

## How far did Victorian intellectuals believe they could 'civilise' non-Europeans?

The legacy of slavery cast a long shadow over the European perceptions of the qualities and lack thereof displayed in black Africans. These perceptions had of course long existed without any need for official comment, but increasingly they came to inhabit political actions as well. Thus when the Italians had rebelled against their Austrian colonial ruler they were cheered by British observers, yet when slaves attempted the same in St Domingo in 1802 the assembled white world looked on with horror, and even in 1866, the Jamaican uprising of that year was met with the comment that 'The African is everywhere useful as a slave, but when freed becomes a useless intriguer, imbued with a deadly hatred to the white man who had generously declared him free.'<sup>1</sup> It proved useful to white writers to continue the traditional stereotypes of black people as being lazy and bestial. Thomas Carlyle in his *Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question* in 1849 added a dig by saying 'If Quashee will not honestly aid in bringing out these sugars, cinnamons and nobler products of the West Indian islands *for the benefit of all mankind*, then I say neither will the Powers permit Quashee to continue growing pumpkins there for his own lazy benefit.'<sup>2</sup> Likewise it also sold more copy at home to continue peddling stereotypes regarding Indians. Even as late as 1892, a correspondent of the Fabian Graham Wallas felt obliged to say 'The real fact is, that these men are a different species of animals to ourselves - their physical and mental constitution are extraordinarily different... their physical constitution is feeble and weedy and often disgustingly sensual. Their character is fawning and grovelling to superiors, bullying to inferiors, mean and deceptive to equals. Their general level of character does not show as much reason as ordinary European children and is much more full of spite and meanness.'<sup>3</sup>

However, these hoary old generalisations came less and less to satisfy the mid-Victorian desire for precision and scientific truth. Consequently new scientific methods were devised to offer proofs of the inherent generalisations which most white men accepted anyway. One of these was the techniques of Craniometry and phrenology first announced by Anders Retzius of Stockholm in 1840 - which seemed to be able to use statistics to measure the relative qualities of men, even though its own inventors pleaded against it being used on large groups of people.<sup>4</sup> In the end it was not - since when measuring relative brain sizes of Negroes and whites only 20 skulls were used from which to draw conclusions. George Combe in 1849 developed the first scientific 'proof' of racial differences, when he extrapolated from Negro skulls that 'The organs of Philoprogenitiveness and Concentrativeness are largely developed; the former of which produces love of children and the latter that concentration of mind which is favourable to settled and sedentary employments. The organs of Veneration and Hope are also considerable in size. The greatest deficiencies lie in Conscientiousness, Ideality and Reflection.' Without bothering to specify his method of locating 'the organ of Veneration' he managed to come up with a description of the Negro which fitted perfectly the traditional concept of Negro character.<sup>5</sup> Likewise Dunn described how 'the receding forehead and projecting jaws of the Negro speak a language which cannot be mistaken... for whenever and wherever ignorance and brutality, destitution and squalor have for a long time existed, this prognathous type invariably prevails. By contrast the Saxon broad forehead, upright jaws and symmetrical features clearly indicate the harmonious development of the whole brain, and a special fullness in the intellectual and moral

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<sup>1</sup> Bolt *Victorian Attitudes to Race* p.124

<sup>2</sup> Rich: *Race and Empire in British Politics* p.12

<sup>3</sup> Rich: *Race and Empire in British Politics* p.27

<sup>4</sup> Currin *The Image of Africa* p.366

<sup>5</sup> Currin *The Image of Africa* p.367

regions.<sup>6</sup> When Francis Galton - the founder of eugenics measured 9,000 people at the 1884 International Health Exhibition, and chaired the 1887 Anthropological Conference on Native Races in British Possessions, it appeared that anthropometry had gained a measure of intellectual credibility., which even as late as 1900 could still prompt the comment on the work-rate of blacks that 'in anything which depends only on muscle they excel the average European; but in anything requiring judgement they are easily beaten. The nervous system is not very sensitive, and the appreciation of pain is dull. Operations can be conducted without anaesthetic.'<sup>7</sup>

