

# TRINITY COLLEGE CAMBRIDGE



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## Theodore and Trevelyan: How Trinity Historians & Eastern Africans Shaped the Course of American Democracy<sup>1</sup>

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In early October 1911, Colonel Theodore Roosevelt typed a 117-page letter to the Trinity historian and statesman Sir George Otto Trevelyan.<sup>2</sup> It was one of the longest letters that he authored following his presidency (1901–1909). The emotional timbre of the letter was personal and reflective. It followed a visit made to Welcombe House a few months earlier in June by the former American president. Roosevelt had been accompanied by members of his family, including Edith Kermit Roosevelt, Ethel Carow Roosevelt, and Kermit, with whom Roosevelt had recently completed an expedition in Kenya, Uganda, Congo, Sudan, and Egypt. The Roosevelt family was welcomed by George Otto and Caroline Trevelyan, and their three sons, Sir Charles Trevelyan, Robert C. Trevelyan, and George M. Trevelyan.

Roosevelt began his letter by sharing that its contents were only for the Trevelyan family, as ‘it would be obviously entirely out of the question to make public, at any rate until long after all of us who are now alive are dead’. The letter is expansive, reaching around 32,800 words. It chronicled Roosevelt’s political

<sup>1</sup> The author wishes to thank Professor John Lonsdale and Trinity College, who graciously hosted him as a Visiting Fellow Commoner in 2021. He is also grateful for Rebecca Hughes and Diana Smith of the Wren Library, who expertly assisted in accessing Roosevelt’s correspondence with the Trevelyans. Lindsay Davenport and Susan Sarna of the Sagamore Hill National Historic Site were equally generous with their time and knowledge of Roosevelt’s former home and its holdings.

<sup>2</sup> Unless indicated otherwise, the citations draw from Roosevelt’s writings in *Scribner’s Magazine*, and from the Theodore Roosevelt Collection at Harvard College Library; Theodore Roosevelt Papers, Library of Congress; Smithsonian Institute Archives; Booker T. Washington Papers, Library of Congress; Wren Library, Trinity College; Churchill Archives, Cambridge, and W.E.B. Du Bois Papers, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.



and cultural reading of the British empire in Sudan and Egypt, and outlined his visits with European monarchs and heads of state following his eastern African expedition between 1909 and 1910.

At first sight, the letter reads like an explorer's chronicle, filled with Roosevelt's intuitive reactions to the cultural spaces of court life throughout early twentieth-century Europe. Roosevelt expressed his disdain toward Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands, for instance, whose 'pretentiousness [...] made her ridiculous'. In the company of Italian royals, Roosevelt was perplexed to find that men did not remove their top hats during formal occasions, constituting 'one bit of etiquette which I did not strike at any other court'.

Beyond cultural commentary, though, Roosevelt reflected on the question of political progress and social reform more than any other topic. Monarchs and religious leaders were assessed on their (in)abilities to govern according to the perceived welfare of their populations. The idea of the general welfare compelled Roosevelt to criticise American missionaries in Rome, who openly chastised the Pope. It further shaped how he talked about the role of the British Empire in Egypt and Sudan, where he spent the final weeks of his eastern African expedition. It was in Cairo, Roosevelt noted, 'where I was disappointed with some of the officers of the British Army whom I met'. As he recounted to Trevelyan, 'there were a few of the officers who were unpleasantly like the type described by Kipling in his South African story, "The Outsider". These particular officers were absorbed, not in their duty, but in the polo and tennis matches, and treated the assassination of Boutros Pasha as a mere illegitimate interruption to sport; evidently they had no serious appreciation of the situation nor of their own duties'. It was a political attitude that contradicted what Roosevelt called in the letter, 'real progress and civilisation'.

The surviving letter comes to us at a moment when Theodore Roosevelt's understanding of race and progress were undergoing transformation. It was a shift precipitated by the influence of eastern Africans. Roosevelt's growing concern over the Republican Party in the United States was also influenced by a generation of Whig historians at Trinity, especially George O. Trevelyan, George M. Trevelyan, and Thomas B. Macaulay, whose memorial accentuates the College's antechapel.

This essay wishes to briefly explore Roosevelt's political transformation between 1909 and 1912. As Roosevelt travelled throughout eastern Africa between 1909 and 1910, he was simultaneously immersed in his mobile, 'pig-skin' library,

where he reflected extensively on Thomas Macaulay's Whiggish history writing. During his campaign for president in 1912, Roosevelt reworked Trevelyan's *American Revolution* into his speeches and essays on race. All along, Roosevelt had in mind the positive impact of his interactions with eastern Africans, especially in the Kingdom of Buganda. Baganda diplomats conveyed to him the realities of Black progress and development.

