

## Two Sides of a Coin: Image of Ethiopia in the US until 1935

Shimeles Ayele<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

*This study explores the image of Ethiopia in the US until 1935. It is historical research based on qualitative content analysis. The sources were historical newspapers, books, journal articles, and websites. Based on these sources, the image of Ethiopia was explored in the US in two periods – before and after Adwa. In each of those periods, Ethiopia had two contradictory images which appeared at the same time. In the pre-Adwa period Ethiopia was a redeemer and dignified black nation for African-Americans, but land of black barbarians and savage for the racists. Besides, after Adwa Ethiopia continued as a symbol of freedom for the African-Americans, but it became a Caucasian civilized nation for the racists. Adwa enhanced Ethiopia's symbol of freedom for the African-Americans. Conversely, Ethiopia was transformed from barbaric Negro to civilized Caucasian in the view of racists.*

**Keywords:** Ethiopia, US, persona, Adwa, relation, and newspapers

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<sup>1</sup> Shimeles Ayele is lecturer of History, Department of History, Bahir Dar University

## **1. Introduction**

The researcher was motivated to investigate the view of the US towards Ethiopia in earlier periods due to the current political pressure of the former on the latter. Tigray People's Liberation Front started the war on November 3, 2020, by attacking the northern command of the Ethiopian National Defence Force. It also committed ethnic cleansing on November 9, 2020, on over 800 Amharas.<sup>2</sup> However, the operations of law enforcement and survival in Ethiopia annoyed the US. The US officials hastily released statements that bulldozed the Ethiopian Government. The US has the interest to save Tigray People's Liberation Front. As a result, the US has been putting pressure on Ethiopia in various ways.<sup>3</sup> And these pressures emanated from undermining Ethiopia as a nation. This was manifested through threatening national sovereignty.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, there were times when the US had given higher stature to Ethiopia. Besides, it had been rushing to establish diplomatic relations with Ethiopia.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, the researcher was inspired to know more about the earlier view of the US about Ethiopia.

The study chiefly aimed to reconnoitre US's view about Ethiopia until the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Besides, it aimed to assess early Ethio-US interaction, identify early US interest in Ethiopia, and analyse the role of Adwa victory in changing the image of Ethiopia. The study attempted to answer the following questions.

- ❖ How was the early US view of Ethiopia?
- ❖ What were the interests of the US in Ethiopia in its early relation?
- ❖ How did Adwa change the image of Ethiopia in the US?

In order to investigate how the US viewed Ethiopia, historical research design is applied. Historical research is the finding, using, interpreting, and correlating information from both

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<sup>2</sup> Jon Abbink, *The Atlantic Community mistake on Ethiopia: counter-productive statements and data-poor policy of the EU and the USA on the Tigray conflict*, African Studies Centre Leiden, Leiden University, The Netherlands. ASC, Working Paper 150 / 2021, 2nd edition, P. 9.

<sup>3</sup> Ayele Gelan, Addis Standard. Op-Ed: US government's blind spots on the current crisis in Ethiopia. June 10, 2021. <https://addisstandard.com/op-ed-us-governments-blind-spots-on-the-current-crisis-in-ethiopia/>. Accessed on 3/01/2022; Anadolu Agency, Pressure from US, EU could destabilize Ethiopia', 22.04.202 <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/pressure-from-us-eu-could-destabilize-ethiopia/2216638>. Accessed on 3/01/2022; Andrew Korybko, The Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC), Analyzing The American Hybrid War on Ethiopia, October 11, 2021. <https://russiancouncil.ru/en/blogs/andrew-korybko/analyzing-the-american-hybrid-war-on-ethiopia/>. Accessed on 3/01/2022.

<sup>4</sup> Worku Abera, Opinion – Biden's Blunder on Ethiopia. E-International Relations, N O V 1 7, 2 0 2 1.P. 1. <https://www.e-ir.info/2021/11/17/opinion-bidens-blunder-on-ethiopia/>. Accessed on 3/01/2022.

<sup>5</sup> The Sunday Star, United States in the Red Sea, Washington Dc, January 13, 1907. P. 4. Barbour County index, Making Treaties With Menelek of Abyssinia, (Medicine Lodge, Kan.), November 11, 1903.31. The Sun, Sunday, Abyssinia through Mr. Skinner's Eyes, December 9, 1906.

primary and secondary sources in order to understand past events.<sup>6</sup> Qualitative content analysis of archived newspapers and secondary sources, i.e. literature, was applied for the study. The researcher utilized historical newspapers published in the US.