At the same time as denigrating the non-European, craniology appeared to confirm the natural prejudices of most European onlookers - namely that they belonged to a superior race, as well as a superior country in Europe. As Dicey said in 1897 'The enforcement of Pax Britannica throughout the British Empire and the maintenance of civilised order throughout the length and breadth of the United States... is the main service which the Anglo-Saxon race renders to civilisation.'<sup>8</sup> George Boxall went as far as to say in 1902 'The sole object of the English system of education seems to be to subordinate the Anglo-Saxon intellect to the Greek and Latin, to cramp the mind of the superior race down to the level of the inferior race.'<sup>9</sup> Yet this perceived hierarchy illustrated well the curious dualism in European thought which on the one hand castigated the 'savages' for their lack of Westernised civilisation and on the other regarded them as helpless and passive without the tender care of the missionary. Certainly this brimming self-confidence was shared by the missionary orders, who saw it as their duty to spread the superiority of their civilisation. The *Church Missionary Intelligencer* mentioned in 1850 that 'England's high position amidst the nations of the earth is a providential dispensation. Her vast colonies, her extended influence her universal commerce afford astonishing facilities for the wider dissemination of Gospel truth.'<sup>10</sup> The *New York Herald* declared that 'The work of England for Africa must henceforth begin in earnest where Livingstone left off.'<sup>11</sup>

Unfortunately what this certainty did not answer was what to do about the lack of civilisation in parts of the world where Britain had not only reached but was trading freely with. In a post-abolition world, rigid hierarchies were clearly unacceptable to the moral and religious civilisation which Britain wished to share with the world. The *Review of Reviews* said in 1900 that 'It may be right on the principle of the Golden Rule to subject our black brother to Mr Carlyle's beneficent whip, but nevertheless it cannot be right to shoot him wholesale or hand him retail if he refuses to abandon practices disturbing whitemen.'<sup>12</sup> Nor was it acceptable to religious and missionary opinion to exploit blacks even if still heathen - the growing scandal in liberal circles over Léopold's treatment of the Congo proved a case in point. Morel commented that 'The presence of a lawless, marauding soldiery ever increasing in numbers and only held in nominal discipline by the conferring of full freedom to loot and rape, is a menace.'<sup>13</sup>

One potentially beneficial method, which was becoming more popular in the early part of the nineteenth century, was the idea of inter-marriage improving the inferior race, while using techniques of cross-breeding to emphasise desirable traits in the manner of the Agricultural Revolution. As Bryce also added, 'the English race becomes so enfeebled in the second generation without respite under the Indian sun that it would probably die out, at least in the

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<sup>6</sup> Bolt *Victorian Attitudes to Race* p.16

<sup>7</sup> Rich: *Race and Empire in British Politics* p.19

<sup>8</sup> Rich: *Race and Empire in British Politics* p.13

<sup>9</sup> Rich: *Race and Empire in British Politics* p.25

<sup>10</sup> Bolt *Victorian Attitudes to Race* p.111

<sup>11</sup> Oliver *The Missionary Factor in East Africa* p.35

<sup>12</sup> Rich: *Race and Empire in British Politics* p.33

<sup>13</sup> Rich: *Race and Empire in British Politics* p.36

plains, in the third or fourth.<sup>14</sup> The answer according to Anthony Trollope was to create a new race for the West Indies 'fitted by nature for their burning sun, in whose blood shall be mixed some portion of Northern energy, and which shall owe its physical prowess to African progenitors - a race that shall be no more ashamed of the name of Negro than we are of the same of Saxon?'<sup>15</sup> Samuel Oliver fifty years later surveyed the results of an integrationist racial policy when he said 'A community of white or black alone is in far greater danger of remaining, so far as the unofficial classes are concerned, a community of employers and serfs, with at best, a bureaucracy to keep the peace between them. The graded mixed class in Jamaica helps to make and organic whole of the community and saves it from this distinct cleavage.'<sup>16</sup> However, Trollope and Oliver were distinctly in the minority, since for many others, inter-marriage would either produced barren children or debase both parties. The early anthropologist Crawford said 'In a society consisting of these discordant elements, no substantial equality is possible; since, whether in a free or servile condition, the inferior race would be certain to be viewed by the superior as a degraded class, with whom it is impossible to amalgamate'<sup>17</sup> In France, Alfréd Fouillée wrote that 'Unite a Bushman and a European woman and the struggle of antagonistic elements, instead of existing among diverse individuals, will be transported to the character of the one and same individual. You would have a personality divided against itself, incoherent.'<sup>18</sup> Certainly, half-caste communities suffered great public indignity, bearing the brunt of race riots in 1919 in Cardiff, Liverpool, Stepney and South Shields.

