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C.C. Spaulding & R.R. Wright – Companions on the Road Less Traveled?
A Reconsideration of African American International Relations in the Early
Twentieth Century

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A Thesis presented to the Graduate Faculty
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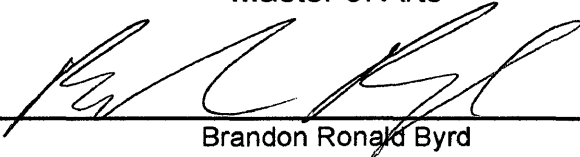
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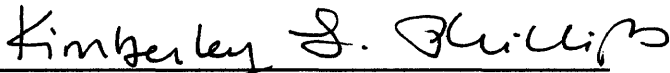
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ABSTRACT PAGE

In April 1937, Charles Clinton Spaulding and Richard Robert Wright, Sr. embarked on a voyage to Haiti. Their trip coincided with the emergence of a new emphasis on Pan-African bonds by African-Americans. This intellectual trend, described as black internationalism, was a primarily anticolonial reaction to the independence struggles permeating the African continent. While Spaulding and Wright were affected by these intellectual currents their internationalist venture stands out for its incongruence with the actions and ideals of their more liberal peers. Specifically, both men had longstanding roots in an accommodationist international milieu. Their diasporic worldviews focused on the role of middle-class African-Americans in the economic and religious aspects of the global black world. Consequently, as many of their peers stressed an activist agenda in Africa, Spaulding and Wright solidified economic, social, and political bonds between elite African-Americans and Haitians. Their efforts, and the pronounced impact they had on black America and Haiti, necessitate a reconsideration of black internationalism in this era and the nature of African-American and Haitian relations.

On April 1, 1937 Charles Clinton Spaulding, renowned president of the North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company, proud race leader, and faithful disciple of Booker T. Washington, boarded the Steamship Columbia and embarked on a twenty-nine day journey to the Republic of Haiti.¹ Other prominent African American leaders sailed with him, including W.H.C. Brown, an attorney from Newport News, Virginia; Abraham Lincoln Lewis, the retired president of the Afro-American Insurance Company in Jacksonville, Florida; Samuel Decatur McGill, an attorney from Jacksonville; Elder Lightfoot Michaux, a nationally-syndicated radio evangelist from Washington, D.C.; and Major Richard Robert Wright, Sr., a Philadelphia banker, educator, and the organizer of the delegation.² They left the New York port for their long-awaited trip to the Western Hemisphere's only nation governed by peoples of African descent.

Spaulding, Wright and the other delegates traveled south around Cape Hatteras, along a route followed by tourists eager to experience an exotic and luxurious vacation in the tropics. When Spaulding and his associates arrived in Port-Au-Prince, they saw much more than an idyllic tourist's destination. From the outset of his trip, Spaulding envisioned the beginnings of a great construction project that would create better understanding and mutually beneficial opportunities for African Americans and Haitians. In his ethnocentric vision, this "highway" stretched from the underdeveloped black republic to the cultural and economic centers of the African American world.³

This thesis follows the journey to Haiti, placing the actions and ideals of Spaulding and Wright in a broader context of African American international outlooks of their era. Their time in Haiti is central but this thesis also scrutinizes the decades preceding and the years following the trip to establish the foundations and ramifications of Spaulding and Wright's Haitian agenda. Primary source material including pamphlets, books, oral histories, speeches, letters, and advertisements

¹ Charles Clinton Spaulding, "A Trip to the Republic of Haiti," *Carolina Times*, May 14, 1937; Business Group Going to Haiti," *Capital Plaindealer*, February 21, 1937.

² "American Delegation Photographed in Haiti," *Carolina Times*, May 8, 1937.

³ Spaulding, "A Trip to the Republic of Haiti."

help recover Spaulding and Wright's voices. Duke University's C.C. Spaulding Papers and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's William Jesse Kennedy Papers and Southern Historical Collection provide the basis for the discussion of Spaulding. Sources from Temple University's Charles S. Blockson Collection and Walter C. Beckett Papers supply the foundation for the thesis' examination of Wright's role in this transnational history. Numerous African American and some white newspapers from the period complement these sources. The *Carolina Times*, *Pittsburgh Courier*, *Baltimore Afro-American*, *New York Amsterdam News*, *Washington Post* and others show the prevalence of American interest in Haiti, demonstrate popular African American thoughts on international relations, and present coverage of Spaulding and Wright's international careers that is missing from the archival collections.

A diverse body of secondary works frames these primary sources in the context of early twentieth-century black America, during a moment of increasing African American discourse on international issues. Walter B. Weare and Jerry Gershenhorn offer insights into Spaulding's background, domestic leadership, and the worldview of African American leaders raised in the late nineteenth century.⁴ David Henry Anthony's *Max Yergan: Race Man, Internationalist, Cold Warrior* informs the discussion of early-twentieth century African American values while showing how traditional, conservative ideals changed and were reshaped in an international context. Penny Von Eschen's *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* and Brent Hayes Edwards' *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* explicate the new, radical views championed by African American leaders in the 1930s and demonstrate how these views were expressed. In *Haiti and the United States: The*

⁴ Weare's main contributions are in *Black Business in the New South: A Social History of the North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973) and "Charles Clinton Spaulding: Middle-Class Leadership in the Age of Segregation," in *Black Leaders of the Twentieth Century*, eds. John Hope Franklin and August Meier (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 167-190. Gershenhorn chronicles a pivotal stage in Spaulding's life in "Hocutt v. Wilson and Race Relations in Durham, North Carolina during the 1930s," *The North Carolina Historical Review* 78, no. 3 (2001): 275-308.

Psychological Moment, Brenda Gayle Plummer shows how black intellectual trends affected relations between the United States, African Americans, and Haiti.⁵

The primary sources and secondary literature confirm that African Americans considered several different ways of interacting with foreign blacks during the early twentieth century. As shown in the secondary literature, African American leaders advocated for global black independence and self-determination during a period of increasing civil rights discourse in the United States. Spaulding and Wright took a different course of action. They advocated for foreign intervention in Haiti and placed African American culture and capitalist projects at the center of their international worldview. These African American businessmen commanded a wide audience and found support for their transnational project among African Americans, particularly the black press. Spaulding and Wright's interactions with Haitians show their differentiation from black internationalists of the era. Yet they also illustrate the promise and disenchantment, success and failure that distinguished the varied attempts to link black people across the globe.

The 1937 voyage to Haiti began with abundant optimism, an ambitious agenda, and a pronouncement of cultural objectivity. Spaulding stressed that the delegates began this undertaking with "open minds and unselfish ambitions" but their endeavor was ultimately biased and not entirely altruistic.⁶ Spaulding and Wright wanted to promote American importation of Haitian coffee, develop the tourist industry on the island, and impart African American religious values to Haitians. The construction of their "highway" required cooperation between African American leaders and Haitian government officials, religious representatives, and coffee exporters. Neither Spaulding nor Wright considered the Haitian masses as the principal agents in this African American-dominated scheme. Unlike their black internationalist contemporaries also involved with Haitian affairs, which included Langston Hughes, Rayford Logan, and W.E.B. Du Bois, Spaulding and the others on

⁵ Plummer also notes the impact of anticolonial, antiracist African American thought in Haiti in her article "The Afro-American Response to the Occupation of Haiti," *Phylon* 43, no. 2 (1982): 125-143.

⁶ *Ibid.*

his fact-finding mission did not endorse anticolonial activism. They also failed to address the exploitation of Haitian peasants and the role of Haitian elites in maintaining a rigid social hierarchy. Opportunism born out of their business interests was the principal cause of Spaulding and Wright's agenda. Their conceptualization of race relations in the United States and their belief in the middle-class African American doctrine of racial uplift also helped produce an accommodationist worldview touted by the black press. Spaulding and Wright thought the U.S. racial hierarchy placed all blacks in a marginalized position and that African American leaders were responsible for directing the salvation of their brethren. Spaulding and Wright assumed that elite Haitians had developed a similar view as they encountered various forms of white supremacy. While Spaulding and Wright believed that their actions and ideals were integral to the ascension of all Haitians, their racial chauvinism and class bias shaped a limited elitist and accommodationist model for black international relations that stood in stark contrast to more progressive critiques of Haitian society.

Spaulding and Wright's shared international agenda gradually took shape during their separate paths to prominence in black America. In 1894, at the age of twenty, Spaulding left his family's rural farm in Whiteville, North Carolina and traveled to Durham. He soon allied with John Merrick and his uncle, Dr. Aaron McDuffie Moore, who formed the vanguard of the city's African American leadership class and established the North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company.⁷ In a relatively short period of time, it grew into one of America's largest and most successful African American owned and operated businesses. Approximately one decade after beginning operations, the Mutual had nearly 500 employees, a premium income of about \$250,000, assets of roughly \$120,000, and over

⁷ The North Carolina Mutual and Provident Association (given its current name in 1919) was actually founded in 1898 by Merrick, Moore, and five other African American community leaders. After a period of initial losses Merrick and Moore were left alone as their colleagues abandoned the fledgling enterprise. This precipitated Spaulding's rise from part-time agent to general manager when the three men reorganized the company in 1900. Walter B. Weare, *Black Business*, 4, 29, 48-49.

\$2,000,000 of insurance in force. Such figures paled in comparison to those of white companies such as John Hancock and New York Life but they placed the Mutual among the most profitable black insurance companies along with Atlanta Life, Standard Life, and National Benefit Life.⁸ The Mutual's success afforded Spaulding a healthy monthly salary of \$500 and also ensured that Spaulding and his colleagues' economic influence would extend to the social and cultural sectors of black Durham.⁹

Spaulding, Merrick, and Moore used their economic and social position to further a middle-class agenda of racial uplift — essentially a reaction to pervasive white racism. This ideology's devotees emphasized self-sufficiency, race unity, moral betterment, and economic practicality within the African American community. Racial uplift was most evident in the leadership program of Booker T. Washington and corresponded with accommodation because its adherents did not emphasize equal political rights or "social equality".¹⁰ Devotion to the accommodation of segregation often entailed the creation of social institutions. Spaulding, Merrick, and Moore helped found Lincoln Hospital and the Durham Colored Library and financially supported the North Carolina's Colored Orphan Asylum.¹¹ These business and philanthropic endeavors catered exclusively to a black clientele and promised racial advancement through physical and moral improvement. The orphanage, for example, began with a mission to rescue destitute blacks from "the gutters of vice and misery." Throughout the early twentieth century, Spaulding and the other directors and trustees worked to carry out this

⁸ Weare, *Black Business*, 91-92, 103.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 92.

¹⁰ For further discussion of accommodation as an African American political philosophy see Robert J. Norrell, *Up From History: The Life of Booker T. Washington* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009)

¹¹ Weare, *Black Business*, 53, 129; R. McCants Andrews, *John Merrick: A Biographical Sketch* (Durham: Seeman Printery, 1920), 46-50, 60-62; *Annual Report of the Colored Orphan Asylum Located at Oxford, North Carolina From December 1, 1908, to December 1, 1909* (Oxford, N.C.: Orphanage Print, 1910).

middle-class racial burden and prevent black children from becoming “a dark blot on civilization and Christianity.”¹²

Spaulding and his colleagues also ensured that racial uplift was embraced in Durham by assuming leadership roles in religious organizations. In the twentieth century’s first years, Spaulding and Moore joined and gained influence in the White Rock Baptist Church, the spiritual home of the city’s black bourgeoisie. Moore was a member of the board of trustees, chairman of the board of deacons, and superintendent of the Sunday school. Spaulding also served on the board of trustees and, in the estimation of one African American journalist, lent his “international reputation” to the White Rock’s “inspiring” Sunday school.¹³ Biographer Walter B. Weare stresses that Spaulding was a devout Baptist and the recollections of Spaulding’s contemporaries support this opinion.¹⁴ One Mutual employee remembered him as a committed churchgoer and a “mainstay” of the White Rock.¹⁵ Conrad Odell Pearson, an African American lawyer who described the White Rock’s pastor Miles Mark Fisher as one of his best clients, added that “the Mutual controlled White Rock from the days of Aaron Moore right on up through Spaulding.”¹⁶ Spaulding and other Mutual leaders used this influence to support their other social

¹² *Colored Orphan Asylum of North Carolina, Oxford, N.C.* (Oxford, N.C.: Public Ledger Print, 1900), 3. By 1908, if not earlier, Spaulding contributed to the asylum. As its most influential trustee in the 1930s he still harkened back to the founders’ original intentions. He solicited African American support for the asylum by stressing a shared racial responsibility and claiming “that the moral and spiritual growth of a race is largely dependent on the investment made in Youth.” *My Future Depends On You! The Colored Orphanage of North Carolina* (Oxford, N.C.: The Orphanage, 1939), 6.

¹³ Weare, *Black Business*, 54; George King, “Mission of the Sunday School,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, September 14, 1912. Spaulding eventually became chairman of the White Rock’s board of trustees in addition to holding various other administrative positions. “Saga of an American,” *Whetstone* 26, no. 1 (1949): Foreword; Weare, *Black Business*, 188.

¹⁴ Weare, *Black Business*, 184.

¹⁵ Viola Turner, interview by Walter B. Weare, *Southern Oral History Program Collection*, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, April 17, 1979 (hereafter cited as Turner, interview).

¹⁶ Conrad Odell Pearson, interview by Walter B. Weare, *Southern Oral History Program Collection*, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, April 18, 1979.

endeavors. The Durham Colored Library started as the White Rock Sunday School Library and grew into an essential public institution with the help of the White Rock's parishioners. They allotted five dollars per month to this library that had two of their most influential peers, Spaulding and Moore, on its board of trustees.¹⁷ Spaulding was thus able to gain positions of leadership in social organizations and disseminate his uplift ideology by achieving respectability through business success. In his position of religious leadership, Spaulding also found the initial occasion to apply his economic and racial worldview to Haiti.

By the 1910s, the black missionary movement had secured a firm position on the agenda of Spaulding, Moore, and other African American Baptists in North Carolina. Moore was the president of the Baptist State Sunday School Convention for more than a decade while Spaulding was a noted attendee at its annual gatherings.¹⁸ Another member was Dr. Calvin Scott Brown, a Sunday school worker from Winston Salem and the founding president of the Lott Carey Foreign Mission Convention. Since its inception in 1895 the Lott Carey, which had branches in more than eleven states in the eastern U.S., focused its missionary work on Africa. Nearly all of the approximately \$60,000 raised during the Lott Carey's first two decades of operation went towards the establishment of chapels, mission houses, schools, and missionaries' salaries in Liberia and the Belgian Congo.¹⁹ Spaulding and Moore were supportive of the mission's focus on evangelization in Africa. According to Weare, Moore was adamant in his insistence that the White Rock contribute monthly to Liberia. A contemporary correspondent for the *Baltimore Afro-American*

¹⁷ Andrews, *John Merrick*, 60-62.

