2014

"Duty for To-day, Hope for the Morrow": Alexander Crummell's Communitarian Ideal

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A THESIS
Submitted to the graduate faculty of The University of Alabama at Birmingham,
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA

2014

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HISTORY

ABSTRACT

A complicated thinker, full of paradoxes, Alexander Crummell (1819-1898) engaged deeply with the world around him. He established prominent public relationships with often deified figures such as Frederick Douglass, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Booker T. Washington; he crossed transatlantic boundaries, impacting the lives of whites and blacks in America, England, and West Africa; and he continually searched for a community where blacks could freely exercise their rights and fulfill the duties of citizenship and self-governance. He championed black nationalism and racial pride, but, at the same time, he imagined and idealized a cohesive cosmopolitan community, a kind of universal human family that transcended both race and geography. He encouraged the expansion of commerce and trade, but he lamented selfish greed and the mindless race for mammon. He consistently called for individual personal responsibility while also demanding the development of a collective identity and the fulfillment of one’s communal duties. This contradictory nature of Crummellian thought has often puzzled scholars, and it has often led them to oversimplify his ideas or to misunderstand them or to ignore them entirely. He has, at various times, been called a conservative, a radical, a Federalist, a Hamiltonian

elitist, a Christian mystic, a black nationalist, and a cultural imperialist. But attempting to pack him away into these tiny boxes limits our view of Crummell as a public intellectual and as a three-dimensional human being.

My hope is to complicate the historiography and contribute to a better understanding of Crummellian thought by suggesting that Crummell's frustrations with the hypocrisies of American slavery and racism, as well as with economic individualism run amok, amounted to a communitarian critique of nineteenth-century American liberalism. Moreover, Crummell's communitarianism embodied a distinctive brand of philosophical idealism, which in turn allowed him to raise universal questions that transcended both space and time: he asked questions about the meaning of justice, truth, beauty, spirituality, and freedom. Ultimately, Crummellian thought embraced the idea that individuals could never achieve their transcendent moral ends alone but only collectively, and that individuals could never be fully human unless they maintained and nurtured those essential communal ties.

Keywords: Alexander Crummell, communitarianism, idealism, intellectual history, race relations, slavery

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

> We mark with light in the memory of the few interviews, we have had in the dreary years of routine and sin, with souls that made our souls wiser; that spoke what we thought; that told us what we knew; that gave us leave to be what we inly were.
>
> —Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Divinity School Address* (1838)

There are many, many people who have helped me with this project, and I am eternally indebted to each of them.

A long time ago, Scott Arnold taught me how to approach an argument squarely, how to see, how to think, and how to live with integrity. It is his advice that I call to mind daily and it is his example that I have tried my very best to follow, though I have certainly fallen short.

More recently, Brian Steele has shown me that our dialogue with the past is also a dialogue with the present and with the future, that these conversations carry our own unfulfilled ideals into another age. Without his advice, without his guidance, I would have irreparably bungled and blundered my way through this thesis and through graduate school. He has saved me from countless mistakes (those that remain here are due solely to my own ignorance and stubbornness) and he has pulled me out of the mud more often than I would like to admit. His intellect inspires me to work harder to be a better historian and his kindness inspires me to work harder to be a better person.

Special thanks must be given to Pamela King, whose unflagging encouragement has now spanned more than a decade. Her prowess in a classroom cannot be reckoned with, and I can only hope to one day excite and provoke my students half as much as she has hers. Walter Ward persistently pushed me in new directions and continually challenged me to consider new angles and new approaches. Robert Jefferson took a keen interest in this project at a critical moment and his enthusiasm and expertise propelled me forward and provided me with much needed momentum.

The history department at the University of Alabama at Birmingham offered me financial support for which I am incredibly grateful—and without which I could not have completed this thesis or this master's degree. Colin Davis was exceedingly generous with both his time and with departmental funds; Andrew Keitt and John Van Sant each diligently ensured that my experience as a graduate assistant was a positive one. Jerry Smith put out all the fires.

My friends and family have graciously tolerated this project. They have allowed me my odd preoccupations, my absent-mindedness, and my long hours at the library; they have shared my frustrations, my disappointments, my joys, and my triumphs. Christel Carlisle and Ashley Wilson, especially, provided me with a daily dose of sanity, with light and with laughter; if not for their constant camaraderie and companionship, I would have felt very alone indeed.

Over the years, I have found quite a lot to love in this world, but my husband, Joseph, is the best that it has to offer. Words are simply inadequate here.

Finally, if I have ever once acted with intelligence or compassion or humility, it is due solely to my father's abiding spirit.

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No man is an Iland, intire of itself; every man
is a peece of the Continent, a part of the maine.
—John Donne, Meditation XVII (1624)

Truth is within ourselves; it takes no rise
From outward things, whate'er you may believe.
There is an inmost centre in us all,
Where truth abides in fullness; and around,
Wall upon wall, the gross flesh hems it in,
This perfect, clear perception – which is truth.
A baffling and perverting carnal mesh
Binds it, and makes all error: and, to know,
Rather consists in opening out a way
Whence the imprisoned splendour may escape,
Than in effecting entry for a light
Supposed to be without.
—Robert Browning, *Paracelsus* (1835)

PROLOGUE

In *The Souls of Black Folk*, W. E. B. Du Bois remembered Alexander Crummell as a "prophet of the world." If Crummell had lived in another time, he "might have sat among the elders of the land in purple-bordered toga; in another country mothers might have sung him to the cradles."[1] Crummell, who died in 1898 at the age of 79, had a profound impact on African American thought. He engaged intensely with the world around him and was a complicated thinker, full of paradoxes. He entered into deep debate and dialogue with the likes of Frederick Douglass, Henry Highland Garnet, Booker T. Washington, W. E. B. Du Bois, Martin Delaney, Edward Wilmot Blyden, and Anna Julia Cooper, among others. Crummell's contemporaries eulogized him as one of the most significant black philosophers who had ever lived.[2] It has even been argued that he ought to be remembered as "The Father of the African-American intellectual tradition."[3] Yet,

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[1] W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, in W. E. B. Du Bois, *Writings*, Nathan Irvin Huggins, ed. (New York: Library of America, 1986), 512, 519-520.
[2] See Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk*, in *Writings*, 512-520; William Henry Ferris, "Alexander Crummell: An Apostle of Negro Culture," *American Negro Academy Occasional Papers*, no. 20 (Washington, D.C.: The American Negro Academy, 1920); and "Alexander Crummell Dead—The Most Noted Negro—No More," *The Washington Bee*, September 17, 1898, 4.
[3] V. P. Franklin, "Alexander Crummell: Defining Matters of Principle" in V. P. Franklin, *Living Our Stories, Telling Our Truths: Autobiography and the Making of the African-American Intellectual Tradition* (New York: Scribner, 1995), 57. Also see Otey M. Scruggs, *We the Children of Africa in This Land: Alexander Crummell* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University, 1972); and Alfred A. Moss, "Alexander Crummell: Black Nationalist and Apostle of Western Civilization" in *Black Leaders of the Nineteenth*

oddly, Crummell has been relegated to the margins of history, remembered by only a few scholars. Even in the academy, examinations of Crummellian thought remain disconcertingly sparse. Only a handful of articles focus on his social activism and his intellectual evolution. Currently, only three book-length monographs dealing solely with Crummell have been published.[4]

We ought to find Crummell's exclusion from the canon puzzling. After all, Crummell established prominent public relationships with deified figures like Douglass, Du Bois, and Washington; he crossed transatlantic boundaries, impacting the lives of whites and blacks in America, England, and West Africa; and he continually searched for a community where blacks could freely exercise their rights and fulfill the duties of citizenship and self-governance. While Crummell's ideas often directly responded to events rooted in a particular time and place—to the inequities, that is, of slavery and racism in nineteenth-century America—he also raised universal philosophical questions that transcended both space and time. He asked questions about the meaning of justice, truth, beauty, spirituality, and freedom. His moral inquiries attempted to "pierce the

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Century, August Meier and Leon F. Litwack, eds. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991): 237-251.

[4] Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *Alexander Crummell: A Study of Civilization and Discontent* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992); J. R. Oldfield, *Alexander Crummell and the Creation of an African-American Church in Liberia* (Lewiston, NY: E. Mellen Press, 1990); and Gregory U. Rigsby, *Alexander Crummell: Pioneer in Nineteenth-century Pan-African Thought* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987).

Both Moses and Oldfield have compiled collections of a portion of Crummell's sermons, speeches, letters, and notes, making some of Crummell's own writings easily accessible not only to scholars and to students but also to the general public for the first time. See *Destiny and Race: Selected Writings, 1840-1898*, W. J. Moses, ed. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992) and *Civilization and Black Progress: Selected Writings of Alexander Crummell on the South*, J. R Oldfield, ed. (Charlottesville: Published for the Southern Texts Society by the University Press of Virginia, 1995).

mystery of being, and to solve the inscrutable problems of existence," questions which "have haunted the soul in every condition of life, and in all periods of human history."[5]

Wilson Jeremiah Moses has argued that Crummell's black nationalism paved the way for Marcus Garvey's pan-Africanism while his doctrine of Emersonian self-reliance indirectly led to Thomas Sowell's black conservatism, but I would argue that Crummellian thought transcends these traditional left-right political categories.[6] Crummell advocated individual self-help and self-education on the one hand, while emphasizing the importance of the community and the common good on the other hand. He championed black nationalism and racial pride; at the same time, he imagined and idealized a cohesive cosmopolitan community, a kind of universal human family that transcended both race and geography. He encouraged the expansion of commerce and trade, but he lamented selfish greed and the mindless race for mammon. He consistently called for individual personal responsibility while also demanding the development of a collective identity and the fulfillment of one's communal duties. My hope is to complicate the historiography and contribute to a better understanding of Crummell's thought by suggesting that his frustrations with the hypocrisies of American slavery and racism, as well as with economic individualism run amok, amounted to a communitarian critique of nineteenth-century American liberalism. Moreover, his communitarianism embodied a distinctive brand of philosophical idealism, which in turn allowed him to

[5] Alexander Crummell, "The Solution of Problems: The Duty and the Destiny of Man: The Annual Sermon of the Commencement of Wilberforce University" (16 June, 1895) reprinted in *African Methodist Episcopal Church Review* 14, no. 4 (April 1898), 399, 408.
[6] See Moses, *Alexander Crummell*, especially at 8-9, 291-292, and 295-298.

continue his sociocultural activism throughout his life in the face of continuous racial discrimination.

Admittedly, Crummell's ideas can often appear, at first glance, to be contradictory: Crummellian thought wrestled with and, at times, embraced the tension between the individual self and the communal self, between materialism and idealism, between moral suasion and institution building, and between divine determinism and human free will.[7] Even his life embodied paradox: he was a "product of American slavery" without having experienced it, he was a black Episcopalian during a time when blacks were roundly abandoning the church, and he was a black scholar "in a land where the multitudes of blacks were illiterate."[8] Gregory Rigsby has gone so far as to claim that Crummell merely appropriated fashionable ideas, that he never "broke new ground," and that he "accepted uncritically the beliefs of his age."[9] However, the paradoxical nature of Crummellianism does not necessarily reveal an underlying incoherence or unoriginality. Indeed, Crummell's thought consisted of a rational, systematic, and innovative examination of moral absolutes, of the individual and communal selves, and of what it meant to be black during the nineteenth century.[10]

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[7] Moses has highlighted the dialectical opposition between individualism and communalism in Crummell's thought in *Alexander Crummell* at 290-291. Also see Moses, *Creative Conflict in African American Thought: Frederick Douglass, Alexander Crummell, Booker T. Washington, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Marcus Garvey* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), especially at 83-84.

[8] Elizabeth West, *Writing the Black Woman: Post-Civil War Constructions of African American Womanhood in the Writings of Alexander Crummell* (Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 1997), 35.

[9] Rigsby, *Alexander Crummell*, 182.

[10] Like most rational thinkers, Crummell responded to the realities of the changing world around him. His ideas, then, did not remain (nor could they have remained) static. Jonathan Scott Holloway once wrote of Du Bois that when he did change his mind, it always entailed a "larger purpose." Notably, these "shifts were not fabricated to secure a

Crummell's ideas cannot be fitted into traditionally labeled boxes. As Moses has so eloquently put it, "All active thinking runs unavoidably into contradiction" and "all original thought is generated by the tragic and heroic struggle to reconcile conflict."[11] Crummell had the ability to "hold two oppos[ing] ideas in [his] mind at the same time" while also "retain[ing] the ability to function." He was, for example, "able to see that things [were] hopeless" and yet he was "determined to make them otherwise."[12]

The contradictory, complex nature of Crummellian thought has often puzzled scholars, and has often led them to oversimplify or to straightforwardly misunderstand his ideas. He has been called a conservative, a radical, a Federalist, a Hamiltonian elitist, a Christian mystic, a black nationalist, and a cultural imperialist. But attempting to pack him away into these tiny boxes limits our view of Crummell as a public intellectual and as a three-dimensional human being.

Otey M. Scruggs has described Crummell as a republican Federalist, contrasting his political philosophy with Douglass's democratic Jacksonianism.[13] According to Scruggs, Crummell clung to some of the "old Federalist" suspicions of popular rule; his experiences in both the United States, where Southern slaveholders held the entire nation hostage, and in Liberia, where a cabal of racist colonists seized political power and refused to include native Africans in the sociopolitical community, lent credibility to his

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better place for himself in the world, but to secure a better world." The same can be said of Crummell. Jonathan Scott Holloway, "The Soul of W. E. B. Du Bois," *American Quarterly* 49, no. 3 (September 1997), 604.

[11] Moses, *Creative Conflict*, xi.

[12] F. Scott Fitzgerald describes this aptitude, which literary scholars like to refer to as Keatsian negative capability, in *The Crack-Up* (New York: New Directions, 1945) at 69.

