First Chapter

From Slave to Savage:
The Realization of a Topos (1800-1885)[1]

> All the religions of the world give the first place to morality. If there are any exceptions, they are at the extremes, Congoism on the one hand and Protestant Christianity on the other
> JOHN MILLER/THEOLOGY 1887

RADICAL DISCOURSE IN RADICAL TIMES: AN INTRODUCTION

Many discursive aspects of the "real-and-imagined" Congo were developed in times when the Central West African Congo was not yet colonially possessed or imperially exploited by Euro-American powers. This chapter traces the discourse surrounding the pre-colonial Congo in U.S. American intellectual texts from the late 18th to the late 19th century (1885, to be precise). This period bore witness to interactions between the Congo and the United States that altered the course of both regions. The massive slave importation from the Congo into the cotton-booming Low South of the United States constitutes one central dynamic that runs through this chapter. Permeating the period under scrutiny were extreme polarization and opposing trends in both the U.S. American and the global economic and social arenas, often revolving around the issues of freedom and civil rights.

This chapter demonstrates how these polarizations often arose from dialectical processes: Discursive action triggered counter-reactions by the key players in these struggles – men and women, Black and white, Americans and "Africans", elite and

1 This title builds on the essay by Dubravka Ugrešić, "The Realisation of a Metaphor."

working-class, and all those in-between that are now understood as agents within the analytic categories of race, class, gender, and ethnicity. This chapter describes the many discursive interactions between these actors by highlighting the often paradoxical and ironic social processes with which they had to deal. For instance, in a time of intensifying anti-Black racism and slavery, both abolitionist sentiments and African American activism, independence, and agency grew. The conservative "cult of true womanhood" presents another case in point: While it thrived, both the Women's Rights movement and "manliness" discourses intensified. Finally, at precisely the same time that ongoing calls for African and American unity were being issued, Black American institutions were organized around the exclusive categories of wealth, color, and middle-class virtues.

Polarizing dialectical processes produced radical discourses, and Congoism was one of them. Congoism's development in the 19th century will be systematically traced in this chapter. This will be done by reading texts by African American intellectuals both "widely" and "closely" (Hallet 2010: 294), moving gradually from a broad intertextual reading of the 19th-century context ("wide reading") to a more detailed text-immanent one ("close reading"). The "wide" contextual reading will describe 19th-century processes decisive for Congoism. Additionally, political trends, discursive themes, and perceived social fault lines in white and Black American intellectual circles, as well as in Central West African contexts, will be discussed.

This chapter attempts to interpret the context of the 19th century "through" primary texts. Thus, contexts are not considered external to the texts they produced, but rather regarded as "produced by and in the texts themselves", as Rebecca Karl phrased it in her seminal Staging the World (2007: 13). The texts through which the multiple contexts of the 19th century are read contain journalistic and popular scientific texts, such as the white abolitionist paper The Liberator and Black weeklies and monthlies like The Christian Recorder, The Colored American, The North Star, Douglass' Monthly, and Frederick Douglass' Paper.

Despite the aim of reading contexts predominantly through 19th-century primary sources, contemporary secondary literature plays a central role as well. Tracing the Central West African context through primary sources was a particularly slippery and elusive business, as the traces and voices of those enslaved, dominated, and destroyed in the 19th century remain either unrecorded or mediated via sources that tell the story of enslavement from the perspective of the enslavers (cf. Hartman 2007: 17). The reading here, ideally, seeks to circumvent the pitfalls of a top-down history by reading my carefully selected literature against the grain. This boils down to asking an uncomfortable, but necessary, question: To what extent can the

scholarly works by, for instance, Melville Herskovits be considered part and parcel of a Congoist discourse, albeit an academic version of it?

After examining the various American and Central West African contexts, this chapter turns to Congo discourse in exemplary African American texts. Antebellum and postbellum Congo rhetoric are discussed separately by reading two African American works of history "widely". In the antebellum section of this chapter, the overall narrative, political agenda, and intellectual-epistemic background of R. B. Lewis's 1844 history Light and Truth will be debated. In the postbellum section, George Washington Williams's 1885 work History of the Negro Race in America from 1619 to 1880 is discussed. These works exemplify a number of typical aspects of the African American intellectual "knowing" and "unknowing" of the Congo in 19th-century America. What is known about the Congo is decisively influenced by how it is known, particularly in terms of intellectual traditions, schools of thought, and epistemic trends. Concretely, Lewis could actively "ignore" the Congo by writing a universal history based on the Bible and on antique sources with an agenda that was decidedly Afrocentric. Williams, in turn, could "re-know" the Congo by producing an Americanist history that built upon scientific paradigms and scientific texts of late 19th century. This chapter will show how this worked.

To make investigative claims of "ignorance" and of a "re-knowing" of the Congo requires uncovering the alternatives – what could have been said or written by Lewis's and Williams's contemporaries. A "contrapuntal" reading, as Said terms it (cf. the Introduction of this book), helped to do so by confronting the utterances of Lewis and Williams with the Congo discourses of a) Black newspapers (mentioned before) and b) standardized knowledge produced by white-dominated American dictionaries and encyclopedias (e.g. Lieber's Encyclopaedia Americana, Webster's American Dictionary of the English Language, and Porter's Practical Dictionary). White Euro-American studies, monographs, and travelogues on "Africa" that were known or had been used by Lewis and Williams constitute another source for contrapuntal confrontation (e.g. Reade's Savage Africa; Livingstone's A Popular Account; Stanley's Through the Dark Continent).

After the works of Lewis and Williams have been read "widely", they will be discussed "closely" by highlighting how their "ignorance" towards (cf. Introduction for a discussion on "ignorance") or "re-knowing" of the Congo could be produced and justified. This analysis is aided in particular by an examination of recurring figures of style. In these sections, the Congo signifier is discussed as a double geographical figuration, vacillating between the Central West African Congo and the U.S. American Congo. To illustrate what this meant in 19th-century Congo discourses, one might look to William Still's 1872 work of history, The Underground

Railroad. There, Stills cites from a heart-wrenching "letter dated Lewis Centre, Ohio": "Ohio has become a kind of a negro hunting ground, a new Congo's coast" (1872: 761). How should this quote be read?

The Central West African aspect of the phrase "Congo's coast" is used tropologically here as an analogy for Ohio within the context of the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, a law that flooded the North with slave catchers from the South. To understand this particular use of the Congo, it is of central importance to come to terms with the Central West African reference behind it. "A new Congo's coast" hardly makes sense without uncovering what the Central West African coast stood for in African American discourses – namely, a slave district. This will be an important task in this chapter and a highly challenging one. Another result of this double figuration is the productive distinction throughout this work between the Congo as a geography and the Congo as a people, which begins to explain why African Americans were described as Congo: The geographical traits attached to the African region along the Congo estuary made them so.

The discussion of Lewis and Williams will be concluded by a more detailed examination, focusing on social power relations in the 19th-century U.S., of why their systematic "ignorance" and "re-knowing" of the Congo occurred. First of all, the silentium of the pre-60s discourses will be discussed via the terms "unknowledge" and "unknowing". These are discursive tools of surpassing or ignoring knowledge about peoples that are considered not worth knowing, since they are perceived as "slaves" whose insulting presence and existence caused free intellectual African Americans to assume "the only reasonable position [...] by a descendant of slaves" (Hartman 2007: 71): Silence, negation, and abjection.

Secondly, to debate the postbellum "re-knowing" of the Congo, the issue of knowledge proliferation and knowledge re-ordering during the rising tide of imperial epistemology in the late 19th century will be taken up. Through the central watchwords of that section – "classification", "progress", and "civilization" (Loomba 2005: 53-62; Burke 2012: 53-77) – Congo people came to stand for the internal and external "savages" that had to be uplifted from their low position in the supposed hierarchy of humanity through colonization, education, commerce, and Christianity.

What connects these ante- and postbellum processes of "unknowing" and "re-knowing" is the discursive creation of a racial, gendered, and classist "subpersonhood" in order to gain a "flexible positional superiority" (Said 2003: 7) towards what one is not – savage, enslaved, ugly, without history.

DIVISION IN BLACK AND WHITE: RACE, CLASS, AND GENDER STRUGGLES

19th-century intellectual America was a house with many chambers and most of them were deeply antagonized and "divided", to paraphrase Abraham coln.[2]Among the white American majority, the coexistence of pro-slavery politics and abolitionist activism led to ongoing sectional fights within the U.S. intellectual antebellum arena. The contradictions between national and state laws are only one example of the many tensions between pro-slavery and abolitionist political forces. For instance, while the Continental Congress3 prohibited the importation of slaves as early as 1774-1776,4 states of the Low South reopened and re-energized the transnational slave trade as soon as "the overpowering practicality" (Zinn 2003: 171) of booming sugar and cotton production demanded cheap labor.[5] This led to the importation of an estimated 250.000 slaves in the 19th century (ibid: 172), 100.000 of whom were imported between 1783 and 1808 (Wright 2001: 196).

Another example of the legal tension between abolitionist and pro-slavery politics was the admission of the Mexican war territories as non-slave states at the same time as the national U.S. government passed the controversial Fugitive Slave Act in 1850. Through this Act, free Blacks in the North had to prove their free status before commissions with little incentive to believe them, as these commissions were paid to return slaves to the South. This led to random arrests and wild accusations

2 Abraham Lincoln's famous speech, delivered upon accepting the Illinois Republican Party's nomination as that state's senator in 1858, is paraphrased here: "A house divided against itself cannot stand. I believe this government cannot endure, permanently, half slave and half free" (qtd. in Foner 2010: 99).

3 Which governed the colonies through the war against the British army (Zinn 2003: 81).

4 As Littlefield shows, the major reason for advocating abolitionism was to put economic pressure on British merchants, rather than to object to the inhumanity of the trade. Nevertheless, none of the states committed to the abolition of the external importation of slaves reopened the trade after the war, apart from those in the Low South (Littlefield 2005: 119). In the end, the policy was confirmed by the United States Federal Law in 1807 (Act Prohibiting Importation of Slaves).

5 Supported by technical innovation, such as Eli Whitney's improved cotton gin in 1793 (which separated the seeds more easily from the strands), cotton became the principle export good of the U.S., accounting for more than half of the nation's agricultural exports (White 2005: 169-170; Zinn 2003: 172).

based on "meager and conflicting evidence", as the African American abolitionist newspaper The National Era decried on January 2, 1851 (1851: n.p.).

Despite the ongoing push against slavery in antebellum America, slavery ultimately became big business again. In the wake of the flourishing cotton and sugar trade, as well as the stern enforcement of anti-fugitive laws, forced internal and external emigration boomed. New slaves were imported from Africa's coasts (mostly the Congo's, as is discussed in subsequent sections), while America-born slaves were directed from the Chesapeake area to the economically revived cotton and sugar regions in Alabama, Mississippi, Texas, and Louisiana (Wright 2001: 196).

To legitimize and stabilize the local slave- and plantocracy, legal defense mechanisms developed to keep both enslaved and free Blacks in check. State and city legislatures integrated "slave codes" into their legal systems at the turn of the century, of which Louisiana's are quite typical. Louisiana, a major importer of slaves from the Congo, declared that those enslaved owed absolute obedience to their masters, whose property they were. The codes outlined what behavior was socially acceptable and denied the freedom to be schooled, to assemble in groups, to travel, or to carry arms (ibid: 180-181). This legalized oppression was rationalized through discourses that condemned Black Americans as morally defect or Biblically cursed (ibid: 173), whereby pro-slavery advocates turned bondage "into something that at its worst was a necessary evil, and at its best a positive good" (ibid: 173). These rationales became attractive to African Americans, too, as soon as they were liberated from slavery; they were eagerly taken up in the context of postbellum African American discourses on Congo slavery, as is discussed in subsequent sections.

Abolitionists tirelessly protested the legal and discursive justifications of slavery, and the life and work of William Lloyd Garrison is exemplary in this regard. As the publisher of the influential abolitionist newspaper The Liberator and as the co-founder of the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1833, Garrison promoted a policy of "moral suasion" – a non-violent, non-political approach to activism that opposed slavery by moral argument (Everill 2013: 5). An excerpt from The Liberator on June 9, 1843 gets to the heart of this stance. "Moral suasion and law won't mix, any way you fix it," the newspapers states, "the moment you begin to talk about the latter, the former loses all its force, and is perfectly useless" (1843: n.p.).

Increasingly, Garrison grew critical of intellectuals who advocated non-abolitionist or violent solutions to slavery. A major target of his critique became the American Colonization Society (ACS). This organization succeeded in depicting itself as the solution to the "problem" of free Black Americans in the midst of slavery. Moreover, the ACS promoted the spreading of "an empire of American culture, civilization, Christianity, and commerce" in Africa (Everill 2013: 25), foreshadow-

ing, as well as actively participating in, the early stages of the colonial era (cf. the final part of this chapter, as well as the next chapter). Boosted by the state funding of Virginia and Maryland (ibid: 57), the ACS eventually gained enough support to establish new colonies in West Africa, which eventually became the much-discussed country of Liberia in 1822 (ibid: 28). Although Garrison initially advocated ACS's emigration plans for free African Americans, he dismissed the ACS in the end. The Liberator wrote of the ACS on November 19, 1831 that it "is the most compendious and the best adapted scheme to uphold the slave system that human ingenuity can invent [...] [I]t serve[s] to increase the value of the slaves, and to make brisk the foreign and domestic slave trade [...] It expressly declares that it is more humane to keep the slaves in chains, than to give them freedom in this country!" (1831: n.p.). While many African American intellectuals joined Garrison in his objections against the ACS, many more of them celebrated the existence of an independent Black state, as is shown below.

Whereas anti-slavery and pro-slavery activism were the major issues that led to a deeply polarizing field of discourses in antebellum white America, of which many intellectuals were very aware,[6] racial polarization was an increasingly large concern as it was stoked by the fires of industrialization, immigration, and the aggressive capitalism of the postbellum "Gilded Age" (Winterer 2002: 99).

The tension deriving from the protection of the rights of African Americans during post-war "Reconstruction" (Wright 2001: 202), via an army of both troops and officials from the Freedman's Bureau, was resolved (at least for white Americans) under the economic and social pressures of the Gilded Age. Under economic pressure, white support for the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments, as well as the Civil Rights Act, was withdrawn (Zinn 2003: 198-204). After this withdrawal, white supremacy was re-installed. "Black codes" replaced the former "slave codes" and peonage systems of "sharecropping" which kept African Americans beleaguered and indebted to former slave masters (ibid: 199; Frankel 2005: 256). This re-subordination of Blacks to whites (Burton 2001: 55) re-united the white majority on the anti-Black, racial plane. "By the century's final decade," Donald R. Wright infers, "almost no influential [white] supporters of black equality existed [...] by 1890 the only 'radicals' in race relations were the racist southern whites intent on driving Blacks down into, and keeping them in, their lowly place" (2001: 205).

6 Black and white contemporary newspapers frequently expressed their concern about this polarization. A case in point is the condemnation of the "fanatical" Fugitive Slave Law in Black newspapers. The African American weekly Frederick Douglass' Paper wrote, for instance: "If the North and West [...] were calmly united in opposition to the Fugitive Slave Law, there would be no fanaticism among us the subject [sic]" (1851b: n.p.).

The unity of the white majority in terms of self-proclaimed racial superiority by no means turned whites into a social monolith, however. Tensions within the majority were rising, too. Against the background of increasing economic competition and insecurity, white American culture increasingly redefined and differentiated gender roles in terms of true "womanhood" and ideal "manliness". As a moral counterweight to this economic strife, a "Cult of True Womanhood", as Barbara Welter famously termed it, developed in the 19th century, establishing the "female virtues" of piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity (1966: 152). True women, therefore, were to be passive and timid responders, silent and dependent "ladies" (Hafter 1979: 14). Domesticity in particular was much prized, firstly because it was considered the "proper sphere" (Welter 1966: 153) for white, middle-class women,[7] and secondly because it could be combined easily with the socially prized notion of motherhood. The cult of submissive, domestic womanhood had far-reaching consequences for the perception of female sexuality. Although American Victorians did not altogether deny the female sexual nature, good Christian women were not supposed to have a sex drive, nor were they supposed to experience pleasure during sexual activity (Newman 2005: 209; Donnelly 1986: 47). This led in American Victorian society to a rhetoric of restraint with respect to sexual practice in general (Donnelly 1986: 41).

In the footsteps of the social Darwinists and male imperial travelers, true womanhood also became an integral part of the discourse on "civilization". This strengthened the assumption that civilized womanhood had to be domestic and asexual, and that the most advanced races were those that divided most perfectly between the male and female spheres (Bederman 1995: 27). Prototypical for this type of discourse was the leading social Darwinist Herbert Spencer, who explicitly debated the link between civilization and gender roles in his popular 1874 Principles of Sociology (1897: 768):

When we remember that up from the lowest savagery, civilization has, among other results, caused an increasing exemption of women from bread-winning labor, and that in the highest societies they have become most restricted to domestic duties and the rearing of children; we may be struck by the anomaly that in our days restriction to indoor occupations has come to be regarded as a grievance, and a claim is made to free competition with men in all outdoor occupations. This anomaly is traceable in part to the abnormal excess of women; and obvi-

7 Christine Stansell has done a study of white and Black working-class women in antebellum America, City of Women: Sex and Class in New York City, 1789-1860, showing that the construction of separate spheres extended well beyond the white middle-class home.

ously a state of things which excludes many women from those natural careers in which they are dependent on men for subsistence.

To Spencer, the degree of sexual differentiation (marked by the "exemption of women from bread-winning labor") is indicative of the progress that societies have made. Societies have moved from "lowest savagery" to "civilization", Spencer claimed, here making an overt reference to the popular 19th century notion of "evolution", which discussed civilization as a process that went through the stages of savagery and barbarism (Bederman 1995: 25). "Civilized" women, for Spencer, were delicate, spiritual, quietly content, and dedicated to the home. Spencer thus legitimized the ideals of true womanhood, and domesticity above all. Women stuck in the "lowest savagery", in turn, constituted their implied counterparts. In his quote, Spencer also makes clear that he is struck by "the anomaly" of the "grievance" of women concerning their "restriction to indoor occupations" – discursively defaming those opposed to patriarchy.

Spencer had good reason to vilify his female opposition: Plenty of white women challenged the cult of true womanhood. Opposition would come in many shapes and forms. A conservative reaction to the oppression of women was to improve the rapidly deteriorating health of the corseted, inactive middle-class women through health reform and the propagation of physical exercise as a means of increasing their maternal capacities (Newman 2005: 118). More progressive responses came from health advisers and popular writers, who attempted to re-shape the discourse of true womanhood in terms of a tough, (sexually) active, self-reliant woman equal both emotionally and biologically to men – a concept which Francis B. Cogan referred to as "The Ideal of Real Womanhood" (Harris 1988: 331). The most radical challenge came from the ongoing agitation of the Women's Rights Movement, which demanded equality and reform with respect to marriage laws, access to the "public sphere" (e.g. education and work), and suffrage.

The activism of the Women's Rights Movement is illustrated well through Elizabeth Cady Stanton's 1852 speech, delivered at the "Woman's Temperance Convention" in Rochester. In the speech, which was re-published in the Frederick Douglass' Paper, the leading American women's rights activist mobilized the most prominent paradigms and vocabulary of her days to question the validity of "true womanhood". "By the light of science," Stanton proclaimed, "we also see how the salvation of man – the full development of the race, as moral and intellectual beings, the perfect subjugation of the animal, that now wastes and deforms God's perfect image, is all bound up in the freedom of women" (1852b: n.p.). Stanton mobilizes some of the major intellectual paradigms of 19th century intellectual life here,

such as "race", "science", "development", as is discussed in more detail later on, after which she continued her speech by claiming that women's "God-given prerogative is to be free, noble and true" (ibid). But instead of freedom, women were held in "a subordinate position, subject to the will and dictation of another," Stanton asserted, "thinking no great thoughts, and feeling no true liberty, always confined to the narrow treadmill round of domestic life, wholly occupied with trifling matters and ministering to the animal necessities, and lusts of the flesh alone, that part belongs not to woman" (ibid). Stanton thus forcefully addresses the oppression of "women" in the middle of the 19th century, ranging from social subordination ("treadmill round of domestic life") to sexual oppression ("lusts of the flesh [...] belong[s] not to woman").

Despite evoking the unifying label of "women", it is clear that Stanton is talking about white (middle-class) women throughout her passage; women in the working classes and those enslaved would surely suffer more under the "treadmill" of exploitative labor than under the drudgery of "trifling matter[s]" (ibid). Read against the grain, Stanton's passage suggests a disconnect between white and Black women too, and Stanton clearly does not address the latter. Moreover, as women's rights activists drew analogies between their own situation and that of slaves, as is the case in the exemplary 1850 announcement of the "women's rights convention" in the African American newspaper The National Era (titled "Women's Rights Convention"; 1850: n.p.), Black and white women struggled to establish a common cause. The National Era, declares that "in the relation of marriage", (white) women had been "actually enslaved, in all that concerns her personal and pecuniary rights" (ibid). Via the metaphor of the "slave" and "enslavement", white American middle-class women constructed a counter-narrative to true womanhood. Unfortunately, this constituted the "double move," as Sabine Broeck suggests, "of propagandistically evoking and disavowing a likeness of woman with slave" (Broeck forthcoming). This double move was executed, according to Broeck, "not in order to create a transgressive solidarity between the figures of 'woman' and 'slave' against the powers that be, but in order to create an enabling distance". White women's activists of the 19th century thus depended heavily on an "evocation of actual enslavement's annihilation of the human" (Broeck: forthcoming) in order to inscribe themselves into full, civilized, able humanness. A similar process can be observed in antebellum African American intellectual circles towards the Congo, as will be elaborated in the next sections.

As a response to the challenges of the women's movement, as well as to those of immigrant and working-class white male workers, bourgeois "manhood" became a topic of ongoing debate in the last third of the 19th century (Bederman 1995: 14).

Produced in a nexus of race, class, and gender, the watchwords of this period became "manliness" and "masculine", terms which marked the difference between any essential characteristics that men mutually shared ("masculine") and the attributes that the Victorian middle class admired in a man ("manly"; ibid: 18). The set of desired characteristics had been formed throughout the 19th century and were communicated and negotiated systematically via popular media such as the monthly gift book Godey's Lady's Book. In its April 1841 edition, the fictional story "A Tale of Domestic Life" described the desired character of a man worthy of being courted by telling its readers what should not be lacking. "Brilliant, intelligent, and amiable, he had not that strength of mind, that fixedness [sic] of purpose, and firmness in the path of rectitude, which are so essential in the formation of character," the author wrote, underlining those essential characteristics that cannot be replaced by other qualities, "however pleasing" they may be (Campbell 1841: n.p.). More than "intelligence" and "amicability", in short, firmness of character, strength of mind, self-reflectivity, and rectitude in life were communicated as the traits of desirable manliness. As with "true womanhood", these "manly" components were part and parcel of the late 19th century discourse of civilization. "Civilized men" had to be self-controlled and independent breadwinners and protectors of women and children, while "savage" men were their alleged opposites, forcing their women into exhausting drudgery such as cultivating the fields and tending the fires.

