

“LOOKING FORWARD ALWAYS TO AFRICA”: *William George Emanuel and the Politics of Repatriation in Cuba, 1894–1906*

ABSTRACT: This article examines a back-to-Africa movement from early twentieth-century Cuba. The leader, William George Emanuel, arrived in Cuba from Antigua in 1894, and over the next several years, he worked to unite the *cabildos de nación* and *sociedades de color* on the island. After independence in 1898, Emanuel and his followers rejected Cuban citizenship and began petitioning Britain, the United States, Belgium, and the Gold Coast for land grants in West and Central Africa. Each petition, however, told a different story. Emanuel skillfully tailored his appeals according to his audience, variously claiming that he and his followers were “British,” “African,” “Congolese,” or “Mina,” among other identities. Anticipating the rise of Marcus Garvey by over a decade, Emanuel’s campaign reveals an overlooked pan-Africanist strand in the typical narrative for this period of Cuban history. Drawing mainly on the petitions themselves, the article analyzes how Emanuel blended the languages of empire, nation, race, and ethnicity to create a dynamic pan-African identity. More generally, the article demonstrates how marginalized groups have long negotiated the boundaries of identity in the pursuit of belonging.

KEYWORDS: Cuba, back-to-Africa, empire, race, pan-Africanism

Cuando no soy yoruba,
soy congo, mandinga, carabalí.

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In June 1902, a man named William George Emanuel sent a petition from Havana to the British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs in London. Emanuel, born in Antigua, was requesting British support for the return of several thousand Africans in Cuba to British territory on the continent. As the leader of a nascent pan-Africanist group, the *Colonia Africana*, Emanuel

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explained that his followers would never agree to be “naturalized as Cubans.” Instead, he wrote, they were “looking forward always to Africa” and wanted to “return to build up Africa their birthplace.”¹

This article is about Emanuel’s back-to-Africa movement, which unfolded between 1894 and 1906. Anticipating Marcus Garvey’s better known initiatives by over a decade, Emanuel worked persistently to unite Africans in Cuba and to secure land grants in West and Central Africa.² He sent petitions to the British, United States, and Belgian governments, and even traveled to Europe to raise support for his repatriation campaign. Above all, he and his followers rejected membership in the emerging Cuban republic and sought out different forms of belonging.

While ultimately unsuccessful, Emanuel’s remarkable efforts reveal an overlooked pan-Africanist strand in the typical narrative for this period of Cuban history.³ As many scholars have explained, late nineteenth-century Cuba produced a range of shifting and conflicting ideas about race and nation.⁴ Most notable was José Martí’s powerful vision of “racelessness,” a nation that would be “with all and for all.” Yet Cuban independence in 1898—under US occupation—did not always measure up to that vision. In many cases, the racial hierarchies and stringent inequalities of the colonial period persisted. As a result, some scholars argue that Cuban and US elites relied on the “myth” of racelessness to suppress black activism.⁵ Other scholars, however, contend that the ideology of racial

1. William George Emanuel to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, via British Consul General in Havana, June 7, 1902, National Archives of the United Kingdom [hereafter NAUK], CO 96/401.

2. In addition to the voluminous work on Garvey and Garveyism, there has been a surge of scholarship on “reverse” migration in the last two decades. See for example Caree A. Banton, *More Auspicious Shores: Barbadian Migration to Liberia, Blackness, and the Making of an African Republic* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019); Alexander Byrd, *Captives and Voyagers: Black Migrants across the Eighteenth-Century British Atlantic World* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008); James Sidbury, *Becoming African in America: Race and Nation in the Early Black Atlantic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); James T. Campbell, *Middle Passages: African American Journeys to Africa, 1787–2005* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006); Nemata Blyden, *West Indians in West Africa, 1808–1880: The African Diaspora in Reverse* (Rochester: Rochester University Press, 2000); and Lamin Sanneh, *Abolitionists Abroad: American Blacks and the Making of Modern West Africa* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999). For an earlier example, see David Jenkins, *Black Zion: The Return of Afro-Americans and West Indians to Africa* (London: Wildwood House, 1975).

3. Aline Helg, for example, writes that “hardly any [Afro-Cubans] advocated black separation, pan-Africanism, or . . . return to Africa, which would have signified separating oneself from the Cuban nationality.” Aline Helg, *Our Rightful Share: The Afro-Cuban Struggle for Equality, 1886–1912* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 7.

4. For overviews of this period and the interplay of ideas about race, nation, and empire, see David Sartorius, *Ever Faithful: Race, Loyalty, and the Ends of Empire in Spanish Cuba* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014); Ada Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba: Race, Nation, and Revolution, 1868–1898* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Rebecca Scott, *Slave Emancipation in Cuba: The Transition to Free Labor, 1860–1899* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985); Louis A. Pérez Jr., *Cuba Between Empires, 1878–1902* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1983); and Thomas T. Orum, “The Politics of Color: The Racial Dimension of Cuban Politics during the Early Republican Years, 1900–1912” (PhD diss.: New York University, 1975).

5. Indeed, political leaders considered organizing along racial lines “unpatriotic” and eventually rendered such mobilization illegal. See for example Lillian Guerra, *The Myth of José Martí: Conflicting Nationalisms in Early*

equality, despite its inconsistencies, created new opportunities for black Cubans to participate in the social, political, and economic life of the country.⁶

Emanuel's story does not fit easily within the contours of these narratives. Instead of making claims within the new Cuban nation, he and his followers imagined freedom in distinctly non-national forms.⁷ To this end, they deployed a range of identities, variously claiming to be African, British, Congolese, or Mina, though never "Cuban." I argue that Emanuel fashioned a dynamic pan-African identity that transcended the confines of the new Cuban republic. Deftly drawing on the languages of empire, nation, race, and ethnicity, Emanuel's tactics reveal how Africans and their descendants in the Atlantic world adapted these languages in the pursuit of belonging.

RACE, ETHNICITY, AND THE *CABILDOS DE NACIÓN*

Emanuel arrived in Cuba from Antigua in 1894. He was a Protestant pastor and was fluent in at least three languages: English, French, and Spanish. His motivations for migration are unclear, but he likely moved to Cuba in search of work, along with many others from around the Caribbean.⁸ Upon arrival, he also became involved in politics and found himself at the intersection of several potent influences. Cuban nationalists, to name one of them, broadcast their vision of a "raceless" nation, an ideology that had emerged from the battlefields of the Ten Years' War (1868-78) and the Little War (1879-80). Conversely, imperial loyalists navigated a delicate balance between supporting the Spanish and granting concessions to those who advocated for independence. Afro-Cubans were divided. Many had fought on opposing sides of the preceding wars, and by 1894, some were pledging support for an independent Cuba while others maintained their loyalty to Spain.

Twentieth-Century Cuba (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005). See also Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba*; and Helg, *Our Rightful Share*.

6. Alejandro de la Fuente, for example, argues that "racial democracy" allowed African-descended people in Cuba to make claims on the state and manipulate the language of equality for their own ends. See De la Fuente, *A Nation for All: Race, Inequality, and Politics in Twentieth-Century Cuba* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

7. Writing in the context of Caribbean migration to the United States, Michelle Ann Stephens argues that "early-twentieth-century Caribbean immigrants . . . had uncertain ethnic identities, unimaginable in solely national terms." Stephens, *Black Empire: The Masculine Global Imaginary of Caribbean Intellectuals in the United States, 1914–1962* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 2–3. On non-national forms of sovereignty, see Gary Wilder, *Freedom Time: Negritude, Decolonization, and the Future of the World* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).