[13] Moses and Bernard Boxill have preferred "Jeffersonian democracy" to "Jacksonian democracy." See Moses, *Alexander Crummell*; and Bernard Boxill "Populism and Elitism in African-American Political Thought," *The Journal of Ethics* 1, no. 3 (January 1997): 209–238.

doubts about untempered democracy. Crummell, then, "saw democratic politics becoming a school for [selfish] demagogues and 'spoilsmen'" when it should have protected and advanced the interests of the whole community.[14]

Crummell's critique of Jeffersonian and Jacksonian democracy, though, did not stem from his republicanism or his supposed Federalism but from his abiding longing for community and his deep-seated fear of the tyranny of the majority. Unlike Douglass, Crummell was no classical "laissez-faire" liberal.[15] Crummell consistently sought institutional reform that would primarily benefit the wider community rather than the individual, and he was willing to undermine individual rights in order to protect those communal interests. His political ideas should not be boiled down to an emphasis on a strong national government nor on a federal fiscal policy nor on a substantial tariff nor on some sort of rigid Hamiltonian elitism. When (and if) Crummell supported any of those things, he ultimately sought to prevent the fragmentation of sociocultural life; he ultimately sought to encourage individuals to act not for themselves but for the common good, and he did so at both the local and the national levels.

Scruggs has also argued that Crummell's faith in old ideas—his faith in the power of the moral cultivation and the mental improvement of the black community to combat racism, for example—epitomized conservative reform.[16] However, the limitations of this

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[14] Otey M. Scruggs, "Two Black Patriarchs: Frederick Douglass and Alexander Crummell," *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History* (January 1982), 23. Also see Moses, *Alexander Crummell* at 152: "For self-government to succeed in any nation, the people must 'cultivate a spirit of generous forbearance, and learn the lesson of self-restraint.' Otherwise the people would be 'trammelled, chained, handcuffed' by their own passions. The government of a truly free system must 'proclaim the *duties* of citizens as well as their rights.'" Emphasis in original.

[15] Moses, *Creative Conflict*, 107.

[16] Scruggs, "Two Black Patriarchs," 22.

old liberal-conservative dichotomy prevent us from fully understanding that while Crummell did find inspiration in the past, he also reformulated and reimagined threadbare ideas, transforming them into something entirely new.[17] Crummell himself believed that he was not merely reformulating old ideas but imagining a distinctly fresh future, and he stated that belief directly: "Everything in this work is new; and believe me, as *severe* as it is new. The past is forever gone."[18] Similarly, in 1885 Crummell wrote, "We can, indeed, get inspiration and instruction in the *yesterdays* of existence, but we cannot healthily live in them. . . . It is on this account that I beg to call your attention to-day, to -- 'The need of new ideas and new aims for a new era.'"[19] Clearly, Crummell did not cling to tradition for tradition's sake; instead, his own brand of perfectionism and philosophical idealism allowed him to throw off the shackles of the past and to act to attempt to reconstruct the present in order to secure a better future for the black community.

I do not mean to disparage Scruggs. His work paved the way for future inquiries into Crummell's life and work, and he drew some compelling conclusions.[20] For instance,

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[17] Moss acknowledged Crummell's intellectual creativity in "Alexander Crummell" in *Black Leaders* at 250; Charles H. Reynolds and Riggins R. Earl, Jr., have also acknowledged the innovative nature of Crummellian thought in "Alexander Crummell's Transformation of Bishop Butler's Ethics," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 6, no. 2 (October 1978): 221-239; as has Gayraud S. Wilmore in *Black Religion and Black Radicalism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998) at 140-142.

[18] Crummell, "Right-mindedness" (c. 1886) in Crummell, *Africa and America: Addresses and Discourses* (Springfield, Mass.: Wiley & Co., 1891), 377. Emphasis in original.

[19] Crummell, "The Need of New Ideas and New Aims for a New Era" (1885 Storer College Address) in *Ibid*., 13-14. Emphasis in original.

[20] Possibly the first scholar (other than Crummell's own contemporaries, such as Du Bois and Ferris) to acknowledge the significance of Crummell and to wonder at his neglect by historians was George Shepperson. See George Shepperson, "Notes on Negro American Influences on the Emergence of African Nationalism," *The Journal of African History* 1, no. 2 (January 1960): 299–312. Along with Scruggs, Kathleen O'Mara Wahle made a pioneering effort in Crummellian scholarship by analyzing Crummell's role in the development of a pan-African black nationalism in "Alexander Crummell: Black

Scruggs did make a crucial observation about the underlying ideological differences in Douglass's and Crummell's political philosophies: while Douglass focused on individual freedom, equality, and rights of citizenship, ideas that were part of the broader liberal tradition, Crummell stressed positive duties over negative rights. In other words, Crummell believed that the "individual achieved his grandest fulfillment in working for the common weal."[21]

Additionally, in an earlier sketch of Crummellian thought, Scruggs recognized Crummell's "deep need for community" as a response to the "increasing fragmentation [of] American life."[22] He reasoned that "Crummell placed the claims of the group above the claims of the individual" and he contrasted Crummell with Douglass's "more libertarian stance."[23] Furthermore, Scruggs cogently pointed out that Crummell's philosophical idealism seemed to be "imperiled by the tide of materialism" that swept the United States and Europe during the late 1800s. Crummell "feared that in the scramble for its possession, property had become an end in itself, dissevered from the development and refinement of the 'lofty motives' of character" and morality.[24] If these points of analysis had been fully developed and contextualized, they just might have resulted in a communitarian conception of Crummellian thought.

Evangelist and Pan-Negro Nationalist," *Phylon* 29, no. 4 (December 1968): 388–395. For one of the most thorough early examinations of Crummell's life and work in West Africa, see Luckson Ewhiekpamare Ejofodomi, *The Missionary Career of Alexander Crummell in Liberia: 1853 to 1873* (Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 1974). The more recent work of Rigsby, Oldfield, and, especially, Moses remains unrivaled. See above, n5.

[21] Scruggs, "Two Black Patriarchs," 21.

[22] Scruggs, *We the Children of Africa in This Land: Alexander Crummell* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University, 1972), 5.

[23] Ibid., 10.

[24] Ibid., 9.

In a similar vein, Bernard Boxill has pigeonholed Crummell as a Hamiltonian elitist. Boxill identified two divergent strains of thought in African American intellectual history: Hamiltonian elitism, represented by Crummell on the one hand, and Jeffersonian populism, represented by Douglass on the other hand. Boxill argued that black elitism and populism stemmed from "the rich legacy of the founding [federalist and anti-federalist] debates."[25] Pointing to Crummell's suspicion of Jeffersonianism, Boxill explained that Crummell doubted the ability of the typical, uneducated citizen to capably follow the "sophisticated reasoning" necessary to consent to a "just and effective" government. Because ordinary citizens could plausibly "extend [their consent] to government that [was] both unjust and ineffective," Crummell feared that Jeffersonian democracy would ultimately result in a morally corrupt tyranny of the majority.[26]

While Boxill did make some astute observations about Crummell's critique of American democracy, he egregiously ignored Crummell's prolonged personal experiences of the failures of the American nation, experiences that directly reinforced his philosophical predisposition to reject Jeffersonianism. Boxill further ignored Crummell's notion of duty to the nation as well as Crummell's commitment to the perfectibility of man and the wider community. Crummell's skeptical view of American democracy ultimately stemmed not from some sort of sociocultural elitism nor from a lust for mammon, as Boxill implied, but instead from his deeply cynical view of human nature. Crummell feared man's natural state, which he thought to be a condition of shameless egoism, a condition that sustained and even necessitated spiritual and cultural depravity. Virtue, Crummell believed, could be attained only through spiritual and

[25] Bernard Boxill, "Populism and Elitism," 210.
[26] Ibid., 224.

intellectual education and enlightenment, and those who had attained (at least some measure of) virtue were duty-bound to help uplift their fellow men and their communities.

But Boxill focused instead on Crummell's purported thirst for "material prosperity and national respect," which he thought "corresponded precisely to the elite class" that Hamilton had so admired.[27] Boxill relied heavily on Crummell's open letter to Charles Dunbar, "The Relations and Duties of Free Colored Men in America to Africa," and he often quoted Crummell wildly out of context in order to put forward his argument that Crummell hoped to recruit an "elite class of merchants and businessmen" to Liberia whose individual wealth and power would command international respect.[28]

This is an especially troubling reading of Crummell given his staunch opposition to economic greed and selfish material acquisition. Crummell clearly wanted to enlist black men and women who felt bound by a greater duty to improve both their race and their new Liberian nation. However, he particularly attempted to attract men and women who were willing to do so even at the expense of their individual economic interests. In that very letter to Dunbar, Crummell wrote, "No greater *curse* could be entailed upon Africa than the sudden appearance upon her shores of a mighty host of *heartless* black buccaneers, (for such indeed they would prove themselves,) men sharpened up by letters and training, filled with feverish *greed*, with hearts *utterly alien from moral good and human well-being*, and only regarding Africa as a convenient gold-field from which to extract emolument and treasure to carry off to foreign quarters. Such men would only

[27] Ibid., 224-225.
[28] Ibid., 225.

reproduce the worst *evils* of the last three sad centuries of Africa's history."[29] Crummell did call for (collective) material prosperity and (collective) material gain, but the economic interests of the community made up only one part of his vision. More importantly, he tried to appeal to people who shared his transcendent values and his communitarian outlook.

Other overly simplistic readings of Crummell include Kwame Anthony Appiah's and Tunde Adeleke's treatments of Crummellian thought. Appiah's exploration of Crummell's ideas centered on Crummell's "ethnocentrism." Appiah argued that Crummell "inherited a set of conceptual blinders" from America and England that made him "unable to see virtue in Africa, even though [he] needed Africa, above all else, as a source of validation."[30] Because Crummell "conceived of the African in racial terms," then, his "low opinion of Africa was not easily distinguished from a low opinion of the Negro."[31] While there is some truth to these claims—indeed, Crummell clearly approached Africa from an Anglo-American perspective—a plethora of evidence exists demonstrating that Crummell genuinely admired the intelligence, spiritual connectivity, physical strength, industry, and innovation of native Africans.[32] Moreover, it is simply

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[29] Crummell, "The Relations and Duties of Free Colored Men in America to Africa: Addressed to Mr. Charles B. Dunbar, M.D." (1 September, 1860) in Crummell, *The Future of Africa: Being Addresses, Sermons, Etc., Etc., Delivered in the Republic of Liberia* (New York: Scribner, 1862), 234-235. Emphasis added.

[30] Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Alexander Crummell and the Invention of Africa," *The Massachusetts Review* 31, no. 3 (Autumn 1990), 388.

[31] Ibid. Appiah further reinforced this notion when he wrote that Crummell "had such low opinions and such high hopes of the Negro" in "Ibid." at 393.

[32] See, for example, Crummell, "The Progress and Prospects of the Republic of Liberia" (1861) in *Future of Africa*, 131-148, especially at 138-145; Crummell, "'Africa and Her People': Lecture Notes" (undated) in *Destiny and Race*, 61-67; "Report from Buchanan, Liberia, on a Journey to St. Andrews Church" (1870) in *Ibid*., 68-74; "Letter on Ethnology" (1894) in *Ibid*., 81; Crummell, "The Absolute Need of an Indigenous

ridiculous to believe that Crummell ever had anything but the highest regard for the black race.[33]

Undoubtedly, Crummell's language can often appear to modern readers to be insensitive or downright distasteful: he referred to indigenous Africans as "heathens" who lacked "civilization." But it is important to remember that Crummell's nineteenth-century language did not in its own time and in its own context imply innate racial inferiority. Crummell did not intend for his language to be understood in that way: after all, Crummell worked to include native Africans in his imagined Liberian community, and he worked to include them not as second-class citizens with limited rights but as full-fledged members of the sociopolitical body. Furthermore, Crummell believed that *every* race required spiritual and cultural enlightenment, and that *every* human being ought to work to improve herself and her community. Indeed, Crummell believed that until a person, regardless of her race, attained spiritual and cultural enlightenment, she would remain "uncivilized" and in a natural state of immorality. Moreover, this type of civilizationist language was common amongst Crummell's contemporaries and especially

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Missionary Agency for the Evangelization of Africa" (1895) in *Ibid*., 277-283. There are countless other instances in his writings where Crummell praised indigenous Africans and even, at times, romanticized them.

[33] Appiah probably made this claim because Crummell frequently pointed to the failures of blacks in America, England, and West Africa. But his critiques were not veiled attempts to cast aspersions upon the black race. Rather, his forward-looking idealism pushed him to attempt to provoke and to inspire blacks to improve themselves and their communities, and to build a more perfect nation. One does not have to delve very far into Crummell's writings to find that his self-esteem and self-worth emanated from his pride in being black. He admired the progress blacks had made, and he hoped that the black community would continue to progress and would set a positive example (in its morality, brotherhood, and nationhood) for the rest of the world to follow. Crummell disparaged racism, and he spent his entire life trying to refute irrational racist beliefs—instead of waiting around, passively longing for white people to someday come to their senses, he tried to be proactive and he tried to effect positive change where he could.

amongst Christian missionaries during the nineteenth century. While Crummell's emigrationism and civilizationism can certainly be criticized, we would do well to remember the historical context in which he thought and lived.

Appiah's own conceptual blinders—blinders steeped in presentism—limited his reading of Crummell. He used Crummell's language to anachronistically ask whether Crummellian ideas were racist:

> Though [Crummell] always assumes that there are races, and that membership in a race entails the possession of certain traits and dispositions, his notion of "race"—like that of most of the later Pan-Africanists—is not so much thought as felt. It is difficult, therefore, to establish some of the distinctions we need when we ask ourselves what is bound to seem an important question: namely, whether, and in what sense, the Pan-Africanist movement, and Crummell as its epitome, should be called "racist."[34]

Appiah concluded that racism did indeed underpin Crummell's pan-Africanism.[35] But such an interpretation never would have occurred to Crummell, and much evidence exists

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[34] Appiah, "Alexander Crummell," 391.

[35] Ibid., 393-395.

Although Appiah offered a more nuanced portrait of the complexities of Crummellian in his later work, he repeated many of the reductionistic claims put forward in "Alexander Crummell." See Appiah, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), especially chapters one and two.

Moses once claimed that "Appiah studied very little Crummell before writing about him." While it is impossible to know how much of Crummell's work Appiah actually read or studied, it is not entirely unfair to point out that Appiah cited only two of Crummell's writings in "Alexander Crummell" and appeared to be unfamiliar with almost all of the secondary literature on Crummell that existed at the time—which could very well explain his superficial reading of Crummellian thought. That said, Appiah obviously had ideological aims and wanted to use Crummell to prove a sociopolitical point about contemporary conceptions of race. See Appiah, "Alexander Crummell," especially at 405-406. Appiah cited only Crummell's "The English Language in Liberia" (1861) and "The Relations and Duties of Free Colored Men in America to Africa" (1860), both of which were very close in date and both of which were published in Crummell's *Future of Africa* in 1862. Appiah did reference Moses's *Golden Age of Black Nationalism*, but ignored other important works on Crummell. Rigsby (1987) had already published his groundbreaking monograph on Crummell; Moses (1975, 1983, 1988, 1989) had made several significant contributions to the historiography; and Wahle (1968),

in his writings that would lead one to believe that such a reading would have horrified him.