Like the white majority, which frequently split along racial, class, and gender lines, African Americans throughout the 19th century grappled with each other on many fronts. When the leading African American intellectual and activist Frederick Douglass ended his cooperation with the abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison due to the latter's paternalistic outlook on Black Americans (White 2005: 214), Douglass's newly founded newspaper The North Star would echo some of the disunity amongst African Americans by calling for its opposite in an article titled "To our Oppressed Countrymen": "Remember that we are one, that our cause is one, and that we must help each other, if we would succeed," Douglass reminded his readers (1847: n.p.). According to the author, Blacks were united by misery: "We have drank [sic] to the dregs the bitter cup of slavery; we have worn the heavy yoke; we have sighed beneath our bonds, and writhed beneath the bloody lash" (ibid). To Douglass, these "cruel mementoes [sic]" were indicative "of our oneness". Addressing slaves in particular, Douglass asserted that he and his fellow freedmen "are one with you under the ban of prejudice and proscription – one with you under the slander of inferiority – one with you in social and political disfranchisement" (ibid). The final lines stressed Douglass's desired unity: "What you suffer, we suffer; what you endure, we endure. We are indissolubly united, and must fall or flourish together (ibid).

Douglass's explicit evocation of "oneness" – in terms of being bound together by slavery, by social and political disfranchisement, and by "proscription" – echoed Ralph Ellison's idea of a unifying "identity of passions" founded on a "common suffering more than by our pigmentation" (1966: 255). Since Douglass addressed this "identity of passions" in the first edition of his newspaper, one may infer that this identity needed active confirmation, or was far from being understood as a given. The latter option would not be surprising in a period that saw tensions between light-skinned and dark-skinned African Americans, between emigrationists and integrationists, between free and enslaved Blacks, and between American-born and African-born Blacks. Even more than in the white majority strata, the issue of enslavement was a major fault line in the African American community.

In 19th-century America, the increasing importation of newly enslaved Africans coexisted with a thriving free Black population. The numbers of free Blacks rose from 59.000 to 488.000 between 1790 and the eve of the Civil War (White 2005: 201). This increase was the result of Black children born of free mothers and of Black immigration from the West Indies and Haiti (ibid: 201).[8] From the 1770s onward, free African Americans became considerably more self-organized. This was as much the result of the Black community's resilience as it was of the self-defeating racism of white Americans and their effort to keep Black Americans out of their churches, schools, neighborhoods, and offices. Because African Americans were not allowed to send their children to public schools until after the Civil War, when (mostly inferior) public schools were established via the Freedman's Bureau (Banks 1996: 10-11; Frankel 2005: 274), African Americans founded their own educational institutions. The same process may be observed with regard to the professional market. Since few jobs awaited free, educated African Americans in the 19th century, they created their own newspapers, schools, churches, and other segregated institutions.

Black churches increasingly took the lead in the educational and political organization of free Black life between 1800 and 1860 (Wood 2005: 90) by offering Sunday schools for children and informative presentations on contemporary political events (White 2005: 207). African American benevolent societies, in turn, provided everyday life services and assistance to their members, supporting them financially during during illness or after the death of family members (ibid: 208). Literary and cultural associations expanded the market for Black publications; at the same time, the Black press developed, albeit sporadically, from 1827 onward, offering the small percentage of literate African Americans a Black perspective on national and

8 Haiti gained its much-discussed independence from France in 1804 after a successful insurrection by the free Blacks that had begun in 1790 (Littlefield 2005: 163).

local events (ibid: 215; Hutton 1993: viii). A final phenomenon related to this increasingly organized African American intellectual life was the convention movement. This led to regularly organized political meetings on a state and national level between the 1830s and 1850s (Hutton: xiii; Banks 1996: 17; White 2005: 217). The New York state convention on August 29, 1840 is one such example; it tackled the question of "the extension of the elective franchise to us, as to other men", according to The Colored American in an article titled "The New York State Convention" (1840b: n.p.).

A common trait of many of these free Black institutions and initiatives was their (un)conscious organization around "wealth and complexion" (White 2005: 208-209). There were obvious color-coded, as well as class- and gender-based divisions in most organizations, creating a hierarchy in which light-skinned and fairly well-to-do male Blacks occupied privileged positions. Throughout the 19th century, the "mulatto" population made its power felt. This occasionally took the form of segregating light-skinned African Americans from their darker-skinned counterparts. For instance, light-skinned Blacks formed exclusive social ties and organizations that imposed and maintained a color line within the African American community. This was especially the case in South Carolina and Louisiana – not coincidentally, two states with a high number of Congo slaves who were said to be dark-skinned.

In Charleston, South Carolina, the Brown Fellowship Society was founded on November 1, 1790. This organization admitted "brown men of good character" willing to pay fifty dollars' admission (Lake 2003: 24), resulting in a membership comprised of light-skinned males with considerable economic success. Other Charleston societies, like the Society of Free Dark Men (later called The Humane Brotherhood; ibid: 27), were less marked by color- and class-coded memberships. These societies disdained to some extent the explicit elitism of the Brown Fellowship Society. Ultimately, the Freed Dark Men were as insular in their social relations as other societies (ibid: 19-50). They married within their own class and color lines, owned their own burial plots, established their own schools, and worshiped at their own churches (or worshiped together with white Americans). Some free Blacks from South Carolina also owned slaves, just as other Black elites in Southern states did (ibid: 31-32).

These racial hierarchies continued after slavery ended, thereby consolidating the social and political privilege of the African American upper class (ibid: 39). To Vernon Burton, this division of the African American community along racial, gender, and particularly class lines had devastating effects on the political activism of African Americans in Louisiana and South Carolina – two states with a large population of Congo slaves. "Class differences between the conservative, lighter-

skinned, property-owning free blacks [...] and the darker-skinned, formerly enslaved landless laboring class" hastened the breakdown of postbellum Reconstruction, reducing the effective exercise and unity of Black political power (Burton 2001: 54).

The construction of a Black male public "sphere" had substantial consequences for the African American political struggles against slavery and for civil rights. These struggles increasingly took place in a vocabulary that turned the African American struggle into a fight for "manhood" rights. Although Frederick Douglass supported the right to vote for women as well as men (hooks 1990: 90), he simultaneously and systematically equated "Black" with "men". As such, Douglass debated the quest for civic power through the lens of gender. By proving that African Americans were "men", too (Bederman 1995 21) – an assertion that was subject to constant attack by white supremacists (ibid: 25) – Douglass and other male activists equated "Black" with "men", just as women's rights activists had connected "women" with "white[ness]" (hooks 1990: 8).

It goes almost without saying that Black women commented on the use of "Black" as a synonym for "male" by African American spokespeople. In her famous "Address to the First Annual Meeting of the American Equal Rights Association" following the acquisition of Black male suffrage in the District of Columbia in 1867, Sojourner Truth commented on the "great stir about colored men getting their rights, but not a word about the colored women" (Truth 2011: 242). The danger that Truth saw was that if "if colored men get their rights, and not colored women theirs, you see the colored men will be masters over the women, and it will be just as bad as it was before" (ibid: 243). Obviously, the trope of the "master"/"slave" is at work in Truth's postbellum speech, just as was the case in the discourses of white women's right activists, who asserted their own personhood by disavowing the Black slave. A similar process of self-affirmation on the back of slaves can be extrapolated from Truth's paradigmatic quote. Given Truth's own status as a freed slave, her quote acquires particular significance when taking into account the perceived opposition in African American intellectual circles of the difference between "free" and "enslaved" Blacks.

This perceived opposition was debated frequently in intellectual circles. An excellent example of the rhetoric employed by free Blacks with regard to enslaved Americans was the "Colored National Convention" in Rochester, New York, as reported in the Frederick Douglass' Paper of November 25, 1853 in an article titled "Slavery: Colored National Convention" (1853b: n.p.). During this convention, Frederick Douglass pointed "with pride and hope" at the results of the "education and refinement" of Black Americans, leading to Black "mechanics, farmers, mer-

chants, teachers, ministers, doctors, lawyers, editors, and authors against whose progress the concentrated energies of American prejudice have proved quite unavailing" (ibid). These Black professionals, according to Douglass, were "the intelligent and upright free men of color" who would undermine the justifications of slavery by virtue of their "knowledge, temperance, industry and righteousness, in just that proportion" (ibid). Throughout Douglass's speech, these "intelligent and upright free men of color" are opposed to those enslaved, a circumstance that becomes apparent in the lines that follow. "Intelligence is spreading abroad, and light and chains are incompatible," Douglass is reported to have said, continuing, "If it be impossible to keep three and a half million of [sic] people in darkness, it will be impossible to keep them in the condition of beasts of burden" (ibid). With this passage, Douglass constructed an opposition between, on the one hand, "light"/ "intelligence" and, on the other, "darkness"/"beast of burden". By means of this opposition, a distinction and hierarchy is produced between the group of free Blacks and those enslaved: Whereas the former represented themselves as the torch of enlightened hope, the latter were depicted as their dark and ignorant opposite.

At times, the link between slavery and African primitiveness is made explicit. For instance, it becomes clear from Bishop Allen's 1827 letter (titled "Letter from Bishop Allen") to the editors of Freedom's Journal on emigration schemes to Liberia that Allen considered American slaves to be "poor ignorant Africans", who ought to be "civilized and christianized [sic]" as much as the Liberian Africans. The existence and history of enslavement led to harsh statements by Allen about all African Americans. "We are an unlettered people, brought up in ignorance; not one in a hundred can read or write; not one in a thousand has a liberal education," Allen castigated his constituency (1827b: n.p.). "Is there any fitness for such to be sent into a far country, among heathens, to convert or civilize them; then they themselves are neither civilized nor christianized [sic]?" (ibid). Allen obviously thought not. He goes on, "See the great bulk of the poor ignorant Africans in this country; exposed to every temptation before them; all for the want of their morals being refined by education, and proper attendance paid unto them by their owners, or those who had the charge of them" (ibid). This ignorance played in favor of the slaveocracy, Allen asserted pointedly: "It is said by the southern slave-holders, that the more ignorant they can bring up the Africans, the better slaves they make" (ibid). Bishop Allen's quote echoes some of the perceived fault lines running through African American circles in the early 19th century, revolving around the issues of education, Christianity, temperance, civilization, and freedom. Since Black Americans were predominantly ignorant "Africans" themselves who had not reached an acceptable standard

in any of these areas, Allen maintained that they should refrain from going to Liberia to try and convert the "heathens" (ibid).

While free Blacks separated themselves from enslaved African Americans, the enslaved blacks were hardly perceived as a homogeneous people, either. Slave owners would differentiate between slaves born and socialized on American soil and newcomers from Africa. The distinction between African-born and American-born Blacks was evoked consistently, for instance in how they were labeled: "Country-born Negroes" would be set apart from "salt water Negroes" (Gomez 1998: 168). Thus, advertisements such as one in The Pennsylvania Packet from the late 18th century, titled: "Two Hundred Dollars Reward", were published which promised to reward anyone who could return "their" runaway "salt water Negro man" (Cockey 1778: n.p.).

It is evident that the interaction between African-born and American-born slaves and free Blacks required considerable cultural negotiation – ranging from learning daily plantation routines and adjusting to social conventions to learning one another's languages (Gomez 1998: 14-15). In an article titled "Native Africans Enlisting" from April 1863 in Douglass' Monthly, it becomes clear to what extent these enslaved newcomers were perceived as different. The article recounts the story of two freed slaves called "Wimbo Congo" and "August Congo" who tried to enlist in the 2nd Regiment Louisiana Volunteers Native Guards ("Native Africans Enlisting" n.p.). Both men are described as "natives of Africa" from the "Congo river" who "give wonderful accounts of Africa, and tell how they were stolen from there and brought to America" (1863: n.p.). The article then tells its readers that both Congo-born slaves were brought to Louisiana "some three years ago on board of the celebrated yacht Wanderer, and sold as slaves to a slaveholder on the opposite side of the river, and were compelled to work until the city was captured by the United States troops" (ibid). Both "patriotic sons of Africa" tried to enlist in the U.S. army "in broken language" to defend their homes, a request that was first declined "because they could not speak the English language plain enough to be soldiers" (ibid). Still, both Congolese were enlisted in the end and "proved as good soldiers as we can find in the whole three colored regiments" (ibid). Despite its happy end, this story is quite telling in terms of the language negotiations and cultural accommodation that had to take place between Congo-born slaves and their environment.

Distinctions between slaves were also determined and enforced by the tasks they performed. In contrast to those working in the master's house, field "hands" were clearly held in lower esteem. A typical demonstration of how this division between "field negroes" and "house negroes" was produced (as Malcolm X would

phrase it ironically and critically, amongst others in his speech "Message to the Grass roots" in the early 1960s) can be found in a slave advertisement from The New York Evening Post. This particular advertisement was reproduced in The North Star of January 12, 1849 in order to critique the Post's double standards towards slavery – condemning it in print, but profiting from it via advertisements from slaveholders. This reproduced advertisement indicates clearly how slaves were divided in the slave master's rhetoric. It begins: "THIS DAY, the 14th, at 11 o'clock, at the Mart, on East Bay, will be sold the following family of NEGROES" (1849: n.p.). Subsequently, the advertisement separated the "field hands" (who are explicitly labeled as such) from the rest of the slaves, who are known by their occupation: "viz: Anthony, 40, field hand, and Ploughman. Juliet, about 40, superior Cook, Washer and clear starcher. Caroline, 6, Field Hand, very likely. Mary Ann, 3 years old" (ibid).

The division of field and house slaves often went hand in hand with the deprecation of the former vis-à-vis the latter. In an article in the Frederick Douglass' Paper, from July 6, 1855 ("Profits from Bees"), the low value of field slaves is emphasized in an anecdote by "Mr. Jesse Wilson, an esteemed citizen of Lamar County," who "realize[d] a sufficient amount of money from the industrial pursuits of his honey bees to purchase one good field Negro each and every year" (1855b: n.p.). Furthermore, it becomes clear from the many implicit and explicit utterances in African American newspapers referring to "field hands" that they were considered morally inferior to those working in the house. In the article "Negro Shot" in the Frederick Douglass' Paper from September 3, 1852, the story of how a slave was shot by his overseer is told. In the anecdote, the slave is offhandedly called a "field hand" and conspicuously linked to attributes, such as "insolence", "idleness", and aggression, thus reproducing the divisions instituted by slaveholders in the slave body (1852c: n.p.).

Judging by what we know from African American sources so far, Congo slaves must have ranked fairly low in the slave hierarchy of antebellum Black intellectual circles. Quite often, they were both African-born and field slaves, two aspects which aspiring bourgeois Black intellectuals would have disdained. Several cultural practices testify to the Congo's low position in the American social landscape. Racist and dehumanizing minstrel shows, America's "preeminent form of entertainment" between 1840 and 1900 (Bean/Hatch/McNamara 1996: xii), frequently used the name Congo in their imitations of plantation life. One of the earliest minstrel bands was called the "Congo Minstrels", as The Crest Musical Bulletin wrote in its article "Negro Minstrelsy from its Origin to the Present Day", looking back at the practice in 1908 (2002: 82); minstrel instruments were named after the Congo, too

(e.g. "Congo Banjo", Nathan 1996: 36). The link between Congo and "field" slavery was strengthened through reverse language appropriation. Words such as tota, potentially brought to the South by slaves of the Congo region, was turned into "to tote", a "universal Southern term" for "picking up" in times that involved so much lifting and carrying by Congolese slaves (Wood 2005: 88). In Liberia, in turn, slaves recaptured by British anti-slavery patrols came to be called "Congos" rather pejoratively, whether they originated from the Congo or not (Fairhead 2003: 22).

These traces provide good reason to believe that Congo slaves were hardly the most popular Blacks around, facing rejection from whites and Blacks alike. The full picture remains immensely blurred, however, as Congolese will not "speak" for "themselves" for a very long time (cf. the Third Chapter on the chances for and challenges of self-representation). Despite the unbalanced historical record, there has been much speculation with regard to how (many) "Africans" in general (and Congolese specifically, although there is less interest in this) were enslaved during the course of U.S. American history. Research efforts have attempted to grapple with Congo slavery by quantitatively and qualitatively evaluating documents from slave holders (e.g. Gomez 1998) or by executing anthropological research (e.g. Herskovits); others have theorized slavery (e.g. Patterson 1982) or have speculatively imagined the trajectories of Congo slaves (e.g. Van Reybrouck 2014). Read together, the overall discourse of this research and of this popular history is devastating for the Congo slaves, who are cast, for the most part, in gruesome roles in the larger narrative of slavery, ranging from self-enslavers to "socially dead" Blacks, as Patterson would suggest.

As argued in the Introduction of this book, the use of sources produced by those deeply involved in the organization of slavery can neither be reduced solely to the "mistakes" of the historians in question nor to their discipline. Although works of individual scholars are looked at more closely here, they are merely exemplary of a larger, historically contingent discourse. Examining the Congo along Foucauldian lines means, after all, digging into the "episteme, the discursive formation, the regime of truth", as Stuart Hall explains (2003: 55), which produces, regulates, and limits the range of possibilities of what can be said about the Congo (Jäger 2004: 127-130; Maset 2002: 80-81). To Foucault, this meant the radical removal of the subject as the foundation of history as well as the "death" of the knowing and self-conscious subject (including the scholar). Although this book makes a case for a careful return to the subject (cf. Chapter Three), Foucault's premise remains its fruitful starting point. The scholars from various disciplines mentioned here (sociology, history, anthropology, cultural studies) thus function as examples for the rhetorically recurring and socially conventionalized statements on the Congo within

academia. Contemporary scholars write within and against an archive and discourse that they did not create themselves – similar to the generation of African American intellectuals throughout the last two hundred years.

Melville Herskovits's seminal 1941 The Myth of the Negro Past constitutes an influential case of what is hypothesized here as "academic Congoism", or the ongoing fabrication of dismissive academic knowledge on the Congo based on deeply flawed source material and on motivations that converge with those found in the primary material (i.e. the Congo archive). A number of attitudes appear in Herskovits's work that are echoed in the work of others. One might begin with his claim of the massive importation of slaves from the Congo basin, for instance. This has been picked up by many researchers (including the work at hand, albeit skeptically), despite the unsolved problem of the fact that regional indications of slaves on traders' ships give "no clue at all as to provenience", as Herskovits himself noted (1941: 47). Even if the provenience is given, one still knows very little, it should be noted, as the Congo at that point had already become a highly malleable signifier – it meant, among other things, a Central West African region, as well as any captured "black from Africa", a runaway slave, and an "Angolan", as will be shown in subsequent sections. To focus quantitatively on what is said in slave records hardly produces a genuine image of the origin of these slaves. Moreover, as African identity was more a matter of "their presence in America" (Kolchin 2003: 41), these are some real difficulties in determining the scope of Congo slavery.

The severe limitations concerning the quantitative aspect of Congo slavery have not limited the claims made in contemporary research. Studies continually produce numbers, such as the assertion that 40 percent of the roughly ten million slaves shipped to the New World began their Middle Passage in the ports of modern-day Angola and The Democratic Republic of the Congo (Miller 1976:76; Klein 1999: 169). With these numbers in mind, the Congo-Angola region in general – and its slave ports Luanda and Loango in particular (Hall 2005: 153) – constituted "the single most important" slave-producing area in Africa from the sixteenth to the late 19th century (Klein 1999: 66; Gomez 1998: 142). Thus, this quantitative story goes, Central West Africa accounted for more than half of slave imports into British North America (Gomez 1998: 33), and these slaves were mostly transported directly to the United States and not via the Caribbean islands (ibid: 169). Due to their large numbers and predominantly young age (Kolchin 2003: 73), prices for West Central Africans labeled and named "Kongo"/"Congo"/"Angola" were comparatively low (Hall 2005: 16).

The numbers game so typical of the overall Congo discourse continues in a large amount of other research projects, as well. For the period between 1800 and

1885, for instance, we may read that of the roughly 100.000 slaves imported from Africa between 1783 and 1807, more than a third to half of them are said to have come from the Congo-Angola region (Littlefield 1991: 154; Gomez 1998: 137). An estimated 380.000 Congolese were shipped across the ocean from the start to the middle of the 19th century (Birmingham 1981: 124-125). This new wave of "Congoes" strengthened the already existing population of slaves originating from Congo-Angola in the U.S. slave economy of the Low South that predominated in the 17th and 18th centuries (Hall 2005: 160; Littlefield 1991: 154). The great majority of Congolese shipped to the United States ended up in the Low South doing intense gang labor (Hall 2005: 160; Gomez 1998: 144). Other research stresses that slave owners saw them as fit house servants because of their alleged weakness (Kolchin 19). General traits attributed to Congolese by their owners thus ranged from docility and comeliness to an inclination to run away (Gomez 1998: 136-141).

Herskovits, for one, was well aware of the epistemic problems involved in his own work and that of others. It made him return again and again to the problem of "not-knowing for sure" in his work (a trait which will return in contemporary, popular accounts of the Congo, too; cf. the Conclusion of this work). In terms of producing truthful anthropological knowledge, Herskovits's hopes were not high. "Deficiencies are greatest for Congo ethnography", he asserted. "The poor quality of the reporting [...] places great difficulties in our way when we search for detail" (Herskovits 1941: 78). Flawed, incomplete information, however, is mostly followed by more truth claims. Rhetorical disclaimers such as "it is said that" indicate Herskovits's doubts, but do not undo the comments made (thus, these comments live on in the archive). Via this strategy, Herskovits conveys to his readers that the Congo was a major slave port, since "it is said that slaves in some numbers were traded from tribe to tribe across the entire bulk of Central Africa, so that members of East African communities found themselves at Congo ports awaiting shipment to the New World" (ibid). Said by whom specifically, one might ask? Led by what interest? Transmitted through what kind of text or oral trajectory?

Skepticism is not out of place when examining how Herskovits arrived at his conclusions. If one looks at the researcher's methods, it shows that Herskovits bases some of these dismissive assertions on writers from the fifteenth century, when the "Portuguese made their appearance" (ibid: 85). Although these writers could be easily dismissed as "untrained observers" – as Herskovits's condemns Mary Kingsley, who was faulted for being "influenced by the period in which she lived" (ibid: 56) – none of this is done in the context of the Portuguese travelers. As is often the case in Congoism, the "rumoring of the archive", to paraphrase Ernst's book, is either

taken at face value, or rules of knowledge production are constructed that apply to the Congo only. I will return to Herskovits in the Second Chapter.

Once these Congo slaves entered the U.S., Herskovits's story goes, they could not contribute substantially to American culture. Or, supposing they did contribute, their contributions can be boiled down to folk and other traditional versions of culture. "The vast masses of Congo slaves that we know were imported have made their influence felt disproportionately little," Herskovits claims (ibid: 50). To make this assertion stick, Herskovits suggests that there are few traces of the Congo in the American archive (a claim that will be falsified here). This claim testifies to the irrelevance of the Congolese, despite their great numbers. Except for a "few tribal names, a few tribal deities, some linguistic survivals, and more often the word 'Congo' itself" (ibid), African slaves in general and Congo slaves in particular contributed little to establishing an African cultural trait in the United States, Herskovits asserts.

Instead of contributing to their communities, Herskovits writes, Congo slaves were liabilities to them. He draws here from Caribbean anecdotes in order to underscore the low stamina of Congo slaves, for instance – a trait which reappears in present-day scholarly work on slaves from the Congo. Gomez's work, for instance, reproduces the following anecdote from Herskovits: "In Haiti," Gomez suggests based on Herskovits, "Congo slaves are said to have been more complacent than those from other parts of Africa, and were held in contempt by those Negroes who refused to accept the slave status with equanimity" (1998: 136).

