives just half a mile away, a barefooted native boy who could hardly understand me was sent'. NATT, CSO 7452/1912-1926, Fairley to Colonial Secretary of Trinidad, 8 Feb. 1914.

<sup>50</sup>NATT, CSO 7452/1912-1926, Junior Lieutenants, 'Recruiting for the Nigerian Railway: British West Indians knocked about - a warning', *The Mirror*, 22 June 1914. In the letter, Junior Lieutenants/Josiah Ward referred to 'myself, Donawa, Fairley, and Neptune' having to travel to Lagos because they were sick. In Feb. 1914, Ward, Albert Donawa, Milton Fairley, and Charles Neptune left their posts in northern Nigeria and travelled south to Lagos to seek medical care.



Shackleford, Fairley, and Ward worked jointly to scuttle Waller's recruitment tour in the Caribbean, but this was not the first time they had come together for a common goal. A few months earlier, Fairley, Ward, and two others from Trinidad, Charles Neptune and Albert Donawa,<sup>51</sup> had abandoned their stations in northern Nigeria and travelled together to Lagos to seek higher wages and access to medical care.<sup>52</sup> In response, the colonial government in Lagos cancelled their contracts. The four men then demanded to return to the Caribbean and sent a short but pointed telegram to the governor of Trinidad: 'Stranded help return notify families'.<sup>53</sup> After meeting with the central secretary, however, who approved small salary increases, they returned to their posts.

This incident, along with the letters from Shackleford, Fairley, and Ward, reveal some of the shock experienced by West Indian railway workers who came to West Africa. Growing up in the Caribbean and attending colonial schools, they saw themselves as part of the British Empire. When they arrived in West Africa, they made clear distinctions between themselves and 'the natives'. Yet such thinking collided with the racial and hierarchical dynamics of colonial Nigeria. When Josiah Ward arrived in Kaduna in December 1913, for example, he found that there was 'no W.C. for [his] use, the one there on Rly premises said to be for use of Europeans only' and he was forced to 'make use of the bush as the natives do'.<sup>54</sup> Unlike in the Caribbean, where education and middle-class aspirations mitigated some of the indignities of racism, colonial officials in West Africa often treated West Indians like 'natives'.<sup>55</sup> The letters from Shackleford, Fairley, and Ward were an expression of their frustrations with these dynamics and their complaints about accommodations, healthcare, and low salaries reveal a sense of isolation and betrayal.<sup>56</sup> Such experiences also explain their subsequent collective motivation to warn other West Indians about the realities of working in Nigeria.

Despite the negative publicity campaign of Shackleford, Fairley, and Ward, Waller's recruitment trip was a modest success. In Trinidad and British Guiana, Waller and Blades signed 74 men.<sup>57</sup> They also travelled to Panama, but there Waller noted that the 'West Indian coloured staff' was

<sup>51</sup>Donawa was one of the few Caribbean railway workers of Indian background, likely the descendant of indentured servants who came to the Caribbean from India in the nineteenth century. After meeting with Fairley, Ward, Neptune, and Donawa in Lagos in Feb. 1914, Central Secretary Donald Cameron noted that Donawa 'seem[ed]...to be of East Indian extraction'. NAI, N 856/1914, note in file, 10 Feb. 1914.

<sup>52</sup>In a petition to the governor, the four men wrote that they were 'forced to come in to Ebute Metta' because of their 'ill health'. They also explained that they were 'stranded' and were 'existing only by the kind help of friends'. NAI, N 856/1914, J. F. Ward, M. A. Fairley, A. E. Donawa, and C. C. Neptune to Governor of Nigeria, 3 Feb. 1914. In an earlier letter, Ward summarized their experiences: 'I find it impossible to remain here any longer in consequence of my failing health, caused by the bad housing accommodations and want of good food'. NATT, CSO 7452/1912-1926, Ward to general manager of Nigerian Railway, 13 Jan. 1914. Fairley, meanwhile, had found that 'white Drs find it very much below their dignity to attend black or coloured people personally, so they depute this work to native boys'. NATT, CSO 7452/1912-1926, Fairley to colonial secretary of Trinidad, 8 Feb. 1914.

<sup>53</sup>Upon receiving the telegram, George Le Hunte, the Governor of Trinidad, reported it to the Colonial Office in London but decided to take 'no action with regard to it' because he was 'unable to understand the telegram'. NAUK, CO 295/490, Le Hunte to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 3 Feb. 1914.

<sup>54</sup>NATT, CSO 7452/1912-1926, letter from Josiah F. Ward to Colonial Secretary of Trinidad, 11 Feb. 1914.

<sup>55</sup>In fact, in June 1914, a colonial official in Trinidad remarked on this problem: 'The Nigerian Government would be well advised to waste no more time in importing West Indians, if it cannot ensure differentiation of treatment between these men who are far ahead of the native population in civilisation and knowledge of their work, and the local native staff'. NATT, CSO 7452/1912-1926, Note in file, 22 June 1914.

<sup>56</sup>Before coming to Nigeria in 1913, Josiah Ward was earning £65 p.a. on the Trinidad Railway, and so the starting salary of £96 p.a. in Nigeria was appealing. However, the high cost of living in Nigeria, along with monthly remittances, cut into this discrepancy and negated the 'excellent start in life' promised by Waller. NATT, CSO 7452/1912-1926, letter from Josiah F. Ward to Colonial Secretary of Trinidad, 11 Feb. 1914; NATT, Trinidad Yearbook 1913, 157.

