

EXPORTING THE RACIAL REPUBLIC: AFRICAN COLONIZATION, NATIONAL  
CITIZENSHIP, AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF U.S. EXPANSION, 1776-1864

BY

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## **ABSTRACT**

The effort to create a colony of African Americans on the west coast of Africa was one of the most celebrated and influential movements in the United States during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. While historians have often viewed African colonization through the lens of domestic anti-slavery politics, colonization grew from an imperial impulse which promised to transform the identities of black colonists and indigenous Africans by helping them to build a democratic nation from the foundation of a settler colony. By proposing that persons of African descent could eventually become self-governing subjects, the liberal framework behind colonization offered the possibility of black citizenship rights, but only within racially homogenous nation-states, which some proponents of colonization imagined might lead to a “United States of Africa.” This dissertation examines how the notion of expanding democratic ideals through the export of racial nationhood was crucial to the appeal of colonization. It reveals how colonization surfaced in several crucial debates about race, citizenship, and empire in the antebellum United States by examining discussions about African Americans’ revolutionary claims to political rights, the bounds of US territorial expansion, the removal of native populations in North America, and the racialization of national citizenship, both at home and abroad. By examining African colonization from these perspectives, this dissertation argues that the United States’ efforts to construct a liberal democracy defined by white racial identity were directly connected to the nation’s emerging identity as a defender and exporter of political liberty throughout the world.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

“The African Colonization scheme... is one of the best foreign projects in which we can engage because it has its basis on what men can do for themselves, and not what we can do for them. We hope to bless them only as we can instruct them to bless themselves. Their abundance is from their industry. Their progress from their arts, their welfare from the liberty they can learn to maintain.”<sup>1</sup> – newspaper editorial, 1817

“The double bind of freedom [is]: being freed from slavery and free of resources, emancipated and subordinated, self-possessed and indebted, equal and inferior, liberated and encumbered, sovereign and dominated, citizen and subject.”<sup>2</sup> – Saidiya Hartman

W.E.B. Du Bois once tersely summarized his view of the antebellum African colonization movement: “It was inadequately conceived and not altogether sincere.”<sup>3</sup> On the face of it, his assessment is absolutely accurate. Judged on its own terms, African colonization was nearly a complete failure. While the effort succeeded in creating an African colony, it failed to achieve the designers’ stated aims of ending the international slave trade or removing large numbers of African Americans from the United States. The resulting nation, the Republic of Liberia, was weak, ineffectual, and plagued by instability. It was decidedly not a vast African empire of civilization, commerce, and Christianity imagined by its promoters. As the abolitionist movement highlighted, the colonization movement’s official motivations offered a thin veil for the racist attitudes, and in some cases pro-slavery sympathies, that undergirded the logic of the movement.

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<sup>1</sup> *Essex Register (Salem, MA)*, December 17, 1817.

<sup>2</sup> Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-making in Nineteenth-century America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1997), 117.

<sup>3</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Suppression of the African Slave Trade of the United States of America, 1638-1870* (New York, NY: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1904), 197.

In the century of scholarship that followed Du Bois's assessment, historians have debated the efficacy of the movement as well as the sincerity of its advocates. Until recently, much of this work has been rightly preoccupied with situating colonization within the long history of anti-slavery struggle in the United States. However, while African colonization was intertwined with the development of the abolitionist movement, the impact of debates over colonization extended far beyond the small cadre of white activists engaged in factional disputes. Colonization's resonance with a variety of audiences means that it should be taken very seriously as a way to understand the national and international dimensions of race in the early United States.

For all its failings as a movement, African colonization exerted considerable ideological force during the four decades of the antebellum era in which it maintained a high profile in public discourse. It was one of the most celebrated and influential movements of the antebellum era.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps, the most limiting aspect of the tendency to view colonization primarily through the lens of domestic anti-slavery politics is that it has diminished the fact that the popular appeal of colonization was built on an imperial impulse to transform the identities of black colonists and indigenous Africans by helping them to form a liberal democratic nation. Promising that persons of African descent could eventually become self-governing subjects, this liberal framework offered citizenship rights but only in a racially homogenous nation-state, which some colonizationists imagined might lead to a "United States of Africa."<sup>5</sup> In focusing on both

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<sup>4</sup> In 1833, Amasa Walker, an abolitionist and opponent of colonization, remarked, "This was a highly popular object, and was hailed with applause in every section of the Union. ... Such a dazzling display of great names has never before been made by any association of modern origin in this country. So extensive a combination of power and influence has never been brought to bear upon one object before." "From the Annual Meeting of the New-England Anti-Slavery Society," *Liberator*, January 26, 1833.

<sup>5</sup> Geo S. L. Starks, "Analogy between the Anglo-American and the Liberian," *The African Repository* 27, no. 11 (November 1851): 345.



the popular and imperial dimensions of colonization, this dissertation examines a range of issues in early America which clustered around the idea of colonization while avoiding a straightforward narrative of the movement which advocated colonization. In displacing the familiar story of colonization, my dissertation accounts for how the ideas of African colonization appeared in different political questions in the antebellum US, including conceptions of continental expansion, revolutionary claims to natural rights, the removal of indigenous populations, and the foreign and domestic production of national citizenship. By examining African colonization from these unfamiliar angles my dissertation reveals how emerging ideas about race and nationhood in early America were intimately connected with the United States' imagination of itself as a defender and exporter of political liberty within a global context.

The justification for racialized nationhood grew out of the discussions about human freedom during the "Age of Revolution" when the containment of revolutionary ideas was a high priority of elites in the early United States. On its most basic level, debates about African colonization were part of a broader struggle over the meaning of freedom: to whom did it apply, where it should be extended, how it could be managed. The earliest arguments for colonization were driven by appeals to liberal individualism. Colonization advocates' rhetorical emphasis on securing individual rights was frequently connected to the idea that the expansion of "legitimate trade" by black colonists would eventually displace the slave trade. Supporters not only imagined the possibility of an independent African civil society, they frequently viewed this as an example of how the world could be remade in a similar image. Many supporters of colonization believed that

African Americans had the ability to learn the skills that were required to maintain a functioning liberal society.

The idea of African colonization is an ideal venue for exploring the intersection between racial identity, nationalism, and imperial expansion because the concept seamlessly fused both foreign and domestic objectives. I argue that the preoccupation with African colonization in the early US reveals that the reproduction of racialized nationhood was a constitutive component of US domestic and foreign policies. The United States' efforts to fashion itself into a liberal democracy defined by its white racial identity, were not just internally generated by the idea of constructing racial purity within the nation but they were also concerned with replicating this model of racial nationhood outside its borders, thus making race an indispensable link between foreign and domestic policy.

## **HISTORIOGRAPHY**

Historians have tended to avoid considering African colonization's place within the ideological framework of empire by instead studying colonization as a movement of moderate anti-slavery activists or as the migration of African Americans from the United States. Colonization has primarily been understood in relation to the steady ascendancy of abolitionism during this era. Scholarship emphasizing this dimension of colonization has carefully illuminated how the conflict between these competing movements played out on both the national stage, and in particular local contexts.<sup>6</sup> The anti-slavery

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<sup>6</sup> Some of examples of the earliest work on African colonization which set this trend are: P. J. Staudenraus, *The African Colonization Movement, 1816-1865* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1961); Frederic Bancroft, "The Colonization of American Negroes," in *Frederic Bancroft, Historian*, ed. Jacob E. Cooke (Norman, OK: University Press of Oklahoma, 1957), 145-269; Early Lee Fox, *The American Colonization Society* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1919); Henry Noble Sherwood,

approach to colonization has also been enriched by attention to the manner in which African Americans played a decisive role in discrediting the colonization movement and how this was crucial to forming the political identity of Northern black communities.<sup>7</sup> The study of early Liberian national history has provided an important counterpoint to nationally-focused studies of US anti-slavery by illustrating how colonization played out on the ground in Africa. These histories give insight into the complicated implementation of the colonial vision, but remain occupied with telling the national story of Liberian statehood.<sup>8</sup> More recently, scholars have fused the local stories of anti-slavery activism with the particulars of black migration to Liberia. This work locates the transnational identities of Black settlers within the social drama of Liberian migration

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“The Formation of the American Colonization Society,” *The Journal of Negro History* 2, no. 3 (July 1917): 209-228; some excellent examples of recent studies which frame colonization within the anti-slavery movement in both local and national contexts: Eric Burin, *Slavery and the Peculiar Solution: A History of the American Colonization Society* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005); Claude A. Clegg, *The Price of Liberty: African Americans and the Making of Liberia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 1-76; Marie Tyler-McGraw, *An African Republic: Black & White Virginians in the Making of Liberia* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Paul Goodman, *Of One Blood: Abolitionism and the Origins of Racial Equality* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 1-54; Elizabeth Varon, “Evangelical Womanhood and the Politics of the African Colonization Movement in Virginia,” in *Religion and the Antebellum Debate over Slavery*, ed. Mitchell Snay and John R McKivigan (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 169-195.

<sup>7</sup> Floyd John Miller, *The Search for a Black Nationality: Black Emigration and Colonization, 1787-1863* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1975); Goodman, *Of One Blood: Abolitionism and the Origins of Racial Equality*, 23-64; Ousmane Greene, “Against Wind and Tide: African Americans’ Response to the Colonization Movement and Emigration, 1770-1865” (Ph.D, Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts - Amherst, 2007); Patrick Rael, *Black Identity and Black Protest in the Antebellum North* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Eddie S. Glaude, *Exodus!: Religion, Race, and Nation in Early Nineteenth-Century Black America* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Robert L. Allen, *Reluctant Reformers: Racism and Social Reform Movements in the United States* (Garden City, N.Y: Anchor Press, 1975), 11-48; Carter G. Woodson’s curated collection of letters written to the American Colonization Society was a critical piece of scholarship on the relationship between colonization and African American identity. Carter G. Woodson, *The Mind of the Negro as Reflected in Letters Written During the Crisis, 1800-1860* (Washington D.C.: The Association for the Study of Negro life and History, Inc., 1926), 1-158.

<sup>8</sup> Amos Jones Beyan, *The American Colonization Society and the Creation of the Liberian State: A Historical Perspective, 1822-1900* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1991); James Wesley Smith, *Sojourners in Search of Freedom: The Settlement of Liberia by Black Americans* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1987); Yekutieli Gereshoni, *Black Colonialism: The Americo-Liberian Scramble for the Hinterland* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1985).

while demonstrating the tensions inherent to settling the colony.<sup>9</sup> All of these approaches have been extremely fruitful for situating African colonization within the politics of anti-slavery, black emigration, and black nationalism in early United States.

Although studies directly focused on African colonization have frequently examined its relationship with activist movements and African American politics, a handful of broader histories point to colonization's constitutive role in early US racial ideology. In the 1960s and 70s, historians studying the intellectual history of racism argued that colonization flourished alongside the emergence of white nationalism in the antebellum era. George Fredrickson viewed colonization as "exclusively concerned with the national 'purification' and homogeneity that allegedly would result from the narrow localization or complete disappearance of an 'inferior' and undesirable Negro population." Similarly, Lawrence Friedman stressed the psychological dimensions of the colonization movement, which he claimed were connected to a desire for white racial purity.<sup>10</sup> More recently, historians have taken an approach which situates colonization in the national discourses that contributed to the social construction of race in early America. This work has shown that colonization addressed uncertainty about social identity in the post-emancipation North, which reinforced a rhetoric of race that

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<sup>9</sup> Tyler-McGraw, *An African Republic: Black & White Virginians in the Making of Liberia*; Amos Jones Beyan, *African American Settlements in West Africa: John Brown Russwurm and the American Civilizing Efforts* (New York: Palgrave, 2005); Clegg, *The Price of Liberty*; Richard L. Hall, *On Africa's Shore: A History of Maryland in Liberia, 1834-1857* (Baltimore, MD: Maryland Historical Society, 2003); Alan Huffman, *Mississippi in Africa* (New York, NY: Gotham Books, 2004); Kenneth C. Barnes, *Journey of Hope: The Back-to-Africa Movement in Arkansas in the Late 1800s* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

<sup>10</sup> George M Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1971), 1-42, 130; Lawrence Jacob Friedman, *Inventors of the Promised Land* (New York, NY: Knopf, 1975), 180-258; Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), 542-582; Leon F. Litwack, *North of Slavery; the Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1961).

increasingly defined recently freed blacks as outside the bounds of citizenship.<sup>11</sup> While these scholars occasionally address the ideological influence of colonization discourses, like the literature on the anti-slavery movement, these works are fundamentally grounded in telling national stories of race without situating colonization in an international context.

While historians have long recognized the domestic racial implications of African colonization, scholars have only recently to considered African colonization within an imperial framework. Traditionally, US scholarship denied or marginalized expressions of empire in the United States; however, this began to change with a wave of studies in the wake of the Vietnam War. This body of work began to focus new attention on military and economic empire in the US in culture and policy by drawing from interdisciplinary perspectives as well as the work of traditional foreign relations.<sup>12</sup> This work resituated

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<sup>11</sup> Good examples of sustained treatment of colonization in this regard are: Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and "Race" in New England, 1780-1860* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 163-209; Nicholas Guyatt, "'The Outskirts of Our Happiness': Race and the Lure of Colonization in the Early Republic," *The Journal of American History* 95, no. 4 (March 2009); Other examples of this work which tangentially deal with colonization are: James Brewer Stewart, "The Emergence of Racial Modernity and the Rise of the White North, 1790-1840," *Journal of the Early Republic* 18, no. 2 (Summer 1998): 181-217; Bruce R. Dain, *A Hideous Monster of the Mind: American Race Theory in the Early Republic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002); John Wood Sweet, *Bodies Politic: Negotiating Race in the American North, 1730-1830*, Early America (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003); David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Alexander Saxton, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic: Class Politics and Mass Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (London, UK: Verso, 1990).

<sup>12</sup> Ronald T. Takaki, *Iron Cages: Race and Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York, NY: Knopf, 1979); Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1973); Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981); Richard Drinnon, *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating and Empire Building* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1980); A good summary of this early literature on race and empire is available in: David R. Roediger, "The Pursuit of Whiteness: Property, Terror, and Expansion, 1790-1860," *Journal of the Early Republic* 19, no. 4 (Winter 1999): 579-600; This reconsideration was partially inspired by the turn towards empire in diplomatic history: William Appleman Williams, *Empire as a Way of Life: An Essay on the Causes and Character of America's Present Predicament* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1980); Walter L. Williams, "United States Indian Policy and the Debate over Philippine Annexation: Implications for the Origins of American Imperialism," *Journal of American History* 66, no. 4 (March 1980): 810-831; Ernest R. May, *American Imperialism: A Speculative Essay*

continental expansion during the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a form of settler colonialism that set the groundwork for US global empire in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, both diplomatic and cultural analyses ignored African colonization, likely due to its lack of a clear economic basis and its designation as a project of the domestic anti-slavery movement. By the 1990s, studies of empire had become commonplace, and many scholars followed the lead of cultural studies which analyzed imperialism in the United States to understand continuity between foreign and domestic discourses of nationhood.<sup>13</sup> American and literary studies approaches have broadened the horizons of scholarship on African colonization by considering it within the context of US imperial expansion.<sup>14</sup> While these diversions from the general trend of colonization historiography were crucial provocations, most of the work has been limited to articles and book chapters that deeply analyze a small selection of texts. This work exclusively comes from literary scholars and no US historians have, to date, produced a sustained examination of the imperial aspects of the colonization movement. Additionally, the recent turn towards empire in the antebellum era has focused on reexamining continental expansion rather than forays

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(New York, NY: Atheneum, 1968); Walter LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860-1898*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1963); William Appleman Williams, *The Contours of American History* (Chicago, IL: Quadrangle Books, 1966).

<sup>13</sup> For excellent examples of this work see: Donald E. Pease and Amy Kaplan, eds., *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993); Mary A. Renda, *Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Culture of U.S. Imperialism, 1915-1940* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Kristin L. Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998); Paul A. Kramer, *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States, & the Philippines* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

<sup>14</sup> Susan M. Ryan, "Errand into Africa: Colonization and Nation Building in Sarah J. Hale's Liberia," *The New England Quarterly* 68, no. 4 (December 1995): 558-583; David Kazanjian, "Racial Governmentality: The African Colonization Movement," in *The Colonizing Trick: National Culture and Imperial Citizenship in Early America* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); Etsuko Taketani, "Postcolonial Liberia: Sarah Josepha Hale's Africa," *American Literary History* 14, no. 3 (2002): 479-504; Etsuko Taketani, *U.S. Women Writers and the Discourses of Colonialism, 1825-1861* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2003); Andy Doolen, "Snug Stored Below: Slavery and James Fenimore Cooper's White America," in *Fugitive Empire: Locating Early American Imperialism* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2005); Amy Kaplan, "Manifest Domesticity," *American Literature* 70, no. 3 (September 1998): 581-606.

overseas.<sup>15</sup> While the study of United States foreign relations has typically focused on the rise of the US as a global power in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, my work stresses a longer timeframe for the history of overseas empire by showing that the antebellum African colonization movement popularized a global model of expansion that emerged alongside the continental expansion of Manifest Destiny.

The last century of scholarship has produced a great volume of studies that have addressed African colonization as an aspect of the anti-slavery movement, a story of international migration, an idea integral to the formation of black activism and nationalism, and as a crucial component of racial ideology. However, most scholarship on colonization has assumed that because the foreign aims of the project were largely *subordinate* to the domestic ones, they were necessarily *marginal* as well. While it is true that no colonization movement would have existed without the ostensibly domestic issues of slavery and race, the particular framework that developed to address these issues, a settler colony invested with US republican principles, must be more carefully examined by scholars. As much as colonization was project self-consciously concerned with shoring up national identity, it was equally a vision of empire. I hope to build on the work of scholars who examine race in early America and situate the development of colonization's white nationalism within a broader US imperial agenda that stressed democratizing and indirectly managing nations rather than the raw acquisition of territory

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<sup>15</sup> The focus of most recent studies of antebellum empire has been on continental, rather than global, expansion: Shelley Streeby, *American Sensations: Class, Empire, and the Production of Popular Culture* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002); Paul W. Foos, *A Short, Offhand, Killing Affair: Soldiers and Social Conflict During the Mexican-American War* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Sam W. Haynes and Christopher Morris, eds., *Manifest Destiny and Empire: American Antebellum Expansionism* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1997); some exceptions to the continental focus of antebellum studies of empire are: Aims McGuinness, *Path of Empire: Panama and the California Gold Rush* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008); Amy S. Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

or the domination of populations. In doing so, I intend to link domestic and international understandings of racism, as well as illustrate the connections between continental and overseas manifestations of US empire.

### **EXPORTING THE RACIAL REPUBLIC**

The title of this dissertation, “Exporting the Racial Republic,” reflects its concern with the relationship between construction of racial statehood and the ideology of US expansion. Colonizationists helped to legitimize and reconfigure white nationhood within the United States by proposing to reproduce a seemingly coherent model of racial statehood onto other peoples. In characterizing the “racial republic” I build upon David Theo Goldberg’s understanding of the “historicist” racial state which offered the possibility of citizenship, but in a form that was never quite complete or equal to that of normative (white) subjects. Goldberg argues that in such racial states, “Citizenship was a status and standing not only quite (to be) reached for the racially immature but for whom the menu of rights was never quite (as) complete.”<sup>16</sup> While colonization helped produce the subordinate status of racialized subjects within the United States, it also proposed the reproduction of a US-modeled racial state. The reproduction of a racial republic would make black Liberians abstractly equal to American citizens, while the relationship between the two nations was inherently hierarchical and imperial in its structure. Thus, colonization functioned to produce legal, political, and social identities that were purported to be formally equivalent, but which were fundamentally unequal.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Goldberg applies the term “historicist” to modes of racialization which rely on claims of historical underdevelopment rather than inherent superiority. David Theo Goldberg, *The Racial State* (Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 106.

<sup>17</sup> In his examination of colonization, David Kazanjian has made similar observations, arguing that colonization rhetoric used the language of liberal citizenship “by representing itself as a merely technical,



In suggesting formal equivalencies between racial republics, the internal racial ordering imagined by colonizationists was deeply connected to their desire to cultivate a vision of US expansion. Aziz Rana has used the concept of a “settler empire” to describe the United States as a nation whose “ethnic basis flattens internal inequalities while justifying the construction of dependent external communities.”<sup>18</sup> The idea of planting a black colony followed a similar logic evident in the government’s relations with Indian nations which existed in unincorporated spaces that were granted quasi-sovereignty but lacked ultimate control over their territory. In imagining the export of a race-based republic, colonization was constructed alongside the colonial relationships that existed with indigenous peoples by creating a new conception of dependent communities and a new expression of imperial expansion.

My study argues that colonization illustrates how the racial management of different groups should be seen within the United States’ larger global agenda to foster and manage an international order amenable to its interests. This is reflected in the fact that colonization developed as a response to revolutionary challenges to the premise that political sovereignty necessarily rested on white supremacy. Thus, the idea of colonization shows that the question of freedom was not simply about the ways that sovereignty would be applied to populations within national borders, but how the ideas of liberalism would be expanded and maintained throughout the world. While continental expansion has largely been viewed as an important ideological precursor to US global empire, historians have largely not accounted for the fact that they draw from overlapping, yet distinct, ideological justifications. I argue that the concept of

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governmental realization of the necessary relationships among freedom, race, and nation.” Kazanjian, “The Colonizing Trick,” 97.

<sup>18</sup> Aziz Rana, *The Two Faces of American Freedom* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 10.

colonization illustrates the links between these modes of empire from its origins as a product of US settler colonialism to its development of a model of subordinate sovereignty as an independent republic.

Whites deployed the idea of colonization deny black citizenship rights in the United States while promising to extend sovereignty to African Americans within the confines of a race-based nation-state. This contradiction was central to the liberal thinking which animated US nationalism during this period: the universalism articulated within the revolutionary era would require constant racial and geographic management. I contend that the idea of colonization was not principally about the denial of liberalism's universality through the justification of racial exclusion, but instead it promised to expand and preserve liberal citizenship by building racially-based nation-states. By making African Americans the objects of removal, colonization reinforced the abstract equality of white citizenship through its insistence on aligning race and nationhood. More than promoting a sense of natural and inherent racial superiority for whites and purity for the US nation, colonization was based upon the notion that persons of African descent could eventually become self-governing subjects, but, within this framework, they would always remain distinct and unequal.

## **CHAPTERS**

The chapters of the dissertation follow a chronological pattern, but are thematically, rather than narratively, organized. Chapter two historicizes the era before mainstream political consensus coalesced around the idea of a West African colony. The chapter situates the African colonization movement as a counterrevolutionary response to the Haitian revolution which grew out of the imperatives of settler colonialism within

North America. The colonization idea reformulated the democratic ideals of the revolutionary era through the lens of empire by claiming to empower African Americans with the ability for self-government. Chapter three explores how politicians, reformers, and missionaries devised interrelated ideas for creating race-based republics for African Americans and Native Americans that promised to manage the problems of race and nationhood within in the multiracial landscape of North America. I argue that the abandonment of Indian colonization for federal removal policy, and the defeat of government funding for African colonization, reflected diverging conceptions of US expansion at the heart of the Jacksonian era. The fourth chapter examines the relationship among colonization, citizenship, and violent domestic politics in two public forums during the 1830s and 40s: anti-black urban mobs and state constitutional conventions. In both cases, white participants used the rhetoric of colonization to exclude African Americans from citizenship rights in the United States: rioters threatened black communities with violence and exclusion, while politicians promised that African Americans would be removed so that they would enjoy human rights in another nation. The fifth chapter examines the advent of Liberian independence in the late-1840s by studying the multiple meanings it held for the Liberian settlers and both black and white observers in the United States. It argues that white audiences interpreted the declaration of political sovereignty by the Republic of Liberia as a realization of US potential for spreading democratic values even while African Americans critiqued its inability to live up to these values both at home and abroad. The final chapter serves as a short epilogue which explores how colonization, and the racial republic, intersected with emerging ideologies of continental and global expansion in the 1850s and 60s. It examines how

diplomatic recognition for racial republics coincided with efforts to use black colonization to commercially develop both West Africa and Central America.

## CHAPTER 2

### **A NATION ONCE REMOVED: THE ORIGINS OF COLONIZATION IN AN AGE OF DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTION AND CONTINENTAL EMPIRE, 1776-1817**

In an 1823 speech Reverend Leonard Bacon warned his audience to support African colonization or else a “Toussaint” or an “African Tecumseh” would lead slaves to insurrection “and we shall witness scenes—which history describes, but from the thought of which the imagination revolts.”<sup>1</sup> Bacon’s reference to these contemporary revolutionaries illustrates not only how the threats of black and Indian resistance were closely linked in the early republic, but it also suggests how this resistance challenged the particular vision of US expansion in North America that had taken shape in the two decades since the Louisiana Purchase.<sup>2</sup> Such rebellions undermined the racial and imperial basis for US nationhood by suggesting that non-white populations might organize around political coalitions that rejected white supremacy. Several plans for black resettlement within North America emerged following the American revolution, but ultimately white political leaders decided that an independent black nation outside US national boundaries posed as much of a threat to expansion as the Indian nations that already existed there. In rejecting a role for black settlement in an expanding continental empire, the newly founded American Colonization Society proposed that African

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<sup>1</sup> Leonard Bacon, “The African Colonization Plan Review of the Reports of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Color in the United States,” *Daily National Intelligencer*, November 1, 1823.

<sup>2</sup> Bacon was an influential evangelical activist in the Northern colonization movement. He grew particularly concerned with the possibility of race war following the Missouri crisis of 1819-1820. See Hugh Davis, “Northern Colonizationists and Free Blacks, 1823-1837: A Case Study of Leonard Bacon,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 17, no. 4 (Winter 1997): 655.

Americans could participate in a new model of expansion in Africa by demonstrating the United States' power to spread the ideals of liberal democracy.

When Leonard Bacon addressed his audience, the African colonization movement had already been firmly established for five years and enjoyed federal funding and public support from the nation's most influential politicians. Despite the idea's rapid rise in popularity, such consensus around an African colony was not inevitable. Indeed, much of the discussion about colonization in the previous two decades was focused on creating a black colony, not in Africa, but in western territory in North America claimed by the United States. While the fear that a slave uprising might spark a large-scale political revolution had always been a motivating factor in promoting colonization schemes, a black colony in North America had not always been viewed as a strategic threat by the time African plan for colonization had become dominant. This chapter analyzes the development of ideas about colonization in the era before mainstream political consensus coalesced around the model of an US-sponsored West African colony. This chapter contends that white leaders in the United States rejected a western colony because the nation's emerging ambitions for territory in North America left little room for independent black settlements that could align themselves with Native Americans who already threatened US expansion.

This chapter first examines how policymakers in Upper South addressed the threat of a slave rebellion in the wake of the St. Domingue uprising during the 1790s and the foiled slave conspiracies in Virginia during the first years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. These events inspired a series of colonization proposals in both the North and South which sought to preemptively neutralize the threat of domestic insurrection by planting African

American colonies in the lands in western North America. Colonization plans reimagined the liberal ideals of the revolution through a colonialist framework and proposed that racial groups could be managed through fostering limited sovereignty. I contend that these ideas were ultimately defeated because the colonies they proposed, and the possibility of a Black-Indian alliance they threatened, were increasingly viewed as antithetical to the emerging imperatives of US expansion in North America. The chapter also examines how the British colony of emancipated slaves in Sierra Leone created during the 1790s was both the direct inspiration and a pointed contrast for the early architects of African colonization. While some advocates of colonization believed the colony might be suitable for African Americans, Sierra Leone's status as a colonial territory of the British Empire prompted the movement's leaders to ultimately favor a US-designed colony. In advocating a new colony, colonization supporters contrasted the liberatory empire imagined by the United States with the purportedly more oppressive and self-interested British approach to colonialism. The fact that white leaders ultimately rejected colonies in North America or Sierra Leone illustrates that early debate over African colonization contained a subtle discourse about the meaning of US expansion.

### **COLONIZATION AND COUNTERREVOLUTION**

Although West Africa would eventually become the focus of plans for colonization in the United States, it was not the first or most popular destination discussed in the decades following the Revolutionary War. Most histories of African colonization afford minimal attention to these efforts at colonization in the western North America. When these early colonization efforts have been acknowledged, they are largely situated as precursors to the formidable social movement that would coalesce

behind African colonization, rather than an incipient movement in their own right.<sup>3</sup>

Although colonization advocates in the United States were aware of British efforts to create a West African colony in Sierra Leone, many of the earliest plans for colonizing African Americans looked to promise of a expanding territorial empire in North America. I argue that these visions of colonization must be properly contextualized within the thinking of settler colonialism in early United States. While colonization plans for the West never achieved anything approaching the movement behind African colonization, these plans were, arguably, the most seriously-discussed colonization proposals before the War of 1812. Thus, the failure of western colonization plans to generate concerted action, compared with African colonization's success, illuminate the broader geographical and political context in which the idea of colonization emerged. These early western colonization plans focused on the need to prevent African Americans from making revolutionary claims to political rights. Although this concept of western colonization was eventually displaced the dominance of white settler colonialism in North America, its brief ascendancy illustrates that from their inception, colonization plans were deeply bound up with visions of national expansion.

During the 1790s, Virginia's centrality to national discussions of slavery and emancipation in the United States made it a crucial incubator for colonization plans. The

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<sup>3</sup> For scholarship that offers little or no mention of western colonization see: Clegg, *The Price of Liberty*, 21-2; Beyan, *The American Colonization Society and the Creation of the Liberian State*, 2-3; Smith, *Sojourners in Search of Freedom*, xi; Tom W Shick, *Behold the Promised Land: A History of Afro-American Settler Society in Nineteenth-Century Liberia* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 3-4; Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914*; for work that provides some background on these early efforts as a precursor to African colonization see: Burin, *Slavery and the Peculiar Solution: A History of the American Colonization Society*, 7-13; Tyler-McGraw, *An African Republic: Black & White Virginians in the Making of Liberia*, 9-12; for scholarship that offers little or no mention of western colonization see: Staudenraus, *The African Colonization Movement, 1816-1865*, 1-3; Nicholas Guyatt's recent work is an exception to this tendency with a detailed look at these early efforts. Guyatt, "The Outskirts of Our Happiness," 1-3. To date no scholarship has seriously considered western colonization within the context of early US expansion.



disruptions to the slave system caused by the Revolutionary War and the declining profitability of tobacco created a large number of surplus slaves and an increase in the state's free black population. Many whites in declining slave societies thought that a growing class of free African Americans threatened their long-term demographic supremacy. Many Virginian politicians who were also crucial national leaders who questioned the viability of continued investment in the institution of slavery following the revolutionary war.<sup>4</sup>

In this regard, the writings of Virginia's most famous planter, Thomas Jefferson, were crucial to defining the parameters of the debate over slavery, emancipation, and colonization in both Virginia and the nation as a whole. Approaching the subject from the perspective of a Virginia planter who was anxious about the future of slavery in a revolutionary era, Jefferson did more than any other individual in the early republic to advance and popularize the concept of colonizing persons of African descent. In the early years of the revolution, Jefferson helped draft a new version of Virginia's constitution that featured the gradual emancipation of the state's enslaved populations, provided that they were sent to "be colonized to such place as the circumstances of time should render most proper" where they would become a "free and independent people." While this plan was not included in the final version of the constitution, Jefferson's colonization scheme received wide circulation when *Notes on the State of Virginia* was published a few years later with these abandoned sections included. While Jefferson was sufficiently vague in his proposals to place free African Americans somewhere in US

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<sup>4</sup> Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998), 277-285; Peter Kolchin, *American Slavery, 1619-1877* (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1993), 78-81.

territory, the plan's inclusion within the massively influential volume encouraged other writers to take up the idea in subsequent years.<sup>5</sup>

Historian Peter Onuf has pointed to Thomas Jefferson's frequent equation of national identity and racial identity as a basis for his conception of colonization.

Jefferson's writings illustrate his belief that African Americans constituted a distinct and necessarily antagonistic nation of people who were held captive within the white US nation. Believing these nations would remain perpetually in conflict, he concluded that their separation into different political communities was the only viable solution.

Crucially, Jefferson's suggestion that African Americans might have natural rights as a captive nation drove his fear that they might come to realize their nationhood through the process of political revolution, just as the United States had from its colonial masters in Britain. Jefferson believed that "total emancipation" was around the corner, and he hoped that this would happen with "the consent of the masters, rather than by their extirpation."<sup>6</sup> Thomas Jefferson's concerns about the inevitability of political revolution were echoed many times by subsequent supporters of colonization, including anxious slaveholders and advocates of abolition, who warned that if the political rights of African Americans were not restored, they would inevitably be seized through a bloody conflict.

Less than a decade after Jefferson penned these predictions, such abstract fears were made more concrete following the extended revolutionary actions of slaves in the French Caribbean. In the early 1790s, a political struggle over extending citizenship

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<sup>5</sup> Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (Richmond, VA: J.W. Randolph, 1853), 149; Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812*, 546-7; John Chester Miller, *The Wolf by the Ears: Thomas Jefferson and Slavery* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1977), 21-2.

<sup>6</sup> Peter S. Onuf, "'To Declare Them a Free and Independent People': Race, Slavery, and National Identity in Jefferson's Thought," *Journal of the Early Republic* 18, no. Spring (1998): 3-6, 8-10; Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, 175.

rights to free persons of color in France's richest sugar colony, St. Domingue, led to a series of slave uprisings in August of 1791 which rapidly developed into a vast revolutionary army. After more than a decade of fighting and several attempts to reconquer the island by the French, Spanish, and British Empires, the revolutionaries finally signed a treaty with France and established the Republic of Haiti. A few years into the conflict, Toussaint L'Ouverture emerged as the primary revolutionary general, eventually becoming a national symbol of an independent Haiti and an international symbol of both the threat and promise of slave revolution. Recently, scholars have emphasized that Haitians' claims to citizenship should be understood as the most radical expression of the universal rights of man that were articulated during the age of democratic revolution.

The impact of the Haitian revolution throughout the Atlantic world was immediate and vast: it posed ideological challenge to the meaning of democratic freedom and one of the first blows to the system of slavery in the Americas. Lurid and exaggerated reports of slaves massacring white colonists were widely publicized in both the North and South, leading to predictions that a widespread racial revolution was imminent in the United States. Haiti became a symbol of resistance for many African Americans, both free and enslaved, inspiring slave uprisings and helping to generate a radical edge to the emerging abolitionist movement. The evolving circumstances in St. Domingue advanced the discussion of colonization among white leaders for the next several decades by forcing them to situate their own relationship to slavery within a hemispheric framework of the rapidly spreading ideas of political liberty.<sup>7</sup> In this

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<sup>7</sup> Sibylle Fischer, *Modernity Disavowed: Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery in the Age of Revolution* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004); Alfred N. Hunt, *Haiti's Influence on Antebellum America:*

context, the early colonization efforts in the United States should be seen as part of an ideological counterrevolution that aimed to counteract and redirect revolutionary democratic claims by creating favorable terms through which black citizenship might be fostered and contained.