History is characterized by successive reconsideration, rethinking and redrafting. Sequentially, it provides new patterns and meanings of the past. In the process of revision and rewriting historians need to use sources. Historical newspapers are among those sources of history.<sup>7</sup> Historical newspapers have much significance for historians as sources. First, historical newspapers offer the opportunity to understand the people's views about historical events. This enables researchers to reduce excessive dependence on a mere accumulation of events.<sup>8</sup> Second, newspapers fill the gaps of records of large organizations that can be used by political historians.<sup>9</sup> Histories of individual and social groups can be incorporated through careful exploitation of newspapers.<sup>10</sup>

Third, historical newspapers reflect the different aspects of a certain society. They reflect the political, moral, and economic environments in which they were produced and they hold dense, continuous and multi-level information which can help us understand how contemporaries experienced their present. This makes them indispensable sources for research, for both academic and non-academic users.<sup>11</sup> Fourth, historical newspapers may contain information that is unavailable in other sources.<sup>12</sup> Lastly, they are important to check facts and collect data about larger issues.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Torou Elena, KatiforiAkrivi, Vassilakis Costas, LepourasGeorgios, HalatsisConstantin, Capturing the Historical Research Methodology: An Experimental Approach, Researchgate, Conference Paper, anuary 2009.p. 1. [file:///C:/Users/hp/pc/AppData/Local/Temp/Capturing\\_the\\_historical\\_research\\_methodology\\_an\\_e-2.pdf](file:///C:/Users/hp/pc/AppData/Local/Temp/Capturing_the_historical_research_methodology_an_e-2.pdf). Accessed on 3/01/2022.

<sup>7</sup> Anthony Brundage, *Going to the Sources: A Guide to Historical Research and Writing*, 6th ed, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Hoboken, USA, 2018. P. 17

<sup>8</sup> The Magazine of American Historical Association Perspectives on history <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/october-1993/late-to-the-feas> Archives and Research Late to the Feast: Newspapers as Historical Sources. Jerry W. Knudson | Oct 1, 1993. Accessed date 06/11/2011. The Ohio State University. [https://guides.osu.edu/newspapers/why\\_use](https://guides.osu.edu/newspapers/why_use). Accessed date 06/11/2011.

<sup>9</sup> Secker, J, *Newspapers and historical research: a study of historians and custodians in Wales*, (Unpublished Doctoral thesis, University of Wales, 1999). P. 1.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid*, P. 26.

<sup>11</sup> Maud Ehrmann, Estelle Bunout and Marten Düring, *Historical Newspaper User Interfaces: A Review*. Research gate.Conference paper, 2019.<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/339529189>. P. 1 W.H. McDowell, *Historical Research: A Guide for Writers of Dissertations, Theses, Articles and Books*, Pearson Education Limited, 2002. P. 67.

<sup>12</sup> Secker, J. P. 183.

<sup>13</sup>Elina Late and SannaKumpulainen, *Interacting with digitized historical newspapers: understanding the use of digital surrogates as primary sources*, *Journal of Documentation*, Emerald Publishing Limited, [www.emeraldgroupublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm](http://www.emeraldgroupublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm). 2021. P. 3

Nevertheless, historical newspapers may encounter limitations. The major shortcomings are inaccuracies and distortions.<sup>14</sup> Besides, there may be an inability or unwillingness of historians to imagine the various ways in which newspapers can be used and inaccessibility of historical newspapers.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, the usual scrutiny and sifting of sources are important in exploiting historical newspapers.

The newspapers used for the study were collected from the repository of the Library of Congress. The newspapers were published by different organizations. These include Barbour County Index, The National Tribune, The Washington Times, The Sunday Star, The Washington Herald, New York Daily Tribune, Washington Sentinel, The Topeka State Journal, and others. The newspapers were selected on the basis of contents. The yardstick for newspaper selection was whether it comprised stories about Ethiopia or not. In addition, various books, journal articles, and web sources were exploited.

## **2. The Origin of Ethio-US Relations**

The early relation between Ethiopia and the USA was among peoples at an individual level. The initiation was taken by the African Americans in the US. They used to be inspired by biblical, independent, and civilized Ethiopia for progress and freedom. In addition, in 1808 there were Ethiopian merchants in New York.<sup>16</sup> There were also US individuals who arrived in Ethiopia for various missions. Those individuals were mostly comprised of military men, journalists, and African Americans. At the time of British military expedition Henry M. Stanley, a special correspondent for New York Herald was in Ethiopia. Stanley came with the British troops and witnessed the situation in Ethiopia during the expedition.<sup>17</sup> There were also American military officers who came to Ethiopia supporting the Egyptian invasion attempt. General W. W. Loring was well known among those US military officers.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> W.H. McDowell, P. 66. And Secker, J. P. 4.

<sup>15</sup> Glenn R. Wilkinson, At the coal-face of history: Personal reflections on using newspapers as a source, *Studies in Newspaper and Periodical History*, 3:1-2, 211-221, DOI: 10.1080/13688809509357927, 1995. P. 212.

<sup>16</sup> Assefa Mehretu, Partners for Progress and Modernization: Rise and Fall of United States of America's Soft-power Relations with Ethiopia. *Eastern Africa Social Science Research Review*, Volume 29, Number 2, June 2013, pp. 51-77. P. 53.