Adeleke's treatment of Crummell similarly served to reduce him to a "cultural imperialist" who "denied the existence of intelligence" in native Africans and who wanted to build a cultural and political empire.[36] Adeleke argued that Crummell "arrived in Africa with a curious sense of gratitude to Europeans and a positive perspective on his experience in the United States, despite the callous realities of enslavement."[37] He further claimed that "Crummell's reinterpretation of the black experience in America [was] similarly remarkable in its apology for, and almost total rationalization of, oppression. . . . Slavery was the connecting factor in Africa's contact with Europe and, *ipso facto*, the channel for the diffusion of superior European values! Crummell consequently de-emphasized the destructive and inhumane character of slavery."[38] As Moses has aptly pointed out, Adeleke's "unimaginative reductionism" concocted an antihistorical view of Crummell that was "meretriciously filtered through Anthony Appiah."[39] Crummell's early work irrefutably revealed his forceful critique of the failures of American democracy and of the immoral and dehumanizing effects of American slavery and racism—a critique that eventually led to his abandonment of the American project and to

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Scruggs (1972 and 1982), C. R. Stockton (1977), William Toll (1978), M. B. Akpan (1982), and Oldfield (1988) had all published important articles about Crummellian thought and its origins. For the Moses quotation about Appiah, see *Creative Conflict* at 11.

[36] Tunde Adeleke, *UnAfrican Americans: Nineteenth-Century Black Nationalists and the Civilizing Mission* (Lexington, University of Kentucky Press, 1998), 79.

[37] Ibid., 75.

[38] Ibid., 80-81.

[39] Moses, *Creative Conflict*, 9n15, 291.

his emigration to Liberia.[40] If Crummell ever felt any sort of indebtedness to Europe, it was only because he found a temporary reprieve from the psychologically devastating effects of racial discrimination and social alienation while he studied at Queen's College, Cambridge.[41]

These sorts of analyses show us that we gain very little by attempting to stuff Crummell into ideological boxes in order to achieve our own ideological ends. Such interpretations not only reduce and distort Crummellian thought on its own terms, but they mislead us in our attempts to understand ourselves in our own time. Whatever lessons Crummell might teach us cannot be found in his emigrationism or in his black nationalism—ideas which directly responded to events that occurred during a very specific time and in a very specific place. If we are to learn any lessons from Crummell at all, we should instead examine his abiding search for community and his attempts to answer transcendent philosophical questions about the nature and meaning of justice, freedom, and truth.

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[40] For a start, see Crummell, "Address at the New York State Convention of Negroes, 1840" in *A Documentary History of the Negro People of the United States*, Herbert Aptheker, ed. (New York: Citadel Press, 1965), 1:198-205; Crummell, "Report of the Committee on Abolition" (1847) in "Proceedings of the National Convention of Colored People, and Their Friends, Held in Troy, N.Y., on the 6th, 7th, 8th, and 9th October, 1847" in *Minutes of the Proceedings of the National Negro Conventions, 1830-1864*, Howard H. Bell, ed. (New York: Arno Press, 1969), 31-32; Crummell, "Remarks of Alexander Crummell: Delivered at the Hall of Commerce, London, England" (21 May, 1849) in *The Black Abolitionist Papers*, C. Peter Ripley, ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 1:149-151; Crummell, "Speech by Alexander Crummell: Delivered at Freemasons' Hall, London, England" (19 May, 1851) in *Black Abolitionist Papers*, 1:276-282; Crummell, "Speech by Alexander Crummell: Delivered at the Lower Hall, Exeter Hall, London, England" (26 May, 1853) in *Black Abolitionist Papers*, 1:349-354.

[41] Especially see Crummell, "Alexander Crummell to John Jay" (9 August, 1848) in *Black Abolitionist Papers*, 1:142-148.

Perhaps the preeminent Crummellian scholar, Moses has offered the most nuanced portrait of Crummellian thought.[42] *Alexander Crummell: A Study of Civilization and Discontent* has remained the most comprehensive study of Crummell's work, examining the entirety of his life from his birth in 1819 until his death in 1898. According to Moses, "In his final years, we find him grappling honestly with the challenges of Marx and Darwin and trying to reconcile his basic love of order with his understanding that revolution can bring about necessary changes."[43] Moses astutely pointed out that "while Crummell's writings on black advancement were voluminous, racial concerns were the subject of only a portion of his thought and writing."[44] Inspired by Platonic idealism inherited from his Cambridge mentor, William Whewell, Crummell

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[42] See Moses, *Alexander Crummell*; Moses, *Creative Conflict*; Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), especially chapter three, a version of which originally appeared in *The Journal of Negro History*; Moses, "Civilizing Missionary: A Study of Alexander Crummell," *The Journal of Negro History* 60, no. 2 (April 1975): 229-251; Moses, "Cambridge Platonism in the Republic of Liberia, 1853-1873: Alexander Crummell's Theory of Development and Transfer of Culture," *New England Journal of Black Studies*, no. 3 (1983): 60-77; Moses, "W. E. B. Du Bois's 'The Conservation of Races' and Its Context: Idealism, Conservatism, and Hero Worship," *The Massachusetts Review* 34, no. 2 (Summer 1993): 275-294.

After Moses's vast body of scholarship, the most perceptive studies of Crummell's life and work are Rigsby's *Alexander Crummell* and Oldfield's *Alexander Crummell*. For other studies that have attempted to address some of the complexities of Crummellian thought and that have attempted to offer three-dimensional analyses of particular aspects of his life, see M. B. Akpan, "Alexander Crummell and His African 'Race Work': An Assessment of His Contribution in Liberia to Africa's 'Redemption'" in *Black Apostles at Home and Abroad: Afro-Americans and the Christian Mission from the Revolution to Reconstruction*, David W. Wills and Richard Newman, eds. (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1982); Ejofodomi, *Missionary Career*; Franklin, "Alexander Crummell" in *Living Our Stories*; Moss, "Alexander Crummell" in *Black Leaders*; Oldfield, *Alexander Crummell*; Reynolds and Riggins, "Alexander Crummell's Transformation"; Scruggs, *We the Children of Africa in This Land*; William Toll, "Free Men, Freedmen, and Race: Black Social Theory in the Gilded Age," *The Journal of Southern History* 44, no. 4: 571-596; and Wahle, "Alexander Crummell."

[43] Moses, *Alexander Crummell*, 288.

[44] Ibid., 289.

asked questions such as: "What is mind? What is the nature of mind? What is its basis? Is it a product of our physical nature, or, of a finer and more subtle essence?"[45] Following Plato, Crummell concluded that reason trumped passion and that "mind and spirit were more important than the body."[46] His Platonic idealism culminated in a vigorous antimaterialism; it was this philosophical outlook that led Crummell to disagree strongly with Washington's corporeal pragmatism.

Moses appropriately positioned Crummell in the history of black thought and, to some extent, in the broader context of nineteenth-century American intellectual history.[47] "More systematic in his thinking" than Douglass, Crummell produced a body of work that went beyond racial issues.[48] He provided Du Bois with an intellectual and spiritual father figure[49] and accorded Washington with an annoying antagonist.[50] His childhood friendship with Henry Highland Garnet survived until Garnet's death, whereupon Crummell delivered the principal eulogy at his funeral in front of a "packed" audience that included Douglass and Henry McNeal Turner.[51] Anna Julia Cooper wrote admiringly of Crummell's progressive view of women's rights.[52] William Wells Brown lauded

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[45] Crummell, "The Solution of Problems" (1895 Wilberforce University Address), 406.
[46] Moses, *Alexander Crummell*, 72. Also see Rigsby, *Alexander Crummell* at 31-37; and Crummell, especially "Address on Laying the Cornerstone of St. Mark's Hospital" (24 April, 1859) in *Future of Africa* at 196-197.
[47] Especially see Moses, *Creative Conflict*. Also see Moses, *Alexander Crummell* at 276-301.
[48] Moses, *Alexander Crummell*, 289.
[49] Moses, "Du Bois's 'The Conservation of the Races,'" 278.
[50] Moses, *Creative Conflict*, 121-123.
[51] Moses, *Alexander Crummell*, 226.
[52] Ibid., 220. Also see Moses, *Creative Conflict* at 7; and Anna Julia Cooper, *A Voice from the South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988) at 24.

Crummell as "one of the foremost" black intellectuals of his era.[53] And Crummell offered leadership and (often unsolicited) advice to other early black nationalists such as Blyden and Delaney. Moreover, Crummell's prose uncloaked his learnedness and unveiled his ability as a wordsmith. Moses claimed, "A figure like Crummell could easily have been accommodated within the [literary] tradition as it was defined by Perry Miller and F. O. Matthiessen, for he exemplified the sort of highly literate, elitist Northeasterner who was most accessible to the sort of method they used."[54] Indeed, Crummell's talent as a writer and thinker was self-evident:

> But what a corrective is this grand truth, to the selfish regards which lead men to set up their own personal good as the main object of existence! "O, happiness, our being's end and aim," the exclamation of a great poet, is the creed of the Epicurean and the Bacchanal. Not so! Happiness is *not* the terminal point of our being. The end of our existence is a something out of and beyond ourselves. It is a grand fact which reaches over to another and a higher nature than our own. It is a reality in which is involved a struggle and fight to rise beyond self to a somewhat infinite and ineffable, beyond the skies.[55]

Certainly Crummell deserves a place in the nineteenth-century American intellectual and literary canons.

Moses attempted to understand Crummell's complexities, choosing to wrestle with his opposing ideas rather than to misconstrue his contradictions or to simply sweep

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[53] William Wells Brown, *The Rising Son: Or, the Antecedents and Advancement of the Colored Race* (Boston: A. G. Brown: 1874), 455-457. Also see Moses, *Alexander Crummell* at 223.

[54] Moses, *Alexander Crummell*, 300.

[55] Crummell, "Sermon XIII: The Discipline of Human Powers" in Crummell, *The Greatness of Christ and Other Sermons* (New York: Thomas Whittaker, 1882), 214. Emphasis in original.

Incidentally, *The New York Times* reported that *The Greatness of Christ* was the "first volume of sermons ever put forth by a colored preacher" in the United States. In a review of Crummell's book a few months later, the *Times* informed readers that Crummell was a "coal-black negro." See "Literary Notes," *The New York Times*, February 20, 1882; and "New Books," *The New York Times*, September 10, 1882.

them under the rug. According to Moses, Crummell's attraction to the Emersonian doctrine of self-reliance on the one hand—his attraction to the "principles of will-power, self-love, and moral strength"—revealed his underlying social conservatism.[56] On the other hand, his black nationalism, his pan-Africanism, and his dedication to collective duty and effort revealed an implicit radicalism that would link his nineteenth-century black nationalism to twentieth-century Garveyism.[57] But it is not clear to me that such a division of Crummellian thought can or should be sustained. While it is true that stressing Crummell's idea of collective destiny makes it "easy to overlook the fact that he constantly emphasized the importance of individual character and personal responsibility, believing that nothing would be achieved collectively if the individual black man and woman did not develop the building blocks of personal character," it is also true that emphasizing Crummell's social conservatism makes it easy to overlook Crummell's innovation and willingness to abandon untenable traditions.[58] In the end, Crummell's doctrine of self-improvement and his black nationalism comprised his lifelong search for community. By improving and uplifting one's self, one would also improve and uplift the community; by imagining a united black nation, Crummell hoped to find a true home, and he hoped to offer blacks around the world a place where they could find acceptance, achieve equality, and fulfill their duties to the wider human community. These ideas, then, seem to be thoroughly enmeshed.

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[56] Moses, *Alexander Crummell*, 291.
[57] Moses, *Alexander Crummell*, 271, 292-293, 295-298.
[58] Ibid., 210. David Brion Davis has shrewdly pointed out that it could be argued that "the true conservatives were those who opposed 'elevation' and improvement and who idealized dysfunctional traditions." See David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Emancipation* (New York: Knopf, 2014) at 373n1.

Crummell sought to perfect and to protect the rights of the community even at the expense of the rights of the individual. He did not advocate the traditional American conception of negative liberty that was embedded in the Bill of Rights (i.e., the individual's natural right to be left alone and to be free from interference), but instead espoused a kind of positive liberty, which was tied to one's duty and obligation to *act*. Crummellian thought embraced the subversion of the individual self to the communal self. Crummell embraced the idea that we cannot achieve our ends alone but only collectively, and that we cannot be fully human without those essential communal ties, which he would continually search for throughout his life.[59] This communitarian conception of Crummellian thought reveals that Crummell's ideas were not inconsistent or arbitrary, but were carefully reasoned responses to his conception of the world and to his own personal experiences.

My aim is not to pass judgment on Crummell, but instead to clarify Crummellian thought, to provide a way for us to understand often bewildering ideas in familiar terms on familiar ground. Shifting the conceptual framework away from these traditional left-right, liberal-conservative dichotomies allows us to begin to reckon with all of Crummell's perplexing paradoxes. A communitarian conception of Crummellian thought provides us with a fresh lens through which to view Crummell's ideas; it provides us with a new way to reconcile his seemingly diametrical theories; and it provides us with the means to grasp hold of an intangible past that we often find confusing and even offensive. An examination of Crummell's communitarian critique of American liberalism helps us to understand Crummell's own rationalization of his own thought processes, and it allows

[59] This is, simply and straightforwardly, what I mean when I refer to Crummell's "communitarianism" or call him a "communitarian."

us to understand how and why he ultimately placed himself outside of the American liberal tradition.

BECOMING "A FULL AND COMPLETE MAN": CRUMMELL'S SEARCH FOR A SPIRTUAL AND INTELLECTUAL HOME, 1819-1853

Born to free parents in New York in 1819, Crummell grew up in a supportive, politically conscious family that actively participated in sociocultural institutions in order to provide both education and social services to the disenfranchised black community. Throughout his life, as he became increasingly disillusioned first by the failures of American democracy and then by the failures of the Liberian republic, Crummell increasingly turned to these sociocultural institutions, especially to churches, in order to attempt to secure the rights of blacks as full-fledged citizens of the polity. Crummell continually worked to strengthen and uplift the black community, maintaining his hope that blacks would eventually find acceptance and power within the wider human community.