According to Herskovits, "Tradition has it that when the Blacks rose in revolt, these Congo slaves were killed in large numbers, since it was felt they could not be trusted" (1941: 52). Held in contempt by other slaves, Congolese were thus depicted as at the bottom of the planter's hierarchy. This may or may not be true, as the claim is based mainly on "it is said" utterances or some vaguely formulated reference to "tradition". Congo slaves seem to represent the quintessence of what Patterson termed "socially dead" Blacks (1982: 21): Slaves thus stand not merely for forced workers, but for people who depend exclusively on a single person for protection – in contrast to "free" people, who have claims, power, and privileges distributed across a broader community (ibid: 28). With no social ties to speak of outside the relationship to his master (ibid: 38), the slave had no social capital whatsoever. Although slaves were forcibly thrown into a working environment or social community, they remained marginal figures in them, Patterson suggests.[9] This was

9 Through the passing of generations, this alienation and isolation would only gradually decrease, thereby turning slavery into an ongoing production of long-term marginality (Patterson 1982: 46).

particularly true for Congolese slaves, it can be inferred, who were turned into "external exile[s]" through pervasive naming practices (ibid: 39).[10]

Although the empirical base and methods employed by Patterson and others diverge substantially from that of the work at hand, common ground is found in the general function of the slave: It is a category which allowed others to elevate themselves on the back of Blacks from Central West Africa. Some kind of agreement "between master and nonslave" can indeed be suspected, as Patterson asserts, through which "honorable membership" could be claimed for oneself "vis-à-vis the dishonored slave" (ibid: 34). How this worked in concrete terms is the subject of the next sections.

ABSENCE: IGNORANCE AND SLAVE EPISTEMOLOGY IN ANTEBELLUM AMERICA

Drawing on Lewis's Light and Truth, a 400-page tome dedicated to relating the universal history of the "Colored and Indian race", the conspicuous non-presence of the Congo in antebellum African American intellectual discourse may be discussed. To identify the function of the Congo in these discourses, Lewis's book will be read both "widely" and "closely", beginning here with the former. This section then turns to Lewis's narrative, as well as the political agendas and intellectual backgrounds that determine his work. At first sight, Lewis's silence on the Congo (apart from a single instance that will be discussed in more detail later) could be easily attributed to Light and Truth's many structural and factual flaws. This afforded the book a controversial status in African American intellectual circles. Martin Delany's rebuttal of Lewis's work of history in his 1852 The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States echoes the discomfort many intellectuals felt with regard to Lewis. In a chapter devoted to the "Literary and Professional Colored Men and Women", Delany faults Light and Truth in a bibliographical footnote for being "a compilation of selected portions of Rollin's, Goldsmith's, Ferguson's, Hume's, and other ancient histories; added to

10 As Patterson noted, slave-owners tended to rename their human imports according to their alleged origin – Congo, in this case. Since the Congo estuary was very much perceived as a slave-trading geography itself, naming someone Congo would not be a matter of stripping a person of his former identity, one might argue in opposition to Patterson (1982: 85), but constituted an act of re-enforcing an extreme form of fatalistic slave identity these doomed slaves already "possessed".

which, is a tissue of historical absurdities and literary blunders, shamefully palpable, for which the author or authors should mantle their faces" (2004: 143).

Delany's accusation of the usurpation of "Rollin's, Goldsmith's, Furguson's, and Hume's" historical works essentially faults Lewis for being too "white" in his source selection. At the same time, however, Delany takes issue with Light and Truth for being too "Black", although this also constitutes its sole "redeeming quality" according to the man. Thus, the book "is a capital offset to the pitiable literary blunders of Professor George R. Gliddon [...] who makes all ancient black men, white; and asserts the Egyptians and Ethiopians to have been of the Caucasian or white race!" Lewis, in turn, performed quite the opposite operation: He "makes all ancient great white men, black – as Diogenes, Socrates, Themistocles, Pompey, Caesar, Cato, Cicero, Horace, Virgil" (ibid: 143). Delany thus casts Gliddon and Lewis as occupying two sides of the same coin: "Gliddon's idle nonsense has found a capital match in the production of Mr. Lewis' 'Light and Truth,' and both should be sold together" (ibid).

Delany backed up his seething condemnations, which will be taken up in more detail in what follows, by mentioning "learned colored gentlemen", such as "Reverends D.A. Payne, M.M. Clark", who agreed with Delany's "disapproval of [Lewis's] book" (ibid). The deafening silence on Light and Truth by fellow African American historians from the 19th century, as well as African American abolitionist newspapers, suggests that there probably was a broader consensus on the questionable quality of the book amongst Black intellectuals (Ernest 2004: 143). At the same time, some support was given by white abolitionists, who celebrated the publication as a success for the African American intellectual community as a whole, consistent with the broadly paternalistic tone adopted towards Black Americans at the time. In the widely-read abolitionist newspaper The Liberator, Lewis's book was described in an advertisement title "Light and Truth" as a monograph by a "colored man" whose object "seems to be to state who, among the distinguished men of past ages, have been of Ethiopian descent" (1836: n.p.). The rather cool and uninspired conclusion of this review (which was a re-publication)[11] indicated some reservations about the book. The assertion that "the reader will find some facts in it that will probably surprise him" certainly would not have motivated many potential readers to purchase the book (ibid).

Despite his criticism of the book's "historical absurdities and literary blunders", Delany nevertheless found Light and Truth important enough to position himself explicitly and passionately against it. This gave Lewis's book a legitimation that seems quite undeserved for a work perceived as so absurd. One reason for Delany's

11 The review was published first in another abolitionist paper called The Emancipator.

comments may have been, no doubt, the status of the book as a "first", that is, the first published effort by an African American intellectual to produce an extensive work of history (Ernest 2004: 101). Another reason could have been the undeniable success of the book. In his rebuttal, Delany came close to congratulating Lewis for successfully applying the "'Yankee trick'" of publishing a book with the aim of "mak[ing] money" (2004: 143). The publication history of Light and Truth suggests that the book was indeed a commercial success. After the first and second editions were published in 1836 and 1843, the latter twice the size of the former, another revised and expanded edition came out in 1844 (Ernest 2004: 101-102). Lewis seemed to have had ambitions to expand and develop his work systematically by adding maps and more volumes (ibid: 102-103). All the while, Lewis tirelessly promoted his books with tours through New England, thereby turning his book, according to Mia Bay, into one of the most "widely circulated black publications on ethnology" in the 19th century (Bay 2000: 45-46).

When Light and Truth is regarded as a commercial hit, Delany's rebuttal seems more than understandable, particularly since Delany was convinced that Lewis's work was devoid of substance both in terms of content and politics. Some of Delany's critical arguments do, however, appear warranted. Most convincingly, perhaps, was Delany's assertion that Light and Truth looked like a "compilation". Light and Truth indeed cannot be called a closely knit history. Organized in fourteen chapters of varying length, this "volume of collections from sacred and profane history", as the introduction of the publishing committee stated (III), guides its readers both chronologically and thematically through the history of humankind, with the occasional leap to contemporary times. The work started with humankind's biblical origins (Chapter one), then guided its readers through the ancient worlds of Africa, Europe, America, the "Orient", and Israel. It does this by discussing, listing, or providing quotes concerning cities, kings, wars, prophets, "Colored Generals and Soldiers", the arts and sciences, and instances of destruction (chapters two-six, eight, and twelve). Between these fragments and towards the end of his work, Lewis either provides a chronology of the "Great Historical Ages" (chapter ten and thirteen) or takes a contemplative step back to discuss contemporary times, such as "the present state of Judah and Israel" (chapter seven), "Modern Eminent Colored Men" (chapter nine), and "St. Domingo and Hayti [sic]" (chapter fourteen).

Ultimately, Lewis's temporal and thematic back-and-forth produces the strong impression that the historian possesses little coherence in his methodology. Then again, there is too much of a recognizable structure, story, and telos behind Lewis's work for it to be regarded as a mere "compilation" or "a Bakhtinian carnival of documents", as Ernest has suggested (2004: 106). This holds up if one reads the text

"widely", looking at the historiographical and intellectual traditions in or against which Lewis was writing. As a historian aiming for a broad audience, Lewis both responded to and worked within the general intellectual trends in U.S. American historiography, leading to a history that was both universal and national, that drew from classicist and biblical authority, and that applied both romanticist and scientific intellectual tools. By evoking all of the aforementioned traditions at once, Lewis created a powerful effect of familiarity, which turned Light and Truth into a best-seller.

It is worth taking a moment to disentangle the various intellectual tools at Lewis's disposal. Universal history, or the history of humankind from its advent to the present (Hall 2009: 19), was a very obvious feature and structuring principle of Lewis's work. Parallel to this, the authority of the Bible and the idea of "Providence", or God as an operating force in history whose actions are mediated via the sacred texts of the Bible, also played an obvious role and served to structure the volume (ibid: 19-20). But Light and Truth is more than a universal history related through a biblical lens. "Next to the historical books of the Old Testament," Lewis writes, "the most ancient history worthy of perusal is that of Herodotus, the father of profane history" (1844: 310). This gives rise to a highly intentional "nexus of Biblical and classical authority" (Hall 2009: 62).

This mixture of classical and biblical texts reflected the broader intellectual atmosphere of much of the 19th century (with its last third excluded as a time in which modern historical scholarship took over; Winterer 2002: 9). Long stretches of the intellectual history of the 19th century were marked by Athens, as well as by Jerusalem, in what Winterer called a "culture of classicism" (ibid: 15-16). This was not an elite phenomenon. The "real and imagined affinity" with the antiques, as Joseph Levine has it (1991: 7), spread rapidly through the expanding public sphere generated by print media (Winterer 2002: 16).

This medial popularization made the classical past appear almost timeless, yet simultaneously modern and "real" – especially since a classical education became standard for any kind of career in public service. Knowledge of Greek and Roman classics was especially important and prevalent in the antebellum South, it seems. Nat Turner's slave rebellion in 1831 led many white southerners to embark on a more studied defense of slavery based on the antiques, for instance. In the 1830s and 1840s, when Lewis was (re-)writing and (re-)publishing Light and Truth, white southern nationalists and northern pro-slavery advocates began to turn to Aristotle and Herodotus to explain slavery and Black inferiority (ibid: 75). Lewis's reliance on classical sources was thus hardly a coincidence, but a way of refuting white su-

premacist arguments using their own weapons, i.e. Josephus, Herodotus, and Pliny, amongst others (Hall 2009: 62).

Lewis unquestionably also catered to an increasingly nation-oriented readership; history, more and more, was becoming as an essential part of "nation building" (Burke 2012: 192). American Romanticism, another dominant U.S. intellectual movement between the 1830s and 1860s (Hall 2009: 77), played an important part in this process (ibid: 6). Throughout Light and Truth, romantic traits, such as human agency, were stressed by portraying, for instance, "representative men and women", who illustrated that Blacks could be successful, too (ibid: 77). The results of this combination of Romanticism and Americanism can be witnessed in the third chapter, "Antiquity of America", in which Lewis lists the ancient authors, most famously Plato (1844: 125), who "are supposed to have referred to America in their writings" (ibid: 124). The function of such a list is quite obvious – namely, to inscribe America into a universal history through the romantic technique of cataloging its high achievers.

Even more essential to Lewis's effort was the addressing of Black achievement and achievers. These are exemplified by the representational Black success stories listed in chapter nine, which include Alexandre Dumas, amongst others (ibid: 304). These lists of Black successes fulfill a tripartite political agenda, traditionally identified as "vindicationist", "contributionist", and "Afrocentrist" (Hall 2009: 14-21). These three agendas are often all at work at the same time in Light and Truth. They thus lead to the defense of Black humanity against white, racist disparagement (vindicationist); to an inscription of Black achievement into world and local history (contributionist); and to the location of the first forms of civilization in Africa (Afrocentrist).

The "vindicationist" agenda of Light and Truth is overtly announced by the political introduction by the publishing committee, which lauds the book for its opposition to the ongoing trampling of the "weak and defenceless [sic]", in particular those constituting the human "articles of merchandize" (ibid: 3). In the same introduction, the "contributionist" aspect of the book also comes to the fore: Those in chains "in this country" are compared to the accomplished colored men elsewhere who enjoy "every inherent attainment, free from human interference" (ibid). Lewis's contributionist aim, that is, to propagate the achievements of contemporary free Black men abroad, created an ongoing tension between the temporal and thematic structuring in his work, resulting in the ricochet from ancient to modern times and back again. This is exhibited most noticeably by the insertion of contemporary chapters on "Modern Eminent Colored Men" and "Antiquity of America" in a book that was otherwise structured chronologically.

The most obvious aspect of the political agenda of Light and Truth is its Afrocentrism, which leads Lewis to focus heavily on the African roots of human civilization. Lewis does so by tracing humankind back to Black Ethiopia, a region close to the Garden of Eden, which the Bible located "eastward from Canaan, and north from the river Gihon, the land of Ethiopia (Gen. 2:13)". As a consequence, Lewis considers "the first people" to be "Ethiopians, or blacks" (ibid: 10), who he then ties to their most famous descendants: The Egyptians. Subsequently, Lewis "blackens" the ascent of Greece and Rome, as they were, according to Lewis, both colonized by the Egyptians. "It was during the eighteenth dynasty of Egyptian kings, that the first colonization of Greece took place", Lewis writes (ibid: 114). With the authority of the Bible, the antiques, and Rollin's Ancient History of the Egyptians, Carthaginians, Assyrians, Babylonians (which Lewis cites continuously, e.g. ibid: 40, 43, 50, 53, 59, 61, and so forth), Lewis openly contradicts and corrects popular accounts of the "indisputable evidence" of the Asiatic origin of the earliest denizens of the Nile, as claimed, for instance, by Gliddon's popular 1843 account Ancient Egypt: A Series of Chapters on Early Egyptian History, Archaeology, and Other Subjects (ibid: 3).

Since the ancient civilizations inherited their culture from Black Ethiopia and Egypt, a great number of ancient achievers from Carthage, Babylon, Syria, Greece, and Rome are "Africanized". This by no means meant that Lewis casts them uniformly as Black, as Delany suggests in his rebuttal. It is quite probable that Lewis considered Ethiopians and Egyptians, the latter depicted as the descendants of the former, decidedly blacker than the Greeks, whom Lewis viewed as merely colonized by the Ethiopians. It is probable that Lewis adopted a similar position regarding the blackness of Carthage, Babylon, Syria, Greece, and Rome as James W.C. Pennington's Text Book with regard to the Carthaginians. "They were Africans," Pennington asserted, "but African does not mean the same as Ethiopia" (1841: 56). The difference between Ethiopia and Africa was, as Lewis suggests, that "Ethiopia is a name derived from the [black] complexion of the inhabitants, while Africa is a name given to a tract of country inhabited by nations of various complexions" (ibid: 27). Thus, Ethiopia meant blackness; Africa, in turn, was discussed as multicolored.

The subtle difference between "Black" Ethiopia and "multicolored" Africa becomes apparent in how Lewis differentiates between Socrates and Plato. While Socrates is referred to as a "Grecian philosopher – the best of the wise men" (ibid: 303), Plato is labeled both as a "Grecian philosopher" and "an Ethiopian" (ibid: 125, 303), thereby rendering Plato as Black through his "Ethiopianness". Other examples show that Lewis links most of the male achievers of history to Africa, without necessarily claiming that their skin color was black. While Homer is an "Ethio-

pian" (ibid: 311), and thus probably considered a Black man by Lewis, Moses was merely a "general of Egypt" (ibid: 192), which leaves the question of his skin color open. Thus, although Lewis links all of the historical figures mentioned above to Egypt, Ethiopia, and Africa, he did not necessarily cast them as Black, as Delany suggests.

While drawing on the authority of ancient and biblical sources, Lewis also extensively utilizes popular scientific works and academic paradigms. He does not (or cannot) always acknowledge them openly, however. The attention Lewish lavishes on chronologies, most noticeably in the 70-page thirteenth chapter titled "Periods & C", seems, at first, an odd add-on to the rest of his work, but can be explained in light of the increasing mania for classification in the 18th and 19th century (Burke 2012: 52-66). This mania resulted not only in an extensive division of time, nature, and peoples, but also in a boom of specialized knowledge that was captured in new text genres, such as dictionaries, which Lewis relied heavily upon.[12] The 19th century paradigm of human classification, or the division of human beings into races according to biological, linguistic, and national traits (Gossett 1997: 128), truly pervades Lewis's work. When Light and Truth was written, the "index" of biologically determined racial specifics – most noticeably "blood", skin color, hair, nose, and forehead – had obviously gained currency (ibid: 70-80), as becomes obvious in Lewis's classification of "the blood of Africa" (for which Lewis, according to himself, drew from "Webster's Dictionary"; Lewis 1844: 340):

> Mangroon, is all black, a full blood, (a whole negro).
> Sambo,[13] is three quarters blood, (three quarters negro).
> Mulatto, is one half blood, (one half negro).
> Quadroon, is one quarter blood, (one quarter negro).
> Mestizo, is a half quarter blood, (a half quarter negro).

Lewis emphasizes the importance of this kind of skin color classification by returning to this exact same issue in the final pages of his work. There Lewis produces a racial scale, it appears, for the entire human race – from "Black" to "Mestizo" and "Mangroon" (ibid: 400):

12 These ranged from specialized dictionaries, such as "Dr. Brown's Dictionary of the Bible" (Lewis 1844: 15), to more general ones, such as "Johnson's Dictionary" and "Webster's Dictionary" (ibid: 339).

13 In newspaper articles from the Frederick Douglass' Paper, such as the 1853 article "The Editor", this designation of skin color also reappears, illustrated by phrases such as "our sambo complexioned editor" (1853a: n.p.).

> Between Black and White is a Mulatto.
> Between Mulatto and White is a Quaderoon.
> Between Quaderoon and White is a Mestizo. (After
> this the color becomes imperceptible to us).
> Between Mulatto and Black is a Sambo.
> Between a Sambo and Black is a Mangroon.
> Between a Mangroon and Black the white hue is lost.
> The complexion of the Indian tribes: Reddish, Copper,
> Brown, Black, and a white mixed hue.
> We are all one, and oppressed in this land of boasted
> Liberty and Freedom. "But wo [sic] unto them by whom it
> cometh."

While distinguishing between black and white by inserting a whole spectrum of variation between them, Lewis simultaneously declares a unity of sorts in the final lines of the second passage: "We are all one". One reading of this line is that the "we" in question designated both Black and white Americans. As such, Lewis could have been positioning himself in the heated debate on the descent of humankind, circling around the "monogenist" and the "polygenist"[14] theses, that is, the debate about the single and shared origin of humankind (mono) versus a multiple and separate origin (poly; Gossett 1997: 57-80).[15] More likely, however, the "we" refers to an imagined Black unity, signifying a self-declared "identity of passion" based on the shared experience of being "oppressed in this land of boasted Liberty and Freedom". This renewed reference to racial unity highlights the paradoxical epistemic background against which Black Americans were writing their histories. Racial in-

14 The work of de Buffon, who substantially influenced Lewis, was foundational for this idea (Roger 1997: 180).

15 When Lewis wrote his book, the debate was still raging, although monogenist thinkers had lost much of their scientific support by this time (Gosset 1997: 58-66). Lewis engaged in a delicate balancing act between both hypotheses. Positioning himself explicitly along polygenic lines would make it hard to mobilize biblical sources with any historical authority, since the Bible supported the monogenic hypothesis (ibid: 44). While catering to biblical authority, however, Lewis at the same time connected himself to the increasingly scientific and oftentimes polygenic belief in the quintessential natural differences between the races (Hall 2009: 62), of which the racial scales mentioned above are but one example. As a compromise, Lewis included nods to both theories by leaning rhetorically toward the monogenic theory, while implicitly applying the principles of the polygenist theory throughout his work.

dexations and qualifications within the white-dominated Euro-American scientific and intellectual circles from the 18th century onward demanded division; Black politics, however, demanded the opposite. The quote thus illustrates that the scientific paradigm of racial differentiation was probably gaining the upper hand in Lewis's work, despite the ideological nod to unity.

There were more signs of Black division in Lewis's color schemes. The idea that "negroes" who are "all black" are more "whole" than their light-skinned pendants[16] (Lewis 1844: 196-197) strongly echoed the vocabulary of many contemporary natural historians. The popular Leclerc, Comte de Buffon, and his Irish spin-off Oliver Goldsmith (who was explicitly and correctly cited by Delany as Lewis's intellectual influence) should be highlighted in this context. That Lewis would be influenced by these authors does not come as a surprise, since both produced works that had become canonical within the scientific circles of the 18th and 19th century (cf. Burke 2012: 101; Gossett 1997 35). If Lewis did not have access to their primary works directly, he certainly would have had the possibility of becoming acquainted with their ideas via popular, best-selling collections of their texts, such as the 1810 A History of the Earth and Animated Nature. In that text, which collected and cited the main ideas of de Buffon and Goldsmith (without separating or marking clearly who said what, thereby evoking the effect of a unified scientific voice), the ongoing fascination with skin color (black, white, red, and everything in between), along with other physical characteristics (height, hair type, lip shape, nose, face, and eyes), can hardly be overlooked. In the chapter on the "Apparent Varieties in the Human Species", a typical passage described the physique of the people of the African continent in great detail. The Egyptian women, for instance, are said to "be very brown; their eyes are lively; their stature is rather low[...]" (De Buffon/Goldsmith et al. 1810: 74). In their appearance, these women diverged from the men in height (the latter are said to be of "good height"), but not in skin color: "Both are of an olive colour; and the father we remove from Cairo, the more we find the people tawny, till [sic] we reach the confines of Nubia, where they are as black as the Nubians themselves" (ibid).

The latter example allows one to infer the extent to which skin color had become a mainstream intellectual concern by the start of the 19th century, having been building since the heyday of the Enlightenment (Eze 2000: 2-5; Winterer 2002: 111). Lewis does indeed align himself with "Goldsmith's, Furguson's [sic], Hume's" work, as Delany mentioned, but he does so in a critical fashion. Although he applies de Buffon's and Goldsmith's rhetoric, concepts, strategies, and methods,

16 A word that Lewis deconstructs and ultimately rejects on the next page, although he subscribes to the underlying idea of blood variation and blood purity.

he simultaneously subverts and inverts their defaming stances towards the African race in general, and that towards the Egyptians in particular.

This is neatly exhibited in how Lewis discusses the "essence" of the Egyptians. This is what is said in A History of the Earth and Animated Nature: "The most inherent defects of the Egyptians are, idleness and cowardice. They do nothing almost the whole day but drink coffee, smoke, and sleep, or chatter in the streets" (De Buffon/Goldsmith et al.: 74). Although Lewis accepted Goldsmith's and de Buffon's stance on the essential character of peoples, he refused to discuss the Egyptians in the way Goldsmith and de Buffon did – in terms of "inherent defects", such as "idleness and cowardice" (ibid). On the contrary, Lewis attributes characteristics such as lawfulness, wisdom, peace, and an "empire of the mind" (1844: 286) to the Egyptians: "Egypt loved peace, because it loved justice [...] She became known by her sending colonies into all parts of the world, and with them laws and civilization. She triumphed by the wisdom of her councils, and the superiority of her knowledge; and this empire of the mind appeared more noble and glorious to them than that which is achieved by arms and conquest" (ibid: 49-50).