<sup>57</sup>NAUK, CO 583/27, Waller to Under Secretary of State for the Colonies, 28 June 1914; NAUK, CO 583/27, Waller to Under Secretary, 4 Aug. 1914; NAUK, CO 583/27, Waller to Under Secretary, 30 Aug. 1914.

not 'up to the standard'.<sup>58</sup> Moreover, the British Consul in Colón advised Waller to 'defer recruitment' in Panama due to 'the circumstances' which were arising in Europe at the time. Waller did not go to Jamaica because the governor there could not promise any men with railway experience, and so Waller returned to England in late August having confirmed 84 new employees and established links for future recruitment.<sup>59</sup>

### The intellectual climate in West Africa

As the experiences of Shackelford, Fairley, Ward, and the rest of their cohort make clear, West Indian railway workers who came to West Africa had to reckon with racism and alienation. They had lower salaries than their European peers, resided in segregated living quarters, and colonial officials usually ignored their complaints. Yet West Indians still adhered to colonial hierarchies in order to preserve their own interests, and they were determined to maintain a sense of separation from Africans. Such thinking was in part the result of the colonial contexts of the British Caribbean in the early twentieth century, where divisions of race and class dominated every aspect of life.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, British claims that West Indians were more capable than African workers seem to have amplified this pattern of thinking. Aligning with Africans against colonial racism or other inequalities would have meant giving up this higher status, including their salaries, which were higher than those of African workers. As Caree A. Banton puts it, in the context of Barbadian migration to Liberia in 1865, West Indians were 'ready to be part of the British imperial arrangement if it had a hierarchical colonial structure that offered them respectability [and] preserved their position of privilege'.<sup>61</sup> West Indian railway workers in West Africa thus upheld their identities as British colonial subjects, and when they used the language of racial unity, it was almost always inflected with colonial hierarchies.

Africans, meanwhile, were eager to offer their perspectives on these claims to West Indian superiority. They filled newspapers with letters and articles describing their resentment about the recruitment of West Indian railway workers. In January 1915, for instance, *The Nigerian Pioneer* published an anonymous article calling for the colonial government to 'stop the disgrace of imported labour'.<sup>62</sup> The problem was not with African railway workers, the writer continued, 'but with the men who train them and the system they are trained under'. In Sierra Leone, similar tensions arose in the first half of 1916, when the Colonial Office began actively encouraging the Sierra Leone railway department to replace Europeans with West Indians.<sup>63</sup> In February 1916, 'Olympio' wrote to *The Weekly News* of Freetown about this 'gross blunder' and questioned whether

<sup>58</sup>NAUK, CO 583/27, Waller to Under Secretary of State for the Colonies, 4 Aug. 1914. While in Panama, Mr. Nutting, the Chief Mechanical Engineer of the Isthmian Canal Works, informed Waller that 'the American negro was troublesome and should be avoided'.

<sup>59</sup>NAUK, CO 583/27, Waller to Harding, 9 July 1914; NAUK, CO 583/27, Waller to Under Secretary of State for the Colonies, 30 Aug. 1914. There were plans for a second recruitment tour in 1919. NAI, N1250/1919, 'Recruiting of East and West Indians for the Railway', 7 Apr. 1919.

<sup>60</sup>As C. L. R. James wrote in 1932: 'In the West Indies to-day there are no native peoples in the sense that there are natives in Africa or in India'. C. L. R. James, *The Life of Captain Cipriani: An Account of British Government in the West Indies* (Durham, NC, 2014 [1932]), 50.

<sup>61</sup>Banton, *More Auspicious Shores*, 160. Waibinte E. Wariboko makes a similar argument regarding West Indian missionaries who worked in southern Nigeria in the early twentieth century. For these missionaries, Wariboko claims, identifying with Africans would have meant disqualification from the 'socioeconomic benefits accruable to "foreign missionaries" in the CMS Niger Mission'. Wariboko also suggests that West Indian missionaries were determined to maintain their identities as British subjects because of an 'ideological desire to protect their personhood from the evil effects of racism and xenophobia'. Wariboko, *Ruined by 'Race'*, 108 and 189.

<sup>62</sup>'West Indian labour in West Africa', *The Nigerian Pioneer*, 15 Jan. 1915, 3.

<sup>63</sup>NAUK, CO 267/566, Acting Governor of Sierra Leone to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 9 Aug. 1915; Colonial Office notes in same file. According to the file, the Sierra Leone Government preferred to hire Jamaicans.