8. Between 1900 and 1930, approximately 140,000 British West Indians migrated to Cuba for work, as did many laborers from Haiti. Robert Whitney and Graciela Chailloux Laffita, *Subjects or Citizens: British Caribbean Workers in Cuba, 1900–1960* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2013), 8. For more on these migrations, see Jorge L. Giovannetti-Torres, *Black British Migrants in Cuba: Race, Labor, and Empire in the Twentieth-Century Caribbean, 1898–1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Marc McLeod, "Undesirable Aliens: Haitian and British West Indian Immigrant Workers in Cuba, 1898–1940" (PhD diss.: University of Texas at Austin, 2000); and Tracey E. Graham, "Jamaican Migration to Cuba, 1912–1940" (PhD diss.: University of Chicago, 2013).

In urban centers like Havana, where Emanuel was based, Afro-Cubans situated themselves foremost among the *cabildos de nación*. Operating like mutual aid organizations, these groups had existed in Cuba for centuries. For the most part, they were divided by linguistic and ethnic identifiers such as Congo, Mandinga, Mina, Lucumi, and so on. Many of these identities were colonial or New World adaptations, but they were nonetheless significant. Through these organizations, enslaved and free people of color adapted and re-created African religions, languages, and institutions. The organizations also offered financial support, education, and apprenticeship. In some cases, they even sponsored manumission.⁹ By the 1890s, however, due to pressure from the Spanish colonial government, many of these ethnic-based organizations changed into *sociedades de color*, groups centered less on ethnicity and more around class and color. Some groups remained committed to the perpetuation of specific African ethnicities, but others cut across such boundaries.¹⁰

One of these newer groups was the Unión Africana, which became the most significant political influence on Emanuel. Formed in 1892, this organization worked to unite the cabildos and sociedades on the island. From a range of distinct ethnic identities, the leaders of the Unión wanted to create a singular identity based on race.¹¹ In 1894, for example, when Unión members elected the newly arrived Emanuel as their leader, they also named him the “sole representative of the African race before the Government.”¹² This was a radical stance, as the Spanish had long fomented fears about Cuba becoming “African” if it did not remain a colony of Spain. Yet this “African” identity remained informed by ethnic particularities. For example, the Unión had already lobbied, unsuccessfully, to use the flag of the Congo Free State. Emanuel continued this orientation toward the Congo by adopting the Holy King Melchor as the organization’s patron.¹³ He also called for direct ocean

9. On the cabildos and sociedades, see María del Carmen Barcia, *Los ilustres apellidos: negros en la Habana Colonial* (Havana: Ediciones Boloña, 2008); Philip A. Howard, *Changing History: Afro-Cuban Cabildos and Societies of Color in the Nineteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1998); and Matt D. Childs, “Re-creating African Ethnic Identities in Cuba,” in *The Black Urban Atlantic in the Age of the Slave Trade*, Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, Matt D. Childs, and James Sidbury eds. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 85–100. For earlier work, see José Luciano Franco, *Ensayos históricos* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1974); Pedro Deschamps Chapeaux, *El negro en el periodismo cubano en el siglo xix* (Havana: Ediciones Revolución, 1963); and Lydia Cabrera, *La sociedad secreta abakuá narrada por viejos adeptos* (Havana: Ediciones C. R., 1958).

10. Helg, *Our Rightful Share*, 30–31. See also Melina Pappademos, *Black Political Activism and the Cuban Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 112–124.

11. On similar processes in North America, see Michael A. Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); and Sidbury, *Becoming African in America*.

12. Fernando Ortiz, “Los cabildos afrocubanos,” in Ortiz, *Ensayos etnográficos* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1984), 27. Also quoted in Sartorius, *Ever Faithful*, 198.

13. According to Jane Landers, King Melchor, “Rey Mago San Melchor,” was the patron of the Royal Congo cabildo from at least the late eighteenth century. Landers, “The Central African Presence in Spanish Maroon Communities,” in *Central Africans and Cultural Transformations in the American Diaspora*, Linda M. Heywood, ed.

routes between Cuba and Africa, an idea he returned to more seriously in 1901. Above all, Emanuel and the Unión (renamed Aurora de la Esperanza in 1895) wanted to blend ethnic and racial identities. In doing so, they hoped to combine the political and economic power of Africans and African-descended people in Cuba.¹⁴

During a contentious 1896 meeting, however, the Aurora de la Esperanza expelled Emanuel. The reasons are unclear, but the expulsion was probably due to ideological differences.¹⁵ For example, leaders of distinct groups within the Aurora de la Esperanza, such as the Mina, Carabalí, and Mandinga, were sometimes hesitant to relinquish power to a more centralized association. Emanuel's strident pan-Africanist stance also likely irked those who favored integration into a new, egalitarian Cuban nation. In 1893, the Directorio Central de la Raza de Color, led by Juan Gualberto Gómez and representing 3,000 people in 70 different sociedades, pushed for the removal of racial designations from all public documents.¹⁶ For Gómez, this was a pathway to equality, but to Emanuel, this position would have amounted to assimilation, a capitulation of African identities for the sake of national citizenship. Moreover, Emanuel did not support the independence effort. While his whereabouts during the War of Independence (1895-98) are not known, Emanuel later repudiated these "Cuban events" and proudly declared that neither he nor his followers had taken part in the war.¹⁷

Whatever the case, Emanuel's time with the Unión Africana/Aurora de la Esperanza was pivotal. He learned much about balancing different identities, knowledge he would continue to draw on over the next decade. He also saw the limits of the nationalist model and became convinced that to secure the welfare of Africans in Cuba, he would have to look further afield. Over the next decade, Emanuel sent a series of petitions to the British, US, and Belgian governments. The details of Emanuel's everyday life are not known, but these petitions provide an intellectual biography of sorts, revealing how he blended ethnic and racial identities and mobilized the ideologies of empire and nation for his own ends.

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 227–241. More generally, Philip Howard notes that most Congo cabildos associated with Melchor and held elections at Epiphany, January 6. Howard also suggests that the link with Melchor stemmed from the influence of Portuguese missionaries in West Central Africa. Howard, *Changing History*, 37, 44. See also Lydia Cabrera, *Reglas de Congo: Palo Monte Mayombe* (Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1986).

14. Ortiz, "Los cabildos afrocubanos," 26–27.

15. According to Fernando Ortiz, this "strange association" left "no trace." Ortiz, "Los cabildos afrocubanos," 27.

16. Howard, *Changing History*, 200. See also Helg, *Our Rightful Share*, 39–40.

17. "Au Congo: civilisation par les nègres d'Amérique," *Le Patriote*, March 21, 1901; clipped in NAIK, CO 96/387.

PETITIONING FOR BRITISH PROTECTION

Emanuel began his new approach in July 1900, when he sent a petition to the British consul general in Havana, Lionel Carden.¹⁸ Emanuel introduced himself as the “Representative of the Africans and their descendents [*sic*]” in Cuba. Writing on behalf of “ten thousand . . . natural born Africans,” Emanuel explained that they were “never admitted to Spanish or Cuban nationality,” but rather had always been considered as “foreigners” and “natives of Africa.” As a result, they had “no wish, whatever, to become Citizens of Cuba.” They were slaves under Spanish colonial rule, Emanuel noted, but even after the abolition of slavery, their “wealth and properties were snatched away from them.”¹⁹ Emancipation, he continued, had also resulted in cultural loss. Referring to the change of *cabildos* into *sociedades*, Emanuel explained that Africans had “preserved their fetish customs of African dances” through the *cabildos*, but Spain changed these “into the name Society.” With this “nominal change,” he wrote, “whatever was left them in slavery was taken away from them in the emancipation.” Rejecting any sense of attachment to either Spain or Cuba, Emanuel pointed toward a shared sense of being “African,” a desire to “retain always their African Nationality.” In closing, he reiterated his main request: British recognition of—and protection for—Africans in Cuba.²⁰

Emanuel’s petition is noteworthy for several reasons. To begin with, his claim to represent 10,000 “natural born Africans” seems exaggerated. An 1899 census reported 12,953 Africans in Cuba. By 1907, that number had fallen to 7,948.²¹ Moreover, most Africans lived not in Havana like Emanuel but further to the southeast, in the provinces of Matanzas and Santa Clara. It is unlikely, then, that all of his followers were African-born, even though slave ships continued to arrive in Cuba until the 1860s. Others were probably migrant workers from Haiti and British Caribbean islands who encountered discrimination in Cuba. Still others may have been “liberated” Africans who had some connection with Britain.