The flip-side to inter-marriage was legal segregation on the model of the Jim Crow system in the south of the USA and also apartheid in South Africa. In America, the justification for Jim Crow was in the words of William Archer (1910) because 'one in every four is physically indistinguishable from the African savage.'<sup>19</sup> In France Gustave Le Bon wrote that 'each people possess a constitution as fixed as its anatomical characteristics. Since these are hereditary, one 'must consider as dangerous chimeras all our ideas of assimilating or Frenchifying any inferior people. Leave to the natives their comes, their institutions, their laws.'<sup>20</sup> In Britain segregation was even encouraged as a reward for the service of blacks in the First World War. The Chairman of the Edinburgh committee of the Native Labour Contingent said that the 'loyalty' exhibited by the Africans necessitated 'public opinion' 'seeing to it that everything possible is done to safeguard the natives from the dangers of Europe.'<sup>21</sup> Clearly here is the previously-held stereotype of the passive and helpless Negro reliant on European godliness for his salvation - though admitting also the pervasiveness of popular racism in impeding blacks' prospects of gaining meaningful employment in Britain itself.

However, the greatest stimulus to the debate and agenda of race politics, was the profound intellectual controversy following on from Darwin's *Origin of the Species* in 1859, which led to many people viewing different human races in the same way as the species of animals naturally competing according to Darwin's theory. It was not hard for scientists of the developing school of sociology to construct Darwinist models of race relations. As Bryce saw, 'for more than half of the tribes or peoples that existed when authentic history begins would seem to have vanished.' Yet race was only a secondary trauma afflicting mid-Victorian certainty to the cataclysmic suggestion that mankind in its entirety may have been descended from animals. As Harriet Martineau suggested in her introduction of Comte, 'We find ourselves suddenly living and

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<sup>14</sup> Rich: *Race and Empire in British Politics* p.22

<sup>15</sup> Rich: *Race and Empire in British Politics* p.52

<sup>16</sup> Rich: *Race and Empire in British Politics* p.73

<sup>17</sup> Bolt *Victorian Attitudes to Race* p.23

<sup>18</sup> Betts *Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory 1890-1914* p.64

<sup>19</sup> Rich: *Race and Empire in British Politics* p.53

<sup>20</sup> Betts *Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory 1890-1914* p.68

<sup>21</sup> Rich: *Race and Empire in British Politics* p.40

moving in the midst of the universe - as a part of it, and not as its aim and object.<sup>22</sup> Prehistoric discoveries seemed to confirm this, since the discoveries of Neanderthal men altered the way in which Men saw themselves; and incidentally bolstered developmentalists' claims that the ancestors of civilised men had been as primitive as those in Borneo and Africa. The outlook of sociologists therefore was one which emphasised the progressive nature of evolution in creating more and more refined versions of creatures. Yet since archaeology showed that prehistoric Europeans were similar to those labelled at the present day as savages, thus it became clear that the latter had simply advanced to a lesser extent down the same road. Admittedly the quality of science on the major archaeological findings was less than perfect, and in the words of Burrow were based 'not on archaeological evidence but of comparative study of modern primitive peoples, the arrangement of these existing economies and societies into an evolutionary sequence; and the projection of this hypothetical sequence into the historic past.'<sup>23</sup> The clear result however was to bolster Europeans in the idea that their civilisation had been proved superior by evolution, and yet was transmissible even if inter-marriage on a physical level would not work. Clearly this left room for missionaries to make attempts, and in the *Anthropological Review* of 1866, Hunt said 'Religion and philosophies are not accidents but the normal product, the necessary consequence of antecedent conditions.'<sup>24</sup> However, the Anthropological Society had a reputation for godlessness, due to its absolute insistence that Biblical authority was invalid as a means of furthering their discussions, and missionary-baiting was common. Winwood Reade suggested 'the absolute futility of Christian missions among the savages' since according to his theory the Negro in general 'had no religion, and no concepts of mercy, pity, fatherly love or conjugal affection.'<sup>25</sup> Burton and Reade suggested that Islam won more converts than Christianity by accepting and restraining native African morals rather than attempting to eradicate them entirely as was the manner of the missionaries.