Many writers of this era referenced the fear of revolts in the abstract, but the claims to citizenship rights made by slaves in St. Domingue were a consistent feature of writings that advocated various plans for colonization. St. George Tucker's *Dissertation on Slavery* (1796) was one of the first influential writings to suggest that the gradual emancipation of slaves might be accompanied by their transplantation to western territory in North America. Tucker was a politically-connected Virginia lawyer whose writings received a wide readership among leaders within the state. The tract outlined a detailed plan for ending slavery in Virginia by advocating the emancipation of all slaves born after a certain date but allowing them no citizenship rights in the state after freedom. In a letter written to a Massachusetts anti-slavery leader shortly before the pamphlet's publication, Tucker described the predicament that led him to such a solution: "The calamities which have lately spread like a contagion through the West India Islands affords a solemn warning to us of the dangerous predicament in which we stand." He believed that the choice for the United States was either to continue supporting the institution of slavery or to copy "the liberal sentiments of the national convention of

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*Slumbering Volcano in the Caribbean* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988); Michael Zuckerman, "The Power of Blackness: Thomas Jefferson and the Revolution in St. Domingue," in *Almost Chosen People: Oblique Biographies in the American Grain* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993); Dain, *A Hideous Monster of the Mind*; on African Americans' awareness of the Haitian Revolution see: Chris Dixon, *African America and Haiti: Emigration and Black Nationalism in the Nineteenth Century* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000); Julius Sherrard Scott, "The Common Wind: Currents of Afro-American Communication in the era of the Haitian Revolution" (Ph.D., Durham, NC: Duke University, 1986).

France [by abolishing slavery]” and “endeavor to do justice to the rights of human nature.”<sup>8</sup>

While the colonization of free African Americans formed only part of the plan set forth in the *Dissertation on Slavery*, Tucker recognized that black claims for equal rights might force colonization in order to prevent revolution, arguing that, “by denying them the most valuable privileges which civil government affords [Virginia could] render it their inclination and their interest to seek those privileges in some other climate.”

Looking westward for such a climate he suggested the “immense territory of Louisiana,” which would “afford a ready asylum for such as might choose to become Spanish subjects.” Despite his emphasis on securing political privileges elsewhere for African Americans he also skeptically observed “how far their political rights might be enlarged in these countries, is, however questionable.”<sup>9</sup> Tucker was preoccupied with denying citizenship rights to African Americans in Virginia after slavery; however, because he worried that emancipation would only embolden African Americans’ revolutionary claims to citizenship, he believed that securing their rights elsewhere was a necessity.

While St. George Tucker’s plan gained wide readership and assent from those sympathetic to gradual emancipation in Virginia, it was followed by little concrete action within the state. Tucker placed his proposal for gradual emancipation and colonization before his friends in the General Assembly of Virginia but it was quickly shelved, largely

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<sup>8</sup> St George Tucker, *Blackstone’s Commentaries: With Notes of Reference, to the Constitution and Laws, of the Federal Government of the United States; and of the Commonwealth of Virginia*, vol. 4, 5 vols. (Philadelphia, 1803).

<sup>9</sup> St. George Tucker, *Dissertation on slavery: with a proposal for the gradual abolition of it, in the state of Virginia* (Philadelphia, PA, 1796), 94-5.

due to slaveholders' considerable investment in maintaining the status quo in the state.<sup>10</sup> Shortly after the *Dissertation on Slavery* was published, Thomas Jefferson wrote to Tucker to register his approval for the proposal. Jefferson specifically praised the plan's urgency, because he feared the ever-looming specter of revolutionary claims to citizenship by African Americans. Acknowledging the difficulty of gaining support for wide-scale slave emancipation, Jefferson predicted that such efforts would eventually be pushed along by gathering waves of revolution: "Perhaps the first chapter of this history, which has begun in St. Domingo, and the next succeeding ones, which will recount how all the whites were driven from all the other islands, may prepare our minds for a peaceable accommodation between justice, policy and necessity." While Jefferson was more skeptical than Tucker about whether African Americans were able to become enlightened citizens, he agreed that they were indeed capable of recognizing their political rights within the revolutionary context of the moment. Jefferson ominously warned that "if something is not done, and soon done ... the revolutionary storm, now sweeping the globe, will be upon us."<sup>11</sup> While Thomas Jefferson, like many Virginia planters, was unsure of whether African Americans were racially fit for the exercise of their political rights, the eminent "storm" that might result from the continued denial of these rights, and their need to ultimately be secured elsewhere, fueled the thinking behind early colonization proposals.

In the Northern states, similar ideas of creating a western colony began to circulate alongside fears of black revolutions, despite their much smaller black

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<sup>10</sup> Douglas R. Egerton, *Gabriel's Rebellion: The Virginia Slave Conspiracies of 1800 and 1802* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 14-15; Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812*, 558-560.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas Jefferson to St. George Tucker, August 28, 1797, in Paul Leicester Ford, ed., *The Works of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 8 (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1905), 231.

populations. Prominent white leaders in the North had advocated colonization schemes at least since the early 1770s, when educator and abolitionist Anthony Benezet suggested that African Americans could be colonized “from the west side of the Allegany mountains to the Mississippi.” Using the revolutionary era rhetoric of natural rights, Benezet advocated a western colony because he believed that African Americans were “as free as we are by nature.”<sup>12</sup> However, colonization proposals did not gain much traction in the North until after the beginning of the revolution when several Northern states began the process of abolishing slavery during the 1770s and 80s. Despite the decline of Northern slavery, the free black communities created emancipation made the issue of black citizenship one of particular concern for Northern audiences.<sup>13</sup>

In 1795, an anonymous writer, later revealed to be Moses Fisk, published the first lengthy Northern proposal for colonization. While more oriented towards ending slavery than the plans of his Southern counterparts, Fisk’s pamphlet, entitled *Tyrannical Libertymen a Discourse Upon Negro-Slavery in the United States*, was similarly concerned with the uncontrollable political forces that might be unleashed after emancipation. Fisk proposed that African Americans could be sent to a colony in the western territories of the United States. Like St. George Tucker’s proposal, Fisk was particularly concerned with how African Americans could be made fit for citizenship and diverted from general rebellion. Fisk acknowledged that a “plausible” objection to emancipation was that it would lead to social chaos on massive scale and he reflected

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<sup>12</sup> Anthony Benezet’s letters on slavery were published during his lifetime and later compiled in: Roberts Vaux, *Memoirs of the Life of Anthony Benezet* (Philadelphia, PA: W. Alexander, 1817), 39; Anthony Benezet, “Letters of Anthony Benezet,” *The Journal of Negro History* 2, no. 1 (January 1917): 83, 85-6.

<sup>13</sup> Melish, *Disowning Slavery*, 50-83; Sweet, *Bodies Politic*, 225-267; James Oliver Horton, *In Hope of Liberty: Culture, Community, and Protest Among Northern Free Blacks, 1700-1860* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1997), 71-75; David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975), 120-130.

increasing fears about something like St. Domingue by arguing that liberty would create a “dangerous parcel of vagabonds” that would become “the terror and vexation of the community.” Fisk succinctly identified both the problem and the solution to this potential outcome: “If they are not fit for freedom, they must be fitted.” While Fisk’s plan was borne out of the fear of rebellion, he believed African Americans’ inevitable desire to become citizens could be harnessed and contained through the process of colonization. The notion of turning a dangerous threat into an ally of expansion would become a hallmark of thinking about colonizing the West and would persist into the era of African colonization, albeit in a different form. Believing that African Americans should briefly become dependents of the government, Fisk’s pamphlet suggested they must be placed “under temporary guardians, governours, and instructors, to be educated, to be made acquainted with their rights and duties, and some honest method of acquiring a livelihood; to be prepared for citizenship.”<sup>14</sup>

Ultimately, such instruction in citizenship would not prepare liberated slaves for integration in US society. Instead Fisk suggested that, “a portion of our new territory be assigned for the purpose; and let the great body of the negroes be sent to colonize it.” While he imagined a relatively autonomous existence for this colony, he argued that this independence would be managed tightly within the goals advanced by the United States: “The must be inured to industry and economy; defended, if any should invade them; and awed by soldiery, if they should rebel.” While the pamphlet suggested that, in time, they might “have a voice in Congress” the colony was a necessary step because “they will

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<sup>14</sup> Moses Fisk, *Tyrannical Libertymen a Discourse Upon Negro-Slavery in the United States: Composed at -- in New Hampshire, on the Late Federal Thanksgiving-Day* (Hanover, NH: Eagle Office, 1795).



never be good citizens, till they know their duties.”<sup>15</sup> Despite the vast structural differences between the black populations of both the North and South, white elites were motivated by similar fears of political revolution during the 1790s. The ongoing slave rebellion in St. Domingue inflected the discussions of emancipation by demonstrating that massive military and political mobilization of enslaved people was possible. The general trend towards abolition within the northern states caused many plantation owners in Virginia to worry about what might become of their slave populations if they were subjected to immediate emancipation.

The revolutionary fears that animated both Northern and Southern colonization proposals of the 1790s were amplified when a large-scale rebellion, planned by a slave known as Gabriel, was foiled by slaveholders in Virginia in 1800. Gabriel planned to lead a band of slaves to collect arms and march on Virginia’s capital in Richmond, where they hoped to capture the city and provoke a general revolt throughout the state. The plot was unsuccessful because two slaves who were aware of the plans alerted the authorities, leading ultimately to the death sentences for Gabriel and twenty-three of his co-conspirators. Both the French and Haitian revolutions were important influences on the plans for the rebellion, which included collaboration from white French radicals. The possibility of such a far-reaching revolution confirmed the worst fears of white leaders in the US. Although the plot was foiled in its earliest stages, the near-rebellion drove many white leaders to examine the possibility of removing black populations in order to neutralize the possibility of revolution. Following this event, the speculative colonization plans of the previous decade gave way to more concerted state action to create a western

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 5, 9-11.

colony of African Americans that would circumvent their revolutionary claims for rights.<sup>16</sup>

Only a few months after Gabriel and his fellow rebels were executed, the state government in Virginia, led by Governor James Monroe, moved briskly to take actions that would prevent future uprisings. A series of laws were implemented to ensure greater control over enslaved populations, including expanded power for state militias and a strengthened slave patrol system.<sup>17</sup> At this time the legislature also considered a resolution along the lines of earlier colonization proposals that would create a colony for rebellious slaves somewhere outside the state. In December of 1800, the House of Delegates passed an open-ended proposal for support by the federal government to aid them in “purchasing lands without the limits of this State” so that persons “dangerous to the peace of society may be removed.”<sup>18</sup> Within weeks of this resolution, George Tucker, a cousin of St. George Tucker, anonymously published a pamphlet addressed to the assembly which outlined colonization as a solution to the pressing threat of slave rebellion. Tucker’s pamphlet, entitled *Letter to a Member of the General Assembly of Virginia, on the Subject of the Late Conspiracy of the Slaves with a Proposal for Their Colonization*, really expanded upon the outline of the Legislature’s resolution. While the modest plan proposed by the Virginia Assembly suggested something akin to penal colony for rebellious slaves, Tucker imagined the wholesale removal of African Americans from the state by colonizing them within Spanish territory on the “Western side of the Mississippi.” While his cousin, St. George Tucker, had proposed gradual

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<sup>16</sup> Egerton, *Gabriel’s Rebellion*, 45-48, 69-79; Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812*, 393-4.

<sup>17</sup> Egerton, *Gabriel’s Rebellion*, 147-151.

<sup>18</sup> *Journal of the House of Delegates of the Commonwealth of Virginia* (Richmond, VA: Thomas Nicolson, 1801), 47-8.

abolition and colonization for a limited number of slaveholders, George Tucker believed that only the complete transplantation of the enslaved population in Virginia would stave off future waves of political revolution within the state.<sup>19</sup>

Like other early proponents of colonization reacting to the appropriation of the “rights of man” by black slaves in the Americas, Tucker warned that African Americans were rapidly gaining knowledge of liberal discourses of freedom. He observed that, “in our infant country, where population and wealth increase with unexampled rapidity, the progress of liberal knowledge is proportionally great. In this vast march of the mind, the blacks, who are far behind us, may be supposed to advance at a pace equal to our own; but, sir, the fact is, they are likely to advance much faster.” He argued that this was inevitable by their very proximity to civil institutions and liberal ideas in the United States: “The very nature of our government, which leads us to recur perpetually to the discussion of national rights, favors speculation and enquiry.” Arguing that this exposure had changed the consciousness of slaves in the few decades since British Loyalist forces offered emancipation during the revolutionary war, he claimed: “The difference is, that then they fought freedom merely as a good; now they also claim it as a right.” Tucker believed that this growing threat could only be alleviated by sending African Americans to land purchased for a colony on “the western side of the Mississippi” and “under the protection and immediate government of this state, or the United States, until it contained a number of inhabitants sufficient to manage their own concerns.” Due to such a colony’s minimal resources and relative size, he imagined a hierarchical colonial

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<sup>19</sup> George Tucker, *Letter to a member of the General Assembly of Virginia on the subject of the late conspiracy of the slaves; with a proposal for their colonization* (Baltimore, MD: Bonsal & Niles, 1801).

relationship with any nation that would result from such a proposal. “We may be to them a haughty and domineering neighbor; they never could be terrible to us.”<sup>20</sup>

The pamphlet had a considerable impact following the wave of laws passed by Virginia in the wake of Gabriel’s rebellion. The tract was so popular within the political class of Virginia that a second edition was printed only a few months after its initial pressing.<sup>21</sup> Shortly after the text’s publication, Governor Monroe wrote to Thomas Jefferson about the state’s colonization proposals. Jefferson was now President of the United States and in a powerful position to advance the colonization idea he had pioneered. While Jefferson and Monroe’s correspondence was not made public at the time, their letters reflect a serious attention to western colonization at the highest levels of government. Writing in his capacity as Governor, Monroe was acting on behalf of the state of Virginia by following up on the legislature’s resolution which sought federal support in removing “persons obnoxious to the laws or dangerous the peace of society.” Monroe believed that this narrowly defined policy, with the help of the federal government, could be an entrée into a broader federal colonization agenda, and he urged Jefferson to contemplate the subject “beyond the contracted scale of providing a mode of punishment for offenders.” In particular, Monroe sought Jefferson’s thoughts about the hotly discussed idea of western colonization that was detailed in George Tucker’s recent pamphlet. He asked Jefferson “whether a tract of land in the Western territory of the United States can be procured for this purpose, in what quarter, and on what terms?”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 6-7, 18, 21.

<sup>21</sup> Egerton, *Gabriel’s Rebellion*, 152.

<sup>22</sup> James Monroe to Thomas Jefferson, June 15, 1801 in Stanislaus Murray Hamilton, *The Writings of James Monroe*, vol. 3 (New York, NY: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1903), 293.

President Jefferson's response to the letter demonstrated his continued support for the colonization idea, but revealed his skepticism towards the sanguine vision of a Western colony some Virginia leaders were entertaining. While Jefferson indicated that land in the Northwest Territory could be purchased, he questioned the possibility of procuring land in the West which was controlled by several Indian nations, as well as, the British, French, and Spanish empires. More importantly, Jefferson worried about the long-term consequences of planting such colonies in North America. He predicted: "It is impossible not to look forward to distant times, when our rapid multiplication will expand itself beyond those limits, and cover the whole Northern, if not the Southern continent, with a people speaking the same language, governed in similar forms and by similar laws." This demonstrates that Jefferson's vision of an "empire of liberty" in which US institutions and laws would extend throughout the continent existed prior to his monumental purchase of the Louisiana territory from France in 1803. Moreover, he concluded that continental expansion must be homogenous and united, arguing that the US should not "contemplate with satisfaction either blot or mixture in that surface."<sup>23</sup> In arguing that white settler colonialism over the face of North America should be without "blot" or "mixture" he articulated the imperatives of US expansion: colonizing the continent in a manner which maintained white racial purity. It is unclear whether Jefferson was more concerned with the independent political imperatives of the proposed black nations situated in North America or if he feared that racial mixture would inevitably result from such settlements.

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<sup>23</sup> Thomas Jefferson to James Monroe, November 24, 1801 in Paul Leicester Ford, ed., *The Works of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 9 (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1905), 315-319.

Thomas Jefferson's private view of an exclusively white empire of liberty was not necessarily shared by all early supporters of colonization, and this became particularly true as the Louisiana Purchase again renewed hopes that Western territory could be set aside for the purposes of a black colony. Despite the President Jefferson's discouragement of western colonies for African Americans, the Virginia legislature passed more resolutions in January 1802, February 1804, and January 1805 and continued to ask the federal government to take action on the matter. The text of both the second and third resolutions referred to the recent purchase of the Louisiana territory to argue that the vast expansion of US territory could make such a colony viable. The January 1805 resolution urged the US Congress to "exert their best efforts for the purpose of obtaining ... a competent portion of territory, in the country of Louisiana, to be appropriated to the residence of such people of colour as have been or shall be emancipated in Virginia."<sup>24</sup>

The purchase of the Louisiana Territory from France in 1803 expanded the United States' claims in North America by reformulating the scope for imperial expansion. This land acquisition made the two defining features of antebellum US nation-building possible: the displacement of Indian communities the Old Northwest and an expansion of chattel slavery in the South. Both of these actions would eventually result in the coerced transfer of massive populations: thousands of Native Americans to a federally established 'Indian Territory' and more than a million African Americans to the fertile cotton-growing lands of the Deep South.<sup>25</sup> Although an elaborate ideology of white expansion

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<sup>24</sup> General Assembly, House of Delegates, Virginia, January 22, 1805, General Assembly, House of Delegates, Office of the Speaker, Executive Communications, January 12, 1805, Library of Virginia.

<sup>25</sup> David Roediger has argued that the Louisiana Purchase reflected a shift in thinking about how slavery would end: from a problem which would be solved in time, to one that would be solved though space.

would develop over the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the Louisiana territory was acquired by the US, the process of settling the land was still a relatively open question.<sup>26</sup> Many Americans were skeptical about the benefits it would bring and whether vast white settlement was possible, or even desirable, in the region. Peter Kastor has argued that early visions of the West were characterized not by the fervent advocacy of expansion but by tremendous anxiety about “regional chaos, war with Native peoples, or international conflict.”<sup>27</sup> The first half of the century was characterized by the continual invention and reinvention of the geo-political space known as ‘The West’ which was inhabited by most of the indigenous populations of North America.<sup>28</sup> While the Louisiana Territory briefly revitalized the idea of colonizing the West, this idea suffered from the perceived racial and political instability of the region. Ultimately, the notion of a black colony in the West interfered with a competing vision of empire in which settler colonialism in North America was exclusively white.

The purchase of territory in Louisiana renewed interest in the idea of western colonization among some Northern anti-slavery advocates. Seizing upon the possibilities offered by the territory, Thomas Branagan, a member of the anti-slavery community in Philadelphia, published a pamphlet titled *Serious Remonstrances Addressed to the Citizens of the Northern States*, which renewed the case for a Western colony to Northern audiences. Like George Tucker’s proposal to the Virginia legislature, Branagan envisioned an independent colony of African Americans in Louisiana that could stand

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David R. Roediger, *How Race Survived US History: From Settlement and Slavery to the Obama Phenomenon* (London, UK: Verso, 2008), 61-3.

<sup>26</sup> Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism*.

<sup>27</sup> Peter J. Kastor, “‘What Are the Advantages of the Acquisition?’: Inventing Expansion in the Early American Republic,” *American Quarterly* 60, no. 4 (2008): 1005.

<sup>28</sup> James P. Ronda, “‘We Have a Country’: Race, Geography, and the Invention of Indian Territory,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 19, no. 4 (Winter 1999): 739-755.

separate from the United States while helping to spread US political institutions across the North American continent.<sup>29</sup> Branagan recommended that African Americans should be given a “free and independent” state somewhere in “some distant part of the national domains.” He argued that slavery had been destructive to the moral character of enslaved Africans and he contended that they needed to be planted far away from the white population of the US in order to establish themselves as an independent people. In this environment, Branagan believed African Americans would be safe from conflict with whites. He argued that within such a plan, African Americans could still remain within the broader purview of the United States and they could be managed and potentially reincorporated at some point in time. Promoting apparent sovereignty for black colonies while insisting that they would be subordinate to the United States would become a hallmark of colonizationist thinking.<sup>30</sup>

Like the Southerners attracted to western colonization, Branagan was influenced by the threat of revolutionary violence, as exhibited in St. Domingue. His insistence on a separate political and territorial existence for African Americans was motivated by his view that demands for black sovereignty were inevitable and if left uncontrolled they would develop with much less favorable terms for whites. Indeed, Branagan’s comments demonstrate that he feared more than a bloody uprising among Southern slaves. He argued that colonization was necessary because of the threat of a “general rebellion” among African Americans “from Georgia to New Hampshire,” revealing that his

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<sup>29</sup>Beverly Tomek, “‘From motives of generosity, as well as self-preservation’: Thomas Branagan, Colonization, and the Gradual Emancipation Movement,” *American Nineteenth Century History* 6, no. 2 (2005).

<sup>30</sup> Thomas Branagan, *Serious remonstrances, addressed to the citizens of the northern states, and their representatives; being an appeal to their natural feelings & common sense*. (Philadelphia, PA: Thomas T. Stiles, 1805), 22, 24.



concerns extended even to places where slavery had been recently been abolished. This perspective led him to regard all African Americans, both enslaved and free, as domestic threats, contending that: “The sons of Africa in America, are the inveterate enemies of Americans, and are at perpetual war with them.” To demonstrate the potential consequences of this situation he pointed to “the fate of St. Domingo” as a cautionary tale and devoted several pages to narrating the story of the revolution. The insistence by Branagan and others that all African Americans were a revolutionary threat demonstrated that such early calls for colonization were not simply motivated by the fear that slaves could overturn the institution of slavery but by the potential for a radical transformation of the political and social order of the United States. Branagan assured his readers that “the most distant part of Louisiana is farther from us than some parts of Europe.” For him, the newly purchased Western territories seemed to be an ideally distant locale for African Americans to establish an independent destiny that would circumvent the revolution which occupied the fears of many Americans during this period.<sup>31</sup>

A year after Branagan’s pamphlet was published John Parrish, another Northern anti-slavery activist, proposed a similar plan in his, *Remarks on the Slavery of Black People*. The pamphlet argued that sentiments of universal liberty which underpinned the Declaration of Independence and Constitution needed to be extended to all people or they would ultimately sow the seeds of revolt and undermine US nationhood. Parrish argued, “If it were not meant as is declared, to form a more perfect union, it must have a contrary effect, and instead of securing domestic tranquility, it will consequently tend to promote

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 22, 24, 34, 41, 43, 48-53.

insurrection, by depriving the coloured people of those rights.”<sup>32</sup> While Parrish believed the abolition of slavery was inevitable, like many of the early supporters of colonization, he was particularly concerned with how this process would unfold. Parrish warned: “The day is hastening when this people will become free; and it is desirable it should be with the consent of those who have authority over them.” In response to critics who worried that emancipation would result in racial mixing, he argued that the execution of colonization plan that infused with the principles of liberal individualism would actually aid the separation of racial groups. Parrish suggested that “when [African Americans were] colonized” they would enjoy “liberty and the rights of citizenship, the possession of property and attachment to domestic happiness” and it would “promote” and “preserve the distinctions of nation and colour.” Like Branagan, he suggested that the US government could easily establish such a colony by assigning “a tract within some part of the western wilderness (where there are millions of acres likely to continue many ages unoccupied).”<sup>33</sup> In Parrish’s view, the establishment of a settlement in the West could act as a safety valve for the lingering revolutionary threats that were built on the denial of African Americans’ natural rights.

Both Northern and Southern writers imagined that the vast Western regions claimed by the United States were largely “unoccupied” and could accommodate multiple strategies for their colonization. While proponents of western colonization were often vague about the relationship that would exist between these colonies and the United States, they must be viewed as part of discussions about settler colonialism in early

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<sup>32</sup> John Parrish, *Remarks on the slavery of black people; addressed to the citizens of the United States particularly to those who are in legislative or executive stations in the general or state governments; and also to such individuals as hold them in bondage* (Philadelphia, PA: Kimber, Conrad, & Co., 1806), 8-9.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 41, 43.

America rather than simply a “solution” to the domestic issue of slavery.<sup>34</sup> Thus, the ultimate choice of Africa as the destination should be viewed as situated within a broader constellation of imperial expansion during this era.

### **THE THREAT OF INTERRACIAL REVOLT**

Following the efforts in the Virginia legislature and increasing interest among Northerners, the idea of a Western colony stalled despite having President Thomas Jefferson’s general support for the concept of colonization. While Jefferson was publically open to all options for the proposed black colonies, he was lukewarm on the idea of Western colonization, which had been widely discussed by fellow planters, politicians, and writers in Virginia. As noted earlier in the chapter, he articulated a vision of continental empire which excluded African American colonies and this view of expansion likely explains his reluctance to put significant federal weight behind the idea. In Jefferson’s private 1801 correspondence with Governor Monroe on the proposed colony for Virginian slaves, he suggested that an independent black nation in the West would set a dangerous precedent. He asked, “Should we be willing to have such a colony in contact with us?”<sup>35</sup> Jefferson’s question demonstrates that he recognized that the method of colonialism in the West would be crucial to controlling the lands and people in western North America. While others still imagined that a black colony could play a role in an expanding continental empire, he believed establishing an ‘independent’ black settlement, whatever its allegiance to the United States, could become an insurmountable barrier to expansion.

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<sup>34</sup> For a good overview of the scholarly debate around colonization status as an anti-slavery effort see: Burin, *Slavery and the Peculiar Solution: A History of the American Colonization Society*, 1-2.

<sup>35</sup> Thomas Jefferson to James Monroe, November 24, 1801 in Ford, *The Works of Thomas Jefferson*, 9:315-319.

The expansion of white settlers onto western lands increased during the first decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the Northwest Ordinance opened up new territories leading to greater conflicts with the indigenous populations that lived there. While the United States government had succeeded in slowly eroding the lands held collectively by indigenous communities east of the Mississippi River, the civilization policies were met with considerable resistance.<sup>36</sup> Tenshwatawa, a visionary prophet, and his brother Tecumseh, both Shawnee Indians, became the greatest symbols of resistance to assimilation and land cession. The brothers were part of a prophetic tradition that extended from the 18<sup>th</sup> century and that rejected Euro-American expansion and perceived European culture as rooted in evil. In the first decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they helped organize the growing discontent within the Northwestern tribes. In particular, they opposed US policies which isolated individual leaders of tribal groupings in order to gain land concessions.<sup>37</sup> Tecumseh used his brother's religious movement against the negative cultural influences of whites and forged it into a political alliance of all Indians that rejected the efforts of the United States to control the destiny of Native Americans.<sup>38</sup>

Tecumseh's leadership facilitated the expansion of native-centric pan-Indian politics, which had developed for several decades in response to diminishing Indian lands following the United States' attempts to transform Native Americans into small-scale farmers. In his effort to facilitate a broad diplomatic alliance against US expansion, Tecumseh travelled to the Creek nation in Alabama and helped inspire a similar political

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<sup>36</sup> On early civilization policy see: Francis Paul Prucha, *The Great Father: The United States Government and the American Indians*, Abridged Edition. (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 48-54.

<sup>37</sup> Reginald Horsman, "The Indian Policy of an 'Empire for Liberty'," ed. Frederick E. Hoxie, Ronald Hoffman, and Peter J. Albert (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999), 51-2.

<sup>38</sup> R. David Edmunds, *The Shawnee Prophet* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 92-3; John Sugden, *Tecumseh: A Life* (New York, NY: Henry Holt and Co, 1998), 187-190.

and religious movement with a traditionalist Creek faction known as the Redsticks. When they attacked the United States' Fort Mims in 1813, the conflict expanded into what became known as the "Creek War" in which the United States enlisted rival factions of the Creeks to put down the rebellious Redsticks. These examples of the broader pan-Indian resistance of this era were so forcefully opposed by the United States precisely because they attempted to draw a permanent boundary between "Indian country" and the United States. Leaders of the alliance argued that when such a boundary was secured, Indians would be able to embrace a separate destiny that was free from the pernicious influence of whites. After a series of military clashes with the United States government before and during the War of 1812, both the Red Sticks and Tecumseh's movement were defeated and the alliance between several Northwestern and Southern tribes was broken.<sup>39</sup>

Tecumseh, like Toussaint L'Ouverture, became a powerful symbol of resistance to white supremacy and offered the possibility for organizing an alternative political reality that was founded on self-determination and opposition to an expansionist US empire. Many white leaders were concerned with finding a solution to the threat that African Americans or Native Americans might undermine the interests of the United States. The management of these populations was central to how the US staked its imperial claims on the North American continent and within the Atlantic world. The fears of coordinated resistance by non-white populations would also motivate political leaders to consider

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<sup>39</sup> Gregory Evans Dowd, *A Spirited Resistance the North American Indian Struggle for Unity, 1745-1815* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), xiv, 129; R. Douglas Hurt, *The Indian Frontier, 1763-1846* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2002), 123-33; on Tecumseh's wide-reaching efforts and pan-Indian diplomacy see: Claudio Saunt, *A New Order of Things: Property, Power, and the Transformation of the Creek Indians, 1733-1816* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 249-272; John Sugden, "Early Pan-Indianism: Tecumseh's Tour of the Indian Country, 1811-1812," *American Indian Quarterly* 10, no. 4 (Autumn 1986): 273-304.

their plans to colonize in the West. After the initial burst of interest in Western colonization following the Louisiana Purchase, the idea of placing a black colony in Africa became more popular than destinations in remote portions of North America. Following the War of 1812, many proponents of colonization became convinced that the movement's focus needed to be shifted away from North America. Early supporters of an African destination articulated concerns similar to those in the various proposals for a western colony since the 1790s: that United States still faced a revolutionary reorganization of power similar to the outcome in St. Domingue. However, they did not share earlier proponents' assumption that African Americans could be placed far enough away from the frontier of white settlement in North America for this threat to be contained.

Often, this concern with black rebellion merged with the recent threats posed revolutionary pan-Indian confederacies. In one of the foundational texts of the African colonization movement, *Thoughts on the Colonization of Free Blacks* (1816), Robert Finley, co-founder of the American Colonization Society, directly addressed the feasibility of proposals to colonize African Americans in western settlements. Concluding that the risks were too great to have "in our vicinity an independent settlement of people who were once our slaves," Finley wondered whether, "there might be cause of dread lest they should occasionally combine with our Indian neighbors."<sup>40</sup> Another co-founder of the ACS, Samuel Mills, spoke similarly of the problem when he summarized it a British minister: "Should they [African Americans] ultimately obtain their freedom, which is more than probable, the position of the American government would be extremely embarrassing. To incorporate them into the Republic as an

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<sup>40</sup> Robert S. Finley, *Thoughts on the Colonization of Free Blacks* (Washington, 1816), 6.

Independent part of it would be scarcely possible. To permit them to remain as a separate Nation, with political interests opposed to it, would be a dangerous expedient.”<sup>41</sup> After the formation of the ACS in 1816, the organization produced a widely-circulated pamphlet which summarized the new organization’s principles and used the same reasons outlined by Mills to dismiss the possibility of a western colony. The promotional pamphlet for the new society admitted that a black settlement in the West, “would be cheaper, and more immediately under the eye and control of our government” but also worried that, “they might here after join the Indians, or the nations bordering on our frontiers in the cause of war, if they were placed so near us—that the colony would become the asylum of fugitive and runaway slaves.”<sup>42</sup> Early colonizationists viewed independent national aspirations of African Americans within North America, and their potential collaboration with Indian allies as a dangerous prospect.

During the early 1810s such fears were not mere idle speculation as independent communities of African Americans and Indians demonstrated that placing a black population near the frontiers of white settlement might be a risky proposition. Whites’ concerns about black revolutionary movements and independent black settlements converged in the 1811 slave rebellion on the German Coast of Louisiana when more than two hundred slaves marched on city of New Orleans. The uprising indicated both the strong influence of the Haitian Revolution and drew strength from the tradition of independent maroon settlements of escaped slaves within the Louisiana swamps.<sup>43</sup> Just

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<sup>41</sup> George Washington Edwards Phillips, “Diary of George Washington Edwards Phillips”, 1817, 110-111, George Washington Edwards Phillips Papers, Duke University, Special Collections.

<sup>42</sup> American Colonization Society, *A view of exertions lately made for the purpose of colonizing the free people of colour, in the United States, in Africa, or elsewhere* (Washington D.C., 1817), 7.

<sup>43</sup> Scott, “The Common Wind: Currents of Afro-American Communication in the era of the Haitian Revolution,” 273-4; Daniel Rasmussen, *American Uprising: The Untold Story of America’s Largest Slave Revolt* (New York, NY: Harper, 2011), 88-90, 125.

months before the ACS first convened in 1816, US forces had destroyed the “Negro Fort” in the Florida Panhandle region. Although located on territory claimed by Spain, the fort was targeted because it was occupied by nearly eight-hundred fugitive slaves, as well as a handful of Choctaw and Seminole Indians. The existence of an ostensibly sovereign settlement of heavily-armed African Americans near the border was intolerable to both the US military and southern slaveholders; however, the settlement’s connection to surrounding native communities made them all the more disconcerting to whites.<sup>44</sup>

The fort was part of a longer tradition of black-Indian collaboration in Florida because the Seminoles, while slaveholders themselves, had long provided a degree of sanctuary for fugitive slaves by adopting them into their communities. Several African Americans were important soldiers in the Redstick War amongst dissident Creeks, and some of the refugees from this defeat were responsible for the construction of the fort. African Americans had played a decisive role in several Seminole conflicts with the United States during this era, such as “Payne’s War” from 1812 to 1814 in Northern Florida. Slaveholders feared that this cooperation between Seminoles and slaves might demonstrate the possibility of independent black and native communities.<sup>45</sup> A Georgian military leader fighting the Seminoles wrote to James Monroe, then Secretary of War, and argued that if such alliance were left unchecked “the whole province will be the refuge of fugitive slaves” and would be “detached to bring about a revolt of the black population in the United States.”<sup>46</sup> The military and political collaboration of African

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<sup>44</sup> Kevin Mulroy, *Freedom on the Border: The Seminole Maroons in Florida: The Indian Territory-Coahuila and Texas* (Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech University Press, 1993), 13-15; Kenneth Wiggins Porter, *The Black Seminoles: History of a Freedom-Seeking People* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1996), 13-24.