Yet more than simply exaggeration, Emanuel’s claim was part of a rhetorical strategy that he had been developing since 1894, when the *Unión Africana* had

18. Emanuel to Lionel Carden, British Consul General in Cuba, July 13, 1900, NAUK, CO 96/367.

19. Philip Howard cites a number of examples of the colonial government expropriating the property of *cabildos* in the 1880s. Howard, *Changing History*, 176–180.

20. In this first petition, Emanuel did not explicitly refer to a plan for repatriation to Africa, though he did make some gestures. For example, he stated that after emancipation many “would have gladly returned to their native Country Africa, but found it impossible to do so.” This was due in part to “exorbitant expense” but also because many feared they would be “thrown overboard” or killed upon return to Africa. Emanuel also referenced “an African Prince,” who in 1852 or 1853 “was kidnapped and brought to this country. . . [and] was reclaimed and sent back through the British Consul.” Emanuel to Carden, July 13, 1900, NAUK, CO 96/367.

21. US War Department, *Report on the Census*, 1899, 98; *Censo de la República de Cuba*, 1907, 211. For more on the 1899 and 1907 censuses, see Helg, *Our Rightful Share*, 24–29; and Pappademos, *Black Political Activism*, 102–103.

elected him as the “sole representative of the African race before the Government.” In fact, in March 1900, several months earlier, Emanuel had sent a letter to a newspaper explaining that there were “few Africans who [did] not recognize him as their representative in Cuba.”²² By declaring himself the leader of a mass movement, Emanuel was seeking more widespread legitimacy, in Cuba and elsewhere. Beyond numbers, the petition also reveals how Emanuel began to construct an “African Nationality” linked with British imperial subjecthood. To cite just two examples from the petition: “With fresh and vivid recollection of their African homes, never to be forgotten, they looked and still look forward to the British Government to be their Deliverer Shield and Protector and they in turn as true and loyal subjects.” Further, “they cannot bear to claim Cuban Nationality, thoughts like these make them all the more adherent to Africa, their native land, and to the Protection of England.” Through each of these declarations, Emanuel forged a direct link between “African” identity and British “protection.”

For Emanuel, it seems, Africans in Cuba could be African only with British support. While he knew the realities of Britain’s role in slavery, he also knew that Britain had positioned itself as a “protector” by seeking to curtail and abolish the transatlantic slave trade.²³ Emanuel was not likely convinced by this stance, but he nonetheless seized on the language of “protection.” He may have also been aware of Britain’s longer history of intervention in Cuba. After the 1817 Anglo-Spanish Treaty, the British consul in Havana sometimes interceded on behalf of Africans in Cuba who the British had liberated from illegal slave ships and who the Spanish wrongly subjected to forced labor.²⁴

Emanuel’s turn to Britain was also due, at least in part, to his experiences of growing up in the British colony of Antigua. Making use of his inter-imperial migration, Emanuel emphasized his personal stakes in this conception of an “African” identity blended with the ideals of the British Empire: “For this end and human cause I have hitherto become a sacrifice in their behalf, for our nationality and my race.” Emanuel’s delicate balance of these possessive pronouns—“their,” “our,” “my”—demonstrates how he had begun to maneuver different categories of identity. Elsewhere in the petition, Emanuel made a more specific argument about the links between African identity and British subjecthood. According to Emanuel, the Africans in Cuba were from “British territories in Africa” and were thus “legally intitled [*sic*] to Protection

22. “Carta de Emanuel,” *Diario de la Marina*, March 16, 1900, 3.

23. Years later, Eric Williams famously summed up this hypocrisy: “The British historians wrote almost as if Britain had introduced Negro slavery solely for the satisfaction of abolishing it.” Williams, *British Historians and the West Indies* (New York: Scribner, 1964), 233.

24. Rodolfo Sarracino, “Interacción de las políticas Británica e Hispánica de migraciones y el regreso de emancipados a África,” in *Los que volvieron a África* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1988), chapt. 3.

as Subjects of Her Britannic Majesty.” To prove this point, Emanuel gave a detailed description of how his followers had ended up in Cuba:

[They] were kidnapped and as they tell me, were tied, together, by the neck to the number of ten then sent off to the canoa which could carry thirty persons a trip. Others were caught at Yoba, brought through Dahomey and then Lagos and to the brigantine *Esperanza*. Whenever pursued by British Ships they hoisted a red flag which indicated a cargo of Palm oil and if nearing would clamour, *‘Uulique viquioca* Hold your tongue, get below, the English are coming to eat you.’ They were Kidnapped and brought over here as slaves. From the year 1786 down to 1851 in the brigantine *Esperanza* or Hope. In 1854 in [the] Ship Bruja Luisa. In 1863 in steam ship Cataluna. Indeed from British territories in Africa they were brought to Cuba.

This account is significant for several reasons. For one thing, the details are remarkably accurate. According to the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database, the Spanish-owned *Bruja Luisa* did in fact arrive in Cuba in 1854, carrying 589 enslaved Africans.²⁵ Similarly, between 1811 and 1854, more than a dozen voyages on ships named “Esperanza” arrived in Cuba, carrying just over 3,000 Africans. And, while there is no record of a slave ship named “Cataluna” arriving in Cuba, the British captured a slave ship named “Catalina” in Lagos in 1862.²⁶ It is possible that this same “Catalina” returned the following year and brought slaves to Cuba.²⁷ Emanuel also described inland slave-trading in Africa, including the long journeys to coastal ports that were often as deadly as the Middle Passage itself.²⁸

In addition to providing a fairly accurate account of enslavement between Africa and Cuba, Emanuel used this description to highlight three things: his connection with the British Empire, his disdain for the Spanish, and his conception of a pluralized African identity. In Emanuel’s rendering, the British were liberators and the Spanish were deceitful.²⁹ It is possible that Spanish ship captains used

25. See Voyage 46506 of the Slave Voyages Database, “Bruja (a) Luisa,” <http://www.slavevoyages.org/voyage/46506/variables>, accessed October 10, 2020.

26. Following the British Slave Trade Act of 1807, the British began targeting slave ships working north of the equator. As a result, these voyages were “illegal” and did not always leave documentation. Moreover, I have only found a typescript of Emanuel’s petition. In the original, he may have written “Catalana” or “Catalina.”

27. Additionally, a Spanish boat named *Catalana* owned by Jayme Tinto made at least five trips between West Africa and Cuba between 1829 and 1832.

28. For example, Joseph C. Miller estimates that more than one-third of Africans enslaved in West Central Africa (Kongo/Angola) died before arriving in the ports of Benguela and Luanda. Miller, *Way of Death: Merchant Capitalism and the Angolan Slave Trade, 1730–1830* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 384–385.

29. The fear of European cannibalism was widespread. Many Africans believed that European slave traders would eat their flesh and use their blood to make wine, their brains to make cheese, and their bones to make gunpowder. See James H. Sweet, *Recreating Africa: Culture, Kinship, and Religion in the African-Portuguese World, 1441–1770* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 162.

red flags to trick the British, but this reference also echoes the stories told by freed slaves in North America about Europeans using red cloth to lure Africans onto slave ships. Michael Gomez suggests that Africans from different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds told such stories to emphasize that the “overwhelming balance of blame and guilt belonged to white folk.”³⁰ Gomez argues that recasting the history of the slave trade in this manner was essential to the formation of a singular “African” identity in the Americas. While Emanuel lived in a different context, he too used a red flag as both a source of deception and as a literary device for uniting diverse groups of Africans in Cuba. In other words, Emanuel used the history of the British role in curtailing the slave trade to make his claim for a common African identity.

