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DANIEL P. KILBRIDE

During Reconstruction, proponents for black citizenship had to overcome the practically universal assumption among Northern whites that African Americans lacked the moral and intellectual attainments necessary to wield political power responsibly. The glorious record of black military service in maintaining the Union and destroying slavery went a long way toward alleviating those fears. The performance of black soldiers in blue vindicated Frederick Douglass's prediction that "no power on earth [could] deny that he has earned the right to citizenship."¹ W. E. B. Du Bois observed that blacks' peacetime employments did not dent the wall of Northern prejudice. "But when he rose and fought and killed, the whole nation with one voice proclaimed him a man and a brother. Nothing else made Negro citizenship conceivable, but the record of the Negro soldier as a fighter."¹ Military service did not alone testify to African Americans' merits, however. In the late 1850s, prejudice against color encountered a sudden, powerful challenge: a flood of African travel accounts that the press and public received with widespread acclaim. Those books provided Americans with favorable accounts of African character and intellect. Their authors possessed unimpeachable reputations as missionaries or men of science. Their implicit or often explicit attack on the foundations of antiblack racism could not be dismissed as the ramblings of mawkish

1. "Enlistment of Colored Men," *Douglass' Monthly*, Aug. 1863, 850; W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America* (1935; repr., New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2007), 84. On black arms and the debate over citizenship and political equality, see Chandra Manning, *What This Cruel War Was Over: Soldiers, Slavery, and the Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007); 271–92; Kate Masur, *An Example for All the Land: Emancipation and the Struggle over Equality in Washington, D.C.* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2010); Eric Foner, *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2010).

sentimentalists or abolitionist zealots. If anything, this body of work suggested that it was proslavery ideology and racist “science” that was unmoored to reality. Most crucially in the Reconstruction context, these books portrayed African people as morally upright, intellectually sophisticated, and receptive to Christianity and western civilization. Together with the fresh memory of black military heroism, they helped tip the scales in favor of African American citizenship.

But only for a time. Northerners turned out to be fickle allies of black Americans striving claim a place in American civic life out of the wreckage of slavery. One of the fronts in reactionaries’ counterattack against Reconstruction was the new, fragile notion among whites that black people possessed the mental and moral aptitudes for citizenship. Reactionaries benefitted from a rash of new African travel accounts published in the 1860s and 1870s that repudiated the progressive vision of the 1850s. Racists seized on these books, insisting the freedpeople would now revert to their essential, African natures, inflicting cannibalism and human sacrifice upon the prostrate South. The publication of these books coincided with the early reception of *The Origin of Species* and the sighting and description, by explorer Paul du Chaillu, of the western lowland gorilla. Reactionaries opportunistically linked Darwin’s theory with du Chaillu’s discovery to argue that African peoples, including black Americans, were less evolved than whites and probably more closely related to gorillas. Republicans took the bait, accepting battle on terrain chosen by their adversaries. The space that the travel accounts of the 1850s and the black heroism of the 1860s had opened to revolutionize American race relations closed up. A new, insidious, and brutal image of black people took deep root in American culture.

These books, extensively publicized, reviewed, and excerpted in the periodical and newspaper press, caused a spike in popular interest in African travel, although Americans had never been apathetic about Africa. Moreover, travel literature had long been a wildly popular literary genre.² Americans favored books about Europe, but over time their tastes diversified. The first career travel writer, Bayard Taylor, made his name in 1846 with *Views a-Foot; Or, Europe Seen with Knapsack and Staff*, but he eventually published travelogues on China, the Holy Land, and Africa.³ The

2. On travel literature’s popularity, see Eileen Ka-May Cheng, “Popular Nonfiction,” in *The Oxford History of Popular Print Culture*: vol. 5, *US Popular Print Culture to 1860*, ed. Ronald J. Zboray and Mary Saracino Zboray (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2019), 477–81; Dona Brown, “Travel Books,” in *A History of the Book in America*: vol. 2, *An Extensive Republic: Print, Culture, and Society in the New Nation, 1790–1840*, ed. Robert A. Gross and Mary Kelley (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2010), 448–58; Alfred Bendixen, “American Travel Books about Europe before the Civil War,” in *The Cambridge Companion to American Travel Writing*, ed. Alfred Bendixen and Judith Hamera (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2009), 103–26.

3. Liam Corley, *Bayard Taylor: Determined Dreamer of America’s Rise, 1825–1878* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell Univ. Press, 2014).

Amistad rebellion and the return to Africa of “Prince”—Abd-al-Rahman Ibrahima, a Fulani nobleman held in slavery for decades in Mississippi—had turned Americans’ attention toward Africa for short periods early in the nineteenth century.⁴ The accounts of the 1850s and after, however, triggered an intense, sustained, and popular interest. The *North American Review*, the nation’s premier literary journal, barely noticed Africa before the mid-1850s. In the single featured review of African explorations it published in the 1840s, the author confessed, “The Past, Present, and Future of Africa are alike wrapped in mystery.” Between 1855 and 1863, the *North American Review* published eight articles or notices of African developments—chiefly exploration—including one review featuring ten separate books published between 1855 and 1858. Four of the featured authors—David Livingstone, Heinrich Barth, and Southern American missionaries J. Leighton Wilson and Thomas J. Bowen—emerged as the most articulate challengers to Americans’ prejudices toward Africa and Africans in the decade before the Civil War.⁵

Likewise, the *American Publishers’ Circular*—the era’s *Publisher’s Weekly*—was slow to appreciate the popularity of African travel accounts. Although it recognized Livingstone’s celebrity, it merely acknowledged the publication of *Missionary Travels* among the thousands of other titles released in 1858. By 1861, though, the vogue of African travel accounts had become apparent. When Harper’s published Paul du Chaillu’s *Explorations and Adventures in Equatorial Africa*, the *Circular* printed a long excerpt about his first encounter with gorillas. It heralded the publication of his “long-awaited and much-talked about” book, “with its marvelous stories of the terrible gorilla ape, and the cannibal Fan tribe.” The explorers of the 1850s enjoyed such credibility that publishers tried to hitch new books to their bandwagon. Boston’s Ticknor & Fields bragged that J. Lewis Krapf’s *Travels, Researches, and Missionary Labors in Eastern Africa* (1860) was “equal in novelty to the most attractive chapters of Barth and Livingstone.”⁶

4. Marcus Rediker, *The Amistad Rebellion: An Atlantic Odyssey of Slavery and Freedom* (New York: Penguin, 2012); Terry Alford, *Prince among Slaves* (1977; repr., New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2007).

5. “The Men and Brutes of South Africa,” *North American Review* 68 (Apr. 1849): 266; “Recent Researches in Africa,” *North American Review* 86 (Apr. 1858): 530–63; David Livingstone, *Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa* . . . (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1858); Heinrich Barth, *Travels and Discoveries in North and Central Africa* . . . 5 vols. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1857–58); J. Leighton Wilson, *Western Africa: Its History, Condition, and Prospects* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1856); Thomas Jefferson Bowen, *Central Africa: Adventures and Missionary Labors in Several Countries in the Interior of Africa, from 1849 to 1856* (Charleston, SC: Southern Baptist Publication Society, 1857).

6. *American Publishers’ Circular and Literary Gazette*, June 8, 1861, 206, 197–99, June 2, 1860, 287, Apr. 11, 1857, 229.

It was not just elite forums like the *Review* that featured these books. They were widely reviewed in the newspaper and periodical press, very often together. Newspapers frequently reprinted stories, first from the British press, where the first notices of Livingstone and Barth's books appeared, and then from American papers. That practice spread news of these books far more extensively than if outlets had run original accounts written by their own limited staffs. Editors and readers understood their common thematic elements, principally a sympathetic orientation toward African peoples. The sensation these books made among the literate public was nothing short of astonishing. "No other subject [than Africa] is more rife in literature, whether in form of stately volumes, or grave reviews, or ephemeral newspaper disquisitions," one author noted. Looking back at the 1850s from the perspective of 1867, another writer marveled at how "Africa [had risen] at once in importance in the view of the trader, the man of science, and the philanthropist." Reviewers' excitement seems to have made an impression on American readers. The most influential book on Africa published in the 1850s, Livingstone's *Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa* became a bona fide bestseller. Early in 1858, Raleigh, North Carolina, readers learned that their "eager expectations" had at last been met by the appearance of an American edition. The local bookseller "advise[d] all who are looking out for something *new* to read" to buy *Missionary Travels* "at once."⁷

New York's Harper & Brothers capitalized on the popularity of African travel accounts by publishing the most famous authors, including Livingstone, Barth, Wilson, du Chaillu, and Richard Burton.⁸ In the absence of an international copyright law, this was lucrative indeed; foreign authors received no royalties. In a bit of poetic justice, a Philadelphia firm, J. W. Bradley, cannibalized Harper's Livingstone. The New York house bragged that its edition of *Missionary Travels* sold briskly but admitted that Bradley's printing, which was aggressively advertised, had "considerably" cut into its profits. The *American Publisher's Circular* listed Bradley's edition among the top-selling books at an 1858 New York book fair. James Woodhouse, a Richmond, Virginia, bookseller, warned prospective customers against "several spurious publications, which, by artful advertisements, are made to appear as though emanating from Dr. Livingstone." It urged Virginian readers to submit their orders

7. "African Civilization," *Christian Advocate and Journal* 36 (Mar. 7, 1861): 76; "Openings for Christian Effort in Central Africa," *New Englander* 26 (July 1867): 426; *Semi-Weekly Raleigh Register*, Jan. 2, 1858.