West Indians were really ‘doing their work better and quicker than our boys’.<sup>64</sup> Olympio also claimed that he had interviewed ‘a good many’ African railway workers and declared that the railway department would be better off providing them with adequate training. Two months later, *The Weekly News* published a column by ‘Rambler’, who claimed that ‘the charge of [African] incompetence has no foundation in fact’. He also claimed that while ‘the West Indian Black’ was ‘flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone’, Africans would ‘not let any ties of blood blind [their] eyes to truth, fairness, and justice’.<sup>65</sup> In mid-April 1916, Olympio sent in another letter, and this time he appealed to the state of Sierra Leone’s coffers.<sup>66</sup> He claimed that if the colonial government had trained Africans instead of importing West Indian labor, they would have saved £15,708, a sum that he suggested Britain could have used in its ‘struggle for the liberty of the World’. By July 1916, the controversy made its way from the Sierra Leone newspapers to the governor’s office. In a letter to London, the governor explained that ‘the introduction of West Indian fitters is unpopular among the people of Freetown as it is felt to be a slur upon the capacities of the Sierra Leone African’.<sup>67</sup>

Calls for fairness and better training for African workers went unheeded, however, and tensions between Africans and West Indians continued to mount. In July 1918, for example, one writer in the Gold Coast stated angrily: ‘Ordinary clerks from the West Indies are imported into the service of this Colony to hold responsible appointments when there are natives equally competent to do the work’.<sup>68</sup> A month later in Freetown, *The Weekly News* published a short editorial on the ‘just grievance’ of African railway workers, suggesting that in the inverse situation — African workers replacing West Indians in the Caribbean — West Indians would have taken ‘recourse to a less pacific way of redressing their grievances than the method which our own countrymen have pursued’.<sup>69</sup> And in January 1919, Freetown lawyer C. D. Hotobah During sent a letter to *The Weekly News* explaining that there was ‘no need to have imported West Indian Fitters as these were more or less trained in some Railway Establishments (outside Europe) similar to the Railway Establishments here’. ‘Our men’, he continued, ‘could be thus locally trained by the Railway Department here and paid the same salaries now paid to the West Indians’.<sup>70</sup>

These complaints were in part a response to British colonial officials who considered West Indian workers to be more capable than African workers. Yet as Rambler’s reference to ‘ties of blood’ indicates, these letters and articles were also part of larger discussions in West Africa about connections — and tensions — with the Caribbean and the broader diaspora. Edward Blyden, for example, who had long advocated for emigration initiatives to West Africa as integral to the region’s development, moved away from this thinking towards the end of his life. In his final book, *African Life and Customs*, published in 1908, Blyden emphasized the importance of Africans adhering to African institutions, such as family structures, education models, legal systems, and religions. ‘There are today hundreds of so-called civilised Africans who are coming back to

<sup>64</sup>Olympio, ‘The importation of West Indian fitters into Sierra Leone: letter to the editor’, *The Weekly News*, 19 Feb. 1916, 5. It is possible that this ‘Olympio’ was related to the Olympio family of Togo. This family descended from Francisco Olympio, who was born in Brazil in 1833 and arrived in West Africa in 1850. Sylvanus Olympio, grandson of Francisco Olympio, later became the first Prime Minister and then first President of Togo. For more, see A. O. Boyd, *The Latin American Identity and the African Diaspora: Ethnogenesis in Context* (Amherst, 2010), 244.

<sup>65</sup>Rambler, ‘African mechanics at the railway’, *The Weekly News*, 1 Apr. 1916, 8.

<sup>66</sup>Olympio, ‘The Sierra Leone government railway and African mechanics’, *The Weekly News*, 15 Apr. 1916, 7.

<sup>67</sup>NAUK, CO 267/571, R. J. Wilkinson to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 13 July 1916.

<sup>68</sup>‘Pour Encourager les autres’, *The Gold Coast Independent*, 20 July 1918, 27.

<sup>69</sup>Rambler, ‘African mechanics on the railway’, *The Weekly News*, 22 June 1918, 8.

<sup>70</sup>C. D. Hotobah During, ‘The proposed government secondary school’, *The Weekly News*, 4 Jan. 1919, 17. It is possible that disputes over salaries between African and West Indian railway workers were related to disputes over marriages, though I have not found evidence of this. As Lisa Lindsay writes, in the context of the railway in southwestern Nigeria, workers with higher wages were better able to secure marriages because of the ‘formidable’ bride-price. Lindsay, *Working with Gender: Wage Labor and Social Change in Southwestern Nigeria* (Portsmouth, NH, 2003), 36–41.

themselves', he wrote. 'They have grasped the principles underlying the European social and economic order and reject them as not equal to their own'.<sup>71</sup>

Another important influence on the atmosphere surrounding these newspaper debates was Joseph Casely Hayford, a lawyer, politician, and newspaper editor from Cape Coast. In 1911, he published his most well-known work, *Ethiopia Unbound*.<sup>72</sup> The book took inspiration from Blyden, whom Casely Hayford had known while studying in Sierra Leone, and like Blyden, Casely Hayford expounded the importance of African cultural institutions.<sup>73</sup> He was also critical of assimilation: 'It is not so much *Afro-Americans* that we want as *Africans*', he wrote. 'Afro-Americans must bring themselves into touch with some of the general traditions and institutions of their ancestors'.<sup>74</sup> Casely Hayford was not opposed to Africa-diaspora connections. In fact, he forged links with Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois, among other figures.<sup>75</sup> Yet he disapproved of 'blindly imitating western methods' and he held up Blyden as 'the greatest living exponent of the true spirit of African nationality'.<sup>76</sup> In a letter to *The Sierra Leone Weekly News* after the publication of the final article in Blyden's *African Life and Customs* series, Casely Hayford declared: 'What, indeed, can be more certain than that the African in the United States, in the West Indies, and in the mother country, east, west, and south, has need to unlearn a good deal?'<sup>77</sup>