### **Buganda's Diplomats Abroad**

The eastern African Kingdom of Buganda problematised the way that Europeans and Americans conceptualised the interior of Africa. From the sixteenth century onward, the Kingdom of Buganda had developed into a highly organised kingdom composed of a sovereign, clan heads, and royal women, countered by a parliament. Prior to the arrival of Omani traders in 1844, Baganda were already engaged in complex debates about political and historical progress (–kukulaakulana). European and American explorers reached the courts of Buganda – after which Uganda was named – in the 1860s. By May 1880, the Kingdom of Buganda had deployed three envoys – Sawaddu, Namkaddi, and Kataruba – to represent Kabaka (King) Muteesa I and the state before Queen Victoria.<sup>3</sup> Victoria's remaining diary outlines the presentation of the dignitaries: 'Received the 3 black Envoys, from Central Africa, sent by the King of Uganda, who had been very friendly to the explorers and to Capt. Speke. They are very fine tall, dignified, youngish men, wearing a sort of loose blue coat & loose trousers to the knee, with stockings & shoes, white shirts, & broad red sashes. Interpreters & Missionaries came with them, & L<sup>d</sup> Granville was there.'<sup>4</sup> The envoy delivered Queen Victoria a letter on behalf of Kabaka Muteesa I, the contents of which are unknown.

Buganda's early colonial historians and Buganda's future king, Kabaka Daudi Chwa II (r. 1897–1939), used new forms of colonial knowledge and power to legitimise their kingdom's regional influence, giving Buganda an envied status of imperial citizenship.<sup>5</sup> Kabaka Chwa II and Baganda diplomats hosted Winston Churchill

<sup>3</sup> 'Court Circular', *The Times*, 15 May 1880.

<sup>4</sup> Royal Archives, Queen Victoria's Diary, 14 May 1880.

<sup>5</sup> John Lonsdale, 'Kenya's Four Ages of Ethnicity', in *From Divided Pasts to Cohesive Futures: Reflections on Africa*, ed. by Hiroyuki Hino and others (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 15–68.

in 1907 and Theodore Roosevelt in 1909. Building upon much older ideas about African development, Chwa II reworked these leaders' ideas about progress into Buganda's vibrant political culture. To undermine internal political opposition, for example, Chwa II repurposed discourses about civilisation to strengthen his status as Buganda's preeminent guardian of 'empisa ez'obugunjufu', or 'customs of civilization'.<sup>6</sup> Winston Churchill's assertion that Buganda constituted the 'Pearl of Africa' became a rallying cry for Baganda patriots, who used the saying to justify Buganda's authority throughout Uganda. Churchill was often remembered in the Luganda press as an astute political observer.<sup>7</sup> In time, the Muganda musician George W. Kakoma harvested Uganda's 'Pearl' to pen the closing words of the country's national anthem. During a decade of African independence movements, Uganda now marketed itself as, 'The Pearl of Africa's Crown', a gem of civilisation and progress for the world to see.

Baganda administrators and intellectuals throughout the early 1900s took deliberative measures to engage and shape the world of empire. They attended royal investitures in Westminster and visited English communities, universities, and churches. Their diplomacy complicated Victorian views of the African continent and influenced colonial policy. Frederick Lugard's case for Indirect Rule had been developed in conversation with Baganda before it was practiced in northern Nigeria.<sup>8</sup>

Trinity College's early twentieth-century history also intersected with the work of Baganda diplomats. In a period of high Buganda diplomacy, the College hosted Sir Apolo Kaggwa and Hamu Mukasa, two of Buganda's foremost writers and statesmen. Kaggwa and Mukasa were in the United Kingdom in 1902 to attend the coronation of King Edward VII, following Queen Victoria's passing. During their visit, the two travelled to Cambridge to spend time with the missionary anthropologist John Roscoe, with whom Kaggwa had worked to author *Bassekabaka be Buganda (The Kings of Buganda)* one year earlier. The book became one of the most influential political histories in colonial Uganda and it informed an entire generation of scholarship on eastern African state building. On the evening of 6

<sup>6</sup> H.H. the Kabaka, *Obuyigirize, Obulabufu, N'Okwezaya mu Buganda* (Mengo: The Gambuze P. & P. Works, 1935).

<sup>7</sup> *Ndimugezi* [I am a wise person], 6 January 1954.

<sup>8</sup> In *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa*, Lugard argued that Buganda represented 'the best results of indirect rule' (Edinburgh & London: W. Blackwood and Sons, 1922), p. 200.

July, Kaggwa, Mukasa, and Roscoe visited Trinity, where they dined at High Table with the Master, the Latinist Henry M. Butler, and the biblical scholar Aldis Wright.

Mukasa's official history recounted that Trinity students were taught 'both theology and earthly wisdom'.<sup>9</sup> He continued, '[n]ow-a-days they [Trinity students] are taught engineering, carpentering, and about all kinds of machinery, and also nautical knowledge and other things which are profitable to men in this life, after they have learnt religion. Mukasa concluded by suggesting that Trinity – and Cambridge more broadly – constituted "the tutor of the world"; and though there are many tutors in Europe, yet there are none to equal Cambridge'. Mukasa returned to Uganda to build one of the largest private libraries in the country. He also supported the public donation of land for the creation of Bishop Tucker's College (now Uganda Christian University) and Makerere College. Trinity had provided for Mukasa a powerful tableau for imagining new forms of literary education in Buganda.

