



### *Melaku Emanuel Bayan*

Seventy two years ago, African Americans of all classes, regions, genders, and beliefs expressed their opposition to and outrage over the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in various forms and various means. The invasion aroused African Americans – from intellectuals to common people in the street – more than any other Pan-African-oriented historical events or movements had. It fired the imagination of African Americans and brought to the surface the organic link to their ancestral land and peoples.

1935 was indeed a turning point in the relations between Ethiopia and the African Diaspora. It was a year when the relations substantively shifted from symbolic to actual interactions. The massive expression of support for the Ethiopian cause by African Americans is said to have contributed to the re-Africanization of Ethiopia.

One of the most significant Pan-Africanist Conferences took place in 1945, immediately after the defeat of the Italians in Ethiopia and the end of World War II. This conference passed resolutions clearly demanding the end of colonization in Africa, and the question of self-determination emerged as the most important issue of the time.

Another of the most remarkable outcomes of the reawakening of the African Diaspora was the emergence of so many outstanding leaders, among them the Ethiopian **Melaku E. Bayen** and the African American John Robinson. Other outstanding leaders were Willis N. Huggins, Arnold Josiah Ford, and Mignon Innis Ford (*Past posthumous honoree of SEED*), who were active against the war in both the United States and Ethiopia. Mignon Ford the founder of Princess Zenebe Work School, did not even leave Ethiopia during the war. The Fords and other followers of Marcus Garvey settled in Ethiopia in the 1920s. Mignon Ford raised her family among Ethiopians as Ethiopians. Her children, fluent speakers of Amharic, have been at home both in Ethiopia and the United States.

**Melaku E. Bayen**, an Ethiopian, significantly contributed to the re-Africanization of Ethiopia. His noble dedication to the Pan-African cause and his activities in the United States helped to dispel the notion of “racial fog” that surrounded the Ethiopians. William R. Scott expounded on this: “**Melaku Bayen was the first Ethiopian seriously and steadfastly to commit himself to achieving spiritual and physical bonds of fellowship between his people and peoples of African descent in the Americas.** Melaku exerted himself to the fullest in attempting to bring about some kind of formal and continuing relationship designed to benefit both the Ethiopian and Afro-American.” Bayen’s activities stand out as “the most prominent example of Ethiopian identification with African Americans and seriously challenges the multitude of claims which have been made now for a long time about the negative nature of Ethiopian attitudes toward African Americans.”

Historians have written the exemplary Pan-Africanism of Melaku Bayen and others are useful in establishing respectful and meaningful relations between Ethiopia and the African Diaspora. They dedicated their entire lives in order to lay down the foundation for relations rooted in mutual understanding and historical facts, free of stereotypes and false perceptions. African American scholars, such as William Scott, Joseph E. Harris, and Leo Hansberry contributed immensely by documenting the thoughts and activities of Bayen, both in Ethiopia and the United States.

Melaku E. Bayen, born on April 29, 1900, was raised and educated in the compound of Ras Mekonnen, then the Governor of Harar and the father of Emperor Haileselassie. His father was Grazmatch Bayen and his mother Woizero Desta, who is the first cousin of Emperor Haileselassie. He was sent to India to study medicine in 1920 at the age of 21 with permission from Emperor Haileselassie. Saddened by the untimely death of a young Ethiopian woman friend, who was also studying in India, he decided to leave India and continue his studies in the United States. In 1922, he enrolled at Marietta College, where he obtained his bachelor’s degree. **He is believed to be the first Ethiopian to receive a college degree from the United States.**

Melaku started his medical studies at Ohio State University in 1928, then, a year later, decided to transfer to Howard University in Washington D.C. in order to be close to Ethiopians who lived there. Melaku formally annulled his engagement to a daughter of the Ethiopian Foreign Minister and later married Dorothy Hadley, an African American and a great activist in her own right for the Ethiopian and pan-Africanist causes. Both in his married and intellectual life, **Melaku wanted to create a new bond between Ethiopia and the African Diaspora.**

**Melaku obtained his medical degree from Howard University in 1936**, at the height of the Italo-Ethiopian War. He immediately returned to Ethiopia with his wife and their son, Melaku E. Bayen, Jr. There, he joined the Ethiopian Red Cross and assisted the wounded on the Eastern Front. When the Italian Army captured Addis Ababa, Melaku's family went to England and later to the United States to fully campaign for Ethiopia.

Schooled in Pan-African solidarity from a young age, Melaku co-founded the Ethiopian Research Council with the late Leo Hansberry in 1930, while he was student at Howard. According to Joseph Harris, the Council was regarded as the principal link between Ethiopians and African Americans in the early years of the Italo-Ethiopian conflict. The Council's papers are housed at the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center at Howard University. At present, Professor Aster Mengesha of Arizona State University heads the Ethiopian Research Council. Leo Hansberry was the recipient of Emperor Haileselassie's Trust Foundation Prize in the 1960s.

**Melaku founded and published the Voice of Ethiopia**, the media organ of the Ethiopian World Federation and a pro-African newspaper that urged the "millions of the sons and daughters of Ethiopia, scattered throughout the world, to join hands with Ethiopians to save Ethiopia from the wolves of Europe." **Melaku founded the Ethiopian World Federation in 1937** and it eventually became one of the most important international organizations, with branches throughout the United States, the Caribbean, and Europe. The Caribbean branch helped to further solidify the ideological foundation for the Rasta Movement.

Melaku died at the age of forty from pneumonia he contracted while campaigning door-to-door for the Ethiopian cause in the United States. Melaku died in 1940, just a year before the defeat of the Italians in Ethiopia. His tireless and vigorous campaign, however, contributed to the demise of Italian colonial ambition in Ethiopia. Melaku strove to bring Ethiopia back into the African world. Melaku sowed the seeds for a "re-Africanization" of Ethiopia. Furthermore, Melaku was a model Pan-Africanist who brought the Ethiopian and African American people together through his exemplary work and his remarkable love and dedication to the African people.

Melaku's profound statement: "The philosophy of the Ethiopian World Federation is to instill in the minds of the Black people of the world that the word Black is not to be considered in any way dishonorable but rather an honor and dignity because of the past history of the race."

***SEED** posthumously salutes Dr. Melaku Bayen as one of the first Ethiopians to ever receive a degree in medicine from a U.S. college and for his outstanding academic excellence, as a bridge-builder who worked hard to strengthened the bond among Africans, African Americans and the Caribbeans, as a founder and publisher of the voice of Ethiopia which galvanized the Ethiopians in the Diaspora to fight against European colonialism and stop the Italian aggression against Ethiopia (paying the ultimate price in the process), as a co-founder of The Ethiopian World Federation established to fight for freedom, justice and self-determination as well as to maintain the integrity of Ethiopia, in acknowledgement of his struggle for human rights and as one of the leading advocates for the freedom of African Americans at the time, for his civic and professional contributions, community services, his demonstrated love of country, and all of his other distinctive attributes.*