<sup>17</sup> Getachew Metaferia, *Ethiopia and the United States: History, Diplomacy, and Analysis*, Algora Publishing, New York, 2009. p. 13.

<sup>18</sup> William Mce. Dye, *Muslim Egypt and Christian Abyssinia: Military Service Under the Khedive in his Province and Beyond their Borders, as Experienced by the American Staff*, New York, Atkin&Prout Printers, 1880. P. 307; ተክለጻድቅ ሙከራያ, ዐፄ ዩሐንስ እና የኢትዮጵያ አንድነት, ኩራዝ አሳታሚ ድርጅት, አዲስ አበባ, 1982. P. 144.

This early Ethio-US relation can be divided as direct and indirect. For instance, in the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the boat, the S.S. Coptic, was the first and perhaps the most direct link of the US had with Ethiopia. The boat was registered in San Francisco before its departure. The other direct link is associated with the widespread use of the term "Ethiopian" to describe the American Negro. The indirect communication between Ethiopia and the US was through trade. The US cotton sheets were sold in Ethiopia to the extent that all cotton goods were named "Americani." These trade items were distributed in Ethiopia by merchants from Arabia, Greek and Syria.<sup>19</sup> Despite the minor direct and indirect links both the US press and the government were scarcely interested in Ethiopia.

Ethio-US relations were transformed into a new phase after the onset of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The two countries developed interests to engage in diplomatic exchanges. Until then several factors hindered diplomatic relations. The extensive distance between the countries and the US isolationist policy were dominant factors for the absence of diplomatic relations.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, the fame of Ethiopia after the battle of Adwa and the rising interest of the US resulted in the commencement of diplomatic relations.<sup>21</sup>

The initiative came from the US in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Robert P. Skinner was the architect of US diplomatic interest in Ethiopia. He had been working hard to initiate the interest of his country and establish relations with Ethiopia since 1900, but Skinner was given a deaf ear from the then-American secretaries. Thus, he needed to wait for additional three years.<sup>22</sup> The frequent call of Skinner had got a response from the US officials in 1903 after they realized the motives of Skinner and its advantage to the country. As a result, Skinner was appointed to sign the treaty of amity, commerce, and reciprocal establishments with Emperor Menelik II, the then leader of Ethiopia.<sup>23</sup> The diplomatic relations between Ethiopia and the United States was established formally in 1903.<sup>24</sup>

The US interests in Ethiopia arose for strategic, diplomatic and commercial returns. Strategically, the US needed to use Ethiopia as the focal point of its policy toward the rest of

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<sup>19</sup> Frank J. Manheim, The United States and Ethiopia: A Study in American Imperialism, The Journal of Negro History, Vol. 17, No. 2 (Apr., 1932), pp. 141-155. P. 141.

<sup>20</sup>GetachewMetaferia, p. 13.

<sup>21</sup> U.S department of state, Bureau of African Affairs, U.S. Relations with Ethiopia, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-ethiopia/> January 14, 2020. Accessed on 15/11/2021.

<sup>22</sup> Frank J. Manheim, P. 144.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid*, P. 147.

<sup>24</sup>MelakuMulualem, Foreign policy convergence between Ethiopia and America, Ethiopian Foreign Relation Strategic Studies Institute (EFRSSI), 01 Jan 2014.[https://media.africaportal.org/documents/attachment-57-Foreign\\_policy\\_convergence\\_Eth\\_and\\_U.SFor\\_EIIPD\\_Web.pdf](https://media.africaportal.org/documents/attachment-57-Foreign_policy_convergence_Eth_and_U.SFor_EIIPD_Web.pdf), accessed on 15/11/2021. P. 1.

Africa. Ethiopia had been a large and influential country at the time.<sup>25</sup> In addition, Ethiopia's population was large for the consumption of commercial products. Moreover, its mineral and agricultural resources have not yet been fully exploited. All these and other factors encouraged the US to establish relation with Ethiopia. Skinner's note to David J. Hill, then-Assistant Secretary of State, on January 8, 1900, clearly indicates those claims:

*...My chief object in raising a question foreign to my duties in Marseilles is to suggest that in Abyssinia we maintain not even the semblance of official representation, although there exists a vast population, politically independent, and capable of absorbing our products...*<sup>26</sup>

On his arrival in Addis Ababa Skinner was welcomed by Emperor Menelik II.<sup>27</sup> Skinner signed a treaty with Emperor Menelik in Addis Ababa, on December 27, 1903, to be effected for ten years after ratification by the US government and its notification to the Emperor. The treaty was officially proclaimed on September 30, 1904. The treaty had seven articles. It mainly focused on diplomatic exchanges and commercial relations.<sup>28</sup> After the signing of the treaty when Skinner went back to the US, he had taken gifts from Emperor Menelik II to President Theodore Roosevelt. The gifts include lion, hyena, and ivory.<sup>29</sup>



Figure 1. Emperor Menelik II of Ethiopia and Commissioner Robert P. Skinner<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Liang Gencheng, U. S. Policy Towards the Horn of Africa, *Northeast African Studies* , 1984, Vol. 6, No. 1/2 (1984), pp. 41-59. P. 1.