¹⁸ C.S. Brown, "Dr. A.M. Moore as a Churchman," remarks at Moore's funeral, May 2, 1923, in the Charles Clinton Spaulding Papers, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University (hereafter cited as Spaulding Papers); Speech given at the Mutual's Founders' Day Observance, October 20, 1966, in the Spaulding Papers; George Francis King, "Training Young Disciples," *Baltimore Afro-American*, August 16, 1913.

¹⁹ "Lott Carey Convention," *Baltimore Afro-American*, August 28, 1915; "Lott Carey Convention," *Baltimore Afro-American*, August 22, 1914; "Lott Carey Baptists in Annual Session," *Baltimore Afro-American*, August 31, 1912. When the Lott Carey was established, this African nation was formally known as the Congo Free State. It became the Belgian Congo in 1908 and would maintain that title until 1960.

applauded Moore's efforts to "bring better results to the missionary activities of the convention."²⁰ Spaulding was also "very active" in foreign missionary work and helped a Lott Carey promotional tour through North Carolina that succeeded in arousing "the whole state among Baptists in the interest of foreign missions."²¹

In 1915, Brown concluded that the Lott Carey's evangelization efforts needed expansion and he readily accepted the support of the Mutual leaders in this undertaking. During the Lott Carey's nineteenth annual session, Brown urged its members to send him to Haiti "to look into the feasibility of establishing mission and educational work." His appeal was successful. In early February of the following year, Brown set sail for Haiti.²² Moore, a friend he later characterized as "deeply interested in foreign missions", accompanied Brown. Moore exhibited his interest by paying his own way to Haiti in order to "inspect the field" and form his own opinion on the feasibility of "establishing work there."²³ At the next Lott Carey session, Moore and Brown recounted their observations of a society composed of an impoverished peasantry disconnected from a European-educated elite.²⁴ But the Haitian class system was not their primary concern. Instead they lamented the Haitians' Catholic and Vodou faiths and their inaccessibility to education. These factors, Moore and Brown charged, made the island's peasants "ignorant" and "superstitious." They further stressed that Protestantism and Anglo-Saxon culture "had made but little progress there." Moore's view of Haitians as backward and barbaric led him to make "strong pleas" for the extension of missionary work to Haiti.²⁵

When the convention accepted his proposal Moore became the mission's secretary of Haitian missionary work and set about using his considerable domestic influence to contribute to his international project. Beginning in 1917, the White

²⁰ Weare, *Black Business*, 54; George King, "Mission of the Sunday School," *Baltimore Afro-American*, September 14, 1912.

²¹ King, "Training Young Disciples," *Baltimore Afro-American*, August 16, 1913

²² "Lott Carey Baptists End Successful Session," *Baltimore Afro-American*, September 11, 1915; "Baptists to go to Taiti," *Baltimore Afro-American*, February 12, 1916.

²³ Brown, "Dr. A.M. Moore."

²⁴ "Baptists to Help People of Haiti," *Baltimore Afro-American*, September 2, 1916.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

Rock's Sunday school allotted \$600 annually to a missionary project in Saint-Marc, Haiti. Moore earned a reputation within the Lott Carey for his "splendid service in establishing churches and stations" by starting additional missionary projects in Saint-Michel and Jacmel.²⁶ Moore's correspondence with missionaries in Haiti contained ubiquitous references to "superstitious worship", "pagan practices", and endemic disease. Moore believed that African Americans had attained a higher level of civilization than Haitians and had a duty to eradicate these alleged forces of barbarism. The mission trained Haitians for missionary work so they could adopt African American cultural norms and disseminate them to their peers.²⁷

Spaulding responded to his uncle's expansion of the Lott Carey's missionary work by helping rally black Durham to the foreign missionary cause. He joined the Laymen's Missionary Movement, an outgrowth of the Foreign Missions Boards of the U.S. and Canada. Its interdenominational creed and insistence on the grassroots organizing of ordinary laymen allowed for a sizeable degree of local autonomy.²⁸ In 1917, Spaulding and other African American leaders in Durham organized a Durham convention of the Laymen's Missionary Movement. The convention attracted national Lott Carey leaders like Charles S. Morris but was led by Spaulding, Moore, Merrick and other members of black Durham's middle-class. Spaulding put his business acumen to use as treasurer of the convention and executive committees. He also presided over a conference session entitled "Financing the Kingdom" that made clear the practical aspects of an otherwise romantic civilizing mission.²⁹ Many

²⁶ Brown, "Dr. A.M. Moore"; Founders' Day Observance, October 20, 1966. Saint-Marc, Saint-Michel, and Jacmel were sites in which Moore was principally involved. In addition, the Lott Carey established missionaries in Port-au-Prince, Cap Haitian, Trou, and Don Don. Charles A. Walker, ed., *Baptist Year-Book* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1919), 58.

²⁷ J. Vilford Custaeux, letter to Dr. A.M. Moore, April 19, 1921, in the Spaulding Papers; Photographs of Haitian missionaries, n.d., in the Spaulding Papers.

²⁸ Samuel Billings Capen, *Laymen's Missionary Movement of the United States and Canada* (New York: Laymen's Missionary Movement, 1907).

²⁹ Programme," Laymen's Missionary Movement Durham Convention (Colored Men), December 16-19, 1917, in the Spaulding Papers. Merrick served as chairman of the executive committee while Moore was chairman of the registration sub-committee and a member of the executive committee. The convention headquarters

middle-class African Americans in Durham attended this four-day event and embraced this missionary zeal. White Rock parishioners, who believed that one could do well while also doing good, were particularly dedicated to placing the support of foreign missions on their racial uplift agenda.³⁰

While the tone of Spaulding and Moore's missionary proposals was not uncommon – their mentor, Booker T. Washington, had expressed similar ethnocentric views about Haitians – the timing of their actions made their worldview stand out because the 1915 U.S. military occupation of Haiti galvanized twentieth-century African American interest in the black republic.³¹ African American criticism of the military occupation and treaty government solidified after World War I (WWI) as accommodationist outlooks declined, civil rights organizations gained in stature, and black nationalism experienced a resurgence. African Americans placed Haitian affairs on an increasingly internationally oriented agenda.³²

Criticism of the U.S. occupation was widespread among African American intellectual, educational, and political leaders. W.E.B. Du Bois, James Weldon Johnson, Walter White and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) spearheaded anti-occupation efforts. In 1920 Johnson traveled to Haiti at the expense of Republicans who were critical of Democrat Woodrow Wilson's presidential policies.³³ Johnson produced a scathing exposé of America's foreign policy. His critique of the occupation's racist and violent features coincided

were at the Mechanics and Farmers Bank, an institution owned and operated by the Mutual leaders.

³⁰ *Ibid*; Sociologist E. Franklin Frazier best captured this communal spirit in Durham. E. Franklin Frazier, "Durham: Capital of the Black Middle Class," *The New Negro*, ed. Alain Locke (New York: Albert and Charles Boni, 1925).

³¹ Washington was a consistent critique of Haitian culture. In 1915, he justified the American occupation as a productive means of bringing industrial education to Haiti. In 1915 and preceding years, he juxtaposed Anglo-Saxon advancements with Haitian backwardness. Plummer, *Haiti and the United States*, 71,121; Léon D. Pamphile, *Haitians and African Americans: A Heritage of Tragedy and Hope* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008), 104-105.

³² Brenda Gayle Plummer, "The Afro-American Response to the Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1934," *Phylon* 43, no. 2 (1982): 126.

³³ *Ibid.*, 132, 134.

with a *New York Times* exposé on the “unlawful, indiscriminate killing” of approximately 3,250 Haitian peasants by U.S. Marines during the occupation’s first five years.³⁴ Johnson urged Republicans to condemn these murders and the Marine’s support of the *corvée*, an illegal system of forced labor akin to peonage.³⁵ In subsequent years other delegates with similar critiques included W.T.B. Williams, Dean of Tuskegee Institute. The federal government granted Williams permission to report on the state of Haitian education.³⁶ The activist NAACP and conservative Tuskegee machine, historically oppositional entities, expressed a shared concern for the treatment the black republic was receiving from a government that legally upheld racial injustice.

African American leaders also articulated pan-African distress about the damaging effect of white colonial power on black agency. Socialist and labor leader A. Philip Randolph drew a parallel between tyrannical British and American imperial power by describing Haiti as “the Ireland of America.” Black nationalist Marcus Garvey condemned the occupation as a “farce and a lie.” He used the *Negro World*, the official publication of his Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), to relay Haitian news to African Americans.³⁷ While coming from dissimilar ideological backgrounds, these leaders presented a united voice. They spoke to a growing segment of black America that viewed Haiti as part of an African Diaspora in need of redemption from white rule. The same anti-imperial sentiment that led

³⁴ Rayford Logan, “James Weldon Johnson and Haiti,” *Phylon* 32, no. 4 (1971): 399; “Reports Unlawful Killing of Haitians by our Marines,” *New York Times*, October 14, 1920. The *Times* publicized a Navy Department report that included Brigadier General George Barnett’s admission that “indiscriminate killing of natives has gone on for some time.”

³⁵ Robert Debs Heintz and Nancy Gordon Heintz, *Written in Blood: The Story of the Haitian People 1492-1995*, rev. Michael Heintz (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2005), 426-427. Heintz concedes that illegal executions did take place and Haitian officials and U.S. Marines abused the *corvée*. But he asserts that these abuses were not widespread or systematic while implying that ongoing guerilla warfare caused many peasant deaths.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 132, 134.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 137-138.

this wide array of black leaders to condemn the U.S. occupation of Haiti also compelled Du Bois to hold the First Pan-African Congress in 1919.³⁸

Resident missionaries in Haiti were among the staunchest and earliest critics of the American occupation but Moore tried to silence the criticism of his fellow African American evangelists. As early as 1915, missionaries from the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) and African American Baptist congregations spoke out against the abhorrent conduct of the Marines and the utter lack of American-instituted social reform.³⁹ Moore quickly rebuked a member of the Lott Carey society who voiced his disapproval of the occupation before a U.S. government inquiry. "The American Negro", Moore proclaimed, "stands loyally behind the President and his action in shaping the destiny of Haiti." Moore believed that African Americans should relegate their role in Haiti to the educational and religious domains. He concluded that it was foolhardy for "American Negroes to undertake to shape the political policy of an independent country of which they know little."⁴⁰ Moore's conservative stance on the occupation reflected values developed in the Jim Crow South. Although Moore interacted with whites in a frank and open manner, he acquiesced to the most stringent Southern social norms. He successfully built Durham's black institutions while eschewing overt political activity due to white antagonism towards independent black political action.⁴¹ Moore believed that he could similarly help Haitians develop their religious and educational infrastructure without infringing on the racially exclusive political realm.

Following Moore's death in 1923, Spaulding assumed many of the leadership positions previously held by his uncle and maintained his accommodationist view of international black politics. He succeeded Moore as president of the Mutual, became

³⁸ Clarence G. Contee, "Du Bois, the NAACP, and the Pan-African Congress of 1919," *The Journal of Negro History* 57, no. 1 (1972): 13.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 130-131.

⁴⁰ A.M. Moore to L. Ton Evans, August 2, 1918, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of Haiti, 1910-1929, 838.00/1552; Emmett Scott to Bainbridge Colby, April 22, 1920, Records of the Department of State, 838.00/1629, both quoted in Plummer, "The Afro-American Response to the Occupation of Haiti."

⁴¹ Weare, 53-54.

president of the Baptist State Sunday School convention, and carried on Moore's missionary work with the Lott Carey convention and the White Rock Baptist Church.⁴² Spaulding's church continued its support of missionary work in Haiti even during the Great Depression. William Jesse Kennedy, Jr., Spaulding's brother-in-law; the superintendent of the White Rock's Sunday school; and assistant secretary and office manager for the Mutual, praised the church's support of its Haitian missions. In 1929, he commented that the Sunday school still "contributed its quota each month to Foreign Missions" even though enrollment was down in comparison to past figures.⁴³ Speakers were also invited to the White Rock to share their perspective on Protestantism in Haiti. On the morning of June 12, 1932, African Americans from Durham and surrounding areas flocked to the White Rock where, according to Kennedy, they were enthralled by a "very inspiring sermon" given by Reverend Boas A. Harris. These congregants returned later that evening and enthusiastically received another lecture from Reverend Harris, who was taking a brief tour of the city. Kennedy wrote to a Lott Carey officer and stressed how pleased Harris was with the "contribution . . . our church was able to make towards the work in Hati (sic)." On his departure, Spaulding, Kennedy, and other White Rock leaders indicated that they would strengthen their commitment to missionary work.⁴⁴ Spaulding readily continued the international work he began decades earlier yet he was conspicuously silent on the U.S. occupation, which did not end until 1934. While critics of U.S. foreign policy in Haiti focused on the relation between white imperial power and black subjugation, Spaulding's elitist worldview empowered African Americans while deemphasizing the secular concerns of the Haitian masses.

⁴² Weare, *Black Business*, 188.

⁴³ William Jesse Kennedy, letter to members of the Moore Bible Class, December 1929, in the William Jesse Kennedy Papers, #4925, Southern Historical Collection of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the African American Resources Collection of North Carolina Central University (hereafter cited as Kennedy Papers).

⁴⁴ Kennedy, letter to Dr. J.H. Randolph, June 17, 1932, in the Kennedy Papers; Walker, *Baptist Year-Book*, 58.

R.R. Wright Sr. also developed an ethnocentric international outlook during the early stages of his career and gradually began applying an African American model of racial uplift to Haitian affairs. His faith in African American leaders was tied to a belief that this class learned how to uplift common black people by persevering through their struggles. This belief was rooted in his history. Wright was born in 1855 on a plantation in Dalton, Georgia. He remained there until sold to a neighboring master for \$300.⁴⁵ Wright became a part of African American folklore for his prophetic response to an inquisitive Union officer's question. When General Oliver O. Howard asked a group of slave children what he should tell northerners about their condition Wright replied "Tell'em we're rising!"⁴⁶ Shortly after the Civil War, Wright moved to Atlanta with his mother and two siblings. There he did indeed rise.⁴⁷

Wright immersed himself in politics and education while also becoming an advocate for the commemoration of African American history. He graduated from Atlanta University with a B.A. in 1876 and three years later he completed his M.A. at that university. Between 1880 and 1892, he was elected as a delegate to the National Republican Conventions; appointed Chief Deputy Marshall of the Southern District of Georgia in 1884; and was assigned the position of United States Paymaster, along with the rank of major, during the Spanish American War. During these years, he served as the principal of Augusta, Georgia's first black high school. Wright also became the president of Georgia State Industrial College for Colored

⁴⁵ J.A. Rogers, "America's Marvel," *New York Amsterdam News*, October 27, 1934; Ralph L. Lester, "Done At Random," *Wyandotte Echo*, November 23, 1934; Some sources put Wright's selling price at \$75. "Major Wright Buried; Truman Sends Message," *Baltimore Afro-American*, July 19, 1947.