### Theodore Roosevelt in Africa

Theodore Roosevelt's eastern Africa itinerary between 1909 and 1910 nearly mirrored Churchill's. Roosevelt and Churchill corresponded prior to the former's expedition, and Roosevelt read Churchill's publications on Africa to inform his journey. In a letter written on 8 December 1908, Roosevelt's Ambassador to the United Kingdom penned Churchill. In addition to requesting a signed copy of *My African Journey*, Ambassador Whitelaw Reid shared that Roosevelt 'would value any hints about the trip such as you are kind enough to suggest'.

In time, Roosevelt felt similarly about the Kingdom of Buganda, whose courts he reached by Christmas 1909. Like Churchill, Roosevelt saw in Buganda a 'new outpost of civilization in the heart of the Dark Continent'. Roosevelt reworked his expedition into stories for *Scribner's Magazine*, whose circulation increased from 100,000 to 215,000 between 1909 and 1912.<sup>10</sup> Roosevelt's accounts provided Americans with their first popular engagement with eastern Africa. *Scribner's* published twelve of Roosevelt's articles between October 1909 and

<sup>9</sup> Ham Mukasa, *Uganda's Katikiro in England: Being the Official Account of His Visit to the Coronation of His Majesty King Edward VII*, trans. by Ernest Millar (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1904), p. 119.

<sup>10</sup> <<https://modjourn.org/scribners-magazine-an-introduction-to-the-mjp-edition-1910-1922/>>, accessed 28 September 2021.



September 1910, each filled with adventure stories and photographs. Formally, Roosevelt's expedition was funded by the Smithsonian Institution, designed to fill the United States National Museum with the natural world. It was a well-choreographed affair, where 'Mr Roosevelt and his son [Kermit] will kill the big game, the skins and skeletons of which will be prepared and shipped to the United States by other members of the party'. According to the Smithsonian, the expedition shipped around 11,400 specimens, including the skins of large animals and stuffed small mammals.<sup>11</sup> An additional 10,000 plant specimens were sent back to Washington, DC.

The sheer scope of hunting during the expedition has inspired a body of scholarship almost entirely focused on Roosevelt's interests in science and naturalism. Roosevelt's formal writings and letters of correspondence, however, illuminate a political biography undergoing considerable change. Roosevelt used his time in Africa to think deeply about politics and historical progress. He dined with British settlers and missionaries; and attended a carnival in Mombasa, Kikuyu healing practices in the Kenyan highlands, and royal courts in Uganda.<sup>12</sup> We also have good reason to believe that Roosevelt absorbed the knowledge of African porters about the natural world. As Roosevelt journeyed from Kenya to Cairo, he also read aggressively, studying Thomas Macaulay's *History of England from the Accession of James II*, *Critical and Historical Essays*, and *Lays of Ancient Rome*.

Roosevelt's essays in *Scribner's Magazine* were reworked into the book *African Game Trails*, which was published during the same period. The opening nine and eleventh essays are set in Kenya. The tenth is devoted to Uganda, while the twelfth and final essays end in Sudan and Egypt. The logic of Roosevelt's structure follows the trajectory of the Uganda Railway, whose construction symbolised the ostensible advancement of colonial progress into the interior of Africa. As Roosevelt put it, 'this railroad, the embodiment of the eager, masterful, materialistic civilization of to-day, was pushed through a region in which nature, both as regards wild man and wild beast, did not and does not differ materially from what it was in Europe in the late Pleistocene'. In his published accounts, Roosevelt offered political commentary on local communities and British and

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<sup>11</sup> <[https://www.si.edu/object/auth\\_exp\\_fbr\\_EACE0006](https://www.si.edu/object/auth_exp_fbr_EACE0006)>, accessed 29 September 2021.

<sup>12</sup> Roosevelt's cultural exchanges in Kenya were reproduced on film and are currently housed in the Library of Congress: <<https://www.loc.gov/item/mp76000261/>>, accessed 12 August 2021.



Image 1: Roosevelt was hosted in Buganda by Catholic missionaries and the kingdom's principal diplomats. Left to right (front): Prince Nuhu Mbogo (head of Uganda's Muslim community); Mother Mary Paul; Sister Capistran; Theodore Roosevelt; Kabaka Daudi Chwa II; Prince Joseph. Left to right (back): Minister of Justice Stanislaus Mugwanya (head of Uganda's Catholic community); Revd Henry Write Duta (partially blocked); Sir Apolo Kaggwa; Revd Zakarya Kizito Kisingiri.

(Library of Congress/DIG/ppmsca/37593).

South African settlers in Kenya. Roosevelt also explored the culture of porters, with whom he developed an especially close relationship, to which we will return in the final paragraph of this essay. Roosevelt's assessment of Kenyan politics was predictably imperialistic, informed by White settlers and colonial administrators who viewed themselves as champions of political development and the end of Indian Ocean slavery.

After spending nine months in Kenya, Roosevelt reached central Uganda, where he spent time in the courts of the Kingdoms of Buganda and Bunyoro (Image 1). Like Trinity's headmaster years earlier, Roosevelt dined with Apolo Kaggwa, in addition to several Baganda diplomats and Kabaka Daudi Chwa II.