Early in his childhood, Crummell developed a visceral connection to West Africa. In the 1780s, slave traders kidnapped his father, Boston Crummell, who was reportedly a Timanee prince, from the region now known as Sierra Leone.[60] According to Crummell, after ten years of bondage in America, his father refused to continue to serve his enslaver and managed to establish his own household in New York City as a free black man. The

[60] Crummell, "'Africa and Her People'" (undated) in *Destiny and Race*, 61. Also see Crummell, *Greatness of Christ* at v-vi; and Henry L. Phillips, *In Memoriam of the Late Rev. Alex. Crummell, D. D., of Washington, D.C.* (Philadelphia: The Coleman Printery, 1899) at 10.

Crummells guarded the memory of Boston's self-emancipation, and Alexander proudly became known as "the boy whose father could not be a slave."[61] He grew up surrounded by his father's "burning love of [Africa]" and "vivid remembrance of scenes" from his ancestral homeland, becoming "deeply interested in the land of [his forefathers]."[62]

After securing his liberty, Boston Crummell married Charity Hicks, a freewoman from Long Island, and gained employment as an "oysterman." He probably opened his own oyster house in order to provide greater economic and social stability for his burgeoning family. Indeed, Boston Crummell must have acquired a significant amount of social status within the black community in New York City: prominent freemen and abolitionists such as Samuel Cornish and John Russwurm frequently visited the Crummells, and the first African American newspaper, *Freedom's Journal*, was founded in the Crummell home in March 1827.[63] Growing up in such an environment—in a household that exemplified black activism and that placed such an emphasis on education and self-improvement—undoubtedly had a formative impact on the young Crummell. Out of his more famous contemporaries (Douglass, Washington, Du Bois, and Garvey), Crummell alone inherited a "sophisticated African narrative" which "encompass[ed] three generations of well-informed, male ancestors," and Crummell alone spent nearly twenty years on the African continent trying to find community and kinship.[64] Boston Crummell set an example for his son by successfully negotiating society in antebellum

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[61] Moses, *Alexander Crummell*, 11-12.
[62] Crummell, "'Africa and Her People'" (undated) in *Destiny and Race*, 61.
[63] Moses, Alexander Crummell, 13, 306n13; Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Emancipation*, 181. Interestingly, Oldfield has pointed out that Boston Crummell could neither read nor write (which could be one of the reasons why he so forcefully urged his son to obtain an education). See Oldfield, *Alexander Crummell* at 6.
[64] Moses, *Creative Conflict*, 85.

America whilst simultaneously maintaining a positive memory of his African homeland. He made the transition from freedom to slavery and back to freedom; he embodied the ideal of what would later become known as free labor ideology, working his way from shucking oysters as a wage laborer to self-sufficient business owner; and he prospered in New York City, managing to obtain an elite position within the free black American community. Crummell's idealism and his optimism, as well as his emotional connection to the African continent, indubitably stemmed from the legacy of his father's successes.

As a young black man in antebellum America, Crummell struggled to pursue his education, enrolling first at the African Free School No. 2 in New York City, where he met and befriended Thomas Sidney and Henry Highland Garnet. In 1835, a group of white abolitionists founded the Noyes Academy in Canaan, New Hampshire, aiming to educate youths "of any and all races" and "of both sexes."[65] Crummell, Sidney, and Garnet travelled together from New York to New Hampshire to enroll at Noyes. Crummell remembered the humiliating journey: the three young men spent the night on a steamboat without cabin passage, which was reserved for white passengers, and were therefore without beds and without food, "exposed to the cold and storm."[66] For the rest of the nearly four hundred-mile trip, Crummell and his friends rode uncomfortably on top of carriages as there were no railroads. Crummell wrote, "Rarely would an inn or a hotel give us food, and nowhere could we get shelter."[67] They were "taunt[ed] and insult[ed] at every village and town. . . . The sight of three black youths, in gentlemanly garb, traveling through New England was, in *those days, a most unusual sight;* started not only

[65] Crummell, "Eulogium on Henry Highland Garnet, D. D." (1882) in *Africa and America*, 278.
[66] Ibid., 279.
[67] Ibid.

surprise, but brought out universal sneers and ridicule."[68] This acute sense of social persecution and alienation deeply affected Crummell, and it drove him in his search for community, for a spiritual and intellectual home.

Crummell and his friends attended the Noyes Academy for about a month before they were expelled at gunpoint by a white mob. Crummell later identified the "Democracy of the State" as the root of the problem: racist whites "could not endure what they called a 'Nigger School' on the soil of New Hampshire; and so the word went forth, especially from the politicians of Concord, that the school must be broken up."[69] Garnet apparently fired on the mob with a shotgun, and, according to Crummell, saved the boys' lives.[70] This early experience of mob violence profoundly informed Crummell's later communitarian critique of nineteenth-century American liberalism, when he criticized the inherent self-interestedness of majority-rule government and called for a greater sense of brotherhood.

From 1836 until 1838, Crummell attended Beriah Green's Oneida Institute, which encouraged intellectual and spiritual development in addition to teaching pragmatic skills, and which had a formative impact on both his theological development and what would later evolve into his pedagogical philosophy. At Oneida, Crummell began to study theology; he worked to improve his Greek and Latin and he began to learn Hebrew. He took rooms across the hall from Sidney, whose rigorous study habits inspired Crummell to establish his own ascetic routine. He became "accustomed to ris[ing] before daybreak"

[68] Ibid., 279-280. Emphasis in original.
[69] Ibid., 280.
[70] Ibid., 280-281.

in order to read and pray.[71] He would maintain these austere habits until the end of his life, working at his desk for six or seven hours each day despite his failing eyesight and declining health.

At Oneida, Crummell experienced a spiritual awakening and gradually began to prepare for the Episcopal priesthood. In a letter dated 1837, Crummell wrote, "Since I have been a member of Oneida Institute I have made a profession of Religion. . . . Henceforth my aim and endeavor shall be, to be a man of *Principle*; convinced that nothing but principle and honesty in every department of life, will make a man,—a man of usefulness."[72] Crummell's Christian theology informed his communitarian outlook and allowed him to raise questions about human nature and truth without compromising his dedication to moral absolutes. Crummell believed that God instilled man with the "spirit of unity," which required cooperation and community. Solitude, he thought, ran against human nature and against God. He would later write, "God declared of the single and solitary Adam, 'It is not good for the man to live alone.' . . . From this principle flows, as from a fountain, the loves, friendships, families, and combinations which tie men together, in union and concord. . . . For no one man can effect anything important alone."[73] Crummell drew on the book of Isaiah in order to establish this principle of sociality or cooperation: "They helped every one his neighbor, and every one said to his brother, Be of good courage. So the carpenter encouraged the goldsmith, and he that

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[71] Crummell, "From 'Eulogium on the Life and Character of Thomas Sipkins Sidney" (1840) in *Destiny and Race*, 53.
[72] Crummell, "Letter to Elizur Wright" (22 June, 1837) in *Destiny and Race*, 45-46. Emphasis in original.
[73] Crummell, "The Social Principle among a People and Its Bearing on Their Progress and Development" (1875) in *Civilization and Black Progress*, 31.

smootheth with the hammer him that smote the anvil, saying, It is ready for the soldering; and he fastened it with nails, that it should not be moved."[74]

Just as Crummell battled to secure his education,[75] he also subjected himself to a bitter, arduous struggle in order to become an ordained priest in the hierarchical, white-dominated Episcopal Church. In 1839, after he left the Oneida Institute, Crummell applied for admission to the General Theological Seminary but was denied entry due to his race. He petitioned the seminary's board of trustees, who subsequently engaged in a "fierce and angry debate" before once again rejecting Crummell's application. Crummell later recalled that "during the session of the Trustees, Bishop [Benjamin] Onderdonk sent for me; and then and there, in his study, set upon me with a violence and grossness that I have never since encountered, save in once instance, in Africa. . . . I was, as you may judge, completely at sea; and the ministry seemed to me a hopeless thing."[76]

Crummell became a "marked man," known as a "presumptuous Negro" because he made a "public issue" out of the General Theological Seminary's institutionalized racism.[77] Despite being deeply wounded, and despite being deeply discouraged, Crummell persevered. He received encouragement, guidance, and patronage from John Jay, the grandson and namesake of the first Chief Justice of the United States; he studied

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[74] Isaiah 41: 6-7, quoted in "Ibid."

[75] For an excellent overview of Crummell's education, see Moses, *Alexander Crummell* especially at 13-22 and 57-88. Interestingly, at 17-18, Moses noted, "For Crummell and other bright, stubborn black adolescents who were reaching puberty around the time of the Nat Turner revolt, bookish activity came to be seen as an act of defiance. . . . Crummell and a group of his friends resolved that while slavery existed, they would not celebrate the fourth of July."

[76] Crummell, "Jubilate: The Shades and the Lights of a Fifty Years' Ministry" (1894) in *Destiny and Race*, 33.

[77] Ibid.; Randall K. Burkett, "The Reverend Harry Croswell and Black Episcopalians in New Haven, 1820-1860," *The North Star: A Journal of African American Religious History* 7, no. 1 (Fall 2003), 7.

informally at Yale Theological Seminary; and, after white parishioners from Trinity Church in New Haven began to restrict black parishioners to four pews in the rear of the sanctuary, he reportedly encouraged rebellion, and, with Reverend Harry Croswell's blessing, he helped Trinity's black worshipers form their own congregation. Eventually, Crummell was ordained as a deacon in Boston in 1842 and was accepted into the priesthood in Delaware in 1844.[78]

Although Crummell could have easily joined the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) movement, or a black Presbyterian church, or a black Baptist church, he instead vowed to "never submit to the ungracious and degrading conditions which [were] imposed upon colored [Episcopalian] clergymen," and he attempted to foment a fundamental change in the church's social structure by resisting its sanctioned racial injustice.[79] Scholars have routinely asked why Crummell, a proud black man, would have willfully subjugated himself to a white-dominated, highly racist church. Almost universally, these scholars have cited Crummell's supposed sociopolitical conservatism, his love of order and hierarchy, his snobby cultural elitism, or his obsessive Anglophilia.[80] However, those explanations fail to account for Crummell's consistent, and I think radical, opposition to what he saw as the mistreatment of black clergymen and

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[78] Moses, *Alexander Crummell*, 30-38. Also see Burkett, "The Reverend Harry Croswell" at 7-8; and Oldfield, *Alexander Crummell* at 9-11. Curiously enough, Alexander Du Bois, W. E. B. Du Bois's grandfather, was the first treasurer of the newly formed St. Luke's Parish in New Haven. While the fledgling parish searched for a rector, Crummell occasionally delivered sermons to support his studies at Yale. St. Luke's offered the rectorship to Crummell, but he turned it down. Eventually, he returned to New York where he took charge of the Church of the Messiah in Manhattan.

[79] Crummell, "Jubilate" (1894) in *Destiny and Race*, 38.

[80] See, for example, Bernard Boxill, "Populism and Elitism" at 234; Franklin, "Alexander Crummell" at 57-58; Moses, *Alexander Crummell* at 281-284; Moss, "Alexander Crummell" at 245-246; and Scruggs, "Two Black Patriarchs" at 21.

black congregants in both America and Liberia. As one begins to study Crummell's own explanations of his own actions, it should quickly become evident that (though he could be, at times, prone to self-aggrandizement) he earnestly believed that by acting as a "disturber of the peace," by refusing to passively accept race-based discrimination and mistreatment, he was ultimately working toward the improvement of both the black and the white communities.[81]

Crummell did not limit his activism to schools and churches. He participated in the Negro Convention Movement on both the state and the national levels, where he advocated for universal freedom, black suffrage, and black intellectual and cultural cultivation. He argued that in order to be a full-fledged member of the community, one must be able to exercise one's fundamental rights, including the right to vote. The vote, Crummell thought, would facilitate political and ethical uplift, and it would help protect blacks from the tyranny of the majority and from white oppression. In 1840, at the New York State Convention of Negroes, Crummell appealed to Revolutionary-era ideals of freedom and equality, and he utilized the language of natural rights embedded in the Declaration of Independence. "However individuals or nations may act," he observed, "however they may assail the rights of man, or wrest him from his liberties, they all equally and alike *profess* regard for natural rights, the protection and security of which they claim as the object of the formation of their respective systems" of government.[82] Basing his claim to suffrage on "the possession of those common and yet exalted

[81] Crummell, "Jubilate" (1894) in *Destiny and Race*, 33.
[82] Crummell, "Address at the New York State Convention of Negroes, 1840" in *A Documentary History of the Negro People of the United States*, Herbert Aptheker, ed. (New York: Citadel Press, 1965), 1:202. Emphasis in original.

faculties of manhood," Crummell forcefully declared, "WE ARE MEN."[83] "When nature is hindered in any of its legitimate exercises—on the ground of our *common humanity*, do we claim equal and entire rights with the rest of our fellow citizens."[84]

Because the American nation—in practice if not in theory—denied universal freedom and equality, and because it denied black suffrage, it had failed to live up to its Revolutionary-era ideals. America, then, had failed to fulfill the promise of "liberty set forth in the Declaration."[85] Black suffrage, Crummell argued, met with the "full sympathy" of the "history of the country, the spirit of its Constitution, and the designs and purposes of its great originators" while disenfranchisement "lower[ed]" blacks "in the scale of humanity" and ostracized them from the wider human community.[86] This fundamental failure, then, was a blow not only to the ideal of American liberty, but also to the wider human community. Crummell's notion of liberty was a positive one: it bound the individual to both the local community and the nation, and it required the individual to act in order to preserve (and to perfect) the common good. Crummell adamantly maintained that liberty did not grant individuals license to do as they pleased—it did not grant someone license to hold another human being in bondage, for example—nor did it permit the individual to free herself from the burdens of universal

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[83] Ibid. Emphasis in original.
[84] Ibid., 1:202-203. Emphasis in original.
[85] Ibid., 1:201.
[86] Ibid., 1:199-203.

For an excellent overview of blacks' appropriation and adoption of the language and ideals of the American Revolution in order to oppose slavery and to criticize the failings of the nation, see Mia Bay, "See Your Declaration Americans!!!: Abolitionism, Americanism, and the Revolutionary Tradition in Free Black Politics" in *Americanism: New Perspectives on the History of an Ideal*, Michael Kazin and Joseph A. McCartin, eds. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006): 25-52.

moral claims.[87] For Crummell, the rights of the communal self, then, outweighed the rights of the individual self.