8. In the back matter of Winwood Reade's *Savage Africa: Being the Narrative of a Tour in Equatorial, Southwestern, and Northwestern Africa . . .* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1864), the publisher appended a list of eighteen "Standard Works of Discovery and Adventure in Africa" it had published since the 1850s—a "small library" in its own right.

for the Harper's edition posthaste, as "it is expected that the demand" for *Missionary Travels* would exceed all other titles save Macaulay's *History of England*.⁹

The editors of a Virginia newspaper welcomed Bradley's edition, arguing that the book's "immense sale" provided opportunities for local men to work as sales agents. Livingstone's success was not unique. Advertisements for Bowen's *Central Africa* called it an "eagerly expected" book, a "thrilling work of travels" that also held interest for "the philanthropist who would see Ethiopia stretch out her hands." It was reviewed in newspapers across the country and even caught the attention of the US Senate, which invited Bowen to testify on behalf of his plan for an American-led Niger expedition. At least one editor tried to attach the moniker "The American Livingstone" to Bowen (it didn't stick). His *Central Africa* sold more than sixty-five hundred copies in less than a year, an impressive feat considering that his publisher, the Charleston-based Southern Baptist Publication Society, had just a fraction of Harper's publicity machine.¹⁰

Black citizenship's proponents understood the potential utility of these books. The writers of the 1850s made it clear that Africa's conventional image had been based on little more than rumor and prejudice. Sympathetic critics contrasted the integrity of this body of work to the lurid and implausible accounts of others. Although scholars typically lump Livingstone's cohort together with those who came before and after, from Mungo Park to Henry Morton Stanley, they were in fact sharply divergent. Contemporary readers recognized the discontinuity. The explorers of the 1850s introduced Americans to Africans who were scarcely recognizable: culturally diverse, industrious, compassionate, and intelligent. As one New Englander observed, "travellers in Africa" had shown that continent's people to be "free, independent, amiable, brave, urbane, and ever intelligent." American readers could not help but apply this new information to the controversies of the

9. "Literary Intelligence—The Fall Trade Sales," *American Publishers' Circular and Literary Gazette*, Sept. 25, 1858m 462; J. Henry Harper, *The House of Harper: A Century of Publishing in Franklin Square* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1912), 246; *Richmond Whig*, Dec. 1, 1857; *Cooper's Clarksburg (VA) Register*, Oct. 22, 1858.

10. Bowen advertisements from Rev. E. T. Winkler, *Notes and Questions for the Oral Instruction of Colored People, with Appropriate Texts and Hymns* (Charleston, SC: Southern Baptist Publication Society, 1857), [135]; "The American Livingstone," *North American and United States Gazette*, Jan. 10, 1859. On Bowen's sales, see David Carson Davis, "Thomas Jefferson Bowen and His Plans for the Redemption of Africa" (MA thesis, Baylor Univ., 1978), 61. On Livingstone, see Matthew Rubery, "A Transatlantic Sensation: Stanley's Search for Livingstone and the Anglo-American Press," in *The Oxford History of Popular Print Culture*: vol. 6 of 6, *US Popular Print Culture, 1860–1920*, ed. Christine Bold (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2011), 505. The mention of Ethiopia refers to Psalm 68:31, a verse frequently quoted by those committed to the Christian conversion of Africa: "Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God."

1860s and 1870s. African exploration accounts reinforced what many Northerners learned from the black military experience—that African Americans were intellectually and morally equipped to undertake the responsibilities of citizenship.¹¹

Ultimately, of course, these works failed to convince Northerners to realize the promise of Reconstruction for black Americans—but they might have. Their ultimate failure stemmed from several factors. Republicans made a critical strategic mistake at the outset. They and their allies might have insisted that the matter to be decided during Reconstruction was the South's responsibility to meet the North's minimal demands for justice for the freedpeople. Instead, they allowed themselves to be roped into a debate over blacks' capacity for responsible citizenship, one key body of evidence for which were African travel accounts. That body of work was problematic for several reasons. It assumed the superiority of western civilization; Africa, not the West, would be transformed. Also, its endorsement of African capacity was sharply limited. These explorers might advocate civic equality, but never social equality. They tried conscientiously to avoid lurid descriptions of cannibalism, human sacrifice, and other staples of "dark Africa" literature. But they all contained details guaranteed to shock Victorian sensibilities, and their critics quickly seized on them. When Heinrich Barth described Burnu troops severing the legs of a hundred Musgu warriors, yet refused to condemn Africans as a degraded race, a writer in *DeBow's Review* concluded that his "heart, his mind, and all his nature" had been warped by the "base slander" of abolitionism. Thus, despite their authors' intentions, these accounts contained material aplenty to be used against the cause of black citizenship. African Americans' antagonists did not hesitate to take examples out of context, distort, or use outright misrepresentation to apply these works to the cause of white supremacy.¹²

Finally and most important, Africa literature took a turn for the worse in the 1860s. The old humanitarianism gave way to swashbuckling works of adventure steeped in racist tropes. Explorer-celebrities like Paul du Chaillu and Winwood Reade engaged in the grossest sensationalism, providing the critics of Reconstruction with all the ammunition they needed to document Africans' incapacity for civic responsibility. One reviewer put it succinctly: analyses of Africans' aptitudes

11. Letter to the editor, "Christian Civilization," *Boston Investigator*, Sept. 19, 1860. On the tendency to lump nineteenth-century explorers together, see Patrick Brantlinger, "Victorians and Africans: The Genealogy of the Myth of the Dark Continent," *Critical Inquiry* 12 (Autumn 1985): 166–203.

12. Philip D. Curtin, *The Image of Africa: British Ideas and Action, 1780–1850* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1964); Barth, *Travels and Discoveries in North and Central Africa*, 1:577; Dr. Kilpatrick, "The African El Dorado—How the Africans Live at Home, Part Two," *DeBow's Review*, June 1859, 639.

could be divided into “despairing secularists [and] hopeful Christians.” By the 1870s, the secularists had won the day.¹³ Livingstone and his cohort had always appealed to a limited, if significant, demographic. Some Northerners were open to questioning their racial prejudices, but others were unreachable.¹⁴ The new wave of African travel accounts sowed doubt among Northern progressives and provided content that reactionaries were eager to weaponize. With these books in hand, they engaged in a ruthless campaign of vilification against African Americans. The proponents of black citizenship, rooted in the tactics and mentality of antebellum benevolence, were utterly unequipped to withstand this onslaught.¹⁵

The most highly publicized works appearing in the 1850s were written by Livingstone, who crossed Southern Africa from Luanda to Quelimane from 1854 to 1856; Heinrich Barth, who explored the western Sudan from 1850 to 1856; J. Leighton Wilson of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, who served at Cape Palmas, Liberia, and the Gabon River from 1834 to 1852; and Southern Baptist missionary Thomas Jefferson Bowen, who served in Yorubaland, in present-day Nigeria, from 1850 to 1856. Although different in style, content, and purpose, these works were very similar thematically: all but Barth were missionaries who were passionately committed to bringing Africa to Christ; Bowen and Livingstone had ambitious plans for combining commerce, civilization, and imperial authority to convert Africans; and all four shocked readers with appealing portrayals of African people.¹⁶

These books appeared at a time when the condition of people of color in the United States was at a nadir. Chattel slavery had never seemed so deeply entrenched. The legal condition of both slaves and free people of color deteriorated sharply during the 1850s. The Dred Scott decision, rejecting the very concept of black citizenship, threatened to undercut completely the legal position of people of color. The 1850 Fugitive Slave Act panicked free blacks with the threat of kidnapping; emigration to Canada spiked, and the hated American Colonization Society enjoyed a renaissance. And, as already noted, the authority of racial science soared. In 1860, a Philadelphia conservative concluded that recent research had “produced results which are gradually leading the educated mind of Europe and this country

13. “Africa and the Africans,” *Ladies’ Repository*, Feb. 1875, 165.

14. Matthew E. Stanley, *The Loyal West: Civil War and Reunion in Middle America* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 2017), 98–109.

15. On the flexibility of Northern racial attitudes, see David Prior, “Reconstruction Unbound: American Worldviews in a Period of Promise and Conflict, 1865–1874” (PhD. diss., Univ. of South Carolina, 2010), 111.

16. Livingstone, *Missionary Travels*; Barth, *Travels and Discoveries in North and Central Africa*; Wilson, *Western Africa*; Bowen, *Central Africa*.

to the conclusion, that most of the difficult and complicated social and political questions which agitate the world, if not all of them, resolve themselves into questions of race." The deterioration of blacks' position was so obvious that when, in his opinion on *Dred Scott*, Chief Justice Taney suggested that their status had improved since the Revolution, Abraham Lincoln could hardly contain himself. "Their ultimate destiny has never appeared so hopeless as in the last three or four years," he said. "All the powers of the earth seem rapidly combining against him. Mammon is after him; ambition follows, and philosophy follows, and the Theology of the day is fast joining the cry."¹⁷

The travel accounts of the late 1850s shattered that racist consensus. These works represented Africans as people worthy of empathy, respect, and assistance in integrating into what one reviewer called "the great confraternity of man." Barth filled his book with stories of his friendly exchanges with African peoples. He wrote about two girls from the village of Molghoy who saw he "was a good-natured sort of man who took great interest in them" and engaged him in "a long pleasant chat" one June evening in 1851. Livingstone's *Missionary Travels*, too, foregrounded humanizing, empathetic stories of encounters with sub-Saharan Africans. "His tone in speaking of them is uniformly kind and affectionate," noted one reviewer. "He vindicates their intelligence, excuses their faults, and allows no religious prejudice to bias his judgment of their character."¹⁸

Southerners Bowen and Wilson were more circumspect. Wilson did not think that Africans could "under any circumstances" acquire "the energy, the enterprise, or the inventive powers of the white man." Yet, he suggested that Africans' deficiencies stemmed from the "circumstances of heathenism," not biological inevitability. He conceded that Africans' "intellectual faculties" did not equal whites' but argued that it "must be ascribed to the circumstances in which they have lived." For his part, Bowen thought that "the dark races are constitutionally inferior to the white," yet he insisted that Africans were capable of great improvement via the application of commerce, Christianity, and western civilization. Europeans had once been barbarians, he reminded readers of *Central Africa*. He envisioned the rise of "negro

17. [Sidney George Fisher], *The Laws of Race, as Connected with Slavery* (Philadelphia: Willis P. Hazard, 1860), 9; "Speech on the *Dred Scott* Decision at Springfield, Illinois," in *Lincoln's Selected Writings*, ed. David S. Reynolds (New York: W. W. Norton, 2015), 115–16. On free blacks in the 1850s, see Lawrence Levine, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790–1860* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1961), 247–79; Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and "Race" in New England, 1780–1860* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1998), 261–85; R. J. M. Blackett, *The Captive's Quest for Freedom: Fugitive Slaves, the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law, and the Politics of Slavery* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2018).