The aim of 19th-century processes of categorization, historicization, and racialization was the depiction of the "progress" and "decay" of peoples, which boiled down to depicting the advances (or relapses) of whole societies from primitive to more complex and civilized stages (or vice versa; Hall 2009: 19). This fascination with "progress" and "decay" also had been gathering momentum since the Enlightenment, the thinkers of which provided a very particular vocabulary for discussing historical change and human differentiation through terms such as "race", "nature", "savagery", "civilization", and "progress" (Eze 2000: 2-5). As such, progress had been measured for quite a long time through the alleged static and backward state of others. In his story of Black achievement and empowerment, Lewis discussed Haiti as a model of progress, for instance, as opposed to the story of the "native inhabitant of America". Whereas the latter developed backwards due to "their connexions [sic] with the most degenerate part of the white people" (1844: 263), the former embodied the telos of Light and Truth, ending the volume on a high note. The then-recent events in Haiti were "singularly important" to Lewis, since they were "connected with the establishment and progress of civil and religious liberty and free institutions" (ibid: 386). The rise from slave state to Black self-government was very much the symbol of ultimate Black triumph, particularly for a Black American historian who witnessed the perseverance of U.S. American slavery (Hall 2009: 105). By placing Haiti in the final section of his work, Lewis rounds off the historical story of Light and Truth with the ultimate marker of Black success: an independent, self-governed, slave-free state called Haiti.

Against this complex background of cultural trends, political agendas, and scientific paradigms, Lewis mentioned the Congo only once. He did this in a short, ten-page chapter that discussed the "Ancient Arabians". In this chapter, Lewis tells the story of Abduhl Rahhahman, who was both "a native of the celebrated city of Timbuctoo [sic], in Central Africa" (1844: 344) and heir to the throne of a place called "Footo Jallo", twelve hundred miles from Timbuktu and home of Teembo, which was "now known as one of the largest cities of that continent" (ibid: 344). In this two-and-a-half-page account, Lewis stresses the geography and greatness of Timbuktu, very much in line with his usual vindicationist agenda. "The city of Timbuctoo is situated in the middle of Africa; and has been the object of the European's curiosity for many years" (ibid: 346). Lewis knows this based on the stories of "the slave-traders from the North, East, and West" who have spoken of the city in "marvellous [sic]" accounts (ibid). "Several travelers have attempted to reach it, but none have been able to get so far; and some have sacrificed their lives to the difficulties of the journey. The Prince Abduhl describes the city as surrounded by large and high walls. The government maintains a standing army; and the people are well advised in arts and sciences" (ibid).

Apart from its empowering stance, a striking trait of this quote is that Lewis links the "middle of Africa" to the grand city of Timbuktu, not to the Congo (as will happen later on with Stanley and Conrad, who cemented the idea of the Congo as "the interior" and the "heart" of Africa). But if the Congo was not situated in the middle of the continent, where was it? Lewis answers this question in the final stages of his story, in which he recounts how Prince Abduhl saved a "sick and lame" (ibid: 345) American surgeon in the interior of Sierra Leone. Being the first white man the prince ever saw, Dr. Cox was entertained "with the greatest hospitality" (ibid) for six months by the royal family in Teembo. While Dr. Cox returned to his homeland, the Prince was ambushed by the Hebohs, a slave-trading tribe who sold the prince to the Mandingoes, who sold him to a "slave ship at the mouth of the Gambia" (ibid). The prince ended up in Natchez, Mississippi, where he was recognized sixteen years later by the same Dr. Cox who the prince had saved in the interior of Sierra Leone. Assisted by others, Cox managed to liberate the Prince (ibid: 346). After his manumission, the prince left for Monrovia, Liberia, where he died from a "seasoning fever" a month later. Lewis ended the story and the overall chapter by honoring the "memory of Abduhl". In the final paragraph, the author cites a four-line poem in which the Congo is mentioned (ibid):

The palm's rich nectar, and lie down at eve
In the green pastures of remembered days,

And walk – to wander and to weep no more –
On Congo's mountain-coast, or Gambia's golden shore.

A "mountain-coast" – that is the only reference to the Congo in Light and Truth. In what follows, this reference is read both "widely" and "closely" in order to determine to what extent this utterance constituted the "full" range of discursive possibilities regarding what could be said about the Congo when Lewis wrote his book. To do so, this passage is read against Black and white accounts that serve as counterpoints, ranging from contemporary historians to dictionaries and African American newspapers.

The Political and Intellectual Agenda of Ignorance

"And walk – to wander and to weep no more – / On Congo's mountain-coast, or Gambia's golden shore." Although the origins of the poem are uncertain (Griffiths and Singler 94), it is safe to state that it was widely circulated over a long period within American intellectual circles – especially circles that discussed the colonization of West Africa favorably. As late as 1862, the notable African American intellectual and emigrationist Alexander Crummell cited the poem in his seminal The Future of Africa: Addresses, Sermons, etc., etc. (1969: 285). Three decades prior to Crummell's publication (in 1834), The Colonizationist and Journal of Freedom mentioned the poem in an article on "Abduhl Rahamann" (1834: 31). These texts were published in very different periods, of course. But what connected all of them was that they used this poem to evoke a sense of a carefree African "homeland" in order to legitimize the return of free African Americans to West Africa in general, and Liberia in particular. As such, the Congo appeared to be mobilized as just another, random region in Africa to signify the continent of origin.

At the same time, it is unlikely that the specific geographies relied upon in this poem – the Congo and Gambia – were used completely at random. There are qualitative differentiations between the Congo and Gambia in the poem, after all. While both regions are designated as regions near the sea, the terms used to communicate this were not quite synonyms. In contrast to Gambia's "shore", the Congo was labeled as a "coast". This differentiation may seem too subtle to be noticed, but if one looks at the entry "shore" in Webster's 1834 American Dictionary of the English Language, some substantial differences appear. Webster's defined "shore" rather generally as "land adjacent to the coast or sea" (Webster 1834f: 752), while "coast" was discussed as a particular "country near the sea-shore" (Webster 1834a; 156). The central term in the latter's explanation, "country", designated "any region, as distinguished from other regions; a kingdom, state or less district" (Webster 1834c:

200). Thus, Webster's assigned to "shore", via its central noun ("country"), a specificity and organizational depth (e.g. kingdom, state) that "land" did not possess, since it merely designated any "fixed part of the surface [...] any portion of the solid, superficial part of the globe", whether it was a "kingdom" or a "real estate" or any "superficial part of the earth or ground" (Webster 1834e: 484).

In keeping with the differentiation between "shore" and "coast", the adjectives used to describe the Congo and Gambia differ greatly, too. While Congo's coast is referred to as a "mountain", Gambia's shore is described as "golden". While the former designation is a geographical add-on, the latter reference is a judgmental and moral one, explained by Webster's American Dictionary as "excellent; most valuable", "happy; pure", and "preeminently favorable" (Webster 1834d: 381). Gambia's favorable shore was therefore pitched nominally and morally against the Congo's, of which it was implied (via the term "shore") that there was more to know than its relatively sparse description suggested. There are many questions that should be raised in this context: If there was more to know about the Congo, what was it? Where can it be learned? And why is this knowledge not imparted in Lewis's history? In discourse analytic terms, these questions aim to address the other socially and discursively conventionalized possibilities and knowledge that were at Lewis's disposal, but were not used (cf. Hall 2003c).

A first step in mapping the discursive possibilities and choices made by Lewis involves looking at the texts of other African American historians from the antebellum period. What one learns, however, is that they produced texts quite similar to Lewis's. In short, if African American historians mentioned Africa, they wrote almost exclusively about Ethiopia, Liberia, Babylon, Carthage, and Africa as a whole. Many of the works by fellow historians – Easton, Penningon, Garnet, Delany, and Brown, to name but a few of the major ones that will be cited in what follows – suggested a willingness to talk about "Africa", but in reality produced a discourse on Egypt that underlined its civilization, achievements, and political and scientific greatness.

A number of historians incorporated strong critical traits about Egypt, too, however, mostly to complement their main points. David Walker's famous 1830 "Appeal, in Four Articles" discussed slavery in the "ancient and heathen nation[s]" of Egypt at length (1830: 3). Walker's main point in his "Address" was to show that "the condition of the Israelites was better under the Egyptians than ours is under the whites" (ibid: 12). However, the "Appeal" simultaneously developed an overt story of Egyptian decay, which he considered a region of "Africans or coloured people" (ibid: 10). Walker explained the Egyptian "destructions" (ibid: 6) by mentioning heathenism and slavery, a thought that Ann Plato took up when she stated that

"Egypt, that once shot over the world brilliant rays of genius, is sunk in darkness" (1988: 30). Others developed similar images and ideas.[17]

Against the background of these discourses of Egyptian degeneration, much can be said for Trafton's hypothesis, in his seminal Egypt Land, that Egypt constituted a "figure of the double" (2004: 240), signifying both the "dark land, the land of Hebrew bondage and the home of slavery" and the "black land, a great African civilization" (ibid: 225). How Egypt was signified, according to Trafton, depended on the political agendas that were being advocated (ibid: 226). Strong vindicationist and contributionist agendas, such as those in Light and Truth, would typically lead to a strong emphasis of Egypt's greatness, for instance. Walker's "Appeal" suggested, however, that the rejection and embrace of Egypt could coexist; empowering political agendas and critical stances towards slavery in Africa were, therefore, not mutually exclusive.

In comparison to the "Egyptomania" of the antebellum 19th century, silence towards the Congo plagued all works of history. Early works, such as John Marrant's 1789 sermon "You Stand on the Level of the Greatest Kings on Earth", were as silent about it as Nathaniel Paul's 1827 "Address, Delivered on the Celebration of the Abolition of Slavery, in the State of New York". Book-length historical overviews – ranging from Hosea Easton's 1837 Treatise on the Intellectual Character, and Civil and Political Condition of the Colored People of the U. States to Pennington's 1841 A Text Book of the Origin and History of the Colored People and Martin Delany's 1852 The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States – literally did not mention the Congo once. To my knowledge, no 19th-century female writer with an interest in history ever mentioned the Congo (until Amanda Smith in her 1893 Autobiography). The reason why these female intellectuals ignored the Congo went beyond their restricted access to the male-dominated public intellectual sphere (Hall 2012: 45), since it can be noted that women did mention and write about other African regions, as the example of Ann Plato illustrates (cf. above). As such, ignoring the Congo seems to have been a matter of selection for Black intellectual women as much as for their male counterparts, although their motivations for doing so were not necessarily the same.

17 William Hamilton's 1815 oration "O'Africa" is also a story of Egyptian decay. Hamilton tells us that Egyptians have sunk from "honest, industrious, peaceable and well-disposed people" (1998: 93) to a level beyond good and bad: "Look at the present state of the present inhabitants of Egypt. Sunk, and they shall continue to sink, until they are on a level with the worm they crush beneath their feet; no effort can save them" (ibid).

If fellow historians did not write about the Congo, who did? Did standardized 19th century works of knowledge do so? Lewis was no stranger to encyclopedias and dictionaries. Along with Johnson's Dictionary, which does not refer to the Congo,[18] Lewis mentioned and actively used Noah Webster's Elements of Useful Knowledge (e.g. 1844: 399). Webster discussed the Congo in its description of the African continent, which mainly emphasized Egypt, Northern Africa, and the Cape of Good Hope, just as Lewis had done. However, in a subsection called "Western Coast of Africa" (which was incorporated into the article about "Morocco"), the dictionary did turn its attention in a lengthier passage to the Congo. The text began, "Along the western coast of Africa are numerous kingdoms or states, and countries of which it is needless to give a particular description" (Webster 1806: 256). Despite the fact that the dictionary did not show an urge to describe the states in Western Africa, Webster ultimately did provide a depiction. It mentioned "the principal countries and tribes" which are "inhabited by blacks" called the Jaloffs, Foulahs, Guinea, Benin, Loango, Congo, and Angola, "who resemble each other in their persons and features [...] They are mostly pagans and great believers in witchcraft, inchantment [sic] and magic" (ibid).

After a short description of the climate and the wildlife of West Africa, the entry in Webster's Dictionary concluded by alluding to the local economy. This consisted of the exportation of "gold dust, elephant's teeth, ostrich fethers [sic], and some other commodities, but chiefly slaves" (ibid). The latter economic sector is elaborated upon in more detail by claiming that "the traffick [sic] in slaves commenced in 1517 under a patent from the emperor Charles V. and has been extended to other nations, who supply their colonies in America with blacks to cultivate the lands" (ibid). In this passage, the Congo is once again identified as a "country", just as it was in Lewis's work. Beyond that, however, the Congo was explicitly named and framed as a slave economy that was said to be providing a slave "supply" to the "colonies in America [...] to cultivate the lands". It is at this point that the Congo-as-Resource in a capitalist world economy comes to the fore.

Although dictionaries like Noah Webster's American Dictionary of the English Language or Lieber's Encyclopaedia Americana were not mentioned by Lewis, they were very likely accessible to and used by him. The former dictionary explains the Congo as "a species of tea from China" (Webster 1834b: 178), which is understood by the Encyclopedia Americana in its 1835 edition as a "black tea" (Lieber

18 While at the same time integrating plenty of references to Egypt in its section "Chronological Table of Remarkable Events, Discoveries, and Inventions" (Hamilton 1810: 263-276), which constitutes a mixture of biblical and ancient events quite similar to Lewis's time lines.

1835: 161). Although this might seem trivial at first sight, the Congo as a black tea does confirm the connection between "blackness" and the Congo.

Lieber's Encyclopaedia Americana, in turn, included a lengthy entry on the "Congo", which provided detailed information on this "kingdom in Lower Guinea, under the sovereignty of the Portugese [sic]" (Lieber 1830: 425). In terms of natural geography, the article mentions the river "Zaire", as well as mountains and coastal regions, all of which are in line with what Lewis's poem transmitted. In contrast to the poem, however, the article also mentioned an interior Congo where the wildlife flourished and the Congo's slave economy boomed. According to the article, the peoples of the Congo "seem less intelligent than the other Negro tribes" (ibid: 426). Their "great indolence" was considered a significant "obstacle to their civilization" (ibid). Another obstacle was their ongoing engagement with the slave trade, for which they "sell their wives for a glass of brandy to a European" and with which they punish criminals (ibid).

In a similar vein to Webster's Dictionary, the article repeatedly emphasized the importance of the slave trade for the Congo. "Though this country abounds in all the productions of the tropics, there appears to be no commerce carried on, except that in slaves, of whom vast numbers are annually carried to Brazil" (ibid). Again, the link between slavery and the Congo is made, just as in Webster's Dictionary. After the description of its main provinces, the article describes how the kingdom of the Congo was founded in 1487 and subsequently Christianized by the Portuguese, which was a rather unsuccessful enterprise, since "idolatry [...] is more comfortable to their savage state" (ibid). The article concluded by again stressing the importance of the Congo in terms of slavery: "[T]his kingdom has been important to the Portugese [sic], on account of the slaves which it afforded. Among slave-dealers, the Congo men are generally not considered so strong and powerful as slaves from some other parts of Africa" (ibid).

As these dictionaries show, select information about the Congo, its geography, political organization, economy, and peoples was readily available to Lewis. Given the information that was there for the taking, ranging from a banal tea called Congo to a specific country labeled as such, why were African American historians led to ignore these options? To discuss the issue of silence among African American historians, Black newspapers will be used as a counterpoint to discuss what was known about the Congo in African American circles and why it was ignored in works of history. Central to this analysis of newspaper articles is the issue of "people, places, and processes" (Miller 2012: 28).

Ignorance and Slave Epistemology

Like works of history, Black newspapers communicated little about the Congo. The handful of articles that did address it, however, provide valuable clues as to why the Congo had become an ignored entity in antebellum African American intellectual discourses. The geography of the Congo primarily stood for a river, a coast, and a "country". As a coastal country – a depiction already evoked by the poem that Lewis cited – the Congo was typically located on the "Western coast of Africa [...] occupying a line of coast of less than three hundred miles in length", as the Frederick Douglass' Paper suggests in an article titled "The Slave Trade" on September 4, 1851 (1851a: n.p.). The port of Loando constituted the sole concrete place mentioned in these articles. This reduction of the geographical Congo to its "watery" regions – its coast and major river – was reinforced by how the "banks" of the river Congo were depicted, namely as a ship-oriented economy of "piers" and "wharfs", in the Douglass' Paper of March 1861 (1861c: n.p.).[19] In this lengthy letter from a reader of the Douglass' Paper, the Congo river was discussed as a tightly-organized commercial arena in which a ship, as it is told, "sails unmolested some thirty miles up the river, and with all the bustle of a new arrival, hauls into a pier opposite the 'factory' and warehouse belonging to the Havana Company" (ibid).

Within the commercial infrastructure of the Congo made possible by the water, only one economic activity attracted systematic African American interest: The slave trade. The "discursive events" that led a description of Congo's geography almost exclusively related to events in which slave ships, slave ports, or slave factories were involved. The Congo's geography, typically, would be mentioned within the context of ships that took slaves from the Congo coast or were captured while attempting doing so. An article titled "Capture of a Slaver" from January 5, 1848 in The North Star, for instance, recounts the story of a slave ship that was "taken at Congo river, at which place it appears she had been delivered to Brazilian purchasers" (1849a: n.p.). Other and mostly shorter articles in Douglass' Monthly in the early 60s, for instance the article from December 1861 titled "Conviction of a Slave Trader", tell the story of how slave-traders shipped "900 Africans at Congo River" (1861b: n.p.).

What sets the Congo apart from other slave-catching geographies is that it was considered one of the last bastions of the transatlantic slave trade. "The slave trade on the coast of Africa is nearly extinguished," the Frederick Douglass' Paper wrote

19 This quote comes from an excerpt from the article "Secret History of the African Slave Trade", reproduced from the Evening Post in Douglass' Monthly in March, 1861 (1861a: n.p.).

in the article "The Slave Trade" on September 4, 1851, with the exception of "Lagos, Poto Novo […] and eight or ten factories in the Congo country" (1851a: n.p.). Given the ongoing abolitionism of African American newspapers, the slave ports of the Congo were a continual annoyance, particularly since these ports were frequently used to bypass the anti-slave trade blockades by the British Navy. In an article from The North Star on January 16, 1851, a letter from the Boston Journal is reprinted titled "The African Slave Trade" in which "an officer on board of one of our ships on the African station" expressed skepticism about the "suppression of the slave trade by the present system of blockade", particularly in light of the dubious role of the U.S. Navy (1851: n.p.):

I very much regret to say, that for a long time the greatest facilities for carrying on the slave trade have been afforded by the prostitution of our flag. I believe full one half of the negroes shipped from the Congo southward, have been made in vessels under its cover. The position which the United States occupies upon the right of visitation and search, is such that a "bona fide" American vessel, cannot be molested by a British cruiser, even with a full cargo of negroes on board. England by treaty or convention, has secured the right, under certain restrictions, of visiting and searching all suspected vessels, except those wearing the American flag; – such, are sacred, and thus guarded, may embark hundreds of slaves under the guns of the British Commodore himself, avoid all interruption from foreign countries, and by hoisting the Brazilian flag may escape capture by our own. Now, I believe I know my duty as an officer too well to find fault with the acts of my Government, but after two years' service and experience as an African cruiser, and not wholly without observation, I am free to say that could the United States, authorities consistently make an exception to the general rule, so as to allow vessels notoriously engaged in the slave trade to be detained by British cruisers and delivered up to own, the disgraceful traffic would be greatly curtailed, and especially would the vile prostitutiion [sic] of our flag be prevented.

In this significant quote, the real-and-imagined Congo stood as a physical place from which slaves were shipped and as a marker of "the prostitution of the American flag". The Congo was thus more than just some place in Africa: It stood for the active non-commitment of the United States to end the external and illegal slave trade by refusing to be controlled by British vessels, even when the American ships were clearly transporting "negroes shipped from the Congo southward". In this quote, the real-and-imagined Congo geography stood for the political and moral disaster of slavery.

Various metaphorical operations transferred the "slavery" characteristics of the Congo to other geographical entities, particularly those in the United States. The Colored American explained to its readers in an article titled "Power of the Free

States" on May 18, 1839 that the internal slave trade in the United States was enabled by "northern slaves states" happy to sell their Blacks to the South. By doing so, those states became "the Congo and Guinea of America", according to the paper (1839a: n.p.), therefore transferring the real-and-imagined slave qualities of the Congo to the northern states.

A more minor aspect of the topos of the Congo-as-Slave was the trope of the Congo as "a home country", a feature that will return in subsequent decades. The Colored American, for instance, discussed the recaptured slaves of the famous and hotly debated schooner Amistad in an article titled "From the Herald of Freedom" on September 28, 1839.[20] In it, the human cargo was said to be heading to "their dear lost Congulese [sic] country and home" (1839b: n.p.). This idea of the Congo as a "mother-land", a term used by the Frederick Douglass' Paper on January 12, 1855 in an article titled "Our Correspondents" (1855a: n.p.), was already at play in the poem cited in Lewis's Light and Truth and would return in other poetic utterances, too. For instance, the 1849 poem titled "The Captive Dreams", published in The North Star on May 4, depicted a family of Tennessee slaves, with the father dreaming of freedom on African soil, where he could again chase "the Congo bird / Amid the cocoa bowers / Again his parents voices heard, / And danced away the hours: / Back through the lapse of years he passed" (1849d: n.p.).

People called Congo in antebellum African American intellectual discourse were rarely free Blacks.[21] That the Congo as a slave district also stands for the Congo-as-Slave is not "natural", but the result of a discursive strategy that aimed at merging those referred to as Congo with their slave environment. Living in a slave district could have easily opened up the possibility of framing people named Congo as both "victims" and "perpetrators", too, as would be the case in postbellum discourse (cf. next section) or the era of the Congo Free State (see next chapter). References to Congo people in Douglass' Monthly vary from "cargoes of Congos" in the article "Slave Breeding" (1859c: n.p.) to "Congo Africans for sale" in the article "Miscellaneous News Items" (1859b: n.p.). These slaves are discussed in ways that still reduced them to merchandise, in other words.

A slave could be identified as Congo by skin color: The blacker the slaves, the more easily they could be labeled as Congo. How this link between Congo and blackness discursively played out can be witnessed in an article from The Liberator titled "American Civilization Illustrated: A Great Slave Auction", reprinted April, 1859 in the Douglass' Monthly. The article critically described and discussed the

20 This was a reproduced from the Herald of Freedom.

21 One free Black called Congo was a supporter of the National Reform Convention: "Emmanuel Congo", as The Colored American records it on July 25, 1840 (1840a: n.p.).

slave sale of the "Butler stock", including "but very few" who were "a shade removed from the original Congo blackness" (1859a: n.p.). The article makes clear that Congo blackness was a label reserved to those who "have been little defiled by the admixture of degenerate Anglo-Saxon blood" (ibid). Full-blooded blackness was considered favorable "in the eyes of the buyer" since "pure blooded negroes are much more docile and manageable than mulattoes, though less quick of comprehension, which makes them preferred by drivers, who can stimulate stupidity by the lash much easier than they can control intelligence by it" (ibid).

In the same vein, other journalistic articles overtly linked physical blackness to intellectual darkness. In an article titled "Dealings with Slavery and the Contrabands: Facts, Scenes and Incidents" from December 1861, Douglass' Monthly separated slaves with "genuine Congo physiques" from those "as white as their masters, and as intelligent" (1861c: n.p.). An extreme case of this connection between Congo blackness and low intellectual capabilities is the story of Tom, the mentally challenged and untutored slave who was something of a musical Wunderkind, since he could play several instruments as well as any schooled musician. In an article reprinted from Dwight's Journal of Music from St. Louis, Tom is described in the African American The Christian Recorder on June 22, 1861 as "a grinning, idiotic, Congo boy [...] more like an ape than a man" (1861a: n.p.). Through this animalistic terminology, Tom's "blackness" and stupidity are stressed. The fact that Tom, as a Black "Congo boy", played the piano with the gusto of "a master" caused the narrator of the story to be "astounded, I cannot account for it, no one can, no one understands it" (ibid). The disbelief in Tom's skills did not only reflect amazement towards a gifted disabled person, but mainly towards a Black, animal-like Congo.