In 1847, Crummell displayed his capacity for leadership at the National Convention of Colored People in Troy, New York, where he played an active part in the convention's proceedings. Crummell sat on the committee on abolition alongside Frederick Douglass, John Lyle, and Thomas Van Rensselaer as well as on the committee on education alongside James McCune Smith and Peter G. Smith. Crummell compiled the report on education and read it aloud to the convention with what one witness described as "all that beauty of diction for which its talented author ha[d] long enjoyed a distinguished reputation."[88]

Crummell's own early experiences informed his report on education. He cherished higher learning, a value instilled in him by his father, and he knew from his own experiences that secondary schools in the North often barred black pupils and that colleges and other institutions of higher learning (such as the General Theological Seminary) often refused to admit qualified students due to racial prejudice. Additionally, his father's illiteracy provided an intimate reminder of the slave experience: enslaved blacks were closed off from formal and, very frequently, informal schooling. In his

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[87] Crummell repeatedly used a variation of the phrase "liberty is not license" throughout his writings. See, for example, Crummell, "The Responsibility of the First Fathers of a Country for Its Future Life and Character" (1863) in *Africa and America* at 153-154; Crummell, "The Assassination of President Garfield" (1881) in *Destiny and Race* at 229 and 233; and Crummell, "The Negro As a Source of Conservative Power" (undated) in *Destiny and Race* at 238.

[88] William Cooper Nell, "The Colored Convention," *The North Star*, December 3, 1847. Also see "Proceedings of the National Convention of Colored People, and Their Friends, Held in Troy, N.Y., on the 6th, 7th, 8th, and 9th October, 1847" in *Minutes of the Proceedings of the National Negro Conventions, 1830-1864*, Howard H. Bell, ed. (New York: Arno Press, 1969) at 1-32.

report, Crummell argued that learning was a "matter wound up in our very existence. It is involved in the very constitution given us [by God]. The duty and responsibility are coincident with our very being."[89] Crummell tied the necessity of education to the preservation of one's humanity: "Man is neither animal existence, nor a spiritual being, nor yet an intellectual creature alone. But man is a compound being," he declared. Man is "a being of mind, soul and body." If one were to neglect the development of one's mind, then, one would never be a "full and complete man"; without intellectual development, without education, Crummell stated, "our people can never be a people."[90]

Crummell called for the formation of a black college in order to guarantee that the black community would have access to advanced education (and thus to their humanity), and he listed the practical advantages of black institutional power. A black college, he argued, would employ and produce "generation[s] of scholars" and teachers; its affordability would lessen the financial burden on black students, who often could not afford to pay tuition at white schools; and its manual labor plan would prepare blacks for employment in the real-world workforce, providing them with practical skills to gain economic security.[91] Crummell further claimed that, because God had imbued man with "the noble powers of reason," the "contempt and outrages" arising from "blind prejudice" would vanish once blacks could clearly demonstrate their intellectual equality and overall ability. Only "when capacity, undoubted capacity," could be empirically proven would racists' "imputation[s] of inferiority" cease.[92] Crummell naïvely assumed that racists

[89] Crummell, "Selections: The Colored Convention: Report of the Committee on Education," *The North Star*, January 21, 1848.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Ibid.
[92] Ibid.

would not also blind themselves to empirical evidence and thus to their own powers of reason. Nevertheless, Crummell was casting about for ways to organize and strengthen the black community, and he was searching for a way to redefine the debate over black equality. Moreover, his communitarian critique of nineteenth-century American liberalism would become increasingly tied to this notion of intellectual uplift: in order to strengthen and improve the black community, the educated individual would have a duty to act in order to help the masses gain the knowledge and skills necessary to improve themselves and, in turn, improve their communities.

Although Douglass delivered the report on abolition, Crummell almost certainly voiced his opinions in committee—he was not one to keep quiet—and he likely had at least some influence on the substance (and possibly on the language) of the report. The report on abolition asserted,

> Slavery exists because it is popular. It will cease to exist when it is made unpopular. Whatever therefore tends to make Slavery unpopular tends to its destruction. This every Slaveholder knows full well, and hence his opposition to all discussion of the subject. It is an evidence of intense feeling of alarm, when John C. Calhoun calls upon the North to put down what he is pleased to term "this plundering agitation." Let us give the Slaveholder what he most dislikes. Let us expose his crimes and his foul abominations. He is reputable and must be made disreputable. He must be regarded as a moral lepor----shunned as a loathsome wretch----outlawed from Christian communion, and from social respectability----an enemy of God and man, to be execrated by the community till he shall repent of his foul crimes, and give proof of his sincerity by breaking every chain and letting the oppressed go free.[93]

This was certainly a notion that Crummell could get behind. He had a desire to excise the evils of slavery, along with the institution's perpetuators, from the wider human community. This desire revealed both Crummell's unwillingness to compromise with

[93] "Report of the Committee on Abolition" (1847) in "Proceedings of the National Convention of Colored People, 1847" in *Minutes of the Proceedings*, 32.

supporters of slavery and his underlying conviction that southern slaveholders, who placed an extraordinarily high value on their own ties to (and power within) the community, would not be willing to tolerate such dehumanizing forces of social alienation and isolation. Slaveholders would only be allowed to reenter the wider human community after endorsing the universal moral good of freedom—that is, abolition—thereby aligning themselves with the common good. Crummell's unwillingness to compromise over the existence of American slavery and over the persistence of the transnational slave trade compelled him to question his American identity. His perceived membership in the wider human community—in the wider moral community—precluded any sort of political horse-trading over the issue of slavery, and it ultimately resulted in his disillusionment with the American sociopolitical system.

After a series of ministerial disappointments in Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and New York, which Crummell described as "calamitous" and "distressing," he traveled to England in 1848 to raise money for his growing but impoverished Manhattan parish.[94] He quickly became a "minor celebrity" on the lecture circuit, where he met with distinguished churchmen, politicians, and philanthropists.[95] "Among these were Wilberforce," Crummell recalled, "the great Bishop of Oxford; Bishop Bloomfield of London; Dr. Stanley, the Lord Bishop of Norwich; Bishop Hinds, who, at a later day, licensed me, for six months to a Curacy in Ipswich. Once I had the privilege of spending a morning with the Dean of St. Paul's, Dr. Thirwell, Bishop of

[94] Crummell, "Jubilate" (1894) in *Destiny and Race*, 35. Also see Moses, *Alexander Crummell* at 34-51.
[95] Moses describes Crummell as a "minor celebrity" in *Alexander Crummell* at 57.

Landaff; the most learned Bishop of the English Church."[96] It was in England rather than in America that Crummell was accepted into intellectual and theological communities, recognized for his talents as both a thinker and a speaker. He was permitted "entrance into the circle of noted families," including "the Froudes, the Thackerays, the Patmores, . . . the Laboucheres, the Noels and the Thorntons."[97] He visited Windsor Castle whereupon he privately divulged that he "saw Her Majesty and one of the Princes and had recognition from royalty."[98] Crummell proudly proclaimed that he listened "for two or three hours, to that brilliant avalanche of history and biography, of poetry and criticism which rushed from the brain and lips of Thomas Babington Macaulay."[99] And he delightedly called attention to his friendship with "Mrs. Clarkson, widow of the great Thomas Clarkson, the ABOLITIONIST."[100] After Crummell's death, Henry Phillips would pointedly observe, "This [was] the man who in America was scarcely acknowledged to be human."[101] Indeed, Crummell keenly felt the stark contrast between his experiences in America and in England, a juxtaposition that would instill within him a disturbing doubt about the efficacy of the American project. Crucially, Crummell felt that he had been alienated and alone in America, his intellectual and spiritual development stunted by white oppression. He felt that he had experienced freedom in both body and mind for the first time during his stay in England: in August of 1848, Crummell wrote, "I do indeed thank God for the providence that has brot me to this land, and allowed me, for

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[96] Crummell, "Jubilate" (1894) in *Destiny and Race*, 39.
[97] Ibid.
[98] Crummell, "Alexander Crummell to John Jay" (27 January, 1852) quoted in Moses, *Alexander Crummell*, 64.
[99] Crummell, "Jubilate" (1894) in *Destiny and Race*, 39-40.
[100] Ibid., 40. Emphasis in original.
[101] Phillips, *In Memoriam*, 17.

once in my life, to be a freeman. Oh the acquisition to one's mind & heart and soul—the consciousness in all its fullest that one is a man! I never had it before I came to England. I use to think I had, but I was mistaken. But now I know it."[102]

In 1849,[103] after a bit of handwringing, Crummell enrolled at Queen's College, Cambridge, where he studied moral philosophy under the tutelage of William Whewell. Crummell's decision to attend Cambridge was both careful and cautious. He dutifully weighed the pros and cons of a university education, and he conscientiously considered the effects that an extended stay in England would have on his Manhattan congregation. While he admitted that there would be some "disadvantages," Crummell optimistically argued that a degree from Cambridge would

> have a lively and startling influence among the prejudiced and proslavery at home, especially in our CH [church]. You know how prominent[104] has been my own case, how I have been kept from the fountains of knowledge, how—our most prominent Bishops have disciplined me—I will use no stronger language for desiring and aiming to get in the "Seminary." Will not such a marked contrast between the two countries presented in the same individual too have a powerful—nay a decisive influence? . . . Wd. not the learning of an English University in my own person and an English University degree, place me in a position among American Clergymen, wh. wd. shame, contempt, neutralize caste—yea even command respect & consideration? And wd. not all this be of service to the cause. . . . Is it not a matter of importance that the standard of learning among the African race, in America shd. be raised? There is not a learned black minister in the whole U.S. A very considerable portion of our ministers (among the negro

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[102] Crummell, "Alexander Crummell to John Jay" (9 August, 1848) in *Black Abolitionist Papers*, 1:145.

[103] Oddly, in Crummell's only autobiographical work, "Jubilate," he claimed to have begun studying at Cambridge in 1851. See Crummell, "Jubilate" (1894) in *Destiny and Race* at 38. Nearly all other sources, however, (including university records as well as Crummell's own letters) indicate that he enrolled in 1849.

[104] Indeed, Crummell's rejection from the General Theological Seminary received prominent attention in at least one African American newspaper. See "The General Theological Seminary of the Episcopal Church," *The Colored American*, September 7, 1839. *The Colored American* also provided Crummell with a public forum in which to respond to Bishop Onderdonk. See "Case of Bishop Onderdonk and Mr. Crummell," *The Colored American*, December 7, 1839.

> race) are men who can neither read nor write. Besides, of what very great service cd. I not be as a Classical teacher in New York, as the Head of a Seminary for Colored Youth especially, as for training young men for the Ministry? There is not such an Instn. [Institution] in the whole country. And wd. not the partial temporary disadvantages be almost nothing compared with the permanent advantages for years to come (God sparing me) to my people and my race in America.[105]

Obviously, a Cambridge degree would benefit Crummell personally, providing him with leverage to use against the racist Episcopal clergymen in America who he felt had so ruthlessly wronged him. But if we are to take Crummell at his word, his concern for the black community and his forward-looking optimism (which informed his faith in the efficacy of sociocultural institutions to simultaneously uplift blacks and erode racism) prevailed over his own self-interests. A Cambridge degree, then, would arm him with the intellectual weapons required to abolish chattel slavery and racial prejudice; after all, he had always believed that these were primarily problems of the mind, problems that could be solved only by the "triumph of ideas."[106]

At Cambridge, Crummell's professors reinforced his philosophical idealism. They trained him to dismantle Lockean materialism and Hobbesian utilitarianism, and they argued convincingly, Crummell thought, against the hedonism of John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham in favor of the moral absolutism of Joseph Butler and the utopian principles of Plato. Crummell had instinctually believed that the "laws of nature were universal," that "morality was imprinted in the breasts of men, and that intuition as well as reason could provide for moral guidance in human affairs," but Cambridge provided him with the "intellectual framework for what had earlier been mainly a matter of

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[105] Crummell, "Alexander Crummell to John Jay" (9 August, 1848) in *Black Abolitionist Papers*, 1:143. Emphasis in original.
[106] Moses, *Alexander Crummell*, 72.

temperament."[107] Crummell utilized this newfound framework to hone and refine his antislavery arguments, which began to take an increasingly historical tone. He began to utilize the classical rise of Western civilization to demonstrate the progress and perfectibility of man, to root his abstract moral appeals in a temporal reality that his readers and listeners could understand. Ultimately, though, his antislavery arguments always appealed to "the conscience" instead of to "self-interest or practical considerations."[108] This philosophical eschewal of pragmatism and embracement of idealism would later become the fundamental source of disagreement between Crummell and Washington. It would reaffirm Crummell's forward-looking optimism, which would eventually become the basis of his debate with Douglass over the postbellum memory of slavery. Most importantly, it provided him with a frame of reference that served to reinforce his notions of duty to others and the subordination of the individual self to the greater good.

Crummell was thirty-three years old when he graduated with his A.B. in 1853. According to C. R. Stockton, Crummell was "the first black American ever to matriculate at Cambridge."[109] Antislavery newspapers in the United States celebrated Crummell's education. "We are happy to learn," wrote one editor, "that [Crummell] is capped and gowned in the University of Cambridge."[110] In England, Crummell had finally achieved what he had worked so hard for, and had been denied in America: a university education.

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[107] Moses, "Cambridge Platonism," 62-63.
[108] Ibid., 64.
[109] C. R. Stockton, "The Integration of Cambridge: Alexander Crummell As Undergraduate, 1849-1853" in *Integrated Education* 15, no. 2 (1977), 15.
[110] "A Negro in Cambridge University," *The Liberator*, March 23, 1849. Also see, for example, "National Anti-Slavery Standard," *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, November 14, 1850; and "Letter from William Wells Brown," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, October 2, 1851.

Although his years overseas were not entirely free from racial prejudice, his relatively warm welcome into English intellectual and theological communities provided him with a striking point of contrast to the injustices and disappointments he had experienced in America. While England provided him with a temporary reprieve from the catastrophic emotional effects of systemic oppression and social alienation, it also instilled within him an increasing dread of a return to America.