<sup>45</sup> Saunt, *A New Order of Things*, 235-240, 269-270.

<sup>46</sup> Quoted in Kenneth Wiggins Porter, “Negroes and the East Florida Annexation Plot, 1811-1813,” *Journal of Negro History* 30 (1945): 24.



Americans and Indians was even more threatening because the movements like the Red Stick Creeks and Seminoles were inspired by, or aligned with, the pan-Indian efforts of Tecumseh, suggesting the possibility of wide-ranging geographic, political and racial coalitions against US expansion and white supremacy.

Shortly after the formation of the American Colonization Society in late 1816, the United States Congress issued a report on the potential for federal support of an African colony. The report, issued in February of 1817, reflected the emerging consensus against the wisdom of a colony in Western territory. While it acknowledged that “every new territory established by our government, constitutes, indeed, a colony” they were successful only because they were “an extension of homogenous settlement.” However, the report also noted that black colonies of this nature were problematic because “the rapidly extending settlements of our white inhabitants would soon reach them” and they would likely need to be “planted on lands now owned and occupied by the native tribes of the country.” Indeed, the report predicted “it is not difficult to foresee the quarrels and destructive wars” that would result “should the colony so increase as to become a nation.”<sup>47</sup> The *National Register* concurred with the report’s assessment of “the evil effects which would accrue to the nation by colonizing them any where upon this continent.” However, the paper added that avoiding a continental colony was also a question not only of expansion, but of national security, because it was likely they could be “tampered with and brought over, as the Indians are, by an enemy, in the event of war with a foreign power.”<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Report cited in: “Report on Colonizing the Free People of Color of the United States,” *Daily National Intelligencer*, March 28, 1817.

<sup>48</sup> “Colonization of Free People of Color,” *The National Register*, April 5, 1817.

Even the political elite of Virginia, who since the 1790s had been the vanguard for western colonization plans, now turned their support to African colonization. Following the expansion of white settlement onto more indigenous lands in the West and the growing concern about non-white resistance to this expansion, prominent Virginians shifted their focus to Africa. A decade after the state government of Virginia had openly advocated western colonization it adopted new resolutions which argued that such a colony should exist “on the coast of Africa, or some other place not within the states or territorial governments of the United States.”<sup>49</sup> The resolution was passed two days before the inaugural meeting of the ACS in Washington D.C. and it reflected a definitive shift away from the Virginia-led inquiries into western colonization towards growing support for a national organization aimed at a colony in Africa.

While plans to transplant African Americans within North America circulated in the first decades following US independence, the first such African colony, Sierra Leone, was promoted by Britain in an effort to manage far flung populations of emancipated slaves throughout its empire. The creation of a colony in Sierra Leone served as a direct inspiration and an important contrast to the African colonization movement as it began to take shape in the United States. Early supporters of the ACS briefly entertained the idea of using the newly-formed organization to send emigrants to the already well-established colony. The debate over the merits of Sierra Leone shows that US colonizationists’ decision not to support the already existing British colony reflected underlying arguments about the theory of empire that the United States would seek to promote in its African colony.

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<sup>49</sup> General Assembly of Virginia, December 23, 1816, House of Delegates, Resolutions, Library of Virginia.

The establishment of the settlement in Sierra Leone was partially a product of the British policies during the American Revolutionary War that offered freedom to slaves who would take arms against the rebelling colonists. After the Revolutionary War, the British government made slaves that defected with the promise of freedom its effective wards and they became part of the massive migration of Loyalists from former British colonies that followed the conclusion of the war. About three thousand former slaves were relocated to various parts of the British Empire: some were sent to London but the majority went to a new settlement in Nova Scotia.<sup>50</sup>

Like the proposals for Western colonies in North America, the colony in Sierra Leone was motivated by the liberal principles of the revolutionary age and initially sought to instruct former slaves to be citizens of a self-governing nation. Originally dubbed the “Province of Freedom,” the vision for the colony was shaped by the utopian spirit of Granville Sharp, one of the most prominent spokespersons for abolition in Britain during the 1770s and 80s. Sharp was sympathetic to the ideal of representative democracy embodied in the American Revolution and sought to extend these liberal sentiments to the colony he founded. While administered by white philanthropists like Sharp, the colony was protected and partially funded by the British government, which supported the effort as a repository for problematic black populations and as a way to end the slave trade through the development of legitimate commerce in West Africa. When the Sierra Leone Company faced bankruptcy in 1807, the British government stepped in to make Sierra Leone its first crown colony in Africa and assumed full administration of

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<sup>50</sup> Mary Louise Clifford, *From Slavery to Freetown: Black Loyalists After the American Revolution* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 1999), 36-9; Lamin Sanneh, *Abolitionists Abroad: American Blacks and the Making of Modern West Africa* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 33; Sylvia R. Frey, *Water from the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 174.

the settlement. Thus the colony which was first modeled as a free and democratic society became a harbinger of direct imperial rule in Africa by the British Empire.<sup>51</sup>

The experiment in Sierra Leone received considerable attention in the United States during the early 1810s when Paul Cuffe, a successful black ship captain, became the most prominent spokesperson for settling African Americans in Sierra Leone. Cuffe attempted to establish trade relations with the colony while also helping African Americans to settle there. During a visit to Sierra Leone in 1812, he secured informal trading partnerships with leaders of the colony, but he ran into difficulties as the tensions with the British Empire had caused the United States to institute trade embargos. After the conclusion of the War of 1812, Cuffe was given permission to trade and settle in Sierra Leone by British leaders and proceeded to transport, through his own funding, thirty-eight free African Americans. However, Cuffe's success was short-lived. His trading partnerships dissolved, the land for settlers did not materialize, and he was financially devastated by the venture. By the time of his death in 1817, he had lost hope of securing Sierra Leone as a destination for African American emigration.<sup>52</sup> Paul Cuffe's aspirations in Sierra Leone have long been viewed as a direct inspiration for the African colonization movement in the United States. Indeed, there is something to this line of thought, for following his aborted efforts in Sierra Leone and his untimely death shortly thereafter, a contingent of white politicians and philanthropists, claiming to carry

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<sup>51</sup> Sanneh, *Abolitionists Abroad*, 43-4; Mavis C. Campbell, *Back to Africa: George Ross and the Maroons : From Nova Scotia to Sierra Leone* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1993), iv-v; Richard West, *Back to Africa, a History of Sierra Leone and Liberia* (New York, NY: Holt Rinehart & Winston, 1971), 23-6, 34; Christopher Fyfe, *A History of Sierra Leone* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1962).

<sup>52</sup> George Arnold Salvador, *Paul Cuffe, The Black Yankee, 1759-1817* (New Bedford, MA: Reynolds-DeWalt Printing, 1969), 12-15, 30; Sally Loomis, "The Evolution of Paul Cuffe's Black Nationalism," in *Black Apostles at Home and Abroad: Afro-Americans and the Christian Mission from the Revolution to Reconstruction*, ed. David Wills and Richard S. Newman (Boston MA: G.K. Hall, 1982), 298-299; Miller, *The Search for a Black Nationality*, 30-31.

on Cuffe's vision, rapidly organized themselves into a formidable political lobby by the end of 1816.

When the first meeting of the "American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Color"<sup>53</sup> convened on Capitol Hill in December 1816, the organization had already amassed an impressive roster of vice presidents including: General Andrew Jackson, Chief Justice John Marshall, Speaker of the House, Henry Clay, and Supreme Court Justice, and nephew of George Washington, Bushrod Washington.<sup>54</sup> This weighty display of political power in the early meetings of the Colonization Society immediately made colonization a focal point for national discussion. This intense interest is evident in extensive coverage about the unfolding colonization debate in both periodicals from nationally focused newspapers, such as the *Nile's Weekly Register*, *Daily National Intelligencer*, *National Register*, and the *National Advocate*. Like the previous proposals for western colonization, the early public consideration of African colonization was framed within debates over the nature of US imperial expansion.

The earliest national discussions of African colonization often considered the relative merits of supporting an already-existing colony in Sierra Leone versus creating a new US-designed settlement. These debates were critical to articulating the unique imperial vision that would undergird the eventual Liberian colony. Supporters of the newly founded colonization movement often used Sierra Leone as an example of the feasibility of colonization, as several of the earliest public appeals published to support colonization referred directly to the experiment in Sierra Leone. One such article argued, "African colonization is no novelty...It is not a dream" and referring to Sierra Leone, "it

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<sup>53</sup> This name was later shortened to the American Colonization Society.

<sup>54</sup> Staudenraus, *The African Colonization Movement, 1816-1865*, 29-30.

has the support of past observation and the demonstration of real fact.”<sup>55</sup> Several newspapers during this period widely reprinted an 1811 letter by Thomas Jefferson, which recommended that African Americans from the US could go to Sierra Leone or that “the United States would themselves undertake to make such an establishment.” Most articles provided little context for the letter, but in fact Jefferson was responding to the inquiries of a friend of Paul Cuffe about the feasibility of African colonization.<sup>56</sup> Presented within the rising tide of white pro-colonization sentiment, Cuffe’s work for a Black-organized emigration to Africa was erased from its presentation in the press. This de-contextualization of Cuffe linked the emerging colonization movement to the ideas put forth by prominent white elites and reminded audiences both that Jefferson himself had long been an advocate of colonization plans and that Sierra Leone was still considered a viable alternative to a US-sponsored colony.

As the formal colonization movement was organized in 1817, some of its advocates in the United States advocated what they considered to be a distinctly different approach than Britain’s in Sierra Leone. While the early meetings of the ACS had set an open agenda for potential colonies, including the possibility of supporting Sierra Leone, many of the society’s leaders were already set on creating an US-centric colony. Colonization supporters in the press quickly began to object to any approach in which US efforts were simply grafted onto the existing colonial structure created by the British. An editorial in the *National Advocate* argued that Sierra Leone was inadequate, because “it

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<sup>55</sup> “African Colonization,” *The National Advocate*, November 5, 1817.

<sup>56</sup> Lamont D Thomas, *Paul Cuffe: Black Entrepreneur and Pan-Africanist* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 117; For reprintings of Jefferson’s letter see: “Colonization of Free Blacks,” *Daily National Intelligencer*, April 14, 1817; *The National Advocate*, April 16, 1817; “African Colonization,” *Niles’ Weekly Register*, April 19, 1817; “Colonization of Free Blacks,” *Boston Recorder*, April 29, 1817; “American Colonization Society,” *Christian Herald*, January 31, 1818; “Mr. Jefferson’s Letter,” *The Christian Messenger*, February 28, 1818.

has been established, and still exists like various other of the *humane* establishments of England, calculated to make rich a few hungry parasites who must be provided for.” The devolution of the Sierra Leone settlement of from self-governance into a British crown colony renewed anti-imperial rhetoric of the United States’ recent war with the Britain. The article continued on to argue that,

The colonization of the free blacks should exist, we conceive, independently—form its own laws, and have no connexion with the U. States, further than the protection which it might afford them in their infant settlement—and be as different, in every respect, from Sierra Leone as the government of the states is from Great Britain. Let the precedent of humanity thus be fairly claimed as American, and as fairly denied that we are in any manner indebted for it to England.<sup>57</sup>

When a US Congressional committee issued a report on colonization plans more than a month later, it suggested pursuing some level of cooperation with the existing British colony while simultaneously expressing deep reservations about entangling the United States with the motives of the British Empire. In February 1817, members of the Congressional *Committee on the Slave Trade* presented a report concerning the possibility of an African settlement shortly after the formal organization of the American Colonization Society, which had first convened two months earlier. The committee expressed concern with the level of control the United States would have over the direction of the Sierra Leone colony, and how the British government would react to US plans for the colony: “Would that government agree that at the period when the colony shall be capable of self-government and self-protection, it shall be declared independent? In the mean time, will it desire to monopolize the commerce of the colony? This would be injurious to the colonists, as well as to the United States.” In short, the committee was

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<sup>57</sup> “Colonization of Free Blacks,” *The National Advocate* (December 20, 1816).

concerned that British imperial interests in the colony would supersede or hinder the very aspects of the colony that supporters in the US hoped to secure: free access to the development of trade and the eventual transition into independent form of government for the colony. While the committee ultimately recommended pursuing common principles for cooperation with the British on a single colony, if such an agreement could not be reached, “the design of forming a separate colony might be announced.”<sup>58</sup>

The *National Intelligencer*’s response to the two options proposed by the Congressional report suggested considerable anxiety over the manner in which the United States would extend its empire. The editorial noted that both options were problematic because supporting “Sierra Leone” would “be promoting the colonial interest of England at our own expense” and an independent settlement “would bind us to protect the infant colony, and consequently involve us in war with some sovereign whose avarice would excite him to conquer it.” However, the editorial argued that colonial advantage might be ceded to Britain even if the United States acted independently because creating a new colony would have negative consequences for the United States with the result being that: “much money and numbers of troops would be left at the disposal of the executive” and “the attention of the nation would be diverted from local to colonial affairs.” The writer warned that such a pursuit would inevitably devolve into imperial excursions harmful to the nation. To avoid this fate the editorial suggested that colonization should offer true independence without the imperial interference of the United States: “For the moment a citizen of the U. States becomes a member of another independent state, our right to his

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<sup>58</sup> American Colonization Society, *A view of exertions lately made for the purpose of colonizing the free people of colour, in the United States, in Africa, or elsewhere*, 17; Reprinted in “Report on Colonizing the Free People of Color of the United States.”



services, and his claim to our protection, are cancelled.”<sup>59</sup> An article in the *National Advocate* articulated a similar sentiment by suggesting that the United States and the British government could share in the common goal of supporting a colony which would end the slave trade. The editorial also feared that unilateral expansion by the United States could result in problematic imperial entanglements, questioning “whether it would be politic for the government of the United States to give official sanction to this attempt at colonization, as involving us in foreign disputes, and leading, by their consequences, to the agitation of question of a more serious and important nature.”<sup>60</sup>

Other prominent commentators came to similar conclusions about the wisdom of expanding US foreign entanglements. An editorial published by Hezekiah Niles in his influential weekly newspaper, sympathized with the aims of establishing an independent colony, but warned that “people have placed too great a value upon” the pursuit of “*foreign* affairs,” fearing that “by having our attention directed *abroad*, we may neglect our means at *home*.”<sup>61</sup> A month later, the same paper published a rebuttal by an anonymous writer identified as “Howard.” In response to Niles’ critique of colonization on the grounds that it created excessive foreign entanglements, “Howard” defended colonial expansion as a fundamental fact of human history arguing, “Since the earliest periods, at which we have any knowledge of mankind as living under any regular forms of government, the *establishment*, or *acquisition*, of colonies, has been part of their policy.” However, the writer articulated a fundamentally different vision of imperial expansion, contending that in the United States, “there remains no necessity for pursuing

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<sup>59</sup> “Free People of Color,” *Daily National Intelligencer*, May 5, 1817.

<sup>60</sup> “Colonization,” *Daily National Intelligencer*, July 28, 1817; “Colonization,” *The National Advocate*, July 23, 1817.

<sup>61</sup> “The colonization scheme,” *Niles’ Weekly Register*, October 4, 1817.

such a policy, *as it has generally been pursued by other nations.*” In his view, the colony would be “planted and protected, from *motives*, differing in their origin and tendency, from those which have generally actuated other nations in such cases.” Indeed, according to the writer, in the case of the proposed African colony, the colonial relationship would be fundamentally distinct because, “our after conduct, in relation to the jurisdiction, which we should attempt to exercise over this settlement would be materially different” from that of previous empires. Because the United States would encourage an independent government that would not permit restraints on “their lives, their liberty, or their property” the colony would “in fact not deserve to be considered as an appendage to the government of the United States.”<sup>62</sup> This sentiment reflected early colonization advocates’ conviction that the proposed African colony could represent a benevolent expansion of US values and institutions without the negative consequences of a formal empire.

Some newspaper coverage cited the example of Sierra Leone to demonstrate the viability of a black colony, but argued that an US-designed colony could improve upon the British model because “free people of colour in the United States” could be instructed in “all civil, literary and religious rights, with strong assurance of order competence and propriety.”<sup>63</sup> A series of editorials published in the *National Register* in late-1817 objected to “aid of British means, British information, or even British humanity itself” because it would unduly give them “the glory and greatness of an enterprise which had its origin in the bosoms of independent Americans.” The writer claimed that the only way Sierra Leone would succeed was by imitating “the government of that colony” planted by

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<sup>62</sup> “To H. Niles,” *Niles’ Weekly Register*, November 8, 1817.

<sup>63</sup> “African Colonization,” *The National Advocate*, November 17, 1817.

“this society of freemen” in the United States.<sup>64</sup> These articles recounted the brief history of the Sierra Leone colony, from its origins as a humanitarian enterprise through its devolution into to British crown colony in order to demonstrate how the government of the colony was “found wanting in every feature of liberality and independent” as a result of “British principles.” The articles condemned the form of economic empire practiced by Great Britain as a detriment to the establishment of a free colony: “Did Great Britain ever give the world the example of her sacrificing a lucrative commerce at the shrine of humanity? And how can we suppose that the commerce she enjoys by furnishing all Africa with the manufactures of India, as well as those of her internal fabrication, should be relinquished in a government where *policy* always prevails over *principle*?”<sup>65</sup>

The newspapers advocating an American settlement often depicted US expansion as working to promote independent nationhood, rather than colonial dependence. A Washington D.C. political paper, the *Georgetown Register*, commented on the ACS’s eventual rejection of Sierra Leone, and expressed their approval that the organization had “no intentions whatsoever of making any attempt to connect their colony with that at Sierra Leone” and applauded their efforts to make the “settlement totally distinct from and independent of any other” and to “establish and regulate it upon principles wholly American.”<sup>66</sup> A Baltimore religious magazine emphasized that African Americans skeptical of colonization might be swayed to support the movement if they could be convinced that independent nationhood would be promoted under the aegis of American power: “let the free people of colour be well assured, that they are to revisit their native

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<sup>64</sup> “The Colonization of the Free Blacks,” *The National Register*, November 8, 1817.

<sup>65</sup> “The Colonization of the Free Blacks - No. II,” *The National Register*, November 20, 1817; “The Colonization of the Free Blacks - No. III,” *The National Register*, November 22, 1817.

<sup>66</sup> Georgetown Register article cited in: *Raleigh Register, and North-Carolina Gazette* (August 8, 1817).

country, civilized, free, and independent; that they are to be protected by the American Eagle, and to assume their proper rank among the nations of earth.” The journal argued that such assurances would not only hasten emigration but ensure colonists’ continuing allegiance to the United States: “forever will they hail with joy, the star-spangled banner, under the protection of which they were made *freemen*.”<sup>67</sup> General disapproval for sending African Americans to Sierra Leone was often expressed through the discourses of both nationalism and imperial expansion. The international framework evident in early discussions of colonization illustrates that colonization was not simply viewed as a project of domestic significance but also as an expression of the model of colonialism that would be linked to the United States’ global aspirations.

While the Washington political class discussed the relative merits between aiding the already-established British colony or creating a new one, the leaders of the Colonization Society sent an expedition to scout new lands in West Africa in order to strengthen its case for federal support of a US-sponsored colony. Ultimately, the colonization lobby secured a generous interpretation of the 1819 Slave Trade Act by longtime colonization supporter President James Monroe. With limited federal support, the ACS was able to fund an expedition to purchase land for a new colony, thus realizing desires of the society’s leadership for an American colony and circumventing the debate over Sierra Leone.<sup>68</sup> The short-lived debate about Sierra Leone within public discussion of the early colonization movement was ostensibly about selecting the most practical and effective method for colonizing African Americans; however, it also revealed a lower

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<sup>67</sup> “Colonization of Free Blacks,” *The Christian Messenger* (July 12, 1817).

<sup>68</sup> Staudenraus, *The African Colonization Movement, 1816-1865*, 36-7, 55-6.

register conversation about the shape and limits of US expansion that developed out of the earlier discussion of black colonies in North America.

After the formal colonization movement's rejection of a North American colony, only a handful of anti-slavery activists who were not convinced of the viability of African colonization held onto the idea. One of the most important early anti-slavery organizations, the Philadelphia-based American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery (ACPAS), continued to view the West as a potential location for black colonies. In the Convention's first report on the subject of African colonization in 1818, the organization had condemned the emerging national movement, calling the idea "impracticable" with potentially "fatal consequences to those who shall embark on its purposes."<sup>69</sup> A year later, the Convention issued another response to the growing colonization movement by attempting to revive the idea of western settlement: "By the cession of Louisiana, the United States have become entitled to the exclusive purchase of immense tracts of land westward of the Mississippi." The report argued a colony of free blacks could be settled there, at minimal expense, and would create a "territorial or provincial form of government, calculated for the protection of property and personal right."<sup>70</sup> Some African Americans had already expressed support for western settlement in contrast to the new consensus beginning to emerge around west African colonization. A witness to a meeting of the free people of color in Richmond, Virginia reported, "They will prefer colonization in any quarter of their native land, to being exiled into a foreign

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<sup>69</sup> *Minutes of the Proceedings of A Special Meeting of the Fifteenth American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, and Improving the Condition of the African Race* (Philadelphia, PA: Hall & Atkinson, 1818), 49; on the relationship between the ACPAS and the emergence of the colonization movement see: Robert Duane Sayre, "The Evolution of Early American Abolitionism: The American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery and Improving the Condition of the African Race, 1794-1837" (Ph.D., Columbus, OH: Ohio State University, 1987).

<sup>70</sup> *Minutes of the Sixteenth American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, and Improving the Condition of the African Race* (Philadelphia, PA: William Fry, 1819), 51.

country, and hope that a situation may be allowed them on the Missouri, or elsewhere in North America.”<sup>71</sup> In advocating such a territory, the Convention pointedly targeted the prevalent arguments against an independent settlement outside the borders of white settlement. While arguing that the erection of an “independent power” that could become “a dangerous enemy” was an “alarming prospect” it was not that different from “the political relations of the Indian tribes, who now use the same surface of territory.” However, the report contended that such black settlement in the West would have even greater prospects for the management of the territory because they will transport “a great portion of those civil arts, which they have acquired or observed among us.” Indeed, the report argued that their emulation of US institutions might make them a bulwark against Indian populations and more pliable ally in Westward expansion. The report rhetorically asked: “Will they not carry with them an attachment to, and a sense of dependence upon us? Will they not form a strong and useful contrast to the proud and jealous spirit of independence, which actuates the Indians?”<sup>72</sup>

In articulating a vision for an independent western colony that would retain strategic allegiance to the United States institutions and interests, the ACPAS hewed very closely to the basic impetus for the African colony which they ostensibly opposed. These competing ideas had fundamentally different approaches to empire-building. The proponents of western settlement imagined that the US could harness a politically sovereign, yet dependent, black settlement to aid expansion. Meanwhile, the vast

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<sup>71</sup> Jesse Torrey, *A portraiture of domestic slavery, in the United States : with reflections on the practicability of restoring the moral rights of the slave, without impairing the legal privileges of the possessor : and a project of a colonial asylum for free persons of colour* (Philadelphia, PA: John Bioren, 1817), 93-4.

<sup>72</sup> *Minutes of the Sixteenth American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, and Improving the Condition of the African Race*, 52.

majority of colonization advocates had judged such a solution to be incommensurate with the emerging vision of continental expansion. In their view, North American empire would be reserved for white settlement, while the African colony could express a grander vision of the United States aiding the expansion of independent nations, or as some imagined, a “United States of Africa.” Within this context, the fleeting gestures to shift the colonization debate back to North America were overwhelmed by the ascendancy of African colonization and the expansion of slavery westward. The tide of support for African colonization spread rapidly as the ACS aggressively gathered donations and planted auxiliary societies across the United States during the 1820s. Shortly after the ACPAS report recommended western colonization, Missouri was admitted as a slave state, dashing any lingering hopes that this particular land might be used as a site for a black colony and illustrating the broader trend towards the westward expansion of slavery. In 1821, the anti-slavery organization succumbed to these forces and revoked its recommendation for Western settlement citing fears that “If slavery in the United States is permitted still to exist...the proposed colony [would] become an asylum for runaway slaves.”<sup>73</sup> By the early 1820s, the American Colonization Society’s vision of a US-sponsored colony in Africa had become dominant and the notion of a black colony in the West rapidly faded from view.

## **CONCLUSION**

In advocating the “expatriation” of African Americans to Edward Coles in 1814, Thomas Jefferson warned that “the hour of emancipation is advancing.” He believed that this process was inevitable, “whether brought on by the generous energy of our own

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<sup>73</sup> *Minutes of the Seventeenth Session of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, and Improving the Condition of the African Race* (Philadelphia, PA: Atkinson & Alexander, 1821), 44.

minds; or by the bloody process of St. Domingo.”<sup>74</sup> As this quote implies, Jefferson’s concern about slave insurrection was fundamentally about losing control over the terms of political power in a world after slavery. In the decades following the American Revolution, the energies of many white leaders were dedicated to securing a framework for freedom that would control the seemingly inevitable processes of liberation. As the concept of colonization emerged from this impulse to manage the contagion of liberty, both internal and external threats of racially-based revolution were inseparable from the evolving strategies of imperial expansion. The solution that many white leaders settled on was African colonization. A colony in Africa offered a competing conception of black self-government to that of revolutionary Haiti. In imagining and constructing such colony, US colonization advocates emphasized a narrative of eventual national independence and republican government as a contrast to the perceived colonial dependence exhibited by the British colony in Sierra Leone. In historicizing the era before mainstream political consensus coalesced behind Liberian colonization, this chapter shows that the ultimate selection of West Africa as a destination for this colony was firmly situated within the development of US imperial thinking in both continental and global terms.

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<sup>74</sup> Thomas Jefferson to Edward Coles, August 25, 1814 in: Paul Leicester Ford, ed., *The Works of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 11 (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1905), 237.



## CHAPTER 3

### CONSTRUCTING RACIAL REPUBLICS: AFRICAN COLONIZATION, INDIAN REMOVAL, AND COMPETING VISIONS OF US EXPANSION, 1817 - 1832

During one of his last public pronouncements to Congress in January of 1825, President James Monroe outlined a future course for federal Indian policy. In the speech he recommended that the United States should engage in an ambitious effort to remove all native groups residing in the Southwest and Old Northwest by colonizing them in a region west of the Mississippi river. There they could become “civilized” by establishing a government and securing inextinguishable title to the territory. Monroe argued that colonization could solve the problem of Indian resistance to US expansion by arguing that native peoples’ “conflicting interests” with “frontier settlements will cease” and through the adoption of “civilized” government “their movement will be in harmony with us, and its good effect be felt throughout the whole extent of our territory to the Pacific... the condition of all the tribes inhabiting that vast region may be essentially improved; that permanent peace may be preserved with them, and our commerce be much extended.”<sup>1</sup> Monroe’s plan theorized that by redirecting Indians’ efforts for sovereignty into a single colony, he could end challenges to US legitimacy and aid the nation’s imperial expansion. President Monroe’s plan was ambitious in two senses. First, it proposed a vision of the space east of the Mississippi, the core of the early republic, as a territory wholly reserved for settlement by white populations and their black slaves. While this had been a common desire among white leaders throughout the early national era, the

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<sup>1</sup> James D. Richardson, “Message of Monroe, Jan. 27 1825,” in *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents*, vol. II (New York, NY: Bureau of National Literature, 1911), 280-283.

prevailing federal policy had been largely directed towards instructing Indian populations in the East in the “arts of civilization,” thereby absorbing these peoples and diminishing their territorial claims. Secondly, the policy aimed to achieve the ideal of white nationhood in the East through the simultaneous creation of an Indian nation in the West. While the new policy maintained a progressive view of human development, in which Indians could gradually attain civilization, it posited that this would be most effectively achieved not through absorption into the white body politic, but through separation from it.

This chapter examines how reformers, missionaries, and politicians who proposed plans of Indian and African colonization during the 1820s and early 1830s imagined that creating racially-based nations outside of the United States could help solve the problem of constructing white national identity within the multiracial landscape of North America. The idea of relocating non-white populations within North American territory claimed by United States was not a new idea. Some eastern Indian populations had been offered territorial exchanges for western lands in treaties throughout the 1810s and early 1820s, and as detailed in the previous chapter, many whites had been actively interested in creating black colonies in the West during the post-Revolutionary era.<sup>2</sup> However, Monroe’s plan was very new in its object, the creation of an Indian nation, a territorial and political space defined by race, and in its execution: a dramatically reimagined federal state that would be involved with not only with removing populations, but take an active role in nation-building. The racial republic it proposed was remarkably similar to the West African colony of Liberia that Monroe’s administration had helped create by

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<sup>2</sup> Theda Perdue and Michael D Green, *The Cherokee Removal: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston, MA: Bedford Books of St. Martin’s Press, 1995), 16-17.

lending federal appropriations, naval support, and eventually the name for its capital city, Monrovia.

During the first decades following the revolutionary era, white leaders perceived two interrelated racial problems: the threat of revolutionary insurrections and the claims to political sovereignty which they produced. The concept of a racial republic solved these by organizing claims to sovereignty within a racial and political order modeled after the United States, while situating the imagined states within a hierarchical colonial relationship. Proponents surmised that just as the United States was creating order and national solidarity through racial nationhood, so could other racial groups. By narrowly structuring autonomy through the lens of racially homogenous nation-states, these plans emphasized racial difference between African Americans and Native Americans while strengthening the legitimacy of white nationhood.

During this era, the campaigns for African and Indian colonization rose to national prominence, in part by promising the consolidation of white nationhood, and proposing similar versions of racial nationhood for African Americans and Native Americans. In tracing the co-creation of these concepts, this chapter does not suggest parity between these visions of racial nationalism. Despite colonizationists' repeated claims that these racial groups could be eventually "elevated" to the level of whites, such conceptions of racial nationhood were always asymmetrically constructed. The theoretical possibility of eventual equality was always undermined by the disparate power relationship between the United States and the peoples to be exiled from US soil. Moreover, the differing histories of racializations of African Americans and Indians and the disparate political and territorial situations of both groups resulted in different

manifestations of the idea. In fact, no unified concept of racial republicanism emerged during this era. As Lawrence Friedman has noted, although Indian removal and African colonization both appealed to white racial nationalism and developed alongside each other, they were not always supported by the same politicians frequently did not overlap in their political support. For example, politicians like Daniel Webster and Henry Clay, two of the most prominent supporters of African colonization, were staunch political opponents of Jacksonian Indian removal policy.<sup>3</sup>

Most scholars have only tentatively considered the relationship between African and Indian colonization.<sup>4</sup> In his recent work on the common histories of black and Indian colonization, Nicholas Guyatt has argued, “It would be a mistake to assume that the adoption of colonization rhetoric represented a hardening of racism toward nonwhites. Instead, benevolent colonization combined an abstract commitment to nonwhite potential with a familiar squeamishness about racial coexistence.”<sup>5</sup> I agree that colonization articulated a new rhetoric of racism that maintained itself through an expression of universalist ideals of humanity. However, I contend that such ideas developed not because whites were simply uncomfortable with the presence of Black and Indian populations. In fact, as I demonstrated in the first chapter, they were a calculated response to the distinct threat posed by an unfavorable restructuring of power away from

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<sup>3</sup> Friedman, *Inventors of the Promised Land*, 201-202.

<sup>4</sup> For the only sustained inquiry into the relationship between colonization and removal see: Guyatt, “The Outskirts of Our Happiness,” 199-215; for more cursory examinations see: Mary Young, “Racism in Red and Black: Indians and other free people of color in Georgia, law, politics, and removal policy,” *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 73, no. 3 (1989): 199-215; Friedman, *Inventors of the Promised Land*, 199-215; Susan M. Ryan, *The Grammar of Good Intentions: Race and the Antebellum Culture of Benevolence* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 25-45; Clegg, *The Price of Liberty*; Burin, *Slavery and the Peculiar Solution: A History of the American Colonization Society*; Staudenraus, *The African Colonization Movement, 1816-1865*; the relationship between removal and colonization has been largely ignored in both recent and classic examples of scholarship on the colonization movement: Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914*.

<sup>5</sup> Guyatt, “The Outskirts of Our Happiness,” 988.

white supremacy. These were ideas borne from the context of political struggle and held enduring significance for managing racial groups long after removal and colonization had left the center stage of national politics. Moreover, it is crucial to consider the enduring power of colonization rhetoric by examining it not just as an element of racial thinking, as Guyatt and other scholars have, but also as a crucial expression of emerging ideas about US imperial expansion. Both Indian and African colonization proposed an ideal vision of US expansion that could solve the perceived problems of racial mixture. The solution these plans proposed wedded developmentalist conception of civilization to spread of US republican ideals.

A central question which emerged during the 1820s was: would the federal government take on the massive project of building race-based nations? While the ideas of African colonization and Indian removal overlapped during this era, they suffered different fates: removal mustered the full power of the federal government while colonization continued to rely on a dwindling base of private donations. The movement for Indian colonization was replaced by removal, meaning the triumph of a military approach to expansion which all but abandoned the pretense of civilization from the effort. On the other hand, the federal government only tenuously supported African colonization, and several campaigns to actively involve the federal government in managing Liberia were largely failures. Despite the short-term defeat of both forms of colonization as national policy, I argue that they elaborated new ways of imagining US expansion which emphasized the promotion of racialized nations that would be subordinate to broader US interests.

## **THE RACIAL REPUBLIC**

The idea of creating racial republics developed closely alongside the construction of white nationhood in the early republic. In the aftermath of Northern slave emancipation, white leaders increasingly viewed free African Americans as a “degraded” and “disorderly” threat to the social order which needed to be contained. However, unlike later racial thinking which would emphasize innate racial inferiority, early colonizationists followed the prevailing Enlightenment theories which attributed the condition of African Americans to negative “environmental” of slavery and second class citizenship in the United States.<sup>6</sup> However, as the previous chapter indicated, the colonization movement also had its roots in an effort to square the universalist claims of the revolution with the multiracial reality of the early United States. Within this context, elites perceived African Americans’ and Native Americans’ competing claims to political sovereignty as threats to the supremacy of whiteness as a basis for nationhood.