He also visited with Catholic missionaries. Roosevelt's earliest impressions of Uganda were shaped by the writings of Sir Harry H. Johnston, who served as a colonial administrator in Uganda. It was Johnston who concluded negotiations with the Kingdom of Buganda, resulting in the Uganda Agreement of 1900. The Agreement simultaneously bolstered Buganda's special political status in Uganda, while privatising land holdings. Roosevelt had helped orchestrate Johnston's 1908 tour in the United States. To Booker T. Washington, Roosevelt presented Johnston as 'the great English administrator', 'the kind of advisor and friend who is sorely needed by the colored race'. During his stint in the United States, Johnston and Washington met on the campus of Tuskegee Institute.

Roosevelt's, Johnston's and Washington's earlier conversations about eastern Africa were part of a larger interest growing among Black intellectuals in the United States. W.E.B. Du Bois founded *The Crisis* – the official publication of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People – in November 1910. By late 1912, the magazine had covered Buganda's role in global politics. In the October issue, Kabaka Chwa II, 'the black boy who is king', was selected as the magazine's Man of the Month. Chwa was cast as an exemplar of Black political power and diplomacy during a time when Jim Crow policies were expanding rapidly throughout the United States. The magazine's readership learned about 'the thirty-seventh king who has ascended the throne of Uganda'.<sup>13</sup> Du Bois showed that Buganda's earliest monarchs had been the contemporaries of King Henry IV and Joan of Arc. Following Du Bois' history, the Muganda sociologist Ernest B. Kalibala began corresponding with Du Bois on Buganda's history and culture. Du Bois reworked their correspondence in 1930, writing on the history of the Kingdom of Buganda in *Africa, Its Geography, People and Products*.

Roosevelt's letters to Johnston show that he had studied the colonial administrator's works before reaching Uganda. As Roosevelt shared with Johnston, 'you are interested in the very subjects which appeal particularly to me'. The President's remaining library at Sagamore Hill, Long Island, shows that he maintained a copy of Johnston's two-volume history, *The Uganda Protectorate* (1902). It was in Johnston's pages that Roosevelt learned about Apolo Kaggwa,

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<sup>13</sup> 'Along the Color Line', *The Crisis*, 4, no. 6, October 1912, p. 276.

who had shaped much of what Johnston knew about ‘native customs, history, and languages’. Through his prolific writing, Kaggwa outlined the power and sophistication of Kiganda culture.<sup>14</sup> He standardised Buganda’s royal chronicles in a way that underscored precolonial progress, showing how the region’s royal historiographies were just as complex and ancient as the House of Hanover’s. As Johnston saw it, the complexities of historical debate in early colonial Buganda propelled early colonial literacy. ‘During the years from 1899 to 1901’, Johnston noted, ‘125,737 books (religious and educational) were sold by the Church Missionary Society to natives of the Protectorate at prices amounting in the aggregate to £2,459.’ Local debates regarding the deep past and the kingdom’s expanding foreign policy required accessible libraries.

Roosevelt’s writings about Buganda differed significantly than those on Kenyan cultural and society, of whose complexities he knew very little. As Roosevelt saw it, [a]lone among the natives of tropical Africa, the people of Uganda have proved very accessible to Christian teaching, so that the creed of Christianity is now dominant among them’. Unlike Kenya, ‘Uganda can never be this kind of white man’s country [...] it must remain essentially a black man’s country’. Buganda, as he continued, must ‘develop without fear of being overwhelmed in the surrounding gulf of savagery; and this aside from the direct stimulus to development conferred by the consciously and unconsciously exercised influence of the white man, where there is much of evil, but much more of ultimate good.’

Roosevelt’s conception of societies in Uganda beyond Buganda was as ill-informed as it was racially problematic. Where in Kenya Roosevelt saw colonial settlers ushering ahistorical ‘tribes’ into a world of political progress, the work of Europeans in Buganda was cast as potentially problematic, one that could obstruct older histories of development in the region. The sort of Christianity developing in Buganda was one where churches were ‘built by native Christians themselves without outside assistance in either money or labor’. In his commentary on visiting the Lukiiko, or Parliament of Buganda, Roosevelt informed his American readers, ‘I met [Kabaka Chwa II’s] advisers, shrewd, powerful looking men; and went into the Council Chamber, where I was greeted by the council, substantial looking men, well dressed in the native fashion, and representing all the districts of the kingdom’.

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<sup>14</sup> In addition to *Bassekabaka be Buganda*, Kaggwa’s works included, *Engero Za Baganda*, 1927; *Ekitabo Kye Mpisa Za Baganda*, 1934; *Ekitabo Kye Bika Bya Baganda*, 1949.