⁴⁶ This exchange is memorialized in the poem "Howard at Atlanta" by John Greenleaf Whittier. John Greenleaf Whittier, *Howard at Atlanta*, in the Spaulding Papers. Originally published in John Greenleaf Whittier, *Anti-slavery poems: songs of labor and reform* (New York: Houghton, Mifflin & Co, 1888), 265-266.

⁴⁷ Richard Robert Wright, Sr., *Radio Speeches of Major R.R. Wright Sr.*, ed. Harriet Beecher Stowe Wright Lemon (Philadelphia: The Farmer Press, 1949), xi-xiii, in the Charles L. Blockson Afro-American Collection, Temple University (hereafter cited as the Blockson Collection).

Youth, one of the first state-funded colleges for black students in the South.⁴⁸ In 1895, he traveled to Europe and visited England, France, Switzerland, Belgium, Germany, and Italy. He returned to Europe two decades later after founding the Negro Historical Society. Georgia Governor Hugh M. Dorsey gave Wright a commission to study the state's African American veterans of World War I (WWI).⁴⁹ After this trip, Wright resigned his post as college president and moved to Philadelphia, where he established the Citizens & Southern Bank and Trust Company. There he found another opportunity to study the African American role in world history. On this occasion Pennsylvania Governor J.E. Fisher appointed Wright to a committee assigned the task of creating a monument to the state's black veterans of all wars.⁵⁰ In Wright's view, African Americans' military service and contributions to American success proved their moral character, their importance in national and international affairs, and their right to equal opportunity. "African Americans", Wright claimed years later, "never faltered in [their] loyalty to the American government."⁵¹

Like Spaulding, Wright also believed that African Americans could achieve racial uplift through elite-led economic endeavors and he took additional strides to make African American leaders key agents in international uplift projects. In February 1934, Wright embarked on his first journey to Haiti along with one of his five daughters. Harriet Wright Lemon, a teller at her father's bank, provided most of the commentary on their return to the U.S. She recounted their travels in an article titled "How Haiti, "Magic Island" Welcomed the Wrights," which was published in the *Afro-American*.⁵² Haitian President Sténio Vincent received Wright and Lemon when they arrived in Haiti, impressing Lemon with his crisp white linen suit and

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* Georgia State Industrial College for Colored Youth was renamed Georgia State College after Wright resigned his post and currently operates under the name of Savannah State University.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, xvi.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, xiii-xvi.

⁵¹ Speech delivered by Major R.R. Wright, Sr. at Bankers Convention, September 1941. Wright, *Radio Speeches*, 33-34.

⁵² Harriet Wright Lemon, "How Haiti, "Magic Island" Welcomed the Wrights," *Baltimore Afro-American*, March 10, 1934.

“handsome” demeanor. The mayor of Port-au-Prince also welcomed the visitors and presented Wright and his daughter with a report of the capital city. The next day, Dr. Camille L’Herisson, a faculty member at Port-au-Prince’s medical school and a director of health, met with the African American travelers. Wright and Lemon were given a private tour of the departments of pharmacy and dentistry as well as the hospital and medical school.⁵³ Wright gave special attention to Haitian businesses and banks. He visited lard, sugar, pineapple, and furniture factories and took particular note of the process of separating and bagging coffee at the coffee house.⁵⁴ Wright and his daughter visited the National Bank of the Republic of Haiti (BNRH) where they met with the bank president. He took Wright and Lemon on a tour through the accounting, loan, commercial, savings, and investment departments of the BNRH before giving them souvenir currency.⁵⁵

While in the black republic, Wright mainly interacted with Haitian elites at the social events he attended. Along with meeting Vincent, Dr. L’Herisson and the BNRH president, he also was invited to the house of Dantès Bellegarde, Haiti’s renowned cultural ambassador and Minister to the United States. Lemon characterized Bellegarde’s home as “beautiful” and she remarked on its numerous flower gardens that typified the splendor of upper-class Haitian residences. Picturesque “trees and clusters of flowers” also surrounded the “large verandas, open porches, and . . . large dance hall” of Port-au-Prince’s exclusive Belleview Club.⁵⁶ Wright and Lemon were guests at several receptions and a ball abounding with exceptional food and Haitian guests wearing the finest European-style eveningwear. Their reception at the Belleview Club was matched by the welcome

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* The National City Bank officially relinquished control of Haiti’s national bank in 1935. However, the BNRH would remain under United States supervision until 1947. By 1933, the office of financial adviser to which Lemon refers had actually been replaced by that of fiscal representative. Like the financial adviser, the fiscal representative was a U.S. citizen but had more restricted powers in overseeing the Haitian government’s financial operations. Brenda Gayle Plummer, *Haiti and the United States: The Psychological Moment* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1992), 139.

⁵⁶ Lemon, “How Haiti.”

they received at a country club in Port-au-Prince. Wright and his daughter attended a ball at the invitation of Sylvain Cator, head of the Haitian Tourist Bureau. The Philadelphia banker joined Haiti's elite in a nine-course dinner enjoyed at the sea-front club.⁵⁷

Ordinary Haitians were seemingly of little importance to Wright and Lemon. Their most personal interaction with working-class Haitians came as they were traveling with "one of the leading business men" in the country. They stopped a peasant in the hopes of riding his donkey. Wright, Lemon, and the Haitian businessman were unable to understand the Haitian Creole the peasant spoke. Wright's daughter related their surprise when this individual, "mumbling in broken French," asked for payment in return for the services of his donkey. Lemon lamented that gaining access to the personal property of the Haitian peasantry was "not as easy as we had thought."⁵⁸ Wright developed few insights into the perspective of common Haitians because he did not think that they possessed significant influence. In his worldview, Vincent and other government leaders were worthy of attention while the Haitian peasantry did not even have sufficient agency to deny strangers the use of their property. Wright came to view this lack of agency as a prerequisite for the economic, social, and political intervention of African Americans and other foreigners into Haitian affairs.

The production, processing, and exportation of Haitian agricultural products was one area where foreigners and elite Haitians worked together to exploit ordinary Haitians and benefit from their labor. In the 1930s, coffee was a crucial crop for elite Haitians who benefited from its trade.⁵⁹ Opportunistic Haitian speculators, exporters, and government officials profited as middlemen who stood between native producers and foreign buyers. Haitian government officials obtained revenue from the coffee export tax and exporters and speculators received

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Coffee and cotton constituted over 60% of all Haitian exports from 1934-1939. George Eaton Simpson, "Haitian Peasant Economy," *The Journal of Negro History* 25, no. 4 (October 1940): 507.

income from the exported product.⁶⁰ They allocated commoditized peasant laborers an inordinately small percentage of the profits from their labor. In many cases, the peasant cultivators and processors barely “eked out a bare existence.”⁶¹ Haitian bourgeoisie entrepreneurs recruited workers that found this situation intolerable and sold their labor to sugar and coffee producers in Cuba and the Dominican Republic. In the words of one sociologist, the Dominican coffee economy historically emphasized the “absolute exploitation of labor.” Yet Haitian migrants preferred the low wages they received in the Dominican Republic to the abusive process of coffee cultivation and exportation in their native country.⁶²

The exploitation of peasant labor, whether on Haiti’s coffee farms or as an export commodity, reflected Haiti’s historical class divisions.⁶³ Modern Haitians inherited ideas of superordination and subordination from their colonial ancestors and perpetuated a social hierarchy characterized by a vast separation of elite and mass.⁶⁴ Peasants recognized the rigidity of this unjust system and continued to cultivate semiwild coffee crops in seemingly careless and inefficient ways. They had little reason to change their agricultural techniques or behaviors because they would not profit from any changes in production. Peasants, some supposed, became “reconciled” to their station in life.⁶⁵

Haitian elites and foreign buyers did not view peasant concerns sympathetically. Haitian speculators, exporters, government officials and their foreign associates thought peasant logic was indicative of backwardness and simplicity. They addressed agricultural infrastructure, not peasant grievances. In the 1930s, Haitian exporters invested thousands of dollars in new agricultural

⁶⁰ Plummer, *Haiti and the United States*, 110-111; Simpson, “Haitian Peasant Economy,” 509.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 509.

⁶² Sherri Grasmuck, “Migration within the Periphery: Haitian Labor in the Dominican Sugar and Coffee Industries,” *International Migration Review* 16, no. 2 (Summer 1982): 372.

⁶³ Plummer, *Haiti and the United States*, 110-111, 147.

⁶⁴ Simpson, “Haitian Peasant Economy,” 499.

⁶⁵ Plummer, *Haiti and the United States*, 110-111; Simpson, “Haitian Peasant Economy,” 514.

equipment instead of giving peasants greater monetary incentives to improve coffee production and processing. Agricultural agents, responsible for enforcing elite interests, jailed and fined purportedly unproductive peasants without addressing the inequalities that adversely affected peasant reception of these “progressive” measures.⁶⁶ Sometimes disdain for peasant culture and unrepentant exploitation of peasant laborers had more dire effects than incarcerations or fines. In December 1929, fifteen hundred peasants gathered in Aux Cayes to protest decreased coffee prices, low wages for workers, and other economic concerns. Approximately one hundred peasants were wounded – twenty-five fatally – when U.S. Marines fired on individuals they perceived to be subversive.⁶⁷

Recognizing the economic power and influence held by foreigners in Haiti, Wright proposed an alternative model for Haitian businesses that catered to the interests of African American elites and their Haitian partners. According to Lemon, Wright regretted “the white man’s financial manipulations of the country.”⁶⁸ In an article published in the *Chicago Defender*, Wright stated that Haiti suffered from the “greed and hypocrisy of the white races that surround it” and deserved “the sympathy and goodwill of the twelve million Negroes in America.”⁶⁹ Instead of advocating the removal of foreign involvement in Haitian affairs, however, Wright suggested that African Americans assume the racial burden of uplifting the Haitians. He told the *Defender’s* readers that trade was the best way to help the struggling country. Developments in the Haitian coffee industry provided him with the opportunity to put this abstract ideal into practice. During the occupation, when it was unable to improve the quality of its product or meet French importers’ demands for preferential treatment, Haiti lost its favored place in the French coffee

⁶⁶ In 1936-37, Vincent’s government spent \$20,000 on concrete coffee platforms to eliminate Haitian coffee’s “earthy” taste. Simpson, “Haitian Peasant Economy,” 511; *Ibid.*, 511-514.

⁶⁷ Plummer, *Haiti and the United States*, 118.

⁶⁸ Lemon, “How Haiti.”

⁶⁹ Wright, “Some Interesting Facts About Haiti Revealed,” *Chicago Defender*, February 9, 1935.

market.⁷⁰ In 1936, France reneged on its commercial treaty with Haiti and raised duties on Haitian imports. The historically lucrative French market became effectively closed to Haitian products such as coffee. Haitian coffee traders were forced to focus on other buyers, including African Americans in the increasingly important American market.⁷¹

Historian Brenda Gayle Plummer maintains that few experts understood the class dynamics inherent in the Haitian coffee trade and Wright's perspective remained limited as he focused on the role of African American and Haitian elites in this world of international commerce.⁷² He was a newcomer to the Haitian coffee trade and he remained as oblivious to the issues of exploitation as the expert foreign merchants and economists already involved in it. Throughout the spring and summer of 1934, Wright solidified his plans to create an economic bond between African Americans and Haitians based on the exportation of Haitian coffee in exchange for American soap.⁷³ Wright conceived of that business opportunity, which would also include the endorsement of tourism in Haiti, as part of a broader international mission. He intended to extend his business operations to the other black republics – Liberia and Ethiopia. This plan centered on the notion that peoples of African descent shared a common past, had a shared place in world affairs, and could increase their status with the help of African American leadership. According to Wright, President Vincent also held this ideal and welcomed the influence of African Americans in the Haitian tourist and coffee industries.⁷⁴ Vincent's correspondence to Wright, re-printed in French by the *Chicago Defender*, shows the Haitian leader's candid supporter of Wright's ideals. Vincent assured the Philadelphia banker that his was an "interesting initiative for which you will find me always disposed to give the widest support." The Haitian president informed

⁷⁰ Plummer, *Haiti and the United States*, 139.

⁷¹ Heintz, *Written in Blood*, 476-477.

⁷² Plummer, *Haiti and the United States*, 111.

⁷³ "Visitors From Haiti Will Get Reception," *New York Amsterdam News*, September 1, 1934; "Haitians Would Trade Their Coffee for Soap," *The Washington Post*, October 8, 1934.

⁷⁴ R.R. Wright, "Haiti Invites Black Americans," *Chicago Defender*, September 15, 1934

Wright that he was doing everything in his power to initiate relations between Haitians and “our congeneric Americans.” He stated that he had already asked Haiti’s highest-ranking official in the trade department to immediately communicate with Wright and his exporters “to plan practically the fulfillment of this project.”⁷⁵

Wright’s praise for Vincent’s actions anticipated the public statements that Spaulding and the other Haitian delegates would make after their 1937 trip. He lauded the Haitian President for his political program, friendship, and encouragement of an international program that would place African Americans in an advantageous relationship with Haitian elites. Wright assured African Americans that Vincent appeared “to be a strong, loyal, thoughtful statesman, who wishes to develop his country along with the development of other countries.”⁷⁶ Vincent’s authoritarian political practices, which included heavy press censorship, were already notorious and did not fit the benevolent description that Wright ascribed to him. Still Wright sympathized with the Haitian bourgeoisie that controlled the coffee trade and the labor it required. He told readers of the *Chicago Defender* that the “French-speaking class” contained “statesmen, literary people, scientists, poets and authors who rank as high as may be found anywhere.” Wright created a strange dichotomy between these individuals and the “native classes” and insinuated that elite, “better” Haitians had transcended Haiti’s primitiveness.⁷⁷

Wright’s favorable opinion of Vincent and Haitian elites was partially a product of the business success he soon achieved because of his relationship with them. In August 1934, Wright announced his trade and tourism proposal to a regional audience using the private broadcasting station located in his Citizens & Southern Bank. Due to Wright’s stature, Vincent’s support, and the ambitious nature of this international program, it quickly garnered the attention of the national African American press. Wright did not disappoint. He sold \$60,000 worth

⁷⁵ Sténio Vincent, letter to R.R. Wright, Sr., quoted in Wright, “Haiti Invites Black Americans.”