Crummell's reluctance to return to America stemmed from his growing disgust with the nation's moral hypocrisies. "It might be supposed," he wrote in 1853, "that in the United States a free man would be a free man. But unfortunately it was not so if he happened to have a black face."[111] He argued that "the slave trade not only lowered the nations that engaged in it, in the scale of humanity, and in the tone of their morals, but it robbed them of the clearness of their mental vision."[112] They were, Crummell thought, blinded by their own economic selfishness, unable to understand the moral implications of buying and selling the lives of human beings. Those who had colluded with slavery, either directly or indirectly, "not only robbed the Negro of his freedom—they added another crime thereto: they denied his humanity."[113] Crummell began to worry about the moral corruption of the American system itself, arguing that it threatened "tyranny"; it "hinder[ed] the progress of man" by "retard[ing] the advancement of the cause of freedom"; and it "lacked the great element of humanity."[114] The American character and

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[111] Crummell, "Speech by Alexander Crummell: Delivered at the Lower Hall, Exeter Hall, London, England" (26 May, 1853) in *Black Abolitionist Papers*, 1:349.
[112] Crummell, "Hope for Africa" (1852) in *Future of Africa*, 290.
[113] Ibid.
[114] Crummell, "Speech by Alexander Crummell: Delivered at Freemasons' Hall, London, England" (19 May, 1851) in *Black Abolitionist Papers*, 1:276; Crummell, "Speech:

American Christianity, he argued, required a "stronger presence of the idea of brotherhood" in order to overcome political and cultural bankruptcy.[115]

Crummell's communitarian critique of nineteenth-century American liberalism further deplored Americans' selfish, "blind rush" for "mere material ends" and decried the "frenzied partisan efforts" of the nation's "demoraliz[ed]" political system—all of which, according to Crummell, culminated in the increasing fragmentation of American life.[116] Developing a strain of thought that would become much more pronounced in the 1880s, he idealistically intoned that a return to community would restore a kind of balance by facilitating individual sacrifice for the common good and would thus emphasize moral ends rather than materialistic ones. In the 1850s, though, he never fully examined what constituted community: he treated it as if it were some sort of intangible spirithome, a mystical place where like-minded people could find equality and acceptance while exercising their freedom to act toward the common good. Nevertheless, it was his search for this community, this spirithome, that drove him. Crummell's early alienating experiences in America, and his dissatisfaction with the results of the American sociopolitical system, prodded him to turn to Liberia, West Africa, where he hoped to find kinship and camaraderie, and where he could begin again with a fresh slate.

Delivered at the Lower Hall, Exeter Hall, London, England" (26 May, 1853) in *Black Abolitionist Papers*, 1:351.

[115] Crummell, "Speech: Delivered at the Lower Hall, Exeter Hall, London, England" (26 May, 1853) in *Black Abolitionist Papers*, 1:351.

[116] Crummell, "Assassination of President Garfield" (1881) in *Destiny and Race*, 226-228.

AFRICA AND AMERICA: THE TRANSNATIONAL TRAFFICKING OF IDEAS, 1853-1898

In the summer of 1853, Crummell left England for West Africa and arrived in Liberia following a difficult two-month-long voyage. Although Crummell romantically remembered his years in England as "a period of grand opportunities, of the richest privileges, of cherished remembrances and of golden light," he had been plagued by near-constant health problems.[117] For years, Crummell had been suffering from frequent "tremors" and "palpitations brought on by stress or excitement," which were probably the result of a "valvular disorder of the right side of the heart."[118] Crummell claimed that his doctor, Sir Benjamin Brodie, had "ordered [him] to a tropical clime" and cited his "sickness" in order to explain his sojourn to Africa.[119] Other factors, however, were clearly at work. The declaration of Liberian independence in 1847 ushered in a new period of hope amongst black nationalists, whose desire to create a free and independent black-governed nation suddenly seemed possible. The passage of the Fugitive Slave Act in the United States in 1850, on the other hand, resulted in a heightened sense of pessimism and anxiety within the African American community, whose fate in America

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[117] Crummell, "Jubilate" (1894) in *Destiny and Race*, 39.
[118] Oldfield, *Civilization and Black Progress*, 233n13.
[119] Crummell, "Jubilate" (1894) in *Destiny and Race*, 39-40.

Rigsby has germanely pointed out that Liberia would have been an odd choice: due to its "notorious malaria fever," it wasn't exactly known as a healthful retreat. See Rigsby, *Alexander Crummell* at 69.

appeared to be growing increasingly dismal. The promising future of Liberia, then, coupled with the bleak outlook for emancipation in America, made emigration a viable option for men and women who had previously repudiated it as a red herring.

As Crummell became more and more disenthralled with the American project, and as his critique of nineteenth-century American liberalism began to take on distinctly communitarian dimensions—lambasting America's tendency toward moral compromise and (il)legitimate deal-making and lamenting the rise of radical individualism at the expense of cooperative community—he began to cast his eye toward Liberia. Crummell was willing to risk suffering "the dangers and inconveniences of frontier life" not only because he "found the indignities of American life intolerable" but also because his optimism allowed him to imagine a new Liberian ideal.[120] Crummell's education "placed him head and shoulders above most black men of the age," including almost every Liberian settler, and he hoped to take advantage of his prestigious social standing in order to help found a truly free, truly moral nation.[121]

At the time of Crummell's arrival in Liberia in 1853, the African American settler population numbered somewhere between 3,000 and 8,000.[122] Most of the colonists were agricultural laborers or ex-slaves, uneducated and impoverished black Americans who sought material wealth and freedom on the African continent. Many of these colonists, though, pitted themselves against the native population and attempted to exclude native

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[120] Moses, *Alexander Crummell*, 87.
[121] Rigsby, *Alexander Crummell*, 69.
[122] Oldfield has claimed that the colonist population in Liberia in 1853 numbered around 3,000. Akpan, however, has claimed that it was closer to 8,000. While Akpan relied on contemporary reports from the field (which possibly painted an overly positive portrait of the successes of Liberian colonization in the interest of attracting additional colonists), Oldfield cited a 1980 study of nineteenth-century Liberian settler society. See Akpan, "Alexander Crummell," 284; and Oldfield, *Civilization and Black Progress*, 6.

Africans from their schools and businesses. They further divided amongst themselves, forming two sociopolitical factions along racial lines. Winwood Reade, a prominent English writer, traveled to Liberia in 1868 and observed, "There are no real politics in Liberia. . . . The real parties consist of mulattoes and negroes. A mulatto and a negro are always run against each other at Presidential elections; and the offices of State are filled with men of the same colour as the President himself. The mulattoes are aristocrats, and call the black men niggers. . . . The negroes, on the other hand, call the mulattoes bastards and mongrels, and declare that they are feeble in body and depraved in mind."[123] Racial distinctions, then, were conspicuously established in Liberia by the time of Crummell's arrival, and such distinctions were quickly becoming entrenched not only in Liberian sociocultural life but also in the Liberian political system. This was not the serene spirithome Crummell had imagined; he would nevertheless spend nearly nineteen years attempting to reform and refashion what would become an increasingly dysfunctional community.

Although Crummell secured a ministerial appointment at St. Paul's Church in Monrovia, he undoubtedly had ancillary aims. As Oldfield has pointed out, "For men like Crummell, Liberia was not just another missionary field but an experiment in nation-building that was [designed] to demonstrate once and for all [blacks'] capacity for self-government."[124] Crummell's fealty to the idealistic ideas of progress and the perfectibility of man allowed him to imagine that Liberia would become a shining nation-state upon a hill. Where the American system had failed, the Liberian system would succeed, and

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[123] Winwood Reade, *The African Sketch-book* (London: Smith, Elder, & Co.: 1873), 2:257.
[124] Oldfield, "The Protestant Episcopal Church, Black Nationalists, and Expansion of the West African Missionary Field, 1851-1871," *Church History* 57, no. 1 (March 1988), 34.

Liberia would become a paragon of universal liberty and genuine brotherhood, an example for the rest of the world to follow. Liberia would provide palpable proof that blacks could successfully govern themselves, and it would fundamentally disprove white racist ideas about the "'rude ignorance of the Negro'" and his "'inability to [form] any extensive plan of government.'"[125] "In Liberia," Crummell wrote, "we understand somewhat our position, and the solemn duties it brings with it. We feel deeply the responsibility of planting afresh, in a new field, a new form of political being. We are conscious of the obligations . . . and are endeavoring to tread the paths of duty with the high spirit and the deep moral convictions of true men!"[126] In Liberia, then, Crummell hoped to combine what he thought were uncorrupted versions of American freedom, republican government, and citizenship with his communitarian principles and with his philosophical idealism in order to create his vision of the perfect nation and the perfect community.

According to Rigsby, there were rumors around the time of Crummell's emigration that he might become "the first black Episcopalian bishop" or possibly even the "president of Liberia."[127] Crummell almost certainly had designs on the bishopric, but

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[125] Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* as quoted by Crummell in "Hope for Africa" (1852) in *Future of Africa* at 306-307.

In an address in Washington, D.C., in 1875, Crummell argued that white Americans (and the white race in general) should be forced to recognize black "equality," "attainment," "culture," and "moral grandeur." According to Crummell, the "*white* population should forget, be made to forget, that we are *colored* men!" Racial caste would be overthrown and racial distinction would become a point of pride for all blacks everywhere. See Crummell, "The Social Principle among a People" (1875) in *Civilization and Black Progress* at 40. Emphasis in original.

[126] Crummell, "Address of Rev. Alexander Crummell: At the Anniversary Meeting of the Massachusetts Colonization Society" (29 May, 1861), *The African Repository* 37, no. 9 (September 1861), 280.

[127] Rigsby, *Alexander Crummell*, 69.

he consistently eschewed the political sphere, opting instead to work in the sociocultural dimension. He thought of himself as a public intellectual, as a philosopher and a theologian—not as a politician—and he sought to influence policy as an admired academic. He aimed to cultivate intellectual and spiritual enlightenment amongst the black masses (including amongst native Africans), and he wielded the power of both the pulpit and the lectern in order to encourage Liberians to embrace the ethical life, to embrace community spiritedness and economic thrift.

Crummell wanted to build a "beneficent" nation made up of "small communities," and he hoped that the Liberian people would trade "ostentatious" displays of material wealth for intellectual and moral ideals, embracing matters of the mind over matters of the body.[128] He worried about the wealth gained from mercantile trade; although such wealth made an "active political life" possible, it also "provided the sinews for luxurious living."[129] He feared "excessive devotion to material pursuits," which, "coupled with [a] previous educational inadequacy" under slavery and a "dearth of efficient schools and qualified teachers in Liberia," had resulted in a "blight on the intellectual [lives] of the Americo-Liberians."[130] It was precisely this so-called "intellectual blight" that Crummell hoped to eradicate by building schools and public libraries and by recruiting and training proficient teachers and citizens.

Crummell's conception of citizenship, of membership in the sociopolitical community, was inseparable from his notion of the individual's duty to benefit the wider human community. Crummell argued that nations were duty-bound to "contribute to the

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[128] Crummell, "Address of Rev. Alexander Crummell" (29 May, 1861), *African Repository* 37, no. 9 (September 1861), 275, 278.
[129] Akpan, "Alexander Crummell," 284.
[130] Ibid.

well-being and civilization of man."[131] He believed that the nation ought to be—indeed, it was required to be—a moral entity. In 1855, he wrote,

> Moral character is an idea—as true, exact, and absolute, applied to a nation as to a man. A moral system which claims authority only in its private, personal, application to men, but withdraws from them so soon as the individual is merged in the association or the body politic, is nothing but vagueness, darkness, and confusion. "Nations and individuals," says [William Ellery] Channing, "are subjected to one law. The moral principle is the life of communities." Under no moral code can the individual eschew truth and justice. Neither can the nation throw them aside, and perform its functions, treating right, and truth, and principle as matters of indifference.[132]

America had been indifferent and at times even hostile to the ethical life, Crummell believed, and the American nation had therefore failed to fulfill its promise of liberty. The community clearly took precedence over the individual, which was evident even in early Crummellian thought; but here, in the 1850s and 1860s, Crummell increasingly began to tie the proliferation of morality and justice to the success of the community and to the success of the nation.

In a fit of cosmopolitan idealism, Crummell claimed that a nation was "but a section of the great commonwealth of humanity."[133] He declared, "As no individual man can draw himself off from his fellow-man, and proclaim, '*I am distinct from the mass of humanity*,' so no nation can set itself off, unconcerned, from the rest of the [human] race."[134] Crummell attempted to use this line of argumentation to attract black settlers to Liberia, writing,

> When then colored men question the duty of interest in Africa, because they are not Africans, I beg to remind them of the kindred duty of self-respect. And my reply to such queries as I have mentioned above is this: 1.

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[131] Crummell, "The Duty of a Rising Christian State" (1855) in *Future of Africa*, 64.
[132] Ibid., 65.
[133] Ibid., 60.
[134] Ibid., 69. Emphasis in original.

> That there is no need of asking the interest of Englishmen, Germans, Dutchmen and others in the land of their fathers, because they have this interest, and are always proud to cherish it. And 2d. I remark that the abject state of Africa is a most real and touching appeal to *any* heart for sympathy and aid. It is an appeal, however, which comes with a double force to every civilized man who has negro blood flowing in his veins.[135]

It is important to point out that even here, in 1860, at what was perhaps the pinnacle of his black nationalism, Crummell took care to acknowledge the *universal* appeal of Africa: all men should come together under the umbrella of humanity to help those who had been "robbed . . . of [their] freedom."[136]

Crummell's version of democratic republicanism required the nation to uphold "the doctrine of human rights," to demand "honor to all men," to recognize "manhood in all conditions," and to use "the State as the means and agency for the unlimited progress of humanity."[137] Following this line of thought, then, we might conclude that the common good, or the rights of the wider community,[138] should therefore supplant the individual's rights.[139] This, of course, constitutes a classic communitarian dilemma: the individual will, or the individual self, eventually becomes completely subverted or even extinguished in the name of "public spiritedness" or "communal interest," which, some would argue, inevitably leads to tyrannical torment and slavish obedience. The implications of this line of thought are terrifying to most modern Americans (and indeed to most modern citizens of democratic states the world over). Crummell attempted to deal with this problem of "force" in 1870. His idea was that "unenlightened" individuals

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[135] Crummell, "The Relations and Duties of Free Colored Men in America to Africa" (1860) in *Future of Africa*, 219. Emphasis in original.
[136] Crummell, "Hope for Africa" (1852) in *Future of Africa*, 290.
[137] Crummell, "The Race-Problem in America" (1888) in *Civilization and Black Progress*, 170.
[138] Conceived of as an individual's positive duty to "the other."
[139] Conceived of as the freedom from (primarily governmental) interference.

would be "wards" of the educated elite, who would utilize the "force of restoration and progress" to "elevate" the unwashed masses. Eventually, after achieving moral and intellectual enlightenment, those "elevated" individuals could enter the community as full-fledged members, thereby rendering force unnecessary.[140] Although Crummell did not solve the authoritarian temptation inherent in communitarianism—and it could be argued that he further complicated the problem by introducing an even more complex sociocultural system of paternalism—his attempt to account for it in some way demonstrates his sophistication as a thinker and buttresses a communitarian conceptualization of Crummellianism.