18. "Hope for Africa," *New-York Evangelist*, Mar. 28, 1861; Barth, *Travels and Discoveries*, 2:385; "Recent Researches in Africa," *North American Review* 86 (Apr. 1858): 55.

nations fully as much civilized as we are at present” once free people of color, with the assistance of the US government, devoted themselves to Africa’s redemption.¹⁹

These accounts, and other, lesser-known works, stunned American readers. It was as though a blank space on the map of the world had suddenly been filled. “The secret of Africa has ceased to be,” declared a story originating in the *New York Tribune* and reprinted in papers in Nebraska, Hawaii, Ohio, and Philadelphia. A South Carolina paper noted that Africa’s secrets were “being gradually revealed . . . by the efforts of daring travelers and courageous missionaries.” It was not just that these books had laid open hitherto unknown parts of the earth, although that was remarkable enough—maybe even a sign that “the kingdom of God has come into this world,” as one writer proposed. Rather, the dissipation of ignorance about Africa and other remote parts of the world rendered it difficult to caricature their inhabitants with crude stereotypes drawn from the imagination. “Geographical and national insulation is a barrier to that sympathy for race which proclaims our common humanity,” Joseph Thompson, a geographer, explained. The new African discoveries had revealed “one earth from pole to pole . . . a common moral nature susceptible to the same virtues and vices . . . and the same social elevation.”²⁰

These explorers’ depictions of Africa’s people struck readers as even more remarkable than their geographic discoveries. Barth and Livingstone described Africans as a diverse people, distinguished by a variety of physical appearances, levels of civilization, and technological accomplishments. “We have heretofore known but little of Africa or its inhabitants,” a much-reprinted article admitted. It was “inhabited by a most interesting people, or rather a group of races” superior to the coastal nations, peoples corrupted by generations of slave trading from whom Americans had drawn most of their views of African character.²¹ The accounts of the 1850s showed that Africa was not peopled by sloths addicted to warfare, cannibalism, and human sacrifice, but “peaceful and industrious natives, who raise cotton, tobacco, and negro corn.” In short, Africans had been shown to be “in a far

19. Wilson, *Western Africa*, 380–81; Bowen, *Central Africa*, 61–62.

20. “Dr. Livingstone’s Discoveries,” *Bellevue (NE) Gazette*, Apr. 2, 1857; “The Interior of Africa,” *Abbeville (SC) Banner*, Feb. 5, 1857; T.L.P., “The Advance of Civilization,” *Circular* (Brooklyn, NY), Mar. 25, 1858, 34; Joseph P. Thompson, “Department of Geography: The Value of Geography to the Scholar, the Merchant, and the Philanthropist,” *Journal of the American Geographical and Statistical Society* 1 (Apr. 1859):105, 107.

21. “African Products and Discoveries,” *Maine Farmer*, Dec. 31, 1857. Originally published in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, this article (sometimes titled “African Productions and Discoveries”) exemplifies not only reprinting’s ubiquity but its potential to promote the circulation of a single article. This one was reprinted in at least five additional papers: *Maine Farmer* (Augusta); *Friends Intelligencer* (Philadelphia); *German Reformed Messenger* (Philadelphia); *Friends Review* (Philadelphia); and the *Emigrant Aid Journal of Minnesota* (Nininger).

more advanced state of civilization than is generally supposed.” Having learned that Africans “are prone to civilization, and industry and culture,” a Methodist writer predicted, “the long accepted idea of their inferiority is destined to vanish.”²²

Many Northerners drew that shocking conclusion from these books. Their depiction of Africans simply could not be reconciled with conventional wisdom. These responses reveal the presence of an alternative cultural space where some Americans envisioned a common humanity unbounded by race. Wartime experiences broadened but did not create what Peter Kolchin calls a “reservoir of sympathy and even admiration” for African Americans.²³ One writer observed that Americans assumed that “the native African was an unmitigated savage, plunged in the infinite abyss of barbarism, living penuriously, and constitutionally incapable of voluntary labor.” Many Northerners were prepared to revise that assessment, given the opportunity. That was precisely what the accounts published in the 1850s provided. Announcing the publication of Barth’s book, a Philadelphia paper admitted, “We have thought so contemptuously of the black race and their land, that the facts here published, attesting the claims of Africa to respect and study, come upon the world like a new revelation.” The implications for Africans were revolutionary: the notion that they were “doomed by the laws of nature to eternal degradation, may pass current on the banks of the American Chattahoochee, but disappear on the African Zambesi,” reported an Indianan. The implications for the African continent were at least as thoroughgoing. Nobody could take Livingstone and Bowen at their word and fail to envision a future Africa “thronged with educated Africans—polished men of color—negro inventors, philosophers, teachers, orators, poets, painters, sculptors, authors, and even doctors of divinity.”²⁴

The religious press found these works especially meaningful. They suggested Africa was finally ready to come to Christ. To progressive evangelicals, the opening of Africa even suggested that the millennium was about to be realized. Among the events that Rev. W. A. Scott identified as signs for the imminent “overthrow of idolatry and infidelity, and the diffusion of the Gospel” were the explorations of Barth and Livingstone, which had made possible the “opening of vast regions of its interior to trade and missionary enterprise among a dense population.” These

22. “African Discoveries,” *Scientific American*, Feb. 13, 1858, 181; “Discoveries in Africa,” *Zion’s Herald and Wesleyan Journal* 29 (Jan. 13, 1858), 6.

23. Peter Kolchin, “Reexamining Southern Emancipation in Comparative Perspective,” *Journal of Southern History* 81 (Winter 2015): 15.

24. “Africa,” *North American and United States Gazette*, Oct. 22, 1858; “Book notes,” *North American and United States Gazette*, Feb. 5, 1859; “African Commerce: Its Internal Trade and American Connections,” *Randolph County Journal* (Winchester, IN), July 15, 1858; J. D. Bell, “A Nation of the Future,” *Ladies’ Repository*, Oct. 1860, 614–15.

books, which combined scientific rigor with missionary zeal, seemed to hearken a new age of progress for Africa. Once as isolated as if they “had tenanted one of the planets that wheels in the space between Mars and Jupiter,” Africans had now been brought out of the darkness. That and other “great events will rouse the true people of God,” one evangelical predicted. Indeed, Africa’s integration into the civilized world would complete the unity of humankind. One midwesterner enthused, “We are no longer at that period of civilization when the light shines only in spots. . . . We must prepare to behold the whole globe filled with a light which belongs now to the favored and the few.”²⁵

Until the Civil War, when “What shall we do with the Negro?” became an urgent question, the practical application of these books was unclear.²⁶ They gave hope to emigrationists like Martin Delany that American blacks could thrive in Africa. Opponents of the movement to reopen the Atlantic slave trade mined these books for evidence of its inhumanity—and they found plenty. Livingstone’s cohort agreed that “the foreign slave traffic constitutes the gigantic evil of Africa,” as one reviewer avowed. “The negro races are naturally as full of the feelings of humanity, their family affections are as strong, and their sense of justice is as correct, as those of any other people or race.” The slave trade had toxified these “natural instincts.” Bowen and Wilson were the most authoritative Southern critics of slave trade revival. Bowen wrote, “The battles and sieges which supply Europeans with slaves . . . destroy from two to four persons for every laborer who reaches the plantations in America.” Likewise, Wilson insisted that “almost all the anarchy, misery, bloodshed and warfare, that have reigned in that country for two centuries past” could be traced back to the Atlantic slave trade.²⁷

African travel accounts began to inform public policy when emancipation became a Union war aim in late 1862. They seemed relevant because most whites identified slaves and free people of color as Africans, despite their American patrimony. The convergence between the opening of Africa and the death knell of slavery struck many Americans as positively providential. A writer for the *Christian Recorder* went

25. W. A. Scott, D., “Sermon XXXV: Two Worlds United,” *National Preacher and Village Pulpit* 1 (Nov. 1858): 357; “Dr. Livingstone’s Travels in Africa,” *Theological and Literary Journal* 10 (Apr. 1858): 658, 660; “African Commerce.”

26. Paul D. Escott, “*What Shall We Do with the Negro?*” *Lincoln, White Racism, and Civil War America* (Charlottesville: Univ. of Virginia Press, 2009).

27. “African Discovery,” *Quarterly Review* 109 (Apr. 1861): 522, 524. This was reprinted in *Littell’s Living Age*, new ser. 13 (June 1861): 541–61. “Importation of African Negroes,” *Athens (TN) Post*, May 14, 1858; J. Leighton Wilson, “The Foreign Slave Trade: Can It Be Revived without Violating the Most Sacred Principles of Honor, Humanity and Religion?” *Southern Presbyterian Review* 12 (1860): 495. See also Ronald T. Takaki, *A Pro-Slavery Crusade: The Agitation to Reopen the African Slave Trade* (New York: Free Press, 1971), 81–82.

so far as to argue that only the workings of a divine plan could explain how “at just the time when the great and absorbing questions which relate to this people in our own land are forcing themselves upon our attention, the continent of Africa is attracting more of interest in the way of discovery and travel than any other portion of the earth.” Especially “since the commencement of the great Rebellion in the interests of Slavery,” another Northerner observed, the country had been engaged in a conversation about “God’s providence and purposes with respect to Africa and the African race.” It could not be denied that a “strange connection” bound together the momentous events in the United States with “the forces which are being brought into play to redeem the native home of the slave.”²⁸

Republicans seized on these works in their campaign for black citizenship. Radicals called attention to accounts of Africa to “plead for our Common Humanity,” as Charles Sumner put it. Frederick Douglass found in Livingstone’s, Barth’s, and Wilson’s books evidence for “highly progressive and civilizing elements in the colored race.” Most black leaders, however, were loath to call attention to Africa, lest it distract from their demand to be considered fully American.²⁹ It was white Americans, not blacks, who used African travel accounts as weapons in the battle over black citizenship. The subversive influence of African travel accounts transcended Radical circles. Ordinary Republicans realized that these works challenged conventional wisdom about black peoples’ abilities and needed to inform Reconstruction policies toward the freedpeople. The religious press, a powerful force in radicalizing Northern public opinion, helped publicize these books. There can be no doubt that their sympathetic coverage helped propel support for black citizenship among white Northerners.³⁰ A Massachusetts Baptist appealed to those “no longer afraid to be counted friends of the negro” in predicting a future for all African peoples “which shall exhibit a sublime contrast to his present and past humiliation.” Samuel B. Hunt, a Union army doctor, thought that the “facts reported by African travelers” provided a valuable perspective to assess the future

28. A Veteran Observer, “The President’s Plan of Emancipation,” *New York Times*, Dec. 12, 1862; “The Future of the Colored Race in America,” *Christian Recorder*, Sept. 3, 1862; Notice of *The Negro Problem Solved*, *New York Evangelist*, Sept. 29, 1864; “Book Notices,” *Methodist*, July 13, 1861.