Thus, the early African colonization movement theorized that removing of African Americans from the debilitating effects of social and economic discrimination would allow them to advance while creating a republican government like the United States that would be based on black, rather than white, racial identity. Furthermore, colonizationists theorized that by building a republican nation in Africa, African Americans would instruct indigenous Africans in Christianity, commerce, and government. For this reason, Africa, rather than North America, was the ideal location for a model black republic. As the colonization movement further developed these

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<sup>6</sup> On origins of colonization and the threat social order see: Douglas R. Egerton, “‘Its Origin Is Not a Little Curious’: A New Look at the American Colonization Society,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 5, no. 4 (Winter 1985): 463-480; on environmentalism and the early racial theory behind colonization see: Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914*, 6-27.

arguments during the 1820s and 1830s, proponents advocated the use of the racial republic to reformulate the liberal ideals of the revolutionary generation into an imperial vision of globally extending the “rights of man.”

The earliest formal appeals for African colonization emphasized that the proposed colony would eventually develop into an independent republic governed by African-descended peoples. The American Colonization Society’s first memorial to Congress argued that colonists would build “the glorious edifice of well ordered and polished society” which was based on “the deep and sure foundations of equal laws” and the “prevailing power of liberty.” The memorial suggested that the colonization of Africa would create a liberal and self-governing nation that could demonstrate “capacity of a race of men” that “had yet made no progress in the refinements of civilization.” In demonstrating the viability of a black nation modeled after US principles of liberty, the colony would become “the orient star revealing the best and highest aims and attributes of man.”<sup>7</sup> Newspaper publications and speeches devoted to building popular colonization during the early 1820s made similar appeals to building a racial republic in the Liberian colony. An 1824 editorial in a popular political journal, the *National Intelligencer*, written under the pen name “Pelham,” situated Liberian colonists within the United States’ global republican mission by arguing that the establishment of a black nation based on American principles would benefit the world more than any “holy alliances of emperors and kings.” According to Pelham, African Americans were “more fortunate than two-thirds of all mankind” because they had benefited from “living in a

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<sup>7</sup> American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour of the United States, *Memorial of the president and board of managers of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour of the United States : January 14, 1817 : read and ordered to lie upon the table*. (Washington D.C.: William A. Davis, 1817), 3.

nation where all are free (except themselves)” and that their observation of “the pleasures and comforts of liberty” would teach them how “wretched man is without freedom, secured by general principles, organized by a constitution, and administered by elective agents.” Pelham conjectured that this republic of African Americans would demonstrate the power of the “freedom of conscience,” “liberty of the press,” “jury privilege” and “equal taxation.” These features of US democracy would even enable Liberia to surpass the recently-independent nations of South America that hadn’t renounced “Catholic supremacy.”<sup>8</sup>

In addition to planting a new government in Africa, white colonization supporters imagined black colonists would become ideal vessels for spreading republican ideals to Africa because they were racially suited to forming governments in which indigenous Africans could eventually participate. The editor of the *North American Review* argued that Africa was superior to other colonization destinations because it would “see the sons of Africa returned to the home of their fathers, establishing good governments among themselves, and communicating the influence of their example to their degraded brethren.”<sup>9</sup> Although African Americans and indigenous Africans would bring vastly different conceptions of race and ethnicity to their encounters in the Liberian colony, most supporters assumed that black racial identity would hold same the binding power to build a nationality as white identity had in the United States. In the religious variation on this theme, colonizationists frequently claimed that slavery had been divinely ordained so that Africans would be brought to North America to ultimately become missionaries for US liberty in Africa.

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<sup>8</sup> Pelham, “To the Editors,” *Daily National Intelligencer* (November 13, 1824).

<sup>9</sup> “Emigration to Africa and Hayti,” *The North American Review* 20, no. 46 (January 1825): 203.



While race undergirded these narratives of African redemption and the diffusion of US liberty, some advocates of colonization were explicit in their comparison of racial nationalism and republican government in both Liberia and the United States. At the ACS Annual Meeting in January of 1828, C.C. Harper, a leader from a Baltimore colonization auxiliary argued that racial separation in the US had inspired Liberia to become outpost for black liberty. Harper enjoined fellow colonizationists to renew their support for the colony because he claimed, “We are the guardians of a nation in the bud,--a miniature of this Republic,--a colored America on the shores of Africa.” While holding up Liberia as a “colored America” that could protect black rights, Harper suggested that the white national identity created a “mockery of freedom” in the United States which would only be remedied by sending African Americans to “the only resting place and refuge of the coloured man.”<sup>10</sup> While colonizationists like Harper believed that the colony could create a parallel equality between a white republic in the United States and a black republic in Liberia, other proponents emphasized that colonization would preserve white republicanism by avoiding racial revolution. In a pamphlet on behalf of colonization, L.L. Hamline rhetorically asked, “if this enterprise is equal to the American revolution, *in its promise of security to the rights of man?*” Echoing long-standing white concerns about black insurrection, he framed this in the context of the need to expand the rights of man: “Again the Colonization scheme is intimately connected with the *security* of our country. Our slaves are our enemies. They believe we hold in fouled abeyance their most sacred rights. We must restore their rights, or they never will relinquish their

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<sup>10</sup> “Annual Meeting of the American Colonization Society,” *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 3, no. 11 (January 1828).

hostility.”<sup>11</sup> While the fear of revolutionary claims to rights had been the focus of the first generation of colonizationists in the wake of the Haitian revolution, the development of a Liberian colony by the mid-1820s had created a territorial and political space where whites could envision the “restoration” of African American rights within safely distant and non-revolutionary context.

During the 1820s, Indian colonization paralleled African colonization’s emphasis on the alignment between race and republican nationhood. James Monroe’s concept of creating a permanent Indian nation was pioneered by the Baptist missionary Isaac McCoy in the early 1820s and it steadily gained support with prominent politicians and reformers over the course of the decade. Proponents of Indian colonization believed that, just as in Liberia, the planting of a new colony would help engineer the shape of Indian sovereignty by creating a nation based on racial identity. These colonization plans often emphasized that African Americans and Native Americans would consent to the terms of their independence, thus legitimating US imperial expansion and racial exclusion while maintaining the fiction that those who colonized these territories were making a legitimate choice. As Indian colonization transformed into a policy of removal, the illusory nature of such a choice was laid bare as proponents of removal continued use the benevolent language of colonization while resorting to the threat of force and overt coercion to achieve results.

The idea of an Indian republic in the West grew from decades of US Indian policy which aimed to alienate native tribes of collectively-held lands by assimilating them into the expanding republic through introducing them to “civilized” practices of land

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<sup>11</sup> L.L. Hamline, *An Address Delivered in Zanesville, Ohio at the Request of a Committee of the Zanesville and Putnam Colonization Society* (Zanesville, OH: Peters and Pelham, 1830).

ownership and political governance. The federal government contended that Indian rights to the lands in the East had been signed away in the treaties immediately following the Revolutionary War.<sup>12</sup> While claiming ultimate right to these territories, the United States pursued policies that sought to privatize these lands so that they could be purchased, which was deemed to be a less costly or bloody solution than outright force. These practices were adopted by George Washington's administration which, under Secretary of War Henry Knox, set the framework for the 'civilization policy' in the early years of the republic. In the following decades, the United States government pushed eastern Indians to adopt the cultural, political and economic values of the United States, primarily through promoting individualist agricultural practices and encouraging them to abandon tribal political identities.<sup>13</sup> Proponents of civilization policy argued that Indians would also contribute to the unique identity of an emerging US national culture even as they were stripped of their particular cultural practices.

While civilization policy had an assimilationist framework rooted in Enlightenment ideals, it was also undertaken with an eye towards more easily managing the Indian populations that occupied valuable land. In both his writings about race and his policies as President, Thomas Jefferson advanced the idea that Native Americans could assimilate with white Americans as the frontier expanded. Near the end of his presidency he was optimistic about the prospects of intermixture in aiding an expansive empire when he spoke to a group of Munsees, Delawares and Mohicans, "You will unite yourselves with us, and we shall be Americans. You will mix with us by marriage. Your

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<sup>12</sup> Robert A. Williams, *Like a Loaded Weapon: The Rehnquist Court, Indian Rights, and the Legal History of Racism in America* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 51-70. Robert Williams demonstrates how the United States assumed claims to this land based on the right of discovery claimed within the British legal tradition.

<sup>13</sup> Horsman, "The Indian Policy of an 'Empire for Liberty'," 37-42..

blood will run in our veins and will spread with us over this great island.”<sup>14</sup> However, even during the high tide of civilization policy, the seeds of removal were evident in Jefferson’s thinking, particularly following the purchase of Louisiana. In an 1803 letter, Jefferson voiced his skepticism about the success of civilization policy: “They will in time either incorporate with us as citizens of the United States or remove beyond the Mississippi.”<sup>15</sup> US officials echoed this ultimatum many times in subsequent decades and its stark choice demonstrates how easily the civilizationist ethos could lead to the logic of displacement. While Jefferson’s civilization policies would continue for many more years, his approach had simultaneously set the stage for future removal policy.

The idea that Native Americans could be made into proper citizens had been implicit since the early policies of the Washington administration. This approach was based on notions of race which posited that difference was generated by environment. However, hopes that Indians could be ‘civilized’ and integrate into American society had been largely abandoned in the following decades. As white settlement expanded near the borders of Indian land, white frontiersmen violently challenged the sovereignty of indigenous nations and repeatedly prodded both state and federal governments towards policies that would remove eastern Indians and free up territory. With mounting frontier pressure and dwindling enthusiasm for assimilating Indians into the body politic, proponents of Indian colonization reformulated the basic developmental ethos of civilization policy by arguing that it was in the best interest of Indians to be moved away

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<sup>14</sup>Anthony F. C Wallace, *Jefferson and the Indians: The Tragic Fate of the First Americans* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 207-240. War Department, Letters Sent, Indian Affairs, B, 395-6.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Jefferson to William Henry Harrison, February 27, 1803, Thomas Jefferson Papers, Library of Congress.

from the pernicious threat of white encroachment. Colonization retained the ideology of civilization, while serving the practical ends of removal.<sup>16</sup>

Isaac McCoy's advocacy was critical in shifting the terrain of Indian policy from assimilation and civilization and towards separation and colonization. During the 1810s, McCoy began work as a Baptist missionary to Indians on the western frontier in Indiana. His initial interests aligned with US policy as he endeavored to make Indians into Christians, farmers, and eventually US citizens. However, McCoy grew weary of establishing missions which he felt were destined to fail due to the impact of ever-present pockets of white settlers. In response to these failures, he began to dream of colonizing the geographically scattered, and politically disunited, Indian populations of within the East to a new territory across the Mississippi River which would be protected from white settlement.<sup>17</sup>

The shift in Isaac McCoy's thinking away from assimilation and toward colonization demonstrated influence from the growing African colonization movement. Since the formation of the American Colonization Society in 1817, African colonization had attracted considerable attention with reform-minded evangelical communities.<sup>18</sup> In the early 1820s, McCoy was one of the founding members of the Indiana Auxiliary of the American Colonization Society.<sup>19</sup> He had also adopted an African American child who had attended his missionary school. McCoy raised the boy with the intention that he would be groomed to become a leader in the Liberian colony when he reached the

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<sup>16</sup>Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism*, 192.

<sup>17</sup> George A. Schultz, *An Indian Canaan: Isaac McCoy and the Vision of an Indian State* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972), 67-8.

<sup>18</sup> On African colonization as part of larger wave of religiously-motivated reform activity see: Ronald G Walters, *American Reformers, 1815-1860* (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1978).

<sup>19</sup> Indiana Colonization Society, "Constitution of the Indiana Auxiliary American Colonization Society" (June 1822).

appropriate age.<sup>20</sup> McCoy argued that colonization offered a solution to the parallel situations of Native Americans and Africans Americans. Believing both groups lacked a nation-state that would engender recognition for their rights, McCoy stated, “I have supposed that Indian calamities, as they now exist, originated in their degradation, and have until this time been cherished by the same general cause. This is not a solitary case; the condition of the wretched Africans is fully in point, and strikingly illustrative of the position we have taken... The fact is, Africa, that portion at least of which we speak, is too destitute of national character to command respect, and therefore, in the usage of other nations, its natives cease to be treated as human beings entitled to common rights.”<sup>21</sup> McCoy’s diagnosis of the commonalities between Indian and African degradation led him to view nationhood as a remedy to their situations.

In building an Indian colony, McCoy was preoccupied with how to meld numerous disparate Indian tribes into a single national identity that could be incorporated within a new territorial domain. This echoed the bold ambitions behind African colonization which similarly attempted to reconcile the differences between various black emigrants and native Africans through the binding powers of race and nationhood. In McCoy’s attempts to reconstitute several identities into a single national entity, his brand of Indian colonization departed from the nationalist efforts within Indian tribes. For instance, the movement of the Cherokee towards nationhood was based, in part, upon preserving and validating their particular tribal identity in the face of an expanding US nation. In contrast, the concept of colonization reformulated the native-centric efforts to

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<sup>20</sup> Schultz, *An Indian Canaan*, 33.

<sup>21</sup> Isaac McCoy, *Remarks on the Practibility of Indian Reform, embracing their colonization* (New York, NY, 1827), 10.

forge a pan-Indian identity through a civilizationist lens aimed at creating an Indian republic.<sup>22</sup>

The idea that America's native populations were "vanishing" was critical to sustaining philanthropic arguments on behalf of Indian colonization. McCoy contended that all previous white settlement near Indian land had resulted in the rapid disintegration of native communities, leaving colonization as the only way that Native Americans and African Americans could be protected from the advance of white populations. Following this logic, helping tribes emigrate was imagined as a benevolent effort that aided the preservation of their culture. Likewise, talk of extinction also featured prominently in appeals for black colonization as colonizationists argued that free black communities suffered degradation due to their proximity to whites with whom they could not stand on equal footing. Some speculated that mass emancipation might lead to African Americans to gradually die off. The widespread notion of the "vanishing Indian" made the humanitarian argument more palatable to the wider public.<sup>23</sup>

More than simple preservation, colonization offered an approach that portrayed and imagined itself as wholly transformative. A missionary publication claimed that, "removal to some distant point, and concentration, as far as possible, into one body, appears to be the only means which can guard the Indian name and interest against total

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<sup>22</sup> On the development of Cherokee nationality as a response to US expansion see: Ryan, *The Grammar of Good Intentions*, 35; William Gerald McLoughlin, *Cherokee Renaissance in the New Republic* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986).

<sup>23</sup> Brian W Dippie, *The Vanishing American: White Attitudes and U.S. Indian Policy* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1982), 48-61; Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914*, 154-164; Lora Romero, "Vanishing Americans: Gender, Empire, and New Historicism," *American Literature* 63, no. 3 (September 1991): 385-404; for a good example of this thinking from the most prominent national spokesperson for African colonization see Henry Clay's speech: Henry Clay, "An Address; Delivered to the Colonization Society of Kentucky, at Frankfort, December 17, 1829, by the Hon. Henry Clay, at the request of the Board of Managers," *Daily National Intelligencer* (January 12, 1830); Wallace, *Jefferson and the Indians*.

extinction.”<sup>24</sup> This explicit call for the concentration of Indian peoples spoke to the purpose of securing carefully-managed political power for indigenous populations and also to the broader effort to cultivate and instill a sense of national identity among Indians. The writer listed advantages of such an arrangement: “they would be under a regular polity, would possess inducements to acquire property, would feel a sort of national importance and would be more accessible to missionaries and other agents of reform and civilization.”<sup>25</sup> As in African colonization, Indian colonization would seek to create an Indian republic that could mirror the imagined racial and national unity of the United States. In McCoy’s *Remarks on the Practibility of Indian Reform* he argued that colonization “proposes to place the Aborigines on the same footing as ourselves; to place before them the same opportunities of improvement that we enjoy... the colony would commence and improve, much after the manner of all new settlements of whites.”<sup>26</sup> In creating a body politic of this new Indian republic, colonizationists argued that the “civilized” Indian tribes of the east could serve to instruct and acculturate the western tribes that had been exposed to the influence of missionaries.<sup>27</sup> This concept of constructing racialized nationhood through the process of civilization was central to the arguments put forth by African colonizationists, who assumed that black racial identity would link African Americans and indigenous Africans within a similar civilizing dynamic.

While appeals for African and Indian colonization both emphasized national self-determination, they only imagined this in terms that would ultimately serve grander US

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<sup>24</sup> “Indian Colonization,” *Columbian Star and Christian Index* 1, no. 11 (September 12, 1829): 171.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> McCoy, *Remarks on the Practibility of Indian Reform, embracing their colonization*, 30.

<sup>27</sup> On McCoy’s envisioned role for “civilized” Indians in the West see: Ibid., 40.



national imperatives. In Liberia, colonizationists proposed that African Americans would constitute a political community distinctly separated from the United States. However, the nation would crucially be based on a specific vision of political governance and ultimately serve commercial and political interests through the creation of a sympathetic republic. While the rhetoric of African colonizationists emphasized independent statehood, proponents of Indian colonization imagined a different relationship in which the colony would constitute an independent Indian civil society that could unite many groups of Indians but would also aid the United States' designs on imperial expansion in North America. In McCoy's *Address to Philanthropists in the United States* argued that unlike the Indians who had lived as separated tribal cultures in the east, in an Indian territory, "they are to be united in one common bond of civil community, and constituted an integral part of the United States."<sup>28</sup> In this vision of independence, an Indian territory would theoretically inhabit a territorially and politically sovereign space. However, this sovereignty would never be complete, and any vision of Indian independence was necessarily integrated within the broader interests of United States: a strategically aligned Indian republic encompassed by and subordinate to the white US republic.

The vision of empire advanced in both ideas of colonization sanitized the violence of US expansion and nation-building by emphasizing a commitment to the reproduction of independent civil societies for marginalized populations. In the case of African colonization, supporters sometimes counteracted the contention that the creation of an African colony would lead the United States down the unwelcomed path of expansion by arguing that it represented a reinvention of empire that would illustrate the civilizing

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<sup>28</sup> Isaac McCoy, "Address to Philanthropists in the United States Generally, and to Christians in Particular, on the Condition and Prospects of the American Indians," in *History of Baptist Indian Missions* (Washington D.C.: William M. Morrison, 1831), 432.

importance of colonies while being free of their more coercive aspects. In an 1829 speech before the ACS auxiliary branch in Frederick County, Maryland, colonization leader Richard Barton placed the transmission of liberal enlightenment to Africa within the history of “improvement” through the succession of great empires stretching back to Ancient Greece and Rome. He noted that “Europe in modern centuries enlightened America, and to America is reserved the greatest of benefactions; for around this western hemisphere is a bright halo is spreading which will reflect a retributive light upon benighted Africa!” However, Barton argued that unlike previous empires “Ours is not to follow the conquest of arms, the blood-stained path of the victor—its progress indicated by the violation of rights” because “It neither contemplates invading the rights of others abroad, nor of violating rights at home”<sup>29</sup> In such a conception of colonization, the idea of creating a racial republic served as a validation of the benign and exceptional character of US empire.

The Indian nation championed by McCoy had considerable influence among US policymakers during the late 1820s and early 1830s. Following his conversion to colonization, McCoy lobbied influential policymakers, such as Lewis Cass, the Governor of Michigan and Richard Johnson, a US Senator from Kentucky. In 1824, his persistent advocacy gained an audience with President Monroe and his Secretary of War, John C. Calhoun. While both men seemed impressed with McCoy’s colonization proposals, the meetings resulted in no immediate plans for a shift in Indian policy. Since Jefferson’s presidency, the federal government had supported voluntary removal and bands of Cherokee, Shawnee, Delaware, Kickapoo, and Wea had signed eastern lands away in

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<sup>29</sup> “Notice of Publications in behalf of the American Colonization Society,” *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 6, no. 10 (December 1830): 290.

exchange for western lands in parts of Arkansas and Missouri.<sup>30</sup> These scattered instances of removal had operated alongside the government's civilization programs and none of them were patterned after the grand colonization plans envisioned by reformers like McCoy. Thus, when President Monroe announced his shift in Indian policy towards both removal and colonization, it must have seemed that McCoy's lobbying had finally paid off. Indeed, it seemed as if Monroe's advocacy might have a similar impact on the fortunes of Indian colonization as his federal support for African colonization did a half decade earlier.

This shift from civilization to colonization was also evident in the evolution of thinking by the federal Indian agent, Thomas McKenney. McKenney had served in the Bureau of Indian Trade since the mid-1810s and was eventually appointed superintendent of Bureau Indian Affairs (BIA) by the Monroe administration. Within the bureaucracies of federal Indian agencies, McKenney had been a vocal advocate of continuing efforts to civilize eastern Indian tribes, claiming that Indians were "our equal" in "intellectual and moral structure" and that he never doubted "the capacity of the Indian for the highest attainments of civilization."<sup>31</sup> When Monroe first proposed removal as a precondition for civilization in late 1824, McKenney changed from his former civilization position to full-fledged support of colonization, despite having only weeks earlier spoken of the possibility of reforming Indians in their current territorial locations.<sup>32</sup> McKenney's shift towards Indian colonization policy was a natural one given his consistent support for

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<sup>30</sup> Schultz, *An Indian Canaan*, 67-69.

<sup>31</sup> Thomas Loraine McKenney, *Memoirs, official and personal: with sketches of travels among the northern and southern Indians : embracing a war excursion, and descriptions of scenes along the western borders* (New York, NY: Paine and Burgess, 1846), 34.

<sup>32</sup> Drinnon, *Facing West*, 175.

African colonization.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, he viewed colonization as a way to unify the white republic against racial threats. In an 1829 speech he argued that, “the two problems yet to be solved” were “the black population, which we carry in our bosom” and the “red population which we carry on our back.”<sup>34</sup> Over the second half of the 1820s, McKenney would become the one of the most important federal advocates for the removal and colonization of Native Americans, bridging the policies of Presidents James Monroe, John Quincy Adams and Andrew Jackson.

While Monroe’s ambitious plan likely emboldened advocates of colonization, as a parting President, he had little effect on its implementation. The incoming administration of John Quincy Adams pursued a policy similar to the one outlined by Monroe. In 1826, Adams’ Secretary of War, James Barbour, proposed an expansive federal project of removal and colonization which elaborated on the loose sketch put forth by Monroe. In a letter to the Congressional Committee on Indian Affairs, Barbour argued for the creation of an Indian territory on the other side of the Mississippi which would remain guaranteed to them indefinitely. As a federally-governed possession, the territory would face no conflicts with state government and it would work to dissolve all tribal identities, along the lines proposed by McCoy, in an effort to instill a sense of national unity as well as eliminate US management of competing tribal claims. In Barbour’s hands, the concept of a permanent Indian republic was decidedly less idealistic than McCoy’s but it reflected the persistent influence that colonization still held within Indian policy circles.

Ultimately, Barbour’s plan was never adopted by Congress and Andrew Jackson would

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<sup>33</sup> Herman J Viola, *Thomas L. McKenney: Architect of America’s Early Indian Policy, 1816-1830* (Chicago, IL: Sage Books, 1974), 88.

<sup>34</sup> McKenney, *Memoirs, official and personal: with sketches of travels among the northern and southern Indians : embracing a war excursion, and descriptions of scenes along the western borders*, 229.

come to office on a removal policy far less concerned with building a unified Indian nation west of the Mississippi.<sup>35</sup> While Isaac McCoy's concept of colonization was popular during this interim period of Indian policy, the harder-edged Jacksonian view of removal included far less emphasis on the sovereignty and civilization of tribes. While President Monroe's plan might have initially appeared to signal an era of a federally-guided Indian colonization policy, in fact, it marked the beginnings of federal removal policy.

During Andrew Jackson's 1828 presidential run, he garnered crucial support in Southern states by promising strong support for a removal policy which purported to protect states rights' to their territory. While Jackson's election reflected a definite shift in Indian policy objectives, benevolent colonization remained a popular rhetoric in which to drape the coercive aspects of removal policy.<sup>36</sup> In the early years of his presidency, Andrew Jackson met with McCoy several times for advice and informally endorsed some of the suggestions offered in his pamphlet, *Remarks on the Practicability of Indian Reform*. During the congressional debates over Indian policy, legislators frequently consulted McCoy as an expert. He also attempted to promote own Indian colonization society, "The Indian Board, for the Emigration, Preservation, and Improvement of the Aborigines of America." While the organization failed to attract enough evangelical interest to counter the growing anti-removal campaigns, it did gain the support of similarly-minded government officials like Thomas McKenney who had continued to

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<sup>35</sup> On the continuation of Monroe's Indian colonization policy by James Barbour see: Prucha, *The Great Father: The United States Government and the American Indians*, 66-7; Alexander Saxton offers astute analysis of Barbour's policy as an aspect of Whig approaches to a regulated policy for western expansion. However, I believe this plan should be also viewed as bearing the direct imprint of the colonization discourses of the era. Saxton, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic*.

<sup>36</sup> Ronald N. Satz, *American Indian Policy in the Jacksonian Era* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1974), 11-12.

serve during Jackson's administration.<sup>37</sup> In President Jackson's first annual address, he advocated removal within the familiar language of colonization: "There [west of the Mississippi] they may be secured in the enjoyment of governments of their own choice, subject to no other control from the United States than such as may be necessary to preserve peace on the frontier and between the several tribes. There the benevolent may endeavor to teach them the arts of civilization, and, by promoting union and harmony among them, to raise up an interesting commonwealth, destined to perpetuate the race and to attest the humanity and justice of this Government."<sup>38</sup> Such perfunctory declarations of support for Indian self-determination were scattered throughout Jackson's rhetoric, even when his speeches also argued that removal was inevitable.

By arguing that it was the ultimate expression of latent notions that Indians were not "improvable," historians have commonly regarded the transition to removal policy as a reflected a hardening of racial attitudes. Reginald Horsman has argued, "Indian Removal as it developed between 1815 and 1830 was a rejection of all Indians as Indians not simply a rejection of unassimilated Indians who would not accept the American lifestyle."<sup>39</sup> The role of Indian colonization is marginalized in this narrative, even though it played a transitional role between the enlightenment ideals behind civilization policy and the uncompromising coercive force behind removal policy. Colonization advocates' insistence on the improbability *and* exclusion of African Americans and Native Americans complicates the common argument about the move from 'soft' to 'hard' racial

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<sup>37</sup> Schultz, *An Indian Canaan*, 120-25, 131-33.

<sup>38</sup> Andrew Jackson, "First Annual Message to Congress, December 8, 1829," in *A Compilation of Messages and Papers of the Presidents*, ed. United States Congress Joint Committee on Printing, vol. 3 (Bureau of National Literature, Inc., 1897), 1005-1025.

<sup>39</sup> Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism*, 192.

attitudes.<sup>40</sup> While the rise of removal accompanied the wane of colonization, and the notion of building racial republics, the idea of colonization was a testing ground for notions of a liberal empire in which expansion could be achieved without racial mixing.

### **THE INSTABILITY OF THE RACIAL REPUBLIC**

While colonizationists proposed plans for creating racial republics during the 1820s, some Indian tribes had already begun to take steps to make their political structures resemble those of the United States. During this era several tribes, such as the Creeks, Choctaw, and Cherokee, all made efforts to reform their tribal governance by adopting the bureaucratic functions of a nation-state.<sup>41</sup> This section focuses on the Cherokee nation, which had moved the furthest down the path of political reform during this era and subsequently became the most celebrated case of Native American claims to sovereignty during the national debate over removal. Opponents of removal held up their “civilization” and national government as evidence they should remain entitled to their territory while proponents contended that Cherokee claims to independence were overruled by the imperatives of an expanding white nation. Even more crucially, the Cherokee were the most prominent example of something similar to the racial republic envisioned by colonizationists. Cherokee efforts to present themselves as civilized involved efforts in racial management which required the marginalization of black populations within national borders, and even the advocacy of African colonization. Some Cherokee supported African colonization to prove their racial fitness for political

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<sup>40</sup> Alexander Saxton has argued that “soft” and “hard” rhetorics of racism appealed to different audiences but worked to sustain white supremacy. Saxton, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic*.

<sup>41</sup> Michael D. Green, *The Politics of Indian Removal: Creek Government and Society in Crisis* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 69-72; James Taylor Carson, *Searching for the Bright Path: The Mississippi Choctaws from Prehistory to Removal* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 86-102; McLoughlin, *Cherokee Renascence in the New Republic*.

citizenship while suffering from parallel colonizing discourses from the US government which promoted the necessity of removal in order to preserve white nationhood. I argue that this tension between the symbolic necessity of racial ordering and the impossibility of creating such order illustrates that the racial republic was an inherently unstable concept that was destined to reproduce asymmetrical relationships of race, despite its promise of equality. In short, despite the colonizationists' claims, a white nation, a black nation, and an Indian nation could never be functionally equivalent.

In the 1820s, the Cherokee were in the difficult position shared by many Indian nations; however, in contrast to some other groups, they attempted to legitimate their sovereignty by operating within the racially-bounded logic of US nationalism. Even though they likely recognized African colonization's proximity to removal rhetoric, some members of the Cherokee nation supported the idea, perhaps believing that aligning with such efforts bolstered their own performance of civilization. The attempts made by the Cherokee to present themselves as a civilized nation were frequently lauded by supporters of Indian and African colonization. Isaac McCoy's writings, for example, made exceptions for the "civilized" Cherokee, Creek, and Choctaw nations in his recommendation that Indians move westward. While McCoy believed the Cherokee faced the threat of white settlement, he considered them to be an already existing model of Indian statehood that he hoped would take hold in the West.<sup>42</sup> The Cherokee had pursued self-determination by adopting a republican form of government; however, members of the Cherokee state also appealed to racial homogeneity in order to protect their claims to nationhood. In order to prove racial fitness for nationhood, the Cherokee

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<sup>42</sup> For McCoy's exceptions for "civilized" tribes see: McCoy, *Remarks on the Practibility of Indian Reform, embracing their colonization*, 16-17, 26, 40, 46.



sometimes eschewed potential interracial alliances against white supremacy by recommending that African Americans be civilized through colonization.

The Cherokee efforts to articulate their political identity through the terms of a nation-state were a response to the expansion of US imperial claims. Beginning in the 1790s, many Cherokee leaders attempted to become self-consciously “civilized” while maintaining a distinct cultural identity. This led to the adoption of southern plantation farming models (including the use of African American slaves), a system of writing the Cherokee language, as well as the development of written law and national government. Throughout the 1810s and 20s, elite Cherokee leaders pushed these changes in order to legitimize themselves in response to increasing threats from the federal government and Georgia’s state government. As the Cherokee nation faced external pressure from the United States government to cede more land, they transitioned into the more centrally organized government of the National Committee, which ultimately became a constitutionally-based republican government.<sup>43</sup> These moves towards Cherokee nationalism culminated in the adoption of a constitution in 1827 modeled on that of the United States.<sup>44</sup>

The creation of the Cherokee nation was a response to the emergence of a more restrictive vision of United States nationalism that did not include a place for native peoples. This new orientation as a republic mirrored the race, class, and gender stratifications of the United States by locating greater power among the land-holding Cherokee elite while excluding women, poorer farmers, black slaves, and many African-

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<sup>43</sup> Mary Young, “The Cherokee Nation: Mirror of the Republic,” *American Quarterly* 33, no. 5 (Winter 1981): 502-524; on the relationship between “civilization” and racial identity amongst many Southern tribes see: Dowd, *A Spirited Resistance the North American Indian Struggle for Unity, 1745-1815*, 152-4.

<sup>44</sup> McLoughlin, *Cherokee Renascence in the New Republic*, xvi.

descended Cherokee. The historian Tiya Miles has noted that since the first contacts between imported African slaves and Cherokee in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, “Cherokees did not view African Americans categorically or relate to all black people in the same manner.” However, the new Cherokee constitution created a singular authority for defining national identity and citizenship. The constitution included considerable attention to the racial composition of the nation and its language systematically prohibited most African descended peoples from participating in the government.<sup>45</sup>

This conception of racially-homogenous nationhood was influenced by the emergence of an explicitly racialized form of nationalism that strengthened during this era in the United States. As in the United States, some Cherokee were likely attracted to African colonization in order to legitimate their own racial and national identity.

Longtime Indian agent Thomas McKenney remarked that the Cherokee national consolidation would lead to the establishment of racial separation through colonization:

“There is hardly an intermixture of Cherokee and African blood. The presumption is, that the Cherokees will, at no distant day, co-operate with the humane efforts of those who are liberating and sending this proscribed race to the land of their fathers. National pride, patriotism, and a spirit of independence mark the Cherokee character.”<sup>46</sup>

McKenney believed the Cherokee interest in African colonization aligned with their efforts to create a racially homogenous nation-state and some elite members of the nation supported the program of African colonization.<sup>47</sup> White missionaries residing on

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<sup>45</sup> Tiya Miles, *Ties That Bind: The Story of an Afro-Cherokee Family in Slavery and Freedom*, 14 (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), 100-128.

<sup>46</sup> Walter Lowrie, Walter S. Franklin, and Matthew St. Clair Clark, eds., “McKenney to James Barbour, Sept. 2, 1825,” in *American State Papers*, vol. II (Washington DC, 1832), 651.

<sup>47</sup> Theda Perdue, “Cherokee Planters, Black Slaves, and African Colonization,” *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 60, no. 3 (1982).

Cherokee territory sometimes aided the diffusion of colonizationist thinking among black slaves within the nation. In 1829, a white missionary described his mission within the Cherokee nation: “I have assisted the black people in Wills valley in forming themselves into a society, called the Wills Valley African Benevolent Society. Their object is to aid the cause of civilization and Christianity in Africa.”<sup>48</sup> Several articles from *Cherokee Phoenix* show that colonization was one of the several benevolent projects supported by missionaries who had influence with Cherokee leaders.<sup>49</sup> Most of these articles differed in tone from that of the most racially divisive views of colonizationists; however, unlike many whites, Cherokee supporters of colonization did not always use the idea to explicitly deny black citizenship. In fact, on a few occasions the *Phoenix* seemed to support some rights for African Americans, even publishing an article that decried attempts by the Michigan legislature to expel African Americans from the state: “We do not believe that a human being who is a free man, although possessing a black or yellow complexion or being one or more shades darker than is common to white freemen, should be deprived of those rights and privileges, which are the common heritage of this happy and republican country.”<sup>50</sup> This mix of advocacy for African colonization and some black claims to rights occurred at the same time that the Cherokee nation strove for racial homogeneity in support of their claims to nationhood.

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<sup>48</sup> American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, “Extracts from a Letter of Mr. Chamberlin, Dated 8th of January 1829,” *The Missionary Herald* (April 1829): 119-120.. A record of the donations made by the African Benevolent Society is in “Untitled,” *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 6, no. 2 (April 1830): 63.