The cosmopolitan strain in Crummell's thought would appear, at first glance, to be at odds with his steadily evolving black nationalism.[141] His imagined Liberian ideal aimed to create a nation of self-sufficient, community-oriented black citizens—citizens who would be morally required to help their black brethren achieve physical, intellectual, and spiritual freedom—and he supported the utilization of centralized state power to build the appropriate institutions such as roads, schools, public libraries, hospitals, and courthouses. He began to champion a new brand of black nationalism. All black men and women, he thought, ought to imagine themselves united as a kind of family unit, tied

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[140] See Crummell, "Our National Mistakes and the Remedy for Them: Delivered before the Common Council and the Citizens of Monrovia, Liberia, West Africa" (26 July, 1870) in *Destiny and Race* at 175-193 and, especially, at 185-186.

[141] Moses, Ross Posnock, and Rigsby have tossed the "cosmopolitan" label around, and they have pinned it crookedly to Crummell's lapel, but no one has, as of this writing, fully fleshed out the idea. See Moses, *Alexander Crummell* at 96, 109, 130, and 301; Ross Posnock, "'Irrational Zigzags': Cosmopolitanism in African American Intellectual History," John F. Kennedy-Institut für Nordamerikastudien Working Paper No. 121 (1999) at 10-13; Posnock, *Color and Culture: Black Writers and the Making of the Modern Intellectual* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998) at 13, 19-20, 22, and 73; and Rigsby, *Alexander Crummell* at 98.

together by blood rather than by physical location.[142] In order to gain acceptance into the wider black community, then, one did not necessarily have to become a Liberian citizen (although Crummell certainly believed, or at least hoped, that every black person ought to *want* to become a Liberian). While his black nationalism ultimately transcended geography, his "crucial goal" was to "free individual blacks from the subservience, dishonor, and persecution they suffered simply by virtue of being black."[143] In other words, he wanted to preclude the legal and social exclusion of blacks from the sociopolitical community; he wanted to improve and perfect the failed American project, transplanting its best features to a universally free state in Africa.

The development of Crummell's black nationalism and his cosmopolitanism reflected his growing interest in the question of what constituted community. He sought a place where both individuals and communities would take a strong moral stand, a non-negotiable stand, against the enslavement and the dehumanization of blacks. He sought a place where blacks would be accepted as full-fledged members of the sociopolitical body, and where nations would facilitate wider human cooperation. Ultimately, his notion of the black community (or the black nation) was consistent with his cosmopolitanism. Both visions tended to transcend physical space, instead constituting an "imagined community," a spirithome, that would be inhabited primarily by the mind.[144] As Gregory Rigsby has eloquently put it, Crummell believed that "race could bind large groups of

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[142] Crummell, "Relations and Duties of Free Colored Men in America to Africa" (1860) in *Future of Africa*, 213-281.
[143] David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Emancipation* (New York: Knopf, 2014), 129.
[144] Benedict Anderson famously coined the phrase "imagined community" in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006).

people scattered over the earth into one family, and nations could bind different races together into one people."[145] Crummell explicitly stated this idea when he wrote, "Large, yea cosmopolitan views do not necessarily demand a sacrifice of kinship, a disregard of race, nor a spirit of denationality."[146] His black nationalism, then, was a step toward a cosmopolitan vision of "world unity."[147]

By 1870, Crummell's disillusionment with the Liberian project had set in. He had endured a bitter battle with Liberia's white bishop, John Payne, whose opposition to both a national Episcopal church as well as black ecclesiastical leadership stymied Crummell's plans for an independent Liberian church organization, an organization that would be free from the racist Episcopal hierarchy in America.[148] Crummell's attempts to balance his missionary activities with his teaching had failed, and his dismissal from his post as "Professor of Intellectual and Moral Philosophy and English Language and Literature and Instructor in Logic, Rhetoric, and History" at Liberia College dealt a crushing blow to his ambition to become Liberia's foremost intellectual.[149] When it became obvious in 1871 that he had no hope of ever attaining the bishopric, he began to plan his return to

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[145] Rigsby, *Alexander Crummell*, 98.
[146] Crummell, "Relations and Duties of Free Colored Men in America to Africa" (1860) in *Future of Africa*, 262.
[147] Rigsby, *Alexander Crummell*, 98.
[148] Crummell's activities in Liberia, West Africa, have already been heavily documented in the historiography. For an overview of Crummell's power struggle with Payne, readers should start with Moses, *Alexander Crummell* at 89-118 and 162-178; Oldfield, *Alexander Crummell* at 59-92; Oldfield, "Protestant Episcopal Church" at 31-45; and Rigsby, *Alexander Crummell* at 79-92.
[149] "Professor of Intellectual and Moral Philosophy and English Language and Literature and Instructor in Logic, Rhetoric, and History" was Crummell's official professorial title. See Moses, *Alexander Crummell* at 146.

For an overview of Crummell's failed tenure at Liberia College, see Moses, *Alexander Crummell* at 146-161; and Rigsby, *Alexander Crummell* at 119-125.

America.[150]

Significantly, Crummell had managed to embroil himself in the sociopolitical debates between the mulatto-negro factions. By arguing that native Africans ought to have equal citizenship rights, and, especially, equal access to schools and churches, he aligned himself with the negro party. When Liberia College was built on the Monrovian coast for the convenience of the settler population, rather than in the interior, Crummell fully realized the "symbolic significance" of the site: "the college looked back to America rather than forward to the interior of Africa. The mulattoes were clinging to their European-American ancestry rather than their black African heritage."[151]

In an 1870 speech that was delivered on the twenty-third anniversary of Liberian independence, Crummell conspicuously criticized Americo-Liberians for neglecting the native population. "We have been guilty of a neglect," he intoned, "which has carried with it harm to the aborigines." Crummell claimed that Americo-Liberians "look[ed] down upon the native as an inferior, placed at such a distance from [them], that concord and oneness seem[ed] almost impossible]."[152] He also rebuked the Liberian government for "carelessly, thoughtlessly" ignoring "the *national* obligation to train, educate, civilize, and regulate the heathen tribes," and he reminded Americo-Liberians of their moral "obligation to do [the natives] good."[153] He chastised his fellow citizens for not fulfilling their duties to the black community, and he worried that Liberia itself could become a failed state if its people refused to embrace his idealistic vision. He affirmed,

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[150] Regarding Crummell's failed bid to the bishopric, see Oldfield, "Protestant Episcopal Church" at 41-44; and Rigsby, *Alexander Crummell* at 79-92.
[151] Rigsby, *Alexander Crummell*, 121.
[152] Crummell, "Our National Mistakes" (26 July, 1870) in *Destiny and Race*, 177.
[153] Ibid., 177-178. Emphasis in original.

> Some such work of magnitude must be undertaken by us, or, otherwise, we shall lose all nobleness of feeling and endeavor; we shall become gross, sordid, and sensual; and so insignificant and trifling will be the life of this nation that, by and by, the declaration will become a common one everywhere—"That people are undeserving national recognition; they are only playing at government; they are not fit to live!" To prevent such a degrading fling at us, we must give up the idle notion of dragging hither a nation from America, and go to work at once in the great endeavor to construct a vast national existence out of the native material about us.[154]

This admonishment stemmed from Crummell's growing belief that the corruptions of American sociopolitical life had been brought to the shores of Liberia by white racists (with whom the mulatto faction identified) who sought only to protect their own material interests at the expense of the moral and intellectual health of the black community. His cosmopolitan vision could not tolerate such divisiveness; in a twist of irony, Crummell's querulousness with the mulatto faction resulted in hardened racial lines and eventually estranged him from the Liberian community he had sought to perfect.

When political unrest and disillusionment induced Crummell's return to the United States in 1872, he found that he had returned to a drastically different America.[155] He moved to Washington, D.C., in the midst of the heady days of Reconstruction and black political and cultural activism. In postbellum America, Crummell's optimism about the future of the black community began to return, and he began to work toward a new American ideal. Crummell later reflected on his own renewed sense of optimism about the future of the black American community when he wrote, "Never in all the history of the world has the Almighty been wanting of the gallant spirits, ready, at any sacrifice, to vindicate the cause of the poor and needy, and to 'wax valiant in fight' for the

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[154] Ibid., 188.
[155] For an excellent, highly detailed overview of the political upheaval in Liberia that prompted Crummell's flight from Africa, see Rigsby, *Alexander Crummell* at 125-133.

downtrodden and oppressed."[156] Crummell explicitly acknowledged his forward-looking hopefulness when he proclaimed, "Standing now more than three score years and ten, in age; the scars of bitter caste still abiding, I am, nevertheless, a most positive OPTIMIST."[157]

Crummell's abiding optimism about the future might strike us as superficial or even naïve. But, as Ejofodomi has acknowledged, "Crummell's optimism was not a shallow one. His optimism was founded on the assumption that we live in a fallen world, once good but now shot through with evil."[158] Crummell's optimism allowed him to believe that by "learn[ing] to recognize evil," by "not turn[ing] aside from evil," and by "confront[ing] and overcom[ing] evil," individuals could effectively work to protect, preserve, and perfect the moral community.[159] In the twentieth century, a remarkably similar brand of philosophical idealism—along with a similar sort of optimism and community spiritedness—would be taken up by African American thinkers such as Howard Thurman and Martin Luther King, Jr., in order to encourage unity during the Civil Rights Movement.[160]

Soon after his return to the United States, Crummell secured an appointment in Washington, D.C., at St. Mary's Episcopal Church, where he used the pulpit to encourage his congregation to join together to organize the moral, cultural, and political uplift of black Americans. Founded by the liberal clergyman Reverend John Vaughan Lewis, St.

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[156] Crummell, "Jubilate" (1894) in *Destiny and Race*, 43.
[157] Ibid. Emphasis in original.
[158] Ejofodomi, *Missionary Career*, 60.
[159] Ibid.
[160] See Walter Earl Fluker, "They Looked for a City: A Comparison of the Idea of Community in Howard Thurman and Martin Luther King, Jr.," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 18, no. 2 (Fall 1990): 33-55.

Mary's mission served every member of the community, "regardless of race."[161] Allegedly, such distinguished figures as President Chester Arthur, William W. Corcoran, Senator George F. Hoar, and Congressman Julius Seelye attended Crummell's sermons. In 1876, Crummell renewed the battle begun in his youth when he publicly opposed the establishment of "separate churches, conventions, or diocese for black people" in America, aligning himself with the idea that such separation was "pernicious and unscriptural."[162] The rapid growth of St. Mary's led Crummell to found St. Luke's Episcopal Church in 1879, which became "a vital center of black activity" and was one of the most prominent parishes in Washington by the time of his retirement in 1894.[163]

During this time, Crummell increasingly argued that individuals must cultivate their own intellectual and spiritual characters in order to improve the wider community. In a significant 1875 sermon, Crummell preached:

> Character, my friends, is the grand, effective instrument which we are to use for the destruction of [racial] caste: Character, in its broad, wide, deep, and high significance; character, as evidenced in high moral and intellectual attainments; as significant of general probity, honor, honesty, and self-restraint; as inclusive of inward might and power; as comprehending the attainments of culture, refinement, and enlightenment; as comprising the substantial results of thrift, economy, and enterprise; and as involving the forces of *combined* energies and enlightened *cooperation*.[164]

Crummell argued that, if only individuals could achieve the lofty goal of intellectual and spiritual enlightenment, racial discrimination would "pass, with wonderful rapidity, into endless forgetfulness. . . . All the problems of caste, all the enigmas of prejudice, and

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[161] Moses, *Alexander Crummell*, 197.
[162] Ibid., 197-200.
[163] Oldfield, *Civilization and Black Progress*, 9.
[164] Crummell, "The Social Principle among a People" in *Civilization and Black Progress*, 39. Emphasis added.

unreasonable and unreasoning repulsion" would be "settled forever."[165] He reasoned that the black community, as well as the whole of mankind, would progress, subsequently moving forward, and that the universal human community would finally be able to fully cooperate in order to achieve its ends. Notably, it was the individual's duty to the community to fulfill these obligations.

Crummell's early experiences of oppression as a free black man in New York provided him with an acute understanding of the destructive effects of post-Reconstruction discrimination on black American life and community. He renewed his criticisms of the hypocrisies of American liberty, and in 1888, he sounded downright radical when he wrote,

> If this nation is not truly democratic then she must die! Nothing is more destructive to a nation than an organic falsehood! This nation cannot live—this nation does not deserve to live—on the basis of a lie! Her fundamental idea is democracy; and if this nation will not submit herself to the domination of this idea—if she refuses to live in the spirit of this creed—then she is already doomed, and she will certainly be damned.[166]

Crummell's idealistic solution to racial discrimination involved communal cooperation, moral uplift, and material thrift. He earnestly believed that if the black community could provide palpable proof of their capacity for self-governance, and of their ability to fulfill the duties of citizenship, then racial discrimination would magically melt away.

In this same sermon, Crummell affirmed and emphasized the natural human tendency toward sociality. "The social principle," Crummell asserted, "prevails in the uprearing of a nation, as in the establishing of a family. Men must associate and combine

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[165] Ibid.
[166] Crummell, "The Race-Problem in America" (1888) in *Civilization and Black Progress*, 171.

energies in order to produce large results."[167] He claimed that "no one man" had ever "effect[ed] anything important alone" and maintained that "there never was a great building, a magnificent city, a noble temple, a grand cathedral, a stately senate-house which was the work of one single individual. . . . Everywhere we find that the great things of history have been accomplished by the *combination* of men."[168] The community, whether it was a small, localized community or a vast, national community, required human cooperation and sociopolitical organization. If individuals failed to work together, Crummell thought, then they would surely fail to achieve their ultimate, transcendent ends.