After leaving Buganda, Roosevelt maintained diplomatic correspondence with the Kingdom of Buganda. When he returned to New York, Roosevelt displayed ‘the state sword’ of the Kabaka in his house.<sup>15</sup> On 25 August 1911, Roosevelt typed a letter to Zakaria Kizito Kisingiri. Kisingiri served as the chief of the powerful county of Bulemeezi, whose frontier separated the Kingdoms of Bunyoro and Buganda. He was later appointed one of Kabaka Chwa II’s three regents, alongside Apolo Kaggwa and Stanislaus Mugwanya. Kisingiri also took an active role in supporting the Christian conversion of the Omugabe (King) of Ankole. Kisingiri had forwarded Roosevelt ‘the courteous greetings of His Highness the Kabaka, and the ministers of the Native Parliament’. In reply, Roosevelt requested Kisingiri to ‘express to His Highness and to the Ministers my cordial appreciations’. It was a letter that was drafted on the eve of Roosevelt’s article on the political power of local communities over corporate and government charters in New York. As one article seven days later noted, political progress was predicated upon the very sort of determination and political development that Roosevelt observed in Buganda’s management of eastern Africa’s colonial regime: ‘Every principle of home rule is violated by such action [of imposing corporate charters], and it is to the last degree undemocratic and in violation of the fundamentals of popular government.’

### **Trinity History Writing**

Roosevelt’s ruminations about progress were also impacted by the history writing of Thomas Macaulay and the historical and political work of the Trevelyan family. Roosevelt’s association with the Trevelyans began when he was Governor of New York (1899–1901). With Charles Philips Trevelyan, he corresponded about the poetry of William O’Neill. Roosevelt invited George Otto Trevelyan to stay with him in the White House in 1903. It was the least Roosevelt could do after Trevelyan mailed copies of the earliest volumes of his Whiggish interpretation of the American Revolution. Roosevelt considered the history to be ‘the best account of the Revolution written by any one’.

Roosevelt had also begun corresponding with George M. Trevelyan by 1907. George Otto mailed Roosevelt a copy of *England Under the Stuarts* in 1905, where his son outlined a history of religious toleration and constitutional

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<sup>15</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, *An Autobiography* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1913), p. 358.



progress.<sup>16</sup> Roosevelt took particular interest in G.M. Trevelyan's 1907 book on the Italian patriot Guiseppe Garibaldi, which placed its readers in conversation with 'man's long march to civilisation'.<sup>17</sup> Trevelyan's approach to Garibaldi was consistent with the sentiments of Whigs and Liberals of the period, who regarded Garibaldi as a champion of political progress and freedom. Roosevelt used the work to complicate Pierre de La Gorce's history of the siege of Rome. Informed by Trevelyan, Roosevelt was wary of histories – like La Gorce's – that were 'anti-democratic'.

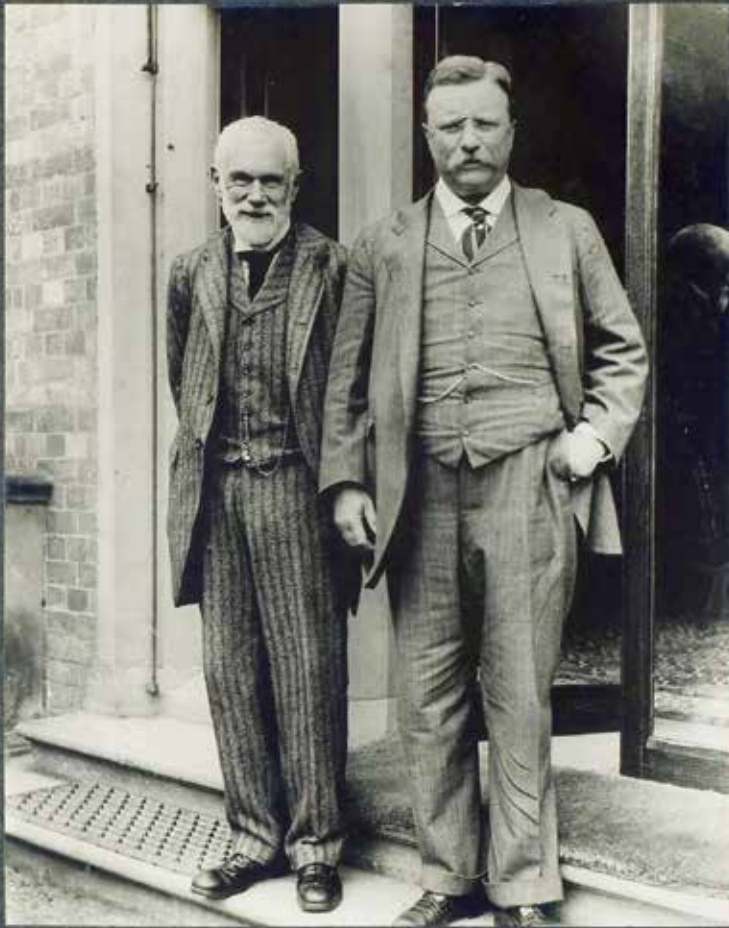
George O. Trevelyan and Roosevelt corresponded extensively about the history writing of Thomas Macaulay, which Roosevelt read extensively in eastern Africa. Roosevelt travelled to eastern Africa with fifty-nine books, weighing around sixty pounds. A single porter was responsible for transporting the library. In a letter to Trevelyan, Roosevelt shared that 'I will have to take some books on my African trip, and the special piece of resistance is to be Macaulay's complete works [...]'. Once in Kenya, Roosevelt continued to write to Trevelyan about his uncle's histories. Macaulay had authored Roosevelt's most read book throughout the expedition. As he would share, 'Of all the authors I know I believe I should first choose him as the man whose writings will most help a man of action who desires to be both efficient and decent, to keep straight and yet to be of some account in the world'.