Similar ideas circulated in early twentieth-century Nigeria, through intellectuals such as Mojola Agbebi. Christened David Vincent, Agbebi was a poet and preacher, as well as an ardent follower of Blyden. Agbebi stressed the importance of African-led churches, and in April 1888, he and several others left the Southern American Baptist Mission and formed the Native Baptist Church in Lagos, the first independent church in Nigeria.<sup>78</sup> Like Blyden and Casely Hayford, Agbebi was critical of European models and he urged missionaries to adapt Christianity to African cultures and religions. 'The introduction of the usages and institutions of European life into the African social system', he wrote in 1911, 'has resulted in a disordering and a dislocation of the latter which threatens to overthrow the system altogether and produce a state of social anarchy'.<sup>79</sup> Agbebi was also skeptical of foreign missionaries, including African Americans, and he inverted their notions of providential design. During a speaking tour in the United States, he declared: 'America, not Africa, needs missionaries'.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>71</sup>E. W. Blyden, *African Life and Customs* (Baltimore, 1994 [1908]), 36–7. The book originally appeared as a series of articles in *The Sierra Leone Weekly News*, a newspaper that Blyden had helped establish with Claudius and Cornelius May in 1884. The articles were then collected and published as a book in London in 1908. Odamtten, *Edward W. Blyden's Intellectual Transformations*, 170; C. Magbaily Fyfe, 'May, Joseph Claudius', *The Historical Dictionary of Sierra Leone* (Oxford, 2006), 126–7.

<sup>72</sup>J. E. Casely Hayford, *Ethiopia Unbound: Studies in Race Emancipation* (London, 1969 [1911]).

<sup>73</sup>Esedebe, *Pan-Africanism*, 24.

<sup>74</sup>Casely Hayford, *Ethiopia Unbound*, 173 and 165. Emphasis in original. Perhaps it was no coincidence that Railway's July 1907 call of 'Africa for Africans' was published in Casely Hayford's newspaper, *The Gold Coast Leader*.

<sup>75</sup>On the influence of Booker T. Washington in West Africa, see A. Barnes, *Global Christianity and the Black Atlantic: Tuskegee, Colonialism, and the Shaping of African Industrial Education* (Waco, 2017); and A. Zimmerman, *Alabama in Africa: Booker T. Washington, the German Empire, and the Globalization of the New South* (Princeton, 2012).

<sup>76</sup>Casely Hayford, *Ethiopia Unbound*, 161 and 164.

<sup>77</sup>Letter from Casely Hayford to *The Sierra Leone Weekly News*, 5 May 1908, reprinted in Blyden, *African Life and Customs*, Appendix A, 77.

<sup>78</sup>E. A. Ayandele, 'A visionary of the African Church: Mojola Agbebi (1860-1917)', in Ayandele, *African Historical Studies* (London, 1979), 112. Agbebi was later involved with other independent churches, such as the United Native African Church, formed in 1891, and the African Bethel Church, formed in 1901.

<sup>79</sup>M. Agbebi, 'The West African problem', in G. Spiller (ed.), *Inter-racial Problems* (London, 1911), 343–4. Also quoted in Zachernuk, *Colonial Subjects*, 69.

<sup>80</sup>'Dr. Agbebi in America: He Speaks for Africa', *The Lagos Standard*, 13 Jan. 1904. Also quoted in R. Okonkwo, 'Mojola Agbebi: apostle of the African personality', *Présence Africaine*, 114 (1980), 147. On Agbebi, see also A. Akiwowo, 'The place of Mojola Agbebi in the African nationalist movements: 1890-1917', *Phylon*, 26:2 (1965), 122–39.

In short, the ideas and writings of figures such as Blyden, Casely Hayford, and Agbebi created an intellectual climate that centered the importance of African institutions and leadership and that rejected all notions of West Indian or African American superiority. African and West Indian railway workers were part of this intellectual climate, and their disputes over jobs thus provide insights into how colonial hierarchies and diasporic tensions shaped the language of racial unity in early twentieth-century West Africa. One particularly revealing example of this dynamic is the controversy that erupted in February and March 1915, when *The Lagos Standard* published an article by Ivanhoe Fitzherbert Maye titled 'West Indians in Nigeria'.<sup>81</sup>

### A controversy in Lagos

Maye, from Jamaica, was a clerk in the Nigerian railway department, and he began his article by stating that he wanted to improve relations between Africans and West Indians. West Indians, he explained, were 'further advanced' than their 'African brother[s]' because of their longer history with 'European civilization', but this did not mean that they should separate themselves as distinct from Africans. Instead, Maye argued, West Indians should 'assist in bringing the [African] up to him'. Maye evidently believed in the 'civilizing' effects of colonialism — at one point he referred to 'the advancing light of civilization' — yet because West Indians were 'of the same blood [as] the African Negro', he also saw a special role for West Indians in this 'civilizing' mission. Pursuing the point of blood, Maye emphasized that Africans and West Indians were 'kith and kin' and as a result, 'the same brotherly feeling existing between West Indians of different grades of society should be extended to Africans'. 'The native', Maye continued, would then realize that 'the West Indian is here, not to exploit, but to assist him'. In order to reach a 'closer unity' and support 'the future of the race', Maye insisted that West Indians 'elevate and assist' Africans. 'Cease to mistrust him, and his suspicion of you will disappear; treat him as a man and brother, and he will do the same; do not speak disparagingly of his backwardness where you observe it, but educate him, and he will appreciate you'.