Crummell's return to the United States prompted him to redefine and readjust his notion of what constituted community. While he maintained his nationalistic ties to both America and Africa, and while he continued to proudly identify himself with the black community, he ultimately began to identify primarily with the "whole family of man"—that is, he began to predominantly see himself as a member of the universal human community.[169] In an 1877 sermon, Crummell argued that great civilizations, such as ancient Greece and Rome, appropriated positive cultural and political ideas from other nations, and that America and Africa should do the same. He claimed that all great nations have "seized upon the spoils of time." They all "became cosmopolitan thieves. They stole from every quarter. They pounced, with eagle eye, upon excellence wherever

[167] Crummell, "The Social Principle among a People" in *Civilization and Black Progress*, 32.
[168] Ibid., 31. Emphasis added.
[169] Crummell, "Duty of a Rising Christian State," (1855) in *Future of Africa*, 59.

discovered, and seized upon it with rapacity."[170] Crummell "banish[ed] the exclusionary rhetoric of origin and authenticity"; cultural borrowings and reimaginings, then, worked toward the progress not of one nation or race but toward the perfection of man and all of humanity.[171]

In an 1888 speech, Crummell asserted that the "democratic idea is neither Anglo-Saxonism, nor Germanism, nor Hiberianism, but HUMANITY, and humanity can live when Anglo-Saxonism or any class of the race of man has perished. Humanity anticipated all human varieties by thousands of years, and rides above them all, and outlives them all, and swallows up them all!"[172] In 1897, shortly before his death, Crummell founded the American Negro Academy (ANA) in order to "encourage 'race solidarity' as a means to 'the realization of . . . broader humanity.'" In other words, the Creed of the ANA "urged black Americans 'to maintain their race identity . . . until the ideal of human brotherhood [became] a practical possibility.'"[173] In his inaugural address at the ANA's first meeting, Crummell declared, "Universality is the kernel of all true civilization."[174]

Crummell's optimism—his philosophical idealism—allowed him to continue to look toward a better future. Even after Reconstruction fell apart, he continued to look

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[170] Crummell, "The Destined Superiority of the Negro: A Thanksgiving Discourse" (1877) in *Destiny and Race*, 202.
[171] Posnock, *Color and Culture*, 19-20.
[172] Crummell, "The Race-Problem in America" (1888) in *Africa and America*, 53-54. Emphasis in original.
[173] Posnock, *Color and Culture*, 22.
[174] Crummell, "The Attitude of the American Mind toward the Negro Intellect" (1897) in *Destiny and Race*, 297.

For a history of the ANA, including Crummell's role in its founding, see Moss, *The American Negro Academy: Voice of the Talented Tenth* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981).

forward; he urged the black community to call upon "hope and imagination" while they worked to end racial discrimination.[175] Crummell's mantra of "duty for to-day, hope for the morrow" persisted even in his renewed criticisms of the American sociopolitical system.[176] In 1888, he returned to his earlier critique of nineteenth-century American liberalism when he lamented the institutionalized American tendency to compromise over moral issues: "Indeed, the race-problem is a moral one. . . . There should be no compromise; and this country should be agitated and even convulsed till the battle of liberty is won, and every man in the land is guaranteed fully every civil and political right and prerogative."[177] He looked to the future, when black Americans would be fully accepted into the sociopolitical community.

Crummell explicitly expanded upon his hope that blacks would look toward the future rather than toward the past in his 1885 Storer College Address, which Crummell himself believed to be one of the most significant speeches he ever gave. He implored his audience to turn their attention to "the need of new ideas and new aims for a new era" of freedom.[178] He demanded a "mighty revolution," a change "vaster" and "deeper . . . than that of emancipation."[179] Crummell envisioned a revolution of the mind, a "grand *moral* revolution" that would liberate the inner lives of black Americans, freeing them to "live for the good of man" rather than in a "soulless" state of "drudgery" and "mere physical

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[175] Crummell, "The Need of New Ideas and New Aims for a New Era" (1885 Storer College Address) in *Africa and America*, 15.
[176] Ibid., 14.
[177] Crummell, "The Race-Problem in America" (1888) in *Civilization and Black Progress*, 169.
[178] Crummell, "The Need of New Ideas and New Aims for a New Era" (1885 Storer College Address) in *Africa and America*, 14.
[179] Ibid., 34.

toil," trapped by their active recollection of their previously enslaved state.[180]

Crummell made a distinction between mere "memory" and deliberate "recollection." Memory, he argued, was an involuntary, "passive act of the mind." Memory constituted shared experiences which were necessary for the formation of a community's collective identity. Recollection, on the other hand, was the active, "painstaking endeavor of the mind to bring [the past] back again to consciousness."[181] Actively recollecting, or dwelling upon, slavery, Crummell thought, was to "dwell upon repulsive things, to hang upon that which is dark, direful, and saddening," and which "tends, first of all, to morbidity and degeneracy."[182] Crummell avowed,

> But let me remind you here that, while indeed we do live in two worlds, the world of the past and the world of the future, DUTY lies in the future. It is in life as it is on the street: the sentinel Duty, like the policeman, is ever bidding man "Pass on!" We can, indeed, get inspiration and instruction in the *yesterdays* of existence, but we cannot healthily live in them. . . . There is a capacity in human nature for prescience. We were made to live in the future as well as in the past. The qualities both of hope and imagination carry us to the regions which lie beyond us.[183]

In 1891, Crummell recalled Frederick Douglass's presence in the audience at Storer. "The shifting of general thought from past servitude," he wrote, "to duty and service, in the present; -- met with [Douglass's] emphatic and most earnest protest. He took occasion, on the instant, to urge his hearers to a constant recollection of the slavery of their race and of the wrongs it had brought upon them."[184] Although no account of Douglass's response to Crummell has yet been found, David Blight has attributed their difference in attitude to a difference in experience. Crummell had never been a slave;

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[180] Ibid., 26-36. Emphasis in original.
[181] Ibid., 18.
[182] Ibid., 15.
[183] Ibid., 13-15. Emphasis in original.
[184] Crummell, *Africa and America*, iii-iv.

Douglass, of course, had been, and he had "established his fame by writing and speaking about the meaning of slavery as perhaps no one else ever did." Douglass's "life work and his very identity were inextricably linked to the transformations of the Civil War."[185] Blight argued that Crummell's "connection to most of the benchmarks of Afro-American social memory had been largely distant, international, informed by African nationalism and Christian mission. For Douglass, emancipation and the Civil War were truly *felt* history. For Crummell, they were passive memory."[186]

While Blight made some penetrating observations about the chasm separating Crummell's and Douglass's experiences in antebellum America, his account failed to acknowledge that their disagreement at Storer fundamentally stemmed from an underlying philosophical difference. Douglass was predominantly concerned with understanding the meaning and legacy of slavery. He examined what it meant to be a slave, and what evil did to one's very soul. Douglass's libertarian bent brought him to the conclusion that it was best to free the slaves and "let them alone."[187] Crummell, though, had implored his youthful audience at Storer to look toward the future not because he wanted them to forget the legacy of slavery and all of its evils, but because he wanted them to engage in an intellectual debate over the definition and meaning of freedom. He wanted black Americans to face evil, to overcome it, and to stake out a space as full-

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[185] David W. Blight, "'What Will Peace among the Whites Bring?': Reunion and Race in the Struggle over the Memory of the Civil War in American Culture," *The Massachusetts Review* 34, no. 3 (Autumn 1993), 399.
[186] Ibid. Emphasis in original. Also see Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001) at 316-318; and Blight; "'If You Don't Tell It like It Was, It Can Never Be As It Ought to Be': Keynote Talk at Yale, New Haven, Conference on Yale and Slavery" (2002), http://www.yale.edu/glc/events/memory.htm, accessed 25 April, 2014.
[187] Frederick Douglass, "What Shall Be Done with the Slaves if Emancipated?," *Douglass' Monthly*, January 1862.

fledged citizens of the wider human community. Even early Crummellian thought dealt primarily with the question of freedom rather than slavery: Crummell asked what it meant to be free, how one best ought to live as a citizen of one's community, and what justice entailed. He was an abolitionist in every sense, but he looked beyond emancipation, to a time when black Americans would be accepted as full-fledged citizens, as full-fledged members of the sociopolitical community, to a time when black Americans would truly have lives worth living.

These philosophical differences set Crummell apart from his contemporaries. Most African American thinkers, like Douglass and Washington, intrinsically accepted the American liberal tradition even if they rejected American slavery and racism. But Crummell questioned the American sociopolitical system itself, harnessing his communitarian outlook to ask whether a system that was built to protect individual freedoms by facilitating compromise over moral absolutes could ever be just. In Liberia, Crummell sought but could not find a viable alternative to the American system, and so he worked instead to reform and perfect it, remaining active in the black American community until his death. His understanding of what constituted community shifted and evolved, but his principles remained consistent. By the end of his life, Crummell increasingly tied his self-identity not to the nation, nor to his race, but instead to humanity itself—to the universal human community.

CONCLUSION

> Longing on a large scale is what makes history.
> —Don DeLillo, *Underworld* (1997)

> Scientists tell us that when you throw a pebble in a stream, it sets up a series of ever-widening circles until it reaches the shore. They tell us that when you utter an audible sound, you start in motion sound waves which travel on for miles and miles. So it is with the influence of a human personality. It does not end at the grave. It lives in the lives that have been inspired, in the example set and the thoughts thrown out.
> —William Henry Ferris, *Alexander Crummell: An Apostle of Negro Culture* (1920)

Crummell died in Point Pleasant, New Jersey, on September 10, 1898, at the age of 79. "Alexander Crummell Dead," read *The Washington Bee* headline. "The Most Noted Negro—No More."[188] "The day dawned bright and clear," one obituary poetically proclaimed. "Heaven smiled."[189] Another mournfully declared, "Rev. Dr. Alexander Crummell, who lies dead in this city, was once the best known Negro clergyman in the United States."[190] Invariably, newspapers noted Crummell's Cambridge education, his accomplishments within the Episcopal hierarchy, his efforts to reform both America and Liberia, and his three book publications. This was an impressive list. But these superficial summations failed to capture the crucial aspect of Crummell's life: the amorphous life of the mind.

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[188] "Alexander Crummell Dead," *The Washington Bee*, September 17, 1898
[189] "Dr. Crummell at Rest," *The Washington Bee*, September 17, 1898.
[190] "The Rev. Dr. Crummell Dead," *The Freeman*, September 17, 1898.

In 1895, just three years before his death, Crummell wrote, "The grappling with indeterminate questions is one of the inevitabilities of our life. Man must test, struggle with, attempt to settle them, or else he will lose all mental vitality. The only mode of escape for him is insanity, or suicide, or death. Struggle is one of the prime conditions of existence."[191] For Crummell, wrestling with these transcendent moral questions required mental fortitude; it required a constant striving toward a new answer, a clearer answer, a better answer. This was the essence of Crummell's philosophical idealism, and it was this idealism which ultimately allowed him to imagine a more perfect community.

Toward the end of his life, Crummell began to reckon with the modern world, asking questions about the existence of freedom and justice in an increasingly industrialized, mechanized society:

> Is the laborer to be a freeman, exercising his own will, and using his own powers? Or, is he to be a slave, both will and powers at the command of others? If a hireling, what is to be the measure of his wage? So stint, indeed, as to forbid thought of the higher nature? So stint as to impose that serfage in condition which forbids the hope of manhood? Or, on the other hand, such just and liberal remuneration as gives opportunity of release from grinding drudgery, and lifts up the ambitions of humblest humanity to enlargement, to enlightenment, to culture, and eventually to grand civilization?[192]

He began to wonder whether wage laborers were truly free. Crummell believed that mere physical labor was not enough to sustain one's humanity, and inadequate compensation for labor forced one to focus, out of necessity, on material needs. He believed that this drudgery or toil was another kind of enslavement, an enslavement of the mind by the body, and one could free oneself only if one could cultivate a rich intellectual life—a moral life.

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[191] Crummell, "The Solution of Problems" (1895 Wilberforce University Address), 412.
[192] Ibid., 403.

Crummell argued that these transcendent moral questions could not be separated from ordinary experiences of the world. In 1895, he eschewed Marxist materialism when he wrote,

> The material aspect is only the surface aspect. It is only blind eyesight which can resolve those convulsions of humanity into mere symptoms of animal unrest. For the difficulties in their essence lie far deeper than any mere outward seeming. Nothing can be falser than the view which divorces these events from ethical ideas. For see how, *everywhere, moral principles are intermingled with every feature of the subject*. There has rarely, if ever, been a strike, a labor riot, an industrial disturbance, an Agrarian outbreak, in all the history of man, but what has had underlying, some absorbing moral problem which agitated the souls of men. Always ideas of justice, or equity, or right, have risen up as prominent factors in them. I am not speaking of the wisdom or the unwisdom of such movements. I only point to the prodigious fact *i. e.* that questions of right and justice more or less underlie the commonest concerns of life. Man never passes beyond the boundary lines of dull content into the arena of strife or agitation, unless some deep moral conviction first circles his brain and fires his blood, or tinges his imagination.[193]

For Crummell, ideas were the warp and woof of life. His longing for community stemmed from his own longing for a spirithome, his own search for a place in the world. But it was also a longing for a more perfect community, for a better world not only for blacks but also for all of humanity. Crummellian thought fully embodied the idea that individuals could not achieve their transcendent moral ends alone but only collectively, and that individuals could never be fully human unless they maintained and nurtured those essential communal ties.

This communitarian conception of Crummell provides us with a way to understand and grapple with some of the complexities and paradoxes inherent in Crummellian thought. Envisioning Crummell as a kind of communitarian idealist allows us to understand the inherent tension between the individual self and the communal

[193] Ibid., 404. Emphasis added.

self—a tension that was clearly evident not only in Crummellian thought but also in the American sociopolitical system itself.

While there is no neat little box that can contain all of Crummell's often paradoxical ideas, and while there is no perfect label that can be pinned to Crummell's lapel, this communitarian conception of Crummellian thought at least allows us to move beyond the traditional left-right, liberal-conservative dichotomies. It allows us to understand that nineteenth-century debates over moral questions were fluid rather than static. It allows us to understand that the transcendent nature of questions about the meaning of justice, truth, beauty, spirituality, and freedom did not foreclose debate but instead encouraged it. And it allows us to understand that the American mind was concerned with more than mere economic prosperity. Ultimately, envisioning Crummell as a communitarian encourages us to struggle to understand something deeper about the life of the mind and the legacy of ideas.

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