29. Charles Sumner, *The Question of Caste* (Boston: Wright & Potter, 1869), 24; “The Douglass Institute: An Address Delivered in Baltimore, Maryland on 29 Sept. 1865,” in *The Frederick Douglass Papers*, ser. 1, *Speeches, Debates, and Interviews*, ed. John Blassingame, et al., 5 vols. (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1979–92), 4:94; Prior, “Reconstruction Unbound,” 141.

30. Mark E. Neely Jr., “Politics Purified: Religion and the Growth of Antislavery Idealism in Republican Ideology during the Civil War,” in *The Birth of the Grand Old Party: The Republicans’ First Generation*, ed. Robert Engs and Randall Miller (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 103–27.

prospects of African Americans. Hunt maintained that the flaws that Americans ascribed to race had been produced by historical conditions both in Africa and the United States. They “may be expected to disappear under the engerising [*sic*] influences of freedom and the teacher.”³¹

Advocates for emancipation and black citizenship took pains to point out that Livingstone’s cohort of Africa experts agreed that the incidence of allegedly common practices like human sacrifice, cannibalism, and witchcraft had been greatly exaggerated in older accounts. In an article on Livingstone’s Zambezi expedition, a reviewer likened African “witches’ . . . wonderful power” over the people to that of the “modern spiritualists” of the United States. “The African, after all, is very much like other men,” he or she concluded. Even those in the next wave of African exploration were sometimes willing to dispel the most egregious myths about the continent. Richard Burton’s 1865 report on Dahomey—“a synonym for all that is cruel and barbarous” about Africa, observed a reporter—stressed that accounts of human sacrifice, rumored to number in the many thousands per year, were wildly overblown. The Dahomeans, Burton reported, sacrificed just a small number of war captives and criminals. Paul du Chaillu resisted an easy opportunity to caricature the Fang people as unadulterated savages.³² He described them as “regular ghouls” for eating the dead of neighboring tribes. One of his favorite stories, repeated many times on the lecture circuit, was of a Fang woman casually toting “a piece of the thigh of a human body, just as we should go to market and carry thence a roast or steak.” It was a shocking account, perfectly calibrated to trigger Americans’ darkest stereotypes of Africans.³³ In time, du Chaillu would stoke those prejudices. An ambivalent orientation toward Africans marked his early years of celebrity, however. He insisted not that he had never feared for his safety during his long acquaintance with the Fang but that he had been treated with the warmest hospitality. He maintained that the Fang were a highly advanced race—“the most promising people in all Western Africa.”³⁴

31. “The Negro Problem,” *Christian Watchman and Reflector*, Oct. 13, 1864; Sanford B. Hunt, “The Negro as a Soldier,” *Quarterly Journal of Psychological Medicine, and Medical Jurisprudence* 1 (Oct. 1867): 172–73, 177.

32. I will use the modern spelling, “Fang”; Du Chaillu wrote “Fan.”

33. Paul du Chaillu, *Explorations and Adventures in Equatorial Africa* . . . (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1861), 89, 74. Some critics accused him of exaggerating or fabricating the account. Robert B. Walker, an American trader, wrote that neither he nor other residents had ever seen “a human bone or other remains,” much less piles of them, in the Fang country. “Mr. Du Chaillu and His Book,” *Athenaeum* 1769 (Sept. 21, 1861): 373.

34. “Livingstone’s Expedition,” *Christian Watchman and Reflector* (Boston), Nov. 15, 1866; “Royal Ceremonies in Dahome,” *Daily Age* (Philadelphia), Nov. 16, 1864; “African Research,” *Methodist*, Oct. 29, 1864; Du Chaillu, *Explorations and Adventures*, 89, 74, 97. The newspaper articles referenced David Livingstone, *Narrative of an Expedition to the Zambesi and Its Tributaries*.

In sum, the evidence from both the African interior and Civil War battlefields assuaged many Northerners' doubts about black Americans' ability to participate in civic life. "If our Southern friends doubt the ability of the freedman to take care of himself," one of them recommended that they read Livingstone's account of his Zambezi expedition, which teemed with accounts of Africans' shrewdness, industry, and compassion. To those traits, the evidence from the South's battlefields added valor, self-sacrifice, and patriotism. Describing the rescue of Gen. Halbert Paine from the entrenchments around Port Hudson, Louisiana, by a squad of US Colored Troops, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* asked, "Can it be imagined that Gen. Paine will hereafter in the pride of race, compare the negro to the gorilla?" The question answered itself. "A better day is opening for black as well as white," the *Tribune* predicted, one that would establish a "better Humanity, a purer Liberty, a stronger Union founded on Right."³⁵

The *Tribune* proved far too optimistic in forecasting that military service would, in the long term, transform Northern racial attitudes. Its reference to Africans and gorillas suggests a major reason why. In the 1860s and '70s, a new set of African travel accounts appeared, the most influential of which were written by Richard Burton, John Speke, Paul du Chaillu, and Henry Morton Stanley. Burton, best known for making the hajj under disguise in 1853, traveled extensively in East and, later, West Africa. Speke had partnered with him before setting off on his own to discover the source of the Nile. The most authoritative source for Americans was du Chaillu, the son of a Frenchman employed by the French colony at Gabon. Du Chaillu's maternity is a mystery. Most of his biographers think his mother was a native of Réunion (known then as Bourbon), where Paul was born around 1831. He lived in the home of Jane and J. Leighton Wilson at their Gabon mission from 1848 to 1852. He taught at a girls' school in Carmel, New York from 1852 to 1855. Denied naturalized citizenship, du Chaillu nevertheless assumed American nationality. He claimed to have unfurled an American flag on setting off on his first journey into the African interior. On returning, he had two porters affix the flag from the tallest tree. In the 1850s and '60s, he made two long explorations of equatorial Africa. He was the first westerner to see and report on the western

ies (London: J. Murray, 1865); and Richard Burton, "On the Present State of Dahome," *Report of the Thirty-Fourth Meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science* (London: John Murray, 1865), 138–39.

35. "Livingstone's Expedition," *Christian Watchman and Reflector*, Nov. 15, 1866; "Our Colored Allies," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 2, 1863. For an account of Paine's rescue, including the claim, "It is universally conceded that the negroes make capital soldiers," see "Gen. Paine Seriously Wounded—Interesting Particulars—Noble Conduct of Negro Troops," *Wood County Reporter* (Grand Rapids, WI), July 9, 1863.

lowland gorilla in the wild. His writings and lectures about those encounters made him famous. More ominously, he and the other explorers of the 1860s and '70s found themselves entangled—or entangled themselves—in the counterattack against black citizenship in the United States.³⁶

Du Chaillu and his contemporaneous author-explorers utterly lacked the benevolent orientation of Livingstone's cohort. In the 1850s, one critic reflected, it seemed as if the purpose of "all enterprises of African adventure" had been to open "Africa to commerce, Christianity, and civilization." That was hardly the case with du Chaillu's generation. They were either apathetic or, in Burton's case, hostile to the idea of "civilizing" Africans. Together, their publications represented a disaster for the image of black people in and out of Africa. They halted the progress, in both the learned community and in popular culture, of a decade of favorable writings on African potential. They provided the ammunition for a devastating counterattack against advocates for African American citizenship.³⁷

These books laid the foundation for a pitiless depiction of people of African descent that took deep roots in American culture. Proslavery writers had feigned concern for the enslaved, insisting that bondage had refined hitherto savage Africans. Charles Roderick Dew had gone so far as to aver that American blacks were "civilized," having "imbibed the principles, the sentiments, and feelings of the white" man.³⁸ Antebellum Southern solicitude toward Africans disappeared after emancipation. Hitherto described as "happy, content, unambitious, and utterly incapable" of disorder, black Americans suddenly became Africans—cannibals, practitioners of human sacrifice, and bloodthirsty killers.³⁹ Just after the Fourteenth Amend-

36. Monte Reel, *Between Man and Beast: An Unlikely Explorer and the African Adventure that Took the Victorian World by Storm* (New York: Anchor Books, 2013), 223. David Prior skillfully examines Democrats' use of du Chaillu's work in "Reconstruction Unbound," 108–46. Richard Burton authored many works. *Abeokuta and the Camaroons Mountains, An Exploration*, 2 vols. (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1863); and *The Lake Regions of Central Africa*, 2 vols. (London: Longman, Green, Longman, & Roberts, 1860), were widely reviewed in the United States. John Hanning Speke, *Journal of the Discovery of the Source of the Nile* (New York: Harper, 1864).

37. "The Oxford, Cambridge, and Dublin Mission to Central Africa: News of the Mission, and of Dr. Livingstone," *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 37 (Aug. 1861): 237. On Burton's view of Africans, see Dane Kennedy, *The Highly Civilized Man: Richard Burton and the Victorian World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2005), 146–50.

38. Charles Roderick Dew, "Abolition of Negro Slavery," in *The Ideology of Slavery: Proslavery Thought in the Antebellum South, 1830–1860*, ed. Drew Gilpin Faust (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1981), 68; Joyce E. Chaplin, "Slavery and the Principle of Humanity: A Modern Idea in the Early Lower South," *Journal of Social History* 24 (Winter 1990): 299–315; Edward B. Rugemer, "The Southern Response to British Abolitionism: The Maturation of Proslavery Apologetics," *Journal of Southern History* 70 (May 2004): 221–48.