<sup>49</sup> “A Scene in Africa,” *Cherokee Phoenix* (March 6, 1828); “The African Colony,” *Cherokee Phoenix* (June 23, 1828); “The African Colony,” *Cherokee Phoenix* (October 8, 1828); “Colonization,” *Cherokee Phoenix* (July 15, 1829); “The Coast of Africa,” *Cherokee Phoenix* (December 3, 1829); “American Spectator and Washington City Chronicle,” *Cherokee Phoenix* (July 2, 1831).

<sup>50</sup> “Rights of Blacks in Michigan,” *Cherokee Phoenix* (May 22, 1830). Another article in the *Phoenix* decried the unjust treatment of a black man by a Florida court: “Land of Liberty,” *Cherokee Phoenix* (July 21, 1828).

Despite these limited endorsements for black rights, there is little evidence that Cherokee leaders were ambivalent about supporting African colonization on the grounds that it might diminish their own arguments for self-determination. This is likely due to the fact that within the state of Georgia, the efforts to colonize African Americans had frequently been linked to the removal of indigenous populations from the state. Many Georgian leaders, such as Governors Wilson Lumpkin and George Troup, were strong advocates for both projects and utilized the language of removal and colonization to turn popular sentiment against the black and Indian populations of the state.<sup>51</sup> In such a context, alignment with the white promoters of colonization might bolster claims to “civilization” and thus the legitimacy of the Cherokee nation.

An 1830 article in the *North American Review* revealed that perhaps some support among elite Cherokee for African colonization came from the fear of association with African Americans. In the article, an anonymous white writer described Indian populations in the East: “If ardent spirits and other adopted agents are not removing them fast enough much may be gained in point of time, by colonizing them to the coast of Africa; or sending recruits to Key West. It matters little, to a wild, red man, in what forests he pursues his game, or from what river he draws his fish.” The commentator justified removal by observing, “Government is unknown among them; certainly that government which proscribes general rules and enforces or vindicates them. They have no criminal code, no courts, no officers, no punishments.” In suggesting that any ‘forests,’ including those of Africa, were suitable for removal, the writer implicitly linked

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<sup>51</sup> Young, “Racism in Red and Black: Indians and other free people of color in Georgia, law, politics, and removal policy.”

Native Americans to African Americans while demonstrating little interest in the civilizing language of colonization.<sup>52</sup>

In response to this article, the editor of the *Cherokee Phoenix* argued that the suggestion that they remove to Africa insulted the Cherokee efforts to adopt Euro-American civilization. He critiqued the *North American Review*'s attempt to "ascribe to the whole race of red men one uniform and fixed character," but delighted in the contradiction of the writer's racial logic: "The writer raises a note of alarm, because this obstinate son of 'nature' who has no government and cannot be persuaded to submit to any—whose character is as fixed from age to age, as the character of a rock or a tree, has already organized 'a government de facto, within the limits of the State of Georgia, claiming *legislative, executive, and judicial* powers, and all the essential *attributes of sovereignty*.'" The editor concluded by exclaiming, "What a change a few pages have made in the unchangeable character and condition of the Indian!"<sup>53</sup> The *North American Review*'s suggestion that "it matters little" where Native Americans, and likely African Americans, would be removed to demonstrates how closely linked these ideas were in whites' minds. This exchange also illustrates that while the racial republic could be used to defend Cherokee fitness for self-government, the rhetoric of colonization was simultaneously deployed by the *North American Review* as a tool to justify raw racial exclusion. In part, this conflict over race and self-government reflected the historical shift towards viewing racial difference as inherent and immutable, but it also reveals how both colonization and racial republicanism were unstable concepts that could be deployed from disparate, and even contradictory, perspectives.

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<sup>52</sup> "Indians," *Cherokee Phoenix* (March 3, 1830).

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

In the logic fostered by the ideas of Indian and African colonization, racial homogeneity was the method by which racial identity could be successfully translated into national identity. This effort to fix race to nationhood precluded the cooperation of African Americans and Native Americans against white supremacy in the ways that some feared during the first decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It simultaneously legitimated the form of nation-building that the United States pursued by making race the dominant lens through which statehood could be realized. The response by the *Cherokee Phoenix* reveals the difficulty of navigating these overlapping racializations without undermining perceptions of Indians' capacity for self-government. Such sensitivity about being characterized as incapable of government was understandable considering that the adoption of a U.S.-style government was a crucial strategy by which the Cherokee nation attempted to distinguish its claims to territory and sovereignty. The mere suggestion that Indians were fit to be compared to African Americans threatened the efforts of Cherokee leaders to claim racial and national legitimacy by supporting African colonization themselves.

As the debates over both removal policy and colonization intensified, abolitionists would begin to expose the instability of the racial republic. Abolitionists pointed out that the US government undermined the claims to sovereignty made by the Cherokee, and other Eastern nations, in a manner that mirrored African colonizationists' disingenuous claims to support the consent of black colonists. In 1835, a British traveler named Edward Abdy remarked on the similarity of the ways that Native Americans and African Americans were regarded in the United States: "It is curious to observe, in the treatment they both have received, the same principles in operation, and the same professions put

forward. Under the plea of kindness they are plundered of their lands and their labor, and driven from their native country to find a grave in the waves of the Pacific, or the pestilent marshes of Africa. The legislature of Georgia uses the same sort of language, when speaking of the Indians, that the Colonization Society employs to describe the descendents of Africa.”<sup>54</sup> In his analysis, Abdy expressed the views of US abolitionists at the height of the twin debates about Indian removal and African colonization in the early 1830s. During this period many anti-slavery activists turned away from supporting African colonization and moved towards an abolitionist stance partially as a result of their participation in the campaign against Indian removal policy. Several former colonizationists built on their opposition to removal to refashion their activism into a more pointed critique of white supremacy. Drawing from the forceful criticism of colonization by Northern black communities, black and white abolitionists critiqued the limited and coercive form of self-determination offered by both removal and colonization. They argued that a nation constituted through removal undermined the principle of representing the consent of the colonists.

This critique emerged among abolitionists after some black leaders began to connect the negative effects of US colonialism on Native American communities to their long-standing critiques of colonization. Having encountered a similar logic in both projects, some identified the inherent contradictions of colonization by framing their responses in the language of anti-colonialism. Reverend Peter Williams stated: “The colonies planted by white men on the shores of America, so far from benefiting the aborigines, corrupted their morals, and caused their ruin; and yet those who say we are

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<sup>54</sup> E. S. Abdy, *Journal or A Residence and Tour in The United States of North America, from April, 1833, to October, 1834, Vol. III* (London: John Murray, 1835), 86.

the most vile people in the world, would send us to Africa, to improve the character and condition of the natives.”<sup>55</sup> In drawing on this parallel, Williams critiqued imperial expansion, which he argued had treated the native populations of North America with injustice. The black abolitionist Maria Stewart was even more explicit in her account of the destruction wrought by settler colonialism in North America. Stewart invoked the relationship between the removal of native Americans and the denial of black citizenship within the colonization movement: “The unfriendly whites first drove the native American from his much loved home. Then they stole our fathers from their peaceful and quiet dwellings, and brought them hither, and made bond-men and bond-women of them and their little ones. They have obliged our brethren to labor; kept them in utter ignorance; nourished them in vice, and raised them in degradation; and now that we have enriched their soil, and filled their coffers, they say that we are not capable of becoming like white men, and that we can never rise to respectability in this country. They would drive us to a strange land. But before I go, the bayonet shall pierce me through.”<sup>56</sup> Stewart argued that whites had exploited and cast aside indigenous populations in North America just as they were now attempting to do with African Americans.

As some white activists joined the opposition to Indian removal, black leaders seized on this sentiment to mobilize their opposition to colonization within the anti-slavery community. A set of resolutions in November of 1831 by the black community in Providence, Rhode Island condemned the hypocrisy of whites who opposed Indian removal, yet wholeheartedly endorsed colonization. One resolution stated: “We view,

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<sup>55</sup> Peter Williams, *A Discourse Delivered in St. Philip’s Church, for the Benefit of the Coloured Community of Wilberforce, in Upper Canada on the Fourth of July, 1830, by the Rev. Peter Williams, Rector of St. Phillip’s Church* (New York, 1830) in Porter, *Early Negro Writing*, 295-6.

<sup>56</sup> Maria Stewart, *Maria W. Stewart, America’s First Black Woman Political Writer*, 63-4



with unfeigned astonishment, the anti-christian and inconsistent conduct of those who so strenuously advocate our removal from this our native country to the burning shores of Liberia, and who with the same breath contend against the cruelty and injustice of Georgia in her attempt to remove the Cherokee Indians west of the Mississippi.”<sup>57</sup> By placing the burden of moral consistency on white activists, many African Americans were more successful in convincing them of the injustice of colonization than they had been in the last two decades of protest to the idea. Black leaders aimed their critiques of colonization and removal precisely at the quality of these ideas most emphasized by their supporters: self-determination. In a protest by free African Americans against colonization, a speaker said, “We hope that those who have so eloquently pleaded the cause of the Indian, will at least endeavor to preserve consistency in their conduct. They put no faith in Georgia, although she declares that the Indians shall not be removed but ‘with their own consent.’ Can they blame us if we attach the same credit to the declaration, that they mean to colonize us ‘only with our consent?’ They cannot use force; that is out of the question. But they harp so much on ‘inferiority,’ ‘prejudice,’ ‘distinction’ and what not, that there will no alternative be left us but to fall in with their plans.”<sup>58</sup> While colonizationists used the idea of voluntary consent to legitimate their republican claims, many African American leaders recognized that the influence of colonization rhetoric made true self-determination even more difficult, just as it had with Indian peoples of the East.

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<sup>57</sup> “A Voice from Providence” in William Lloyd Garrison, *Thoughts on African Colonization: Or an Impartial Exhibition of the Doctrines, Principles and Purposes of the American Colonization Society. Together with the Resolutions, Addresses and Remonstrances of the Free People of Color* (New York: Garrison and Knapp, 1832), 44.

<sup>58</sup> “An address to the citizens of New York,” *Liberator* (February 12, 1831).

Many white abolitionists also began to observe that the logic of colonization and removal fostered an illusion of consent for African Americans. At the Annual Meeting of the New-England Anti-Slavery Society, Amasa Walker invoked the contemporary crisis over removal in Georgia: “But, sir, I know I shall be met here by the declaration, that the friends of Colonization ‘*don’t compel* the blacks to emigrate.’ This is a wonderful discovery, truly. So said the government of Georgia, in regard to the removal of the Indians—we don’t compel them to go. No, Sir, they *did not* compel the Indians *to go*; but then, they rendered them so uncomfortable, by their oppression and injustice, that the poor Indians *can’t stay*.” Walker argued that the rhetoric of colonization and removal was so successful that they had become the only solutions in the minds of many whites. In shifting the conceptual terrain, colonization would become a ‘choice’ of last resort for the targeted communities. He went on to note that, “It is but a short time, a few months, since the sympathies of this community were excited to the highest pitch, by the proposed removal of the Cherokees from the land of their fathers, to the western banks of the Mississippi ... all this was said and felt, because a few thousand Indians were to be removed from one part of the United States to another. And yet, Sir, *these very men*, who raised this lamentation, over Indian sufferings, look with entire complacency upon the expatriation of twenty-five hundred thousand of their fellow beings to the dark, sickly coast of Africa!”<sup>59</sup> This approach of connecting removal and colonization was common among abolitionists who were attempting to persuade white reformers to abandon their previous colonizationist stance.

The fate of the Cherokee nation, in particular, had become a *cause célèbre* among Northern activists, many of whom had previously been strong supporters of colonization.

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<sup>59</sup> “From the Annual Meeting of the New-England Anti-Slavery Society.”

It was no coincidence that defending the Cherokee became popular with Northeastern white activists. Through their adoption of Euro-American customs and a republican form of government, Cherokees embodied the type of civilization that white reformers had wished to see in the colonists travelling to Liberia. While many in the anti-slavery community became abolitionists because they saw the colonization movement as being in collusion with slavery, the grounds on which they adopted the Cherokee cause displayed the influence of their recent belief in colonization. Historians Mary Hershberger and Alisse Portnoy have argued that opposition to Indian removal helped to hasten the transition to immediate abolition and the abandonment of colonization rhetoric within the anti-slavery community.<sup>60</sup>

William Lloyd Garrison's *Thoughts on African Colonization*, the piece of writing that was responsible for turning anti-slavery activists against colonization, demonstrates the considerable impact of the anti-removal campaigns. Garrison argued that opposition to colonization should naturally flow from a stance against Indian removal, which many in the anti-slavery movement had already adopted.<sup>61</sup> In a scathing critique of Cherokee removal, an editorial in Garrison's *Liberator* summarized the perspective of the abolitionist community that had developed in the past few years, "What more could be done in Georgia by a Cherokee Colonization Society, headed by their Excellencies Troup, Lumpkin and his Honor Judge Clayton? In regard to the principle I can see no distinction between the case of the Cherokee and that of the Africo-Americans, but this;

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<sup>60</sup> Mary Hershberger, "Mobilizing Women, Anticipating Abolition: The Struggle against Indian Removal in the 1830s," *The Journal of American History* 86, no. 1 (June 1999): 39; Alisse Portnoy, *Their Right to Speak: Women's Activism in the Indian and Slave Debates* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

<sup>61</sup> Garrison, *Thoughts on African Colonization: Or an Impartial Exhibition of the Doctrines, Principles and Purposes of the American Colonization Society. Together with the Resolutions, Addresses and Remonstrances of the Free People of Color*, 16.

the Cherokees had to contend with a single state,--to the black men we are all Georgians!”<sup>62</sup> In equating the persecution of the Cherokee with the implicit support for colonization harbored by most whites, the editorial demonstrated that complicity with white supremacy was evident in efforts which seemingly had the most benevolent intentions.

Many African Americans had long expressed their skepticism about the rhetoric of consent and self-determination which grounded justifications for colonization. However, for many white activists, the hollowness of the racial republic promoted by colonizationists was finally illustrated by the fate of the Cherokee who seemed to represent its purported ideals of civilization and sovereignty. Any illusions that those in the anti-slavery community had about whether colonization reflected the best interests of the colonists were severely undermined by the ease with which the concept of benevolent colonization had developed into a set of politics which sought to remove Indian populations at any cost.

### **THE DIVERGING FORTUNES OF REMOVAL AND COLONIZATION**

While the protests of African Americans, Native Americans, and white abolitionists against colonization and removal plans had exposed the contradictions of a racial republic by the early 1830s, this concept still held power to mobilize political constituencies in defense of white nationhood. However, the ambitious programs of both Indian and African colonization also required a vision of a federal government that would take an active role in shaping and supporting these proposed colonies. In a congressional debate on an appropriations bill for the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Samuel Vinton, a US

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<sup>62</sup> “Communications Georgia and the Colonization Society,” *The Liberator* (August 17, 1833).

Representative from Ohio, sharply criticized the idealism behind President Monroe's parting recommendation of an Indian colony and the continued adherence to this policy by his successor, President John Quincy Adams. Vinton's speech took place in the lead-up to the 1828 election, and his voice reflected the wave of Jacksonian supporters who were skeptical that creating and managing new nations was within the scope or interests of the US federal government. Vinton acidly commented, "[The Indian colony is] the boldest experiment upon human life, and human happiness, that is to be found in the history of the world. It proposes to take a whole people, nay, more, the remnant of forty nations from their abodes and place them down in the recesses of a distant and forbidding wilderness, and there, after creating a Government over them, to reform, amalgamate and civilize them."<sup>63</sup>

However, Representative Vinton's criticism of Indian colonization did not simply hinge on its implausibility. He worried that it might actually result in an independent and sovereign Indian republic: "If you succeed in the plan of civilization, the increase of population and moral power that must necessarily result from the success of the measure, added to their preservation as a distinct race of men, and the great extent of country occupied by them, must unavoidably, bring about the establishment of a Government independent of our own."<sup>64</sup> For Vinton, the prospect of a permanent Indian territory evoked the memory of the still-recent pan-Indian insurrections in his home state of Ohio. In this vein, he harshly rebuked Monroe's suggestion, "You have executed, by a single movement, the great plan of Tecumseh, that carried terror and dismay to every cabin beyond the Alleghenies... he labored to bring about a concentration of Indian power, not

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<sup>63</sup> "Congressional Debate House of Representatives—Feb. 20, 1828," *Daily National Intelligencer* (March 12, 1828).

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

for the purpose of civilization, but to resist and arrest the march of your population, and then to draw a perpetual line of separation between them and us... If the name and the prowess of Tecumseh are so far forgotten here, as to induce us, voluntarily, to concentrate the whole Indian power on the frontier, it is far otherwise in the West—they are not forgotten there.”<sup>65</sup>

In the unfolding debate over removal policy, Vinton’s concerns would win out over the colonizationists’ idea that Indians could be granted greater autonomy while they refashioned themselves as an independent, but subservient, nation-state. However, this development illustrates more than a simple progression towards increasingly coercive and racist politics behind removal. Indeed, it was part of the failure of a particular vision of the US imperial state which could extend its power through building republics based on race. The grandiose claims made by supporters of Indian colonization mirrored the wildly ambitious designs of African colonizationists who claimed that a colony in Africa would civilize black colonists and reorganize the West African coast around US ideals. While colonizationists contended that both Indians and Africans could become civilized extensions of a vast US empire, Vinton’s speech addressed a central tension in both African and Indian colonization: if these nations were truly independent, how could they be expected to reflect the interests of an expanding white republic? The parallel discussion about the extent and nature of federal support for African colonization during the 1820s and 30s reveals a vital debate about what kind of empire the United States should be. The potential of colonization to create a bold US imperial state which could use geographical transplantation to refashion politics, culture, and identities of racially

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

marginalized populations ran counter to the emerging Jacksonian politics which idealized the militarized white frontiersman in a decentralized vision of expansion.

During the early 1820s, the colony in Liberia was largely created through support and funding of the United States government. This approach to federal funding of colonization was rooted in broad interpretation of federal powers initiated by President James Monroe's administration. However, the internal debates within the Monroe cabinet revealed the continuing anxieties about the federal boundaries of colonizing new territory and how it might fit into the emerging shape of US empire. This internal debate reflected the public and congressional debates within the national press that were addressed in Chapter 1. These questions about the impact of colonization on the shape of a US empire predated the passage of the Slave Trade Act of 1819, which authorized limited funding for colonization, and surfaced continually in critiques of the colonization idea throughout the 1820s.

Shortly after the passage of the Slave Trade Act, President Monroe indicated to his cabinet that he believed the law permitted the federal government to purchase territory for a colonial settlement in West Africa. John Quincy Adams, then Monroe's Secretary of State, argued against this view within cabinet discussions by contending that it was "impossible that Congress should have had any purchase of territory in contemplation of that Act." More than that, Adams believed it was unconstitutional, arguing that, "the acquisition of Louisiana, and the establishment at the mouth of [the] Columbia River, being in territory contiguous to and continuous with our own, could by no means warrant the purchase of countries beyond the seas, or the establishment of a colonial system of government subordinate and dependent upon that of the United

States.”<sup>66</sup> Arguing strongly for this position within Monroe’s cabinet, Adams convinced Attorney General William Wirt that federal support for colonization was not authorized in the act, and that it amounted to the erection of an unconstitutional “colonial system.” After several months of persistent lobbying from colonization officials, and at the urging of President Monroe, Wirt changed his official interpretation of the law by conceding that Congress had authorized the executive branch the power to return re-captured African slaves and that this implied power to create a colony.<sup>67</sup> While Wirt’s decision allowed Monroe to proceed in funding the American Colonization Society, it pushed aside the constitutional issues that Adams raised in his claim that colonization would constitute the undesirable aberration in the nature of a US empire.

Encouraged by the precedent for government action set by the Monroe administration, African colonization supporters looked to expand federal support for colonization. In the mid-1820s the legislatures of Ohio, New Jersey, Delaware, and Connecticut all sent memorials to Congress urging it to take even more direct role in aiding the fledgling colony. However, politicians from slaveholding states resisted these attempts to realize colonization as a national policy because they were suspicious that colonization was a backdoor route to the abolition of slavery.<sup>68</sup> ACS secretary Ralph Randolph Gurley strongly contended that the organization did not have abolitionist aims in editorials from the early issues of the *African Repository* while he argued that African colonization required a more concerted governmental effort. He contended that the organization was merely interested in removing “a people which are injurious and

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<sup>66</sup> Charles Francis Adams, ed., *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams, comprising portions of his diary from 1795 to 1848*, vol. 4 (Philadelphia, PA: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1875), 292 - 294.

<sup>67</sup> Staudenraus, *The African Colonization Movement, 1816-1865*, 53-7.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 170-1.



dangerous to our social interest, as they are ignorant, vicious, and unhappy.” He concluded that: “The object is *national*, it demands *national* means.”<sup>69</sup>

While opponents of colonization expressed concern about federal intervention into slavery, their criticisms often renewed anxieties about the United States’ relationship with overseas empire which colonization skeptics had first voiced when the movement hit the national spotlight in the mid-1810s. A series of letters written during 1824 and 1825 Richmond, Virginia’s *Enquirer* illustrated this ongoing concern about the scope of federal authority to build an empire. The letters were so popular that they were later published as a pamphlet entitled, *Controversy between Caius Gracchus and Opimius*. The public dialogue began in 1824 when an editorial, penned anonymously by “Gaius Gracchus,” warned that the Colonization Society was a dangerous vehicle being used by politicians to expand the power of the federal government. In response, William Henry Fitzhugh, writing under the pen name “Opimius” addressed the criticisms of colonization’s constitutional authority.<sup>70</sup>

As a Virginian planter and vice president of the ACS, Fitzhugh defended colonization against growing concerns that the federal government should only have the power to acquire territory that would become a permanent part of the nation. Fitzhugh argued that the acquisition of territory and relocation of populations both within and outside US borders was constitutionally sound and fit neatly alongside other federal actions, such as the purchase of Louisiana and the removal of native populations within North America. He asked: “How else will he account for the appropriations made for the

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<sup>69</sup> R. R. Gurley, *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 2, no. 9 (November 1825).

<sup>70</sup> Caius Gracchus [George Fitzhugh], *Controversy between Caius Gracchus and Opimius: in reference to the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour of the United States : first published in the Richmond enquirer*. (Washington D.C.: Georgetown, 1827); Staudenraus, *The African Colonization Movement, 1816-1865*, 173-4.

purchase of Louisiana and Florida” or for “the repeated acquisitions of Indian Territory — for ameliorating the condition of the savages”<sup>71</sup> Fitzhugh’s anonymous opponent also worried that a federally-supported African colony might threaten the racial composition of the nation by challenging the boundaries of US territory. “Caius Gracchus” asked: “does there live a man so blinded by fanaticism and folly as to wish to see the Federal Union extended beyond the Atlantic to the Western shores of Africa, to embrace a population already deemed so vile by the votaries of this scheme as to be unfit to live among us? I presume not.”<sup>72</sup> Fitzhugh responded by explaining that colonization would not saddle “the country with ‘a permanent Colonial System,’ or ‘of extending the rights and privileges of the. Federal Union to the shores of Africa, and to a negro population.’ Neither will be necessary. The territory to be acquired will be acquired for a special purpose, believed to be conducive to the general interests of the nation.”<sup>73</sup>

Although this dialogue ostensibly concerned a question about the legal authority within the constitution, it revealed a deeper debate about the shape and character of US imperial authority with respect to territories and populations both inside and outside the United States. Fitzhugh acknowledged that the prospect of a permanent colonial system or “Federal Union of Africa” presented a troubling extension of the United States’ power. These eventualities were disconcerting because they implied the need for a vast, and complicated, management of a formal empire with limitless boundaries. Perhaps more importantly, it threatened to undermine the racial basis for US nationhood by potentially extending equal rights and privileges to inferior racial groups. To reassure skeptics, Fitzhugh appealed to the efforts already being undertaken to remove Native American

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<sup>71</sup> Caius Gracchus [George Fitzhugh], *Controversy between Caius Gracchus and Opimius*, 65.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

populations to federally-managed, yet autonomous, lands. Fitzhugh implied that African colonization would cultivate a similar sort of dependent autonomy, in line with other forms of US expansion that would promote the ‘general interests of the nation’ without needing to establish a colonial system or endanger the racial purity of the nation. While the prospect of national sovereignty supposedly provided a legitimate basis for the racial republic, it also offered a potentially effective strategy for indirectly managing empire.

In 1827, Senator Robert Hayne of South Carolina voiced similar concerns about the perils of empire when fellow Senator Ezekiel Chambers introduced a memorial from the American Colonization Society that asked for an increase in federal support. Hayne argued that despite colonizationists’ contention that they were constructing the foundation for an independent republic in Liberia; the entire enterprise raised “the great political question” of “establishing Colonies abroad.” Speaking to this issue, Hayne asked, which “part of the history of the world we are to look for argument in favor of the Colonial system?” After cataloguing the “wars,” “injustice,” and “oppression” evident in the practices of the British empire, he asked, “What argument could possibly be urged in favor of its adoption, at this time, by us, whose habits, institutions, and fundamental principles, oppose an almost insuperable bar to all foreign connexions and alliances?” Hayne then read into the Senate record several ACS documents detailing the colonists’ conflicts with both indigenous populations and European powers in West Africa which were intended to demonstrate that the United States’ support for colonization would “engage this country in a war with the native tribes on that continent, and to involve us in serious difficulties with other nations.”<sup>74</sup> While Southern critics like Hayne likely opposed colonization from the fear that it would cause an unwelcomed disturbance to

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<sup>74</sup> *Register of Debates*, 19th Cong., 2d sess. (1827): 289-90.

their pro-slavery constituencies, it is significant that they used this particular rhetoric of anti-imperialism to frame their arguments.

While colonization had developed into a contentious issue in national politics during the mid-1820s, its insertion in the 1828 Presidential contest between Henry Clay and Andrew Jackson worked to connect it to Jacksonian critiques of expanding federal power. While Andrew Jackson had previously lent his name to the large list of titular ACS vice presidents in 1816, he had not remained active in the organization and publicly quiet on the topic. While Jackson may have broadly supported the idea of removing black populations to Africa it is just as likely that he viewed his membership as a boon to his rising political ambitions though associating himself with the Washington political elite who backed the organization. Regardless of the convictions behind Jackson's previous support for colonization, by his second presidential campaign in 1828, the idea of using federal funds to create far-flung colonies and potentially intervene in slavery made the project antithetical to the states' rights ideology motivating his campaign. Jackson supporter Robert J. Turnbull's *The Crisis: or Essays on the Usurpations of the Federal Government* was an influential pamphlet published in 1828 which situated African colonization program as evidence of federal overreach which used the constitutional concept of "general welfare" to create a "*consolidated* national government" in the United States.<sup>75</sup> In the 1828 Presidential election, Andrew Jackson won the presidency, in part, by opposing ambitious and meddlesome government efforts, such as a federally supported colonization program. At the same time, his campaign was also successful at mobilizing support for expanding federal removal policy which sought

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<sup>75</sup> Robert James Turnbull, *The Crisis: or, Essays on the Usurpations of the Federal Government* (Charleston, SC: A. E. Miller, 1827), 7; on the relationship between anti-colonization and anti-federalism amongst Jacksonian see: Staudenraus, *The African Colonization Movement, 1816-1865*, 175.

to remove Eastern native peoples West of the Mississippi. This disjuncture between how Jacksonians viewed two projects reveals two competing visions of imperial expansion. For many, colonization was a dangerous step towards a boundless, and federally managed, overseas empire while removal policy was an outgrowth of the United States' presumed authority within North America which was frequently not defined as an imperial enterprise.

In the midst of the 1828 election, Littleton Tazewell, a Jackson supporter and Senator from Virginia, commissioned a report for the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations that argued against the concept of federal authority for African colonization. Tazewell's report raised familiar concerns about the creation of an empire and particularly dwelled on whether the United States had the constitutional right to acquire territory in Africa. While the report admitted that the federal government had the authority to secure territory through "discovery, conquest, or negotiation" it contended that acquiring a colonial possession in Africa would not be appropriately placed in any of these categories. With regard to the United States' ability to make treaties for the cession of territory, the report argued that this could only be executed with people who respected the rights and obligations of "intercourse between the different members of the family of nations." The report contended that for this reason, "no civilized nation in modern times" entered into a treaty "with any of the savage tribes who wander over the deserts, or dwell upon the coast of Africa."<sup>76</sup>

Indeed, critics of colonization like Tazewell saw this mode of empire as fundamentally distinct from the expansion pursued by the United States in North

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<sup>76</sup> *Report of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, April 28, 1828* (20 Congress, 1 session, Senate Document no. 178, serial 167: Washington D.C., 1828), 3, 5-6.

America. Conscious of the apparent contradiction this argument presented for the United States' numerous treaties with Indian tribes, Tazewell contended that "the peculiar character" of compacts with Indian tribes did not acknowledge their "independent sovereignty" but Indian titles to land were extinguished "under the permission of the United States, who long since acquired the acknowledged sovereignty and dominion over the territory so possessed." Even so, the report argued that contiguous territories were very different from "distant territory" that was "separated from the United States by a wide ocean" because they must "continue in a state of colonial bondage, deprived of all hope of being ever admitted into the Union." Most importantly, the report argued that "the genius and spirit of all our institutions" are opposed to "holding distant colonies" or "creating new empires" that would be independent of the United States.<sup>77</sup> While many proponents of colonization saw little distinction between the imperial practices already exercised in North America and those proposed in West Africa, critics like Tazewell contended that colonization was fundamentally different and reflected a dangerous new path for US expansion.

Proponents of Jacksonian removal distinguished the policy from the ideas of colonization by de-emphasizing a "civilized" and racially unified Indian nation west of the Mississippi. While Jackson sometimes employed the language of benevolence in speeches and sought the council of Indian colonizationists like Isaac McCoy and Thomas McKenney, he shared none their utopian designs, preferring to focus on the objective of opening up territory occupied by native peoples. In the debate over Indian removal in the late 1820s and early 1830s, some members of Congress were discouraged by the manner

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.; The logic behind the distinction made here is outlined in by Robert Williams' discussion of the role of "discovery" in legitimating native dispossession in US legal theory. Williams, *Like a Loaded Weapon: The Rehnquist Court, Indian Rights, and the Legal History of Racism in America*.

in which the system of colonization and civilization proposed by Monroe and others had devolved into something which sought to undermine the authority of sovereign Indian peoples. During the debate for the 1830 Indian Removal Act, John Test, a US representative from Indiana, criticized the law's attempt to undermine the autonomy, and potential civilization, of individual Indian tribes though its efforts to grant authority to individuals to personally alienate collective tribal lands in a piecemeal fashion. In defending the long standing sovereignty of Indian nations Test said, "I have always been in favor of colonizing the Indians as well as the negroes; but I wish, when it is done, it may be done in a manner that shall be agreeable to them—that it shall be done upon correct principles. Give them a territory over the Mississippi; let us take it under our protection; let us not undertake to govern them with our laws, but aid them in governing themselves with their own laws." Test believed that by giving a unified Indian nation the ability to govern themselves, under the tutelage of the United States, they would eventually neutralize their capability to threaten the republic. "Let them be Indians, not tribes of Indians; cultivate a good understanding with them; give them to know that we intend to treat them as our equals."<sup>78</sup> Despite the conceptual relationship between colonization and removal, with the passage of the 1830 Removal Act, the colonizationist vision desired by Test and others fell by the wayside.

Despite the dwindling enthusiasm for federal colonization policy for both African Americans and Indians among Jacksonian Democrats, many colonization supporters continued to champion direct funding for colonization. Some were even encouraged by federal support for Indian removal and attempted to re-align it with the aims of colonization. Drawing on the organizational expansion of the ACS during the 1820s, the

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<sup>78</sup> *Register of Debates*, 21st Cong., 1st sess. (1830): 1111-2.

parent society asked local auxiliaries to increase their advocacy for federal funding by using their influence in state legislatures to pass memorials calling for action by the United States Congress.<sup>79</sup> In an 1830 memorial sent to the United States Congress, the Kentucky Colonization Society called on the federal government to take a more active role in funding colonization. The Kentucky auxiliary observed that “millions of dollars have been annually expended for the maintenance and comfort of the North American Natives.” They argued that the Africans’ claim “is at least of equal dignity with that of the savage.”<sup>80</sup> In an 1831 petition to Congress, the citizens of the county of Buckingham, Virginia argued for the use of federal power in building the Liberian colony: “We find that the General Government has uniformly passed laws which sanction the principle of colonizing the free negroes, and that those laws have received the approbation of the part which has been most rigid in their constructions of the powers of Congress granted by the constitution, by the purchases of Louisiana and Florida, by the erection of fortifications on Key West, and by the removal of the Indians. We are unable to draw the distinction between the constitutional power of making purchases in America and making purchases in Africa; between settling Key West and settling Liberia, (neither of which can ever form an integral part of our Union) and between removing the Indians and removing the free negroes.”<sup>81</sup> Like previous advocates of federal support for colonization, the petitioners interpreted colonization within a much broader range of US imperial authority that included the power to relocate non-white populations with impunity as well as the ability to control and manage territory that would not necessarily become US soil.

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<sup>79</sup> Staudenraus, *The African Colonization Movement, 1816-1865*, 178.

<sup>80</sup> Kentucky Colonization Society, “Memorial of the Kentucky Colonization Society,” *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 5, no. 11 (January 1830): 348.

<sup>81</sup> “Petitions of Congress,” *Daily National Intelligencer* (February 12, 1831).