Maye might have condemned the 'exploitation' of Africans, but he saw no link between this exploitation and the 'assistance' that West Indian railway workers were providing. Instead, his enthusiasm for colonization reveals how entrenched he and other West Indians were in a European, progressive view of 'civilization' and world history. In fact, Maye closed his article with an allusion to providential design, noting that the West Indian presence in Nigeria was likely 'in fulfillment of some portion of God's plan for the amelioration of the social and economic condition of the Negro'. In other words, Maye believed this 'amelioration' could be best accomplished — and indeed was *meant* to be accomplished — through a divinely ordained 'civilizing' mission, and not, for example, by challenging colonial occupations in Africa.

Maye's claim about the 'different grades of society' in the Caribbean is also revealing of his intellectual context. Maye wrote that a 'brotherly feeling' existed across race and class divisions in the Caribbean. This recasting of Jamaican society as harmonious is puzzling, since he grew up in a Jamaica with sharp divisions of race and class. Yet by 1915, Maye had been in Nigeria for three years.<sup>82</sup> His experiences with racism, coupled with animosity from Africans, would have led to a sense of alienation. Perhaps he reimagined the Caribbean as a beacon of unity, one that he hoped to replicate in Nigeria.

<sup>81</sup>I. F. Maye, 'West Indians in Nigeria', *The Lagos Standard*, 10 Feb. 1915, 5. *The Lagos Standard* was founded in Sep. 1894 by George Alfred Williams, who was born to Egba parents in Freetown in 1851. Williams first came to Lagos as a trader but was forced out of his business ventures by European interference. The newspaper was often critical of the colonial government and was an integral part of the cultural nationalism of early twentieth-century Lagos. Williams remained editor until his death in May 1919. F. I. A. Omu, *Press and Politics in Nigeria, 1880-1937* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ, 1978), 36–8.

<sup>82</sup>NAI, N 389/1913, 'List of West Indian Employees in the Railway Department'.

Finally, Maye's article reveals the hierarchies embedded in his call for racial unity. At no point did Maye suggest equality between Africans and West Indians. Instead, his case for 'unity' rested on 'further advanced' West Indians who could 'elevate' Africans *into* unity. Rather than insisting that Africans were not 'backwards', Maye stated that West Indians should simply 'not speak disparagingly' about African 'backwardness'. Maye evidently believed that the only way to unify 'the race' was for West Indians to ignore this 'backwardness' and stoically bring Africans up to speed. Maye used the language of racial unity, but this was a unity rooted in hierarchy.

A week after the publication of Maye's article, two other West Indians in Nigeria wrote letters to *The Lagos Standard* to distance themselves from Maye. In the first, John Phillips stated that Maye's article contained 'grave misrepresentations of West Indians in [Nigeria] as regards their attitude towards the Native' and was concerned that such a 'rabid article' would create tension.<sup>83</sup> Attempting to smooth things over, Phillips asserted that there was no 'wide line of demarcation' between Africans and West Indians. Instead, he claimed, 'a bond of blood' connected them and they lived in 'friendly intercourse...in all walks of life'. Yet Phillips's attempt to paint Africans and West Indians as equals contained the same paternalism found in Maye's article. In the second half of his letter, Phillips claimed that West Indians did not need any of Maye's guidance for their interactions with Africans because 'coming as he does from the older Colonies, the West Indian fully realizes the importance which would be attached by the Native to his every word or action'. Moreover, Phillips explained, the West Indian in Nigeria was 'quite aware of the fact that he should so live that his example may be a guiding beacon to his African Kinsman'.

Amos Shackleford of Jamaica wrote the second response to Maye's article.<sup>84</sup> Shackleford rejected Maye's claim that West Indians were 'arrogant' and engaged in the 'overlordship' of Africans. Instead, Shackleford claimed, West Indians always carried themselves in a spirit of 'goodwill'. Yet, like Phillips, Shackleford's defence of West Indians betrayed his own sense of superiority. He made the circular argument that if West Indians really were 'further advanced' than Africans, they would not put on airs of superiority because they would be 'guided' by a 'higher civilization'. In other words, Shackleford did not deny the possibility that West Indians were more 'advanced' than Africans, but he did deny Africans the opportunity to criticize West Indian prejudice. For Shackleford, West Indians were either not 'further advanced', in which case they would not be 'arrogant', or they were 'further advanced', in which case their 'higher civilization' would keep them from arrogance. Shackleford reinforced this implicit paternalism by noting that even if there had been instances of tension between Africans and West Indians, 'the native must have taken it in good part as he made no complaints'. In these formulations, just as with Maye and Phillips, Shackleford was not willing to consider himself on the same plane as Africans. This thinking was rooted in hierarchical understandings of culture, religion, education, and civilization and these views seeped into his assertions of racial unity.

'The native', however, did take notice and did make 'complaints'. One week later, on 24 February 1915, *The Lagos Standard* published two more letters responding to Maye's article, and this time, the letters came from Africans.<sup>85</sup> In the first letter, Akinola sarcastically dismissed Maye's 'elevation and advancement Crusade' and expressed doubt about a 'bond of union' between Africans and West Indians. He stated that such unity was impossible because 'the West Indian clings to his opinion, expressed and implied, that he is far and away superior to the African co-worker both in civilization and intellect'. Akinola continued by writing that 'whatever advantages the West Indian may have gained from his long contact with European civilization are not being displayed by those imported into Nigeria'. In closing, Akinola proposed a straightforward solution to African-West

<sup>83</sup>J. H. Phillips, 'Letter to the editor', *The Lagos Standard*, 17 Feb. 1915, 6.