Real-and-imagined people called Congo were as transnational as the slave trade. Slaves called Congo were thus located discursively in both America and Africa, most prominently the area around the Congo estuary and Liberia. There were considerable differences between geographies and people called Congo in the United States (internal) and elsewhere (external). As we have seen, the internal entity of the Congo constituted a metaphor for racial abomination and abolitionist perversion (that is, by signifying "pure-blooded" blackness and ongoing enslavement, the Congo constituted the perversion of American liberties guaranteed by the Constitution). This internal Congo could only be turned into an abominable entity by reference to an external Congo in Central West Africa that was discursively reduced to a slave factory and a slave coast populated by incorrigible and morally defective pagans. Liberian "Congoes" strengthened this imagery. In Liberia, Congoes constituted both a "class" and a "tribe". The North Star of April 13, 1849 gives us an idea of

how this "class" of Congoes is related to the "tribe" by discussing the Liberian apprentice system in an article titled "Extracts" (1849c: n.p.):

> But there is another class, who live in the families of the colonists, and are bound to them for a term of years. Some are recaptured Africans taken off the Pons. They are of the Congo tribe. There are others from the tribes within the Republic. These are bound under what is called the apprentice system. I enquired how long the term of their service was, and learned that the Congos had to serve seven years. I asked if they were bound to educate them. They told me they were not, unless they choose to; but when there was a native school convenient they generally sent them.

The social order in Liberia clearly segregated the class of "Congos" from other Liberians by organizing a "native school" and by providing religious education "especially among the Congo negroes that are flocking in", as The Christian Recorder reported in an article from May 30, 1863 titled "A Bird's Eye View of Missions in Africa" (1863: n.p.). The reason for this segregation was that those people called Congo were undesired folk, both in Liberia and beyond. Their "real-and-imagined" enslavement would make them incompatible with the central beliefs, norms, and paradigms of those in power.

Congoes also presented an integration challenge to Liberian elites because of their "paganism". In a period that saw the "Great Awakening", or the opening and intensification of the "religious marketplace" for African Americans and their Black churches (McDonald 2001: 12), paganism was a cardinal sin. Thus, when a late 18th-century sermon summoned Black American believers to keep on progressing in faith, it also warned against what was left behind and should not be returned to: The Congo. "You are a people who have walked in darkness," the re-published sermon titled "A Sermon Delivered in Saint Thomas' Church, Fifth Street, Philadelphia, July 17th, 1794" went in The Christian Recorder on October 19, 1861 (1861b: n.pag.). The reason why the preacher called his African American congregation descendants from heathens was their supposed roots in "Benin, Congo, or Angola" (1861b: n.p.), and to remind them of what they once were: Unchristian and untaught. What was in the past for African Americans was a bitter reality for those contemporary "tribes" called Congo. To these tribes were sent "Bibles, missionaries, well qualified teachers, and as many Christian families as can be spared" for the purpose of "advancing the missionary enterprise", as the historian Pennington is reported to have said about the "Mandingo and Congo" in a public speech, reported in the Frederick Douglass' Paper of February 5, 1852 (titled: "Meeting of the Colored People of New York"; 1852a: n.p.).

From the latter suggestion that one send bibles to them, one should conclude that there was hope for the Congoes, as a class and a tribe, both in Africa and America. They were clearly not considered completely beyond education or salvation. It becomes clear from many newspaper passages, however, that this hope placed in the progress of the so-called Congo people was often more of a theoretical assumption that satisfied one's own interests than a practical belief in the Congolese's ability to improve their status. For instance, in an article on "The Law of Human Progress", September 14, 1849, The North Star explicitly incorporated "the Fegee Islander [sic], the Bushman, the Hottentot, the Congo negro" into its discourse of progress, since "no term of imagined 'finality' can arrest it" (1849e: n.p.). It is quite clear, however, that the Congo is addressed in this passage in order to validate the theoretical universality of "human progress" rather than to concretely exemplify the ability of the Congo people to advance. This strategy is also applied in the 1843 "An Address to the Slaves of the United States of America" by Henry Highland Garnet, who only mentions the "untutored African who roams in the wilds of Congo" (2003: 117) to emphasize his universal demand for liberty. Garnet's silence about the Congo in his lengthy historical work The past and the Present Condition, and the Destiny, of the Colored Race (1848), published but a few years later, shows how little interest he actually had in addressing the Congo as a topic in its own right.

Despite their (theoretical) ability to progress, people called Congo were conceived of as fairly inert, particularly those from Africa. An article on marriage customs around the world appearing in Freedom's Journal on October 5, 1827 titled "Marriage Customs, &C. of Various Nations" states (1827a: n.p.):

> The converts to Christianity among the Congoese, in their nuptial ceremony adopt the manners of the Portuguese; but no persuasions can prevail upon the most religious Congoese Catholics to renounce the custom of keeping as many women as their circumstances will enable them to maintain.

Obviously, this quote was not very optimistic about the ability of "Congoese" to denounce polygamy, since "no persuasions can prevail". Minor changes in their behavior aside, the external "Congoese" could not, according to the article, be redeemed. The inertia of external "Congoese" contrasts with those called Congo in African American realms. Instances of inner-American people called Congo conceived of as unable to adapt were therefore rare. If this suggestion was made at all, it was evoked via humorist allegory. In an article describing the internal workings of the newspaper in an overtly ironic manner (February 18, 1853), the Frederick

Douglass' Paper asked why its "colored editor" did not "learn to read". Its answer denounced less the editor than the entity to whom he was compared to (1853a: n.p.):

> It is a singular defect in our colored editor, a sort of bizarre make-up, which reminds one of the dear old Congo King, stalking abroad under his own palm trees, dressed in a red military coat and golden spurs, with a dusky hiatus between, an object for the profound admiration of himself and his very colored subjects.

The humorous absurdity of the editor's refusal to learn is highlighted by comparing him to the preposterous "dear old Congo King", whose unchangeable penchant for ignorant and tasteless pomp matches the editor's alleged pompous ignorance. An interesting side-effect of this allegory is that the Congo was implicitly inscribed in historical processes by reference to the institution of the king, which was never actually done beyond this passage. As such, when the history of the Congo was mobilized at all in Black newspaper articles, it was done so in order to ridicule and negate it. The complete silence about the history of the Congo did not mean, in other words, that newspapers considered the Congo to have none; it merely meant that they considered it too ridiculous to be dealt with in a serious and systematic manner. To what extent did this change in the postbellum period? This will be investigated in the following section.

PRESENCE: IMPERIAL EPISTEMOLOGY AND THE CONGO'S RE-EMERGENCE IN POSTBELLUM AMERICA

On the surface, postbellum Congoism was significantly different from its antebellum manifestation. To discuss this, George Washington Williams's History of the Negro Race in America From 1619 to 1880 will serve as a continuous point of reference. This work was chosen, amongst other reasons, because of its immediate success and enduring and wide circulation. John Hope Franklin's assertion that "at the outset few blacks knew of the existence of the work by Williams" (1998: 120) is thus questioned. Franklin's claim rests upon the obvious demise of the African American press in the 1880s, supposedly preventing works of history by Black Americans from being discussed or announced properly (ibid).

The disappearance of Black newspapers in Boston, Philadelphia, and Chicago was no doubt a serious blow to the circulation of Black knowledge. The work at hand, however, has insisted on white and Black intellectual "entangledness" (cf. Introduction). Seen from this perspective, it seems very likely that Black intellectuals

would have known of Williams's book despite this. When Black media ceased publishing, Black intellectuals still had to remain informed, and would thus have consulted white media channels. Chances were very high that they would read about Williams's book, since more than three hundred magazines and newspapers – ranging from the American The New York Times and the Magazine of American History to the British Spectator and Westminster Review – considered Willams's history worthy of critical acclaim, as Franklin himself noted (ibid: 117-119). This remarkable amount of attention can be partially attributed to the fact that the reputable publishing house G.P. Putnam's Sons published all editions,[22] both in New York and London (ibid: 119).

The willingness of the white press to discuss the book was matched by the serious interest exhibited by what African American local press was still left, and this took forms as diverse as reviews in media outlets such as the Huntsville Gazette to editorial comments in the Washington Bee (ibid: 120). The Christian Recorder also published a lengthy review of the first edition of the book on January 18, 1883. On top of that, after the book's initial publication in November 1882, it ran a three-week ad campaign from January 4, 1883 to January 18, 1883. The ad titled "A History of the Negro Race in America from 1619 to 1880 Negroes As Slaves, as Soldiers and As Citizens" announced the book as "a Great Work for the Negro Race!", thus overtly inviting African Americans to read the book as an act of racial solidarity, since it was billed not only as a history of the "negro" race, but also for it (1883a: n.p.). At the same time, the advertisement attempted to emphasize the importance and authority of the book by quoting supporters from the white N.Y. World. That publication describes the book as a "prodigious work [...] one of the most cheering books of recent times". Furthermore, the N.Y. World lauded the book's "philosophic breadth of vision" and finished by saying that "the author has presented with an almost poetic force one of the greatest problems that await human solution" (ibid). This quote from the N.Y. World again exemplifies the interdependence of white and Black intellectual thought: It shows how Black intellectuals tapped white authority in order to assert their own worth and quality. On top of publishing ads for the book, The Christian Recorder offered a deal for the two-in-one version at "the low price of $4.00" on September 10, 1885, as it concerned a book "which should be read in the home of every colored family" (1885h: n.p.). Other news media offered free copies of the two-in-one-volume edition in 1885 to new

22 Putnam's Sons also published the second volume of Williams's work, A History of the Negro Troops in the War of the Rebellion, 1861-1865, as well as the 1885 two-in-one-volume titled A History of the Negro Race in America 1800-1880. It is the latter volume that has been consulted in this book.

subscribers (Franklin 1998: 126), as in the case of the Bostonian Advocate or the New York Freeman (ibid).

What is behind these odd (and plainly false) claims by John Hope Franklin?[23] Much of Franklin's skepticism about Williams's success is caused by the alleged "complete obscurity" of The History of the Negro Race among Black and white intellectuals in subsequent generations (ibid: xix). Williams's alleged disappearance – another assertion that does not hold ground; cf. subsequent sections and chapters – clearly did not begin until some years after his book's initial publication. In the review in The Christian Recorder, "Williams History [sic] of the Negro", the book was consistently lauded, and in the end recommended without reserve: "It were to be wished that Mr. Williams would give the public a cheap edition of his invaluable work, assured as we are that it ought to be in every library, and on the table of thousands" (1883b: n.p.). If the book was criticized at all, particularly by condescending authors in the white press, it was due to Williams's tendency to repeat himself or to write in a "declamatory" fashion (Franklin 1998: 119). Another critique was that the history was lacking, in that it did not tie the great amount of facts together to produce a compelling narrative (ibid). This was also echoed by The Christian Recorder: "Mr. Williams is less of an analyst. He gives little evidence of knowing how to interpret a fact" (1883b: n.p.).

In general, however, Williams's history was very well-received. His perceived obscurity by Franklin was therefore probably caused by Williams's controversial personal and professional life. Accusations of embezzling subscribers' money from his short-lived Washington journal The Commoner hurt his reputation considerably in subsequent decades, for instance. The same went for the ongoing suspicion surrounding him because he was perceived as an opportunist who hopped from one profession to the next, leading to short-lived careers as a Baptist pastor, state representative, lawyer, and human rights activist. Enough accomplishments remain in the end to save Williams from obscurity: His engagement with the Congo is still remembered, especially his activism (cf. next chapter), as is his merit as a historian: W.E.B. Du Bois's 1888 laudatory comments on Williams as "the greatest historian of the race" surely helped his cause (qtd. in Franklin 1998: 133).

There are many reasons why white and Black readers found Williams's book appealing. In what follows, the intellectual influences and political agenda that

23 Who is, after all, considered by the Oxford Encyclopedia of African American History to be a deeply transformative figure in the American historical profession (Finkelman 2006b: 265), as well as the "most influential African American historian of the twentieth century" (ibid: 263).

guided Williams will be addressed, allowing, as with Lewis in the previous section, the man and his work to be seen in its broader context.

(African) American Progress as Program

One reason for Williams's success was that his work focused on the history of the United States, and especially its great dramas (the American Revolution and the Civil War, amongst others). Whereas Lewis's Light and Truth took a look at the present and future through an ancient, universal, and Afrocentrist perspective, Williams remained close to home, both temporarily and geographically, just as many of his late 19th-century contemporaries did. Williams, for instance, devoted the entire second part of his two-in-one-volume to "slavery in the colonies" and focused solely on the "Negro in the Revolution" in part three, in which he examined Black soldiers and intellectuals – their military employment and achievements, their "intellect" as astronomers, mathematicians, and physicians, and their overall legal status. Williams maintained this focus on the United States in subsequent parts by covering topics such as "anti-slavery agitation", the role of Blacks in the Civil War, and the rise and decline of Black institutions and African American achievers up until 1880.

The only part of the epic, 1000-page tome that departs from this America-oriented narrative is the roughly 100-page "Preliminary Considerations" (part one). The title already suggests the status of this chapter in Williams's larger narrative, i.e. as a primer for the story that really mattered: The U.S. and its Black population. In this section, Williams discusses numerous international topics. He debates the merits of Egypt and Ethiopia in the chapter "Primitive Negro Civilization" (chapter 3) and integrates a discussion of the "Negro Kingdoms of Africa" into chapter four (Benin, Dahomey, Yoruba). The Ashantee empire receives particular attention (chapter five), as do Sierra Leone and Liberia (chapter nine and ten). In between these chronologically organized African case studies, Williams devotes himself to discussing Africa as a whole – its "Negro Type" (chapter six), its "Idiosyncrasies" (chapter seven), and its "Languages, Literature, and Religion" (chapter eight). It is in chapters six to eight that the Congo is mentioned and discussed.

Through an American lens, Williams systematically inscribes Black Americans in U.S. history. The author announces this "vindicationist" and "contributionist" aim in the introduction (see previous section for a discussion of these terms), in which he states that "the history of the Colored people in America was required" (Williams 1885: v) due to a number of reasons, including the lack of "historically trustworthy material" (ibid); because "colored people" had been, historically speaking, "the most vexatious problem in North America" (ibid: vi); because "Colored

people had always displayed a matchless patriotism and an incomparable heroism in the cause of Americans" (ibid); and because Williams's history "would give the world more correct ideas of the Colored people, and incite the latter to greater effort in the struggle of citizenship and manhood" (ibid).

These openly communicated political agendas have much in common with those of Lewis's Light and Truth. To set the historical record straight, or to provide "more correct ideas of the Colored people", is an obvious goal of the work. Williams pursues this aim by integrating Black Americans into American history and by staging and listing them as American patriots, heroes, and scholarly people, which was a quintessential romanticist tool already at work in Lewis's work. Williams's history contains strong vindicationist traits, as well, in the form of what one could call a "pushing b(l)ack" strategy – in other words, by pushing back against the racism that distorted the "ideas of the Colored people" and by pushing Black to elevate the race in terms of "citizenship and manhood".

This double vindicationist strategy was very much understood and taken up in the many reviews of the book. Exemplary here is The Christian Recorder. The newspaper reported in "Williams History [sic] of the Negro" from January 18, 1883 that, until Williams, "[The American negro] could not look with any pride upon the past, as that past had been told him by those whose first business as an excuse for themselves was to blacken and defame it" (1883: n.p.). The result was devastating, according to the paper: "American black men holding Africa and all that relates to it, even the color of their faces and the texture of their own hair, in downright contempt; seeing with the whites beauty only in a white face, and 'good' hair, only in hair that is straight" (ibid). Thus, Williams's work is lauded for studying Black Americans "as part of the nation" (ibid).

This passage indicates that Williams's history was considered as a corrective for the "contempt" and the "prejudice" about and of Black Americans, their African roots, and "the color of their faces and the texture of their own hair". These views were clearly internalized by African Americans, the quote suggested, by virtue of "seeing with the whites beauty only in a white face". On top of that, The Christian Recorder read Williams's story as an internally unifying narrative of "our common manhood and our common civilization". With the reference to "our", African Americans are meant, especially since The Christian Recorder hardly considered the Blacks in Africa as equals. Paganism marked the difference between African Americans and Africans, according to The Christian Recorder, which openly asked in this review whether "the African" would have been as "far advanced as any pagan or Mohammedan power on earth, as far as Morocco, or Turkey, or the inferior powers of East Asia" if "Christianity been given him" (ibid). The review's high-

lighting of African inferiority should hardly come as a surprise, as Williams's work constituted an ongoing devaluation of Africa in history, particularly as compared to Light and Truth. Whereas Lewis was concerned with locating the Urform of humankind in Black Ethiopia, Williams refrained from discussing Africa in these terms. Although he describes Ethiopia as "the cradle of civilization" (Williams 1885: 40) and suggested that "Greece went to school to Egypt" (ibid), he did so offhandedly. Unlike Lewis, Williams never aspired to celebrate Egypt and Ethiopia as a major benchmark of Black achievement.

Although it might sound paradoxical at first, the reason for this reluctance to develop an Afrocentrist discourse is Williams's reliance on 19th-century "civilizationist theory" (Hall 2009: 155), casting history even more strongly than Lewis as periods of "advance" and "decline". More explicitly than in Lewis's account, progress could be achieved (or lost) via Christianity as well as through secular agents – "nations", "empires", "kingdoms", and "republics" with "different nationalities, and hence different languages" (Williams 1885: 2). The most notable examples of the latter were to be found in Liberia and Sierra Leone, which Williams discusses at disproportional length. Nations were truly considered by Williams as the "lighthouses" on the "Dark Continent" (ibid: 109). As such, Liberia and Sierra Leone were obvious exceptions to the common decline of the post-antique "negro races" – the embodiment of which was to be found in Egypt and Ethiopia, where progress was stalled by heathenism. "It is asked", Williams states in the chapter titled "Primitive Negro Civilization", "what caused the decline of all this glory of the primitive Negro? Why this people lost their position in the world's history?" Willams's answer: "Idolatry! Sin!" (ibid: 41). In addition to the lack of Christian socialization, the former antique nations were also steadily declining, according to Williams, due to their emigrational drive, a trait they shared with other African "cosmopolitan people" (ibid: 35). This trait will return within the context of the Congo, as well.

Williams used late 19th-century "civilizationist theory" to demonstrate his compatibility with the dominant strands of the American intellectual culture of that period, which argued strongly along national, racial, and linguistic lines (Gossett 128). But he also used the concept of "civilization" to challenge the notion that white Americans, and whites in general, constituted its apex (cf. Hall 2009: 155). Williams addressed this topic via a little intellectual detour. By discussing the "unity of mankind" on the very first page of his book, he dismissed the "absurd charge that the Negro does not belong to the human family" (1885: 1), which rendered Blacks unable to civilize. Williams believed that God gave "color, language, and civilization" to all humankind (ibid). "It is fair to presume", he reminded his readers, "that God gave all the races of mankind civilization to start with" (ibid). De-

spite this omnipresent ability to civilize, some peoples were, for Williams, clearly more apt to develop and advance than others. Although Williams never spelled it out, it becomes clear from his narrative that the "dark and woolly-haired people who inhabit Western Africa" (ibid: 31) are less prone than other Blacks to achieving what was understood as civilization.

To start understanding this, Williams's particular framing of "blacks" and "Negroes" must be explained, especially since Williams clearly distinguished between the two. This differentiation had been marked since ancient times by the hair: "Negroes" have "curly or woolly hair" (ibid: 32); "blacks", in turn, have "straight hair" (ibid). Based on ancient sources, furthermore, Williams comes to the conclusion that there "were nations who were black, and yet were not Negroes". He thus combines a national outlook with a thoroughly racialized one, as was the case with Lewis.

To Williams, Western Africans are exemplary representatives of the "Negro" type, not only because of their physical appearance, but mainly because of their essential inability to progress beyond the vice of slavery (ibid: 45). Williams underscores this difference by describing the "Negro" as "the lowest strata of the African race" (ibid: 117): "The genuine African has gradually degenerated into the typical Negro", Williams asserts. He goes on: "His blood infected with the poison of his low habitation, his body shrivelled [sic] by disease, his intellect veiled in pagan superstitions, the noblest yearnings of his soul strangled at birth by the savage passions of a nature abandoned to sensuality, – the poor Negro of Africa deserves more our pity than our contempt" (ibid). This typical "Negro" is thus depicted as a physical, social, and psychological disaster. Williams's point was to connect the "least civilized" blacks of Africa to the "worst" among African Americans. William begins by asserting, "It is true that the weaker tribes, or many of the Negroid type, were the chief source of supply for the slave-market in this country for many years" (ibid). However, he does not leave it at that: Slaves in the U.S. had bettered themselves through suffering and education, his story goes. Through the "severe ordeal through which to pass to citizenship and civilization", the African American, Williams asserts, moved from "idolatry" to "an extreme rationalism" (ibid).

Williams's passage did not deny the ability of West African "Negroes" to progress because the "slumbering and dying attribute in the Negro nature" could supposedly be awoken through tough, but necessary "ordeals", such as slavery, allowing them to pass from "pagan superstitions" and "savage passions" to "citizenship and civilization" (ibid). African Americans were therefore congratulated by Williams for having turned misery into salvation through (first) "extreme religious exercise", followed by an "extreme rationalism" (ibid). Apart from overtly separating

primitive and backward Africans from highly advancing Black Americans, this passage is particularly revealing in terms of the epistemic background against which Williams was writing. It is striking that "extreme rationalism" figured as the final stage of African American progress. This reflected what Peter Burke labeled the "knowledge revolution" of the late 19th century (2010: 256-258), which saw the ongoing substitution of theological and classical thinking for "rational" and scientific reasoning and methodology.

The coexistence of biblical and classical authority that dominated many antebellum works of history (Winterer 2002: 9) was increasingly replaced by "science" (ibid: 104-108). Science understood time as "progressive". As such, it comes as no surprise that the major engine of history in History of Negro Race is both "science" (e.g. Williams 1885: 36) and progress. Although Williams did discuss classical and biblical texts, he did so mainly to counter the defenders of slavery and racial oppression who still sought authority in both of them. As a general rule, however, Williams did not draw from the Bible or the antique texts as a historical guide to reality. "While I am a believer in the Holy Bible," Williams stated in the introduction, "it is not the best authority on ethnology" (ibid: 5), a stance that reflected the "liberal Protestantism" typical of the late 19th century, as Winterer called it (2002: 121). This kind of Protestantism designates a nonsectarian and non-dogmatic strand within American Christianity that defined and applied religion as set of ethical ideals rather than a trustworthy historical compass (Winterer 2002: 121). The end result can be seen in Williams, who favored "scientific", "objective", and "truthful" sources over others (cf. Hall 2009: 124; Winterer 2002: 104-105).