However, for both missionaries and anthropologists alike, this defence became less acceptable if under evolutionary theory, African morals were innately primitive. Ironically, this was precisely the same form of argument applied by some to the Irish. The *Edinburgh Review* wrote in 1868 that 'The Anglo-Saxon is everywhere the more successful pioneers and backwoodsman. The Irish are certainly not to be found among the hunters and squatters who prepare the forests for the husbandmen of more settled civilised habits.' Yet Anglo-Saxon racial supremacy was assured 'for though they may not break down Celtic individuality, they will control and modify its tendencies.'<sup>26</sup> French thinkers thought along similar lines, as in the words of Edmond Ferry in 1905, the French role in the evolutionary struggle was to aid the native 'in this long and difficult climb toward the good and the beautiful.'<sup>27</sup> The control and discipline of native societies and eradication of barbarous morals was therefore at least as important for many Protestant missionaries as the actual event of conversion itself. Even pious explorers such as David Livingstone called 'the actual amount of conversions the direct result of Missions, and the wise diffusion of better principles the indirect. I have no hesitation in saying that the latter are of infinitely more importance than the former. I do not undervalue the importance of the conversion of the most abject creature that breathes; it is of overwhelming worth to him personally, but viewing our work of wide sowing of the good seed relatively to the harvest which will be reaped when all our heads are low, there can I think be no comparison...'<sup>28</sup> Sir Bartle Frere in 1874 defended his priorities by noting that the earliest records of missions to the

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<sup>22</sup> Burrow *Evolution and Society* p.106

<sup>23</sup> Burrow *Evolution and Society* p.117

<sup>24</sup> Burrow *Evolution and Society* p.129

<sup>25</sup> Bolt *Victorian Attitudes to Race* p.7

<sup>26</sup> Rich: *Race and Empire in British Politics* p.15

<sup>27</sup> Betts *Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory 1890-1914* p.83

<sup>28</sup> Oliver *The Missionary Factor in East Africa* p.10

barbarians of northern Europe corresponded to 'a fully organised Christian community' and was concerned with teaching not only religious dogma and morals but 'all the arts of civilised life.'<sup>29</sup> The aim of many Christian settlements, cut off from the rest of the native community, was realised in the production of a disciplined workforce - as Bishop Steere put it 'One method of mission work is to take the natives into tutelage, to make them live by order and work when and as they are bidden. This produced fine plantations, good cultivation, well-kept houses and a most respectful demeanour.' However, since its residents had no ties with the outside world, they only produced a small impact on the religion of the surrounding area - especially since residents who lacked all the family and social ties were regarded by other Africans as more foreign than the Europeans.<sup>30</sup> WL James praised the Christian Mission at Sanheit in the Sudan, but pointed out that its converts were virtually unemployable since they were outcasts from their own people and shunned by Muslims.<sup>31</sup>

Missionaries enjoyed a tortured relationship with their own governments. British expansion in East Africa was traditionally based on maintaining the Sultan of Zanzibar, yet the missionaries saw Arab culture as the root of all the influences they were trying to oppose. The British resident Kirk had to warn Dr Southon in 1880 'The value of British-Indian capital that is now employed in the hand of Arabs is immense. It will be for you to consider how far it is possible for you to maintain the mission with Mirambo; but ...before deciding to do so, you should fully consider the dangers that may arise in the course of a native war in which the sympathy and support of the civilised world will be against Mirambo and his allies.'<sup>32</sup> On the other hand, government often used the missionaries to exert influence over small tribal leaders. As Cardinal Lavignerie wrote regarding Tunisia 'I thought it advantageous to France to be represented in these vast and still mysterious regions not only by isolated pioneers, but by a body which could give the support and patience to its scientific and civilising mission, which would make it more powerful.'<sup>33</sup> Such was his success that even Gambetta was forced to say 'L'anticlérisme, Monseigneur, c'est pour la France, mais ce n'est pas article d'exportation.'<sup>34</sup> In other circumstances, however, missionaries from time to time implicated their governments in African squabbles by flying the national flag or declaring themselves to be representatives of the Queen. Some missionaries even managed to use cultural means to promote the efforts of European traders, as Livingstone said 'Britain ought to encourage the Africans to cultivate for our markets, as the most effectual means, next to the Gospel, of their elevation.'<sup>35</sup> Missionaries had a wider cultural impact in providing Western and thus new education in a continent whose social structures were being shaken by the arrival of powerful outside interests. There emerged a growing African and Indian demand for their sons to be educated in 'the mother country', leading to a Westernised élite - the old class of African merchants and traders had been destroyed, and Western education was needed in a competitive society. Yet this experience was profoundly demoralising to many newly-converted black Africans, found themselves mocked and ostracised while in Britain, and therefore many returned home embittered and alienated after tasting European racism.