39. Robert F. Engs and Randall M. Miller observe that the former slaveholders saw the freed-people as "proto-barbarians." By contrast, James L. Roark argues that antebellum paternalism

ment's ratification in July 1868, the *Camden* (New Jersey) *Democrat* editorialized on some "savage atrocities by native Africans." The *Democrat* invited its readers to ask whether "the ignorant masses of negroes in our Southern States have yet been long enough removed from their brutal cannibal fathers, to be put over our white brethren of the South as their masters?" The overtly racist African travel accounts of the 1860s and '70s helped white Southerners and their Northern allies represent the freedpeople as, at best, one step away from "cannibal feast." The "black heel" of these savages was poised to be placed "upon the necks of our white brethren," the *Democrat* warned.⁴⁰

Critics of Radical race policies pointed to Africa to show what the United States could expect from the freedpeople's empowerment. During every step of black progress in the Civil War era—emancipation, enlistment, citizenship, suffrage—reactionaries drew on lessons from African discovery to predict disaster. As early as 1860, a Catholic writer marveled that Northerners seemed willing to sacrifice their lives for people "whose relatives are roasting and eating each other in Africa." In a 1863 debate, Senator David Wilmot sought to assuage fears over black enlistment by reminding his colleagues that the prospective soldiers were "Christian people." Garrett Davis of Kentucky responded that American blacks were merely "reclaimed savages." Putting arms into their hands would "place them in a position where they will relapse into savageism again." Davis charged that enlisting blacks was a reckless social experiment destined to inflict rapine and murder across the South. Their service having failed to realize those dire predictions, reactionaries mounted their next attack during debates over black suffrage. A Louisianan pointed out that the Fang were "relatives of the present candidates for universal suffrage." Racist Americans urged their compatriots to learn about contemporary Africa to understand what "black Republican" governments would do to the South. Only madness or malevolence, one Virginian maintained, could explain why Republicans would dream of placing "Congo and Dahomey . . . on top of Virginia and North Carolina."⁴¹

persisted into the postwar era, although he concedes it was "often a very pale imitation" of the older iteration. Engs and Miller, introduction to *The Birth of the Grand Old Party*, 6; Roark, *Masters Without Slaves: Southern Planters in the Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), 202.

40. "Speech to the Senate by James Henry Hammond," *Congressional Record*, 35th Cong., 1st Sess., Mar. 4, 1858, 992; "African Atrocities," *Camden (NJ) Democrat*, July 18, 1868; "African Atrocities," *New Orleans Commercial Bulletin*, June 23, 1868.

41. *New York Freeman's Journal and Catholic Register*, quoted in Mark A. Noll, "The Catholic Press, the Bible, and Protestant Responsibility for the Civil War," *Journal of the Civil War Era* 7 (Sept. 2017): 363; *Cong. Globe*, 37th Cong., 3rd Sess., Feb. 7, 1863, 799–800; "Adventures in Equatorial Africa," *New Orleans Times*, Nov. 6, 1865; "The Border State Fair," *Richmond Daily Dispatch*, Oct. 21, 1868.

Lest the consequences of that “insane” inversion were less than obvious, blacks’ enemies summoned a vision of contemporary Africa to depict the apocalyptic future that awaited the South. A typical skeptic asked, “Shall this continent be given up to barbarism for a fanatical experiment and a party scheme?” The only innovations Africans excelled in were those that “supplied more efficient means for the gratification of [their] instinct of cruelty.” One story making the Anglo-American rounds in the summer of 1866 reported on a vicious war in Calabar, where after one battle a hundred or so prisoners “were reported to have been eaten at a great cannibal feast.” Republicans ought to “take these, their colored brethren, under their protection, and see that ‘manhood suffrage’ is extended to them,” urged the *Richmond Whig*. Reactionaries looked beyond Africa for lessons about the consequences of black political power. Haiti, a “delightful land of negro supremacy,” provided a rich source of instruction for Americans. An Ohioan argued that the tumultuous administration of Haitian president Sylvain Salnave illustrated the “manifest destiny in our Southern States . . . of negro supremacy.” The freed slaves’ inherent laziness would bring about hunger, soon after which “the pangs of starvation will drive him to rapine and bloodshed, and then will follow his bloody exterminations.” Black political power, in other words would bring about a dystopia in the South—by transforming it into Africa.⁴²

By the mid-1860s, Paul du Chaillu had become the favored authority for Americans seeking to understand Africa and its lessons for black citizenship. Americans should carefully consider du Chaillu’s views of “the capacity and capabilities of the negro,” said the *New York Times*, because of his “extensive” experiences among Africans. He made another excursion into the interior in 1863–65, published his second book in London, and returned to the States, where he launched a second career as a lecturer and children’s book author.⁴³ In his first book, he had occasionally expressed real affection for Africans: “I met every where in my travels men and women honest, well-meaning, and in every way entitled to respect and trust.” But he was all too ready to denigrate Africans, especially when addressing a crowd—maybe, as one biographer suggests, because du Chaillu tailored his lectures for what he thought his listeners wanted to hear. In 1861, a San Francisco audience attended politely to his complimentary account of the Fang. But when du Chaillu shifted to ridiculous,

42. “Border State Fair”; “The Nigger Question and the Republican Party,” *Macon (GA) Weekly Telegraph*, Nov. 8, 1867; “Cannibalism,” *Richmond Whig*, Oct. 26, 1866; “Negro Supremacy in Hayti—Salnave a Specimen Brick,” *Daily Ohio Statesman* (Columbus), Dec. 30, 1867.

43. Stuart McCook, “‘It May Be Truth, but It Is Not Evidence’: Paul du Chaillu and the Legitimation of Evidence in the Field Sciences,” *Osiris* 11, no. 1 (1996): 177–97; Henry H. Bucher Jr., “Canonization by Repetition: Paul du Chaillu in Historiography,” *Revue française d’histoire d’outre-mer* 66:242–43 (1979), 15–32.

dehumanizing stories, they grew enthusiastic. He warmed to the occasion, regaling the assembly with tales about the demerits of African men. They are “very lazy and make their wives do everything for them,” he said to loud laughter. “Big, strong, lazy savage[s]” milled about while “the women are loaded down with plantains.” As the Civil War transitioned into Reconstruction, the man who had become Americans’ leading authority on Africans suddenly had little good to say about them—a fact reactionaries quickly exploited. Du Chaillu’s work, a critic of Radical policies argued, allowed Americans to assess “the nature of the race, by giving us frequent opportunities of comparing the negro in this country with the negro at home.”⁴⁴

By the latter 1860s, the most du Chaillu would say for Africans’ sake was that he hoped they would not become extinct as a race, even though he thought it was probably inevitable. His father figure Leighton Wilson had gotten into trouble with the Maryland State Colonization Society for blaming the decline of the Grebo, the native population at Cape Palmas, on settler imperialism. Du Chaillu, who thought he saw evidence of depopulation in Central Africa, disagreed with that conclusion. “Let me raise my voice in defence of the white man,” he told an audience at the Cooper Institute in 1867. “Primitive man,” he said, “must disappear before the higher intelligence. This is not a theory but a fact.” Wilson did not dispute that Africans and other endangered races were inferior to whites. He simply insisted that their inferiority did not justify their extinction. It is unclear what du Chaillu knew about evolutionary theory. He did not directly address Darwin or his works in his writings or lectures. But, in no small part due to the citizenship debate, his theories were in the air. Du Chaillu engaged those theories in the unsophisticated manner typical of Reconstruction’s opponents: the disappearance of “inferior” races was not only inevitable but necessary. He disagreed both with those who said that Africans were incapable of improvement and with those who thought “that he is capable of reaching the highest state of civilization.” The latter was clearly false, he insisted, but improvement could only go so far—and to no practical purpose. Without much enthusiasm, he told the audience that it was their responsibility “to be kind to” Africans, “and to try to elevate [them].” In the end, though, he opined, “That he will, in the course of time, follow the lower races of men and disappear, I have but little doubt.”⁴⁵

Du Chaillu even adopted the old proslavery tactic of misrepresenting Livingstone, Barth, and others for the purpose of denigrating Africans. From them, he said, “we

44. “Du Chaillu’s African Explorations,” *New York Times*, Apr. 28, 1867; Du Chaillu *Explorations and Adventures*, 21; “The Cannibal Fans and Neam Nams,” *San Francisco Evening Bulletin*, Oct. 11, 1861; Review of *Wild Life Under the Equator*, *Old Guard* 7 (Feb. 1869): 156. Reel, *Between Man and Beast*, 150.

45. “Equatorial Africa,” *New York World*, May 15, 1867.

learn that most of the chiefs are cruel, having the right to put to death their subjects at their will; villages are continually sacked by the stranger, and the people carried into slavery.” That was a blatant distortion of Livingstone and other Africa experts—even Burton—who ascribed slave trading to American demand. In the hothouse political atmosphere of Reconstruction, these misrepresentations did not go unanswered. A writer in Greeley’s *Tribune* objected that du Chaillu’s model African “has for years remained in a savage state; it does not follow as a consequence that he must ‘finally disappear’ from the face of the earth.” If Africa was suffering depopulation, it stemmed not from racial degeneracy but from western violence and greed. Africa would soon take its rightful place in the company of Christian nations. The *Tribune* insisted, “The negro race has an appointed location on this planet, and an appointed work to do on it, and it is impossible to dispose of them by the flippant philosophy . . . which is so fashionable now-a-days in certain very enlightened quarters.”⁴⁶

Democrats turned the *Tribune*’s critique into an opportunity to pummel the Radicals’ agenda. Du Chaillu’s only fault, accused the rival *Herald*, was that he had “fallen afoul of the theories of our Radical friends.” He had sinned in seeing “the negro in his native land as he is, and not as the friends of the black man think he ought to be.” His discoveries had disproven Republican claims that the “negro race on this continent has fitted itself for participation in the highest form of political government.” The *Herald* claimed to understand why his “hard facts should be received with disgust by the sentimental dreamers and political schemers of our time.” Du Chaillu, they argued, was just what the times called for—a clear-eyed observer of African life, unburdened by the biases of Livingstone and his cohort, who recognized the utter incapability of African peoples to rise to the demands of citizenship. An Ohioan put the matter succinctly after seeing the explorer speak in Cincinnati in 1869. “M. du Chaillu,” this witness reported, “is, evidently, not much of a believer in Negro equality.”⁴⁷

Du Chaillu made that plain in the new genre he entered successfully in the late 1860s: children’s literature. Surprisingly, considering his audience, in these books he gave free rein to the most lurid “dark Africa” tropes. Not all of these stories were bereft of sympathy for Africans. The women of one village cared for him when he had become desperately ill for several weeks. He invited his young audience to consider that “even under the black skin of the benighted and savage African,” God had “implanted something of His own compassionate love.” He even engaged in some cultural relativism, observing that if Africans “were to see us dancing in our

46. “Equatorial Africa”; “Du Chaillu on the Negro’s Destiny,” *New York Tribune*, May 18, 1867.