In the same vein as the mainstream historical scientists of his days, Williams aimed to "write a thoroughly trustworthy history" (1885: 7) that would "record the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth" (ibid). We can trace through his footnotes how he did this and which branches of the scientific revolution he mobilized. What obviously constituted dominant epistemic threads in Williams's work were the "twin sciences of anthropology and physical geography" (cf. Eze 2000: 2). Similar to Light and Truth's fascination with the different shades and meanings of skin color, Williams flirted with ideas of racialized physical indexes ("curly or woolly hair" vs. "straight hair", for instance). This reproduced select Enlightenment rhetoric surrounding Africa, which, as Winterer argues (2002: 111), was experiencing a revival in the late 19th century. As in Kant's "Physical Geography", for instance, Williams makes the distinction between "blacks" and "Negroes". To quote this Enlightenment icon: "One can say that the only true Negroes are in Africa and in Guinea. Not just the evenly smoked-black color but also the black woolly hair, the broad face, the flat nose, and the thick lips constitute the characteristics of these

people, in addition to clumsy large bones" (Kant 2000: 60). In this passage, Kant uses most of the buzz words that return in Williams's text – "true negro", "black", "woolly hair".

In all fairness, Williams never mentioned Kant, but he did overtly refer to other champions of the Enlightenment – Blumenbach and Cuvier in particular (e.g. Williams 1885: 23-24), who, due to the highly intertextual trading of ideas amongst Enlightenment thinkers, evoked Kant's racial ideas and discourse on "civilization" as opposed to terms such as "nature", "degeneration", and "savagery" (Eze 2000: 6-7). Williams plainly alludes to this rhetoric when discussing "the genuine African" as a "degenerated" being whose soul is "strangled at birth by the savage passions of a nature abandoned to sensuality" and who could only be brought to "citizenship and civilization" through slavery, which re-awakened the civilization abilities "in the Negro nature" (ibid: 117).

In contrast to the Enlightenment thinkers above, however, Williams left open the possibility that Blacks might become civilized. For this idea, Williams sought scientific support and authority in the work of James Cowles Prichard, one of the leading anthropologists until the mid-19th century (Petermann 2004: 400), mentioned frequently in Williams's footnotes. Prichard considered civilization a human trait, although he did see a correlation between light skin color and the ability to develop. Since the original "stock of men were Negroes" (qtd. in Petermann 2004: 401), Pritchard believed that those with a light skin color were further removed from their original states of primitiveness than those who were black (Petermann 2004: 401; Gossett 1997: 55). In other words, for Pritchard, the likelihood that a people might become civilized increases with the lightness of skin. Williams agreed, as is discussed in what follows.

Pritchard's (and Williams's) intellectual horizon thus mapped the ability to progress according to skin color. This orientation was influenced, but not caused, by the natural environment in which people lived. 19th-century intellectuals genuinely debated the effects of geography, climate, and nature on physical appearance and the ability to historically and morally progress. In the same vein as Prichard (but contrary to Kant and Blumenbach), Williams refrained from making the environment the ultimate determinant of skin color and hair type. He considered many of the theories which advocated this theory as "speculation [...] one theory is about as valuable as another" (1885: 37).

Yet, at the same time, Williams did not shy away from linking "low habitation" to the debased qualities of the "typical Negro" in Africa (ibid: 117). "Low" should be read both literally and metaphorically, since the correlation between flat or low locations and moral debasement – often framed racially through claiming some-

one's "blackness" – was quite strong by the late 19th century. This idea had been gaining traction since the Enlightenment. In Kant's words: "[T]hose that live in the flat parts are blacker than those who live in the high altitudes. That is why the blacker people live in Senegal than in Congo" (2000: 62). The point of Kant's remark was to link flat or low geography to the low and weak character of the "typical Negro", who is quintessentially black.

Williams combined Kant's rhetoric and arguments with the social Darwinian convictions of his times. He did this by discussing the "negroid type" as a member of the "weaker tribes" (1885: 106) which could be more easily enslaved than other Blacks. "Weaker" tribes suggested that there was a hierarchy among the tribes, comprised of "weaker" and "stronger" ones. This evoked the scientific paradigm of "the law of the survival of the fittest", to quote Williams, which "carried the rubbish to the bottom" (ibid). It is no coincidence that Williams wrote "survival of the fittest" to make his point, as this was an increasingly popular catch phrase of the social Darwinist Herbert Spencer, who articulated the social-biological dimension of the "struggle for existence" and the "survival of the fittest" in his 1864 Principles of Biology (1867: 48-60). As a theory of natural selection in the social and civil arena, Spencer's theory had a "tremendous" influence on the American academy viewed broadly, and on many individual intellectuals in particular (Gossett 1997: 153).

Obviously, Williams was one of them, along with African American intellectuals of generations that would follow, as is shown in the next chapter. The "unworthy Colored people" in Liberia, amongst others, were proclaimed by Williams to be "rubbish," opposed to "the better, wealthier class of free Colored people" – a reference indicative of the class divisions in Liberian communities (1885: 106). This happened in spite of Williams's rhetorical efforts to give the impression of racial unity. It will not be the last contradiction in Williams's history arising from his drawing so heavily on white Euro-American intellectual thought, as will become apparent in the discussion of Williams's depiction of the Congo.

Signifying by Any Means Necessary

Working in the same progressive,[24] profane, romantic,[25] and male-centered[26] manner as Williams, many works of history by African American intellectuals that mention the Congo clearly exhibit a new level of qualitative interest in Central West Africa. Williams himself returned a number of times to the Congo in the

24 Postbellum African American historians who mentioned or discussed the Congo wrote works that were permeated with the idea of temporal and social progress. A second similarity to Williams was that they, too, embodied the shift from the primacy of biblical and classical sources to the primacy of profane texts. Many titles of major African American works of history reflected both tendencies. Obvious examples are E.W. Blyden's co-authored 1871 The people of Africa. A series of Papers on Their Character, Condition, and Future Prospects (Blyden/Taylor/Dwight 1871) and William Wells Brown's 1874 The Rising Son; or, the Antecedents and Advancement of the Colored Race, whose key words ("future" and "advancement") imply that these are histories of progress. Moreover, many works in Williams's vein had a strong contributionist and revisionist take on the nation's history, as may be seen in William Still's 1872 The Underground Railroad (which inscribed the clandestine network of white and Black Americans who helped fugitive slaves escape to Canada) and William Wells Brown's 1867 The Negro in the American Rebellion, His Heroism and His Fidelity (which addressed and celebrated Black contributions in the American revolutionary era).

25 The quintessential romantic tool of listing representative men and women was applied in many works. William Wells Brown, who truly dominated the market of Black historical works in the postbellum period, was a notable example of this tendency. His 1863 The Black Man: His Antecedents, His Genius, and His Achievements contained a series of lists of Black achievers, many of whom were eighteenth- and nineteenth-century American contemporaries, such as the activist Henry Highland Garnet, the revolutionary Nat Turner, the poet Phillis Wheatley, and historians Martin Delany, William Nell, and James Pennington.

26 The female Black authors consulted for this work refrained from discussing or mentioning the Congo altogether. Frank A. Rollin comes closest in her 1883 biography Life and Public Services of Martin R. Delany, in which she discussed Delany's maternal grandfather as "an African prince from the Niger valley regions of Central Africa" who, in his youth, was captured "during hostilities between the Mandingoes, Fellahtas, and Houssa [sic]" (1883: 16). While Rollin ignored the Congo, she did mention Egypt and Ethiopia a number of times. One encounters the same omission in Sojourner Truth's 1878 biography Narrative of Sojourner Truth; while Egypt and Ethiopia are gestured towards, the Congo is silenced.

chapter titled "Preliminary Considerations". The privilege of being discussed independently from other African topics is granted only to Sierra Leone and Liberia in Williams's story, together with some of the "Negro Kingdoms of Africa" (Benin, Dahomey, Yoruba) and the "Ashantee Empire". The Congo appears in Williams's more general dealings with the African "Negro Type" (chapter six), "African Idiosyncrasies" (chapter seven), and African "Languages, Literature, and Religion" (chapter eight). In the "Appendix" of the book, Williams returns to the Congo by quoting from Pigafetta's sixteenth century travel account, as is later discussed later.

To tell the story of the Congo, Williams again turns to the scientific and empirical paradigms of his days. His sources range from the natural histories of Prichard and Blumenbach to the travel accounts of Livingstone and Henry Morgan Stanley (Dr. Livingstone's Expedition to the Zambesi and Through the Dark Continent especially), and from contemporary and popular scientific literature on Africa, such as Wilson's 1856 Western Africa and Wood's 1870 Uncivilized Races of Men, to Du Chaillu's 1861 travel report Explorations & Adventures in Equatorial Africa. However, one book that truly sticks out in Willams's list (and which constitutes an odd bedfellow amidst the rest of the literature used) is Winwood Reade's 1864 Savage Africa. This book was a written report on the author's travels in Equatorial, South-Western, and North-Western Africa, mainly compiled from "letters written to a friend at monthly intervals" (Reade 1864: n.p.), as the Preface suggests in defense of the somewhat "familiar and sometimes egotistical tone" (ibid) of his book.

By taking up Savage Africa, Williams was relying on a book that was quite popular in his own days. Since then, however, it has largely disappeared from the historical archive. Since the book meanders between the genres of travel narrative and imaginative fiction, many twenty-first-century historians virtually ignore Reade as a subject of inquiry (Driver 2001: 92). In his own days, however, Reade's books found a wide readership amongst white and Black intellectuals. Reade's 1872 Martyrdom of Man was hailed as a masterwork by contemporaries as various as H.G. Wells, Cecil Rhodes, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Charles Darwin (ibid). Although Savage Africa was not as lauded and accepted as Martyrdom of Man, it was nevertheless part of a critical debate that provoked serious reviews in respectable magazines, as illustrated by the Anthropological Review from May 1864. Although this review criticized the author's liberal drawing on accounts other than his own, particularly from "anecdotes of former travelers" (1864: 123), the final evaluation of Savage Africa is far from negative. The book, in the end, is praised for "the somewhat rare merit of honestly describing what the author saw, and not what he would have liked to have seen" (ibid: 126).

Williams clearly considered Reade's Savage Africa as an authoritative text on Africa. The African American historian quotes him in his History in lengthy passages that are introduced without qualification or explanation. By introducing these passages with lines like "Mr. Reade says of such government [...]" (1885: 55) or "Mr. Reade says of the musicians he met up the Senegal [...]" (ibid: 78), Williams aligns himself quietly with Reade's assertions, raising them to the level of fact. Williams values Reade as an eyewitness of the African continent. "We have quoted thus extensively from Mr. Reade" (ibid: 61), Williams writes, "because he has given a fair account of the peoples he met" (ibid). Although Reade announced in his Preface that he had no "pretensions to the title of Explorer", but sought to travel "with no special object [...] to flaner in the virgin forest; to flirt with pretty savages, and to smoke his cigar among cannibals" (1864: n.p.), he could nevertheless successfully claim authority on Africa due to his rhetorical commitment to the "sacred facts of science" (ibid: 399). Through this positivist position, which Reade shared with Williams and the academic mainstream of his days, it seems his success was ensured. As a flaneur with a scientific posture, Reade inscribed himself successfully in the 19th-century "culture of exploration" (Driver 2001: 10) because he could credibly claim to provide accurate and credible observations (ibid: 51) of what he saw in Africa. Reade's empirical factuality was provided by his name, background, and class, among other characteristics, which formed the emerging standard for believable knowledge production. Despite his failure to graduate from Oxford, he was a member of a well-to-do and well-known family (his uncle was the famous novelist Charles Reade; Hargreaves 1957: 306). This would make his observations quite believable indeed.

Savage Africa found favor with Williams because of Reade's story of the United States and Britain. Both are depicted as the epitome of 19th-century civilization. Reade labeled the United States a "model land of liberty" (1864: 36) and Britain a secular paradise: "The earth should be a reflection of heaven, and heaven is an empire" (ibid). Reade held numerous stances, concerning progress and race particularly, which aligned with Williams's. Reade's assertion that the "African slave-trade has done its work in assisting the progress of civilization" finds strong parallels in Williams's account. Similar to Williams's Spencerian division of the Liberian population into "rubbish" and a "wealthier class of free Colored people", Reade divided Sierra Leone into "Africans of the highest grade" and the "rubbish" to be found in the recaptured African slaves sent over to the English colony (ibid: 27).

Though he describes him as a "good writer" (Williams 1885: 61), Williams does not buy into Reade's whole account. At particular points in the story, in fact, Williams criticizes Reade. While discussing Sierra Leone, Williams faults Reade

for being "somewhat prejudiced against the Negro" (ibid: 89).[27] Indeed, Reade considered the Blacks there to be nothing more than "trained animals", Williams asserts, and were depicted by Reade as merely capable of showing a "display of imitative faculties, with an utter barrenness of creative power" (ibid: 32). Imitating "the white man as the ape imitates the negro", inhabitants of Sierra Leone were thus reduced by Reade to "a caricature" (ibid: 30). Williams clearly objected to this depiction, since he considered Sierra Leone to be "a renewed spot on the edge of the Dark Continent" in which "civilization is at its noonday tide, and the hopes of the most sanguine friends of the liberated Negro have been more than realized" (ibid: 103). Williams thus contradicts Reade's assessment of Sierra Leone, also taking issue with Reade's condemnation of all former slaves in the Americas as the offspring of "the dangerous classes of Africa, the destitute and the criminal" (Reade 1864: 237). There, too, Williams opposes Savage Africa by stating that "many of the noblest types of mankind in Africa, through the uncertainties of war, found their way to the horrors of the middle passage" (Williams 1885: 43). Thus, while valuing Reade's work on many fronts, there were also clear limits in what Williams was willing to accept, particularly when it ran counter to his political outlook.

As ambivalent as Williams might have been towards some passages and attitudes in Savage Africa, the African American historian clearly considered Reade a reliable source for descriptions of the Congo, as did Williams's contemporaries. For instance, Reverend J.G. Wood's 1870 Uncivilized Races of Men of All Countries of the World,[28] which was also taken up by Williams, referred to Reade while discussing the Congo in his entry "The Bubés and Congoese". "The following account is mostly taken from Mr. Reade's condensation" (Wood 1870: 614), it is stated as a matter of fact. Williams adopted a similar factual attitude towards Reade. This is quite remarkable, as Reade did not, in the end, visit the Congo and could not claim the authority of an eye-witness – the premise on which his authority was normally constructed. After a "certain tribe at the mouth of the river" had robbed a schooner and "had declared that they would in future kill any Englishman they could get hold of", Reade gave up on his "Congo enterprise, and took a passage to the islands of the Cape de Verd [sic]" (Reade 1864: 282-283).

The information presented by Read in the twenty-seventh chapter, on the ancient Congo Empire, therefore drew from sources other than his own observations,

27 A suggestion also made by the Anthropological Review, which faulted the author for talking "nonsense" in that same context (1864: 124).

28 Which had the self-declared aim of collecting the information from "many travelers [...] scattered rather at random through their books, of the habits and modes life exhibited by the various people among whom they have travelled [sic]" (Wood 1870: I).

treading on very thin ice from a 19th-century scientific point of view. Reade suggests, for instance, that he derives his knowledge from the "writings of Jesuit and Capuchin missionaries" (ibid: 285) and Portuguese explorers such as Antonio Pigafetta, whose 1591 Report on the Kingdom of Kongo was re-published in English in 1881. As such, Reade claims authority on a subject that he only knew from texts produced hundreds of years prior to his account and that contradicted his own standard of knowledge production. Williams either did not fully realize this or did not care. Either way, the implicit result was twofold: First, the Congo was turned into a static, unchangeable entity that could be re-constructed via age-old sources; second, it opened up the possibility of a re-construction of the Congo via texts that did not meet contemporary standards of quality. Both strategies of (re-)knowing the Congo will return frequently in the course of this book.

Although drawing from "old" sources, the information Williams used was apparently "new" enough to both reproduce and substantially alter some of the central aspects of the antebellum discourse on the real-and-imagined Congo. In terms of reproduction, the Congo geography was labeled in ways that echoed the antebellum narratives. Via the many quotes George Washington Williams incorporated in his History from Savage Africa, the Congo was discussed both as a "country" (56) and a "land" (1885: 45), situated on the "other side of the equinoctial line" (ibid: 447). That the Congo is referred to as a "country", as opposed to a "nation", is significant. Since Pigafetta discussed the Congo as a kingdom with its own governmental customs, the term "nation" would have been a more accurate designation; the contemporary Webster's Complete Dictionary of the English Language, for instance, explained the term "nation" as "a body of people under the same government, and generally of the same origin and language" (Goodrich/Porter 1886c: 875). This would have described the old "Kongo kingdom" fairly accurately.

Instead of calling it a "nation", the Congo was a "country", which, according to that same Dictionary, primarily meant the "region of one's birth, permanent residence, or citizenship" (Goodrich/Porter 1886a: 303). Through its secondary connotations, a derogatory aspect might be suspected, since "country" could also mean "destitute of refinement; rude; ignorant" (ibid). With this label, the country of the Congo could convincingly signify, on the one hand, a home country of some sort and a place of ignorance – designations already in place in antebellum discourses on the Congo, as has been discussed in the context of Light and Truth.

Besides being a "country", the Congo also signified "land" in Reade's account, which, according to the Dictionary of the English Language, designated the "earth, or the solid matter which constituted the fixed part of the surface of the globe, in distinction from the waters" (Goodrich/Porter 1886b: 749). In contrast to earlier

Congo discourses, the watery land of the Congo had suddenly become solidified: It obtained more depth and its profile became more defined. Other designations also changed: The "slave coast" suddenly became a "swamp", although these representations would alternate. Williams refers to the Congo as a "low, swampy land at the mouth of the Congo" (1885: 45). William Wells Brown's The Rising Son even gave the Congo an interior,[29] building on travel accounts such as the one by "Captain Tuckey, of the English Navy" (1882: 73) who, according to Brown, "penetrated" the "heart of the continent" (ibid).

In postbellum America, Congo could refer either to individual Black Americans or groups of Africans. Williams mentioned an African American individual named "Congo Zado" in his History who was part of a "company of colored infantry" during the Civil War (1885: 361). That a Congo could be named, given human qualities, and lauded was hardly imaginable in antebellum America. In postbellum America, however, African individuals called Congo were still next to non-existent. Whenever people in Africa are designated as Congo, this entailed a whole group of "inhabitants" or "tribes" of the Congo "country" (ibid: 84). There is one exception to this rule – the Congolese "judge" in chapter seven, who is said to sit on a "mat under a large tree, and patiently hears the arguments pro and con. His decisions are final. There is no higher court, and hence no appeal" (ibid: 56). Despite being an individual, the lack of personal characterization in this short passage is striking. The judge is thus more a metonymy than a clearly distinguishable human being. He stands in this passage, in short, for the "African idiosyncrasies" announced in the chapter's title surrounding primitiveness and autocratic rule. Being an important entity, the judge sits nevertheless on "a mat under a tree" (which can be considered idiosyncratic); while being a balanced evaluator ("hears the arguments pro and con"), his decision cannot be challenged (and is thus autocratic). As an individual non-individual, the judge is "drowned" in the "anonymous collectivity" (Memmi 1991: 87) of traits that point to the character of a whole "African" people instead of a single Congolese.

"Congo Negroes" function as a malleable, abstract idea in Williams's History (1885: 447). Congo demarcated, for instance, the lowest position on the scale of the African "races", both in Central West Africa and Liberia. This was done by linking human traits, morality included, to geographical ones. In a telling passage on "the Negro Type", Williams cites Reade's African typology and racial categorizations

29 William Wells Brown's 1874 Rising Son located the Congo "along the western shore southward", containing both a coast and an "interior" that had both a "shallow" and "deep" quality, of which the former is constituted by "tablelands" (Brown 1874: 70) near the coast and the deep quality is represented by the "far interior" (ibid).

extensively. In this passage, the "typical Negro" is located in "the low, swampy land at the mouth of the Congo" (Williams 1885: 46). Not coincidentally, geography and humans are described in a similar fashion; it was no coincidence that the "typical negro" of the "low" Congo constituted the "lowest" strata of the African race, which Williams (through Reade's book) divided into "three grand types – the Ethiopian, the intermediate, and the Negro" (ibid). The "typical negro" was the lowest group among the latter, described as an "exceptional race even among the Negroes, whose disgusting type it is not necessary to re-describe" (ibid). According to Williams's passage, the "Negroes" are found "chiefly along the coast between the Casemanche and Sierra Leone, between Lagos and the Cameroons, in the Congo swamps, and in certain swampy plains and mountain-hollows of the interior" (ibid).

The "typical Negro" of the "Congo swamps" highlights the tendency of the intellectual mainstream of the 19th century to connect geography to human traits. "Low" countries were thus populated by "low" people. Williams spelled this out in a more overt and detailed fashion by elaborating on this "Negro", who is found in the "low, marshy, and malarious [sic] districts" (ibid: 47). In this lowly district, no honorable human can live (either physically or socially), the passage assumes. On the "descending scale" of "Negroes", Williams asserts that "the African who moves from the mountain regions down into the miasmatic districts may be observed to lose his stature, his complexion, his hair, and his intellectual vigor: He finally becomes the Negro." "Pathologically considered," Williams asserted, "he is weak, sickly, and short-lived. His legs are slender and almost calf-less: The head is developed in the direction of the passion, while the whole form is destitute of symmetry" (ibid). The spatialization of human vices and virtues was thus clearly common sense to Williams: "That climate has much to do with physical and mental character, we will not have to prove to any great extent" (ibid: 46).

The favoring of "white" and "light" over "black" and "dark" was a process very much at work in the African American community of the 19th century, as was shown in the contextualization of this chapter above. Not surprisingly, this opposition was constantly in play throughout Williams's History, too. The more distant from the "Caucasian somatype" one was, as Charles Mills reminds us (1999: 61), the less acceptable one became. A notable example was the comparison of the "ancient Egyptians" to the "Negro", which boiled down to the comparison between a "debased caricature" to a near-perfect complexion "of a warm and copper-colored tint" (Williams 1885: 48). As a "typical Negro", or the lowest form of "Negro", the Congo Black could be rejected as a "disgusting type" by virtue of "its" dark skin color. William Wells Brown spelled out the connection between the Congo and

blackness even more explicitly than Williams. While describing the skin color of the different "nations" of the world in Rising Son, Brown described the people in "Briton and Germany" to be "fair" and those in Arabia and Egypt to be "tawny or copper-colored" (1882: 79). As an example of blackness, Brown mentioned the Congo: "They are 'black at Congo, in Africa'," Brown told his readers (building on Prichard, as his footnote suggested; ibid), stirring up a whole load of anti-Black connotations.

Those called Congo were not only perceived as black and woolly-haired (and thus "disgusting" and "ugly"), but at the same time also enslaved. This was another discursive trait that was carried over from the antebellum era. Williams, for instance, understood "the typical Negroes" as Blacks from African societies "with whom the slavers are supplied" (1885: 47). A special mention was reserved for the "brutal and debased [...] slaves of the Portuguese" who were "brought for the most part from the Congo" (ibid: 46). The significance of the Congo as a slave arena, however, was clearly waning, since neither Williams nor others called much attention to it anymore. Williams could easily have done as much, since Savage Africa repeatedly framed the Congo as a former and a contemporary slave region, culminating in Reade's claim that "the [contemporary] trade is now confined almost entirely to Congo" (1864: 244). The days of the topos of the Congo-as-Slave were numbered, it seemed, as its meaning had shifted to "savage" in postbellum African American intellectual circles. "The typical Negro is the true savage of Africa" (Williams 1885: 48), it is asserted, using a term that Williams and other historians related to discursive traits of debasement, brutality, patriarchy, or all three combined.