The institutionalisation of European racist thought based on Darwinian principles, lasted only a short time. The discrediting of 'scientific proofs' followed very quickly after their announcement. The assumptions lying underneath the science were quickly revealed - and with it the anthropometric and philological bases for racist thought. AH Sayce declared that 'language is no

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<sup>29</sup> Oliver *The Missionary Factor in East Africa* p.23

<sup>30</sup> Oliver *The Missionary Factor in East Africa* p.64

<sup>31</sup> Bolt *Victorian Attitudes to Race* p.117

<sup>32</sup> Oliver *The Missionary Factor in East Africa* p.86

<sup>33</sup> Oliver *The Missionary Factor in East Africa* p.46

<sup>34</sup> Oliver *The Missionary Factor in East Africa* p.46

<sup>35</sup> Bolt *Victorian Attitudes to Race* p.129

test of race, only of social contact. The spirit of vanity has invaded the science of language itself. We have come to think that not only is the race to which we belong superior to all others, but that the languages we speak are equally superior.<sup>36</sup> Robertson commented on Chamberlain's *Foundations of the Nineteenth Century* (1911) - 'his biology is a mere rod wherewith to beat the undesirable dog and herald the favourite.' Prof Flower moaned in 1881 that 'The study of race is at a low ebb indeed when we hear the same contemptuous epithet of 'nigger' applied indiscriminately by the Englishman abroad to the blacks of the West Coast of Africa, the Kaffirs of Natal, the Lascars of Bombay, the Hindoos of Calcutta, the aborigines of Australia and even the Maoris of New Zealand!'<sup>37</sup> The killer blow to the credibility of anthropometry came however when it was proved in 1928 that 'the differences between the size of the brain of Negroes and that of white people are... no greater and sometimes even smaller than the differences between white men and white women, between educated and uneducated.'<sup>38</sup> Further to this, the myth of Anglo-Saxon racial superiority was exploded by the Rowntree and Webb reports on social deprivation, and the parlous state of British military potential for the Boer War. Even earlier than that, Froude in 1886 doubted whether the grandchildren of those who migrated to the cities could be anything other than 'sickly, poor and stunted wretches whom not school teaching, however excellent, could save from physical decrepitude.' The solution to this, as he believed, was the overseas colonies, where the English race 'could for ages renew its mighty youth, bring forth as many millions as it would, and would still have means to breed and rear them strong as the best which she has produced in her early prime.'<sup>39</sup> Yet it remained the case according to Hobson in his *Imperialism* that 'In the last resort, war is determined neither by generalship nor superiority of weapons, but by those element of brute endurance which are incompatible with the life of industrial towns.'<sup>40</sup> The dangers inherent in anthropometry were pointed out by the French sociologist Vacher de Lapouge who argued presciently in 1903 that 'I am conscious that men will slaughter each other by the million in the coming century for the sake of slight differences in skull measurements.'<sup>41</sup> Yet although these techniques had been discredited in Britain, in France and more so in Nazi Germany they had been anything but discredited, with tragic consequences in the twentieth century.