⁷⁶ Wright, “Haiti Invites Black Americans.”; Sténio Vincent, letter to R.R. Wright, Sr., quoted in “Radio to Carry Plan Launching Trade Movement,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, August 18, 1934.

⁷⁷ Wright, “Some Interesting Facts.”

of Haitian coffee in the U.S. over the next month.⁷⁸ This success produced more promotion. In the ensuing months Wright prepared his company for a national christening that would introduce it to an even wider audience and better explain the ideals on which it was founded.

Wright chose a date and event that placed emphasis on African American history while also celebrating African Americans' inclusion and importance in the African Diaspora. On October 18, 1934, he officially announced the creation of the Haitian Coffee and Products Trading Company at the 71st Anniversary Celebration of the Emancipation Proclamation and Negro Progress held in Philadelphia. Exhibits representing Haiti, Liberia, South Africa, and the Virgin Islands stood beside booths commemorating the emancipation of African American slaves.⁷⁹ Haitian representatives appointed by Vincent were also present at the event and several spoke at the Emancipation celebration and preceding promotional lectures. These highly educated, French-speaking leaders emphasized the cultural aspect of the trade movement and also implicitly reinforced its elitist elements. At their speaking engagements preceding Philadelphia these Haitians lauded the race pride that characterized Wright's business. Dr. Camille L'Herisson, the biologist and health professor who met with Wright during his first visit to Haiti, assured an African American audience in New York of the racial value of the Haitian trading company. He asserted that "the black race", whether in Port-au-Prince or Harlem, Freetown or Addis Ababa, "is inferior to no other."⁸⁰ In L'Herisson's opinion, elites like Wright and his Haitian collaborators possessed the burden of showing their race's intellectual and business capabilities. This view valued Western perceptions of culture and progress while overlooking ordinary Haitians' contributions to the black republic.

⁷⁸ Radio to Carry Plan Launching Trade Movement," *Baltimore Afro-American*, August 18, 1934.

⁷⁹ "Abyssinian Ruler Thumbs Down the Word Negro," *Baltimore Afro-American*, October 13, 1934.

⁸⁰ Haitians Arrive; \$60,000 Worth of Coffee Sold," *Baltimore Afro-American*, September 29, 1934.

These ideals were reinforced as Haitian emissaries spoke before the predominantly African American audience that gathered to celebrate the African American past and welcome a new future for blacks throughout the world. Dantès Bellegarde, the Haitian cultural ambassador and government official who hosted Wright at his Port-au-Prince residence, addressed the crowd of more than twelve thousand. He expressed his approval of Wright's project and praised its potential uplifting effect on both Haitians and African Americans. Another delegate, Haitian Minister Albert Blanchet, stated that theirs was not a movement between two black populations separated by geography, culture, or language. Instead he stressed that the Haitian trading company represented a development among the unified "colored people of [the] continental United States and the tropics."⁸¹ These Haitian emissaries characterized African Americans and Haitians as homogenous groups united by international economics. But they also spoke before an event marketed to Philadelphia's black bourgeoisie and they created relationships with elite African American businessmen like Wright. The international racial collaboration they envisioned was thus confined to the economic and cultural elite of both black groups.

In the ensuing years Wright took measures to ensure that African Americans held prominent roles in his economic program while also strengthening bonds between African American and Haitian elites. Within the first month of official operations Wright sold an additional 50,000 pounds of Haitian coffee in the United States. He used his contacts among middle-class African Americans and his fame to gain the attention of potential buyers. Wright spoke at Georgia State College, where he had served as president, and discussed his importation program and plans for local distribution. Before leaving Savannah to visit other African American colleges, he obtained school officials' promise to use the coffee.⁸² As he created a market

⁸¹ "Haitian Trade Project Gets Native's Okeh," *Chicago Defender*, September 22, 1934; "Haitians Arrive; \$60,000 Worth of Coffee Sold," *Baltimore Afro-American*; "Visitors From Haiti Will Get Reception." *New York Amsterdam News*; "Haitians Would Trade," *The Washington Post*.

⁸² Davis Lee, "Maj. Wright Sells Haitian Coffee," *Baltimore Afro-American*, December 1, 1934.

among the African American middle class Wright also continued to build cordial relations with Haitian elites. In December 1934, he sent two company employees to Haiti on a “good-will trip.” CimoLéon C. Brutus, Haiti’s secretary of commerce received the trading company representatives. He told them he appreciated Wright’s “devoted . . . introduction of Haitian coffee into the United States,” characterizing Wright’s trading company as an “expression of international and racial fraternity.”⁸³ African American college representatives and Haitian elites were equally important to Wright. To use imperial terms, the African American middle class provided economic support at the core while Haitian elites represented Wright’s class interests at the periphery.

African American newspapers were integral in promoting Wright’s operation of an international company founded on an elite African American view of race and class. Newspapers like the *New York Amsterdam News* reported that Wright’s enterprise was indicative of a “growing spirit of commercial co-operation between Haitians and American Negroes.”⁸⁴ Journalists and editors from the *Amsterdam News* and other African American periodicals expressed the opinion that this commercial co-operation was also indicative of African American agency and middle class sensibilities. When Emmanuel C. Wright, one of Wright’s sons, sailed to Haiti in 1935 the *Afro-American* reported the “extended visit . . . in the interest of perfecting the business details of selling Haitian coffee.” This news was printed in its “Society in the East” section that promised coverage of “fashionable facts and smart gossip.”⁸⁵ Depictions of coffee consignments towering over their importers appeared on the front pages of widely circulated African American newspapers like the *Afro-American* and *Amsterdam News*.⁸⁶ Such press reports gave readers the impression that Wright’s Haitian trading company was a powerful affirmation of

⁸³ “Haitian Secretary of Commerce Lauds Good-Will Flyers,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, December 29, 1934.

⁸⁴ “Sign of Commerce,” *New York Amsterdam News*, January 26, 1935.

⁸⁵ “Welcomed in Haiti,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, April 27, 1935; Tad Winchester, “Society in the East: Fashionable Facts and Smart Gossip,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, April 20, 1935

⁸⁶ “Sign of Commerce,” *New York Amsterdam News*; “Haitian Coffee Consignment,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, February 2, 1935.

African American ability, proof that a former slave could become a symbol of the black bourgeoisie's economic vitality. Some African American journalists even concluded that the establishment of trade relations between their community and Haiti was an African American milestone on par with the stay of execution granted to the Scotsboro boys.⁸⁷

This depiction of the Haitian Coffee and Products Trading Company as a product of middle class African American efforts was also congruent with the way in which Wright marketed his business at this early juncture. The company's first slogan was "Give Youth A Chance" and Wright and his employees used promotional materials to emphasize the opportunity that the trading company offered to young African Americans. Emmanuel, also the company secretary, told a prospective investor that African American youth could "develop . . . practical salesmanship" and become successful "business men and women" by working for his father's company.⁸⁸

Not only did Wright work to develop potential middle-class men and women, he also tried to gain the support of Philadelphia's black bourgeoisie. He did so in 1935 when the city's A.M.E. Bishops' Council – a council on which R.R. Wright Jr. served – voted to endorse the importation of Haitian coffee. They applauded Wright's efforts to "create friendly relations between the people of Haiti and the colored group in America."⁸⁹ Wright's assurances that the Haitian trading company would primarily benefit African Americans helped ensure support from this community of church leaders who shared Wright's worldview. His elite vision of racial uplift was also extended to the trading company's aviation program. The Philadelphia banker hoped that African American youth would become interested in flight through the airplane tours he sponsored to Haiti and gain exposure to a field

⁸⁷ Ralph L. Lester, "Done at Random," *Wyandotte Echo*, December 28, 1934.

⁸⁸ Emmanuel C. Wright, letter to Walter C. Beckett, December 22, 1936, in the Walter C. Beckett Papers, Urban Archives, Samuel L. Paley Library, Temple University (hereafter cited as the Beckett Papers).

⁸⁹ Ralph Matthews, "AME's Won't Recall Sims," *Baltimore Afro-American*, March 2, 1935.

in which their race had limited experience.⁹⁰ Wright anticipated that his company could provide African Americans an opportunity to gain employment, learn practical business skills, and experience air travel during a period of unprecedented growth for the aviation industry. Haiti and its coffee became Wright's means of achieving African American uplift.

While Wright's focus was on African Americans and the Haitian elites who would provide access to the island's resources, he also assumed that his company could economically benefit all Haitians. This belief was rooted in an ethnocentric view of racial uplift, unity, and philanthropy held by Wright, Spaulding, and other African American leaders of their generation. Some black intellectuals who were concerned with Haitian affairs during this period also shared this top-down view of Haitian progress. In 1935, Charles A. Petioni, a Harlem physician originally from Trinidad, recalled his first visit to Haiti in an article printed in the *Amsterdam News*. He commented that his first impression of Port-au-Prince was "bitter disappointment . . . at the conditions." He noted "evident signs of decay, degeneration, and political distress" that caused his mind to revert to his adopted Harlem home.⁹¹ Yet in Petioni's opinion the Harlemit had a clear advantage over his common Haitian brethren – the Harlemit had embraced Western civilization. "The Negro in Haiti", he alleged, "has gone back . . . to Africa." His accommodationist and ethnocentric remedy for this harsh view of Haitian society was the intervention of African Americans in Haitian affairs. He looked favorably on the efforts of Spaulding and other evangelists who worked to extirpate a "native brand of religion" that flourished "to the detriment of the people as a whole."⁹² In Petioni's opinion, African American religious and economic leaders could help the Haitian masses by working with Haitian elites who were "looking forward . . . to the establishment of an entente cordiale . . . between the American leaders of Negro blood and themselves." He concurred with Wright's vision and advised African

⁹⁰ "Sign of Commerce," *Baltimore Afro-American*.

⁹¹ Charles A. Petioni, "Haiti Seems What It Really Isn't," *New York Amsterdam News*, October 12, 1935.

⁹² *Ibid.*

Americans to cast their “eyes towards a land pregnant with opportunities” and aid in the black republic’s “way to progress.”⁹³

Petioni’s views were striking and ethnocentric yet even some of his detractors agreed with his recommendations for Haitian uplift. Dr. Henry Binga Dismond was a prominent Harlem physician and poet who opposed Petioni’s allegation that Haitian society was barbaric. He related his own impressions of Haiti, based on recent travels to the country, in the *Amsterdam News*.⁹⁴ Dismond cautioned readers to take Petioni’s remarks with “a grain of salt” and stressed that Wright and other African American visitors had found ample evidence of wealth and culture. He cited the presence of black businesses in Haiti, including automobile agencies, pharmacies, importation and exportation corporations, factories, and distilleries.⁹⁵ His other writings from the period show an appreciation for Haitian achievements and substantial knowledge of the nation’s politics, culture, and social structure.⁹⁶ He exhibited a concern for common Haitians, particularly after Haitian peasants were the targets of a murderous, anti-immigrant campaign led by Dominican President Rafael Trujillo.⁹⁷ Dismond concluded that Haitian society was analogous to African American society. In his opinion, both black populations had attained a high level of civilization and produced individuals who showed the mental and physical capacities of the entire race.⁹⁸ But, Dismond maintained, common Haitians and African Americans needed more time and assistance to reach

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ Alan E. Oestrich, “H. Binga Dismond, MD – Pioneer Harlem Physician and Much More,” *Journal of the National Medical Association* Vol. 93, no. 12 (December, 2001): 497-502; H. Binga Dismond, “Dr. Dismond Looks at Haiti,” *New York Amsterdam News*, October 19, 1935.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ Dismond, “Sylvio Cator, Broad Jump Champ, Tells How He Set World Record,” *New York Amsterdam News*, December 7, 1935; “In Haiti for Her Vacation,” *New York Amsterdam News*, February 15, 1941.

⁹⁷ “Haiti Friends Continue Aid,” *New York Amsterdam News*, January 29, 1938; Oestrich, “H. Binga Dismond,” 500.

⁹⁸ Dismond, “Dr. Dismond Looks at Haiti.”

these levels of progress. He told readers that “the most well-to-do Negro sharecropper of the south” shared the lot of his backward Haitian brethren.⁹⁹

Despite his empathy with Haitian concerns, Dismond advocated foreign aid in Haiti and suggested a program of economic racial uplift for Haitians that was more suited to African Americans. He lent his support to the Haitian elite and gave credence to their power. He stated that President Vincent was using his office to achieve “the stabilization of their government, the reorganization of [the] army, the improvement of the country’s sanitation and the restoring to a sound basis of its finances.”¹⁰⁰ The Haitian President, he contended, had not been averse to accepting foreign intervention to accomplish these goals. Dismond concluded that African Americans should therefore work with Haitian elites to secure the uplift of the island nation. Like Wright, he maintained that African Americans could “assist Haiti by buying its products, insisting on Haitian coffee, Haitian rum, and Haitian fruit . . . and by utilizing those vacation funds for holiday cruises to this Black Paradise in the Caribbean Sea.”¹⁰¹ Dismond implied that the future of Haiti was not tied to the establishment of an independent political system or the achievement of social equality in the nation. Its fate lay in the realm of international commerce dominated by social and economic elites. His perception was based on a middle-class African American model of racial uplift that assumed that Vincent and other Haitian leaders would act in the best interests of the masses. Other African American leaders questioned the feasibility of this ethnocentric and class based agenda even while accepting some of its elements.

Rayford Logan, a prominent African American historian and activist, also traveled to Haiti during this period and observed the country’s economic condition. Like Wright, Dismond, and Petioni, he became a proponent of economic relations between African Americans and Haitians. African Americans, Logan maintained, had a special interest in “the one colored republic in the Western Hemisphere” and

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

needed to show their friendship by providing Haitians with economic support.¹⁰² He told readers of the *Afro American* that they “must not stand aside and permit white Americans . . . alone to ameliorate this condition.” Logan further predicted that African Americans could “raise the standard of living” in Haiti by buying “Haitian coffee, Haitian sugar, Haitian bananas, Haitian pineapple, [and] Haitian sisal.” Haitians, he maintained, would accrue further benefits if African Americans went “to Haiti to spend their vacation.”¹⁰³ These sentiments supported Wright’s actions but Logan supplemented them with critical analysis of Haitian society and American foreign policy.

