

# ***The African Times Online***

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## **About this project**

*The African Times* is an important source for British, West African, and Atlantic history. However, it has often been difficult to access. The only known hard copy is held in the British Newspaper Library in Colindale, and only two microfilm copies seem to be in existence. It is my hope that the digitization of this important resource will contribute to research and pedagogy of the histories of these regions and networks, and allow us especially to hear the voices of Africans, Afro-Britons, and Africans of the diaspora in the Americas.

This digital database was developed with the permission of the British Newspaper Library and the assistance of BMI, as well as the financial support of the San Francisco State University department of history. It is presented through the DIVA system developed by BSS computing at San Francisco State University. DIVA is intended to be a collaborative system, and users of *The Digital African Times* are required to submit research reports of sample assignments in return for rights to use the system. Use is by invitation only.

At this time, only the years 1866-1872 are available online, but we hope to complete the database in the near future, pending the donation of sufficient funds. If you know of any individual or institution that might be willing to donate, please don't hesitate to tell me.

## **Brief 'biographical' notes: The life and history of *The African Times***

*The African Times* began as the newspaper of The African Aid Society. The society was begun in Great Britain in 1860, prior to the great race by Africans to extend formal colonial rule over much of Africa. Indeed, in the 1860s many important British politicians and cultural leaders were anti-expansionist, and believed that Africa as a provider of raw materials could best become a significant trading partner for Britain through independent "development". This economic viewpoint jibed well with humanitarian and religious imperatives of British middle-class liberalism. There was thus a great deal of white British support for efforts by Afro-Britons and Africans of the Americas, as well as by western-educated Africans, to modernize Africa economically.

and to “civilize” Africa culturally. This moment was brief –by the 1880s race had come to dominate the European perspective of Africans just as European armies and administrators were in the process of colonizing African populations. But it was an important moment none-the-less.

The African Aid society was supported by globally-minded Britons such as Henry Christy, Lord Churchill, and Dr. Hodgkin, who were affiliated with the Royal Geographic Society. But its creation was stimulated by the visit to London in 1860 of two Africans of the diaspora: Martin Robison Delany and Robert Campbell (Delaney was born in the Carolinas, Campbell in Jamaica). Both Delany and Campbell supported resettlement projects for Africans in the Americas, and they had returned from Abeokuta (in modern Nigeria) with a treaty signed by a plurality of the states’ leadership and witnessed by Reverend Samuel Crowther, who would be ordained as the first African Anglican Bishop in 1864. The treaty granted land for African-Americans who agreed to respect the laws of the state. In return the settlers agreed to furnish “Intelligence, Education, a Knowledge of the Arts and Sciences, Agriculture, and other Mechanical and Industrial Occupations” in late 1859. It was this treaty that convinced Christy, Churchill, and several Afro-Britons (some of whom were partly resident in Sierra Leone) to develop the..<sup>1</sup>

A.H.M. Kirk-Green explains the objectives of the African Aid Society as follows:

The aims of the African Aid society were, to quote from its articles, “to develop the material resources of Africa, Madagascar and the adjacent Islands; and to promote the Christian civilization of the African races” as a means to accomplish the annihilation of slavery. One of the ways to achieve this purpose was to “assist, by loans and otherwise, Africans willing to emigrate from Canada and other parts to our West Indian Colonies, Liberia, Natal and Africa generally”.

Thus the African Aid Society came to existence within a constellation of other African-focused British societies. Like Anti-Slavery Society and the Aborigines Protection Society, its scope was the formal and informal British empire, and its audience was mainly liberal Britons, although it purported to serve most the interests of Africans. Also like these organizations, it believed in a type of modernization that was akin to westernization: the development of industry, infrastructure, and Christianity in Africa. Its main tool for doing so was economic: the society focused on ending the slave trade by promoting cotton cultivation, and a major effort was aimed at convincing the king of Dahomey to do so. African-American and Afro-Caribbean immigration was conceived to be the linchpin of this effort.<sup>2</sup> The society’s membership also intersected closely with missionary societies such as the London Missionary Society and the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society. Moreover, *The African Times*, as mouthpiece of the society, co-existed with several similar Anglo-African papers, including *The Church Missionary*

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<sup>1</sup> Kirk-Greene, A.H.M., “America in the Niger Valley: A Colonization Centenary”, *Phylon*, 23 (1962), 225-239. See 236-238 especially.