Lionel Carden, the British consul general in Havana, forwarded Emanuel’s petition to the British Colonial Office in London. In the attached correspondence, Carden summarized Emanuel’s petition, explaining that his followers were “natives of English possessions on the West Coast of Africa” and wanted “to be recognized as such and admitted to the privileges of British subjects.” Carden also noted that while they could not produce “documentary evidence to show the place of their origin,” they had maintained “their local dialects and custom,” and so many had “strong indirect proof.” In response, Thomas Sanderson, the under-secretary of state for foreign affairs, instructed Carden to inform Emanuel that the British crown would “recognize, as British subjects, [only] such of these people as can produce satisfactory evidence of having been born on British territory.”³¹

For Sanderson, Emanuel’s eloquent case for the “Britishness” of Africans in Cuba was insufficient. British identity required documentary proof. As we will see, however, it is doubtful that Sanderson would have acquiesced to Emanuel’s demands even with “satisfactory evidence.” Citing the lack of documentary proof was simply the most expedient way of denying Emanuel’s request. Frustrated by Sanderson’s response, Emanuel did not write back to the British for another two years. Instead, he broadened his search and turned toward the United States and Belgium.

REPATRIATION AND THE LANGUAGE OF EMPIRE

After Cuban independence in 1898, leaders of the insurgency attempted to placate the United States, the occupying power. Emanuel, after being rebuffed

30. Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, 199, 207.

31. Thomas Sanderson, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, to Lionel Carden, August 14, 1900, NAUK, CO 96/367.

by Britain, made similar overtures. Even in his July 1900 petition, Emanuel had described the United States occupation in positive terms, at least compared to Spanish rule. “For the first time,” Emanuel noted, Africans were “enabled to freely express their own wishes, without the fear of molestation.”³² Then, in February 1901, building on the theme of the United States as liberator, Emanuel wrote to US president William McKinley and US secretary of war Elihu Root. In the letters, Emanuel reprised his earlier concerns. He opposed the imposition of Cuban enfranchisement, arguing that “the African natives, against their will, [were] being forced into Cuban Nationality.”³³ Spaniards in Cuba, meanwhile, were being given a choice about citizenship—at least according to the proposed constitution.³⁴ Emanuel then asked McKinley and Root to support his new initiative: repatriating Africans in Cuba to Africa.³⁵

Emanuel’s turn to the United States is in some ways surprising, given that the occupation was for many a moment of political foreclosure. Yet Emanuel evidently saw the change in power as an opportunity. By writing to McKinley and Root, he was drawing on a longer history of imperial authorities supporting repatriation for Africans in Cuba. The Spanish, for example, had included this option in the 1870 Moret Law, whose Article 13 made a vague promise to return free Africans to their homelands if they were interested.³⁶ Earlier, in the 1840s and 1850s, the British had facilitated the passages of more than 200 liberated Africans in Cuba to Sierra Leone and Nigeria.³⁷ Emanuel thus sought to use this history of repatriation via imperial networks to make claims on the United States, the new imperial power in Cuba. Moreover, since 1817, and with tacit support from many US government officials, the

32. Emanuel to Lionel Carden, British Consul General in Cuba, July 13, 1900, NAUK, CO 96/367.

33. Emanuel to William McKinley, February 15, 1901, United States National Archives [hereafter USNA], Record of the Bureau of Insular Affairs, Record Group 350, File 2499, entry 5, quoted in David Sartorius, *Ever Faithful*, 217, 268 n2.

34. Guerra, *The Myth of José Martí*, 112.

35. Emanuel to Elihu Root, February 15, 1901; and Emanuel to William McKinley, February 15, 1901, USNA, RG 350, File 2499, both quoted in Guerra, *The Myth of José Martí*, 112, 274 n94. These letters, held at the USNA in College Park, Maryland, are cited by both Sartorius and Guerra. When I visited in January 2018, I made repeated attempts to request these documents. The archivists firmly denied my requests, citing a “moldy box” that was “unsafe” to consult.

36. Pappademos, *Black Political Activism*, 92–94. Pappademos also outlines the 1902 case of Domingo Julia and Leon Escobar, two Africans in Santa Clara who petitioned the governor for assistance with repatriation to Africa for themselves and 100 other former slaves. Unlike Emanuel, however, Julia and Escobar also claimed rights as Cuban citizens. Article 13 states that “Those who want to return to Africa will be transported there.” Translation from Pappademos, *Black Political Activism*, 254 n2. For more on the Moret Law and gradual abolition of slavery in Cuba, see Scott, *Slave Emancipation in Cuba*.

37. Sarracino, *Los que volvieron a África*, 224. In Chapter 8, “Migraciones de Cuba hacia África en la década del 50,” Sarracino uses an 1854 article from the *Anti-Slavery Reporter* to profile the remarkable lives of 23 emancipated Africans who returned to Lagos from Cuba via Southampton. This British support for repatriation was in part a response to the violent crackdown of the Spanish after the 1844 Conspiracy of La Escalera. See Michele Reid-Vázquez, *The Year of the Lash: Free People of Color in Cuba and the Nineteenth-Century Atlantic World* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 162–163.

American Colonization Society had arranged for the “return” of more than 12,000 African Americans to Liberia.³⁸

As with his petition to the British, however, Emanuel’s efforts with the United States were unsuccessful. McKinley and Root were not interested. With no support forthcoming there, Emanuel next set his sights on Belgium and Central Africa. In March 1901, he traveled to Belgium to meet with government officials and to promote repatriation to the Congo Free State, then under the control of King Leopold II. While in Belgium, Emanuel also gave a series of illuminating interviews with local newspapers.³⁹ In each case, Emanuel further demonstrated his acumen for molding ideas and identities according to his audience.

Emanuel arrived in Antwerp on March 20, 1901, and the next day, the Belgian daily *Le Patriote* published an article on his mission.⁴⁰ In the article, Emanuel claimed that he was born to Congolese parents in Antigua and that he represented 18,000 Africans in Cuba who were originally from the Congo. He stated that they were eager to return to the Congo so that they could “found centres of civilization” in their “native land.” He also reiterated his disdain for Cuban citizenship. And, instead of requesting British subjecthood, he now advocated for citizenship with the Congo Free State. Emanuel explained further that he wanted to represent the Congo Free State in Cuba and be given the power to grant Congolese citizenship to his followers there. Accompanying Emanuel were four others from Cuba who, he claimed, had lived in the Congo for the preceding three years. Using them as models, Emanuel described his constituents as “very peaceful” and emphasized that they had taken no part in the “*événements cubains*.” Then, in closing, Emanuel described their expertise in cultivating “tropical products” such as tobacco, coffee, and rubber.

The next day, *Le Patriote* published a follow-up article, including excerpts from an interview with Emanuel.⁴¹ Using this forum to his advantage, Emanuel continued to use the language of colonization. Once in the Congo, he explained, the settlers would build a school for “agriculture and industry” in

38. For more on the American Colonization Society, see Claude A. Clegg, *The Price of Liberty: African Americans and the Making of Liberia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); and Eric Burin, *Slavery and the Peculiar Solution: A History of the American Colonization Society* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005)

39. Emanuel’s arrival in Belgium also attracted attention in the United States. On March 23, 1901, the *New York Times* reported that Emanuel, “a negro born in the British Antilles, of Congolese parents,” was in Antwerp on behalf of “eighteen thousand negroes of Congolese origin who were taken to Cuba as slaves.” Emanuel, the article noted, hoped to lead a movement back to “the Congo State.” “Cuba’s Slaves,” *New York Times*, March 23, 1901, <https://www.nytimes.com/2001/03/23/opinion/1901cubas-slaves-in-our-pages100-75-and-50-years-ago.html>.