47. “Du Chaillu, the Negroes and the ‘Tribun-’” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, May 18, 1867; *Cincinnati Daily Enquirer*, Feb. 14, 1869, quoted in Reel, *Between Man and Beast*, 233.

fashion, they would laugh quite as much as you would laugh if you could see them capering in their uncouth style.” A pervasive atmosphere of horror overwhelmed these brief moments of sympathy, however. The “kind-hearted negroes” in the village in which he convalesced nevertheless “were given to superstitions which led them to commit the most horrid cruelties,” such as the murder of a ten-year-old boy who had been tricked into confessing to witchcraft. American boys and girls read that “they took spears and knives, and actually cut the poor little fellow to pieces.” In another village, three women accused of the murder of an old man who had clearly died of natural causes were forced to drink a poisoned concoction to prove their innocence. As they succumbed, “all was confusion. In an incredibly short space of time the bodies were cut in pieces and thrown in the river.” He also added an element of horror to his description of the Fang. In *Adventures and Explorations*, he had written that in their village he had seen a woman walk by with a piece of human leg. In his lectures to young audiences, he made a clarification: she had carried “the thigh of a little child under her arm for a noon-day stew.” He also told a Brooklyn Sunday School that the Fang preferred to eat women aged sixteen to twenty-four—a claim that contradicted what he had said in his books.⁴⁸

These accounts could hardly have been better designed to inspire fear and disgust toward Africans. Worse was to come. Reactionaries took further courage from the gorilla craze that swept through the western world in the 1860s. Du Chaillu bore much responsibility for that development. His books were sensations, leading to his lucrative career as a lecturer. He even opened a museum on Broadway in 1860 in which he displayed an array of his African curiosities, the star of which was a stuffed gorilla. Images of gorillas appeared throughout Anglo-American popular culture—in a popular songs, stage plays like *Mr. Gorilla*, and as a slur like the one George McClellan used against Abraham Lincoln, whom he privately called “the original gorilla.” In Reconstruction’s context, the gorilla intersected with debates about evolution spurred by the controversy over *The Origin of Species* to provide white Southerners and their allies with a simple, culturally resonant image to denigrate black Americans’ character and intellect. In the 1860s and ’70s, the racial implications of Darwin’s theory were still unclear. Abolitionists pointed out that evolution contradicted polygenist theories of human origins, demonstrating that all races shared a common ancestor. Yet racists took at least as much comfort from Darwin’s book. They argued that Anglo-Saxon peoples had evolved to a more

48. Paul Du Chaillu, *Stories of the Gorilla Country* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1867), 279, 89, 280; Paul Du Chaillu, *Lost in the Jungle* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1869), 157, 160; “Du Chaillu among the Cannibals—He Refuses to Take a Wife—Life among the Man-Eaters,” *San Francisco Evening Bulletin*, Jan. 1, 1870; “Central Africa: M. Paul Du Chaillu Lectures before the Members of St. Peter’s Sunday School in Brooklyn,” *New York Herald*, Nov. 29, 1877.

advanced state than other human races—especially Africans. Seeking any weapon within reach to battle Republicans, reactionaries dismissed evolution's ambivalent implications. They insisted that it clearly demonstrated the unfitness of African peoples for civic or social equality. Evolutionary theory would not be inseparably yoked to popular racism until the 1890s, but that foundation had been laid thirty years earlier.⁴⁹

Interest in the gorilla began when Harvard's Jeffries Wyman and the Reverend Thomas Savage coauthored a paper announcing the new species in 1847. Savage, a medical doctor with an interest in natural history, had served as an Episcopal missionary from 1836 to 1947 at Cape Palmas. Delayed at the Gabon River while returning to the States, he stayed with the Wilsons, old missionary friends who had relocated there after a dispute with colonial authorities. They decorated their home with African curiosities, one of which immediately piqued Savage's interest. It was a large skull with enormous eye sockets and a massive ridge running down the top. Savage tapped Wilson's good relations with the Mpongwe to quiz them about the animal. Their reports, which laid the foundation for his remarkably accurate description of the gorilla's habits, convinced him that the skull came from a hitherto unidentified species of primate—or "Orang," the term applied generally to all great apes. Once again he used his friend's influence, this time to procure additional skulls and a partial skeleton, which he promptly sent to Wyman. Neither man had much interest in the science of racial differences, but they wrote their paper in an atmosphere that made inferences difficult to avoid. Wyman wrote that no careful observer could fail to note "the wide gap which separates" the skeletons of Africans and gorillas. But he added a caveat that the critics of black citizenship would not fail to notice: the "Negro and Orang do afford the points where man and the brute, when the totality of their organization is considered, most nearly approach each other."⁵⁰

Anglo-Americans were fascinated by the gorilla's physical similarity to humanity, which raised uncomfortable questions about humanity's place in the cosmos. One early report characterized the gorilla as a "libelous caricature on mankind."

49. George B. McClellan to Mary Ellen McClellan, Nov. 17, 1861, in *The Civil War Correspondence of George B. McClellan*, ed. Stephen W. Sears (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1989), 135. On the "gorilla craze" see Reel, *Between Man and Beast*, 128–29, 151–63, 227–29. On the early, uncertain implications of evolution, see Randall Fuller, *The Book That Changed America: How Darwin's Theory of Evolution Ignited a Nation* (New York: Viking, 2017), 196–203; Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home and Abroad, 1876–1917* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2000), 139–72.

50. Thomas S. Savage and Jeffries Wyman, "Notice of the External Characters and Habits of Troglodytes Gorilla, a New Species of Orang from the Gaboon River," *Boston Journal of Natural History* 5 (Dec. 1847): 441. On Savage, Wyman, and Wilson see Richard Conniff, *The Species Seekers: Heroes, Fools, and the Mad Pursuit of Life on Earth* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2011), 227–40.

Another reported, "It has almost the sagacity of man, and almost the ferocity of a fiend." Few Americans were interested in subtleties of the gorilla's behavior and physiology. They reveled in stories detailing its ferocity—a mischaracterization that persisted because du Chaillu and others drowned out the scientific literature. His publisher, Harper's, tirelessly marketed his book in the pages of its magazine. Harper's noted, "There is a monstrous fascination about his accounts of this animal which is scarcely equaled by the most horrid of Edgar Poe's nightmare-breeding romances." Anglo-Americans' racial obsessions made it practically inevitable that many commentators would be less interested in similarities between gorillas and humans than between them and Africans. The gorilla, one pundit thought, "looks very much like some of the wild African tribe of negroes." Political imperatives guaranteed that these kinds of inferences—linking gorillas and Africans with the barest veneer of scientific evidence—would intensify during the 1860s and 1870s.⁵¹

Du Chaillu's description of the gorilla combined the sensational with the scientific. He provided a technical physical and behavioral description, concluding that "the gorilla is the nearest akin to man of all the anthropoid apes." But, as usual, he tipped the scale on the side of the marvelous. The first gorilla he saw in the wild struck him like "a nightmare vision," reminding him of a "hellish dream creature—a being of that hideous order, half-man, half-beast." His book featured evocative illustrations, such as a gorilla standing astride the body of a hunter it had slain, bending the barrel of his rifle. Du Chaillu hastened to dispel the most fantastic rumors about gorillas—that they hunted elephants with clubs, that they laid in wait in trees to snatch up women. Yet not only did those myths persist, but he added others. He portrayed the shy, retiring gorilla as violently aggressive. Robert Walker, an American merchant, noted that du Chaillu had encountered a tame young female at his factory in 1859.⁵²

Du Chaillu had supplied gorilla specimens to English naturalist Robert Owen. The gorilla quickly became fodder in debates over evolution and human origins. A fierce critic of Darwin, Owen insisted that he had discovered cranial structures in humans missing in gorillas, proving that no biological relation existed between them. Thomas Huxley set out to show that Owen had misinterpreted, distorted, or fabricated evidence. This academic debate trickled down into popular culture, where crude, speculative connections between Africans and gorillas became commonplace. American reactionaries saw that they could use this controversy

51. "Curiosities from Africa," *Richmond Daily Dispatch*, Nov. 15, 1859; "Strength and Ferocity of the African Gorillas—Extraordinary Species of Man-Fiends," *Cincinnati Daily Press*, Nov. 1, 1860; "Adventures in Gorilla Land," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, June 1861, 32; "The Gorilla," *Scientific American* 1 (Dec. 3, 1859): 363.

52. Du Chaillu, *Explorations and Adventures*, 70–71, after 296, 369, 370, "Mr. Du Chaillu and His Book," 373.

in their campaign against black citizenship. To make a racist case against black citizenship, Reconstruction's opponents did not need evolution, but it provided them with a new, convenient weapon they did not hesitate to wield. As Randall Fuller observes, the timing of *Origin's* publication ensured "that the issues of slavery, primary descent, and evolution would be inextricably linked in the minds of" American readers. Some abolitionists understood evolution to mean that all humans stemmed from a common ancestor. Reactionaries understood that Darwin's theory left no room for polygenesis, but it could be used to vindicate racism and slavery. Even if blacks and whites were from the same species, they argued, the latter had better adapted to the struggle for existence to become a superior branch of humanity. The timing of *Origin's* arrival practically guaranteed that its American reception would be distorted by the politics of race and slavery.⁵³

During Reconstruction, Natural selection, Africa literature, the gorilla, and black citizenship became inextricably linked in American culture. "My name is Gorilla and by that you can plainly see," went the first lines of "The Gorilla Quadrille." "By birth I am a Darkie but you can't get hold of me." The idea that the inferior races of humankind lived adjacent to primates, suggesting a biological connection, gained traction. Josiah Nott and George Gliddon's *Indigenous Races of the Earth* (1857) included a chart titled "The Geographical Distribution of Monkeys in Their Relation of That of Some Inferior Types of Men," purporting to show that the most advanced monkeys could be found amid the "most inferior" human races. Du Chaillu's description of the gorilla suggested to one commentator "that the lowest in the scale of the cannibal negroes would come nearest to the great apes, that still share with him the forest and the mountain in his native land." As David N. Livingstone concludes apropos of these efforts to stress the geographical proximity of allegedly lower races of humankind to advanced primates, "racial mapping simply *was* moral geography."⁵⁴

Links between apes, monkeys, and African Americans predated Reconstruction. Indiana Democrat John Law warned that if Congress passed the Second Confiscation Act it would invite the South's "human gorillas to murder their masters and violate their wives and daughters." In 1862, a proslavery writer cynically conceded, "The negro proper is certainly not so low in the scale of *physical* organism as the gorilla"—suggesting thereby that he was intellectually similar.