Who was this "savage"? The "savage" was a "typical negro" who "dwell[s] in petty tribes", according to Williams (ibid: 48). "Dwell" echoed the verb "roam" used by Garnet's 1843 "An Address to the Slaves of the United States of America" (2003: 117) and suggested an undirected, aimless quality in the Congo people. This idea was reinforced by his use of the term "tribe". "Tribe" is understood by Webster's 1886 Complete Dictionary of the English Language as a people merely united by means of having the "same progenitor" (Goodrich/Porter 1886d: 1411). Thus, the savage "typical Negro" was basically unbound by geographical borders, thereby embodying the quintessential "cosmopolitan" trait of African people in general (Williams 1885: 35). Webster's Dictionary added another explanation to "tribe" – "a nation of savages or uncivilized people" (ibid) – which appointed to the debased status of the "typical negro". In the same vein as the Dictionary, Williams framed "the typical Negro" as "unrestrained by moral laws" and as spending "his" days "in sloth, his nights in debauchery" (ibid: 48). Debasement of the Congo savage was

exemplified by the consumption of "palm-wine", as well as "hashish till [sic] he stupefies his senses or falls into convulsions" (ibid).

It is clear from the ongoing use of the word "his" that this uncontrolled "typical Negro" is a male figure, who, above everything, was a perverted father and a controlling patriarchal husband. "He abuses children," Williams stated in a lengthy passage from Savage Africa, "and makes a trade of his own offspring" (ibid). As such, the male Congolese savage was the polar opposite of the respectable and protective American father, as described in the contextualization. "The typical Negro" was represented as a promiscuous partner with "savage passions" and a systematic taste for polygamy, which was "almost universal in Africa", according to Williams (ibid). Woman, in turn, is "the greater sufferer" from this system, "drained of her beauty [...] like the fragile rose [passing] into the ashes of premature old age" (ibid: 58). Another reason for her premature aging is the miserable laziness of her husband, who "stab[s] the poor brute of a woman whose hands keep him from starvation". In the end, the husband dies "tardy" anyway, since his wife can "no longer care to find him food" (ibid: 48).

Much of the debasement of the Congo and its inhabitants is negotiated through perceived gender transgressions. The scandal in terms of sexual differentiation in Victorian America lies both in women as breadwinners (albeit unstable ones) and addicted, do-nothing males. "Without her industry man would starve," Williams told his readers (ibid: 58), which would likely be read as an undesired reversal of roles. Tellingly, this gender division was discussed in vocabulary that called to mind slavery. "Everywhere man's cruel hand is against her. Everywhere she is the slave of his unholy passions," Williams stated, and he finished this assertion by claiming that women were "the merest abject slave everywhere" (ibid). Within the Victorian cult of true womanhood, this subversion of spheres, in which women dominate the professional sphere while men committed the cardinal sin of "intemperance", would have been considered both a sign of deviant masculinity and an undesirable femininity under which the women would particularly suffer.

Two Congolese women transcended their oppressed state in Williams's History. Since these two were framed as the only female rulers in Africa, according to Williams, they constituted aberrations right from the start. The first woman, "by the name of Shinga", ascended the throne of the Congo empire in 1640. "She rebelled against the ceremonies sought to be introduced by Portuguese Catholic priests, who incited her nephew to treason," Williams wrote (ibid: 54). "Defeated in several pitched battles, she fled into the Jaga country, where she was crowned with much success. In 1646 she won her throne again, and concluded an honorable peace with the Portuguese" (ibid: 54-55). In this quote, Shinga is obviously far removed from

being depicted as the "victim" of men, since she successfully won and re-won the throne of the Congo empire via "pitched battles". At the same time, the impetus behind her ascent is explicitly anti-Christian, as she "rebelled against the ceremonies [...] introduced by Portuguese Catholic priests" – highlighting once again that in 19th-century intellectual discourse, the Congo was quintessentially and stubbornly pagan. The second queen, named Tembandumba, is also said to have "fought many battles", leading to many "great victories" (ibid: 55). This victorious and militant agency of Tembandumba, however, was counter-balanced by a set of traits problematic for Victorian Americans, ranging from descriptions of insatiable sexuality and brutality (cf. Loomba 2005: 131) to engaging in "bloodthirsty" and cannibalistic practices. In the end, she was "poisoned", adding another element of brutality to her Amazonian[30] story of a harsh reign (Williams 1885: 55).

The stories of the two queens are also noteworthy in what they reveal about the information that Williams had at his disposal and what he chose to use. Williams offhandedly refers to the Congo as an "empire" in his passage on Shinga – a piece of information that he derived from Reade's ten-page chapter on the same topic. In that chapter, Reade elaborates on the royal household of the "great empire" of the Congo (1864: 285). He tells anecdotes about its legal and tax system, provides details regarding the "remarkable customs" of Congo culture (ibid), recounts the above-mentioned queens in a five-page section, and hints at Portugal's extensive religious and economic engagement with the Congo.

Reade relied extensively on Filippo Pigafetta as a source (whose 1591 History of the Kongo Kingdom was re-published three years prior to Williams's work). Williams also mentions this early Portuguese explorer in his appendix, which includes additional comments on "The Negro Type". Williams states here that "Pigafetta declares" that the "Congo Negroes [...] have not thick lips or ugly features" (1885: 447). The quote concluded by stating that "except in colour they [the Congo Negroes] are very like the Portugese [sic]" (ibid). Although this passage does not refer directly to Pigafetta's translated account, the quote did reproduce Pigafetta's stance accurately. This is what the Portuguese stated: "The men and women are black, some approaching olive colour [sic], with black curly hair, and others with red. The men are of middle height, and, excepting the black skin, are like the Portuguese" (Pigafetta 1881: 13). Pigafetta continued his description by noting that "the pupils of the eyes are of various shades, some black, others of the colour of the sea. Their lips are not large like the negroes, and their countenances vary, like those of

30 The story of Tembandumba could be certainly read as "Amazonian", or as a postbellum adaptation of the ancient Greek myth describing the Amazonas, the nation of militant femininity (cf. Loomba 2005: 131).

people in our countries, for some are stout, others thin, and they are quite unlike the negroes of Nubia and Guinea, who are hideous" (ibid). This quote from the History of the Kongo Kingdom clearly contradicted the majority of derogatory claims in Williams's work about the Congo and its inhabitants. In contrast to the "disgusting type" in the History of the Negro Race (Williams 1885: 46), Congolese were represented as more similar to the Portuguese than to "the negroes of Nubia and Guinea, who are hideous".

Despite this open contradiction, however, Williams did integrate the statement in the end, albeit hidden in the appendix. Reasons for only including this observation in the margins ought to be sought in the intersection of Williams's vindicationist political agenda (which explains the mentioning of Pigafetta) with his scientific positivism (which explains the marginalization of the Portuguese). Thus, on the one hand, Pigafetta's was a useful text for Williams's vindicationist agenda, especially within the specific discursive context of this passage, i.e. the appendix, is examined. Keeping in mind Williams's aim to re-align the "Negroes" in the Congo ("independently of the woolly hair and the complexion") with "the rest of mankind" (Williams 1885: 434), Pigafetta becomes a textual asset that could be quoted. On the other hand, this could not be done very prominently, since the Portuguese traveler was pre-modern.

The translator's preface to the History of the Kongo Kingdom, written by Margarite Hutchinson, exemplifies how problematic Pigafetta's pre-modern status was to late 19th-century intellectuals. While lauding the work of the Portuguese – "we cannot fail to observe," she wrote, "how much of truth was contained in them" (Hutchinson 1881: ix) – she cannot help but raise her eyebrows in response to many factual issues. She seriously questions the truth value of Pigafetta's maps, for instance, due to the "imperfect scientific knowledge of these earlier travellers [sic]" (ibid). Hutchinson then explains that these pre-modern ways of knowing "prevented their determining with accuracy the position of their various discoveries, and led them into errors with regard to the hydrography of the continent, which are apparent on their maps" (ibid). It seems very likely that Williams, a believer in "science", dismissed Pigafetta because his investigations were not exactly scientifically rigorous, while nevertheless integrating him into the appendix in order to fulfill the ambivalent vindicationist agenda of hist History.

The marginalization of Pigafetta, however, can hardly be reduced to 19th-century scientific chauvinism and Black vindicationism alone. Another major factor led to the specific accumulation of knowledge about the Congo in (African) American intellectual circles: The rising tide of imperial-style knowledge production. This both shaped and drew upon the "sciences", as well as African American political

agendas, in order to bulldoze pre-modern ways of knowing. It is this epistemological project that will form the subject of the next section.

Re-Appearance and Imperial Epistemology

Although African American involvement in the imperial and colonial projects of the U.S. will be looked at in more detail in the next chapter, it is already necessary to begin elaborating upon this topic in order to explain the break between antebellum and postbellum Congo discourse (from slave to savage) and to demarcate early imperial rhetoric (until 1885) from the narratives that were developed in the period when imperialism was in full swing (from 1885 onward).

By the end of the 19th century, empire was no longer "a shadowy presence" but a "central area of concern", as Edward Said states in his groundbreaking Culture and Imperialism (1994: xviii). Indeed, the United States did have a less concerted, state-authorized imperial agenda than many European countries until the embattled annexation of the Philippines at the turn of the century (Harvey 2001: 20). Nevertheless, the traveling vanguard of imperialism alluded to earlier – above all, explorers and missionaries – were well-known and well-regarded in (African) American intellectual circles. In his depiction of the Congo, George Washington Williams, for instance, drew systematically upon authors who openly advocated imperialism and, at times, colonization.

Reade's Savage Africa promoted the re-modeling of African commercial systems along European and British lines. This influenced Williams, too, culminating in his stating that as soon "as the interior of Africa becomes better colonized, a direct trade will be established" (1885: 76). Williams also confided in his work that he had "utmost confidence" (ibid: 110) in both Henry Morgan Stanley and David Livingstone, of whom he wrote that "the noble life-work of Dr. David Livingstone, and the thrilling narrative of Mr. Henry M. Stanley" sparked his interest "on behalf of Africa" (ibid: 76). Although Williams turns the stories of these travelers into personal accounts of bravery, self-sacrifice, and moral victory, the truth of the matter was, of course, that Stanley and Livingstone were the vanguard of state-sponsored imperialism.

Many of the major expeditions, embodied by Livingstone's exploration of the Zambesi, were supported by the Royal Geographical Society, which was "part social club, part learned society, part imperial information exchange and part platform for the promotion of sensational feats of exploration", as Felix Driver pointedly describes it (2001: 25). Livingstone himself was quite open about his intentions and supporters, as well. "The Government have supported the proposal of the Royal

Geographical Society," Livingstone wrote in the preface of his narrative on the Zambesi expedition, "and have united with that body to aid me in another attempt to open Africa to civilizing influences, and a valued private friend has given a thousand pounds for the same object" (1875: vi-vii). The "unprecedented" flood of images and ideas surrounding the Congo generated by Livingstone and others was orchestrated and legitimized, in short, by both state-sponsored organizations and private initiatives (cf. Loomba 2005: 54). This increasingly frenzied and institutionalized push for best-selling knowledge in the service of empire explains the "sudden" re-knowing of the Congo after it had been rendered abject and actively "unknown" merely a few years before. Williams echoed Livingstone's rationale throughout his own work in the analysis of Africa's problems and solutions. Thus, the problem of "African geography", as well as the paganism of the "savage tribes" (Williams 1885: 111), could be approached by broadening knowledge on the African continent and spreading Christianity there.[31]

The "watchwords of Livingstone's mission [were] information, resources, cultivation, and commerce", as Driver observed (2001: 86), which had won official sanction at the highest level: Livingstone explicitly mentioned in his introduction that he had received "instructions from Her Majesty's Government" (1875: 2). Livingstone's commercial goals in East and West Africa are repeated constantly in his book, despite his secondary desire of "securing the happiness and prosperity of tribes now sunk in barbarism or debased by slavery" (ibid). He hoped to lead those tribes to "the introduction of the blessings of the Gospel" (ibid). Producing knowledge in the commercial service of empire, however, was the most conspicuous elements in Livingstone's work, but also in other reports on Central West Africa, ranging from the early-19th-century accounts by Tuckey and Parks to Stanley's late 19th-century one. As all of them were actively used by African American historians and journalists, a deeply commercial and capitalist streak was introduced into their discourse (which remained there, as is discussed in the next chapter).

The rise of imperial-style knowledge production in postbellum America can be traced in detail in African American journalistic publications. Exemplary is the Philadelphia weekly The Christian Recorder, which was one of the few Black papers that successfully weathered the Civil War (Franklin 1998: 120). The reason for

31 Livingstone described his aims in the Introduction as follows: "To extend the knowledge already attained of the geography and mineral and agricultural resources of Eastern and Central Africa – to improve our acquaintance with the inhabitants, and to endeavour [sic] to engage them to apply themselves to industrial pursuits and to the cultivation of their lands, with a view to the production of raw material to be exported to England in return for British manufactures" (1875: n.p.).

its robustness was that it was published by the African Methodist Episcopal Church, through which it became the first paper that actively built upon the financial and human resources of an institution instead of relying entirely upon subscribers, philanthropists, or the "variable fortunes and interests of an individual owner" (Lapsansky-Werner 2006: 268), as was the case for the many papers that went under during and after the Civil War. Although published by a religious organization, The Christian Recorder did not see itself as the mouthpiece of Christian doctrine – particularly not after the Civil War when so many other Black periodicals had ceased to exist. Writing for the Black, literate community at large was its goal. Thus, The Christian Recorder developed and maintained a strong focus on Black politics, science, literature, and morality (ibid). For this reason, the newspaper provides a fruitful source on imperial knowledge circulation in terms of particular rhetorical patterns in late 19th-century African American society.

One of the most striking elements in the Congo news reporting of The Christian Recorder was the sheer amount of detailed Congo information produced by the paper (especially in comparison to historians such as Williams and Brown). The driving force behind this knowledge production on the Congo were discursive events directly related to the twin issues of exploration and exploitation. In terms of exploration, the Congo was known through articles titled "African exploration" (January 22, 1874) describing a series of expeditions, such as the "German expedition organized by Dr. Bastian and the Berlin Geographical Society" (1874: n.p.). Others included Stanley's "circumnavigation of Lake Tanganyika" and Cameron's "Livingstone Relief Expedition" (1877: n.p.; 1875a: n.p.; 1875b: n.p.; 1876b: n.p.). Despite the fact that the interior was becoming increasingly well-known to the Euro-American public, the fixation on Congo's "watery" regions underlies the articles and remains intact, albeit with a clear drive inward. The Congo was no longer reduced to a coast or a swamp, but became a "network of lakes and rivers of the water system" that provided the side-rivers with water (1875b: n.p.).

Like Williams's History, the articles on the expeditions were written as self-congratulatory narratives of historical and scientific progress. The article "Central Africa", which recounted the history of the quest for the origins of the river Congo, serves as a typical example. The efforts of Livingstone, Sir Samuel Baker, and Colonel Long were recounted, culminating in the line "Stanley is on his way there; and it will be a great glory to American explorers in Africa, if they finally establish the exact truth so many have tried to learn, for more than twenty centuries" (1875b: n.p.). The "great glory" of establishing "the exact truth so many have tried to learn for more than twenty centuries" harks back to the belief in the pervasive truth-producing power of science. This language returns in the article from March 22,

1877, titled "Further from Stanley", discussing "Stanley's circumnavigation of Lake Tanganyika" (1877: n.p.). In the article, Stanley's expedition was evaluated in terms of the new knowledge it would bring home through "accurate observations and measurement" (ibid).

The Christian Recorder tended to inscribe itself into the general excitement surrounding the scientific progress of knowledge regarding the origins of the Congo. But there were limits to how much imperial-style knowledge could be adopted and accepted. For instance, the newspaper never went so far as to actually rename the river Congo in its articles. When the explorer Cameron suggested in early 1876 that "the Congo River be changed to Livingstone, in honor of the great missionary who in reality discovered its sources" (1876a: n.p.), the newspaper reported this request but never acted upon it. By sticking to the "old" name, the newspaper demonstrated that the "new" knowledge produced, and the attendant suggestions made by the traveling "men of science" (Driver 2001: 10), had some limitations. What information and suggestions were accepted from these exploring "men of science" in the 19th-century "culture of exploration" (ibid) depended on the moral and scientific integrity of the individual explorers. The "great missionary" Livingstone (1876a: n.p.) is clearly more acceptable to the newspaper than Stanley, whose "circumnavigation of Lake Tanganyika" is said to be (one should read: merely) "a repetition of Cameron's undertaking" (1877: n.p.).[32]

The Christian Recorder also took issue with Stanley's militant methods, which "will forever tarnish the really great accomplishment of this traveller" (1878a: n.p.). The Christian Recorder lauded "that section of the Royal Geographical Society" and the English public in general, "which shows a determination to ventilate his doings" (ibid). "In England," according to The Christian Recorder, "shooting 'niggers' is not tolerated like it is in America" (ibid). As indicated in these quotes, The Christian Recorder's reservations with regard to Stanley were telling of a much broader resistance to Stanley in the United States and Great Britain. Whereas Livingstone was a "saint" of the anti-slavery movement in Britain (Driver 2001: 139), Stanley was mainly portrayed as everything Livingstone was not (ibid: 143). Despite Stanley's achievement of settling the long-running dispute over the sources of the Nile by synthesizing the fragments of knowledge gathered by his predecessors

32 This differentiation can also be found in the History by George Washington Williams, who, despite praising Stanley for possessing a "noble, brave soul" (1885: 71), charged him with producing "a repetition of the experiences of Drs. Livingstone and Kirk" (ibid: 157). Livingstone, in turn, was considered by Williams as England's "courageous son, who, as a missionary and geographer spent his best days and laid down his life in the midst of Africa" (ibid: 113).

(ibid: 117), he was an extremely contested figure. On the one hand, he was presented as a "man of action" and as a representative of "science of action", who embodied the cultural style of a new sort of imperialism – bold, brash, and uncompromising, most noticeably embodied by his support of Leopold II's imperial politics (ibid: 125). On the other hand, Stanley was considered by many philanthropists to be exemplary of "exploration by warfare" (ibid: 123). Stanley's critics thus presented him as a warlord rather than a gentleman scientist in the service of truth (ibid: 127-129).[33]

Despite critiquing Stanley's tactics, The Christian Recorder did accept, and often applauded, his imperial aims and claims. From the 1880s onward, an enormous increase in interest in Stanley's imperial project as a whole may be noted. On June 16, 1881, The Christian Recorder published an article titled "The Twentieth Century" permeated with general thoughts on the issue of progress. To exemplify the issue of progress, Stanley is mentioned. Concretely, it is stated that "the United States Commercial Agent at Gaboon reports to the Department of State that the knowledge of the Congo or Livingston River, derived from Stanley's discovers is already bearing practical fruit" (1881a: n.p.).

The "practical fruits" were both secular and religious in nature, as may be derived from other articles. Quite telling with regard to the interrelatedness of secular and religious progress is an article titled "It Looks as if Ethiopia Would Stretch Forth her Hands" from May 8, 1884, reporting on "a steam launch to Africa for use on the Upper Congo" (1884b: n.p.). This technical improvement was related against the background of a newly-founded missionary station at "Stanley Pool", of which "Mr. Stanley writes to the mission authorities in London that the station [...] is well located and the buildings are the neatest and most complete he has seen on the Congo" (ibid). The passage concluded with the hopeful message, building on Psalm 68:3 that "it looks as if Ethiopia would stretch forth her hands". The article continued by stating that "the world will be greatly indebted to Stanley for the apparently successful effort he is now making to open up the rich valley of the Congo to the advancing tide of civilization" (ibid). The "advancing tide of civilization" mostly signified infrastructural projects, such as the construction of "the Livingstone lock Canal" (1881a: n.p.) and the railroad "Henry M. Stanley is said to be engaged in" around the rapids in the Congo "preparatory to the establishment of a line of steamboats to navigate the upper levels of that river, which extend at least a thousand miles" (1881b: n.p.). In other words, despite the occasional religious undertones in

33 Condemning some of the effects and leaders of imperialism, many philanthropic Societies did not condemn imperialism as such (Driver 2001: 132).

the articles on the Congo, what drove The Christian Recorder's interest was the technical "improvement" of Central West Africa.

The Christian Recorder's interest in progress was described in terms of commerce, competition, conquest, and, ultimately, colonization. An examination of articles on or alluding to the Congo hints at the increasing acceptance of an imperial rationale. Articles increasingly focused on "Stanley's mission" in terms of "open[ing] certain districts in Africa to commerce", which was not to be expected as a successful enterprise "until the companies in whose employ he is, are ready for publicity", as The Christian Recorder wrote on November 23, 1882 (1882e: n.p.). In that same commercial vein, the newspaper announced in an article titled "A Society has been Established at London" on June 7, 1883, the establishment of a railroad society in London called "the Congo and Central African Company" with a capital of "250,000 livres sterling" that was said to traffic along the western side of Africa, especially in the Congo, using the road constructed by Stanley (1883c: n.p.).

Articles focusing on discursive events indicative of the military competition for the Congo began appearing in The Christian Recorder, too: "It is reported from the Congo River that Henry M. Stanley has arrived at Brazzaville with 1000 men. M. de Brazza has a force of 200 men and has made little progress" (1883e: n.p.). Stories like these were indicative of the increasingly numerous territorial claims made by Europeans, also embodied in the quote from the explorers Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza and Henry Morgan Stanley, who operated in the service of Paris and Brussels, respectively.

Within the context of this military competition, The Christian Recorder suggested a distinction between "good" and "bad" imperialists. Portugal's inclination "to have her say in the affairs of the Lower Congo" (1883f: n.p.) amazed the newspaper, as it clearly considered this ailing empire less than eligible to make such claims: "One would think that after making such a medley of things in Western Africa, she would be willing to stand aside and let nations of more vitality attempt the regeneration of that region" (ibid). The competition between less and more "vital" nations was discussed by The Christian Recorder in a vocabulary that cast imperialism as akin to the social Darwinist "survival of the fittest". "The next best thing is to waylay some of the weaker powers," The Christian Recorder reported on Germany's imperial militancy on June 7, 1883, "and this she has been doing with a vengeance. Tunis has already been conquered, while war is being made upon Annam, the tribes of the Congo, and Madagascar" (1883d: n.p.).

In the relatively short time period of five years, starting at the turn of the 1880s, the idea of a struggle between suitable and unsuitable competitors became firmly established in The Christian Recorder. Often these ideas took the form of

overt colonial fantasies, as may be glimpsed in an 1885 article titled "The Destiny of the English-speaking Race" reproduced from Harper's Magazine. The author of the article, John Fiske, was pleased to see that "colonial blue-books" were circulating everywhere. "The natural outcome of all this overflowing vitality," the author claimed, "is not difficult to foresee" (1885a: n.p.). In an analogy between North America in the 17th century and contemporary Africa, the author expressed his wish that Africa – which he considered "rich in beautiful scenery, and in resources of timber and minerals, with a salubrious climate and fertile soil, with great navigable rivers and inland lakes" (ibid) – will not "much longer be left in control of tawny lions and long-eared elephants, and negro fetich-worshippers [sic]" but will be turned over to the "pre-eminently industrious, peaceful, orderly and free-thinking community" (ibid). The model example of such as an "industrious, peaceful, orderly and free-thinking community" was the United States, which, as Fisk maintained, had previously liberated its own territory from "scalp-hunters" and turned it into a booming economic, political, and social order. In the same vein, Fisk hoped that Africa would be "occupied by a mighty nation of English descent, and covered with populous cities and flourishing farms, with railroads and telegraphs and free schools and other devices of civilization", including those regions along the "the course of the Congo and the Nile" (ibid). It is clear from the publication policy of The Christian Recorder (i.e. re-publication without critical commentary) that the staff of The Christian Recorder seconded Fiske's stance.