40. “Au Congo: Civilisation par les Nègres d’Amérique,” *Le Patriote*, March 21, 1901; clipped in NAUK, CO 96/387.

41. “Au Congo,” *Le Patriote*, March 22, 1901.

order to “perfect the existing crops” and to introduce new ones. Emanuel also pledged that the arrivals from Cuba would help to “civilize” the peoples of Congo: “We will focus especially on the youth, education being the basis of all morality, all progress, and all civilization.” Emanuel added that the settlers would rid the “still savage tribes” of the interior of “polygamy, fetishism, and the horrors of cannibalism.” They were ideally suited for this “civilizing mission,” Emanuel declared, because they were “natives” of Congo and “spoke the dialects.” Moreover, this work was best done by “blacks who had already acquired a degree of civilization.” Finally, Emanuel provided some concrete numbers for his migration plans: he would not bring all 18,000 people at once, but rather begin with 800 to 1,000 families.

Emanuel had thus changed his story almost entirely. When writing to the British a year earlier, he had claimed to represent 10,000 Africans in Cuba who were proud British subjects, kidnapped from British territories in Africa. In Belgium, however, Emanuel presented this same group—though now numbering 18,000—as “native” to the Congo. He even claimed that his parents were from the Congo. And, he substituted the language of British imperial subjecthood with a request for Congolese citizenship, which represented a similar possibility of freedom. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, Emanuel started pandering to the “civilizing” impulse of European colonialism. He consciously adopted the Belgian strategy of publicly promoting “progress” in the Congo while still participating in the economic exploitation of the region. Africans in Cuba, Emanuel explained, were a “very peaceful people” with a “hard-work ethic” and were experts in harvesting rubber and “other tropical products.” Emanuel was thus placating Leopold’s need to present a “humane” image of rubber extraction. Emanuel understood the hypocritical politics of colonialism and presented his followers as “civilizers,” uniquely qualified to fulfill Leopold’s wishes in Central Africa. No longer relying only on the networks of empire to support repatriation, Emanuel was now also using the language and ideology of empire to his advantage.

This framing was not entirely unique. Emanuel’s emphasis on education, “civilization,” and especially his proposal to build an “agriculture and industry” school in Central Africa, reflects the direct influence of Booker T. Washington. By 1901, Washington’s Tuskegee Institute had a strong foothold in Cuba and was actively recruiting Afro-Cuban students.⁴² Moreover, like Washington, Emanuel saw imperial networks as pathways to form “diasporic linkages”

42. Frank Guridy, *Forging Diaspora: Afro-Cubans and African Americans in a World of Empire and Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), esp. chapt. 2, “Forging Diaspora in the Midst of Empire: The Tuskegee-Cuba Connection.”

across national boundaries. There is no evidence of a personal link between the two men, but both articulated a pan-Africanism informed by imperialism—they “embedded” imperial ideology in the language of racial uplift.⁴³ Emanuel may have also been inspired by a similar initiative in Togo. Two months earlier, in January 1901, German officials had brought four Tuskegee Institute scientists to Togo to promote new methods of cotton cultivation. Just as the Germans believed the Tuskegee men were ideal candidates for this work, Emanuel portrayed Africans in Cuba as perfect models for “civilizing” the Congo Free State.⁴⁴

After a few days in Antwerp, Emanuel made his way to Brussels, where he met with Baron Adolphe de Cuvelier, the secretary general for foreign affairs of the Congo Free State. Emanuel gave two further interviews after this meeting. In the first, with the journal *Essor Économique Universel*, he explained that De Cuvelier had presented a number of obstacles and that the discussions had gone poorly.⁴⁵ Emanuel stated that he had been corresponding with De Cuvelier’s predecessor, Baron Edmond van Eetvelde, for over four years, and had expected “easy negotiations.” Nevertheless, Emanuel used the opportunity to reiterate his vision. The motivation for returning to Congo was not simply “discontentment” in Cuba. Rather, he and the others were “dictated by their conscience” and “dreamed of founding centres of civilization” in Central Africa. Expounding the many benefits of this reverse migration, Emanuel explained that as “citizens” of the Congo Free State, these “calm and peaceful” people would serve King Leopold II; they would cultivate rubber, tobacco, cacao, and coffee; they would support the European *sociétés*; they would be auxiliaries for Catholic missionaries; and they would import Belgian goods, which would motivate “the native Congolese, who is an imitator,” to buy further goods.

Emanuel’s second interview in Brussels, with *Mouvement Géographique*, appeared on March 31, 1901.⁴⁶ The short article, which referred to Emanuel as a “Cuban mulatto,” reported that De Cuvelier had discouraged the project because of “practical difficulties.” De Cuvelier apparently also told Emanuel to abandon his personal plans to go to Congo, calling them “unnecessary.” Thus,

43. Guridy, “Forging Diaspora,” 11–12. While there are similarities in the language used by Washington and Emanuel, Guridy’s emphasis is on how such “diasporic linkages” were crucial for challenging and shaping national aims in Cuba and the United States. For Emanuel, such linkages were crucial for surviving—and leaving—the Cuban nation.

44. Andrew Zimmerman, *Alabama in Africa: Booker T. Washington, the German Empire, and the Globalization of the New South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

45. Haitian intellectual Benito Sylvain reproduced this interview at the end of his 1901 book, *Du sort des indigènes dans les colonies d’exploitation* (Paris: L. Boyer, 1901), 515–519.

46. “La délégation cubaine à l’État du Congo,” *Mouvement Géographique*, March 31, 1901; clipped in NAUK, CO 96/387.

Emanuel's trip to Belgium, and the plan he claimed was four years in the making, seemed to be ending in failure. In fact, shortly after Emanuel's meeting with De Cuvelier, the British ambassador in Brussels wrote back to London with a disparaging description of the plan: "His Majesty the King [Leopold II] spoke to me sarcastically of the project stating that he believed the negroes would now seek refuge on British soil."⁴⁷

Yet not all was lost. The *Mouvement Géographique* also reported that Emanuel's campaign had piqued the interest of a French *compagnie* with concessions in the Sangha River basin in French Congo. This connection, established through the Brussels-based banker Emile Renders, proved to be the most promising outcome of Emanuel's trip to Belgium. When Emanuel returned to Cuba a few weeks later, Renders traveled with him.⁴⁸ After several months in Cuba with Emanuel, Renders returned to Brussels, eager to promote Emanuel's mission and to begin raising funds. Aboard ship during the return journey, Renders met American writer Hervey White and excitedly relayed his experiences in Cuba. White recorded an informal interview with Renders, and in August 1901 submitted a detailed account to the *Boston Evening Transcript*.⁴⁹

According to Renders—via White's report—the "18,000" Africans in Cuba had all come from the Congo after 1853 and had always wanted to return to Central Africa, "the land of their traditions and their songs." Renders, taking his cues from Emanuel, described them as "Catholic," "civilized," and "accustomed to working for wages." He also emphasized that they "took no interest in the war for freedom" and that "the Cubans were even greater thieves than the Spanish." Regarding Emanuel, Renders described him as a "wonderful fellow" who was "giv[ing] his life," and as a "man of education and genius," fluent in English, French and Spanish. He also noted that Emanuel's followers "worship[ped]" him like a "king" and "bowed down before him." Renders expressed full support for Emanuel's plan, declaring that the Africans in Cuba would "flourish and prosper" in the Congo. Renders and his associates planned to offer each man 10,000 square meters of land, as well as wages for collecting rubber and ivory. The settlers would also "teach the native to work." "We shall civilize the Congoes with Congoes," Renders declared. They would be "speaking the language of the savages, but with the meaning of civilization." Renders even went a step further than Emanuel, arguing that this mass

47. Constantine Phipps to British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, April 3, 1901, NAUK, CO 96/387. In a previous letter, Phipps had noted that "His Majesty does not view this project favourably and is inclined to regard these persons as likely to constitute a dangerous element in the Congo." Phipps to British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, March 23, 1901, NAUK, CO 96/387.