Logan helped increase Americans’ knowledge of Haiti during this period and often provided candid assessments of poverty and foreign intervention in the black republic.¹⁰⁴ Logan asserted that there were entirely too many peasants in the streets of Port-au-Prince. He questioned the American government’s responsibility for the poverty of this group that unwillingly went shoeless and coatless. “How many more Haitians”, Logan asked in 1934, “are wearing shoes and coats now than in 1915, before America stepped in to hand Haiti prosperity on the point of a bayonet?” He answered that there had “not been a great decrease in the shoeless group” during the American occupation.¹⁰⁵ Continued foreign control of Haitian business further exacerbated this problem. Logan noted the disproportionately prominent role of Syrian, German, French, Chinese, and American businessmen in Haitian affairs.¹⁰⁶ He recognized the problems of an economic system where Syrians could own and control over twenty percent of all businesses begun during the

¹⁰² Rayford Logan, “Wrath of Haiti Is Aroused by Hughes Article,” *Baltimore Afro American*, August 18, 1934.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ Logan published his first book on Haiti in 1941. Rayford Logan, *The Diplomatic Relations of the United States with Haiti, 1776-1891* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1941).

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

American occupation.¹⁰⁷ It was critical, Logan stressed, that Haitians “succeed in acquiring a more important share in the business of their own country.”¹⁰⁸

Langston Hughes, the acclaimed Harlem Renaissance writer and internationalist, exhibited even less support for accommodationist international agendas. In presenting a more radical opinion than Logan’s, Hughes condemned the Haitian elites with whom Spaulding and Wright collaborated. During the American occupation, he publicly asserted that Haitian peasants were “ground down” by foreign investors; the American marines and government officials; and Haitian elites who were “educated in the best schools of France” but lacked the empathy or intelligence to “apply their training to the needs of the people.”¹⁰⁹ In 1934, after another tour of the Caribbean, he wrote at length on Haiti’s economic state in the occupation’s aftermath. He told the Communist Party USA’s *Daily Worker* that Italians, Syrians, Frenchmen, Germans, Chinese, and Americans still controlled most businesses in the black republic. Haitians operated some businesses, Hughes wrote, but most Haitians were “barefooted, coatless” peasants.¹¹⁰ Haitian elites and opportunistic foreign investors shared culpability for Haiti’s poverty. Hughes related this opinion to public audiences as he spoke about his travel experiences at various speaking engagements in the U.S. At a forum in Cleveland, Ohio, he argued that in Haiti “the shod are mulattoes who eat caviar, drink champagne and send their children to France . . . The unshod eat and drink what they can get.”¹¹¹ In Hughes’ opinion colonial oppression was at the root of common Haitians’ problems but the Haitian elite – Spaulding and Wright’s associates – were more sympathetic to the goals of the oppressor. This judgment reflected an anticolonial worldview that was becoming increasingly prevalent among black internationalists of the late 1930s.

¹⁰⁷ Plummer, *Haiti and the United States*, 116-117.

¹⁰⁸ Logan, “Wrath of Haiti.”

¹⁰⁹ “Langston Hughes in Harlem After Tour of West Indies,” *New York Amsterdam News*, August 5, 1931.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ “Langson Hughes’ 50,000 Mile Trip,” *The Gazette*, January 4, 1936.

Other invasions in the African Diaspora galvanized critics and ordinary African Americans. The Ethiopian crisis of 1935 was particularly important in the creation of the modern black international. African Americans were already engaged in radical protest, most notably in the “Don’t Buy Where You Can’t Work” and anti-lynching campaigns, when the Italian invasion and occupation of Ethiopia focused their attention on the plight of black people abroad. Black political leaders, journalists, activists, and intellectuals articulated these international connections by forming and directing organizations such as the Council on African Affairs.¹¹² Literary historian Brent Hayes Edwards explains that physical interactions – including the creation of Pan-African organizations, translation and distribution of cultural works, and the formation of black émigré communities – came to characterize this internationalist trend. Haiti carried special importance for black internationalists as black nationalist discourse emerged as a focal point of their discussions and physical contacts.¹¹³ Spaulding and Wright were aware of these developments but responded to them in a much different fashion than black internationalist leaders.

Wright took note of international developments concerning blacks but maintained the accommodationist stance already evident in his international agenda. From the outset of his trading company’s operations, Wright planned on expanding his international business into the black republics of Ethiopia and Liberia.¹¹⁴ He had cordial relations and sustained contact with Ethiopian officials including George S. Collier, governor of the Bank of Ethiopia; Dr. Charles Martin, Ethiopian minister to the Court of St. James; and Haile Selassie, the Emperor of Ethiopia. He took measures to incorporate prominent Ethiopians like these men in his plans and company events. Wright had included prominent Ethiopians in the 71st Anniversary Celebration of the Emancipation Proclamation and Negro Progress

¹¹² Penny M. Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 5-11.

¹¹³ Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), prologue.

¹¹⁴ “Radio to Carry Plan,” *Baltimore Afro-American*

where his trade movement was officially launched. Before the outbreak of war in Ethiopia, Wright obtained assurances that Collier, Selassie, Martin, and other key Ethiopian leaders were eager to help establish trade relations between their countrymen and African Americans.¹¹⁵ Wright's plans were halted by the Italian invasion yet he did not publicly condemn the extension of fascist, colonial power into Ethiopia. Instead he limited his international focus to what he thought was a more practical and productive endeavor – improving the economic lot of Haitians while maintaining African Americans' centrality in the African Diaspora.

Spaulding also recognized these international occurrences and the emergence of black internationalist sentiment but he strengthened his accommodationist and ethnocentric approaches and avoided anticolonial action. Spaulding derided Ethiopia in an editorial written in July 1935 for Durham's leading white newspaper, the *Morning-Herald*. He responded to black internationalists by stressing that Ethiopia was not Africa's last bastion of independence but actually "the last outpost of a savage continent, the last stand of an ancient barbarism." "The true "Ethiopian" empire," he continued, "is a republic within a republic – the colored citizenry of the United States."¹¹⁶ This opinion reflected a conservative African American worldview that considered chattel slavery in the U.S. as a harsh but helpful experience that allowed Africans to attain civilization. African Americans' experience purportedly made them superior to other black populations. They were consequently tasked with aiding their racial brethren who had not had the same exposure to Anglo-Saxon culture. Spaulding's elitism was most evident in his support of Haitian missionary work. As African Americans' interest in international affairs increased, Spaulding collaborated with Wright and expounded on this view of black international relations.

Spaulding and Wright's trip to Haiti in 1937 was precipitated by their earlier endeavors in Haiti and by a business opportunity Wright received the previous year

¹¹⁵ "Abyssinian Ruler Thumbs Down," Baltimore Afro-American; J.A. Rogers, "Ruminations," *New York Amsterdam News*, November 10, 1934; "Major Wright is to Tour Europe," *New York Amsterdam News*, July 27, 1935.

¹¹⁶ C.C. Spaulding, "Vital Works Afoot," *Durham Morning Herald*, July 15, 1935.

but the end of U.S. occupation in Haiti, Italy's invasion of Ethiopia, and the rise of fascism shaped the trip as well. In December 1936 he was contacted by a major coffee exporter from Port-au-Prince who presented Wright with a valuable opportunity for the extension of his trading company.¹¹⁷ Wright sought out the aid of potential African American partners as he made plans to visit Haiti and solidify this business proposal. Spaulding was one such prospective associate. Wright was well acquainted with the Mutual president through their joint business efforts in the U.S. They co-founded the National Bankers' Association in 1927 and were prominent members of the National Negro Business League (NNBL).¹¹⁸ In the latter organization, Wright and Spaulding were mentioned alongside Booker T. Washington and R.R. Moton as the most important figures in its early history.¹¹⁹ Wright probably extended Spaulding an invitation to join his trip to the black republic due to this familiarity with Spaulding and knowledge of their mutual interest in Haitian affairs. Spaulding recognized the similarities between his worldview and Wright's and embraced the opportunity to work with the Philadelphia banker in an international setting.

During the week of February 14, 1937, Wright and Spaulding, along with W.H.C. Brown and Elder Lightfoot Michaux, met at the Mutual's Durham headquarters to "complete arrangements . . . to the land of sunshine and coffee."¹²⁰ These meetings occurred over a number of days and most likely continued in Spaulding's household. Wright came to Durham as Spaulding's honored guest and in the Jim Crow era – when accommodations for traveling blacks were limited – it was customary for middle-class African Americans like Spaulding to open their homes to esteemed guests.¹²¹ Wright, Spaulding, and their African American associates were the only individuals present at these meetings. Yet the recent

¹¹⁷ "Good-Willists' Back in U.S. From Haiti," *Atlanta Daily World*, April 30, 1937.

¹¹⁸ "National News Briefs," *New York Amsterdam News*, September 14, 1927; "History," National Bankers' Association, <http://www.nationalbankers.org/history.asp>

¹¹⁹ Weare, *Black Business*, 144-145, 208-209; "An Outstanding Example of Thrift and Industry," *Capital Plaindealer*, December 23, 1938.

¹²⁰ "Business Leaders Invited to Haiti," *Capital Plaindealer*, February 21, 1937.

¹²¹ Turner, interview; "Business Group Going to Haiti," *Capital Plaindealer*.

shared history between the U.S. and Haiti and the foreign policy of contemporary U.S. politicians contributed to the meetings' outcome.

Spaulding, Wright, and the others met with President Franklin Delano Roosevelt at the White House on March 31, 1937 to discuss a trip that could provide benefits for both parties. Spaulding later told an African American journalist that the President immediately recognized him and extended a warm greeting as he ushered the business leaders into the Oval Office.¹²² Roosevelt was cordial throughout the hour-long meeting and expressed interest in the trip's possibilities. Spaulding stated that the President "kept chatting away about so many things involving our people that we forgot all about the time." Roosevelt concluded the meeting by lamenting that his domestic affairs prohibited him from accompanying the African American leaders on their journey.¹²³ The relationship between the U.S. and Haiti was an important issue for the Democratic Roosevelt administration. African Americans had criticized Democrat Woodrow Wilson during the early stages of the occupation and looked to the Republican Party to institute a fairer policy on Haitian affairs. The astute management of the country's international relations and support of the "Good Neighbor policy" presented Roosevelt with a significant opportunity to gain favor with African American voters and demonstrate Democrats' newfound ability to deal fairly with blacks throughout the Diaspora. NAACP President Walter White stressed that Roosevelt and other politicians had a responsibility to "answer to Black America" on the subject of Haiti if they expected that community's votes.¹²⁴ It behooved Roosevelt to endorse an African American "goodwill" delegation that had no intention of criticizing his administration, was composed of prominent leaders, and had the support of Haitian elites.

¹²² J. Richardson Jones, "Leaders Sail for Haiti," *Pittsburgh Courier*, April 10, 1937. Spaulding visited the White House in 1934 for a national conference of African American community leaders. "Race Representatives at White House Conference," *Pittsburgh Courier*, October 6, 1934.

¹²³ "F.D. Entertains Goodwill Body," *Baltimore Afro-American*, April 13, 1937; "The President Wanted to Go Along," *Baltimore Afro-American*, April 3, 1937.

¹²⁴ Léon D. Pamphile, *Haitians and African Americans: A Heritage of Tragedy and Hope* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008), 125.

Spaulding and Wright understood that Roosevelt's endorsement could also reinforce their relationship with Vincent and other Haitian leaders. The Haitian President's longstanding amicable relationship with Roosevelt received extensive coverage by the African American press and was well known among African American leaders. Detractors such as Walter White labeled this relationship as one of dependence.¹²⁵ Vincent did push for the removal of American troops from Haiti but he also embraced the continued presence of the U.S. in Haitian society. As the occupation neared its end, Vincent reached an agreement with Roosevelt that extended U.S. financial control of Haiti for an additional decade.¹²⁶ The Haitian President continued to rely on the U.S. in order to maintain and perpetuate the tenuous power he gained at the expense of his political opponents' civil liberties.¹²⁷ Spaulding and Wright strengthened their business bond with Vincent and his government's officials by showing their cordial relationship with Roosevelt. The personal greetings they carried to Vincent from Roosevelt distinguished Spaulding and Wright from Vincent's liberal and leftist critics.¹²⁸ Showing common political associations took precedence over considering the unequal power dynamic between the black republic and the U.S.

Spaulding and Wright also attempted to build initial support of their trip among Haitian elites through letters of introduction furnished for them by Dr. Alonzo P. Holly.¹²⁹ Holly's African American father was the Episcopalian bishop of Haiti. Holly was born in Haiti but followed in his father's footsteps and studied theology in the U.S. He returned to his homeland in 1892 and opened a medical dispensary at Gonaïves where nearly eight hundred Haitians were treated for illness or vaccinated within its first year of operations. Holly also established a Mutual Relief Society at Gonaïves for African American emigrants. He eventually served as

¹²⁵ Plummer, *Haiti and the United States*, 142.

¹²⁶ "Haitian President Thanks Roosevelt," *Baltimore Afro-American*, December 16, 1933; "Not Until 1944," *Baltimore Afro-American*, December 16, 1933.

¹²⁷ Plummer, *Haiti and the United States*, 142-143.

¹²⁸ "Leaders Sail For Haiti," *Pittsburgh Courier*, April 10, 1937.

¹²⁹ "Haitians Welcome Leaders," *Pittsburgh Courier*, April 17, 1937.

Haitian consul to the Bahamas before taking up residency in the U.S.¹³⁰ Holly eventually decided to join the African American businessmen on their journey to Haiti after providing letters of introduction. Holly was a living testament to the benefits of African American and Haitian interactions and Spaulding and Wright hoped to ensure a sympathetic Haitian response to their interests by associating with him.

As their departure date drew nearer, the delegates used the press to explain their intentions and interests. Spaulding disclosed the delegates' plans to a reporter from the Associated Negro Press (ANP) on the day prior to their voyage. When asked about the intentions of the "goodwill ambassadors" Spaulding remarked: "We are going to study economic conditions . . . and build as much goodwill as possible between our groups."¹³¹ Wright, identified by African American journalists as the largest importer of Haitian coffee in the United States, was particularly concerned with studying other economic opportunities in Haiti. Spaulding, who previously traveled to Cuba for Mutual business, agreed with Wright about the viability of African American international economic enterprise but he also insisted on including religion as a focal point of the group's trip.¹³² Spaulding told the reporter that he planned on attending to the White Rock's Haitian affairs while he was in the black republic.¹³³ Wright's primary interest was economic but he also shared Spaulding's religiosity. He was a member of the AME Church and an avid reader of the Bible. On previous visits to Haiti, Wright noted the relative scarcity of Protestant churches.¹³⁴ While his religious initiatives were more ambiguous than Spaulding's,

¹³⁰ Pamphile, *Haitians and African Americans*, 74-78, 79; Heinl and Heinl, *Written in Blood*, 215, 271; *Handbook on the Missions of the Episcopal Church: The West Indies* (New York: The National Council of the Protestant Episcopal Church, 1926), Project Canterbury, <http://anglicanhistory.org/wi/missions1926/>

¹³¹ "F.D. Entertains Goodwill Body," *Baltimore Afro-American*.