It was Macaulay's vision of political progress that helped Roosevelt make historical sense out of his experiences in eastern Africa. As deeply problematic and prejudicial as his views often were, Roosevelt's reflections about race and development in eastern Africa compelled him to identify societies that he believed were on the march toward political progress and social development. It was through such lenses that he looked upon Buganda. Baganda, he believed, with the support of colonial policies and missionaries, would continue to 'develop those industries that were natural to them and would be of use when they returned to their own homes'. It was a vision of Black activism and agency that he would rework in time during the Election of 1912.

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<sup>16</sup> David Cannadine, *G.M. Trevelyan: A Life in History* (London: WW. Norton & Company, 1992), pp. 98–105.

<sup>17</sup> George M. Trevelyan, *Garibaldi's Defence of the Roman Republic* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1907), p. 1.



JUNE . 1910 .

SIR GEORGE OTTO TREVELYAN & THEODORE ROOSEVELDT

Image 2: Theodore Roosevelt and Sir George Otto Trevelyan at Welcombe House, June 1910 (Used with the kind permission of National Trust/Donald Bovill and Susan McCormack).



Image 3: Theodore Roosevelt addresses the Cambridge Union, 26 May 1910.

(GBR/0265/UA/VCCorr/XII-19/9/3. Reproduced by kind permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library).

Following his expedition, Roosevelt travelled to the United Kingdom, where he spent time with the Trevelyan family and spoke at several venues (Image 2). The Wren Library maintains dozens of letters that circulated among the Trevelyan family about Theodore Roosevelt. They show how Caroline Trevelyan found Roosevelt to be ‘most amusing’ and that ‘she liked him better than she expected’. It also shows the extent to which the family saw Roosevelt and George Otto as ‘excellent friends’. Trevelyan took keen interest in Roosevelt’s political career, lamenting that Roosevelt may not return to politics after his presidency. ‘I am sorry about Roosevelt’s descending into private life,’ G.O. Trevelyan shared with his son. ‘He is fine as a great Republican fact; but he cannot but feel it rather flat.’ The letters show that Roosevelt’s political career was often a source of anxiety for George Otto, who would go on to follow the 1912 Election closely. It was Trevelyan’s hope that Roosevelt would, at the very least, come in second.

Before reaching the Trevelyan home in June, Roosevelt had begun reworking his ideas about Black progress. He addressed the Cambridge Union on 26 May 1910 (Image 3), where he was welcomed by its president, Trinity student G.G.

Butler. Two days earlier, the Union voted 31 ayes to 49 noes on the motion, ‘That this House prefers a Nationalist to Imperialist Policy’. It was a motion that aimed to silence critics of empire. Roosevelt’s speech explored the question of class, social equality, and personal contentment. He argued that in public life, ‘[i]t is not genius, it is not extraordinary subtlety, or acuteness of intellect, that is important’.<sup>18</sup> More than anything, public life demanded ‘the rather humdrum, virtues that in their sum are designated as character’. For Roosevelt, individuals possessed political virtue to the extent ‘he has done his duty and he deserves to be treated by those who have had great success as nevertheless having shown the fundamental qualities that entitle him to respect’. It was an argument for democratic equality before an audience steeped in the ornamentalisms of class and imperial hierarchy.<sup>19</sup> The former President invited Cambridge undergraduates to recall the American Civil War, where Union soldiers of different ages, rank, and social and racial backgrounds fought with equal admiration.<sup>20</sup> ‘The same principle,’ Roosevelt continued, ‘should shape our associations in ordinary civil life.’

Five days later, before an audience at Guildhall, London, Roosevelt was more direct. It was an address on British policy in Africa, where he cited Uganda to illustrate the history of Black progress and equality. ‘Uganda’, Roosevelt argued, ‘cannot be made a white man’s country, and the prime need is to administer the land in the interest of the native races, and to help forward their development.’ As he continued, ‘Nowhere else of recent times has missionary effort met with such success; the inhabitants stand far above most of the races in the Dark Continent in their capacity for progress toward civilization’. Roosevelt was critical of British policy in Egypt, by contrast, which evoked considerable controversy in the national press. In his remarks, Roosevelt stated that ‘you are so very busy at home that I am not sure whether you realize just how things are, in some places at least, abroad’. At length, Roosevelt outlined what he saw as numerous policies blunders in Egypt, culminating in the assassination of Prime Minister Boutros Pasha Ghali: ‘Yet recent events, and especially what has happened in connection with and following on the assassination of Boutros Pasha three months ago, have shown that, in certain vital points, you have

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18 Theodore Roosevelt, *African and European Addresses* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons), p. 150.