<sup>84</sup>A. S. Wynter Shackleford, 'Letter to the editor', *The Lagos Standard*, 17 Feb. 1915, 6.

<sup>85</sup>Akinola, 'West Indians in Nigeria: letter to the editor', *The Lagos Standard*, 24 Feb. 1915, 4–5, and Sheba, 'West Indians in Nigeria: letter to the editor', *The Lagos Standard*, 24 Feb. 1915, 5.

Indian friction: 'Let the West Indian only erase from his imagination the present illusory notion of his superiority over the Nigerian...and the latter will no longer resent the advent of the former in his domains'.

Akinola was unconvinced by a notion of unity in which West Indians 'elevated' and 'assisted' Africans, and he cut straight through the hierarchies embedded in Maye's call for a 'bond of union'. Akinola also linked the imperious attitudes of West Indians with their 'long contact with European civilization'. Referring sarcastically to the 'advantages' that West Indians '*may have gained*' from this connection and pointing out that none of these 'advantages' were on display in Nigeria, Akinola suggested that 'long contact' with Europe had not been advantageous at all. Instead, this contact had resulted in what he saw as racial alienation, manifested in this case by attitudes of superiority over Africans. Akinola understood the link between 'European civilization' and the economic and psychological exploitation of colonialism. He proposed that West Indians 'erase' their 'illusory', European-inspired notions of superiority. This was both a rejection of cultural imperialism and a call for genuine unity between Africans and West Indians against the onslaught of 'European civilization' in Africa. It was also a reflection of suggestions made by figures such as Casely Hayford and Agbebi, that West Indians and African Americans might need help from African missionaries in order to 'unlearn' European ideas.

The second letter, from Sheba, also criticized Maye and the imperious attitudes of West Indians. Sheba claimed that the 'intelligence' of West Indians did not imply that Africans were 'not intelligent'. Given that Africans and West Indians had 'developed under agents foreign to each other', Sheba continued, this was 'in conflict to reason'. In other words, Sheba rejected a zero-sum equation for judging the 'attainment to civilization' of Africans and West Indians and instead called for a plural, coeval understanding of historical processes in Africa and the Caribbean. In Sheba's mind, the transatlantic slave trade had placed West Indians on a different historical path from Africans, but that did not mean that West Indians were more or less advanced; to make such rankings was ahistorical. In fact, Sheba claimed an enduring connection between Africans and West Indians, noting that the tension between Africans and West Indians in Nigeria ran contrary to 'African Spirit'. The only elaboration Sheba provided on this phenomenon was that 'every inhabitant of the West India islands who lays claim to the commemoration of 1st August 1834—the Emancipation Day of liberated Africans—is of African descent and therefore AFRICAN'. Nevertheless, Sheba's reference to 'African Spirit' and the claim that West Indians had never ceased to be 'AFRICAN' are noteworthy. Sheba would have been well aware of the role of Africans in the slave trade and the fiction of a unified 'Africa' — the last slave ships left Lagos in the 1850s, while 'domestic' slavery continued unabated in Nigeria until its 'slow death' in the 1930s.<sup>86</sup> Yet by claiming that West Indians were 'African' and pointing to an 'African Spirit', Sheba was imagining the potential of transatlantic unity between Africans and African-descended peoples in the Americas. In other words, Sheba was asserting an African-centered view of world history. Instead of framing the histories of Africans and West Indians as mediated or dictated by Europeans — or by providential design, as Maye had claimed — Sheba articulated a view of history in which Africans and African-descended peoples walked different paths but remained linked by a common spiritual force.<sup>87</sup> Like Akinola, Sheba's call for unity moved beyond hierarchical notions of advancement, assistance, and elevation.

<sup>86</sup>On the end of slavery in Nigeria, see K. Mann, *Slavery and the Birth of an African City: Lagos, 1760-1900* (Bloomington, IN, 2007); P. Lovejoy and J. Hogendorn, *Slow Death for Slavery: The Course of Abolition in Northern Nigeria, 1897-1936* (Cambridge, 2011). More generally, see P. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa* (Cambridge, 2012); S. Miers and R. Roberts (eds.), *The End of Slavery in Africa* (Madison, 1988); and S. Miers and M. Klein (eds.), *Slavery and Colonial Rule in Africa* (London, 2006).

<sup>87</sup>It is possible that Sheba was drawing on Blyden here, using 'African Spirit' as a variation on Blyden's 'African Personality'. In fact, Blyden himself occasionally used 'African Spirit' in his writing, such as in his open letter to Booker

The controversy over Maye's 'West Indians in Nigeria' article took a strange turn a few days later when *The Nigerian Pioneer* published a letter from 'An European'.<sup>88</sup> The letter provided a comically misinformed reading of the controversy. 'An European' believed that Maye was a 'West African' and was complaining about West Indian attitudes towards Africans, rather than a West Indian paternalistically calling for unity with Africans. In the letter, 'An European' stated brashly that Maye's article was simply another example of West African 'apathy' and the tendency of West Africans to 'beg for help or kindness from the other races who are beating him in the struggle for existence'. 'An European' suggested that Africans needed to instead help themselves as Europeans did, and pointed out that 'the Lord loveth him who helpeth himself'.