<sup>26</sup> Frank J. Manheim, P. 142.

<sup>27</sup> Robert. P. Skinner, *Abyssinia of Today an Account of the First Mission Sent by the American Government to the Court of the King of Kings (1903-1904)*, New York, Longmans, Green&Co, 1906.P. 113.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid*, PP. 223-227.

<sup>29</sup> *The Washington times* (Washington [D.C.]), December 16, 1906. P. 6

<sup>30</sup>Theodore W.Finchon, *The Importance of a Trade Treaty with Abyssinia*, *The Topeka state journal* (Topeka, Kan.), December 18, 1903, (Last Edition).

The US opened its consulate in Addis Ababa for the first time in December 1906. Frank R. Mower was appointed by the US government as Consul General in Ethiopia in August 1906.<sup>31</sup> On the Ethiopian side, the practical action of sending delegates and opening consuls had taken time. Although there were Ethiopian individuals who visited the US in 1908, the first official delegation to the US was sent in 1919. Ethiopia opened its first consulate in Washington DC in 1943.<sup>32</sup>

### **3. Image of Ethiopia in the US**

#### **3.1. Redeemer for the African-Americans**

Ethiopia has been an important symbol for the African-Americans in their struggle against discrimination and exploitation long before the dissemination of the news from Adwa.<sup>33</sup> The Greek literature and manuscripts of Christianity had contributed a lot in introducing Ethiopia to the African-Americans. The strongest association emanated from their reference to Ethiopia mentioned in the Holy Bible. In the Holy Bible Ethiopians figured as the blacks who were religious and free from alien subjugation.<sup>34</sup>

This association of the term Ethiopia with African-Americans and blacks had been strong since the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The black New England poet Phillis Wheatley was the first to use "Ethiop" to refer to Africans and African-Americans. Many writers followed in the footsteps of Wheatley in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The prominent writers and activists were David Walker, Maria Stewart, Henry Highland Garnet, Martin Delaney, Frederick Douglass and Edward Blyden.<sup>35</sup>

The African-Americans' literature in the US positioned Ethiopia as the land in which Adam and Eve landed after they left paradise. Adam and Eve had gone as refugees around the biblical river Gihon (Abay). According to the literature, the river encircles the whole land of Ethiopia. The Ethiopians in the modern era are also considered as the direct descendent of Adam and Eve.<sup>36</sup> The Ethiopians reference by the African-Americans was also used in their debates against white racists. The racist interpretation of blacks as the inferior race was

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<sup>31</sup>MelakuMuluaem, p. 19.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid*, P.1.

<sup>33</sup>WintanaAlemsegedAynalem, Ethiopia's Symbolism in Pan Africanism: An Analysis of the Abyssinian Crisis and the Global Black and Pan African Reaction, (University of London, MA Thesis,2018). P. 5

<sup>34</sup>The colored American (Washington, D.C.), February 24, 1900.Wintana, p.3.LuleMelaku, History of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church, part 1, Addis Ababa, 2008, pp.5-9.

<sup>35</sup> James Quirin, W.E.B. Du Bois, Ethiopianism and Ethiopia, 1890-1955, International Journal of Ethiopian Studies, Vol. 5, No. 2 (Fall/Winter 2010-2011), pp. 1- 26. P. 2.

<sup>36</sup>The colored American (Washington, D.C.), February 28, 1903.P. 6.

challenged by the bible quotes about Ethiopia such as Amos 9:7 and Jeremiah 13:23. For instance, Bruce Grit, African American, argued against the racist Senator John T. Morgan of Alabama referring to those biblical verses.<sup>37</sup> African Americans also learned from ministers that Ethiopia was not only the dignified black nation but also has a promise to liberate the blacks under exploitation. They often quote the verse "Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God" in the Holy Bible to indicate its emancipatory promise.<sup>38</sup>

In addition, the African-Americans had information about Ethiopians as civilized people in the Horn of Africa. The Ethiopian civilization was considered as the earliest and strongest by the African-Americans. They traced the Ethiopian civilization even long before the Egyptians and the Greeks. They believed that the Egyptian and Greek civilizations were taken from Ethiopians.<sup>39</sup> According to the African Americans in the US, Ethiopians were able to establish not only the earliest civilization but also the strongest which influenced the Red Sea and Middle East. The Ethiopian annals about the Queen of Azeb (Sheba) were well known by the African Americans.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, they had claimed that the Ethiopian King Zerah marched against King Asa of Judah with an army of a million men to indicate its strength.<sup>41</sup>

African-Americans' perception of Ethiopia led to practical movements to establish independent churches. As a result, an Abyssinian Baptist Church was established in the US in 1808.<sup>42</sup> It was the church of the blacks separate from the white Christian churches. Followers of the Abyssinian church sensed that the white Christian church needed spiritual and moral guidance to end slavery, bigotry, and set the nation on an ethical and righteous course.<sup>43</sup> Above all, they were not allowed to attend religious practices equally with the whites. They were subjected to discrimination and humiliation even in those white-dominated religious institutions.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>The colored American (Washington, D.C.), February 24, 1900.