<sup>2</sup> Ratcliffe, Barrie M., “Cotton Imperialism: Manchester Merchants and Cotton Cultivation in West Africa in the Mid-Nineteenth Century”, *African Economic History*, 11 (1987), 87-113. 95.

*Intelligencer*, *The Sierra Leone Journal*, and *The Anglo-Colonial* (very briefly).<sup>3</sup> The African Aid Society was distinguished in part by being pro-expansionist, and in its early years its leaders promoted schemes to extend British rule in West Africa. Even its Afro-British membership saw the empire as a tool for uplifting Africans.<sup>4</sup>

Among the most important of its leaders was Ferdinand Fitzgerald, who became Secretary of the Society in 1861. An ex-Liberian living in London, Fitzgerald was most responsible for publishing *The African Times*. He was assisted (perhaps informally) by the Afro-Caribbean lawyer William Rainy, who had worked for the administration of Sierra Leone (in customs & duty) and who during the 1860s returned occasionally to Sierra Leone to start newspapers there. Among those he helped publish were *The Sierra Leone Observer and Commercial Advocate*, *The African Interpreter and Advocate*, and *The Sierra Leone Journal and Monthly Record of Colonial Affairs*.<sup>5</sup>

Under Fitzgerald, the newspaper covered a number of topics of interest to its mainly West African and Afro-British readership. Slavery and abolition were covered, as were the actions of administrators, relations with peoples of the interior, education and infrastructure, and host of other topics. But Fitzgerald became embroiled in issues surrounding the administration of Sierra Leone, and *The African Times* became controversial as it attacked a number of important African and British leaders. Similarly, administrator John Glover in Lagos began confiscating and slowing delivery of *The African Times*. In 1866, therefore, the African Aid Society disassociated itself from the paper, leaving Fitzgerald to run it alone.<sup>6</sup>

Loosed from The African Aid Society, *The African Times* after 1866 became even more closely tied to western-educated West Africans, and thus it became embroiled in affairs like the Fante Confederation schemes of 1868-1873. Although increasingly less pro-colonial, it chose as its main opponents non-British empires and big states of the interior that were increasingly Britain's opponents in conflict. The paper continued publication, although at times only intermittently, up to December 1902.

Nor were these the only threats for the amorphous merchant-professional class. *The African Times*, edited by the Liberian expatriate Ferdinand Fitzgerald and sympathetic throughout to the Confederation, in a 23 July 1868 editorial argued that the Dutch administration had always been hostile to the development of civilization, "no missionary is permitted to live amongst them, nor are there any schools worth noticing" in the Dutch possessions.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Jones-Quartey, K.A.B., *History Politics, and the Early Press in Ghana: The Fictions and the Facts*, Philadelphia: Afram, 1975, 117-118.

<sup>4</sup> Fyfe, Christopher, *A History of Sierra Leone*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962, 335, 337. Testifying before the 1865 Select Committee, Churchill and the African Aid Society fought a rearguard action against those who proposed abandoning the West African colonies and settlements.

<sup>5</sup> Fyfe, Christopher, "The Sierra Leone Press in the Nineteenth Century", *Sierra Leone Studies* 8 (1957), 230.

<sup>6</sup> Omu, Fred I.A., "The Dilemma of Press Freedom in Colonial Africa: The West African Example", *The Journal of African History*, 9 (1968), 279-298. 288. Also Fyfe, *A History of Sierra Leone*, 342.

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