The following week, *The Lagos Standard* published another response to Maye's article, this time from Solade.<sup>89</sup> Solade began by criticizing Maye, Phillips, and Shackelford, arguing that their descriptions did not 'tally with the actual state of affairs' and that their letters were 'an attempt to impose on the credulity of the Native and lull him into a false sense of security'. 'The attitude of the West Indians, generally, towards the Native', Solade continued, 'has been nothing but impolitic, and carries with it an air of arrogance'. Solade then turned to 'An European', suggesting that in confusing Maye for a West African, 'Mr. An European', had been 'presumably swayed by colour prejudice and racial bigotry'. This confusion, Solade suggested, was an 'unconscious revelation of the pitch which Mr. An European's negrophobism had attained'. In the second half of the letter, Solade targeted the heart of the matter: at every turn, West Africans faced 'unnatural obstacles' and were 'encircled by restrictions' instead of given opportunities. Solade closed by paraphrasing incisively from Thomas Gray's famous 1751 poem, *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*: 'Would anyone attempt to deny that the flower of the intelligence of many a Native has blushed unseen and wasted its sweetness in the desert air?' By pointing out the 'arrogance' of West Indians, the 'racial bigotry' of Europeans, and condemning the 'unnatural obstacles' of colonialism, Solade made clear the issues that Africans faced in British colonies.

The last act in the controversy surrounding Maye's article came a week later, when *The Lagos Standard* published a final letter to the editor.<sup>90</sup> Submitted anonymously, the writer supported the idea of unity between West Indians and Africans. Like Akinola and Sheba, however, the writer pointed out that this unity should not be dependent on West Indians 'elevating' Africans, but rather on West Indians and Africans uniting against European colonialism. Rejecting any sense of providential design, the writer stated that West Indians like Maye, Phillips, and Shackelford were not 'saviours of the race'. Rather, they were 'permeated and saturated by Europeanism and European Ideas and Ideals' and required 'mental Emancipation'. Then, like Sheba, the writer asserted a common African identity by claiming that the 'return' of West Indians to Africa could 'rightly be termed repatriation' and that West Indians of 'whatever shade of colour, if not purely white, are of African descent'. In closing, the writer called for international racial unity against Europeans:

Every broadminded West Indian we are sure will find African Natives everwilling and ready to extend the open hand of an undying friendship. He will be welcome to our hearts and welcome

T. Washington, first published in *The New York Age* on 21 Jan. 1895, and then republished in Sierra Leone as 'Dr. Blyden's Letter', *The Sierra Leone Weekly News*, 9 Mar. 1895, 2.

<sup>88</sup>'An European, 'West Indians in Nigeria: letter to the editor', *The Nigerian Pioneer*, 26 Feb. 1915, 8. Maye's article and the subsequent letters were printed in both *The Lagos Standard* and *The Nigerian Pioneer*. It is possible that the editors anonymously wrote this letter to extend the controversy. *The Nigerian Pioneer* was founded in 1914 by Kitoye Ajasa, a prominent Lagos lawyer. In 1894, Ajasa had been a financial backer of George Williams and *The Lagos Standard*, but as the *Standard* grew more critical of colonial rule, Ajasa left and founded the more conservative and pro-British *Pioneer*. The newspaper is sometimes criticized as a mouthpiece of the colonial government, though Ajasa's politics were more complex. Omu, *Press and Politics in Nigeria, 1880-1937*, 43–50.

<sup>89</sup>Solade, 'West Indians in Nigeria: letter to the editor', *The Lagos Standard*, 3 Mar. 1915, 6.

<sup>90</sup>'To the sober minded', *The Lagos Standard*, 10 Mar. 1915, 4.



to our homes. The forces against us and the times in which we are living must compel, and to appeal to all Negroes wherever found to combine and co-operate. For 'United we Stand! Divided we fall!'

This anonymous writer may have criticized the imperious, Europeanized attitudes of some West Indians, but the letter was nonetheless an open invitation to all Africans and African-descended peoples. Unlike Maye's call for unity, this was a unity grounded in equality, a unity without reference to colonial hierarchies of 'civilization' or 'backwardness'. By asserting that West Indians needed to embrace a collective 'Negro' identity, the writer upended Maye's conviction that West Indians needed to 'elevate' and 'assist' Africans. If anything, the writer was advocating for Africans to 'assist' West Indians in ridding themselves of 'Europeanism'. In some ways, this was a prelude to the global rise of Garveyism, including Garvey's famous declaration: 'We are going to emancipate ourselves from mental slavery because whilst others might free the body, none but ourselves can free the mind'.<sup>91</sup>

Also significant was this writer's treatment of the colonial category of 'native'. Maye, Phillips, and Shackelford had all made sharp distinctions between 'West Indians' and 'Natives'. This writer, however, along with Akinola, Sheba, and Solade, approached this language in a different manner. Akinola, for example, had compared 'West Indians' with 'Nigerians', using this nationalist term interchangeably with 'the Nigerian Native' and 'the Nigerian Negro'.<sup>92</sup> Sheba did not use the term 'native' at all and instead brought West Indians under the category of 'African'.<sup>93</sup> Solade, meanwhile, seemed to appropriate this colonial terminology. For Solade, 'Native' was not a category that marked inherent inferiority but rather a term that designated the social position of 'competent men' who were 'encircled by restrictions' and 'unnatural obstacles'.<sup>94</sup> Finally, this anonymous writer subsumed 'West Indians' and 'African Natives' under the broader, racial category of 'Negroes'. At a time when even many Lagosians described Africans outside of Lagos as 'natives', this was a radically inclusive stance, targeted not only at West Indians but at anyone adopting colonial hierarchies. Referring to 'us', 'we', 'the race', and 'all Negroes' brought together Africans and West Indians under a common racial identity, one that was unified to fight European colonialism — 'the forces against us'.