<sup>38</sup> William R. Scott. Black Nationalism and the Italo-Ethiopian Conflict 1934-1936, *The Journal of Negro History*, Apr., 1978, Vol. 63, No. 2 (Apr., 1978), pp. 118-134. Pp. 118-119.

<sup>39</sup>The colored American (Washington, D.C.), August 11, 1900. P. 14. Wayne A. Rose, W. E. B. Du Bois: Ethiopia and Pan-Africanism, *Journal of Black Studies* 2019, Vol. 50(3) 251–272. P. 253.

<sup>40</sup>The colored American (Washington, D.C.), February 24, 1900.

<sup>41</sup>New-York tribune (New York [N.Y.]), December 1, 1921. P. 12.

<sup>42</sup> Raymond Jonas, *The Battle of Adwa: African Victory in the Age of Empire*, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, London, England, 2011. P. 281.

<sup>43</sup> Christopher Moore, *The Abyssinian Baptist Church Bicentennial: Celebrating 200 years of worship and service*, The Schomburg Centre for Research in Black Culture. Volume 8, No. 2, 2008. P. 4.

<sup>44</sup>Assefa Mehretu, Partners for Progress and Modernization: Rise and Fall of United States of America's Soft-power Relations with Ethiopia, *Eastern Africa Social Science Research Review*, Volume 29, Number 2, June 2013, pp. 51-77. P. 53.

### 3.2. Ethiopia as the Land of Savages and Barbarians

Unlike the redeemer image, Ethiopia was also considered as the land of savage and barbarous people in the US. This image was common mostly among the whites who were influenced by either earliest works of literature or racist orientation.<sup>45</sup> The influence of works of literature was taken from the conventional image of Ethiopia. The savage and barbarous image of Ethiopia first appeared in the early Christian commentaries. This was widely written by the Latin geographers and cartographers of the Middle Ages such as Pomponius Mela. They described Ethiopia as the land of horrendous fiends.<sup>46</sup>

American literature which had a closer connection with the Western world infused this conventional image of Ethiopia into the country. The image was manifested in the US in three ways. The first was an underestimation of the age-old Ethiopian civilization. It depicted Ethiopia as a land without science, profession, and literature.<sup>47</sup> Besides, it considered Ethiopia as a dark and unknown place. The existing marks of civilization were taken as either imported or the legacies of foreigners in the country.<sup>48</sup> In this sense, it denies the civilization and ancient trends of established foreign relations. Moreover, it took the 19<sup>th</sup> century as the landmark of making known to the world by European explorers.<sup>49</sup>

The second manifestation was blaming social and cultural practices in Ethiopia. The Ethiopian tradition of eating raw meat, for instance, was taken as a symbol of barbarity. An explorer who had the opportunity to attend a state banquet in the place of Emperor Yohannes IV called that feast “A barbarian banquet”. He gave this name because he saw the Ethiopians eating raw meat.<sup>50</sup> In addition, the Ethiopian method of crime prevention and criminal detection had been subjected to criticism. The newspaper described it as:

*... there are no prisons in Abyssinia, If a man steals once, he is whipped; if he steals again, his hand is cut off; and if a third time, they cut off his foot. A*

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<sup>45</sup>Barbour County index (Medicine Lodge, Kan.), May 21, 1902.

<sup>46</sup> Donald N. Levin, Greater Ethiopia: The Evolution of Multiethnic Society, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1974. P. 10.

<sup>47</sup> William Mce. Dye.P. 117.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.* P. 118

<sup>49</sup>Barbour County index (Medicine Lodge, Kan.), November 11, 1903.

<sup>50</sup>Julian A. Selby, King John of Ethiopia, The Daily Phcenix, Columbia, s.c, Tuesday, October 2, 1877, vol XIII, No, 104.