During Henry Clay's 1832 presidential run, he attempted to channel this growing support by pushing a bill through Congress that would, among other things, initiate massive governmental spending on behalf of colonization. Clay's "Distribution Bill," introduced into the Senate in April, 1832 was designed to distribute monies generated from public land sales by the federal government to individual states and apply them primarily to public education, internal improvements, and colonization. The bill aimed to aid the continental expansion of white settlers, through territory acquired by "extinguishing title" to Indian lands, and use the proceeds to fund federal efforts that would promote the "general welfare." The concept of "internal improvements" was a central plank in the Whig party's "American System" which attempted to link Eastern manufacturing to Western agriculture through the development of infrastructure, such as roads, bridges, and canals. In the view of Clay and other Whigs, infrastructure aided the nation's geographic and economic cohesion while colonization strengthened social cohesion by appealing to white racial nationhood through the expulsion of a "dangerous" population.<sup>82</sup>

In a lengthy speech on the Senate floor in support of his bill, Henry Clay argued that distribution of public land was important to US republicanism and nation building: "There is public land enough to found an empire; stretching across the immense continent, from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean, from the Gulf of Mexico to the Northwestern Lakes." Clay argued for a retooled public land policy that could encourage the settlement of the vast reaches of an American empire while using the public proceeds from this settlement to economically develop these regions through federally-distributed

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<sup>82</sup> On place of colonization within the Whigs' "American System" see: Daniel Walker Howe, *The Political Culture of the American Whigs* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 134-7.

infrastructure investment. Clay argued that “the possession of this vast national property” was unique in maintaining the egalitarian character of the republic in contrast to “the nations of the Old World” by offering a bulwark against excessive population density and the resulting devaluation of labor prices. Clay asked, “What other nation can boast of such an outlet for its increasing population, such bountiful means of promoting their prosperity, and securing their independence”<sup>83</sup>

Clay then connected these visions of an imperial nation to issues addressed by colonization, “The evil of a free black population is not restricted to particular States, but extends to, and is felt by, all. It is not, therefore, the slave question, but totally distinct from and unconnected with it.” He concluded by weaving the nationalist, republican, commercial, and racial sentiments by arguing that bill would result in “benefits of moral and intellectual improvement of the people, of great facility in social and commercial intercourse, and of the purification of the population of our country, themselves the best parental sources of national character, national union, and national greatness.”<sup>84</sup> In response to Senator Elias Kane’s contention that colonization would not benefit his home state of Illinois, Clay contended, that “Every part of the Union was interested in the human object of colonizing the free blacks” and that “if any part were exempt from the evils of a mixed population, it would still not be indifferent to the prosperity of less favored portions.” Clay rhetorically concluded this line of argument by emphasizing the long-term colonizationist vision of a racially-ordered republic: “Suppose that, fifty or a hundred years hence, the country could be entirely rid of this African race; would the

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<sup>83</sup> *Register of Debates*, 22nd Cong., 1st sess. (1832): 1098, 1100-1.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 1116-1117.

gentleman from Illinois—would any gentleman—say that he should be indifferent to such an auspicious result?”<sup>85</sup>

However much Clay might have agreed with expansionist supporters of removal on the necessity of expanding a far-reaching American empire, his vision of expansion was opposed through a convergence between anti-federal ideology and political economy of Southern slavery. The character of the opposition to Clay’s bill among Jacksonian Democrats was that it represented undue interference in sectional interests, and like internal improvements, did not constitute an appropriate field for federal action. During the debate, Senator Josiah Johnston summarized opposition to the colonization provisions of the bill, express his wish that colonization should never be entertained “unless as the united desire of the slaveholding States themselves.”<sup>86</sup> The Committee on Public Lands produced a report that opposed the colonization provision for similar reasons, “the existence of slavery is local and sectional...If it is an evil, it is an evil to them [the southern states] and it is their business to remove it.”<sup>87</sup>

Beyond criticisms of the bill’s constitutionality, opponents also touched on the long-standing anxiety about the legislation’s ability to set a dangerous precedent for US foreign entanglement in projects of colonial nation-building. In a last ditch plea to sway congressmen against the colonization provision before a final vote, Senator John Forsyth argued that while he felt that getting rid of free black populations could be done without the aid of the government, the other great colonizationist goal which “command[s] the

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<sup>85</sup> *Register of Debates*, 22nd Cong., 2d sess. (1833): 75.

<sup>86</sup> *Register of Debates*, 22<sup>nd</sup> Cong., 2d sess. (1833): 790.

<sup>87</sup> *Report of the Senate Committee on Public Lands, May 18, 1832* (22 Congress, 1 session, Senate Document no. 145, serial 214: Washington D.C., 1832), 16.

approval of all” is the “civilization of Africa.”<sup>88</sup> Forsyth regarded this as a dangerous pursuit which went “beyond the European notion of acquiring justification” through “discovery and purchase.” Instead, he noted that ACS obtained territory “by purchase alone” and “on this sole ground of sovereignty” claimed to exert “authority over twenty thousand people, and expect soon to exert it over one hundred and fifty thousand.” Noting that there had been several struggles between Liberian settlers and surrounding indigenous populations, he argued that the bill would alter the previously tenuous colonial relationship between the United States and Liberia and make “a commitment of the Government to protect the colony against all the world.” Implying that solid federal connection to the colony would inevitably propel the United States into the business of maintaining global empire, Forsyth noted that, “Europe will not allow a colony in Africa thus to grow up and extend, unmolested, while under so feeble prohibition. They will wrest it from the society, unless Government interposes.”<sup>89</sup> Despite the prevalence of such dissenting voices, the bill narrowly passed in both the House and Senate. However, this legislative triumph was undermined by Clay’s decisive defeat in the 1832 election against Andrew Jackson. When the colonization bill came to President Jackson’s desk in early 1833, he vetoed it, effectively ending prospects for a federal colonization policy for several decades.<sup>90</sup>

## **CONCLUSION**

The defeat of a federal African colonization program and the advent of Jacksonian removal policy have been primarily narrated by historians as a shift in racial thinking

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<sup>88</sup> 75.

<sup>89</sup> *Register of Debates*, 22<sup>nd</sup> Cong., 2d sess. (1833): 233.

<sup>90</sup> Staudenraus, *The African Colonization Movement, 1816-1865*, 184-7; Clegg, *The Price of Liberty*, 149.

away from Enlightenment principles and towards the entrenchment of more fixed conceptions of race which further legitimated slavery and the displacement of native peoples.<sup>91</sup> While such a shift in racial categories is certainly evident here, it is misleading to position proponents of Indian and African colonization as ‘moderates’ outpaced by a new, more virulent strain of racial thinking. Indeed, as Alexander Saxton has argued, the ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ racisms expressed during this era were mutually-reinforcing rhetorics of white supremacy.<sup>92</sup>

However, considering the influential concepts of colonization within the lens of imperial expansion reveals considerable debate over a radically ambitious program of racial nation-building. In the first decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, African and Indian colonization schemes arose from the crisis of managing the revolutionary claims of non-white populations. By creating a framework of colonization for the realization of African American and Indian nationhood, whites reimagined how marginalized populations might consent to, and even participate in, the extension of US imperial interests. The racial republic emerged as an acceptable form of sovereignty because it promised to neutralize inter-racial cooperation while legitimating white US nationhood. Because such notions of colonization emerged from the contradictions posed by ideological commitments to both liberal democracy and white supremacy, the racial republic was a fundamentally unstable construct. The contradictions of the racial republic were evident in the case of the Cherokee nation, whose sovereignty was undermined despite its gestures towards both race-based nationalism and republican governance. Moreover, black and white

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<sup>91</sup> Guyatt, “The Outskirts of Our Happiness.”; Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism*; Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914*.

<sup>92</sup> Saxton, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic*, 67-8.

abolitionists' critiques of colonization illustrated that the notion of consent, which was a core republican ideal central to both colonization rhetorics, rang false when weighed against the asymmetrical power of a violent and coercive US nation.

While whites of this era demonstrated their commitment to building a white racial republic, many were uncertain whether doing the same for other racial groups was feasible, or even desirable. However, these were not merely expressed as racial concerns, they raised questions central to the nature of US empire. Some feared an Indian nation in the West would not become an appendage of US expansion but it would develop into an intractable and unpredictable obstacle of the kind threatened by the pan-Indian revolts of the previous generation. While building a nation in Africa did not pose the same threat, some saw it as a dangerous redefinition of the United States as a global, rather than continental, empire. In both cases, the ambitious project of creating nations from unwilling and racially 'inferior' groups of people was frequently viewed as a task outside the limited powers of federal government. Despite the anti-federal ideology of the Jacksonians, in the coming decades they would also use federal power to exercise a military vision of expansion through both removal policy and war with Mexico that was aimed at opening up land for white settler colonialism and the extension of slavery. Although this shift reflected the wane of colonization support on a federal level, the concept of colonization continued to have an important place in popular discourse over the next several decades and provided the basis for an enduring strain of US empire based on promoting nominally independent nation-states that aligned with the broader interests of the United States. Although colonization, whether for African Americans or Native Americans, was pushed aside as federal solution during the Jacksonian era, the concept of

a racial republic continued to hold power for those who hoped to build a white nation or  
imagine new forms of US expansion abroad.

## CHAPTER 4

### **“THEY MAY IN SOME OTHER PLACE ENJOY HUMAN RIGHTS AND PRIVILEGES”: AFRICAN COLONIZATION AND THE REPRODUCTION OF RACIALIZED CITIZENSHIP, 1829-1851**

In 1832, black residents in New Bedford, Massachusetts published a series of resolutions which denounced the growing influence of the African colonization movement. They charged that colonization, “teaches the public to believe that it is patriotic and benevolent to withhold from us knowledge and means of acquiring subsistence, and to look upon us as unnatural and illegal residents in this country.”<sup>1</sup> The black community in New Bedford pointed out one of the most significant effects of colonization’s influence: free African Americans were increasingly regarded as non-citizens, despite being native-born residents of the United States. In suggesting that black claims to political rights could only be protected by a racial republic in Liberia, the concept of colonization had helped to advance the notion that African Americans were a foreign class of residents and thus entitled no protections within the United States. This chapter examines how the ideas and rhetoric of African colonization legitimated increasing denials of black citizenship during the 1830s and 1840s in two forums: anti-black urban mobs and state constitutional conventions. By studying the convergence between street-level politics of the riot and the formal political discourse of state governments, the chapter will illustrate how colonization had a significant impact on both the language and logic of the debates over citizenship through the scheme’s implicit

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<sup>1</sup> William Lloyd Garrison, “A Voice From New-Bedford,” in *Thoughts on African Colonization: Or an Impartial Exhibition of the Doctrines, Principles and Purposes of the American Colonization Society. Together with the Resolutions, Addresses and Remonstrances of the Free People of Color* (New York: Garrison and Knapp, 1832), 50-1.



assumption that African Americans had no place within the physical and symbolic boundaries of the United States.

While the removal of various tribes in the Southeast and the Old Northwest during the 1820s and 1830s had secured white political control in states east of the Mississippi River, the failure of the United States government to fully support colonization policy made the existence of free African Americans a continuing concern of for many white leaders. However, the politics of slavery had considerably shifted since the early days of the colonization movement. While Upper South leaders had viewed African Americans as an insurrectionary threat within the context of the revolutionary era and declining slave societies, the renewal of slavery in the Deep South emboldened new pro-slavery advocates to reject colonization as entry point for federal interference with the institution of slavery. In the North, the early momentum behind colonization movement also faltered following extensive attacks by the abolitionist movement.

Historians studying colonization have generally argued that these developments significantly diminished the relevancy of colonization in national politics starting in the early-1830s.<sup>2</sup> While is true that the American Colonization Society was in organizational disarray during this period, I argue that the idea itself remained popular and continued to have a considerable impact on the public discourses of race in the United States. This was particularly true in Northern states where the existence of free African Americans

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<sup>2</sup> For examples scholarship which highlight the decline of colonization following the organizational crises of the ACS see: Clegg, *The Price of Liberty*, 129-162; Burin, *Slavery and the Peculiar Solution: A History of the American Colonization Society*, 79-99; Kurt Lee Kocher, "A Duty to America and Africa: A History of the Independent African Colonization Movement in Pennsylvania," *Pennsylvania History* 51, no. 2 (1984); Staudenraus, *The African Colonization Movement, 1816-1865*, 224-239; Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914*, 27-32.

continued to challenge the basis for white citizenship. Despite the colonization movement's declining political and financial fortunes, the idea continued to attract adherents who seized on its promise to build a unified white republic. In associating with assaults on black citizenship, colonization rhetoric consisted of a flexible language that could both express working and middle class resentments as well as elite politicians' purported desire to secure rights for African Americans in Liberia.

### **ANTI-COLONIZATION AND BLACK CITIZENSHIP**

Within the first decade of its existence, the colonization movement rapidly extended its influence among white populations while it was publicly rejected by most black communities in the North. Despite some black leaders' initial interest in African colonization, the racially disparaging language used by of the movement's early leaders led African Americans to swiftly reject of colonization in public meetings, protests, pamphlets, and newspapers. These open expressions of protest against the colonization idea exposed the movement's purportedly benevolent intentions to be fundamentally hostile to free black communities. Through a variety of high profile protests against the African colonization movement and a series of black political conventions, Northern black leaders argued that the motivations of colonizationists fundamentally undermined their rights to citizenship in the United States. Therefore, the colonization movement gained strength and popularity in the face of overwhelming rejection from the black communities it claimed to help and the emergence of mob violence associated with colonization in the 1830s must be understood within the context of the long history of black protest against white colonization proposals. Despite colonizationists' claims to represent the interests of free African Americans, the wholesale repudiation of the idea by

the vast majority of black communities in the North made support of it by whites an act of willful defiance against the wishes of the vast majority of free African Americans. In response, African Americans in the North staked their claims to citizenship within the United States through consistent rejection of the idea.

Ever since African colonization was introduced as a serious proposal by white leaders, black communities in the North had fiercely debated how to respond to it. While some black leaders supported colonization in theory, the vast majority of Northern blacks recognized that the logic of colonization would likely contribute to both informal attitudes and formal laws which diminished the standing of free African Americans.<sup>3</sup> From the beginnings of the movement for colonization, several African Americans framed the question of African colonization as one about the meaning and articulation of self-determination. The response by free black communities in the North was rapid and forceful when the first formal efforts to create institutional support for African colonization commenced in late 1816. A few days after the initial meetings of the ACS, members of the organization submitted a memorial to the United States Congress which asked for federal support for removing black populations from the United States. Almost immediately, an anonymous African American writer responded to the document with a “counter memorial.”<sup>4</sup>

The counter memorial forcefully confronted the purported benevolence of colonization by arguing that it conveyed a fundamental indifference to the perspective of

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<sup>3</sup> Goodman, *Of One Blood: Abolitionism and the Origins of Racial Equality*, 23-35; Greene, “Against Wind and Tide: African Americans’ Response to the Colonization Movement and Emigration, 1770-1865,” 67-113; Albert G. Oliver, “The protest and attitudes of blacks towards the American Colonization Society and the concepts of emigration and colonization in Africa, 1817-1865” (Ph.D, St. John’s University, 1978), 45-122; Louis R. Mehlinger, “The Attitude of the Free Negro Toward African Colonization,” *The Journal of Negro History* 1, no. 3 (June 1916): 276-301.

<sup>4</sup> Staudenraus, *The African Colonization Movement, 1816-1865*, 29-31.

African Americans. The statement read, “Your memorialists, far from being insensible to the merits of their self-created benefactors, cannot but protest before your honorable body against the assumed right of any individuals whatever, by whatever motives actuated, to pass judgment on their condition.” The statement pointed out that the language of liberal rights were embedded in white claims to authority over black populations: “They are free men, and consider themselves in every respect qualified to determine for themselves ... what is, and what is not, for their own benefit and advantage; that indeed of all the rights and privileges which they hold under the constitution and laws.” The memorial warned that the privilege to determine the rights of others was never far removed from violence and coercion: “The men who assume to themselves the power to decree that other men are miserable, whether they be so or not, will easily pass from *persuasion* to *force*.”<sup>5</sup> Shortly after the counter memorial’s publication, African American communities in the North organized on behalf of its basic sentiment. In early 1817, black leaders in Philadelphia called a meeting where the newly-proposed colonization plan was soundly rejected by three thousand African American residents in the city.<sup>6</sup> This early meeting in Philadelphia set an example that was repeated by the black communities in other northern cities who voiced their opposition to the Society.<sup>7</sup>

Despite immediate protests from many black communities, white colonizationists believed that African Americans could eventually be convinced that

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<sup>5</sup> “For the National Intelligencer A Counter Memorial Proposed to Be Submitted to Congress in Behalf of the Free People of Colour of the District of Columbia,” *Daily National Intelligencer*, December 30, 1816.

<sup>6</sup> *Poulson’s American Daily Examiner*, January 10, 1817; William Lloyd Garrison, “A Voice From Philadelphia,” in *Thoughts on African Colonization: Or an Impartial Exhibition of the Doctrines, Principles and Purposes of the American Colonization Society. Together with the Resolutions, Addresses and Remonstrances of the Free People of Color* (New York: Garrison and Knapp, 1832), 9-13.

<sup>7</sup> Richard S. Newman, *The Transformation of American Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 99; Leonard P. Curry, *The Free Black in Urban America, 1800-1850: The Shadow of the Dream* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 231-238.

leaving the United States was in their best interest. Many of the earliest issues of *The African Repository*, the official organ of the ACS, were specifically targeted at attracting the interest of white elites who viewed free African Americans as a troublesome population. Henry Clay, described African Americans as “the most corrupt, depraved, and abandoned element in the population.”<sup>8</sup> Although Clay and other colonizationists maintained that African Americans were not innately inferior, they rejected any notion that black residents could integrate into the US body politic. Other colonization supporters more harsh in their indictments of this “depraved class.” In 1826, C.C. Harper told a crowd of whites in Baltimore that African Americans were: “shut out from the privileges of citizens, separated from us by the *insurmountable* barrier of color, they can *never* amalgamate with us, but must remain *for ever* a distinct and inferior race, repugnant to our republican feelings and dangerous to our republican institutions.”<sup>9</sup> In general, early colonizationists portrayed African Americans as destined to occupy a lower caste in US society, thus threatening the foundation of a well-ordered white republic.<sup>10</sup>

Some colonizationists recognized that African Americans opposed the plan because such rhetoric was used to garner white support for the movement. One ACS member observed, “When the Society is spoken of as an Institution which is to relieve us of a present and pressing evil. the people of color are not ignorant of this aspect of the subject; they read—they hear—and when they are spoken of as a nuisance to be got rid

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<sup>8</sup> Henry Clay, *African Repository and Colonial Journal*, VI (March, 1830): 12.

<sup>9</sup> C.C. Harper, “Address of C.C. Harper: Extract from a late Address of Charles Carroll Harper to the Voters of Baltimore” *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 2, No. 6 (August 1826).

<sup>10</sup> Egerton, “Its Origin Is Not a Little Curious.”; David M. Streifford, “The American Colonization Society: An Application of Republican Ideology to Early Antebellum Reform,” *The Journal of Southern History* 45, no. 2 (May 1979): 201-220.

of, they prove themselves men, men of like passions with us, by resenting it.”<sup>11</sup> After defecting from the ACS in the early 1830s, Austin Johnson recounted his disillusionment with a movement which he had initially believed was, “built upon love and pity to the negroes of this country.” In contrast to this stated purpose, Johnson argued that ACS members spoke of African Americans “as a vile race.” He observed that free black men “who have read and heard the language of Colonizationists respecting themselves, do not consider such language as issuing from the lips of friends ... they have no confidence in these men, nor this society.” Furthermore, Johnson argued that the rhetoric of colonizationists, “has had a tendency to make the situation of the people of colour who remain in this country, more uncomfortable than it was before: their condition is worse than if these speeches and writings had never” been published.<sup>12</sup>

African American opponents of colonization also targeted the particular brand of “freedom” or “citizenship” offered by the racial republic that colonization supporters wished to promote in Liberia. Black critics astutely recognized of the irony behind pinning black freedom on the denial of citizenship in the United States. William Watkins characterized colonization as “a scheme which offers *freedom*,--the *inalienable* right of all,--only on the condition of being allowed to deprive the subjects of it of the *liberty of choice*.”<sup>13</sup> Following the lead of black communities, white abolitionists began to make similar critiques by the early 1830s. While speaking at the Annual Meeting of the New-England Anti-Slavery Society, Amasa Walker argued, that “Those who contend that we ought to colonize the Blacks in Africa ... maintain the principle, that that unfortunate

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<sup>11</sup> American Colonization Society, *The Fifteenth Annual Report of the American Colonization Society* (American Colonization Society, 1832), ix.

<sup>12</sup> Austin Johnson, “Apology for Abandoning the Colonization Society”, 1835, Austin Johnson Papers, Duke University, Special Collections.

<sup>13</sup> A colored Baltimorean, “Maryland Colonization Society,” *The Liberator* (January 25, 1834).

class of our fellow creatures have not the rights of men; merely the right of existence, in such place and under such circumstances as we may see fit to assign them.”<sup>14</sup>

Some black leaders also worried that colonization would inspire increasing limits on black participation in US society and force them to accept exile from the United States. In 1831, black residents of New York City penned a series of resolutions that catalogued the myriad ways in which African colonization underpinned racially exclusive citizenship in the United States. The resolutions pointed out that African Americans were barred from “classical education,” not allowed employment as clerks or ship captains, and restricted from working in the same shop as “white mechanics.” The residents concluded that, “when they say that they will not move us without our consent, we doubt their sincerity. They cannot indeed use force; that is out of the question. But they harp so much on ‘inferiority,’ ‘prejudice,’ ‘distinction,’ and what not, that there will be no alternative let us but to fall in with their plans.”<sup>15</sup> Another black critic of colonization noted the disparity in public support for African Americans in the United States and Liberia: “If they [colonizationists] would spend half the time and money that they do, in educating the colored population and giving them lands to cultivate here, and secure to them all the rights and immunities of freemen, instead of sending them to Africa, it would be found, in a short time, that they would be made as good citizens as the whites.”<sup>16</sup> Such conclusions led most black communities to reject colonization on the grounds that deferring liberty to a distant and unrealized republic necessarily diminished black citizenship and opportunity in the United States and implicitly undermined the value of

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<sup>14</sup>“From the Annual Meeting of the New-England Anti-Slavery Society.”

<sup>15</sup> Dorothy Burnett Porter, ed., “Resolutions of the People of Color, at a Meeting held on 25th of January, 1831. With an Address to the Citizens of New York, 1831. In Answer to Those of the New York Colonization Society,” in *Early Negro Writing, 1760-1837* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1971), 283.

<sup>16</sup> “Colonization Hints,” *The Liberator*, February 12, 1831.

any rights secured in Liberia. This linkage between colonization and social exclusion would be particularly evident as rhetoric of African colonization helped animate several anti-black riots in the late 1820s and early 1830s.

### **THE “COLONIZATION RIOTS”**

Beginning in the late-1820s, the actions of white mobs began to reflect more than a decade of rapidly spreading ideas that linked colonization to the denial of citizenship rights. These riots took place within the context of expanding political rights for white men when property restrictions for voting were ended in several states during the 1820s. At the same time, black citizenship rights were only nominally preserved in a handful of northeastern states with relatively small black populations.<sup>17</sup> The street politics of the mob represented the ethos of expanded democratic involvement of white men during the Jacksonian era by providing a forum beyond the bounds of formal civil discourse dominated by the elite politicians.<sup>18</sup> While riots were frequently motivated and directed by elites, workers also participated and sometimes used them as a forum to protest the changing nature of work that accompanied the spread of the factory system. Often these class-based grievances were expressed in an emerging language of racism and resulted in violent and destructive attacks on the black urban communities.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Saxton, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic*, 127-161; Litwack, *North of Slavery; the Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860*, 75-6.

<sup>18</sup> David Grimsted, “Rioting in Its Jacksonian Setting,” *The American Historical Review* 77, no. 2 (April 1972): 361-397.

<sup>19</sup> Carl E. Prince, “The Great ‘Riot Year’: Jacksonian Democracy and Patterns of Violence in 1834,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 5, no. 1 (Spring 1985): 2-3; Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1986), 255-270; David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, Haymarket series (London, UK: Verso, 1999), 95-114; Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1995),



The connection between colonization and rioting was sometimes explicit and sometimes subtle, but this linkage formed a crucial backdrop to the widespread assault on black communities throughout the North. Despite the benevolent form of middle class colonization activism, these riots crucially revealed the violent exclusionism at the core of the idea. Most free African Americans had already recognized the seeds of this violence in their strident opposition to the colonization movement since its inception. For many northern black communities, both colonizationism and mob attacks would come to define the rhetorical and physical battleground on which their very limited rights would be defended. While the formal leadership of the colonization movement was composed of political elites, middle class reformers, and evangelical leaders, the riots illustrated that colonization could also mobilize a broader cross-section of Northern populations against political and social equality for African Americans. Eventually, the informal usage of colonization as a tool to oppose black citizenship would also become evident in the formal political processes as several Northern states re-wrote their constitutions in the decade following the violence of the 1830s.

The states of the Old Northwest had a particularly fragile sense of the white body politic within their borders. During the 1820s and 30s, states like Ohio, Indiana and Illinois were in the process of securing their territory through the military and political defeat of various Indian nations at the same time whites began to express concerns about the immigration of African Americans from bordering slave states. White leaders sometimes mobilized Indian removal and African colonization in rhetoric that appealed to racialized conceptions of citizenship. In Indiana, Governor James Ray Brown drew

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111-135; Jean H. Baker, *Affairs of Party: The Political Culture of Northern Democrats in the Mid-nineteenth-century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 243-9.

very clear parallels between the black and Indian populations of the state and suggested that both groups were inadequate as potential citizens and thus needed to be removed. In his 1829 address to the Indiana General Assembly, Brown warned that a “non-productive” population of former slaves “is pouring in upon us...living without visible means, or labor-most of whom are paupers on society” and suggested that colonization in Africa might be a practical remedy to the state’s “problem.” Immediately following this section of the speech he characterized the state’s remaining native populations in a parallel fashion by complaining of Indians’ “growing indolence” and “increasing dependence” and suggesting that if they were not removed beyond the Mississippi “their national property will be carved up into individual rights.”<sup>20</sup> In such states forged from the still-recent processes of settler colonialism, leaders easily mobilized the rhetorical and conceptual overlap between colonization and removal to justify white political dominance.

As Indian populations in the East were diminished by removal, the rhetorical terrain shifted more towards identifying black populations as a threat to the foundations of white citizenship. During the 1820s and 1830s, the state of Ohio was one of the first places where the linkages between African colonization, exclusionary laws, and racial violence converged. As the first state carved out of the Old Northwest in 1802, Ohio would come to be defined by its status as a frontier between free Northern states and the slave states to the South. Because of this location, a considerable number of emancipated or refugee slaves from the neighboring South became residents of the state. From the beginning of statehood, members of the Ohio legislature constructed a series of laws aimed at containing the threatened influx of African Americans. For instance, in 1804

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 472-3.

Ohio passed a law requiring proof of free status, following this three years later with requirements to post bond.<sup>21</sup> Although such laws stigmatized the black population of the state, they were generally unsuccessful in achieving their goal of curbing immigration and, by some estimates, the black population of Ohio increased by more than one-hundred percent during the 1820s. By the mid-1820s, the African colonization movement had acquired momentum in Ohio, largely based on whites' perception that the state's black population was rapidly increasing.<sup>22</sup>

As a growing frontier city separated from slave territory by the Ohio River, Cincinnati was indicative of increasing racial anxiety in Midwest during this period. While the city experienced only modest growth in its black population before 1820, by 1829 the city directory listed 2,258 "blacks and mulattos" as residents of the city.<sup>23</sup> While many of Ohio's laws restricting black residency within the state were largely not enforced, the growing black community in Cincinnati caused many prominent white citizens to become concerned that the city would be perceived as a haven for freed slaves. Increasingly, white citizens began to demand action from the city by petitioning the Cincinnati City Council in 1828 and 1829 to take action to stem the tide of black immigrants. In 1829, the Cincinnati *Daily Gazette* proclaimed that if steps were not taken to stop the flow of African Americans into the city, "we shall be overwhelmed by an emigration at once wretched in its character and destructive in its consequences."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Thomas D. Matijasic, "The Foundations of Colonization: The Peculiar Nature of Race Relations in Ohio During the Early Ante-Bellum Period," *Queen City Heritage* 49, no. 4 (1991): 23-25.

<sup>22</sup> Eugene H Berwanger, *The Frontier Against Slavery: Western Anti-Negro Prejudice and the Slavery Extension Controversy* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 31.

<sup>23</sup> *The Cincinnati Directory for the Year 1829* (Cincinnati, OH: Robinson and Fairbank, 1829); Richard C Wade, "The Negro in Cincinnati, 1800-1830," *The Journal of Negro History* 39, no. 1 (January 1954): 43-44.

<sup>24</sup> *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, July 24, 1829.

The increase in public action against black residents in Cincinnati coincided with colonization's rise to prominence within the city. In the mid-1820s agents from the American Colonization Society found willing audiences in Ohio and branch of the ACS, as well as a number of local auxiliaries, were founded in the state. In 1825, Ohio boasted only one local branch of the Colonization Society, but five years later this number had risen to forty-five.<sup>25</sup> The Cincinnati Colonization Society was founded in 1826 and while the official membership of the organization numbered less than one-hundred and fifty persons, it boasted some of the most respected leaders of the city.<sup>26</sup> The prominent status of colonization supporters ensured that the idea would receive ample discussion in the city's newspaper and city council debates, particularly as it pertained to the ever-enlarging "problem" of black settlement within the city.

As the black residents were increasingly defined a social problem, colonization reinforced the idea that this was an immigration problem. The 1827 inaugural report of the Ohio State Colonization Society argued that the organization was essential because it could help solve the "alien" status of the state's black residents: "The object [of this society] is to remove from us that unfortunate race of men, who are now, as aliens on their native soil.—A people who do not, but in a small degree, participate in privileges and immunities of the community—and who, from causes in their nature inevitable and reasons insuperable; never can be admitted to the full enjoyment of those rights as fellow-citizens."<sup>27</sup> Since the beginnings of statehood, Ohio had developed the laws that

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<sup>25</sup> Leonard L Richards, *Gentlemen of Property and Standing Anti-abolition Mobs in Jacksonian America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1970), 34.

<sup>26</sup> Staudenraus, *The African Colonization Movement, 1816-1865*, 139; Wade, "The Negro in Cincinnati, 1800-1830," 54.

<sup>27</sup> David Smith, *The first annual report of the Ohio State Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour of the United States* (Columbus, OH, 1828), 1.

generated “alien” status for black residents, but colonization neatly justified this characteristic precisely when black immigration was beginning to be defined as a significant social problem. Cincinnati city officials attempted to renew enforcement of Ohio’s “black laws” and use them to definitively exclude blacks from citizenship and residency in the state. For two decades, the laws had been widely ignored, but, in 1829, city officials demanded that all African Americans register their free status and pay their required bond to remain in the state or else they would be forced to leave the city. Many whites believed that the city should have taken an even more forceful stance, solving the problem by actively removing the black population from the city. Some of these calls were met with pushback from other city officials who believed that forcible removal was an infringement upon the limited rights that African American residents of the state should possess.<sup>28</sup>

In the midst of Cincinnati’s citywide debate over evicting its black population, a colonization supporter published a newspaper article demanding that it “is the time for the Colonization Societies ‘to be up and doing.’”<sup>29</sup> A letter from the Cincinnati Colonization Society to the *African Repository* demonstrated that they were indeed supportive of enforcing existing state laws to rid the city of its black population. The CCS wrote that “we consider this class of people a serious evil among us” and that the organization supported using the law to “make arrangements for their final removal” because “the only remedy affords is, to colonize them in their mother country.”<sup>30</sup> The

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<sup>28</sup> Richard C Wade, *The Urban Frontier; Pioneer Life in Early Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Lexington, Louisville, and St. Louis* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 226; J. Reuben Sheeler, “The Struggle of the Negro in Ohio for Freedom,” *The Journal of Negro History* 31, no. 2 (April 1946): 210-212; Curry, *The Free Black in Urban America, 1800-1850: The Shadow of the Dream*, 104-5.

<sup>29</sup> Quoted from the Cincinnati Emporium in the “Colored People in Ohio,” *The Scioto Gazette*, July 22, 1829.

<sup>30</sup> “Coloured People in Ohio,” *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 5, no. 6 (August 1829).

fact that these calls for removal emerged alongside the renewed enforcement of the “black laws” illustrates how colonization provided a ready-made justification for the shift in public discourse over race in Cincinnati.

In the face of gathering forces for removal, a number of black residents in the city, led by James King, Henry Archer and Israel Lewis, had formulated a colonization plan of their own by forming a group called the Board of Coloured People in Cincinnati for the Purpose of Colonization. The hastily-established organization negotiated with the Canadian Land Company for 30,000 acres on the Sabel River in Western Canada. In the aftermath of the mob attacks, the leaders of this plan pushed forward and a portion of the city’s black population, by some estimates more than one thousand, left to settle in the Canadian colony.<sup>31</sup> The choice to call their organization a “colonization” board is somewhat puzzling considering that African colonization was tremendously unpopular with the black residents of Cincinnati, as in most Northern Black communities. There is considerable evidence to indicate that this group’s desire to leave Cincinnati and construct a colony in Canada was not merely “forced” by the situation on the ground in Ohio. The historian Nikki Taylor has recently suggested that this exodus was the culmination of the efforts for self-determination made by the community.<sup>32</sup> However, while some members of the community had previously investigated emigration to Canada, the plans were clearly accelerated by the ultimatums issued by the Cincinnati city government. The choice of colonization language was likely calibrated to appeal to

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<sup>31</sup> John Malvin, *The Autobiography of John Malvin* (Cleveland, OH: Leader Printing Company, 1879), 12-3; Wade, “The Negro in Cincinnati, 1800-1830,” 50-55; John M Werner, *Reaping the Bloody Harvest: Race Riots in the United States During the Age of Jackson, 1824-1849* (New York, NY: Garland, 1986), 56-7.

<sup>32</sup> Nikki M. Taylor, “Reconsidering the ‘Forced’ Exodus of 1829: Free Black Emigration From Cincinnati, Ohio to Wilberforce, Canada,” *Journal of African American History* 87 (Summer 2002): 283-302.

whites, who were already supportive of African colonization and believed that this black-led effort would coincide with aims of that movement. The organization's strategy to align itself with colonizationism was initially successful and the deadline to leave the city was extended after members of the black community made gestures that indicated their willingness to emigrate to Canada.<sup>33</sup>

In June of 1829, the city posted an ultimatum that those black residents unable to meet the requirements of residency should vacate the city in thirty days, later extending it to early September. In late August, some three hundred white residents, presumably unsatisfied with the pace of black removal from the city, decided to take matters into their own hands by terrorizing the Fourth Ward, a black section within the town. For nearly a week, rioters attacking the neighborhood by destroying a number buildings as well as attacking individuals and many black residents took to arms and defended themselves against attack. The rioting subsided after a few white rioters were wounded and killed during black defense of their community. According to the few existing accounts, unskilled white workers comprised a considerable portion of the rioters who believed that removing black competitors would have a positive effect on their wages.<sup>34</sup> An editorial published shortly after the August riot suggested the participation of unskilled white workers in the violence, as well as their tacit support for some plan of colonization: "[The workers are] animated by the prospect of high wages, which the sudden removal of fifteen hundred laborers from the city might occasion."<sup>35</sup> A few years before the riot a

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<sup>33</sup> Wade, "The Negro in Cincinnati, 1800-1830," 55.