53. On *Origin's* appropriation by white supremacists, see Fuller, *Book That Changed America*, 79, 238–38.

54. C. H. R. Marriott, *The Gorilla Quadrille* (London: J. Williams, 1861); J. C. Nott and Geo. R. Gliddon, *Indigenous Races of the Earth; or, New Chapters of Ethnological Inquiry . . .* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1857), 650 (table after 640); "The Gorilla and His Country," *Eclectic Magazine of Foreign Literature* 52 (Aug. 1861): 525; David N. Livingstone, *Adam's Ancestors: Race, Religion, and the Politics of Human Origins* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2008), 178; Fuller, *Book That Changed America*, 94.

DeBow's, which often took an unsentimental approach to defending slavery, argued that Africans were “as fit for the enjoyment of liberty as an ape or gorilla.” On the other end of the ideological divide, unionists who wanted to discredit the secession movement charged that paternalism was a thin facade. White Southerners, they charged, really saw their slaves as little better than apes. An Indiana Republican warned that should the Confederacy prevail it would reopen the slave trade and force the United States to “join the Southerners, in declaring that the negro is only a kind of hairless gorilla.” Until the Civil War, links between blacks and apes remained the exception, however. White Southerners preferred to speak of their slaves as a childlike race requiring Christian stewardship. But when confronted with emancipation, black men eagerly donning the blue, and the threat of black citizenship and suffrage, they dropped the pretense. White Southerners and their allies became quite willing to argue that African Americans were little more than “hairless gorillas”—and perhaps a good deal less.⁵⁵

Radical Reconstruction's critics had no interest in the serious study of the gorilla and its implications for “the place of humanity in a divinely ordered universe.” They were solely interested in exploiting the scientific literature to support their argument that black people were little evolved above gorillas and other apes. Reactionaries' utilitarian mindset produced invective that was at once incoherent, apocalyptic, and effective. In 1866, one writer even misrepresented Huxley in support of arguments against black citizenship. The “irrefutable truth of science” taught that humans were divided into different species, he or she maintained—a position with which Huxley had no sympathy. The author admitted that Africans were human but noted the “remarkable fact that the negro is the only type of man which bears close likeness to the great apes.” Opponents of black citizenship made this argument constantly. Georges Clemenceau, reporting for the Parisian daily *Temps*, observed that “any Democrat who did not manage to hint in his speech that the negro is a degenerate gorilla, would be considered lacking in enthusiasm.” The absurdity of giving civic responsibility to “a lot of wild men, whose intelligence is no higher than that of the animals,” Clemenceau reported, “is the theme of all the Democratic speeches.”⁵⁶

55. Law quoted in James Oakes, *Freedom National: The Destruction of Slavery in the United States, 1861–1865* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2013), 240; T. W. MacMahon, *Cause and Contrast: An Essay on the American Crisis* (Richmond: West & Johnson, 1862), 50; “Delusions of Fanaticism,” *De Bow's Review*, July 1860, 48; “The Cotton States,” *Daily Wabash Express* (Terre Haute, IN), Nov. 20, 1861.

56. Conniff, *Species Seekers*, 238; “Ape-Like Tribes of Men,” *Old Guard* 4 (Sept. 1866), 558, 561. “The Gorilla and the Negro,” *Athenaeum* 1743 (Mar 23, 1861): 395–96; Georges Clemenceau, *American Reconstruction, 1865–1780, and the Impeachment of President Johnson*, ed. Fernand Baldensperger, trans. Margaret Mac Vegh (New York: Lincoln Mac Vegh & Dial Press, 1928), 131.

A few years later, the *Old Guard* pivoted to ascribe Republican policies to “the most stealthy and the most fatal of all modern theories”—the evolutionary thought of Darwin and Huxley. Radicals’ “mischievous determination to make the negro an equal partner in the government” stemmed from an “infidel politics and theology” that rejected the scientific authority of polygenesis. “Those whom God made *unlike*, let no man attempt to make *alike*,” they pleaded. At stake in arguments about emancipation, citizenship and suffrage for black Americans was nothing less than “the death of our civilization.” The scale of the crisis confronting white Southerners compelled them and their Northern allies to intensify efforts to characterize African Americans as bloodthirsty gorillas in human form. A Democratic writer in Kentucky set the tone in lashing out against emancipation: Europeans had found Africans “feasting upon the scorched flesh, and drinking the warm blood of his brother.” Bondage had provided the necessary restraints against their savage natures. “All that the negro is above the gorilla, he owes to slavery,” he or she concluded. And now the Union had unleashed the gorilla.⁵⁷

Linking African Americans to gorillas served multiple purposes. It invoked the specter of ferocious violence and sexual mayhem commonly, and mistakenly, attributed to them.⁵⁸ An Ohio Democrat claimed in 1867 that the strongman in charge of Port au Prince required white women to give obeisance to “his ebony highness.” They complied, he maintained, because they lived in fear that “brutal naked savages”—as little above “the status of the gorilla as anything of the genus homo discovered by du Chaillu in Equatorial Africa”—would be loosed upon them should they refuse. If Republicans proceeded on their reckless course, the South would be in for the same fate. Heather Cox Richardson observes that “the image of an uneducated mass of African-American voters pillaging society was one of the most powerful ones of the postwar years.” Although she means to suggest that Southerners sought to paint blacks as ciphers, “plotting to confiscate the wealth of their betters through government aid,” reactionaries drew a comprehensive picture of black Americans unsuited to the responsibilities of citizenship. Emancipation unleashed African Americans’ innate qualities, which combined an aversion to labor with a propensity for savage violence.⁵⁹

Essential to this vision of a Southern dystopia was the argument that empowered

57. “Darwinism and Beecherism,” *Old Guard* 8 (Jan. 1870): 44–45; “Fanaticism,” *Dollar Weekly Bulletin* (Maysville, KY), Mar. 17, 1864.

58. Mark Wahlgren Summers, *A Dangerous Stir: Fear, Paranoia, and the Making of Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2009), 49–68.

59. “Negro Supremacy in Hayti—Salvage a Specimen Brick,” *Daily Ohio Statesman* (Columbus), Dec. 30, 1867; Heather Cox Richardson, *The Death of Reconstruction: Race, Labor, and Politics in the Post-Civil War North, 1865–1901* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2001), 118.

blacks would convert the South into an economic wasteland. Explorers observed that sub-Saharan Africa was bereft not only of great contemporary civilizations but any relics indicating that any had existed in the past. Africans, in short, were incapable of rising above barbarism on their own. Du Chaillu noted that he had failed to discover “ruins or remains of buildings to show that the negro was formerly more elevated than he is now.” This argument did not require linking Africans to gorillas or other apes but, as Clemenceau suggested, the connection had become reflexive among Reconstruction’s critics. As a Georgian maintained, explorers were unanimous in concluding that Africans had never “built a city, never bridged a river, never made the smallest discovery having any tendency to widen the little space that separates him from the gorilla.” Frances Butler found this a compelling explanation for the lack of cooperation she received from the freed slaves on her father’s St. Simon’s Island plantations. Africans had “no past history, no monuments, no literature, never advance or improve,” she reflected. Now, without the civilizing influence of slavery, the freedpeoples’ African natures had revived. That was why they were “going steadily backwards, morally, intellectually, and physically.”⁶⁰

Associating Africans, African Americans, and gorillas linked Darwin’s controversial theory, widely connected with irreligion, to Republican policies. It stigmatized Republican efforts to establish racial equality as a perversion of the natural order. The Mistik Krewe’s 1873 Mardi Gras parade did both of these. The Krewe chose as its theme “Missing Links to Darwin’s Origin of Species.” The parade pulled no punches on black Louisianans, portraying them, as Reid Mitchell describes, as “the Missing Link himself, half-human, half-gorilla, playing a banjo and wearing a pink collar.” Most Southerners who linked African Americans with gorillas employed this kind of ridicule. It was at once lighthearted and mean-spirited. It was effective shorthand prejudice—it assembled the elements of postemancipation white Southern racism into a simple, easy-to-understand image. It succinctly conveyed the message that black political power was grotesque and immoral. Thus, a Louisiana conservative characterized the state convention that produced the progressive constitution of 1868 as “a nigger gorilla, ape, monkey and chimpanzee menagerie exhibition.” Conservatives were especially fond of describing black elected officials as gorillas. One said that Robert Elliott, elected in 1870 to Preston Brooks’s old seat for the Forty-second Congress, “would pass as a connecting link between a gorilla and a pure negro.” Another identified I. J. Moody, a leader in the black population in the Macon, Georgia, area, as a “Congo gorilla.” The point was to portray Africans as

60. “Equatorial Africa,” *New York World*, May 15, 1867; “The Nigger Question and the Republican Party,” *Macon (GA) Weekly Telegraph*, Nov. 8, 1867; Frances Butler Leigh, *Ten Years on a Georgia Plantation since the War* (London: Richard Bentley & Son, 1883), 147.

so low on the scale of human development that to grant them any level of political power would be to commit a grave crime against religion and nature.⁶¹

African Americans and their allies recognized the force of this attack and fought back. By the mid 1870s, though, the sympathetic portrayal of African character and intellect advanced by Livingstone and his cohort had been overtaken by the newer, overwhelmingly negative depiction. The most aggressive counterattacks occurred in the 1860s, when both Northern sympathy for African Americans and the favorable image of Africans were at their apogee. Pushing back against the argument that black Americans were essentially Africans, a Northern Methodist insisted not just that the “negro is a native-born American” but that he was “loyal, progressive, republican, Protestant.” They deserved the vote far more than disloyal whites and Irish immigrants, who stood for “slavery, retrogression, drunkenness, mobocracy, and disloyalty.” Writing almost a year after Appomattox, a Pennsylvania writer argued that black military service had disproven Richard Burton’s “flippant” view of Africans and demonstrated that his opinions provided no insight into “the vexed question which now agitates our country.” Contra Burton, he or she argued, “The essential traits of humanity are found in the negro in a manner to exact from our race a respect for the fundamental rights of these African populations.” Another American, reflecting on the common assumption that Africans, like other “primitive” peoples, were destined to wilt in the face of European expansion, pointed out that they had demonstrated the “power . . . [of] withstanding the crushing influence of servitude and incredible hardship.” They were survivors. Had not the ancestors of Anglo-Americans once wandered “through the thick woods of Germany” in animal skins, wielding bows and arrows? African peoples’ endurance in both hemispheres pointed to “important events in the future history of that race,” he or she predicted.⁶²

The force of the reactionary attack on black citizenship put progressives onto the defensive, forcing them to address the ridiculous but rampant connections between Africans and apes—thereby calling more attention to those very charges. Reactionaries were allowed set the terms of the debate. Republicans found themselves arguing over cannibals, human sacrifice, and gorillas. Desperately summoning the authority of the sainted Livingstone against black Americans’ doubters, one New

61. Reid Mitchell, *All on a Mardi Gras Day: Episodes in the History of New Orleans Carnival* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1995), 65; “Letter From New Orleans,” *Memphis (TN) Daily Avalanche*, Jan. 24, 1868, p; “The Negro Representatives,” *Columbus (GA) Daily Enquirer*, Mar. 12, 1871; “The Georgia Press,” *Macon (GA) Weekly Telegraph*, Nov. 19, 1872.