*murderer is handed over to the parents or relatives of the victim to be tortured to death.*"<sup>51</sup>

This was also exacerbated by lack of economic advancement and technologies in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>52</sup>

The third manifestation was the misunderstanding of the deep affection of Ethiopians had for their country and freedom. The ways of the Ethiopian struggle for freedom had been selfless. This selfless character of Ethiopians is misunderstood as “savage without the sense of humanity”. For instance, the headlines of newspapers published in the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century referred to Ethiopian soldiers as savage.<sup>53</sup>



Figure 2. The fortress of Mekelle: The Italians above carrying heavy stones and Ethiopians below fighting fearless of the heavy stone.<sup>54</sup>

The racist view of Ethiopia in the US was also another dimension. This racist image was particularly bold in depreciating Ethiopian Christianity and the battle of Adwa in its immediate years. Accordingly, Christianity in Ethiopia had been corrupted by the darkness of paganism, strange superstition, and fierce fanaticism.<sup>55</sup> This corrupted Christianity taken as a barrier for enlightening works of missionaries from the Western world.<sup>56</sup> The other accusation of the Ethiopian Christianity was incorporation of the elements of Judaism.<sup>57</sup> The element of

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<sup>51</sup>New-York tribune (New York [N.Y.]), June 29, 1902.p. 5.

<sup>52</sup>Teshale, p. 420.

<sup>53</sup> The Journal, Sunday, March 8, 1896. P.17.

<sup>54</sup> The journal (New York [N Y ]), March 1, 1896. p. 23.

<sup>55</sup>Barbour County index (Medicine Lodge, Kan.), November 11, 1903.

<sup>56</sup> A. W. Verona, From the Practical Christian Ethiopia, The North Star, Rochester, N.Y, Friady, March 16, 1849, Vol, 11, No.2.

<sup>57</sup>Barbour County index (Medicine Lodge, Kan.), May 21, 1902.

Judaism in the Ethiopian Christianity was criticised from the perspectives of Protestantism and Catholicism.

The next racist view emanated from the situations related to the Battle of Adwa in the immediate years. In fact, the victory of Adwa was bitter to the racists in Europe and America. In the US the news of Adwa was not addressed impartially. Rather, there were efforts to undermine the martyrs and veterans of Ethiopia in the battle by giving the picture of barbarity and savagery.<sup>58</sup> Great emphasis had been given to describe the uncivilized and barbarous character of the Emperor and Ethiopian soldiers rather than taking into account their bravery. For example, the headline of the newspaper known as “The Journal” published on March 8, 1896, clearly indicated this racist interpretation. It reads as “A SAVAGE WHO CAN'T BE CONQUERED. The Barbarian King of Abyssinia, whose Barefooted Warriors Crushed the Modern Army of Italy.”<sup>59</sup>

#### **4. The victory changing image of Ethiopia**

##### **4.1. An African Caucasus**

In 1896 Ethiopia had won a battle against Italy at the place called Adwa. The defeat of Italy had influenced the political thought of the Western world.<sup>60</sup> US media which had a close connection with Europe radiated the tone. The Battle of Adwa forced the racists to reconsider their understanding of Ethiopia and Ethiopians. The images regarding the people, the Emperor, and the troops were changed. During pre-Adwa, they used to refer to Ethiopians as savage and barbarous blacks.

However, after the Battle of Adwa Ethiopians became bronze Semites and Caucasians in the thought of the wider US media.<sup>61</sup> The Ethiopians were painted white because the racist imperialists could not accept defeat in the hands of black Africans.<sup>62</sup> The US citizens who had the opportunity to visit Ethiopia after Adwa also shared a Caucasian image of Ethiopia. Robert P. Skinner was one of those US citizens who came as a delegate. Skinner believed that Ethiopians had Jewish ancestry using the presence of Bete-Israelies and the practice of pre-

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<sup>58</sup>The journal (New York [N.Y.]), March 1, 1896.p. 23.

<sup>59</sup> The Journal, Sunday, March 8, 1896. P. 17.

<sup>60</sup>Western Kansas World, Eighteenth Year, weakly Kansas, Saturday, March 28, 1896.

<sup>61</sup> Sean McLachlan, *Armies of the Adowa Campaign 1896: The Italian Disaster in Ethiopia*, Osprey Publishing, London, 2011. P. 24.

<sup>62</sup>Teshale, p. 419.

Christian Judaic elements.<sup>63</sup> Christianity in Ethiopia was taken as the most ancient and the people as pious.

The character of Ethiopian troops was also changed from savage, uncivilized, and barefooted blacks to the skilled Caucasus fearless for independence. The statements in the national tribune published in 1899, clearly indicate the change of images:

*The Abyssinians (to use the accepted word) go into battle with modern rifles, and know how to use them; but in the heat of action their spirit is to throw these down and come at the enemy man to man with saber and shield. Each one carries on his left arm a convex buckler made of hippopotamus hide, so thick and tough that often a swift flying projectile is deflected by it.*<sup>64</sup>

In addition, the skill of Ethiopian troops convinced imperialists and racists. As a result, they used the wishful participation of Ethiopians in the First World War to support England against possible disturbance in Egypt. The Ethiopian troops were selected for the mission because of their skill. The possible number was around 200,000.<sup>65</sup> In fact, this circulation on the media was for propaganda. The Egyptians knew the hands of Ethiopian troops at the battle of Gundet and Gura. As a result, imperialists used the issue to check possible revolt in Egypt.