The destruction of the science underlying racial superiority therefore opened the question again of if and when black colonies would gain full-self-government. The British Raj had been justified in the nineteenth century since 'no other sort of government would suit a vast population of different races and tongues, divided by religious animosities of Hindus and Musulmans, and with no sort of experience of self-government on a scale larger than a Village Council.'<sup>42</sup> Yet according to the *Round Table Journal* of 1912 it is highly fallacious to compare British rule in India to that of Africa, for India 'is full of highly-educated, thoughtful and competent people... It has numberless country gentlemen exactly like the country gentlemen of England.'<sup>43</sup> Philip Kerr proposed that India be granted representation in a federal imperial parliament, saying 'If we manage to create in India a self-governing, responsible dominion, and if India, when it is responsible and self-governing, elects to remain within the British Empire, we shall have solved the greatest difficulty which presents itself in the world today.'<sup>44</sup> This laissez-faire policy, in marked contrast to the more integrated policy continued by the Francophonie, set a pattern which as it continued into the twentieth century saw British colonies opt for full independence

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<sup>36</sup> Bolt *Victorian Attitudes to Race* p.11

<sup>37</sup> Bolt *Victorian Attitudes to Race* p.5

<sup>38</sup> Rich: *Race and Empire in British Politics* p.98

<sup>39</sup> Rich: *Race and Empire in British Politics* p.15

<sup>40</sup> Rich: *Race and Empire in British Politics* p.34

<sup>41</sup> Rich: *Race and Empire in British Politics* p.98

<sup>42</sup> Rich: *Race and Empire in British Politics* p.22

<sup>43</sup> Rich: *Race and Empire in British Politics* p.59

<sup>44</sup> Rich: *Race and Empire in British Politics* p.59

while French Africa instead sent delegates to the French National Assembly, and in the cases of Félix Houphoët-Boigny and Léopold Sédar Senghor even ministers in the French government.

From the African perspective, the second generation of missionary activity was a great deal better adapted to their needs and desires than the mission-states relying on uprooted Africans. Some African states were sizeable and reasonably powerful, such as Mutesa's Buganda, which by 1880 contained 2-3m people and required the missionaries to attend Mutesa's court rather than be allowed jurisdiction in his lands. Even had the missionaries succeeded in maintaining their isolated mission-posts in Africa, as Norman Leys pointed out the problems in 1924 by saying 'Advocates of the segregation policy seem to be agreed on only one point. They would keep all Africans strictly under authority. Unfortunately... Christians of the second generation in Africa are always restive under any authority, civil or ecclesiastic, in which they have no share in controlling.'<sup>45</sup> Indeed African chiefs did attempt to take control of the new faith and use it to extend their own authority - Kgama of Tswana refused the Jesuits permission to found a station in 1879 saying 'they will cause division among my subjects.' and expelled an LMS missionary in 1890, saying 'Now the Church is mine. Let all discussion end.'<sup>46</sup> However, despite these protestations of traditional authority, the real causes of success for the Christian missionaries was due to the weakness of traditional social structures to compete with the intrusions of White traders and soldiers who possessed superior economic and military power. Thus missionaries had not so much to drive out old gods, who were already doomed, as to temper, by religious and industrial education, a social and economic revolution pressing in from outside - Africans wished to learn the secrets of these clearly more assertive and powerful outside peoples. The clamours for mass-baptism underline this motivation since hardly any would have passed the rigorous tests of literacy and dogma which missionaries required for individual conversions. Indeed it could be argued that it was by no means the responsibility of white missionaries that Christianity spread across Africa. 'The scale and rapidity of African responses to Christianity succeeded in reducing the personal influence and impact of Whites to an acceptable minimum. Many African Christians had but the briefest of exposures to a White missionary.'<sup>47</sup>

Whatever their direct impact, missionaries most successful at the time when Africans were beginning to adapt to the new economics - yet immediately on acquiring education and qualifications, Africans found themselves up against the barriers of race and class. 'The Gospel might proclaim that God was no respecter of persons, but His European servants were deeply conscious of race and class differentials.'<sup>48</sup> This was especially acute in Britain, where migrating African Christians suffered ostracism and direct violence in for example the riots against coloured seamen in 1919. In France where official policy remained to grant *ex officio* French citizenship to their colonies, continue Frenchification beyond the bounds of mere Christianity, and most importantly to subsidise colonial development with taxpayer's money, it remained possible to maintain African goodwill. The hands-off approach advocated by Britain encouraged the disaffected African élite to push for self-government and independence from a power whose interest appeared solely in economic exploitation.

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<sup>45</sup> Rich: *Race and Empire in British Politics* p.75

<sup>46</sup> Gray *Black Christians and White Missionaries* p.61

<sup>47</sup> Gray *Black Christians and White Missionaries* p.65

<sup>48</sup> Gray *Black Christians and White Missionaries* p.64