19 David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire* (London: Penguin, 2002).

20 Roosevelt, *African and European Addresses*, p. 152.

erred; and it is for you to make good your error.’ The speech was reprinted in entirety in *The Times*,<sup>21</sup> which one American columnist suggested was ‘startling enough’.<sup>22</sup> Anti-imperialist writers in the *Evening Post* were more critical of Roosevelt’s earlier imperial policies, demanding that the United States remove its military from the Philippines.<sup>23</sup>

### **Historical Imagination and the Election of 1912**

Roosevelt returned to the United States in mid-June 1910, whereafter he ran for a third term as President. Roosevelt’s bid in the Election of 1912 and the emergence of his new political party, the Progressive Party, has been explored by scholars elsewhere.<sup>24</sup> The Progressive Party was the last of America’s significant third-party movements. Roosevelt aimed to push for anti-trust policies, campaign finance reform, women’s suffrage, and populist labour rights. It was also a movement backed by the recently formed NAACP for its positions on racial equality. As Roosevelt saw it: ‘We Progressives were fighting for elementary social and industrial justice, and we had with us the great majority of the practical idealists of the country’.

Historians of race have suggested that Roosevelt advocated for ‘the racial superiority of whites over all others’ throughout his long public career.<sup>25</sup> But a closer reading of Roosevelt’s speeches during the campaign show that his vision for social justice had altered significantly after his African expedition. During his presidency, Roosevelt’s position on racial equality was lacklustre. He had been the first sitting US President to invite an African American – Booker T. Washington in 1901 – to dine in the White House. Due to protest among White southerners, it would be the last occasion. One of his more notable presidential addresses on race was delivered before the New York City Republican Club on 13 February 1905. In his speech, Roosevelt sought to mitigate social

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21 ‘Mr. Roosevelt in the City’, *The Times*, 1 June 1910.

22 ‘Mr. Roosevelt’s Speech’, *The Times*, 2 June 1910.

23 ‘By Cable, from our Correspondent’, *The Times*, 2 June 1910.

24 Sidney M. Milkis, *Theodore Roosevelt, the Progressive Party, and the Transformation of American Democracy* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2009).

25 Douglas A. Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II*.



tensions between southern supporters and northern Republicans, arguing that Confederates had fought during the Civil War ‘with equal bravery and with equal sincerity of conviction, each striving for the light as it was given him to see the light, though it is now clear to all that the triumph of the cause of freedom and of the Union was essential to the welfare of mankind’.<sup>26</sup>

The emotional pitch of Roosevelt’s campaign speeches in 1912 were noticeably different, as were the Progressive’s literature on race and political representation. Roosevelt’s most robust commentary on race and political progress was given in Chicago, where he offered a blistering critique of both the Republican and Democratic Parties.<sup>27</sup> It was a speech that was published in a pamphlet alongside several letters and statements written by the party’s candidate. ‘For many years the attitude of the Democratic Party towards the colored man has been one of brutality, and the attitude of the Republican Party towards him one of hypocrisy. One party [southern Democrats] has brutally denied him, not only his rights, but all hope of ever being treated aright; the other [northern Republicans] has hypocritically pretended to be zealous for his rights, but has acted only in ways that did him harm and not good.’<sup>28</sup> Roosevelt continued, asserting that the American project could not ‘permanently succeed except on the basis of treating each man on his worth as a man. The humblest among us, no matter what his creed, his birthplace, or the color of his skin [...] must have guaranteed to him under the law his right to life and liberty, to protection from injustice, to the enjoyment of the fruits of his own labour, and to do his share in the work of self-government [...]’.

Roosevelt’s speech and publication on race was developed while reading George Otto Trevelyan’s recently launched instalment of the American Revolution (*The Concluding Part of the American Revolution*, 1912). It was from *American Revolution* that Roosevelt borrowed the language of ‘life and liberty’, a word pairing that Roosevelt did not employ to any extent prior to reading the book. Trevelyan had presented the British capture of Charleston

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26 Theodore Roosevelt, ‘Address’, ‘Proceedings at the Nineteenth Annual Lincoln Dinner of the Republic Club of the City of New York’, 13 February 1905, p. 14.

27 Theodore Roosevelt, ‘Colonel Roosevelt’s Statement at the National Progressive Convention’, Chicago, 6 August 1912, in *The Negro Question: Attitude of the Progressive Party Toward the Colored Race*.

28 Theodore Roosevelt, ‘The Progressives and the Colored Man’, in *The Negro Question*, p. 13.

in emotional, provocative language: ‘During the opening years of the Revolution they [Americans] had exerted themselves with passionate energy to repel the invasion of their political rights, to ward off the worst penalties of rebellion, and to achieve the liberation of their country. Their personal life and liberty, and their national independence, were now secured; but they still were floundering deep in a morass of trouble which seemed to have neither shore nor bottom. Enthusiasm had subsided, the hope of a prosperous issue was dim and distant, and weariness and dissatisfaction ruled the hour.’<sup>29</sup> Roosevelt saw his Progressive movement building upon a revolutionary spirit outlined in Trevelyan’s interpretation of the late eighteenth century – one that called for radical reform across all sections of the country. Like their political forebearers during the Revolution, Americans were now called upon to ignite a subsided enthusiasm for the cause of racial equality. The cause of racial ‘life and liberty’ must advance.