The persona of Emperor Menelik was also changed. Before and in the immediate years after Adwa Menelik was referred to as savage and barbarous. However, the decisive victory over the Italians and circulation of the news transformed his image into an epitome of monarchical virtues, full of wisdom, intelligence and humorous Emperor.<sup>66</sup> He was also described as the most democratic of all monarchs.<sup>67</sup> Before and some years after Adwa the pictures of Menelik were depicted as black emperor. Even the photos revealed this fact. Conversely, there were efforts to draw the pictures of Menelik as Caucasian after Adwa.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>63</sup>Robert P. skinner, p.179.

<sup>64</sup> The National Tribune , Washington, D.C, Thursday, December 28, 1899.

<sup>65</sup> Cleveland, Ohio Plaindealer, December 8, 1915.

<sup>66</sup>New York Daily Tribune, Saturday, November 17, 1906.

<sup>67</sup> The Washington times (Washington [D.C.]), December 16, 1906. P. 6

<sup>68</sup>Western Kansas World, Eighteenth Year, weakly Kansas, Saturday, March 28, 1896



Figure 3. The picture of Emperor Menelik II, drawn giving him Caucasian facial features<sup>69</sup>

#### 4.2. From back to Abyssinia to Hands off Ethiopia

African Americans in the US were downgraded to the inferior status of citizenship. Racism was the main driver that worked against the welfare of these people. The existed racial discrimination was worsened by the introduction of Jim Crow Law in 1896 that served up to 1964. It was upheld by the Supreme Court decision. The law enforced racial segregation, in public spaces such as schools, transportation, restaurant, etc. It institutionalized economic and social inequalities of African Americans.<sup>70</sup> Despite the constitutional rights the blacks were forced to pass tests in order to participate in election.<sup>71</sup>

Nevertheless, Adwa had a pivotal role in boosting the morale of racially segregated and exploited African-Americans in the US. First, Adwa challenged the racist assumption of whites' supremacy because white colonizers faced the first most costly and crushing defeat at the hands of blacks.<sup>72</sup> Despite their understanding and hope in biblical Ethiopia, African Americans were not psychologically prepared to struggle against racism. Therefore, Adwa introduced a good lesson about the fruits of determination in the struggle for equality and

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<sup>69</sup>*Ibid*

<sup>70</sup> Janice H. Hammond, A. Kamau Massey, and Mayra A. Garza, African American Inequalities in the United States, Harvard Business School, May 5, 2020. P. 4.

<sup>71</sup> Washington, Steven, "The African-American Struggle for Equality: Two Divergent Approaches," (University of Nevada, Honors College, BA Theses, 2012). [https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/honors\\_theses/3](https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/honors_theses/3). P. 1.

<sup>72</sup> Sean McLachlan, P. 24.

freedom. In line with the enhancement of psychological make-up, Adwa reinforced the African-American struggle for equality in the US.<sup>73</sup>

Many African Americans were determined to struggle against racial discrimination after Adwa. They formed associations and engaged in literary works to entice their fellows to struggle. The names Ethiopia, Abyssinia, and Menelik became familiar in their literature and associations. Besides, the Victory of Adwa had been given extensive coverage in media owned and written by the African Americans. Indeed, the highest coverage about Adwa was given by African-American newspapers. Moreover, it was taken as the general knowledge held by African-Americans.<sup>74</sup> All this was to reinforce the struggle for racial equality. And some fruits had been reaped in raising awareness and initiating the struggle.

The victory at Adwa also enhanced the symbolism of Ethiopia for redemption, freedom, and religious ideology.<sup>75</sup> The symbolism of Ethiopia was used in two forms. The first was to enlighten African-Americans. In this form, black intellectuals in the US used the symbol for artworks and associations. The primary purpose of these artworks and associations was to struggle for equality. The Pageant by Du Bois named “The Star of Ethiopia” that shows the history and hope of blacks was the best example in this regard.<sup>76</sup> “The Star of Ethiopia” was prepared to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 by President Lincoln. The pageant was performed in New York City in 1913, in Washington D.C. in 1915, Philadelphia in 1916, and revived one last time in Los Angeles in 1925. It was able to win the attention of audiences.<sup>77</sup>

The second more radical form was to lead the exodus of African Americans into Ethiopia. Initially, a few African-Americans had arrived in Ethiopia some years after the Battle of Adwa. In this regard, the travel of William H. Ellis, a black Wall Street stockbroker from Texas and an admirer of Menelik, to Ethiopia was bold. William H. Ellis’s international news was reported by many US newspapers.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>73</sup>GetachewMetaferia, Ethiopia: A Bulwark against European Colonialism, PaulosMilkias&GetachewMetaferia (eds), The Battle of Adwa Reflection on Ethiopia’s Historic Victory Against European Colonialism, Algora Publishing. New York , 2005. p. 202

<sup>74</sup> James Quirin, 3

<sup>75</sup>GetachewMetaferia, Ethiopia: A Bulwark against European Colonialism.P. 195.