¹³² "Business Group Going to Haiti," *Capital Plaindealer*; Robert McCants Andrews, *John Merrick: A Biographical Sketch* (Durham: Press of the Seaman Printery, 1920), 84, 146.

¹³³ "F.D. Entertains Goodwill Body," *Baltimore Afro-American*.

¹³⁴ Wright, *Radio Speeches*, 189; Lemon, "How Haiti," *Baltimore Afro-American*.

Wright was in favor of incorporating a spiritual and social dimension to the delegates' agenda.

When the delegates finally arrived in Haiti they were taken aback by the unfamiliar peasant culture they had primarily ignored during the trip's planning stages. On docking in Port-au-Prince, Spaulding noted the presence of countless "primitive little reed huts." He marveled at the "jolly natives" who were laughing, singing, and "chattering ceaselessly" as they greeted the African American men.¹³⁵ This interaction was the most extensive direct contact that Spaulding, Wright, and the others would have with common Haitians. Tureane Carrie, Chief Justice of the Haitian Supreme Court, and Emmanuel Nazon, President of the Haitian Bar Association, met the African American businessmen at the dock. These representatives of President Vincent took Spaulding, Wright, and the others on a tour of Port-au-Prince.¹³⁶

Spaulding looked out from behind the glass windows and steel doors of Vincent's personal car and saw a society set apart from his middle-class, African American experience. Spaulding noticed more "thatched huts and curious, pathetic little markets" as the delegates and Vincent's representatives drove through Port-au-Prince's "native quarters." He saw "coal-black" urchins "scampering about in ragged tatters." Spaulding thought he had "never seen a more ragged group of urchins." The peasant women were equally remarkable. Spaulding looked with derision and amazement at "native black women [with] fiery-turbaned heads . . . jogging along on donkeys, their feet bare except for an occasional dilapidated slipper."¹³⁷ Unlike Logan or Hughes, Spaulding did not see bare feet as an indication of the unjust plight of Haitian peasants. Instead he viewed material poverty as indicative of an impoverished culture. "Pathetic" and "primitive" huts, "ragged" clothing, and bare feet were signs of the "native" backwardness that Spaulding had also condemned in Ethiopia.¹³⁸ Spaulding concurred with Wright and distinguished

¹³⁵ Spaulding, "A Trip to the Republic of Haiti."

¹³⁶ "Haitians Welcome Leaders," *Pittsburgh Courier*, April 17, 1937.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*; Spaulding, "Vital Works Afoot."

the “better class” of Haitians, who were often French-educated and French-descended, from the “coal-black” peasant majority.¹³⁹ At the end of their tour, Spaulding, Wright, and the others left Port-au-Prince’s marginalized inhabitants behind and resumed their efforts to establish more business ties with Vincent and other Haitian elites.

The delegates traveled to Port-au-Prince’s Hotel Splendid where they began to form their opinion of the elements of Haitian society that better appealed to their elitist and chauvinistic worldviews. “Elaborate receptions” were held at the hotel on their behalf and attended by Carrie, Nazon, and other influential Haitians.¹⁴⁰ Receptions were an important element of the delegates’ trip because business relations could be forged in those social settings. Yet Spaulding was more impressed with the daily operations of the hotel than with the lavish galas. He called the Splendid “one of the best managed hotels in Port-au Price (sic)” and praised its management. Spaulding told readers of the *Carolina Times* that he was “impressed with the business-like manner in which the hotel was supervised.”¹⁴¹ Spaulding embraced the middle-class, African American belief that respectability was partially achieved by exuding the decorum and class that whites associated with success. So much of his positive impression of the Splendid Hotel and black business in Haiti was also related to physical appearance. Spaulding noted that the Splendid’s “shrubbery and lawns are well kept.” The entire hotel, he continued, “is immaculately clean” and “surrounded with beautiful fragrant flowers, which bloom the year round.”¹⁴²

These observations served a practical purpose for the delegates and their Haitian associates. In the late 1930s, Haitian tourism lagged behind the Cuban, Panamanian, Puerto Rican, and Virgin Island travel industries. Vincent invested himself in making Haiti more attractive to tourists, particularly American travelers of “the better class.” The president of the Haitian Chamber of Commerce – an

¹³⁹ Spaulding, “A Trip to the Republic of Haiti”; Wright, “Some Interesting Facts.”

¹⁴⁰ “Haitians Welcome Leaders,” *Pittsburgh Courier*.

¹⁴¹ C.C. Spaulding, “A Trip to the Republic of Haiti, Part Two,” *Carolina Times*, May 22, 1937.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

individual that Spaulding, Wright, and the others would meet later in their trip – headed Haiti’s National Tourist Office and focused on the country’s hotel infrastructure.¹⁴³ Spaulding advertised the attractiveness of the capital city and its premier hotel to the black bourgeoisie readership of the *Carolina Times* and other African American newspapers.¹⁴⁴ Building goodwill with Haitians and promoting the country’s beauty was also beneficial for Wright’s trade movement. Patrons of his proposed airplane trips to Haiti were interested in the state of the black republic’s hotels and the amenities they provided. Spaulding’s reports presented an appealing perspective of the “Magic Island” that reinforced Wright’s earlier promotional rhetoric.¹⁴⁵

Spaulding’s observations about the Splendid Hotel also reinforced the delegates’ faith in racial uplift and their perception of the connection between culture and business acumen. Just as Du Bois looked for validation of black political capabilities in Liberia, Spaulding and his associates searched for – and apparently found – confirmation of black business ability in Haiti. Spaulding told African American newspaper readers that when “visiting this [Splendid] hotel one is impressed with the fact that black people can successfully operate a hotel when business principals are exhibited.”¹⁴⁶ The acquisition of proper “business principals” was a prerequisite to success and uplift. According to this view, economic accomplishments were also racial achievements because the proper

¹⁴³ Plummer, *Haiti and the United States*, 132-133.

¹⁴⁴ Spaulding’s articles about Haiti were syndicated by the ANP and could be found in black newspapers throughout the country. For instance, “A Trip to the Republic of Haiti,” was published in the *Atlanta Daily World* in May 1937.

¹⁴⁵ Wright aligned his aviation program with a group of African American businessmen from New York interested in Haitian tourism. The group included Dr. Willis Huggins, chairman of the committee of the Haitian Afro-American Chamber of Commerce. “Haitian Trade Project Gets Native’s Okeh,” *Chicago Defender*, September 22, 1934; “2 Haitians on Amity Jaunt,” *New York Amsterdam News*, September 22, 1934. For promotional rhetoric see Wright, “Some Interesting Facts” and Lemon, “How Haiti.”

¹⁴⁶ Historian James T. Campbell succinctly describes the hope Du Bois placed in Liberia. James T. Campbell, *Middle Passages: African American Journeys to Africa, 1787-2005* (New York: Penguin Books, 2007), 233; Spaulding, “A Trip to the Republic of Haiti, Part Two.”

operation of a hotel, bank, or insurance company showed the intellect, civility, and competence of all black people. Spaulding and Wright saw their own success, and that of other middle-class African Americans, validated by Haitian businesses.

While the confirmation of black ability and respectability was important to Spaulding and Wright, they had not traveled to Haiti simply for these reassurances. After attending the welcoming parties and making initial observations on the Splendid Hotel, the delegates “began to seek points of special interest, as well as . . . observe generally the habits, customs, and everyday life” of Haiti’s bourgeoisie. Spaulding and Wright took advantage of their unrestricted access to government departments and commercial institutions during the remainder of their ten-day stay in the black republic.¹⁴⁷ In accordance with Wright’s trading interests, the delegation met with approximately forty Cap-Haitien coffee exporters who were eager to impress the African Americans and gain access to American consumers. Wright, Spaulding, and the others inspected the methods of producing coffee and other Haitian agricultural products.¹⁴⁸ It is neither clear whether the exporters revealed the exploitative elements of peasant labor nor is it apparent how much the delegates attempted to discover. The ex-slave and the former farmer from rural North Carolina were once laborers whose prospects were severely limited by social circumstances. Now as prominent businessmen they sympathized with those who controlled labor and its products.

Spaulding and Wright went to the upper echelon of the Haitian social hierarchy to make these insights into the country’s general economic state. Many were foreigners who became some of their primary correspondents. Spaulding, Wright, and their African American associates met with Sydney De La Rue. The white American fiscal representative to the Haitian government gave them pertinent information about the economic stability and autonomy of the black republic. De La Rue, who met with Wright in 1934, assured the delegates that the Haitian government would pay off the debt it owed to the U.S. as a result of Vincent’s

¹⁴⁷ “Spaulding Back From Good Will Jaunt to Hayti,” *Durham Sun*, April 26, 1937; “Visitors to Negro Republic Praise President Vincent,” *Carolina Times*, May 1, 1937.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

treaties. He based this guarantee on his calculation that Haiti owed the relatively modest sum of ten million dollars. De La Rue appealed to the business outlook of these potential African American investors by stating that Haitian bonds were selling at a respectable rate. He further stressed that these bonds would be paid at maturity and that the country was financially sound.¹⁴⁹ Newspaper reports and Spaulding's recollections do not indicate that De La Rue expounded on the role he and other foreigners maintained in Haiti throughout this period. These assurances and De La Rue's omissions left the delegates impressed with Haiti's economic situation and convinced of its inexorable progress towards independence. Spaulding was particularly struck by the fiscal representative's presentation and "frankly amazed during his tour through the Bank of Haiti." The tour solidified Spaulding's belief that Haiti was gaining financial stability through the actions of Haitian professionals. Ignoring the presence of individuals like De La Rue, he informed African Americans that the BNRH "is expertly manned and every post is occupied by a colored man."¹⁵⁰

The delegates' other experiences in Haiti would challenge Spaulding's glowing reports of the power of the Haitian bourgeoisie. The Mutual President contradicted his assertions about black business in Haiti as he recounted his encounters with the life insurance field in the black republic. Spaulding and A.L. Lewis met with a deputation of Haitian businessmen who were seeking information on the U.S. insurance industry. These men were aware of Spaulding's pioneering efforts in this field and wanted advice on how to compete with the white insurance companies firmly established in their country. According to reports appearing in African American newspapers, white insurance companies were similar to other white-owned enterprises in their treatment of Haitians. These companies showed little concern for the supposedly inferior black clientele and workforce they readily exploited.¹⁵¹ Spaulding had much expertise on this topic and likely provided the

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*; Edgar T. Rouzeau, "Business Leaders Discover Haiti on "Glory Road" To Recovery," *Pittsburgh Courier*, April 24, 1937.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid*.

¹⁵¹ "Visitors to Negro Republic," *Carolina Times*.

Haitians with valuable insights into the upbuilding of a black insurance enterprise. But Spaulding was primarily a businessman convinced of African Americans' importance in international, race-based programs. He was there to identify opportunities for himself and other African Americans in the underdeveloped Haitian insurance field, not as a mentor for indigenous business.

Spaulding made careful observations of Haiti's health conditions and established relations with prominent health department officials as he considered the viability of extending the Mutual's operations into the black republic. Along with the other delegates he visited the office of Dr. Rulx Léon, Haiti's health director. The delegates learned about the logistics of Haitian health services, including the country's "sanitary districts", from this distinguished physician, scientist, and scholar. Léon granted them access to some of Haiti's premier health facilities. The facilities and those operating them impressed the delegates.¹⁵² Spaulding was particularly pleased with the health official's cordiality and he looked approvingly on the efforts being made to improve health conditions in Haiti's cities and rural districts. Of particular interest were the nearly 160 medical dispensaries located throughout the island, the infrastructure at Port-au-Prince's main hospital, and the partnership between the Health Services department and the Haitian pharmacy, dentistry, and obstetric schools. These schools' professors were also responsible for directing the sanitary districts. Their knowledge was usually gained in the European educational system or in the U.S.' black colleges and universities.¹⁵³ Spaulding and Wright were surely encouraged by Haitians' experiences with the latter.

The delegates also learned about some appalling health statistics that made life insurance in Haiti a risky endeavor. Spaulding and his colleagues learned about the tragically high infant mortality rate in Haiti during their tour of the Health Services department. Spaulding reported that 11,000 deaths occurred among the 36,000 births in 1935. He foreshadowed later allegations made against the "pathological" African American family by further stressing that Haitian children

¹⁵² Spaulding, "A Trip to the Republic of Haiti, Part Two."

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

suffered from unstable households. The delegates were told that approximately ninety percent of peasants – a population that represented roughly ninety percent of all Haitians – were born out of wedlock. In the opinion of these middle-class African Americans, this was a sure portent of a troubled life. Tuberculosis, heart disease, cancer, and venereal disease were also particularly prevalent in Haiti. Peasants who survived infancy rarely lived past the age of forty.¹⁵⁴

These health statistics were necessarily of the utmost concern for black life insurance companies. In the early twentieth century, white-owned companies in the U.S. used the presence of higher black mortality rates as an excuse for their refusal to insure blacks. Black companies like the Mutual that focused on serving their neglected communities also considered these statistics. This often meant exercising more exclusive risk selection and operating in cities in order to decrease the amount of death benefits paid by the company.¹⁵⁵ At the same time, the Mutual and other African American life insurance companies also enacted programs to improve the general health of black people. In the 1920s, the Mutual's public health program reduced Durham's black mortality rate by more than one percent over the course of a decade.¹⁵⁶ Expansion of company operations was not an overwhelming challenge to Spaulding. As he inspected the Haitian field, the Mutual was expanding into Philadelphia. But it appears the Mutual President thought the health conditions in Haiti were too daunting to either circumvent or alleviate. No further attempts were made to establish the Mutual enterprise in the black republic.

While unsure about their ability to improve Haitians' physical conditions, the delegates shared a common interest in affecting the spiritual life of the country's

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.* The delegates' findings on life expectancy are corroborated by later studies conducted by economists and social scientists. For example see Population Association of America, *Demography* 6, no. 1 (1969): 231, 240. This organization estimated that life expectancy in Haiti did not reach 40 until 1950. In 1978, a professor of economics at Lehman College who was a Fulbright scholar in Haiti contended that life expectancy was 52 years for men and 45 for women. William N. Léonard, "To Set Haiti on the Path of Development," *New York Times*, August 7, 1978.