It was for this reason, then, that Roosevelt was relieved to see that Trevelyan’s book was published soon after C.R.L. Fletcher and Rudyard Kipling published their *History of England*, whose Conservative interpretation of American political history cast the late eighteenth century as the ‘American rebellion’.<sup>30</sup> Kipling’s racialised history had also lambasted Whig politicians for abolishing slavery in the West Indies. ‘The prosperity of the West Indies, once our richest possession, has very largely declined since slavery was abolished in 1833. The population is mainly black, descended from slaves imported in previous centuries, or of mixed black and white race; lazy, vicious and incapable of any serious improvement, or of work except under compulsion. In such a climate a few bananas will sustain the life of a negro quite sufficiently; why should he work to get more than this? He is quite happy and quite useless, and spends any extra wages which he may earn upon finery.’

Trevelyan, however, structured his history around the biography of the anti-slavery campaigner Charles James Fox. The *American Revolution* taught its readers that Fox, on his deathbed, had commented to his wife, “‘The [end of the] Slave Trade and Peace [of Versailles] are such glorious things. I cannot

<sup>29</sup> George Otto Trevelyan, *Charles the Third and Charles Fox: The Concluding Part of the American Revolution*, Vol 1 (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1912), p. 271.

<sup>30</sup> C.R.L. Fletcher and Rudyard Kipling, *A History of England* (New York: Double, Page & Company, 1911).

give them up even to you.’ His last intelligible sentence was, “I die happy”.<sup>31</sup> The result of Roosevelt’s campaign was not as fortunate. As Roosevelt recalled to Trevelyan on the campaign trail: ‘My opponents speak of me as if I were a demagogue, advocating the Commune; [...] Well, upon my word! I think that the reactionaries here are at least as bad (and probably worse) than the reactionaries in England.’

While Roosevelt predictably did not explicitly mention eastern Africa or Whig historiography in his speeches before an American audience, their lessons of progress reverberated throughout his political writings. Roosevelt’s vision for the country was perceived as too radical. He secured eighty-eight electoral votes to Woodrow Wilson’s 435. But the Progressive agenda, developed further by Black activists after the First World War, would continue to animate liberal politics in a world characterised by Jim Crow policies and colonial empires.

### **Conclusion: Mohammed Yohari in Long Island**

It was in the respective homes of Trevelyan and Roosevelt that their liberal visions were most clearly seen. As Caroline Trevelyan shared with her daughter-in-law Elizabeth Trevelyan, George Otto followed the Election very closely, as it was their view that Roosevelt was ‘the right man to be President’. George O. Trevelyan believed that Roosevelt had indeed been a hero for his own progressive politics. Roosevelt’s response was deferential: ‘I am not in the least a hero, my dear fellow. I am a perfectly common-place man and I know it; I am just a decent American citizen who tries to stand for what is [decent(?)] in his own country and other countries and who owes very much to you and certain men like you who are not fellow-countrymen of his.’

Five months later, in October 1915, Roosevelt received a visitor from such a country. Mohammed Yohari reached the doorstep of Roosevelt’s home after travelling from eastern Africa. He had worked with Roosevelt as a porter during their expedition. We know very little about the journey that led Yohari to Long Island, or how he managed to navigate wartime waters. We know that once Yohari arrived, though, Roosevelt hosted him in the Sagamore Estate for several days, if not weeks. At first, Roosevelt offered to pay Yohari’s transport

<sup>31</sup> Trevelyan, *Charles the Third and Charles Fox*, p. 38.

to Mozambique. However, Yohari persuaded his former employer to secure his admission into an American university. Roosevelt took out a pen and paper and wrote to Booker T. Washington about the possibility of admitting Yohari to the Tuskegee Institute. The account in *Crisis* was more direct: ‘Mohammed Yohari, an African youth, whom Colonel Theodore Roosevelt met in Africa on his hunting trip, came to him in New York recently and asked to be sent to school. Mr. Roosevelt sent him to Tuskegee.’<sup>32</sup>

This may be the first instance that an American president hosted an African guest in their home. One can only speculate about the closeness of Roosevelt’s relationships with his eastern African associates if Yohari possessed the confidence that he would be well received after travelling unannounced to Long Island five years after they had seen each other. Earlier, in *Scribner’s*, Roosevelt talked about how meaningful he felt his interactions were with communities across eastern Africa, including porters, with whom he had ‘become really attached’. Their reunion in New York embodied Roosevelt’s later vision for a racially just world. The sources of inspiration for egalitarian politics in early twentieth-century America were many; Roosevelt’s included the Whig historians of Trinity College and the work of eastern Africans.

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<sup>32</sup> *The Crisis*, 11, no. 3, January 1916, p. 115.