Since the latter part of the eighteenth century the American Negro's interest in Africa has been continually shown in his writings. Probably the first public statement by an American Negro pertaining to Africa was published by Othello, a Negro resident of Maryland, who in 1788 protested the stealing of Africans for purposes of enslavement and wrote that "every corner of the globe would reverberate with the sound of African oppression" if the inhabitants of Africa had crossed the Atlantic Ocean, seized American citizens, and carried them back to slavery in Africa. In the following year the autobiography of Olaudah Equiano, also known as Gustavus Vassa, appeared. In addition to recollections of childhood, Vassa's book contained interesting descriptions of everyday life in Africa.

It is quite possible that Paul Cuffee's Brief Account of the Settlement and Present Condition of the Colony of Sierra Leone (1812) gave rise to interest in Sierra Leone as a place for colonization by

American Negroes. Cuffee, a Negro shipowner and navigator, had explored the area in 1811 for the possibilities of colonization and trade. It seems a meaningful coincidence that in 1817, the very year of Cuffee’s death, the American Colonization Society was formed, and for more than fifty years remained a stimulus to published propaganda by American Negroes for and against African colonization.

During this period, many American Negroes journeyed to Africa; but Negro missionaries and bishops of the various church denominations began as early as the 1830’s to write of their experiences while serving in many parts of Africa, specifically, in Sierra Leone, Liberia, The Belgian Congo, South Africa, and Togoland. Their successors have continued to publish about Africa up to the present. One of the less known, but not the least zealous of Negro missionaries, was Dr. William Henry Sheppard, a graduate of Hampton Institute, who was made a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society of London in recognition of his services as an explorer. Sheppard went in 1890 as a missionary under the Presbyterian church to Luebo in the Belgian Congo. There he labored for twenty years and fearlessly exposed Belgian cruelties towards the Africans. Sheppard’s articles relating to the Bakuba of Central Africa are informative, while his African folk tales are amusing.

Within the scope of the present compilation of 421 titles by forty-nine authors fall the writings of explorers like Martin Robison Delany, who was sent to Africa to study the possibility of using the Niger Valley as a place for the settlement of colored emigrants from the United States; of educators like Alexander Crummell, who reminded the “sons of Africa in America” of their African heritage in his Relations and Duty to the Land of Their Fathers (1861); and of diplomats like George Washington Ellis, whose research into the cultural life of Africa extended over his ten years of diplomatic service. The writings of Thomas McCants Stewart, a lawyer who helped codify the laws of Liberia and assisted in the settlement of numerous boundary disputes in that country, and of the scientists Hildrus Poindexter and Madison Briscoe, field investigators in tropical bacteriology and entomology respectively, may suggest further the considerable diversity of the American Negro’s interest in Africa.

Quite generally known are the varied African interests of the
late Alain LeRoy Locke. In a published article, «Apropos of Africa», Locke urged the American Negro to support programs of African studies and to inform himself about Africa through study, travel, and exchange of students and of journalistic and scholarly publications. The writings of W. E. B. DuBois, Monroe Work, Carter G. Woodson, Rayford Logan and Max Yergan have yielded considerable knowledge of Africa's more recent past; while the unpublished lectures and occasional articles of William Leo Hansberry have enabled that scholar to exert broad influence on both African and American students of African history and archeology.

Other American Negroes have published travelogues, fiction with an African theme, studies on agriculture, religion, family life, linguistics, history, art, music, politics and biography. Their books and articles have touched on life in Algeria, Egypt, Ethiopia, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, South Africa, Belgian Congo, Kenya, Gold Coast, Angola, Southwest Africa, and Swaziland.

Owing to limited space, it has been necessary to omit biographical notes and annotations. For the same reason, the compiler has made no effort to analyze the literature in an extended essay. The purpose here has been to present in true proportion the nature and the scope of published expressions about Africa by American Negro authors. Although it has not been possible to include many newspaper articles by Negroes published in either the white or the Negro press, the compiler feels that this purpose has been accomplished.

It is hoped that in connection with the growing world interest in African affairs, the present compilation will be significant as an index to what Negro scholars, humanitarians, or students of African interests have thought about the «land of their fathers».


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