48. "On the Congo: Movement to Colonize with Cubans," *Lewiston Daily Sun*, April 26, 1901, 7.

49. Hervey White, "The Cuban Moses: A Negro Would Lead His People to the Promised Land," *Boston Evening Transcript*, August 17, 1901, 18.

migration would also benefit Cuba and the United States. The United States would send its “surplus” of African Americans to Cuba, and Cuba would benefit from “having Negroes . . . with more knowledge of free institutions.”

White’s article is significant in that it shows there was genuine interest in Emanuel’s scheme. In fact, the American Colonization Society reprinted the article in its news bulletin *Liberia*.⁵⁰ The article also provides some sense of Emanuel as a charismatic leader with enthusiastic followers. Yet, despite this enthusiasm, Renders and his *compagnie* never followed up with any concrete plans. The following year, Emanuel turned back to the British, but this time armed with a method for combining colonial thinking with his request for repatriation. He now saw more clearly how to use the networks and language of empire to advance his aims.

CHANGING TACK

In June 1902, Emanuel sent a new petition to Lionel Carden, the British consul general in Havana.⁵¹ By this time, Emanuel had formed a new pan-African association, the *Colonia Africana*. In the petition, Emanuel took up many familiar themes. He explained, for instance, that Africans in Cuba were “strictly opposed to Cuban Citizenship.” He also continued to express devotion to the British crown and to link “African” identity with potential British subjecthood, noting that “the Africans of the Colony . . . look up and forward to My Lord the Secretary as their philanthropic father in the nation, the ameliorator of their future condition . . . in whom all their hopes are centered.”

Yet two main factors distinguished this petition from the one Emanuel had sent to Carden in July 1900. First, drawing on his petitions to the United States and Belgium, Emanuel now explicitly asked the British to support repatriation to Africa, rather than simply requesting “protection” in Cuba. Making only a passing reference to the Congo, Emanuel now claimed that the Africans in Cuba came “from British Settlement in Africa” and wanted to return: “They do not wish . . . to remain in Cuba; but to return to Africa with their families, as they have no land of their own there, they implore the British Government to grant them land belonging to the Crown, any part in Africa for the purpose of Colonizing.”

50. Hervey White, “The Cuban Moses,” *Liberia*, Bulletin No. 21, (November 1902): 75–80. Alongside White’s story was an article from Booker T. Washington.

51. Emanuel to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, London, via Lionel Carden, June 7, 1902, NAUK, CO 96/401.

The second main change was Emanuel's appeal to colonial thinking about Africa. As he had done in Belgium and with Emile Renders, Emanuel emphasized how Africans in Cuba could help to "civilize" other Africans. He referred repeatedly to their peaceful nature and agricultural expertise: "quiet and civil people of character . . . [who] took no part in the Cuban Revolution," and who were "acquainted with the cultivation of the Sugar Cane and the making of the sugar, tobacco and Coffee." At one point, Emanuel even credited enslavement with making Africans in Cuba into such "valuable Colonists." "They are a hard working people," he wrote, "and touching agriculture they cannot be outstripped any were [*sic*], a task forced upon them by the severest rigor of Cuban slavery."

Emanuel made no direct references to providential design, but he appeared to attribute the slave trade with giving his followers the tools needed to bring "civilization" to Africa.⁵² In closing, Emanuel appealed to the global benefits of British support: "Their repatriation would be a great benefit to Africa [and] reflect credit to the movement [and] give pleasure to England and a surprise to the world." He even described the potential mass migration as "the great work of humanity."

Carden forwarded Emanuel's petition to the Foreign Office in London and asked for advice on how to respond.⁵³ Carden himself, however, seemed already convinced by the scheme, and even used some of Emanuel's exact words: "They would with their families prove to be valuable colonists, as they have been brought up in habits of industry and are well acquainted with the cultivation of tropical products." Carden also mentioned that Emanuel had informed him in separate correspondence that there were 1,000 people "ready to start." The Foreign Office passed the correspondence on to Joseph Chamberlain, the secretary of state for the colonies at the Colonial Office.⁵⁴ In August 1902, Chamberlain wrote back to inform Carden that it was "not possible to give effect to Mr. Emanuel's petition." According to Chamberlain, the British colonial governments of West Africa had "no land at their disposal which could be granted to the Cuban Africans."⁵⁵

A year later, in August 1903, Emanuel drafted a renewed request for repatriation to British territory in Africa. This time he bypassed Lionel Carden and instead

52. For more on slavery and providential design, see Robert Trent Vinson, *The Americans are Coming!: Dreams of African American Liberation in Segregationist South Africa* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2012), esp. chapt. 1. See also Sidbury, *Becoming African in America*.

53. Lionel Carden to Henry Petty-Fitzmaurice, British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, June 9, 1902.

54. Foreign Office to Under Secretary of State for the Colonies, June 28, 1902, NAUK, CO 96/401.

55. C. P. Lucas, Under Secretary of State for the Colonies to the Foreign Office, August 2, 1902, Public Records and Archives Administration Department, Accra, Ghana (PRAAD), ADM 1/1/153.

wrote directly to Joseph Chamberlain.⁵⁶ Introducing himself as a “faithful British Subject, representing the African Colony in Cuba,” Emanuel reprised many of the same ideas: claiming loyalty to Britain, asking for a “grant of government” for land in Africa, and emphasizing the “well-behaved and industrious” nature of Africans in Cuba. Given their expertise in the “art of cultivation,” he continued, repatriation would “prove a wonderful success in the near future” and would “be a prosperity for Africa.” Emanuel also added further nuance to his appeals for British “protection.” Africans in Cuba, he explained, “most ardently desire[d] to return and . . . perform under the British government, that had protected them, on the sea, from . . . further slavery.” Emanuel thus presented his case not just as a story of Africans wanting to return to British territories in Africa. He also made an adept appeal to Britain’s self-serving ideas about its role in the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade.

His attention piqued by this overture, Chamberlain finally took some interest in Emanuel’s proposition. He even forwarded the August 1903 petition to Frederick Lugard, then the high commissioner of the Northern Nigeria protectorate. Several weeks later, Lugard sent back his assessment.⁵⁷ He stated that he was “doubtful” of the “experiment” but was “not averse to trying it.” Practically speaking, Lugard explained that there was “a good deal of waste land between Zungeru and Wushishi” where the settlers could grow “Cotton, Sugar Cane, and ground nuts.” He even offered to help establish “a small area for the settlement of a Village.” Regarding numbers, Lugard suggested that they should begin with “10 or 12 families at most.” He also emphasized that these “settlers” would have to “pay *all* their own expenses . . . and live in native huts of their own making.” If the mission “proved a success,” Lugard indicated that he could “enlist support for them later on from private sources.”⁵⁸ Yet by the time Lugard’s report arrived in London, Alfred Lyttleton had replaced Chamberlain as the secretary of state for the colonies. Lyttleton was skeptical of Emanuel’s plan and was not encouraged by Lugard’s doubts. In November 1903, Lyttleton sent a terse reply to Emanuel: “After considering the matter, [the secretary of state for the colonies] regrets that he is unable to meet your wishes.”⁵⁹

One month earlier, in October 1903, when Emanuel was still waiting to hear back from the British Colonial Office about his August 1903 petition, he sent a

56. Emanuel to Joseph Chamberlain, Secretary of State for the Colonies, August 10, 1903, PRAAD, ADM 1/1/153.

57. Minute by E. D. Lugard, September 4, 1903, PRAAD, ADM 1/1/153.

58. Here Lugard may have been referring to the British Cotton Growing Association (BCGA). Inspired by the Tuskegee-Togo experiment, the “semi-philanthropic” BCGA had recently brought several Tuskegee scientists to Nigeria to “modernize” cotton production. On the BCGA, see Jonathan E. Robins, *Cotton and Race Across the Atlantic: Britain, Africa, and America, 1900–1920* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2016).