<sup>34</sup> *Western Times* (Portsmouth, OH, August 22, 1829); *Western Star* (Lebanon, OH, August 29, 1829) quoted from the Cincinnati Sentinel; Richards, *Gentlemen of Property and Standing Anti-abolition Mobs in Jacksonian America*, 34-5; Henry Noble Sherwood, "The Movement in Ohio to Deport the Negro," *The Quarterly Publication of the Historical and Philosophical Society of Ohio* VII (June 1912).

<sup>35</sup> *Western Star* (Lebanon, OH), 29 August 1829 cited in Taylor, "Reconsidering the 'Forced' Exodus of 1829: Free Black Emigration From Cincinnati, Ohio to Wilberforce, Canada," 287.

Cincinnati colonization supporter argued that colonization had great potential in the city because African Americans were “a great and manifest drawback on the prosperity of this city” because “they make it difficult for the laboring poor white people to obtain employment.”<sup>36</sup> So while white workers were generally far removed from the prominent social circles that supported colonization, the idea was often framed in ways that appealed to racial solidarity across class lines.

The events in southern Ohio portended the convergence between exclusionary public policy and violent denials of citizenship in which African colonization acted as a common touchstone. While racial exclusion had always been at the core US national citizenship, the colonization movement gave justification for a white racial republic. In Ohio widespread concern over rising black population of the region in the late 1820s led to a symbiotic relationship between the discourses of colonization and violent expulsion over the course of the next decade in which Cincinnati, dubbed the “Queen City of Mobs,” would experience no less than three other violent attacks on the black community. Such attacks also drew varying degrees of inspiration from the colonization movement in 1836, 1839 and 1841.<sup>37</sup>

In New York City, the confluence of colonization and mob activity during the early 1830s grew from the fractures within the anti-slavery movement and eventually broadened into full scale assault on the city’s black population. Beginning in 1833, an escalating series of conflicts between an insurgent abolitionist movement and the

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<sup>36</sup> Robert S. Finley to R. R. Gurley, November 9, 1826, American Colonization Society Papers, Incoming Correspondence; cited in: Staudenraus, *The African Colonization Movement, 1816-1865*, 139.

<sup>37</sup> Carter G. Woodson, “The Negroes of Cincinnati Prior to the Civil War,” *The Journal of Negro History* 1, no. 1 (January 1916): 8, 10-15; Werner, *Reaping the Bloody Harvest: Race Riots in the United States During the Age of Jackson, 1824-1849*, 66-97; Richards, *Gentlemen of Property and Standing Anti-abolition Mobs in Jacksonian America*, 30.



established Colonization Society in New York led to the largest and most destructive example of an “anti-abolitionist riot” in the 1830s. As the abolitionist movement attracted members in the early 1830s, the organizational woes of the American Colonization Society multiplied. From 1832 to 1833, donations to the ACS fell by one third, prompting serious concern within the organization about the attacks by William Lloyd Garrison and his followers. In New York City this trend was reflected in the conversion the leader of the New York Anti-Slavery Society, Arthur Tappan, to abolitionism following his renouncement of colonization in 1833.<sup>38</sup>

In October of 1833, a group of the city’s most prominent colonizationists planned to descend on the inaugural meeting of the New York City Anti-Slavery Society in order to counter the “misrepresentations” of their organization made by abolitionists.<sup>39</sup> The protest was organized, in part, through incendiary articles by the city’s prominent pro-colonization newspapers the *New York Courier and Enquirer* and *New York Gazette* which also placed posters throughout the city promoting the event. Varying accounts of the mob identified the number of pro-colonization intruders at somewhere between three hundred and a thousand people. One observer described the mob as, “armed with dirks and daggers” and “animated by a spirit from which neither freedom of discussion, nor personal safety to their opponents could be expected.” While this incident miraculously concluded without bloodshed, it was one of the first of the “anti-abolitionist” mobs that would proliferate during the 1830s. It demonstrated African colonization’s ability to

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<sup>38</sup> Staudenraus, *The African Colonization Movement, 1816-1865*, 207-223; Richards, *Gentlemen of Property and Standing Anti-abolition Mobs in Jacksonian America*, 26-7.

<sup>39</sup> John Neal to R. R. Gurley, October 2, 1833, American Colonization Society Papers, Incoming Correspondence.

mobilize considerable numbers people against abolitionists.<sup>40</sup> Following this initial disruption of New York abolitionists in 1833, racial tensions continued to simmer in the city eventually leading to a more expansive and destructive attack on New York's black community in July of 1834. Two months prior to this riot, Lewis Tappan, brother of Arthur, and a leader of the Young Men's Anti-Slavery Society, planned a series of events that would stage the "funeral of colonization." One of the events featured a question and answer period with Thomas Brown, an African American man who had recently returned from Liberia. Brown's negative assessment of the conditions in Liberia caused the colonization supporters in attendance to disrupt the meeting with aggressive demands that the colonist be questioned by them.<sup>41</sup>

In July of 1834, the ongoing conflicts within New York's anti-slavery community boiled over into one of the most extensive anti-abolitionist riots of the era. On Wednesday, July 9, a group of would-be rioters congregated at the Chatham Street Chapel, where several pro-colonization newspapers had widely publicized that an abolitionist meeting was going to take place. When the mob learned that abolitionists had abandoned the meeting, they broke into the church and held an impromptu gathering there. One man addressed the crowd by detailing the disastrous effects of immediate emancipation in Haiti and, in response, the audience chanted vows to support colonization.<sup>42</sup> Later in the evening when men gathered to attack the home of the famous colonizationist-turned-abolitionist Lewis Tappan, the crowd reportedly yelled, "three

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<sup>40</sup> E. S. Abdy, *Journal or A Residence and Tour in The United States of North America, from April, 1833, to October, 1834, Vol. I* (London: John Murray, 1835), 389; Joel Tyler Headley, *The Great Riots of New York, 1712 to 1873* (New York, NY: E.B. Treat, 1873), 82-3.

<sup>41</sup> Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Lewis Tappan and the evangelical war against slavery*. (Cleveland, OH: Case Western Reserve University, 1969), 115-6.

<sup>42</sup> Richards, *Gentlemen of Property and Standing Anti-abolition Mobs in Jacksonian America*, 118.

cheers for James Watson Webb,” the colonizationist editor. Webb had been the cheerleader of the near-riot the previous October and had recently published several articles making claims that the city had been overrun by “negro mobs” who were inspired by abolitionism. Earlier during the day of the riot, Webb’s *Courier and Enquirer* had warned that if African Americans in the city continued to align themselves with abolitionists “the consequences to them will be most serious.”<sup>43</sup> In the days following the incident at the Chatham Street Chapel, the mob violence escalated considerably, first focusing on the properties owned by white abolitionists and later expanding to black neighborhoods and places of worship. After more than a week of open attacks on black communities within the city, Mayor Cornelius Lawrence deputized hundreds of private citizens to quell the riot as volunteer policemen. By Monday, July 14, the riots had largely ceased.<sup>44</sup>

Despite the direct impact of colonization rhetoric on participants in the riot, the raw racial antagonism behind their actions was repudiated by leaders of the colonization movement. Most advocates of African colonization in New York City attempted to publicly distance themselves from actions of those who rioted on their behalf. The *Spectator* noted that “we are happy to learn that nothing in these disturbances can be ascribed to the colonizationists” and one of the reporters went out of his way to note that colonizationists were not “abettors of the disturbance on the 4<sup>th</sup>” and “some known Colonizationists set their faces against that disturbance.”<sup>45</sup> On July 10, the Board of

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<sup>43</sup> *New York Evening Post*, July 12, 1834; John Jentz, “Artisans, Evangelicals, and the City: A Social History of Abolition and Labor Reform in Jacksonian New York” (Ph.D, New York, NY: City University of New York, 1977), 245-6; *New York Courier and Enquirer*, July 9, 1834.

<sup>44</sup> Werner, *Reaping the Bloody Harvest: Race Riots in the United States During the Age of Jackson, 1824-1849*, 138-140; Milo Osborn and C.W. Lawrence, July 12, 1834, Miscellaneous Riots, 1834, New York Historical Society.

<sup>45</sup> “Abolition Riots,” *New-York Spectator*, July 14, 1834.

Managers for the Colonization Society of New York quickly passed a resolution which asserted that, “certain tumultuous meetings have lately been held in this city without any previous knowledge on the part of this Board,” and recommended “to every friend of the cause of Colonization, to abstain from all encouragement of the same.”<sup>46</sup> The fact that colonization officials were so concerned with absolving the organization of blame indicates that the public had linked racial violence to the ideas contained in the colonization movement, even though much of the advocacy for colonization was generally couched in the polite rhetoric of benevolence.

Unlike many anti-abolitionist mobs, the rioters in July were largely composed of persons of middle to low economic status, primarily mechanics and young journeyman artisans. While some historians have cited labor competition as a partial motivation for the riot, Leonard Richards has shown that the average rioter was more likely to be a skilled or semi-skilled worker, rather than a common laborer who often competed for jobs with African Americans.<sup>47</sup> The riots revealed considerable mixture between race and class anxieties evident in the mob’s targeting of the Lewis and Arthur Tappan, who were also widely known as wealthy merchants who had founded the influential anti-union paper, the *Journal of Commerce*.<sup>48</sup> Working class activists, like George Henry Evans, were frustrated when workers expressed class-based grievances through such misdirected crowd actions. Evans was an important editor of two of the earliest labor papers in the

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<sup>46</sup> *New-York Spectator*, July 17, 1834.

<sup>47</sup> Richards, *Gentlemen of Property and Standing Anti-abolition Mobs in Jacksonian America*, 150-55; Paul A. Gilje, *The Road to Mobocracy: Popular Disorder in New York City, 1763-1834* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 165-6; In contrast to prevailing interpretations of the riot, Linda Kerber has posited that racialized labor competition was the central concern of rioters. Linda Kerber, “Abolitionists and Amalgamators: The New York City Race Riots of 1834,” *New York History* 48, no. 1 (January 1967): 165-6.

<sup>48</sup> On the complexity of race and class politics amongst workers involved in riot see: Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, 107-111; Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*, 131-135.

city, *The Man* and *The Working Man's Advocate* and hoped to channel increasing class consciousness into viable political mobilization. In Evans' view, such riots threatened the tentative support of the early labor movement for abolitionism. In an article in *The Man*, Evans registered disappointment in the participation of mechanics in the events that he referred to as "Colonization Riots" because they were "instigated by Colonization papers."<sup>49</sup> The *New York Evening Post* concurred with this assessment and noted that the pro-colonization *Journal of Commerce*, "advised violence, and invented rumours to call violent passions into exercise... It predicted a riot, and took all the means in its power to accomplish its prediction."<sup>50</sup>

While colonization auxiliaries generally had few active members who were laborers or skilled artisans, the dominant rhetoric of colonization still proved to be attractive to some workers through its rejection of racial mixing and black citizenship in the United States. The most popular interpretation for worker participation in these riots has been that the fear of "amalgamation" was combined with the close living proximity to both African Americans and abolitionists.<sup>51</sup> The sexualized fears of "race-mixing" built upon concerns about a multiracial national polity. This was the issue that African colonization's promise of separate national citizenships explicitly addressed. The French traveler, Gustave de Beaumont, based a chapter in his novel, *Marie or Slavery in the United States* on his first hand accounts of the 1834 New York riots. In the novel an anonymous passerby described the reason for the riot, "Oh, the amalgamationists are making the trouble; they want the Negroes to be the equals of the whites; so the whites

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<sup>49</sup> "Further Colonization Riots," *Workingman's Advocate*, July 12, 1834.

<sup>50</sup> "Five Points," *New York Evening Post*, July 12, 1834.

<sup>51</sup> Richards, *Gentlemen of Property and Standing Anti-abolition Mobs in Jacksonian America*; Werner, *Reaping the Bloody Harvest: Race Riots in the United States During the Age of Jackson, 1824-1849*.

are forced to revolt.”<sup>52</sup> Evident in this sentiment is that resistance to black citizenship rights was at the core of many rioters’ motivations.

Days after the riots, the pro-colonization New York *Spectator* condemned Rev. Peter Williams, a black clergyman from New York, for his criticisms of colonization. Williams had argued that his primary objection to the colonization movement was that it implicitly rejected of black citizenship in the United States. In a speech, he contended that his opposition to colonization “has extended no further than that Society has held out the idea that a colored man, however he may strive to make himself intelligent, virtuous, and useful, can never enjoy the privileges of a citizen of the United States, but must ever remain a degraded and oppressed being.” In response to Williams, the *Spectator* argued that supporters of colonization were not opposed to the “improvement of the colored race” and that they should become “intelligent, virtuous and useful...by diffusing civilization and Christianity in Africa.”<sup>53</sup> Historians examining such colonization-inspired violence have tended to characterize the role of this racial exclusion at the core of such violence without acknowledging that it was also implicated with the manner in which colonizationists frequently discussed black citizenship as achievable, yet necessarily displaced from the United States.

The rioters’ use of rhetoric from blackface minstrelsy shows how they engaged in a counterargument against defiant black leaders like Peter Williams by depicting a burlesque black citizenship using the minstrel trope of the “black dandy.”<sup>54</sup> In the months preceding the riot, several prominent pro-colonization newspapers were saturated

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<sup>52</sup> Gustave de Beaumont, *Marie, or Slavery in the United States* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1956), 124.

<sup>53</sup> “Address of Rev. Peter Williams,” *New-York Spectator*, July 17, 1834.

<sup>54</sup> On the “black dandy” see: Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*, 131-135.

with articles that defended colonization against abolitionist critiques and included articles which warned against abolitionist efforts to “amalgamate the races.” The *Commercial Advertiser*, one of the papers most closely aligned with the ACS, distanced itself and the colonization movement more broadly, from implication with the riots despite admitting sympathy with rioters who they claimed were reacting to the “absurd and outrageous project of the abolitionists to force public sentiment, and mulattoize our posterity.”<sup>55</sup> On the first day of the riots, the *Commercial Advertiser* printed a satire of a classified advertisement that was published in the *Liberator* in which a white man asked for the hand of an “intelligent Colored Woman.” The mock classified ad was written by a fictional black man who announced that he was “willing to malgumate and jist as lib marry white woman as any.” The article was penned by the blackface-inspired “Bandy Pomp” and written in the style of “bobolition” broadsides which mocked the notion of black citizenship and class ascendancy.<sup>56</sup> This article was republished in the New York *Spectator* three days later, after several days of escalating riotous behavior. Racist burlesques of black respectability were published alongside articles that calmly promoted the success of Liberian colonization. During the riots, this rhetoric of racial thinking was expressed alongside colonization sentiments that reflected the raw violence that undergirded the respectable racialism of the colonization movement. On July 13 rioters broke into the African Methodist Church and occupied it with one man beginning “a discourse in mock negro style” which was interrupted by a group of people who “struck

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<sup>55</sup> *New York Commercial Advertiser*, July 10, 1834.

<sup>56</sup> On the rhetoric of “Bobolition” broadsides and denials of black citizenship see: Sweet, *Bodies Politic*, 379-392; Melish, *Disowning Slavery*, 171-9.

up a *Jim Crow* chorus.”<sup>57</sup> In their disavowal of rioters, the pro-colonization newspapers demonstrated the tension between their violent rejection of black pretenses at equality and their assumed level of respectability associated with the colonization movement.

While there is little evidence that active members of the colonization society participated in the riots, violence and anti-citizenship discourse were clearly associated with the movement in the wake of mob action. Edward Abdy, the English traveler and abolitionist wrote that the attacks on “the churches and houses of the colored people” in the 1834 New York riot “gave convincing proofs that the friends of the Colonization Society are not always the friends of those whose welfare it professes to promote.”<sup>58</sup> In a letter to a fellow abolitionist, Elizur Wright recounted a story of an African American man from New York who was told by a colonization supporter that the agitation of abolitionists would lead to the destruction of black residents if they did not go to Liberia. Wright noted that he had heard of many attempts by colonizationists to “to take advantage of the riots.”<sup>59</sup> The message was loud and clear to free African Americans in the city. A month after the riots, the *Working Man’s Advocate* published an anonymous letter signed to “A Poor Colored Man” which argued that the “late *Colonization riots*” have taught “the colored people who are their *true friends*.” The letter concluded with a few short lines of verse: “We say that: Men who ask “our lives to take,”/ In Afric’s clime to roam / Disclose their friendship like a snake / By biting us at *home*.”<sup>60</sup> While the New York branch of the ACS kept an arms length from rioters, black communities clearly

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<sup>57</sup> *Commercial Advertiser*, July 7, 1834; “A Black Wife Wanted,” *New-York Spectator*, July 10, 1834; “From Liberia,” *New-York Spectator*, July 10, 1834; *The Man*, July 16, 1834.

<sup>58</sup> Abdy, *Journal or A Residence and Tour in The United States of North America, from April, 1833, to October, 1834, Vol. III*, 115.

<sup>59</sup> Elizur Wright to Amos Phelps, August 8, 1834, Elizur Wright Papers, Library of Congress cited in; Werner, *Reaping the Bloody Harvest: Race Riots in the United States During the Age of Jackson, 1824-1849*, 142.

<sup>60</sup> *Workingman’s Advocate*, August 16, 1834.



recognized the mutually reinforcing relationship between colonization and informal violence.

Less than a month after the extended series of mob actions in New York City, white workers attacked the black community of Philadelphia in a strikingly familiar scenario. Edward Abdy, the English abolitionist who had observed the New York disturbances a month earlier, noted that the Philadelphia riots were “similar, in their origin and objects, to what had previously occurred at New York... the end aimed at, being the expulsion of the blacks.”<sup>61</sup> As in Ohio, the Pennsylvania state legislature had produced laws aimed at marginalizing free African Americans at the same time that colonization efforts supplied the ideological context for violent denials of black citizenship in the streets. In 1829, the state’s legislative assembly publicly endorsed the efforts of the American Colonization Society and two years later passed legislation that outlawed black immigration into the state.<sup>62</sup> However, unlike in New York, the initial disturbances that led to the riots in Philadelphia were not instigated by warring factions within the anti-slavery community. In Philadelphia, a personal conflict between a group of black and white men at an amusement park resulted in a series of retaliatory gestures by white mobs, and eventually expanded to premeditated attacks on black neighborhoods beginning on August 12 1834. Over three nights of extensive rioting, two African American men were killed and thousands of dollars worth of black-owned properties were destroyed.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Abdy, *Journal or A Residence and Tour in The United States of North America, from April, 1833, to October, 1834, Vol. III*, 317.

<sup>62</sup> Litwack, *North of Slavery; the Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860*, 69.

<sup>63</sup> John Runcie, “‘Hunting the Nigs’ in Philadelphia: The Race Riot of August 1834,” *Pennsylvania History*, no. 39 (1972): 190.

While playing a much smaller role than in New York, inflammatory articles by newspaper editors helped to rouse the passions of rioters. A report commissioned by the Pennsylvania Abolition Society documented that in the days leading up to riots, colonizationists made several public addresses with disparaging comments about the city's black population. These comments were echoed in articles published in the *Commercial Intelligencer* and the *Philadelphia Inquirer* which sought to "feed the fiendish prejudice against the colored man."<sup>64</sup> On the day when full-fledged riots broke out, one of the city's pro-colonization papers commented on the perceived improprieties exhibited by black laborers in the city: "Among the evils to which our good citizens are subjected, there is not more universally complained of, than of the conduct of the black porters who infest our markets...Is there no way, Mr. Editor, in which the persons of our citizens can be protected from their assaults? Is there no way in which the rudeness and violence of these ruffians can be prevented?"<sup>65</sup> One white observer of the riot recommended African colonization as a solution to such problems after describing two black neighborhoods which displayed "instances of loathsome disease, exhibitions of nudity or something near to it, intemperance, profanity, vice and wretchedness, in all the most disgusting forms."<sup>66</sup>

Such characterizations of the black working poor were common to the rhetoric employed by the colonization auxiliary within the state, which regarded the "immorality"

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<sup>64</sup> Acting Committee, Pennsylvania Abolition Society, "Report on the Aug. 12-14, 1834 Riot Against Blacks by a Philadelphia Mob", 1834, Pennsylvania Abolition Society Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania; Cited in: Werner, *Reaping the Bloody Harvest: Race Riots in the United States During the Age of Jackson, 1824-1849*, 170; Edwin Atlee, "The Mobs in Philadelphia—Their Causes—Their Character," *New York Emancipator*, August 26, 1834; Edward Abdy also noted that several colonization-friendly newspapers played a role in stirring potential rioters: Abdy, *Journal or A Residence and Tour in The United States of North America, from April, 1833, to October, 1834, Vol. III*, 318.

<sup>65</sup> *Commercial Herald*, August 11, 1834.

<sup>66</sup> *Poulson's American Daily Advertiser*, August 20, 1834.

of Pennsylvania's free black residents as grounds for their removal and the negation of any remaining citizenship rights. Shortly after the riot, a speech by Job Tyson, a prominent colonization leader in the city, observed that black representation in the state's prison system was far higher than their proportion of the population. He also objected to the fact that the state formally considered "freemen of colour" to be "free citizens" they are "yet very low in the scale of moral virtue." In advocating colonization as a solution, Tyson cited James Mechlin, a former colonial governor of Liberia, who claimed that the "morals of the colonists" were "much better than those of the people of the United States" where "you will find more drunkards, more profane swearers and Sabbath-breakers."<sup>67</sup> Within the logic of colonization, the absence of barriers to social elevation in Liberia would transform the black anti-citizen into an exemplar of temperance, productivity, and civic virtue.

While this language of racial distinction often relied on claims that African Americans were unable to adapt to requirements of citizenship in the United States, some white workers in Philadelphia also demonstrated racial resentment over the class pretensions of successful African Americans. This had also been an issue for New York rioters who targeted 'respectable' black residents and referenced minstrel show burlesques of black respectability and citizenship. Research on the Philadelphia riot has revealed that young unskilled workers comprised a significant portion of the mobs and the historian John Runcie has noted that even amongst tradesmen and skilled laborers most "fell at the lower end of the occupation scale" which earned "little more than an

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<sup>67</sup> Job R. Tyson, *Discourse before the Young Men's Colonization Society of Pennsylvania : delivered October 24, 1834, in St. Paul's Church, Philadelphia, 1834*, 14-16.

unskilled laborer.”<sup>68</sup> For some of these workers, competition with African Americans for unskilled or semi-skilled labor may have been a partial factor. The Philadelphia’s City Committee’s official report concluded that one of the riot’s causes was the prevailing sentiment among “white laborers” that “certain portions of our community, prefer to employ colored people.”<sup>69</sup> This was also reflected in incidents of post-riot racial violence in which a gang of whites attacked black workers at a Philadelphia coal yard.<sup>70</sup> Edward Abdy noted that this class resentment was bound up with the ideas of colonization among some rioters: “The mob consisted chiefly of young men—many of them tradesmen. One of the sufferers, a man of wealth and great respectability, was told afterwards by a white that he would not have been molested if he had not, by refusing to influence the black community in Philadelphia to go to Liberia, prevented others from leaving the country.”<sup>71</sup> In this case, it was the conspicuous success of an African American man, combined with his refusal to go Liberia, that earned the wrath of white crowds. Although rioters were often motivated by claims of black “degradation,” this episode illustrates that some also expressed sentiments, following colonization’s racial republicanism, which acknowledged black capacity for economic prosperity or citizenship. However, by making separation a prerequisite for the realization of these ideals, rioters worked to maintain the privilege of whiteness by linking citizenship to racialized conceptions of nationalism.

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<sup>68</sup> Runcie, “‘Hunting the Nigs’ in Philadelphia: The Race Riot of August 1834,” 192-195, 200-201.

<sup>69</sup> “Town Meeting.--Riots.,” *Hazard’s Register of Pennsylvania, Devoted to the Preservation of Facts and Documents, and Every Kind of Useful Information Respecting the State of Pennsylvania* 14, no. 13 (September 27, 1834).

<sup>70</sup> *Niles’ Weekly Register*, August 30, 1834.

<sup>71</sup> Abdy, *Journal or A Residence and Tour in The United States of North America, from April, 1833, to October, 1834, Vol. III*, 324.

Such attacks were likely prompted by the fact that a segment of Philadelphia's black community exhibited uncommon prosperity for the era. One the black community's most prominent gentlemen, James Forten, was so respected that the mayor of Philadelphia honored his request for police protection in a black neighborhood during the riot. Forten's long-standing opposition to colonization illustrated how broader discussions of African colonization became implicated with the rioters' actions and the broader politics of citizenship and social class in the city. He was a driving force in organizing opposition to Pennsylvania's recently-passed law that outlawed black immigration into the state. When the legislation was being debated, he led a group of black citizens to oppose the implementation of the law and its connection to the idea of African colonization. In response to the renewed discussion of colonization that followed from the passage of new laws, Forten caustically confronted to the colonizationist logic behind the immigration restrictions and their implicit implementation of his own claims to US citizenship: "I have since lived and labored in a useful employment, have acquired property, and have paid taxes in this city. Here I have dwelt until I am nearly sixty years of age... yet some ingenious gentlemen have recently discovered that I am still an African; that a continent three thousand miles, and more, from the place where I was born, is my native country. And I am advised to go home."<sup>72</sup> With this history of opposition by the black community in Philadelphia to the growth of colonization-inspired rhetoric, it is not surprising that Forten's fifteen-year-old son, as well as several other visibly wealthy members of the community, were targeted by rioters.<sup>73</sup> Within this

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<sup>72</sup> Samuel Joseph May, *Some Recollections of our Antislavery Conflict* (Boston, MA: Fields, Osgood, & Co., 1869), 287.

<sup>73</sup> Gary B Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 274.

context, it is difficult to discern whether such an attacks were motivated more by Forten's defiant claims to citizenship, his wealth and social status, or his high profile hostility to colonization. While the Philadelphia riot of August 1834 was not as much a quintessential "colonization riot" as the New York riots it followed, it demonstrated there was no need for the direct intervention by the city's leading colonizationists for the ideas of the movement to play a significant role in the rhetoric of class, citizenship and racial exclusion.<sup>74</sup>

Anti-black violence inflected with colonization rhetoric was not limited to major urban areas. In Columbia, Pennsylvania a town of just over two-thousand residents, colonization played a very direct role in a riot which took place only days after the Philadelphia riot and less than a hundred miles away. The violence in Columbia began on August 16 when some white residents went into the black neighborhoods of Columbia and began to destroy property for unknown reasons. This pattern of random violence continued for the next two nights, culminating on August 19, when a mob of more than fifty people gathered to terrorize the neighborhood after a rumor spread that a white man had been shot by an African American. After this series of events, many of the town's black residents fled into hiding outside of town for several days until tensions subsided.<sup>75</sup>

Columbia's residents were aware of the colonization-inspired racial violence that had already taken place over the summer of 1834, but they had been exposed to African colonization for several years. In 1830, white citizens formed their own local auxiliary of

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<sup>74</sup> Runcie, "'Hunting the Nigs' in Philadelphia: The Race Riot of August 1834," 215. John Runcie has argued that colonization only played a minimal role in the riot. I agree that it was not a primary factor, but I'm more interested in how its logic was embedded within the context in which rioters acted, rather than a search for direct inspiration.

<sup>75</sup> *Columbia Spy (Pennsylvania)*, August 23, 1834; William Frederic Worner, "The Columbia Race Riots," *Lancaster County Historical Society Papers* 26 (1922): 177-8.

the Colonization Society and Columbia's only newspaper featured numerous articles supporting colonization and reporting on the progress of the Liberian colony.<sup>76</sup> One editorial in the *Columbia Spy* argued for the necessity of colonization by pointing to the town's black residents: "With some few gratifying exceptions what are they but an amalgamation of ignorance and wretchedness ... Nearly all from their vicious and idle habits acquired in slavery, are incapable of maintaining their families. Their few pennies, the produce of their toil and sweat are taken from them and a jug of rum is given in return.—Thus they spend the summer and county jail or poor-house affords them an asylum in the winter." The supporters of colonization in Columbia situated colonization as a solution that would benefit the fortunes of the white community at large.<sup>77</sup>

Columbia's black community resisted the increasing influence of colonization and in 1831 a group of African Americans organized against the local auxiliary only a few months after it was founded. In a statement distributed around town, they denounced the colonization idea in no uncertain terms: "Resolved, That we will resist all attempts to send us to the burning shores of Africa. We verily believe that if by an extraordinary perversion of nature, every man and woman, in one night, should become white, the colonization society would fall like lightning to the earth." Columbia's black citizens identified one core thrust of colonization: the maintenance of white racial citizenship. They also resolved "that we will not be duped out of our rights as freemen, by colonists, nor by any other combination of men. All the encomiums pronounced upon Liberia can

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<sup>76</sup> Leroy T. Hopkins, "The Emergence of Black Columbia, 1726-1861," *Journal of the Lancaster County Historical Society* 89 (1985); "Philadelphia Riots," *Columbia Spy (Pennsylvania)*, August 23, 1834; William Frederic Worner, "The Lancaster County Colonization Society," *Lancaster County Historical Society Papers* 26 (1922): 9.

<sup>77</sup> B., "Remarks on the rise, condition, and prospect of the colony at Liberia. No. 4," *Columbia Spy (Pennsylvania)*, June 14, 1832.

never form the least temptation to induce us to leave our native soil, to emigrate to a strange land.”<sup>78</sup> Black residents of Columbia challenged the claims of republican liberty made by colonization supporters by noting that their “rights as freemen” were under attack and would be undermined by trading them for dubious prospects for citizenship in another nation.

While coverage of the riot by the *Columbia Spy* denounced the unlawful actions of the white rioters, the editors demonstrated their sympathy for their intentions and the scheme of colonization.<sup>79</sup> Newspaper accounts of the events revealed the extent to which colonizationist discourse inflected white interpretations of the riot. An editorial claimed that “a reflecting mind” must be “impressed with the necessity of colonizing the blacks and getting them from among us.” The author went on to suggest that:

they will continue to be jealously regarded—a cause of contention among the whites and exposed at any time to become the victims of their hatred. The two races never can, never ought to be amalgamated, and the spectacle of two distinct nations living commingled together under the same government, entirely disconnected one from another and the one necessarily inferior to the other, is one which has never yet been exhibited upon the globe, unless where slavery existed—where the weak were kept in subjection by the strong arm of power and oppression, and where the sinews and limbs of the one class were taxed to do the labor of the other.<sup>80</sup>

In describing the free black population as a “nation” that was “necessarily inferior” to the white nation it was forced to inhabit, the editorial adopted the rhetoric of colonizationists who argued that African Americans could only receive political citizenship through the creation of a racially-based republic on the continent of Africa.

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<sup>78</sup> *Liberator*, August 20, 1831; Worner, “The Lancaster County Colonization Society,” 109.

<sup>79</sup> For editorial support for colonization in the local paper see: *Columbia Spy (Pennsylvania)*, May 24, 1834. The article stated, “We are happy to have it in our power to offer to our readers arguments and facts favorable to the Colonization plan—the only feasible and justifiable one both for whites and blacks”.

<sup>80</sup> *Columbia Spy (Pennsylvania)*, August 23, 1834.



A few days after the mob actions, a meeting was held at Columbia town hall for “working men and other favourable to their cause,” which indicated that labor competition was among the grievances that some whites had against black residents of the town. While those meeting officially denounced the unlawful disturbances of the rioters, they implicitly supported their aims. The meeting drafted a statement that predicted doom for white workers in the area, “As the negroes now pursue occupations once the sole province of the whites, may we not in course of time expect to see them engaged in every branch of mechanical business, and their known disposition to work for almost any price may well excite our fears, that mechanics at no distant period will scarcely be able to procure a mere subsistence.” The white working men of Columbia also defined their protest against black residents as one against amalgamation, which they believed would threaten the value of their labor and their status as citizens, “The cause of the late disgraceful riots throughout every part of the country may be traced to the efforts of those who would wish the poor whites to amalgamate with the black.” They warned that “the poor whites may gradually sink into the degraded condition of the negroes—that, like them, they may be slaves and tools, and that the blacks are to witness their disgusting servility to their employers and their unbearable insolence to the working class.” In the view of some of Columbia’s white workers, “amalgamation” was a specific class-based threat to the value of their labor power and status as independent citizens. In order to protect against such a possibility, workers concluded that “the Colonization Society ought to be supported by all the citizens favorable to the removal of the blacks from this country.”<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> *Columbia Spy (Pennsylvania)*, August 30, 1834.

In Columbia, colonization played a distinct rhetorical role in the effort to remove the city's black population. Following the riot, white citizens attempted to organize themselves to buy off the property of some of the town's more prosperous black residents. As in other riots, some of these prominent black gentlemen were targeted during the violence, including Steven Smith, a successful lumber and coal dealer, who confronted many of the mobs himself in defense of his property. White workers felt threatened both by competition with a laboring black population and, as in Philadelphia and New York, the conspicuous, if exceptional, examples of black prosperity. In the aftermath of riot, local white businessmen banded together in an attempt to force out prosperous blacks. The *Spy* reported that the "[citizens of the town] recommend the subject to the attention of capitalists; having no doubt that, independent of every other consideration, the lots in question would be a profitable investment of their funds, and that if a commencement were once made nearly all of the colored freeholders of the borough would sell as fast as funds could be raised to meet the purchases."<sup>82</sup> These efforts to remove both black workers and black owners of capital from the town illustrate how colonization could unite whites together across class lines. It also shows that the vicious rhetoric used to describe the "degraded" nature of blacks was contradicted in part by the success, however limited, of Columbia's black men of property, who were urged to leave not with threats of colonization, but with property buyouts. Despite the fact that some black businessmen like Smith attempted to liquidate their property, there was apparently no mass exodus of black residents from Columbia.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> *Columbia Spy (Pennsylvania)*, September 6, 1834.