In the five-year boom in imperial-style Congo articles from 1880 onward, a new way of talking about Central West Africa emerged. Whereas Williams, who wrote prior to and in the midst of this boom, still framed the Congo as an undesirable geography (a "swamp", that is), shifting economic desires with regard to Central West Africa in the 1880s required a new language. Since a "swamp" was difficult to exploit and undesirable to occupy, this metaphor had to become a more attractive one that could also legitimize imperial politics (embodied by the traveling "men of science"). This shifting of gears is obvious in The Christian Recorder, which mobilized a new metaphor reflective of changing geopolitics: The Congo became a "valley".

The trope of the Congo "valley" was both a continuation and a radical break with some of the discursive traits that preceded it. Porter's 1884 A Practical Dictionary of the English Language explained "valley", first of all, as a "tract of low ground, or of land between hills: Valley; dingle: dell; dale; a little trough or canal". This explanation echoes the Congo's depiction in the articles of The Christian Recorder, where it is described in terms of the "Livingstone lock Canal" and "Stanley Pool". The "valley" was also a continuation of the discourse on the Congo as a wa-

tery and lowly place, which would make this new metaphor of the "valley" more credible and familiar. This familiarity is important, as Poletta reminds us: "We believe a story because it is familiar" (2006: 10). The same goes for tropes and topoi (see Introduction). The second definition of the term "valley" in Porter's A Practical Dictionary of the English Language highlighted it as a "space inclosed [sic] between ranges of hills or mountains". The high-low opposition underlying this explanation – low lands surrounded by high mountains – can be observed in The Christian Recorder's suggestion that the Congo was "an open country with metalliterous [sic] mountains" (1874a: n.p.).

This inscription of the Congo as "valley" opened up possibilities for radically re-imagining it. As soon as "trade and revenue" entered the discourse on the Congo – which was reportedly legitimized at the highest political level by President Chester A. Arthur (see next chapter) – the adjective "rich" entered the discourse and was systematically applied. One finds evidence of this in a review of the book The Congo Valley: Its Redemption by D. Augustus Straker, the Black "Dean of the Law School of Allen University", as the article titled "Bethel A.M.E. Church"sgoes (1884a: n.p.).[34] In this review of January 21, 1884, the book is said to provide

> a picture of the beautiful, rich Congo Valley, the recent movements of the great powers with reference to its redemption, the ill methods by which mean and nations have dealt with Africa in the past, ye [sic] the wonderful worth discovered in the "Dark Continent" even under these methods, the wealth and wonders that may yet be found in the "Dark Continent" and its dark people when God's due time shall come and the wilderness shall be made to blossom.

Through the lens of Straker's book, the Congo was radically re-imagined as a "beautiful" and "rich" valley. As with Reade and Williams, the "ill methods" of the past – by which slavery was meant – were justified by the good that allegedly emerged from them, namely the discovery of the Congo's "wealth and wonders". In this passage, the commercial and exotic re-signification of the Congo was far removed indeed from the past representation of Central West Africa as an unfruitful and debilitating "swamp". Yet at the same time, the Congo "wilderness" had to be "made to blossom". With this attitude, the necessity of colonizing the "'Dark Continent' and its dark people" was established.

34 Straker seems to have actively discussed the insights from his books in public speeches, for instance at Selma University in 1885. The Christian Recorder takes note of a talk by him entitled "The civilizing and Christianizing influences upon Africa by the establishment of commercial agencies in the Congo Valley under the auspices of the International Association" (1885g: n.p.).

This need to colonize was based on the "darkness" of Congo's people, which entailed a list of variable faults quite similar to those articulated by Williams. In an 1875 poem titled "Livingstone, the Friend of Africa", The Christian Recorder cataloged some of the well-known ills of the people who "dwell along the Niger and the Nile, / The Congo and Zambezi, Senegal". "Fetish superstitions" and "slavery" rank high. As always, these can be combated, according to the poem, with the twin healers of Christianity and "commerce" (1875c: n.p.). The "darkness" of the Congo was discussed here as indistinguishable from that of the rest of the continent. Far from contradicting the idea of Congo as home to the lowest grade of the "Negro" race, this shows the malleability of the Congo as signifier: It was both part of the continent and a separate geography, depending on the function it had to perform in African American discourse. In the poem "Livingstone, the Friend of Africa", the Congo serves merely as a random African region. The point of the poem was namely to declare the whole of Africa "open" for partition and illumination.

Despite being sometimes treated as only one marker among many on the continent of Africa, the Congo simultaneously indicated something specific. Its particular "darkness" derived from its signifying a certain kind of African "blackness" to The Christian Recorder. Its darkness was applied to Africans and Americans alike, creating a kind of reverberation effect. This was hardly the case for other African regions. The American take on Congo blackness can be gleaned from an article titled "Something About Woman's Work" from June 16, 1866 in The Christian Recorder on "woman's work", in which a "meek-eyed maid" is featured "who will attract the attention of Congo Coolebs" by virtue of being "dark-skinned" and "dusky" herself (1866: n.p.). Another example from the American arena may be found in the article "Princeton: A Difference" from July 23, 1874, in which journalists from The Christian Recorder visit the University of Princeton, where light-skinned Black men are treated as "black as the blackest Congo" (1874b: n.p.).

Thus even in The Christian Recorder, as in Williams's History, Congo blackness occupied a lowly rank on the perceived scale of civilization. In an article from May 18, 1882, titled "The Colored People – Different Races", The Christian Recorder identified "three distinct sorts of American negroes" (1882a: n.p.). Apart from the "the brown negroes" and the "the black negroes with good features", a third group of "black negroes" is presented with "bad" physical and intellectual traits (ibid):

> The black negroes, with flat noses, thick lips, low forehead, and ill-shaped skull. If any of these show high intelligence, the cases must be very rare. And unfortunately the overwhelming majority of American negroes are of this class. They come from the coast of Guinea and

Congo, where they were captured by the superior races of the interior and sold to the slave-ships, or were easily caught by slave hunting parties. They are a low grade of savages.

Apart from establishing the well-known link between the Congo's coast and slavery, this passage relies upon the external and internal hierarchies expressed in the social Darwinist opposition between "superior races" and their "inferior" counterparts. Inferiority had both an "internal" and an "external" aspect. Internal inferiority enters this passage in the separation established between the descendants of the Congo slaves ("the overwhelming majority of American negroes") and an unnamed "rest". That "rest" may be read as the Congo's opposite. And read as such, one ends up with a counterpart to the majority of American "Congoes" that possesses light skin and thin lips – very much how African American elites of the 19th century perceived themselves.

Internal inferiors were probably not addressed by the phrase "a low grade of savages", however, although it might be read this way. More likely to be denounced here was the Central West African Congo "negro". The Christian Recorder did differentiate between American people called Congo and Africans labeled as such. In an article titled "The Outlook's View of American Slavery" on the subject of slavery re-published from Outlook on September 14, 1875, The Christian Recorder explicitly announced the superiority of American Blacks to those in the Congo: "The Virginia negro is far superior to the negro of Congo" (1875d: n.p.). This superiority could "only" be achieved, the article suggested, "through such a process as slavery" (ibid); thus, as George Washington Williams also argued, the article considered slavery a "blessing to the African", despite "all its cruelties" (ibid). "Had the negro, cast upon the coast of Africa, been left to himself, he would have remained in his native heathenism, and would never have reached the degree of civilization he now possesses [...] he would very likely never have learned to work, and would today be a thriftless savage", The Christian Recorder added (ibid).

The superiority of Black Americans is mainly constructed via the tropes of "tribes", "natives", and "Congo savages" (e.g. 1878a: n.p.), all of which are reserved for Central West Africans. One notable exception was William Wells Brown's description of the "Congo negroes" on Congo Square in New Orleans in his 1880 autobiography My Southern Home, "who used to perform their dance on its sward every Sunday" and who were Africans "stolen from their native land [...] New Orleans was the Center" (1882: 121). Although they are said to be divided into "six different tribes [...] named after the section of the country from which they came", it becomes clear from Brown's story that these "curious people" were only considered "tribal" by virtue of their ethnic roots. As such, the Congo also stood for

"the remnants of [the] African jungle" (ibid) brought to Louisiana by these Congo slaves, not as an actual tribe-driven differentiation in African American communities. Labelling these dancers as Congo indicates the existence of an "imagined" Congo that was a variation on an antebellum theme: The Congo as the original African home.

Although it is seldom stated explicitly, African American intellectuals felt very qualified to enlighten the Congo darkness. Blyden's 1882 letter to The Christian Recorder, for instance, reads (1882c: n.p.):

> The American descendants of Africa have not yet realized the fact that their face shines on the continent of Africa. The natives descry the illumination in the distance and are anxious to welcome them not only as missionaries but as colonists on the coast and in the extensive districts of Soudan as well as on the Niger and the Congo, and will second instead of opposing their efforts to destroy the brazen calf of superstition and ignorance with its attendant drawbacks.

Blyden's point was to highlight the desired possibility of emigrating to Africa – any part of it – as "missionaries" and "colonists". Blyden, a prominent advocate and organizer of Black American emigration to Liberia, tied the typical imperial attitudes of the late 19th century explicitly to the "American descendants of Africa" whose "shin[ing] face" was opposed to the "darkness" permeating Africa. The population of the Congo was one of many "native" groups in Africa who "descry the illumination in the distance". The rationale behind sending African Americans as "missionaries" and "colonists" is, according to the author, that "natives" are "anxious" to "destroy the brazen calf of superstition and ignorance with its attendant drawbacks". African American emigrants, the idea went, could turn "elephant hunters from the vicinity of Congo" (1880: n.p.) into Christians through systematic schooling. Ideally, this led to a situation in which "men were preparing for the ministry" (1872: n.p.), or for being "profectures apostolic [...] of Congo", as The Christian Recorder suggested (1876a: n.p.). The next chapter discusses the extent to which African Americans were in fact involved in the missionary project.

CONGOIST STRATEGIES IN THE AGE OF DISCURSIVE EXTREMES: A CONCLUSION

The concept of Congoism is not a postmodern neologism, but has its roots in 19th-century America. The inscription at the beginning of this chapter, from John Miller's monograph Theology, underlines this: "All the religions of the world give the

first place to morality," Miller asserted, continuing, "if there are any exceptions, they are at the extremes, Congoism on the one hand and Protestant Christianity on the other" (1887: 26). In this quote, "Congoism" marks a religious extreme, and draws on the belief that "Congoese" are people who "serve the Devil" (ibid). For Miller, Congolese thus constituted the opposite of an organized religious movement such as Protestantism: "To call it worship is absurd. They [the Congolese] serve him [the devil] because he is so wicked" (ibid). The vilifying of Congolese in a discourse of polarization and defamation returns again and again in 19th-century American culture. This chapter has shown when, how, and why this was the case within African American intellectual circles. To grapple with these discursive extremes, this chapter has focused on the changing forms and functions of the Congo signifier, the results of which will now be discussed.

In terms of "form", Congoist discourse exhibited extreme malleability, epitomized by the topoi of the Congo-as-Slave and the Congo-as-Savage, as well as the tropes of the "coast" in the antebellum period and those of the "swamp" and "valley" in postbellum America. All of these figures of style constitute both continuations of and radical breaks with antebellum discourse. The move from the "coast" to the "swamp" turned water into a register unto itself, granting the "swamp" a familiar feeling, as well as credibility and "realism". The substitution of the swamp with the valley, however, constituted a shift that was decidedly more extreme. This rhetorical move was not just the result of an ongoing deepening and broadening of geographical knowledge triggered by Euro-Americans setting foot on Congolese "land" instead of merely navigating its "watery" regions. In-depth knowledge of and interest in the Congo was available before Stanley and Livingstone "opened" the Congo, as is illustrated via the 16th-century example of Pigafetta and 19th-century encyclopedias and dictionaries. Since detailed knowledge about the Congo was already available, the geographical metamorphosis of the Congo is reflective more of how than what African Americans knew about it (and wanted to know about it). In the antebellum period, African Americans were thus silent about the Congo, because the authorities on which they relied – the Bible and antique sources – had nothing to say about it. Through the secularization, proliferation, and modernization of authoritative sources in the late 19th century, the possibility of "re-knowing" the Congo arose.

In terms of "function", discourses on the Congo were highly reflective of the extremely polarizing powers that shaped African American intellectual communities in the 19th century, both from within and without. The list of polarizing powers is long: Slavery and dehumanization had to be dealt with in antebellum America, as did legalized apartheid and other structures that produced hierarchies after the Civil

War; white Euro-American intellectual power, ranging from de Buffon to Reade, provided a set of bigoted ideas and vocabularies to which intellectuals had to respond; and intellectual Black communities, which were divided along gender, class, and racial lines, had to be addressed and held together by common interests. In this field comprised of extreme tensions, an extreme discourse on the Congo developed that was both reflective and constitutive of these strains.

Although the form the Congo took clearly varied throughout the 19th century, its function remained stable: Signifying that which "we" are not and do not want to be. Therefore, Congoism functioned as a discourse of rejection, both of internal and external Others, and along the axes of gender and race as well as class and ethnicity. What underlies these strategies is the creation of a subpersonhood called Congo that is either too ugly or too dangerous to be integrated into the world view of the African American elite of light-black, male African American intellectuals. In the antebellum period, the Congo quintessentially stood for the thing that was loathed (and feared) the most by free African Americans: "slavery"; in postbellum America, Congo signified the opposite of how Black intellectuals came to see themselves: "savage".

What are the logical operations that undergird the Congo-as-Slave and the Congo-as-Savage? What strategies give these figures coherence and credibility, despite their shaky empirical foundations or tendentious rationales? How have African American intellectuals succeeded in creating "natural" images of a superior "us" and an inferior "them"? In what follows, an attempt has been made to sum up the answers this chapter has offered to such questions. This will be done by focusing on the strategies of Congoism, which operate on multiple levels, including the planes of language, logic, and knowledge production.

One central Congoist strategy in antebellum America (which will return in subsequent chapters, too) was the Congo's separation from, and unification with, the signifier "Africa". This logical operation can be observed in the untitled poem in Lewis's Light and Truth, for instance. The point of the text was to evoke the longing of Black Americans for "Africa" – a longing that was undermined by the division of Africa into different regions, and namely into "Congo's mountain-coast" and "Gambia's golden shore" (Lewis 1844: 346). Although this sentence aimed merely to demarcate two randomly chosen areas of potential return, the specificity of the language register used ("mountain-coast" versus "golden shore") reveals a substantial difference and establishes a hierarchy between these two areas. The strategy of evoking an "African" homogeneity while at the same time dividing it into favorable (Gambia) and less favorable (Congo) parts reappears in many works by antebellum and postbellum African American intellectuals, who claimed to write

about "Africa" in general, but focused solely on parts of it that were particularly interesting and/or deplorable to them and their political agendas.

Another strategy is catering to the epistemic mainstream. Congoism, as was shown, is an extremely conformist discourse. It thus attached itself to the intellectual standard and forced the Congo to fit into the frameworks offered by it. This turned the Congo into a recognizable and understandable signifier that reflected the dominant politics and paradigms of those days. In the discourses of antebellum America, for instance, the Congo had to be rejected, since it constituted nothing to which one could epistemically relate or which one might consider politically desirable. In a culture steeped in classicism, romanticism, and Egyptomania, the Congo could hardly be mentioned or discussed. Moreover, the idea of the Congo as a slave coast was an ongoing offence to the abolitionism of African American intellectuals, as well as to their refinement: As a marker of "pure" blackness, the Congo would rank low in African American color schemes. Seen altogether, these dynamics resulted in a discourse that transformed the Congo into the negative underbelly of the knowledge production on, as Gilroy has it, the "Black Atlantic" (whose positive counterpart was alternately played by Liberia, Haiti, Egypt, or whatever region best matched the ruling paradigms of progress and vindicationism).

As the underbelly of the "Black Atlantic", the Congo could (or had to) be met with the strategy of ignorance and silence in the antebellum period. As a systematically discarded geography, the Congo constituted a model example of "unknowledge", an entity actively ignored and forgotten despite all the knowledge available about it. As Alcoff suggests, ignorance is a truly powerful tool for shaping and cementing social interactions and relations (2007: 44). In 19th-century America, these social negotiations took place between white majorities and Black minorities, as well as within both groups themselves. In the arena of white-Black interactions, an "epistemology of ignorance", as Charles Mills terms it, protected the privileges and supremacy of the white majority by consensually unknowing the racist world these whites themselves had created and profited from (1998: 18). According to Mills, this white ignorance resulted in "white mythologies, invented Orients, invented Africas, invented Americas, with a correspondingly fabricated population, countries that never were, inhabited by people who never were" (ibid: 19). To counter some of the aspects of these white mythologies, "vindicationist" contributions by African Americans, such as Lewis's Light and Truth, were necessary political antidotes (cf. ibid). However, while correcting white "unknowing" of Black achievement via their writings, African Americans simultaneously acted as producers of their own epistemology of ignorance by tapping into this deep reservoir of white epistemologies for their own negotiations.

While as little as "one drop" of blood constituted blackness for the white majority, African Americans intellectuals themselves maintained Black-white constructions by systematically dividing blackness, as Lewis did in Light and Truth, into many shades, ranging from "Mulatto" to "Quaderoon" and from "Mestizo" to "Mangroon". The African American ignorance towards the Congo, therefore, opened the door for the active production of what Charles Mills called "subpersonhood": The condition of people who, due to racial phenotype, genealogy, or culture, were considered not fully human (1998: 56).

Congoism also thrived on the strategy of hierarchization. Black and white intellectuals employed "science" to generate an unprecedented volume of data on a global scale on the "Other". The chauvinistic paradigms of "objectivity of observation" (Loomba 2005: 57), as well as "classifying" human kind and nature at large into "types", provided a clarity regarding Central West Africa hardly achievable in previous times. Classification reduced a vast number of objects and peoples into simplified and frequently stereotypical types and generalizations (Said, Orientalism 119). The original binaries between Christians and the rest of humankind were increasingly complemented by the proliferation of categorizations based on skin color, origin, temperament, and character (Said 2003: 120). One of the tools to impose hierarchy via classification was stereotyping. The notion of the "typical Negro", the category to which peoples called Congo belonged, serves as the prime example of the process of reducing images and ideas to a simple, manageable, and mostly vilifying and racist form (Loomba 2005: 55).

As a "typical Negro", the Congo could be reduced to a certain objectionable phrenology and to a loathsome moral character redeemable only, if this was considered possible at all, through long and hard missionary work. The stereotypical representation of the Congo as a black African savage with thick lips, a low forehead, and woolly hair converged or contrasted sharply with his surroundings. Either Congolese fit their environment (when it was depicted as a disgusting "swamp") or they existed in opposition to it (whenever the Congo was described as a "rich valley"). In the former case, the Congo could be ignored (as was the case in the antebellum period); in the latter "he" had to be helped to overcome "his" heathenism, slavery, and patriarchy in order to finally reap the fruits of the natural riches of his region.

Various discursive strategies lent credibility to this narrative of Euro-American "helping". By depersonalizing people called Congo and rendering them as an undifferentiated mass, they were homogenized into a collective "they". Single individuals were metonomies, functioning merely as an example of the collective. Knowing the character of one Congo in "his" essential pagan and primitive character sufficed to know them all. Arguments about the benefits of systematic law, Christianity, tra-

ditional gender roles, and modern capitalist commerce could be easily made in this way. As inferiors, the Congolese thus deserved to be ruled, which constituted a well-known pattern in "imperial culture", as Edward Said shows (1994: xii).

The Congolese human monolith was termed a "savage", a label that had a long and varied cultural history, as Andrew Sinclair's seminal work The Savage: A History of Misunderstanding shows, but that remained consistent in one aspect: The savage was inferior. From the mid-19th century onward, this inferiority was legitimized by Darwinian thought and early anthropology that turned the savage into the lowest example of human evolution (Sinclair 1977: 93; Brantlinger 1985: 186). People who were lost in intellectual and moral "darkness" required enlightenment from external superiors. The more explorers, missionaries, and scientists went to the Congo in the name of imperial "knowing", as this chapter showed, the darker its people grew and the more need there was for the "light" of science and Christianity (cf. Brantlinger 1985: 166). By re-casting the Congo's geography as an attractive "rich valley" rather than a suffocating "swamp", capitalist exploitation was legitimized. The metaphor of the "valley" turned the Congo into a "good" space that could easily be contrasted with its "bad" population, once again legitimizing the conquest of Central West Africa that would soon take place. Because the Congo turned out to be a rich valley and not a wild, unfruitful "swamp", as the parlance prior to the 1880s had it, the human inability to make use of natural riches turned the people of the Congo into a particularly "low grade of savage" on the Dark Continent. As incapable capitalists, the Congolese were both typical and atypical of the "darkness" of Africa.

The trope of "darkness" draws attention to the strategic continuities and breaches within the Congo discourse between the antebellum and postbellum period. Congoist discourse shows itself to be an accumulation and repetition of past ideas, as well as a rephrasing of these same thoughts executed through new epistemic authorities. The perceived antebellum darkness of the people called Congo was triggered by abolitionist propaganda that thrived on revealing the atrocities of the European slave trade when handling the agency-less, pagan Congolese. In contrast, postbellum African American discourse considered the Congo's darkness a matter of the pagan's savage own doing, no longer victimizing "him", as "he" was considered his own source of misery. Euro-Americans thus no longer played the role of oppressive enslavers, but that of the leaders of "a crusade that would vanquish the forces of darkness" (ibid: 198). Through this strategy of blaming the victim, American slavery was no longer an inhuman brutality, but rather a civilizing tool from which African Americans in the end profited. As beneficiaries of slavery, albeit ones refusing to forget its horrors, African American intellectuals would now inscribe themselves

in the imperial epistemology of "salvaging" the pagan Congolese from their home-made misery – which included everything from the slave trade to tribal savagery, the lack of a work ethic, shameless sexual customs, "unnatural" gender relations, and a general primitiveness.

The metaphors of "light" and "darkness" perpetuated the supposed difference between an "enlightened" self and a "dark" Other (cf. Loomba 2005: 55). Whoever this Other might have been, whether external or internal, its characterization was always determined by reference to what "we" were not: "Who are we? We are non-savages" (Mills 1998: 43). The achievement of imperialism was to bring the world closer together and at the same time separate it (Said 1994: xxiv), which, in the African American antebellum period, resulted in a clear separation of oneself from the pagan African, as well as the African American labeled Congo with the characteristic physical features. Despite their separation, these Others existed as intertwined entities because they would reciprocally produce and influence one another's signification. "Black tea" could stand for Congo only because pitch black Americans, who themselves were named after their alleged home country, would be referred to as such.

By buying into the epistemology of epistemic "whiteness" and "Americanness", African American intellectuals in the late 19th century actively tried to tie themselves through race, class, capitalism, and citizenship to those people in the United States who mattered because of social privilege: white Americans. In an attempt to disrupt the equation of Americanness with "whiteness" (Mills 1998: 58), African Americans produced and pushed for an entity that constituted their alleged opposite: an entity called Congo.