62. “Quarterly Book Table,” review of *The Negro Problem Solved*, *Methodist Quarterly Review* 47, 4th ser., 17 (Jan. 1865): 154–55; “A French View of the Negro” (from the Round Table), *Elk Advocate* (Ridgway, PA), Apr. 9, 1866; “Openings for Christian Effort in Central Africa,” *New Englander* 26 (July 1867): 432.

Englander reminded Americans that he “believes fully in the capacity of the negro; and anticipates for him a glowing future. He sees in him no immature man; no higher type of an ape, a race midway between monkey and man.” In a wide-ranging review of the new strain of deeply racist travel accounts of the 1860s and 1870s—whose collective view of Africans was that they were “a hopeless race of savages for whom there is no prospect of civilization”—the author noted that travelers like Winwood Reade and Richard Burton “think it is as foolish to try to Christianize the African tribes as to attempt to civilize the gorilla.” Like so many Northerners counterattacking against the reactionary onslaught, he or she hearkened back to the 1850s, to Livingstone, Wilson, and Bowen—missionaries, they noted—who had lived for extended periods among Africans, knew their languages, and whose optimistic assessment of their moral and intellectual potential was rooted not only in a hopeful, millennial state of mind but in real knowledge of African societies.⁶³

The benevolent and reformist perspective so emblematic of the antebellum period, insisting that Africa was on the cusp of integrating into the European world, seems to have been losing its grip on Americans after the Civil War. Clearly, many Americans held on to the older, more optimistic orientation.⁶⁴ The conservative attack on African intellect and character, after all, provoked a vigorous response. But it lacked the ruthlessness of the attack on black capacity, which had the authority of new works on Africa to sustain it. The critique of Africans and African Americans, like the new generation of travel literature, was remarkable for its utter absence of sentiment. Lindley Spring wrote *The Negro at Home* to show that any movement toward civic equality between blacks and whites would constitute a “monstrous crime against nature and humanity.” He claimed benevolent motives; he wrote in no “spirit of hostility to the negro. We are sorry for him.” The rest of the book gave the lie to that assertion. Chapter after chapter documented Africans’ intractable barbarity—“Filthy, Naked, and Bestly in all his Ways,” as one subheading put it. The African race had never led humankind in anything, “except it be evil.” Spring urged Americans to make no mistake: black Americans were Africans. “Once a Negro always a Negro.” Likewise, in *The Negroes of Negroland* Hinton Rowan Helper opposed “the revolutionary and destructive measures” of Radical Republicanism by compiling hundreds of quotations, chiefly from travelers—including Bowen, Wilson, and Livingstone—designed to document

63. “Dr. Livingstone’s Explorations in South Africa,” *Congregationalist and Recorder* (Boston), June 14, 1867; “Africa and the Africans,” 160–62.

64. Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2001), x–xi; Fuller, *Book That Changed America*, 235–36. But see Frances M. Clarke, *War Stories: Suffering and Sacrifice in the Civil War North* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2011).

the “crime-stained blackness of the negro.” Chapters included “Mumbo Jumbo in Negroland,” “Human Butcheries, and Human Sacrifices in Negroland,” and, of course, “Cannibalism in Negroland.” Helper alluded not once to the positive qualities of Africans to which even proslavery writers made token reference.⁶⁵

The rage and unanimity that Democrats displayed in opposing any movement toward political rights for the freedpeople contrasted starkly with Republicans’ ambivalence. Even abolitionist stalwarts like Samuel Gridley Howe and Charles Sumner accepted demeaning stereotypes of black people that caused them to doubt their capacity to participate fully in American civic life.⁶⁶ And, of course, moderate Republicans and Democrats harbored far graver reservations. In the late 1860s, even radical-leaning Northerners and Republican-leaning outlets like the *Tribune* and the *Nation* began to express reservations about the prospects for Reconstruction. The new spate of African travel accounts further undermined Northern resolve. Southern and conservative leaders immediately recognized the potential of these sources and swiftly appropriated them to combat the progress of black political power. The benevolent, missionary-oriented accounts of the 1850s had shaken the racist consensus in the North, and the performance of African American soldiers and sailors had further undermined it. A united Republican Party led by Lincoln might have pursued a vigorous policy to guarantee “basic rights, citizenship, and political participation for former slaves”—and forced white Southerners to accept it.⁶⁷ The potential was there for a reimagining of race among a significant, but still limited, portion of the Northern public. But the accounts by Burton, du Chaillu, and others provided cultural reinforcement to political reaction. Together, they helped halt and eventually reverse progress toward equality.⁶⁸

65. Lindley Spring, *The Negro at Home: An Inquiry after His Capacity for Self-Government and the Government of Whites* . . . (New York: Published by the Author, 1868), 233, 236. viii, ix; Hinton Rowan Helper, *The Negroes in Negroland; the Negroes in America; and Negroes Generally* . . . (New York: G. W. Carleton, 1868), viii–ix.

66. Matthew Furrow, “Samuel Gridley Howe, the Black Population of Canada West, and the Racial Ideology of the ‘Blueprint for Radical Reconstruction,’” *Journal of American History* 97 (Sept. 2010): 344–70; Nicholas Guyatt, “America’s Conservatory: Race, Reconstruction, and the Santo Domingo Debate,” *Journal of American History* 97 (Mar. 2011): 974–1000.

67. LaWanda Cox, “Reflections on the Limits of the Possible,” in *Freedom, Racism, and Reconstruction: Collected Writings of LaWanda Cox*, ed. Donald G. Neiman (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1997), 243.

68. James M. McPherson, “Reconstruction: A Revolution Manqué,” in *Conflict and Consensus in Early American History*, ed. Allen F. Davis and Harold D. Woodman (Lexington, MA: Heath, 1976), 422–25; Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863–1877* (New York: Harper & Row, 1998), 524–34; Stanley, *Loyal West*; Jean H. Baker, “Defining Postwar Republicanism: Congressional Republicans and the Boundaries of Citizenship,” in Engs and Miller, *Birth of the Grand Old Party*, 131–41.

Northerners' stunned responses to the travel accounts of the 1850s, presenting them with humanizing accounts of African peoples for which they were completely unprepared, invites a reexamination of the question of Republican overreach during Reconstruction—what LaWanda Cox called “the limits of the possible.” The openness some Northerners voiced to reconsidering their prejudices toward African people combined with the lessons taken from black military service to create the conditions for a reexamination of assumptions about African peoples in the Old and New Worlds. Eric Foner warns against giving into the temptation to use “racism as a *deus ex machina* that independently explains the course of events and Reconstruction's demise.” As Northerners' responses to the works of Livingstone, Barth, and others show, racism was not a fixed quality in the Civil War North; as deep and pervasive as it undoubtedly was, it proved vulnerable to new information and shifting sentiments. Racial attitudes softened among a significant portion of the Northern population; states liberalized laws about black migration, jury service, and voting. Mindsets changed; policies—like suffrage—completely unthinkable to Republicans in 1860 had become accepted as a matter of course in a few years. Republican efforts to inaugurate a new, more liberal model of race relations rested on a firm foundation provided by black military service and sympathetic, authoritative accounts of African peoples. Racism did not doom Radical Reconstruction to failure.⁶⁹

And yet, there can be no doubt that racism contributed to that failure. Rather than finishing the work that had been done before and during the Civil War to transform Northern racial attitudes, Republicans allowed reactionaries to set the terms of the debate about black citizenship. Their opponents did not make that mistake. They seized on the travel accounts of the 1860s and '70s, which, they recognized, enabled them to rebrand popular certainties about African savagery as new knowledge provided by explorers and cutting-edge science. The missionary-explorers of the 1850s did not receive the reinforcement they desperately needed to change Anglo-American attitudes toward Africans. Moreover, the racism Reconstruction's enemies wielded so effectively was a far cry from antebellum “romantic racialism.” It was a post-Darwinian prejudice infused with the scientific hubris to deny the very humanity of African people by linking them to gorillas and monkeys. In the 1850s and '60s, many observers insisted that the simultaneous occurrences of explorers' opening of Africa and the destruction of slavery in the United States could not be a coincidence but, rather, divine providence. Both promised a bright

69. Cox, “Reflections”; Foner, *Reconstruction*, xxiv. Works that foreground race in dooming Radical Reconstruction to failure include Escott, “*What Shall We Do with the Negro?*” 226–45, and Fred Kaplan, *Lincoln and the Abolitionists: John Quincy Adams, Slavery, and the Civil War* (New York: Harper, 2017).

future for Africans and African Americans. By the 1870s, the wheel had turned. The new literature on Africa pointed in a straight line to Leopold's Congo and Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*, where Scarlett O'Hara is accosted by a "squat black negro with shoulders and chest like a gorilla" and Mammy beholds the ruins of Tara with "the sad bewilderment of an old ape."⁷⁰

70. Margaret Mitchell, *Gone with the Wind* (1936; repr., New York: Pocket Books, 1996), 1099, 1384.