After the publication of this anonymous letter, the controversy surrounding Maye's newspaper article appears to have quieted down, at least in the press. Yet even with this open-ended conclusion, the controversy reveals much about the relationships between Africans and West Indians in early twentieth-century Nigeria. Ivanhoe Maye, John Phillips, and Amos Shackelford advocated for racial unity between Africans and West Indians, but their language was inflected with colonial hierarchies. They continued to see themselves as superior to Africans.<sup>95</sup> Akinola, Sheba, Solade, and the

<sup>91</sup>Speech by Marcus Garvey, 1 Oct. 1937, Menelik Hall, Sydney, Nova Scotia, in R. A. Hill (ed.), *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers: Volume VII, November 1927-August 1940* (Berkeley, 1990), 791. Garvey's declaration later inspired the lyrics of Bob Marley's 1980 song, 'Redemption Song'. The idea of 'mental emancipation' also appears in Nnamdi Azikiwe's *Renascent Africa*, a book published the same year as Garvey's speech. N. Azikiwe, *Renascent Africa*, (London, 1968 [1937]), especially 134–40.

<sup>92</sup>Akinola, 'West Indians in Nigeria'.

<sup>93</sup>Sheba, 'West Indians in Nigeria'.

<sup>94</sup>Solade, 'West Indians in Nigeria'.

<sup>95</sup>The thinking of some West Indians appears to have shifted, however. Amos Shackelford, for instance, who left Nigeria at the end of his three-year contract in 1917, returned to Nigeria the following year. In 1920, he helped establish the Lagos Branch of the Universal Negro Improvement Association, along with John Ambleston, a railway worker from Antigua, and Ernest Ikoli, a journalist from southeastern Nigeria. Shackelford became a prominent figure in Lagos and was close friends with Peter J. C. Thomas and Herbert Macaulay. On Shackelford, see P. Janzen, 'Atlantic Intermediaries': R. Okonkwo, 'A Jamaican export to Nigeria! The life of Amos Stanley Wynter Shackelford', *Caribbean Quarterly*, 30:2 (1984), 48–59; and R. Okonkwo, 'The Garvey movement in British West Africa', *The Journal of African History*, 21:1 (1980), 105–17.

anonymous writer, meanwhile, rejected these appeals and responded with resentment and irony. Yet they also expressed regret about this acrimony, and made sincere efforts to surmount African-West Indian tensions.

## Conclusion

In her 2005 book on Marcus Garvey, Claude McKay, and C. L. R. James, Michelle Stephens writes that these three West Indian intellectuals were 'both resisting empire and carrying its tropes along in their wake'.<sup>96</sup> Ivanhoe Maye and other West Indian railway workers who came to West Africa in the early twentieth century seem to have carried the tropes of empire with them as well. On one hand, they were critical of racism and other injustices, but they also benefited from colonial hierarchies, and their calls for racial unity intertwined with their belief in the British Empire. Africans, meanwhile, were resentful about being passed over for these positions and they were quick to criticize attitudes of superiority among West Indians.

Such exchanges, while centered on railway jobs, provide a window into the larger intellectual history of pan-Africanism in early twentieth-century West Africa. Never a linear, triumphant narrative of racial unity, this uneven history was shaped by colonial hierarchies and diasporic tensions. The expansion of colonial power in the late nineteenth century, including the expansion of railway networks, led intellectuals such as Edward Blyden, Joseph Casely Hayford, and Mojola Agbebi to assert various expressions of cultural nationalism and to center the importance of African institutions and political leadership. They remained open to cooperation with the broader diaspora — Blyden, after all, was from the Caribbean — but they rejected claims of West Indian and African American superiority. When West Indian railway workers came to West Africa in the 1900s and 1910s, Africans drew on these surrounding discussions. They harnessed the form of newspapers, specifically letter writing, to challenge colonial hierarchies and to develop a more genuine language of racial unity.<sup>97</sup> In attempting to overcome diasporic tensions, they also wrote a new chapter in the history of links between West Africa and the Caribbean, one that cut across the lines of empire.

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<sup>96</sup>M. A. Stephens, *Black Empire: The Masculine Global Imaginary of Caribbean Intellectuals in the United States, 1914-1962* (Durham, NC, 2005), 31.

<sup>97</sup>Here I am building on the work of Leslie James, who suggests: 'If we are to search for expressions of collective consciousness within Africa and the African diaspora, it is to the method as much as the content of newspapers that we may now turn'. L. James, 'Transatlantic passages: Black identity construction in West African and West Indian newspapers, 1935-1950', in Peterson, Hunter, and Newell (eds.), *African Print Cultures*, 66.

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