59. Secretary of State for the Colonies to Emanuel, November 12, 1903, PRAAD, ADM 1/1/153.

separate petition to the colonial secretary of the Gold Coast.⁶⁰ Emanuel may have simply been impatient, but it is possible that he was attempting to play London and Accra against each other, just as he had earlier attempted to play Britain, the United States, and Belgium against each other. In the petition, Emanuel again pledged his loyalty as a “British Subject,” emphasized the “industry and great skill” of his constituents, and asked whether the Gold Coast government could provide any “fertile land.” Africans in Cuba, he explained, did not want to remain in the Caribbean, but instead wanted “to come and labour in Africa and to be of some use to it.”

Although Emanuel did not know it, his gambit paid off—at least initially. Matthew Nathan, the governor of the Gold Coast, took immediate interest in the proposition and sent Emanuel’s petition to the Colonial Office in London for further consideration.⁶¹ In an accompanying letter, Nathan explained that while the Gold Coast government claimed “no ownership to unoccupied lands,” they could make an “arrangement” with “the principal chiefs of the interior.” This, Nathan continued, would allow “African settlers from abroad . . . to occupy tracts of land for the purposes of cultivation.” Nathan added that this “might be advantageous” because much of the land in the colony was “lying waste.” In closing, he expressed two concerns: first, that the “settlers” be of “desirable character,” and second, that there were no objections from the US government.

Nathan’s correspondence, including a copy of Emanuel’s October 1903 petition, arrived in London in December 1903, only a few weeks after Lyttleton had rejected Emanuel’s August 1903 petition. In light of Nathan’s enthusiasm and tacit endorsement, however, Lyttleton began to reconsider the prospect of repatriating Africans in Cuba. Several weeks later, he wrote back to Nathan, attaching all the correspondence related to Emanuel since 1902 and asking Nathan to review the entire case and make a recommendation.⁶² At the end of January 1904, Nathan responded and reiterated his support for the plan. He noted that Lionel Carden had already described the “proposed settlers” as “valuable colonists” and had thus verified Emanuel’s claims.⁶³ Nathan, however, was at the same time preparing to leave the Gold Coast for a new position in Hong Kong, and so his recommendation was conditional: “I should have been prepared to have made the experiment with a small number of settlers but as I am leaving this Colony I think it better that no further steps should at present be taken in the matter to which I shall call Mr. Rodger’s

60. Emanuel to the Colonial Secretary of the Gold Coast, October 22, 1903, NAUK, CO 96/410.

61. Nathan to Secretary of State for the Colonies, December 3, 1903, NAUK, CO 96/410.

62. Alfred Lyttleton to Nathan, December 31, 1903, PRAAD, ADM 1/1/153.

63. Nathan to Lyttleton, January 26, 1904, NAUK, CO 96/416.

attention.” Nathan was referring to John Rodger, who took over as Gold Coast governor in February 1904.

Here there is a gap in the correspondence. Perhaps Nathan did not leave a note for Rodger. Or perhaps Rodger was less optimistic about allowing Emanuel’s followers to settle in the Gold Coast. Whatever the case, neither the Gold Coast nor the Colonial Office ever wrote back to Emanuel, despite apparent support for his scheme. In the preceding four years, Emanuel had written at least six petitions to Britain, the United States, and Belgium. Yet even with occasional interest in his proposals, he was still without an answer on repatriation, or even a definite response on securing the recognition of Africans in Cuba as British subjects. Emanuel may have understood the nuances of colonial politics in the early twentieth century, but his intellectual agility was no match for the capricious bureaucracies of the British, US, and Belgian empires.

A FINAL APPEAL

After two years of waiting for a response, Emanuel sent a final petition to Lionel Carden in February 1906.⁶⁴ Once again, Emanuel introduced himself as a “British Subject” and as the “representative of the AFRICAN COLONY” in Cuba. By this point, Emanuel appears to have abandoned his hopes for repatriation to Africa. Instead, he renewed his call for British recognition of Africans in Cuba as imperial subjects. Emanuel had first made this claim six years earlier, in July 1900. At that time, Carden had informed Emanuel that this status required “satisfactory evidence of having been born on British territory.”⁶⁵ With this in mind, Emanuel included five testimonial “test cases” with his 1906 petition. He explained that they could be “applicable to the case of all the other Africans in a similar condition, who are able to bring reasonable proof of having been kidnapped in British territory.”

The authors of the five testimonials, which bear close examination, all followed a similar narrative, all of the men claiming that before arriving in Cuba they had been enslaved in British territory in Africa and thus had the right to be recognized as “British subjects.” In the first testimonial, Ignacio Leon, alias Ponio, explained that he was “a native of the British Territory LAGOS, West Africa, of tribe MOPAH.” In 1844, he continued, he was “kidnapped and brought to this country. . . and was owned as a slave, by Don PEDRO LEON

64. Emanuel to Carden, February 10, 1906, NAUK, CO 96/450.

65. Thomas Sanderson, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, to Lionel Carden, August 14, 1900, NAUK, CO 96/367.

HAVANA.” Because of this, Leon claimed that he had a right to being “registered” as a “British subject,” especially considering that he had “never had any compromise of Spanish nationality.”

Telesforo Ayon, alias Ajac, similarly claimed to be “a native of LAGOS of tribe EJAE” and declared that he had been “kidnapped and brought to Havana, Cuba in ship CABALLO, in the year of 1860, under captain of the same name.” In Cuba, he ended up at the “residence of the MARQUIS of VILLALBA.” He added that he had “always claimed himself an African from British Territory and, looked forward always to the time when he might be reclaimed by that Government as its kidnapped subject.” The third testimonial, from Germain Sama, alias Eaoche, shifted the geography slightly: “The undersigned . . . was born in British Territory of the Gold Coast in West Africa, of the tribe MINA POPO, was kidnapped and brought from that Country to Havana in the year 1850 in ship CATALUNA [under] Captain Achoa . . . which was owned by Don Ramon Herrera.” He added that he was “never an adherent to Spanish nationality” and “remained grateful [*sic*] to be reclaimed by the Government of whose territory he is a native born.” Francisco Que, alias Ocrú, likewise claimed a right to “being considered as a British subject.” He explained that he was “a native of the Gold Coast, of tribe MINA POPO,” and that he was “kidnapped from British Territory” and then in 1850 “brought to Havana” aboard the “JUANA ESCRIBI.” He also noted that “the Spanish Government had considered all the Africans as strangers in the land.”

In the final testimonial, Manuel Gonzalo, alias Machü, likewise laid claim to status as a British subject “for having been kidnapped and brought from the GOLD COAST, British Territory, AFRICA.” Gonzalo described himself as “a native of the Gold Coast, WEST AFRICA of the tribe ‘MINA POPO.’” He also provided details of his experience of slavery: he had been “kidnapped with others of his countrymen, and brought in the ship ‘DON VALENTIN ESPERANZA’ in the year 1850 to the town of MATANZAS.” He closed by explaining that he was “always considered as a stranger or foreigner during the Spanish Administration” and never wanted to be “naturalized as a Spanish subject.”

Some of the details in these testimonials correspond to recorded slave ship voyages; others do not. More significant, at least for the present argument, is that each testimonial bears Emanuel’s imprint. Each man claimed to be “African” but also described this African-ness as comprising both geographic and ethnic particularities, buttressed by British imperial subjecthood. Such descriptions parallel the strategy Emanuel had been developing in his petitions since 1900 and even before, in the work he undertook with the Unión

Africana. This strategy was to articulate a dynamic “African” identity—one composed of particular ethnic identities alongside broader racial and imperial identities. While each testimonial was marked and signed by witnesses, Emanuel no doubt had an influence, if not a direct bearing, on the language used in them. It is even possible that Emanuel wrote them himself, given that each man signed with only an “x.”