¹⁵⁵ Weare, *Black Business*, 16, 124-129.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 126. The mortality rate was 29.9 deaths per 1,000 individuals in 1920. This figure stood at 22.4 deaths per 1,000 individuals in 1930.

people. Spaulding emphasized the centrality of religion to the delegation's agenda and his colleagues embraced his religious zeal. Attorney's W.H.C. Brown and Samuel Decatur McGill attended a Haitian AME Church while Spaulding "visited the Baptists" and conferred with several Baptist clergymen." Elder Lightfoot Michaux and Wright, a prominent member of Philadelphia's AME and father to AME Bishop R.R. Wright, Jr., also partook in these religious inspections. The delegates gathered a significant amount of information on "the religious condition of the people of Haiti" and concluded that "the American Negro could do much to improve" the spiritual state of affairs in the country.¹⁵⁷ This meant the extension of Spaulding's previous missionary work and the consequent indoctrination of Haitians in African American ideals.

Spaulding and Wright were able to solidify their previously established international agendas during their time in Haiti and expand on their economic and religious projects. When the delegates returned to the U.S. they decided "to urge American Negro tourists to visit Haiti and . . . create a larger market in America for Haitian products, particularly Haitian coffee."¹⁵⁸ Spaulding asserted that the delegates had created the foundation for these international relations during their time in Haiti. He told readers of the *Durham Sun* that "trade relations were established between the Island and America by our delegation." Spaulding used more race-neutral language as he created a description of an extractive scheme for the *Sun's* white readers. He asserted that the delegates created "greater possibilities for exporting more coffee, bananas, cocoanuts (sic), grapefruit, oranges, limes, and other tropical fruits that are raised in abundance in this Republic." Spaulding presumed that Wright was "the first American to import Haitian coffee to this country" and had provided the inspiration for the delegates' trade movement.¹⁵⁹

After the 1937 trip, Wright increased his efforts on behalf of the Haitian Coffee and Products Trading Company. He strengthened his trading company's standing as the principal importer of Haitian coffee in the U.S. by cultivating

¹⁵⁷ "Visitors to the Negro Republic," *Carolina Times*.

¹⁵⁸ "American Delegation Photographed in Haiti," *Carolina Times*, May 8, 1937;

¹⁵⁹ "Spaulding Back From Good Will Jaunt," *Durham Sun*.

relationships with prominent coffee exporters during the trip to Haiti. By 1938, his company had imported over 500,000 pounds of Haitian coffee since its founding; 16,000 of those came from the “Race exporter” from Cap Haitien who was largely responsible for bringing Wright to Haiti in the previous year. Wright’s business expanded from a local enterprise into a national corporation that sold its product in St. Louis, Richmond, Detroit, Washington, D.C., Georgia, Mississippi, Alabama, and Louisiana – the economic and population centers of black America. He also made more trips to Haiti to oversee the exportation of his valuable commodity.¹⁶⁰

Some of Wright’s trips focused on the promotion of the tourism and aviation aspects of his international project. In 1939, Wright accompanied his son Emmanuel on a well-publicized flight to Haiti. The Colored Chamber of Commerce, the National Economic and Social Betterment Council, and Wright’s Haitian Coffee trading company sponsored the “airplane good will mission” trip.¹⁶¹ Wright set three objectives for this journey: “to establish goodwill between the Negroes of the United States and the Colored People of Cuba and Haiti . . . create Commercial relationship between Haiti and the Negroes of the United States for the purpose of stimulating the U.S. market for Haitian coffee, and . . . encourage aviation among Negro youth.”¹⁶² At the departure ceremony, Wright delighted a crowd of more than two hundred as he christened the “Goodwill Spirit of the American Negro” with Haitian coffee rather than the traditional champagne shower.¹⁶³ Wright and his fellow travelers were received by Vincent in Port-au-Prince as the Philadelphia banker again eschewed contact with the common Haitians whose labor produced

¹⁶⁰ “Haitian Coffee Co. Does Huge U.S. Business,” *Chicago Defender*, November 26, 1938; “From an Editors Note Book,” newspaper clipping, n.d., in the Spaulding Papers. The clipping is most likely from 1939 edition of the African American *Richmond Planet*. It alludes to the 12th anniversary edition of the *Cape Fear Journal*, a black newspaper that began publishing in 1927 and Wright transporting his coffee via airplane over Richmond.

¹⁶¹ “Philadelphian, Pilot on Goodwill Flight to Haiti,” *Chicago Defender*, April 15, 1939.

¹⁶² “Plane Returning From Haiti Trip Quits Tuskegee,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, May 6, 1939.

¹⁶³ “Airmen Off on New Hop,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, April 15, 1939.

his coffee.¹⁶⁴ Wright's trip reaffirmed the centrality of African Americans in his international vision. When they returned to the U.S. from Port-au-Prince, the "Goodwill" passengers made a two-day stop at Tuskegee Institute. Tuskegee's treasurer, comptroller, chaplain, various professors, and a large segment of the student body welcomed Wright and the others. The men related their international commercial intentions and encouraged the African American students to take an interest in aviation.¹⁶⁵ Airplanes were a means of encouraging tourism in Haiti but Wright also envisioned his aviation program as akin to Marcus Garvey's Black Star Line. Controlling commercial interactions and physically transcending international boundaries were critical to Wright's enterprise. Wright envisioned a day when African American tourists and entrepreneurs would use planes "owned by a Negro and piloted by a Negro" to create a more unified black world of travel and trade.¹⁶⁶

After 1937, Wright presented a passionate view of his racial and international agenda in the marketing campaign of his Haitian trading company. He introduced new promotional material that emphasized the economic dimension of international black relations. Wright's campaign outlined "twelve good reasons why you should prefer Haitian coffee." On his list he included:

It comes from the only REPUBLIC governed by black people . . . It gives colored men and women an opportunity for salesmanship and employment . . . Its purchase aids both the Haitian Republic and the American colored man . . . The regular use of Haitian Coffee opens a new field of employment for *our* people (emphasis added).¹⁶⁷

These reasons show Wright's desire to align his company with pan-African ideals but they also suggested his conviction that he had a better understanding of Haiti than Haitians. While Wright was an elitist he believed that middle-class blacks had a responsibility to their race. He helped black educators by founding the National Colored Teachers' Association. He also inaugurated thrift programs in

¹⁶⁴ "Goodwill Flyers Safe in Haiti; To Visit Chicago on Return Flight," *Chicago Defender*, April 22, 1939.

¹⁶⁵ "Plane Returning From Haiti," *Baltimore Afro-American*.

¹⁶⁶ "From an Editor's Note Book," in the Spaulding Papers.

¹⁶⁷ "Twelve Good Reasons Why You Should Prefer Haitian Coffee," advertisement clippings, 1939, in the Spaulding Papers.

Philadelphia to emphasize the value of saving for a community with little economic power.¹⁶⁸ Wright expected that his company would employ African Americans who struggled to gain meaningful employment elsewhere and help them achieve their own uplift through the acquisition of valuable skills. Haitian elites like Vincent did not share Wright's racial worldview and it is questionable how much aid the Haitian Republic derived from Wright's movement. Brenda Gayle Plummer points out that even when Vincent recognized working-class initiatives or culture, he did so in an exploitative manner. Vincent used peasant culture as an economic boon to Haiti's tourist industry but he showed his disdain for common Haitians by praising Haiti's past forced labor systems and reacting with apathy to Trujillo's massacre of his countrymen and women.¹⁶⁹ It was naïve for Wright to imply that Haitians other than Vincent, coffee exporters, and their associates would benefit from his trade movement. But his ethnocentrism and elitism led him to conclude that Haitian elites would act like middle-class African American leaders and that African Americans and Haitians would benefit equally and universally. He consequently implored other African Americans to join "this NEW MOVEMENT" of African American capitalist development.

Spaulding was one of many African Americans who joined Wright's movement and applied an African American chauvinism to international black relations. The insurance field did not present a promising opportunity for Spaulding but he emphasized other economic and religious projects. Spaulding invested in Wright's Haitian trading company, became actively involved in the exportation of Haitian coffee, and promoted Wright's ventures in his hometown's daily paper.¹⁷⁰ Under his guidance, the White Rock continued to support their longstanding missionary work in Haiti. The traditional home of Durham's black bourgeoisie contributed more money annually for missions than for any other church related

¹⁶⁸ Wright, *Radio Speeches*, xiv, xviii.

¹⁶⁹ Plummer, *Haiti and the United States*, 131, 157; Heintz and Heintz, *Written in Blood*, 485.

¹⁷⁰ "Spaulding Back From Good Will Jaunt," *Durham Sun*; "Visitors to Negro Republic," *Carolina Times*; "Business Leaders Discover Haiti," *Pittsburgh Courier*.

cause.¹⁷¹ The evangelical work of the White Rock was no longer an abstract mission for the Mutual leader. He had been to the black republic, viewed its massive cathedrals, made personal connections with some of its people, and strengthened his conviction that Haitians needed African Americans' spiritual and cultural help.¹⁷²

The personal interactions necessary for these economic and social programs influenced the formation of Spaulding and Wright's accommodationist views of Haitian politics. Unlike Max Yergan, Paul Robeson, W.E.B. Du Bois and other African American internationalists, Spaulding and Wright did not try to alter the political state of the foreign black population they encountered. They did not intend to influence African Americans' views of Haitian politics. Yet by 1937 Haitian politics were in such a state of flux that the achievement of economic and religious goals required political action. Spaulding and Wright thought that they could not embark on their trip, establish necessary Haitian connections, or garner positive results after returning to the U.S. if they did not adjust to the politicization of Haitian society. They began accommodating elite Haitian interests at the trip's outset by meeting with Roosevelt and soliciting Holly's support. The genuine respect Spaulding and Wright had for Roosevelt and Holly cannot be discounted but these relationships served a pragmatic purpose for the delegates.¹⁷³ Both businessmen were aware of the amicable relationship between Vincent and Roosevelt and the respect afforded to upper-class individuals like Holly in the black republic.

Spaulding and Wright's friendly ties to Vincent – a leader characterized as an American puppet and dictator by many in white and black American press – were

¹⁷¹ Financial Statement, White Rock Baptist Church, Month of December and Year 1942, in the Kennedy Papers; Financial Statement, White Rock Baptist Church, Month of December and Year 1943, in the Kennedy Papers.

¹⁷² At least one Haitian continued to correspond with Spaulding a year after they met during Spaulding's trip to Haiti. G. Duverglas, letter to Spaulding, December 23, 1938, in the Spaulding Papers; Photographs of Spaulding's Haitian trip, n.d., in the Spaulding Papers.

¹⁷³ Roosevelt also supported Wright's annual Emancipation Day celebrations. Pamphlet, National Freedom Day Conference, Philadelphia, February 1, 1943, in the Beckett Papers; "Ethiopian Consul Mum at Patriotic Celebration Last Week," *Baltimore Afro-American*, October 5, 1935.

also fortified by their personal encounters with Haitians.¹⁷⁴ Because their agenda relied on the support of Haitian elites, Spaulding and Wright primarily interacted with influential Haitians like Georges N. Leger, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Finances; Abel LaCroix, President of the Chamber of Commerce; Odilon Charles, Minister for Justice and Religious Affairs; Alfred Tovar, Minister for Public Works and Commerce; and Auguste Turnier, Minister for Public Instruction, Work, and Agriculture. Their meetings occurred as the delegates surveyed the Haitian economic and religious landscape or dined at extravagant receptions. Spaulding and Wright hoped that by forming these relationships they could gain support for their international projects.

Spaulding, Wright, and the others expressed unambiguous support for Vincent when they returned from their trip to Haiti. They directly countered Vincent's critics by ignoring the Haitian President's troubling record of press censorship and political repression and praising his leadership program.¹⁷⁵ The delegates reported that Haiti's "depression-torn economic structure" was being successfully rebuilt by Vincent in accordance with a "far-sighted economic program." This program primarily consisted of the development of export products, acquisition of information regarding "agricultural methods, crop rotation, soil conservation, manufacturing, and transportation", and the institution of an educational system modeled after Washington's Tuskegee Institute.¹⁷⁶ Spaulding attested to the success of such projects. "Evidences of progress", he asserted, "are seen on every hand in the Republic of Haiti." Vincent remained above rebuke even when Spaulding noted that Haiti's infant mortality rate was exceedingly high while

¹⁷⁴ "AFRO Can't Quiz Vincent in Capital," *Baltimore Afro-American*, December 16, 1939; "Blanchet Snaps Back When Vincent Is Called Dictator," *Baltimore Afro-American*, July 13, 1935; Paul Vanorden Shaw, "Caribbean Dictators," *The Washington Post*, July 5, 1935; "Government Moves to Quell Haiti Revolt," *New York Amsterdam News*, March 11, 1939.

¹⁷⁵ Vincent's repressive policies were well chronicled in many widely circulating black and white newspapers in the U.S. "14 Haiti Newspapers Suspended by Regime," *The Washington Post*, April 15, 1934; Shaw, "Caribbean Dictators"; "Government Moves to Quell Haiti Revolt," *New York Amsterdam News*.

¹⁷⁶ "Business Leaders Discover Haiti," *Pittsburgh Courier*.

life expectancy was remarkably low. Venereal disease, cancer, heart disease, and tuberculosis adversely affected the Haitian quality of life. Yet Spaulding maintained that Vincent had created the opportunity for common Haitians to live healthy, happy lives. "The health conditions of the Republic are considered good", Spaulding alleged, "due to President Vincent's program of improving the general living condition among the natives."¹⁷⁷

Spaulding and Wright's praise of Vincent and the Haitian elites who profited from an intrinsic system of political patronage required a misguided belief in Haitian interclass cooperation. The delegates did not condemn the relationship between the elite and peasant classes like Hughes did throughout this period. Spaulding, Wright, and their associates exaggerated the benefits Vincent's regime accorded to all Haitians. Spaulding claimed that the Haitian President was "desirous of raising the standards of the peasant group thereby making them better producers and consumers." The delegates deemphasized the callous system by which peasants were made "better producers" whether they were being exploited in Haiti or laboring in Cuba or the Dominican Republic as export commodities. They only reported that "dozens of natives are being sent abroad each year" to learn various aspects of agricultural production.¹⁷⁸ Spaulding, Wright, and the others did not see an inequitable labor system as a reason for Haiti's economic trouble. They contended that the only obstacle to progress for all Haitians was a lack of external funding. Spaulding and Wright did not question the motives of a Haitian President derided by some journalists as "the island's little strong man."¹⁷⁹ They believed that if Vincent received funding for his program then all Haitians would advance. The delegates' support for the Haitian President was so uncompromising that they received special treatment from the Roosevelt and Vincent regimes during the late 1930s. Wright, Michaux, and "a few other friends of Haiti," were granted audiences

¹⁷⁷ "Visitors to Negro Republic," *Carolina Times*.

¹⁷⁸ "Spaulding Back From Good Will Jaunt," *Carolina Times*; "Business Leaders Discover Haiti," *Pittsburgh Courier*.