<sup>76</sup>Evening star (Washington, D.C.), October 14, 1915.P. 17.

<sup>77</sup> James Quirin, p.6.

<sup>78</sup>GetachewMetaferia, Ethiopia: A Bulwark against European Colonialism. p. 204

This early visit at the individual level later was developed into “Back to Abyssinia” movement through forming associations. The news that circulated in 1920 explained this effort clearly:

*....Negro organization styling itself "Star Order of Ethiopia" and the Ethiopian Missionary to Abyssinia. Its objects are to substitute the appellation "Ethiopian" for "negro," to better conditions among Negroes and to take Negroes to Ethiopia, their mother land.<sup>79</sup>*

Furthermore, the African Americans had a hope of being invited by Ethiopian rules for the exodus. Prior to the visit of *Ras Teferi* in the US, the news was circulated about him. The Africans-Americans had been preparing for a warm reception. The Rev. R. D. Jonas, of Philadelphia, the leading figure of the Star of Ethiopia was preparing for the reception in different cities. African-Americans were also ready to discuss segregation and their discontent in the US with the *Ras*. Accordingly, they hoped to be invited by the *Ras* to Ethiopia.<sup>80</sup>

The strong sentiment of African-Americans for Ethiopia was also revealed through taking the forerunner position to condemn Italian aggression. When Italy conquered Ethiopia there was a “Hands off Ethiopia” movement among black Philadelphians. As a result, many whites used to call Afro-Americans “Ethiopians” with humor. In addition, some Negroes declared their willingness to go at any time to aid Ethiopia. Moreover, the Negroes organized the Philadelphia Committee for the defence of Ethiopia. The committee called the Negroes to turn their eyes to their motherland Ethiopia.<sup>81</sup>

The following statement by Du Bois shows the strong sentiment of African-Americans:

*The hands which the Land of Burnt Faces is today stretching forth to the God of Things-that-be are both physical and spiritual; and today, as yesterday, they twine gnarled fingers about the very roots of the world. Physically, Ethiopia's fingers are those rough mountain masses of Northeast Africa which form the*

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<sup>79</sup>New-York tribune (New York [N.Y.]), June 22, 1920.P. 4.

<sup>80</sup> The Washington Times, Tuesday, January 20, 1920.

<sup>81</sup> Clayton Vaughn-Roberson, Grassroots Anti-Fascism: Ethiopia and the Transnational Origins of the National Negro Congress in Philadelphia, 2018, 1935–1936, American Communist History, 17:1, 4-15, DOI: 10.1080/14743892.2018.1427389. pp.8-9.

*defensive rampart of the continent and against which Egyptian and Persian and Turk, British and French and Italian, have so far hammered in vain.*<sup>82</sup>

The above statement shows that the African Americans in the US associated the 20<sup>th</sup> century Ethiopia with the biblical one. Ethiopia for African Americans was a redeemer, symbol of freedom, and symbol of unity for the black race.

## **5. Conclusion**

The image of Ethiopia in the United States was explored based on the sources collected from historical newspapers, books, journal articles, and websites. Ethiopia had two divergent images in the US since the Pre-Adwa period. The divergent images had historical roots. The first was the presence of blacks of African origin in the US. Secondly, it appeared due to the racial divisions and discrimination. Thirdly, the divergent images survived because of the influence of European literature on the US media and people.

In the Pre-Adwa period Ethiopia had been viewed as redeemer for African Americans in the US. The racial discrimination, exploitation, and humiliation forced African Americans to search for a land of relief. Ethiopia was that land of hope because of its place in the bible and Christian literature. They thought that Ethiopia was the land of ancient civilization, pious Christians and freedom. In the post-Adwa period this view of African Americans was further strengthened. Ethiopia became a symbol of freedom. They used to refer to Ethiopia in their literature, association, and art as the symbol of freedom and hope for the blacks under exploitation. This strong sentiment towards Ethiopia drew them into bitter opposition against Italian aggression of 1935.

Unlike African Americans, Ethiopia had been viewed as the land of black Christians who were barbarous, uncivilized and corrupt. This image of Ethiopia was bold among the racist groups of people in the US. According to these groups, Ethiopia was considered as a land without ancient civilization. In addition, the traditional practices in the country were depicted as savage. Furthermore, they viewed Ethiopian Christianity as obsolete and corrupted by paganism and fanaticism. However, the dark image of Ethiopia was washed away among the racist groups after the Battle of Adwa. They referred to the people Caucasian who lived in the

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<sup>82</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, *Inter-Racial Implications of the Ethiopian Crisis: A Negro View*. Council on Foreign Relations, *Foreign Affairs*, Oct., 1935, Vol. 14, No. 1 (Oct., 1935), pp. 82-92. P. 82.

ancient civilized people. Therefore, the image of Ethiopia in the US had been like two sides of a coin.

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