Once again, Carden passed Emanuel’s petition on to London. This time, the Colonial Office quickly rejected Emanuel’s request, though the discussion surrounding the rejection is revealing.⁶⁶ One official, for example, pointed out that Lagos was “not ceded to the British Crown until 6 August 1861.” As a result, the two men who claimed that they were kidnapped from Lagos in 1844 and 1860 had “no claim” to being recognized as British subjects. This cynical reading of history, presuming that the British had no influence on slave trading in Lagos before 1861, was merely a prudent way of refuting Emanuel’s petition. Indeed, it is unlikely that the British would have extended the status of British subject to people who were enslaved in Lagos after August 1861.

For the three men who claimed that they were kidnapped from British territory in the Gold Coast, the justification for denial required further research. Germain Sama, Francisco Que, and Manuel Gonzalo had all claimed to be “natives of the Gold Coast” and of the “tribe Mina Popo.” With Emanuel’s support, they used this specific ethnic marker to justify their claims to being both Africans and British subjects. Colonial Office officials, however, were perplexed by the designation “Mina Popo.” One made a “fairly extensive search through books on the Slave Trade and on W. Africa generally,” but found only references to “Great and Little Popo,” not Mina Popo. “Mina,” he stated, likely referred to “Great” or “Little” in “one of the numerous dialects of the Coast.” Then again, he conceded, it was also possible that these names were “applied by Europeans simply to distinguish the two tribes.”⁶⁷ Another official claimed that “Great Popo and Little Popo” had “never been British” and were “now German,” thus referring to territory east of the Gold Coast, in Togo. As a result, he concluded, these men had no claims to being recognized as “British.” He did suggest that Africans in Cuba might qualify for “ex post facto nationality,” but then noted that it would “not be expedient to raise a question of this kind.” In May 1906, the Colonial Office wrote back to Carden and denied Emanuel’s requests for a final time. The

66. Notes in file on Emanuel and the “British Nationality of Cuban Negroes,” NAUK, CO 96/450.

67. There is a considerable literature on the changes and continuities of ethnonyms between Africa and the Americas. On the varied meanings of “Mina” identity in different places and times, see Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, “African Ethnicities and the Meanings of ‘Mina,’” in *Trans-Atlantic Dimensions of Ethnicity in the African Diaspora*, Paul Lovejoy and David Trotman, eds. (New York: Continuum, 2003), 65–81. See also Robin Law, “Ethnicities of Enslaved Africans in the Diaspora: On the Meanings of ‘Mina’ (Again),” *History in Africa* 32 (2005): 247–267.

Colonial Office also advised Carden to rebuke Emanuel and to inform him that he should not write again unless he had “better authenticated” claims.⁶⁸

With this definitive rejection, Emanuel appears to have given up on repatriation and on the British recognizing his followers as British subjects. His exact whereabouts and activities over the next several years are unclear, although in April 1910, he sent several notices to Havana’s *Diario de la Marina* advertising English lessons.⁶⁹ When anthropologist Fernando Ortiz met Emanuel a few years later, he remarked that Emanuel had still not abandoned his efforts to advocate for Africans in Cuba. Yet Ortiz also noted a degree of despondency in Emanuel’s attitude.⁷⁰ After nearly 20 years in Cuba, he had few successes to claim.

Nevertheless, in October 1920 Emanuel was still referring to himself as the “representative of the Africans and their descendants.”⁷¹ The timing of this assertion was significant. Representatives from Marcus Garvey’s Black Star Line had come to Cuba at the end of 1919, and Garvey himself traveled to the island in March 1921 to promote the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA).⁷² Over the next decade, support for the UNIA in Cuba soared. By 1927, there were more than 50 branches in Cuba, more than in any other country in the world outside the United States.⁷³ There is no trace of correspondence between Emanuel and Garvey, although they held similar views. Both advocated for racial uplift, a unifying “African” identity, and a return to Africa laden with imperial ideology.

Emanuel’s position as a precursor to Garvey in Cuba goes some way toward explaining the popularity of the UNIA on the island in the 1920s. To be sure, many of the UNIA adherents were migrant workers from the British Caribbean, yet as Marc McLeod and Frank Guridy have made clear, this claim is somewhat overdrawn.⁷⁴ It is possible that Emanuel’s approach of combining different identities, honed in 1890s Cuba, helped to create a more receptive and “universal” audience for Garvey—an audience that cut across the boundaries of language and nation. Emanuel’s initiatives showed that Africans and their descendants could use the malleable language of identity to imagine freedom outside of the new Cuban republic and within larger, hybridized,

68. Notes in file on Emanuel and the British Nationality of Cuban Negroes, NAUK, CO 96/450.

69. “¡Enseñanza rápida del Inglés!!,” *Diario de la Marina*, April 9, 1910, 11. Similar notices appeared in the newspaper on April 11, 1910, and April 16, 1910.

70. Ortiz, “Los cabildos afrocubanos,” 26–27. Emanuel’s negative outlook would also have been fuelled by the May 1912 massacre of Partido Independiente de Color members in Oriente province by government forces.

71. “Una solicitud,” *Diario de la Marina*, October 21, 1920, 11.

72. Guridy, *Forging Diaspora*, 78–88.

73. Marc McLeod, “Garveyism in Cuba, 1920–1940,” *Journal of Caribbean History* 30:1 (1996): 132.

74. See McLeod, “Garveyism in Cuba”; and Guridy, *Forging Diaspora*, esp. chapt. 2, “Un Dios, Un Fin, Un Destino: Enacting Diaspora in the Garvey Movement.”

supranational organizations, such as the Colonia Africana, the British, US, and Belgian empires, and the UNIA.

CONCLUSION

Emanuel's back-to-Africa movement may have failed, but his petitions offer a glimpse into a unique struggle for belonging in early twentieth-century Cuba. Instead of trying to reckon with the national rhetoric of "racelessness," Emanuel and his followers envisioned non-national forms of sovereignty that lay outside the geographic and conceptual boundaries of Cuba. To this end, they drew on the languages of empire, nation, race, and ethnicity and tacked back and forth between a range of identities. In some cases, as in the Unión Africana and the Colonia Africana, they adapted different ethnicities into a singular "African" identity. At other times, they joined specific ethnicities and a broader "African" identity with imperial subjecthood. They also deployed their memories of Africa and slavery to make claims on imperial power and used imperial networks to create transnational linkages. Depending on the audience and social context, Emanuel relied on a careful reading of political ideologies and a skillful manipulation of history to repackage this dynamic pan-African identity.

Emanuel does not appear to have had any personal connections with other pan-Africanist figures of his day, such as Booker T. Washington, W. E. B. Du Bois, or Marcus Garvey.⁷⁵ Nevertheless, his creative methodologies reveal how Africans and diaspora intellectuals shaped the language of identity for their own ends. Washington, Du Bois, Garvey, and many others relied on similar methods in their articulations of pan-Africanism. It is tempting, then, to applaud Emanuel's intellectual agility and focus on his capacity for "inventing" history. Yet Emanuel's actions mark less a flair for invention than a courageous response to the bleak realities faced by Africans and their descendants around the Atlantic world.⁷⁶ Above all, Emanuel's efforts illuminate how marginalized peoples have long fought against exclusion and pursued belonging by transcending and reshaping supposedly bounded spaces and identities.

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75. It is notable, however, that Benito Sylvain of Haiti reprinted Emanuel's March 1901 interview in Brussels with *Essor Économique Universel*. Sylvain had helped to organize the July 1900 Pan-African Association conference in London, alongside figures such as W. E. B. Du Bois and Henry Sylvester Williams. Sylvain, *Du sort des indigènes*, 515–519.

76. James H. Sweet, "Mistaken Identities? Oludah Equiano, Domingos Álvares, and the Methodological Challenges of Studying the African Diaspora," *American Historical Review* 114:2 (2009): 303–304.