¹⁷⁹ "American Delegation To Haiti Praises Haitian Republic," *Atlanta Daily World*, May 1, 1937

with the dictator during his U.S. visits even though the U.S. State Department kept him under “close wraps” due to increasing scrutiny of his regime.¹⁸⁰

The accommodationist outlook that defined the delegates’ trip to Haiti also influenced the thoughts and actions of a wide audience of African Americans. The countless customers, employees, students, parishioners, and benefactors involved with the Haitian Coffee and Products Trading Company and the White Rock’s missionary work accepted their vision of international capitalism and uplift. African American business organizations also embraced the delegates’ international agenda. In 1943, the NNBL submitted a proposal to the federal Department of Commerce encouraging the formation of a “national committee on post-war planning composed of business executives, educators, and government specialists.” The proposed committee would focus on creating and advancing African American enterprises at the end of World War II. According to the ANP, the NNBL’s goal was to seize opportunities for industry created by the American government’s response to the war. The leaders of this organization looked at the possibilities for increased African American business in the U.S. and abroad.¹⁸¹

In the early 1940s, African American newspapers carried news that the NNBL was seriously considering trade possibilities with various South American countries. The *Amsterdam News* reported that such plans were viable because “presidents of Negro controlled countries and nations with large Negro populations have expressed a desire to do business with American Negroes.” The *Amsterdam News* stated that the precedent set by the organization’s president emeritus particularly impressed the NNBL. This collection of black businessmen concluded that “the successful operation of a plantation in Haiti from which coffee is shipped to the United States by C.C. Spaulding . . . is indication that such ventures can be profitable.”¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ “AFRO Can’t Quiz Vincent,” *Baltimore Afro-American*.

¹⁸¹ “Negro Firms Eye Period After War,” *New York Amsterdam News*, September 11, 1943.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

The NNBL drew inspiration from Spaulding and Wright's international actions even as the Philadelphia banker and Durham insurance man steadily decreased their role in Haiti's economic affairs. By 1941, the economic elements of Spaulding and Wright's program were in decline with the menace of German U-Boats effectively ending the Haitian Coffee company's operations. Wright was in poor health by the end of WWII and Spaulding was evidently content in maintaining a small-scale export enterprise that would not divert attention from his domestic obligations.¹⁸³ Yet the NNBL still viewed their interactions with Haiti as the template for African American international relations.

Individual African Americans also expressed their desire to expand Spaulding, Wright, and their middle-class associates' international agenda. Ralph Matthews, a columnist for the *Afro-American*, supported the NNBL's position that WWII created increased opportunities for African American entrepreneurs to conduct international business. He noted that the American Maritime Commission was selling its many Liberty and Victory ships including those named after esteemed African Americans such as Booker T. Washington, Frederick Douglass, and Harriet Tubman. African Americans, Matthews stated, were presented with the unprecedented opportunity "to acquire one or more of these ships with their colored commanders and well-trained crews" and "enter the field of world trade."¹⁸⁴ He implored "colored businessmen" to pool their resources and organize a joint stock company. Such a venture would produce a "closer relationship between the people of Africa, the Caribbean (sic) Islands, and the United States" primarily through the exchange of goods "between the island people and the thousands of colored farmers in the south and southwest." Matthews concluded that "the possibilities of co-operative planning by forward looking leaders on both sides of the Atlantic and in the islands can bring about a new day and a better understanding among the darker peoples of the world."¹⁸⁵

¹⁸³ Wright, *Radio Speeches*, xvi; Ralph Matthews, "Business Leaders Should Keep Victory Ships Afloat," *Baltimore Afro-American*, October 13, 1945.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

Matthews argued for the necessity and feasibility of this plan by highlighting previous African American endeavors in international transportation and trade. He recalled Garvey's UNIA venture and acknowledged the link between his proposal and the failed Black Star Line. He also alluded to Wright's international program to "introduce Haitian coffee to America."¹⁸⁶ Matthews anticipated that other African Americans would build on Wright's actions and ideals. The Haitian trading company "experiment", he proclaimed, "merely scratched the surface of the potential wealth of the islands." He told readers of the *Afro-American* that Wright "showed what could be done." While it was unfortunate that WWII "curbed this innovation in its infancy", Matthews believed that other African Americans would "re-establish this program and exploit all of its possibilities."¹⁸⁷

As African Americans advocated for the expansion of economic international relations they also incorporated Spaulding and Wright's political opinions into their own worldviews. The African American press expressed widespread acceptance and support of the delegates' reports on Haitian politics. In an article appearing shortly after the delegates' return, *Courier* correspondent Edgar T. Rouzeau corroborated Spaulding and Wright's favorable opinion of Vincent. He asserted that the Haitian President "has the answer to most of his country's ills . . . Under the President's reconstruction program, Haiti is developing her own exports." Rouzeau alleged that all aspects of Haitian society would benefit from the policies of Vincent and other "forward-looking" elites. The journalist concluded by supporting Spaulding and Wright's claim that the only impediment to progress was the need for external funding to compensate for a lack of capital and industrial infrastructure.¹⁸⁸

An editorial printed in the *Carolina Times* also echoed the worldview of these African American business leaders and presented a proposal for continued international projects based on their ethnocentric approach. Floyd J. Calvin related that Haitians, who historically "felt themselves superior" had "received our colored Americans with open arms and discussed with them frankly ways and means by

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ Rouzeau, "Business Leaders Discover Haiti."

which colored people in the United States may help Haiti toward economic progress.”¹⁸⁹ According to Calvin, these discussions took place among black communities united by kinship but not equality. “Colored people in America”, the journalist boasted, “. . . are the leading (so-called) Negroes in the world today.” Blacks outside of the U.S. who sought “the good will and support” of African Americans had to acknowledge their achievements and collaborate with them on a basis of respect and equality. Calvin further suggested that if Ethiopians had done so then African Americans would have lent greater support to that “stricken empire.” Calvin and the *Times* echoed the traditional international thought of conservative African Americans and elucidated a point evidenced by the actions and ideals of Spaulding and Wright. These men showed that African Americans supported forms of international relations that differed from the anticolonial internationalist model.

The leftist sentiments of African American internationalists were largely absent from the public discussion pertaining to Haiti. Individuals and organizations like White and the NAACP did question Vincent’s rule and denounce the continued effects of American interventions into Haitian affairs. But African Americans, particularly the black press, primarily viewed Haiti through the same middle-class, accommodationist lens as Spaulding and Wright. When the *Afro-American* chastised Vincent for seeking Roosevelt’s financial aid in 1940, the paper did not express anticolonial concerns. Instead the *Afro-American* emphasized that Haitians should not seek Roosevelt’s aid because they needed to adhere to the middle-class African American belief in racial uplift.¹⁹⁰ The paper ignored the country’s rampant poverty and class discrimination and questioned “why Haiti is always broke and borrowing” when “nobody ever starves to death” in the agriculturally rich black republic. It was assumed that coffee, sugar cane, pineapples, bananas, and coconuts existed in enough abundance to provide local sustenance and export profits. The paper

¹⁸⁹ Floyd J. Calvin, “The Haitian Report,” *Carolina Times*, May 29, 1937. Calvin was a correspondent for the *Courier* best known for his “Calvin’s Digest” column. It was serialized in African American newspapers nationwide. He wrote countless opinion pieces that were printed by sympathetic editors like the *Times’* Louis Austin.

¹⁹⁰ “Haiti Should Go to Work,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, January 6, 1940.

echoed Spaulding and Wright's shortsighted acceptance of the Haitian political elites' responsibility and ability to intelligently direct labor and economic development in the black republic.¹⁹¹

Spaulding and Wright's legacy in international relations persevered but their international efforts waned in their final years, leaving questions about possible evolutions in their worldviews. It can be assumed that Wright would have continued his international agenda had he been able to stave off multiple infirmities. In 1947, Wright finalized plans to travel to Liberia and attend that nation's centennial celebration at the request of the Liberian government. Wright finally had a chance to expound on his plan to create trade relations between African Americans and Liberians.¹⁹² It is plausible that Wright was reconsidering his racially chauvinistic and elitist views and embracing the more progressive beliefs of his contemporaries. During WWII, he made the most pointed anticolonial sentiments of his life. During a 1944 segment of his Philadelphia radio program, Wright declared that "the African continent has been deceived, betrayed, and exploited by the powers of western civilization." He concluded, "one-half of the world cannot hold the other half in slavery . . . There should be no exploited colonies or forced dependent peoples anywhere on earth."¹⁹³ He told readers of the *Amsterdam News* that the newly defined international community should pay closer attention to the plight of oppressed peoples. "I cannot understand", Wright proclaimed, "how the United Nations can hope to perfect an organization for International security without first dedicating themselves to the principle of human rights and equality of opportunity for all nations."¹⁹⁴ It is not clear what his experiences with Haiti had in Wright's view of anticolonial struggle or how the Philadelphia banker planned to act on his changing ideology. Wright passed away at

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹² "Major R.R. Wright, 94, Friday, Plans Plane Trip to Liberia," *Baltimore Afro-American*, May 31, 1947.

¹⁹³ Wright, Radio Remarks on April 16, 1944, in Wright, *Radio Speeches*.

¹⁹⁴ "Banker Says New World Must Be One of Equals," *New York Amsterdam News*, June 16, 1945.

Philadelphia's Jefferson Hospital two weeks prior to leaving for Africa and embarking on a new journey into international affairs.¹⁹⁵

Spaulding's international agenda during his later years was less ambiguous but more troubling than that of Wright's. During WWII, he became a staunch advocate of the *Courier's* "Double V" campaign while remaining silent on African struggles for independence. Spaulding publicly announced that "the stigma of inferiority with which tradition and custom have labeled the race has been discredited by Negroes in every branch of the armed service." By aiding American victory abroad, African Americans had caused "the pendulum of public opinion" to swing "in the direction of tolerance."¹⁹⁶ Spaulding's rhetoric became more nationalistic as he succumbed to anti-Soviet rhetoric of the Cold War. In an article published in a white Christian magazine, he said African Americans had a better chance to be successful in America than in Russia or any other nation.¹⁹⁷ He boasted that his success "happened in America, not on the Russian steppes." He provided an oft-repeated quote for white journalists when he told the *American Magazine* that he would "always feel grateful that my ancestors were transplanted to North America."¹⁹⁸ The article was translated into a number of languages and distributed throughout India and Africa.¹⁹⁹ In Haiti, Spaulding represented the interests of African American commercial and cultural leaders. In the years immediately preceding his 1952 death, Spaulding became a proponent of American foreign interests as the Soviet Union, the U.S., and various African nations and their internationalist allies struggled to define the terms of African independence in the post-war period.

¹⁹⁵ "Major R.R. Wright, 92, Dies on Eve of Trip," *Baltimore Afro-American*, July 12, 1947.

¹⁹⁶ Spaulding, telegram to the Associated Negro Press, August 16, 1945, in the Spaulding Papers.

¹⁹⁷ Spaulding, "The Land of the Free," *Guideposts* (March, 1950): 5, in the Spaulding Papers.

¹⁹⁸ Spaulding, "What America Means to Me," *The American Magazine* (December, 1948): 7, in the Spaulding Papers.

¹⁹⁹ Jack Riley, "Tar Heel of the Week: Charles Clinton Spaulding," *Raleigh News and Observer*, April 23, 1950.

Spaulding and Wright presented a different perspective on African American international relations than their anti-colonial peers but showed similarity between their beliefs and past African American thought. Their ideology was shared by nineteenth-century black nationalists who, according to Penny Von Eschen, created a worldview consisting of “global analysis and a vision of black solidarity.” Spaulding and Wright also emphasized unity throughout the Diaspora while focusing on the role of middle-class African Americans in achieving uplift and salvation. This accommodationist worldview was considered relevant to a significant number of African Americans and Haitians. Individuals like Lherisson and Dismond expressed similar interest in creating economic bonds between African Americans and Haitians. Lherisson even extolled the continued virtue of African American missionary and civilizing efforts in Haiti. The African American press lauded the delegates and various segments of black America formulated plans to expand on their program. Spaulding and Wright also found enthusiastic partners within the Haitian upper-class. After their trip, one Haitian correspondent of the *Amsterdam News* lauded the “Business Men’s Commission of April 1937” for its investigation into Haiti’s “large opportunities for profitable investment.”²⁰⁰ Vincent and others who controlled Haiti’s labor and profited from investment and trade appreciated the accommodationist approach taken by the African American delegates.

Spaulding and Wright’s international agenda would have benefited from the trenchant analysis of colonialism and class offered by African American intellectuals like Hughes, Logan, and Du Bois. The hierarchical sensibilities of these black internationalists placed more emphasis on the challenges to labor and political exploitation from the black masses while Spaulding and Wright’s view of international relations placed agency in the hands of elites. This worldview was problematic when applied to Haiti, a country whose leader declared that the common people were unprepared for democracy.²⁰¹ Spaulding and Wright had a vision of racial uplift that was not applicable to Vincent’s Haiti but more suited to

²⁰⁰ Henri Ch. Rosemond, “News of Haiti,” *New York Amsterdam News*, June 19, 1937.

²⁰¹ Heintz and Heintz, *Written in Blood*, 485.

the African Americans they hoped would benefit from their scheme. While Spaulding and Wright were shortsighted, this does not mean that liberal and leftist leaders did not also make questionable decisions. Du Bois insisted on the tragic involvement of the Firestone Corporation in Liberia while Hughes supported the Soviet Union until the Nazi-Soviet Pact of 1939.²⁰² It was difficult for African Americans of all ideological persuasions to effectively analyze their miscalculations as they struggled to determine who were allies in a world largely hostile to black advancement. Racial chauvinism and elitism were Spaulding and Wright's handicaps that caused them to place too much faith in the Haitian bourgeoisie and eschew direct interactions with common Haitians. Wright was perhaps shifting his international focus as his life waned but Spaulding remained oblivious to the drawbacks of his international economic, religious, and political actions.

The delegates succeeded in their efforts to "throw up a highway" between underdeveloped Haiti and the economic and cultural centers of black America. They built on a blueprint provided by nineteenth century black nationalists. Other African Americans would provide their own contributions to this construction project in the years following the delegates' trip to Haiti. They laid the foundation for a highway on which African American values and investment dollars were transported to Haiti while Haitian commodities were extracted. Comprehending these international relations is as critical as understanding the anticolonial projects spearheaded by contemporary black internationalists. The actions of both ideological communities provide valuable insights into African American life and ideals during this time period. The beliefs and exploits that created Spaulding and Wright's highway and unified those who traveled on it illustrate the promise and disappointment found in relations between African Americans and their kin overseas.

²⁰² Campbell, *Middle Passages*, 217, 238-240.

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