<sup>83</sup> "Notice," *Columbia Spy (Pennsylvania)*, September 13, 1834; Nearly a month after the initial violence, another mob attacked several houses inhabited by African Americans, allegedly in reaction to the recent

A few years after the riots, the 1837 Pennsylvania Constitutional Convention illustrated the persisting currency of colonization through its legal negation of black citizenship. One way that delegates referenced colonization was in their consideration of African Americans as an “alien” population when addressing a clause that would have prohibited black immigration as well as that of other “foreigners.” Delegate William Darlington attempted to insert language into the constitution which would not just restrict the immigration of free persons of all colors, but “all foreigners” who sought entrance in to the state. Some delegates, such as John Cummin, took issue with the potential application to Irish immigrants: “They came as freemen, to make use of their industry as their means of support ... [and] to associate such a people with the blacks, was an insult not to be endured.” Darlington qualified his amendment by saying that he “presumed the same difficulty would stand in the way of prohibiting them [free persons of color] as in prohibiting the emigration of free white citizens.”<sup>84</sup> Another delegate, Thomas Earle, argued that restricting immigration was an unnecessary step given that the population of Pennsylvania “must continue to be a white population, and I have no fear that the black population here, can ever increase faster than the white.” Earle compared the nativism to colonizationism by noting that there were “particular classes of citizens” that had “feelings” against both Irish and African American emigrants. However, he dismissed the wisdom of such sentiments because he contended that the state was better off with these populations because they served a useful role within the division of labor: “There is no doubt that, in all our intercourse with both the Irish and the coloured emigrant, we get

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marriage of a black man and a white woman. See: “Occurrences of a Night,” *Columbia Spy* (Pennsylvania), October 4, 1834.

<sup>84</sup>Pennsylvania, *Proceedings and Debates of the Convention of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, to Propose Amendments to the Constitution, Commenced ... at Harrisburg, on the Second Day of May, 1837*, vol. 2 (Harrisburg: Printed by Packer, Barrett, and Parke, 1837), 200-1.

the best of the bargain. They submit themselves to do menial service, and we get the profit.”<sup>85</sup> While some delegates likely agreed with Earle’s contention that the state benefited from existence of both groups of exploited immigrants, they did not so easily believe his assurance that the state’s white citizenry could be protected without measures such as colonization.

A large portion of the Pennsylvania convention was devoted to whether the word “white” would be inserted in the state constitution before the word “freeman” to eliminate any ambiguity in the legal treatment of African Americans, who had enjoyed nominal citizenship rights since the abolition of slavery in Pennsylvania. Several convention delegates took pains to note that their desire to exclude black residents from voting in Pennsylvania came not from racial prejudice but out of respect for white citizens of the state. Charles Brown stated that he “had no prejudices against the negro on account of color.” Likely referring to individuals like James Forten, Brown claimed to know, “negroes living in the county of Philadelphia, who were fully as competent to exercise the right of voting as any man in the city or county of Philadelphia.” Yet, he wondered “Would any man place the poorest white man, who goes to the polls with the highest and deposits his vote as fearlessly, on the same footing with the negro? ... Did any one entertain the belief that the negro should be raised to the level of the poorest man who was fit enjoy and exercise the rights of sovereignty?” Despite Brown’s objection to the extension of sovereignty within US borders, he suggested that “the negro is free to select a country for his residence where he can enjoy the same political privileges which

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<sup>85</sup> Pennsylvania, *Proceedings and Debates of the Convention of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, to Propose Amendments to the Constitution, Commenced ... at Harrisburg, on the Second Day of May, 1837*, vol. 5 (Harrisburg: Printed by Packer, Barrett, and Parke, 1837), 456.

white citizens possess here.”<sup>86</sup> Although Brown acknowledged black ability to possess these privileges, Brown urged his fellow white delegates to take a strong stand against giving African Americans any citizenship rights by sending a clear message: “we do not wish you to come here; it is not in our interest, nor to yours, that you should inhabit the same soil, mingle in the same social circles, and we will not invite you here. We will place a few barriers between you and us. We will offer you a premium to go elsewhere, for this is not your home.” However, he believed this strong language should be accompanied by “inducements to leave us, and go to a climate and country, in which they would be comfortable and happy, and not be degraded as they are now.”<sup>87</sup> Brown’s acknowledgement that African Americans were capable of citizenship while he wished they would attain it anywhere but the United States, captures how the concept of colonization attempted to relieve the tension between the desire to uphold liberal universalism while protecting and enshrining the sanctity of a white racial republic.

The potential for black self-governance was often at the heart of the discussion and many whites argued that African colonization would provide a way to demonstrate they were worthy of citizenship rights. Walter Forward, a delegate who did not support granting black residents voting rights in the state, claimed that if African colonization proved that “the colored population were [sic] entirely capable of self-government, that slavery would be yielded up, and better feelings and better principles will universally prevail throughout this extensive country.”<sup>88</sup> While many suggested that a distant colony

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<sup>86</sup> Pennsylvania, *Proceedings and Debates of the Convention of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, to Propose Amendments to the Constitution, Commenced ... at Harrisburg, on the Second Day of May, 1837*, vol. 9 (Harrisburg: Printed by Packer, Barrett, and Parke, 1837), 389.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Pennsylvania, *Proceedings and Debates of the Convention of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, to Propose Amendments to the Constitution, Commenced ... at Harrisburg, on the Second Day of May, 1837*, vol. 10 (Harrisburg: Printed by Packer, Barrett, and Parke, 1837), 8.

could be a way for blacks to demonstrate their ability to govern themselves, they usually did not connect this to the possibility that blacks could be elevated to achieve the same rights within the United States. The delegate George Woodward also echoed these sentiments: “We may love the virtues which they [African Americans] display, and we may sympathize in their sufferings, and alleviate their wants, but white men will not consent to the self debasement, which political and social equality with them would imply.” Woodward argued that, “by giving the black the right of suffrage, an everlasting obstacle is thrown in the way of colonization—it will chain them to us ... Undoubtedly they deserve civil and religious freedom... let them go with our political principles and establish governments after our model, which may protect them, and exert salutary effects on their fellow Africans, now ignorant of all the blessings of civilization.” While Woodward implied that white citizenship was threatened within the United States, when this same ideal of citizenship was reproduced beyond US borders it would make persons of African descent a “great, free and prosperous people.”<sup>89</sup>

During the late 1820s and 1830s, mob actions and state laws aimed at black communities used the colonization movement’s language to justify denials of black citizenship rights. The race riot provided a venue for the expression multiple grievances held by white rioters, including fears of racial-mixing, resentment about black class ascendancy and anxieties from job competition. Far from being merely anti-abolitionist, the riots demonstrated that the rhetoric of African colonization could play a distinct role in facilitating violent retribution aimed at black communities. These calculated acts of terror merged with colonizationist arguments by undermining African Americans’ claims for political and economic equality, identifying black populations as foreign and

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 10:23.

illegitimate, and by arguing that the expulsion of black communities was a practical and achievable goal. Moreover, the inflections of colonizationist thinking in these mobs demonstrates that these ideas had much broader base of support beyond the coterie of elite and middle class reformers who composed the ranks of ACS auxiliaries. Despite the waning fortunes of the national colonization movement, the idea of colonization had proven to be both popular and malleable to white audiences.

### **‘THEY MAY IN SOME OTHER PLACE ENJOY HUMAN RIGHTS’**

By the mid-1840s, the use of state constitutional conventions to address the citizenship status of free black populations had been followed in to several Midwestern states. During the 1840s and early 1850s, the constitutional conventions of Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Indiana, and Ohio attempted to solidify the basis for white republicanism by defining the position of black residents within their borders. As in Pennsylvania, the debates in these conventions demonstrated the relationship between the ideas of colonization and the erosion of black rights in the North. While delegates discussed several topics concerning African Americans, ranging from immigration restriction to suffrage and property rights, colonization surfaced in nearly every debate related to the nature of black citizenship. These discourses of citizenship took place alongside process of formal independence for Liberia, making the relationship between racialized citizenship and nationhood a particularly salient argument for convention delegates. Delegates commonly accepted that black populations could realize their rights in Liberia and this significantly undergirded their efforts to delegitimize black political, economic, and social existence within the United States.

Just as in Ohio and Pennsylvania during the 1830s, white residents of northern regions near slave states continued to worry that black immigrants would enter and undermine white citizenship in their states. These anxieties increased as slave states made it increasingly difficult for free African Americans to exist within their borders. For instance, in 1849 Kentucky passed laws that forced free African Americans to leave the state upon penalty of hard labor in the state penitentiary. During Indiana's constitutional convention, delegate Joseph Robinson argued that, "the action of an adjoining State, has rendered it necessary that the State of Indiana should defend herself from the accumulation of the negro race within her borders."<sup>90</sup> Daniel Read concurred, "Self-defence, sir, is the first law of our nature ... we are surrounded by slave states and consequently have and are always liable to have a constant immigration from those States both of fugitive slaves and of free persons of color."<sup>91</sup> This perceived "attack" by black immigrants spurred discussions of black rights and animated delegates' renewed appeals for colonization.

Some convention delegates made no direct references to African colonization but revealed that colonization logic thoroughly infused their thinking. The passage of laws to severely restrict inter-state immigration was a subject of debate at several conventions and discussion of these laws was often linked to African colonization. Benjamin Bond, a delegate in the Illinois convention, introduced a resolution that would prohibit further immigration into the state and argued that black emigrants should not be allowed into the state "unless we go the full length of admitting the negro to a participation of all the privileges of freemen ... Will we do it? For my own part I answer, nay. Nature has

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<sup>90</sup> "Proceedings and Debates of the Constitutional Convention," *Indiana State Journal* (November 9, 1850).

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*



drawn a line between them and ourselves.” In support of the same law, James Brockman said, “The negroes have no rights in common with the people, they can have no rights; the distinction between the two races is so great as to preclude the possibility of their ever living together upon equal terms.”<sup>92</sup> Later delegate Bond argued, “The only true project in my opinion by which we can be entirely freed from this nuisance, is by sending the blacks to some other country, under the guidance of a benevolent institution like the Colonization Society.”<sup>93</sup> Bond implicitly acknowledged that African Americans deserved the enjoyment of full rights, he also argued that this was essentially unthinkable outside of the framework offered by African colonization.

At the Indiana convention, George Gordon argued that immigration restriction and colonization would work hand in hand, “if we prohibit the further immigration and settlement of Negroes in our State, and at the same time make provision for the gradual colonization of such Negroes and their descendants as may be in our State at the time of the adoption of this Constitution, the time will come when there will not be a Negro within the limits of our State.” Gordon concluded that, “exclusion and colonization are inseparable; and I will not vote for the one without a fair prospect that the other will be adopted.”<sup>94</sup> Other Indiana delegates approved of this “practical” approach to exclusion and backed such projections up with numbers: “If you hope to rid the State of the number of negroes in it in twenty years, then the appropriation should be \$20,000 or \$30,000.”<sup>95</sup>

The idea that African Americans were a foreign element within Indiana’s population

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<sup>92</sup> *The Constitutional Debates of 1847* (Springfield, IL: Trustees of the Illinois State Historical Library, 1919), 203.

<sup>93</sup> “Illinois Constitutional Convention- June 24, 1847,” *Sangamon Journal*, July 1, 1847.

<sup>94</sup> George A. Gordon, “Negroes,” *Indiana State Journal*, Feb 7, 1851.

<sup>95</sup> John S. Newman, “Proceedings and Debates of the Constitutional Convention,” *Indiana State Journal*, February, 6 1851.

allowed the issue to be framed in terms of protecting the state's white political sovereignty within the state, "[this amendment] merely proposes to guard the State of Indiana from the influence of the black pauper population of Kentucky and other States."<sup>96</sup>

Even delegates who opposed the specific aims of black immigration restriction accepted the colonizationist terms of the debate by situating African Americans as a foreign population. Arguing against the anti-immigration act, Milton Gregg made the direct connection between the purposes of the law and the type of legal status afforded to foreign immigrants stating that,

If the poor negro, whose presence has all at once become so hateful to us, had migrated to this country of his own free will and accord, and if we still found him voluntarily forsaking his own foreign home, to seek an asylum in this boasted land of liberty and free government, we might with more propriety close our doors against him, and bid him go back to the shores of Africa from whence he came.

While Gregg would hypothetically close immigration to new African immigrants, he explicitly advocated a notion of US citizenship based on a white Western European definition: "I would say to the honest German, come; to the open-hearted Irishman, come; to the burley Englishman and staid Scotchman, come; to the impulsive Frenchman and jealous Spaniard, come ... enjoy with us all the blessings of civil and religious liberty." Despite Gregg's aversion to a broad definition of US citizenship that included Africans, he claimed that such an immigration restriction was unconstitutional and that blacks should be recognized as citizens. He stated, "To my mind the proposition is very clear, that if free Negroes and mulattoes are citizens of the State—and if citizens of the

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<sup>96</sup> John L. Spann. "Proceedings and Debates of the Constitutional Convention," *Indiana State Journal*, Feb, 6 1851.

State, are they not necessarily citizens of the United States? I say, sir, if they are esteemed citizens in the eye of the law, then this inhibitory clause must of necessity contravene the spirit, if not the very letter of the supreme fundamental law of the land.”<sup>97</sup>

Other opponents of exclusionary laws posed their arguments against restriction of black immigration specifically within the framework of colonization. Jessie Norton, a delegate at the Illinois convention, argued that, “this resolution is unequal, unjust and opposed to the first principles of free government. These colored people came to this country not of their own accord, we brought them here, they cannot get away; it is said to colonize them, how? They cannot colonize themselves.”<sup>98</sup> Alluding to the ongoing war between the United States and Mexico he observed, “Our armies are now fighting at the south and the probability is that we will extend the area of our freedom, and that States are to come into the Union with people of every stripe and color, and can they come in without full and equal rights?”<sup>99</sup> In raising this question, Norton went even further to suggest that an exclusionary notion of freedom was ultimately untenable within the context of United States imperial expansion, even if it was racially-specific in its application, as was the case with African colonization. However, within the constitutional convention, opinions like these were clearly in the minority. Most delegates, and the constituencies they represented, had come to believe that African Americans were not legitimate citizens of either individual states or the nation as a whole. African Americans’ status, which increasingly resembled that of unlawful foreign residents, was legitimated by the notion that they belonged under the protection of a government in Africa.

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<sup>97</sup> Milton Gregg. “Remarks of Mr. Gregg, of Jefferson.” *Indiana State Journal*, November 23, 1850.

<sup>98</sup> *The Constitutional Debates of 1847*, 211.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

Aside from questions about whether black emigrants should be allowed within state borders, conventions devoted considerable discussion to the nature of black citizenship rights within the state. Midwestern states that did not border slave states, like Michigan, focused less on the question of immigration, and more on the citizenship status of black residents within state borders. At the Michigan convention, a lengthy discussion took place about whether the word “white” should remain in the text of the constitution as a qualification for citizenship. Delegate Bagg rejected any such suggestion that black residents should have citizenship rights, contending that it was the first step on the road to “amalgamation.” Despite his unwillingness to admit African Americans as citizens in their present state, he believed that the “hand of Providence” had delivered them to the North America for “a great purpose” so that they could eventually acquire and disseminate notions of political rights elsewhere. Bagg predicted that, “When he shall be raised to a certain state, in comparison with our own, he will go back to Liberia—to Africa—to find the source of the Nile, which has never been found by those barbarous tribes.”<sup>100</sup> In a similar discussion of black suffrage in Indiana, delegate Alexander Stevenson admitted the futility of the debate and used it as an opportunity to remind the delegates that they should, “Colonize them in Africa where they are surrounded only by their equals, governed by a man of their own color and race, and allowed a free participation in all the institutions and privileges of society and government.”<sup>101</sup>

Most convention debates never seriously considered granting full citizenship rights to African Americans and were generally occupied with resolving the uncertain social and legal status of free black populations while enshrining and protecting white

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<sup>100</sup> *Report of the proceedings and debates in the convention to revise the constitution of the state of Michigan, 1850* (Lansing, MI: R.W. Ingals, 1850), 290-1.

<sup>101</sup> A. C. Stevenson, “Negro Suffrage,” *Indiana State Journal*, November 9, 1850.

citizenship. Referencing a referendum on black suffrage, Robert Dale Owen stated, “No man who knows anything about public affairs in Indiana, will maintain for a moment, that the proposition to grant to Negroes the right of suffrage, can obtain amongst the people more than a very small minority.” He went on to state, “They can never obtain political rights here. They can never obtain social rights here. And for these reasons, I think we ought not to have them amongst us.”<sup>102</sup> Though many convention delegates were adamant about excluding blacks from the rights of citizenship or even residence within their state, they often insisted that they deserved some possibility for attaining “human rights” under an appropriate government. In supporting legislation that prohibited African Americans from entering Illinois, Daniel Pinckney explicitly argued that removing the black population from Illinois should be accompanied by securing rights for them elsewhere. Pinckney stated, “if any man proposes to keep these unfortunate persons from our State by just and humane measures, I shall not object. I am in favor of removing them not only from this State, but from all the States, that they may in some other place enjoy human rights and privileges... I therefore concur with the gentlemen in giving the Colonization Society great praise.”<sup>103</sup>

Many delegates were not only concerned with the physical presence of black residents in their states but they also believed that African Americans threatened the integrity of white citizenship. Delegates frequently employed the concept of colonization to reconcile the conflict between the supposedly universal nature of US national citizenship and its exclusionary racial basis. At the 1851 Ohio Constitutional Convention, Delegate William Sawyer clearly expressed the tension when he admitted

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<sup>102</sup> Robert Dale Owen, “Negro Suffrage” *Indiana State Journal*, November 9, 1850.

<sup>103</sup> *The Constitutional Debates of 1847*, 207.

that he believed, “with the Declaration of Independence, that all men were born free and equal, and possessed of certain inalienable rights.” However, Sawyer qualified this assertion by contending that the universality implied by the United States’ founding document should only be applied when race and nationhood were aligned. Sawyer believed “a negro had a right to hold office” and “had a right to sit as President in a convention, but not *this* convention---he had a right to sit as a judge, to serve as a juror, to be a witness, to vote as an elector, and, in short, to have a right to possess and control everything that he had. But, every man in his own place, and in his own order.”<sup>104</sup> In other words, the protection of rights required a republic based on race.

Supporters of colonization looked on the surge of action by state governments as the long-awaited deliverance of the colonization idea to the realm of political mobilization. Referring to the recent actions in the Midwest by Illinois, Indiana, Ohio and Iowa an article in the *African Repository* stated, “We have seen the finger of Providence pointing to Colonization as the only way of escape. And we are glad to see, that in the same States, where the evils are most felt, Legislatures are beginning to look at the subject in earnest.”<sup>105</sup> All of the conventions during this period were successful in passing constitutions which further restricted black rights and, in some cases, these restrictions were specifically attached to colonization measures. The 1851 Indiana constitution was prevailed by an overwhelming majority and included a section stating, “No Negro or mulatto shall come into, or settle in the State, after the adoption of this Constitution.”<sup>106</sup> This section was attached to a provision that appropriated state funding

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<sup>104</sup> *Report of the debates and proceedings of the convention for the revision of the constitution of the state of Ohio, 1850-51* (Columbus, OH: S. Medary, 1851), 56.

<sup>105</sup> “Benevolence to the African Race,” *The African Repository* 27, no. 7 (July 1851).

<sup>106</sup> Indiana Constitution of 1851 art. XIII, sec. 1.

for African colonization and helped establish a state board of colonization. Following the passage of the new provisions in the constitution, interest in colonization continued to grow as it was attached to the ideal of racialized citizenship in the state. Shortly after the decision, Governor Joseph Wright stated, “Indiana, by her recent vote, not only decided in favor of *exclusion* of Negroes and Mulattos, but likewise for the *colonization* of those among us...she [Indiana] desires the gradual separation of the two races; that this separation is called for by all the principles of CHRISTIANITY, HUMANITY and FREEDOM.”<sup>107</sup> Appealing to the US House of Representatives, S.W. Parker, an Indiana Congressman, attempted to revive congressional support for colonization by pointing to the resounding success of his state’s recent constitutional convention: “The people of my state have just been making a new constitution, and by a majority of some *ninety thousand*, have declared that no foreign black man shall ever again set his foot upon the soil of Indiana, and that the scheme of colonization is their remedy for the evil of our existing black population.”<sup>108</sup> The *Lafayette Daily Courier* urged black populations to leave because “they never can and never will be placed upon an equality with the white population in this country,” and promising that, “in Liberia the colored man enjoys all the rights and privileges which the whites enjoy in this country, and which constitute the basis of human enjoyment.”<sup>109</sup> In the minds of many white Indianans, the separation of the races seemed inevitable and necessary for the integrity and maintenance of white citizenship both the state and nation.

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<sup>107</sup> “Meeting of the Citizens of Indiana in Behalf of Colonization,” *Lafayette Daily Courier* (February 9, 1852).

<sup>108</sup> Samuel W. Parker, *Speech of Hon. S. W. Parker of Indiana, In the House of Representatives, April 28, 1852*. (Washington, 1852).

<sup>109</sup> “Letter from Liberia,” *Lafayette Daily Courier*, March 30, 1853

In the late 1840s, Ohio, long ripe ground for both laws restricting black immigration and colonization sentiment, also witnessed a resurgence of public interest in the idea, following the lead of other Midwestern states. The Ohio agent for the American Colonization Society devised a plan called “Ohio in Africa” in which the government of Ohio would support a state-funded colony, in concert with the Republic of Liberia, to which it could send free blacks willing to go. Initial support for the plan, and generous donations by Cincinnati philanthropists, allowed the Liberian government to purchase the proposed land. In an effort to secure firm guarantees of state support for the idea, Christy was given an opportunity to present this plan to both the Ohio General Assembly and the 1850 Constitutional Convention. While the General Assembly demonstrated sufficient interest to pass a resolution encouraging free blacks in the state to remove to Liberia, the political leaders of Ohio were unwilling to offer direct appropriations to support colonization as their neighbors in Indiana had done.<sup>110</sup> The issue of removing the restrictions on black citizenship in the state was taken up during the Constitutional Convention of 1850-1 and soundly rejected by the delegates of the state.<sup>111</sup> Shortly after the convention, State Senator Alonzo Cushing introduced a bill into the Ohio General Assembly 1852 to renew restrictions on black immigration and support Liberian colonization on the grounds that “the voters of the State of Ohio, by the adoption of the new Constitution, have decided against the admission of people of color to the right of citizenship in the State.” The bill proposed to ban all black immigrants from entering the

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<sup>110</sup> Ohio Committee of Correspondence, of the American Colonization Society, *Ohio in Africa*, 1851; Edward Wesley Shunk, “Ohio in Africa,” *Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Quarterly* 51 (1942); Sherwood, “The Movement in Ohio to Deport the Negro.”; Thomas D. Matijasac, “Conservative Reform in the West: The African Colonization Movement in Ohio, 1826-1839” (Oxford, OH: Miami University, 1982), 195-199.

<sup>111</sup> Stephen Middleton, *The Black Laws: Race and the Legal Process in Early Ohio* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2005), 144-156; J. V Smith, *Report of the debates and proceedings of the convention for the revision of the constitution of the state of Ohio, 1850-51* (Columbus, OH: S. Medary, 1851), 56-59.



state after January 1, 1854 on the grounds that “a portion of the colored people have determined to secure themselves equal rights by elsewhere [in the Republic of Liberia].”<sup>112</sup>

By the early 1850s the relationship between colonization and anti-citizenship was an identifiable trend that had many caused African Americans to renew their strong opposition to colonization. In March of 1853, a group of black residents in Syracuse, NY called a meeting to oppose the resurgence of colonization influence evidenced by the adoption of exclusionary state laws. The group claimed that the colonization idea contained “the most intense hatred of the colored race, clad in the garb of pretended philanthropy” and argued that “the expulsion of colored citizens from Delaware, Indiana, Iowa, and more recently, from Illinois” were “kindred manifestations of a passion fit only for demons to indulge in.”<sup>113</sup> An editorial in Frederick Douglass’s newspaper published during the same month argued that “the enemies of mankind have long labored to make Liberian Colonization a political question... It has arrived at that point; and hereafter we may expect it to mingle lustily with the plans of parties and statesmen.” Pointing to the simultaneous rise in colonization societies and black exclusion laws, the article asked, “How happens it that these enemies of the black man and the human race, have so simultaneously started up, to fasten this infernal scheme upon this country?”<sup>114</sup>

## CONCLUSION

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<sup>112</sup> “Negro Exclusion,” *The African Repository* 29, no. 4 (April 1853); “Blacks and Mulattoes,” *The Liberator*, January 7, 1853; “Blacks and Mulattoes,” *New York Daily Times*, December 16, 1852; “Revival of the Negro Laws in Ohio,” *New York Daily Times*, December 17, 1852.

<sup>113</sup> “Anti-Colonization Meeting,” *The Liberator* (April 15, 1853).

<sup>114</sup> “A New Party Question,” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper* (March 18, 1853).

The admission, and then expulsion, of three black students at Harvard Medical School in the early 1850s demonstrates the tension present in both the riots and conventions: on one hand, colonizationists excluded African Americans from the privileges of participating in the social, economic and political life of the United States and at the same time claimed they could reproduce these institutions within Liberia.<sup>115</sup> Although the medical school at Harvard had routinely excluded African Americans from being trained there, in November 1850, the faculty voted to admit three black students, Martin Delany, Daniel Laing, and Issac Snowden, on the condition that they would leave the United States to practice medicine in Liberia.<sup>116</sup> Members of the Massachusetts Colonization Society supplied letters of introduction which argued that the students should be admitted, “in order to fit himself for medical practice in Liberia (Africa) to which place he will go as soon as he can be prepared.”<sup>117</sup> However, shortly after the faculty had approved admitting these individuals, white students at the school immediately organized protests against the action and sent a petition signed by forty-six members of the student body to the medical faculty urging them to reverse their admission.<sup>118</sup> Eventually, the faculty relented and revoked the admission of the three black students, arguing that, “the intermixing of the white and black races is distasteful to a large portion of the class, and injurious to the interests of the school.”<sup>119</sup>

While African Americans were admitted to the Harvard on the grounds that they might support the building of the racial republic in Liberia by providing access to

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<sup>115</sup> This episode is documented further in Ronald T. Takaki, “Aesculapius Was a White Man: Antebellum Racism and Male Chauvinism at Harvard Medical School,” *Phylon* 39, no. 2 (1978): 128-134.

<sup>116</sup> Minutes for November 2, 1850, *Records of the Medical Faculty of Harvard University*, Vol. 2

<sup>117</sup> Charles Brooks to Medical Faculty of Harvard University, October 22, 1850, Petitions and Correspondence RE: Admission of Colored Students, Countway Library, Harvard Medical School.

<sup>118</sup> Minutes for December 12, 1850, *Records of the Medical Faculty of Harvard University*, Vol. 2

<sup>119</sup> Medical Faculty of Harvard University to Abraham Thompson, December 26, 1850, Petitions and Correspondence RE: Admission of Colored Students, Countway Library, Harvard Medical School.

American professional expertise, these efforts were undermined by a protesting white students, whose sense of racial privilege, like that of the other mobs of the 1830s, had been shaped, in part, by the prevailing logic of colonizationism. In admitting the black students, Harvard faculty had tentatively acknowledged that capable African Americans should have some access to education, much in the same way that white citizens in state constitutional conventions had acknowledged the basic right of African Americans to govern themselves. However, in capitulating to the demands of white students, the faculty recognized that the value in maintaining the white privilege inherent to medical students' education was more important than securing education for African Americans or replicating US institutions in Africa.

This chapter has examined how colonization helped to reproduce racialized conceptions of citizenship, in both the US and Liberia, through both racial violence and the legislative processes of statehood. During the 1830s, African Americans were targeted by mobs in Northern cities who utilized the rhetoric of colonization that reinforced the discourses of black anti-citizenship through public spectacles of terror aimed at black communities. Colonization undergirded this violence by targeting African Americans as a foreign population without legitimate claims to rights in the United States. During the late 1840s and early 1850s, this rhetoric of colonization was extended to further exclude African Americans through the legislative system in Northern states. Increasingly, whites used colonization to argue that African Americans had some claim to rights, but those claims could not be legitimately recognized within the United States. The existence of an independent Liberian republic allowed politicians in their state constitutional conventions to assert that equivalence between racial citizenship in both

nations and argue that African Americans' claims to rights were properly situated within Africa.

## CHAPTER 5

### **“THE UNITED STATES OF AFRICA”: LIBERIAN INDEPENDENCE AND THE CONTESTED MEANING OF A BLACK REPUBLIC, 1844-1854**

Hilary Teage, an African American settler in Liberia and one of the most prominent advocates of independent nationhood within the colony, published an editorial in 1847 in Liberia's largest newspaper that commented on the encroachments of Europeans onto the western coast of Africa. In the article, Teage mockingly wished these empires success in obtaining tracts of land on the coast but contended that eventually “we or some of our [African] brethren will surely possess them.” Suggesting that the Europeans would soon be dissuaded from further attempts by “sacrifice of money and life,” he argued that the Liberian settlement would soon have the distinct advantage of independent nationhood over any other colonies in the region. Asserting that Africa would inevitably be governed by people of African descent, Teage urged colonizers to “yield the direction of affairs” and allow “the hands of intelligent colored men” to convert their colonies “from a European dependence into an African Government.”<sup>1</sup>

The editorial was published during an ongoing crisis over sovereignty created by British traders who had refused to recognize the legitimacy of the Liberian colony's tariffs and territorial claims. Teage's confident rhetoric was likely bolstered by the concurrent process of making Liberia the first “African Government” based on liberal democratic values. More than simply illustrating the maturation of Liberia's nationalist political elite, Teage's argument expressed a theory of colonialism that had animated the settlement from its inception. Unlike the colonies propagated by the avaricious empires

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<sup>1</sup> *Liberia Herald*, April 1847.

of Europe, this colony would progress towards independent national existence infused with the spirit of US democracy and would prosper because of it. Shortly after publication, the influential *Daily National Intelligencer* concurred with Teage's sentiments, arguing that a "germ" of "future growth is planted" because Liberia's settlers "have imbibed the rudiments of civilization and Christianity; and they now go back to the country from which they came to infuse some touch of Caucasian energy into the torpid body of old Africa which may around her from the sleep of ages." While the proud Liberian colonists struggled to make claims to their sovereignty, the editorial demonstrated how white onlookers always imagined that "Caucasian energy" was at the core of Liberia's eventual claims to self-governance. To many observers in the United States, the eventual independence of Liberia was a triumph of the idea that a self-governing colony-turned-nation led by Americanized Africans would circumvent the dependent structure of European colonialism to awaken Africa from the "sleep of ages."<sup>2</sup>

US Historians have not significantly examined Liberian independence aside from its role in altering the colony's relationship to the ACS or its impact on the governing structures within Liberia.<sup>3</sup> However, I contend that Liberian independence was important as a symbolic gesture to both black and white audiences in the United States. This chapter argues that the Republic of Liberia's declaration of political sovereignty in 1847 was interpreted by white audiences as a realization of US potential for spreading democratic values even while African Americans critiqued its inability to live up to these

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<sup>2</sup> "Liberia—Colonization," *Daily National Intelligencer* (May 22, 1847).

<sup>3</sup> Burin, *Slavery and the Peculiar Solution: A History of the American Colonization Society*, 154-9; Beyan, *The American Colonization Society and the Creation of the Liberian State*, 89-97; Smith, *Sojourners in Search of Freedom*, 189-202; Staudenraus, *The African Colonization Movement, 1816-1865*, 240-2; An exception to this trend is Claude Clegg's work on the complicated relationship between black audiences and Liberia independence. See: Clegg, *The Price of Liberty*, 179-200.

values both at home and abroad. The establishment of Liberia as an independent nation garnered considerable attention within the United States because it had long been viewed as a transplantation of US democratic ideals to the shores of Africa. Many whites viewed the eventual independence of Liberia as validation of the theory that a colony, through US tutelage, could be elevated to become a sovereign and self-governing nation. The details of early nationhood were followed closely throughout the United States. Most assessments of Liberian independence focused on the outward symbolic resonance of the event: its declaration of independence, national constitution, republican form of government, President, and US-style flag. Although many whites' were skeptical about African Americans' capacity for self-government, coverage of independence in newspapers, pamphlets and popular literature was almost universally positive.

Despite colonization's popularity, widespread support for a sovereign Liberian nation is rather surprising, considering that during the 1840s and 50s free African Americans in several Northern states were increasingly denied citizenship rights as whites argued that black residents were racially unfit for participation in US civil society. As I illustrated in the previous chapter, African colonization provided a powerful framework through which whites could frame black residents as non-citizens. The independence of Liberia received even more attention within the black political sphere of the Northern states. Many African American critics pointed out that Liberia's assumed "sovereignty" was little more than a manipulation aimed at garnering support for the colonization movement and masked the inability of the United States to accept a truly sovereign black nation. African American opponents of colonization critiqued the manner in which an independent Liberia was attached to the symbols of US nationhood

even while the United States refused to diplomatically recognize the former colony. I argue that supporters' frequent emphasis on the potential realization of citizenship in Liberia is just as crucial as the purely exclusionary aspect of ideas about colonization. Specifically, this section demonstrates how colonizationists imagined that black emigrants would be transformed into productive and self-governing people, how Liberian independence provided a validation of racially-specific nation-states, and how colonization relied on the reproduction of US-style republican government.

### **FROM COLONY TO REPUBLIC**

Three interrelated factors contributed to the movement for independence in Liberia: the core principle of the colony's eventual sovereignty, as imagined by the colonization society, the increasing agitation for self-government by black colonists, and British imperial claims in West Africa, which forced the issue of Liberia's political sovereignty to a head in the mid-1840s. As detailed in Chapter 2, popular support coalesced around African colonization partially because it would promote an independent and self-governing nation. This conception of colonization developed in contrast to the model of direct colonial oversight in Sierra Leone and revolutionary self-government in Haiti. The earliest proponents of African colonization emphasized that Liberia would be constructed to become an independent, but carefully-manage, nation-state. In 1817, Reverend Samuel Mills, one of the architects of the African colonization movement, argued that the goal of the colonization society was, "To lay the foundation of a free and independent empire, on the coast of poor degraded Africa."<sup>4</sup> Mills' juxtaposition of

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<sup>4</sup> Gardiner Spring, *Memoirs of the Rev. Samuel J. Mills: late missionary to the south western section of the United States and agent of the American Colonization Society deputed to explore the coast of Africa / by Gardiner Spring* (New York, NY: New York Evangelical Missionary Society, 1820), 139.



“free” and “independent” with “empire” suggested a contrast with both the African empires that controlled West Africa and the European empires that dotted the coast in trading settlements.

Colonization proponents often linked independence with the establishment of republican institutions and their ability to make African Americans productive citizens of a nation. In an 1832 speech, Joseph Underwood argued, “Send the free negro to Africa, and you thereby elevate him to the rank of a citizen. His consequence and dignity of character rises with the new responsibilities imposed upon him; his intellectual faculties are stimulated, and impart new energy and a new character to a being who would forever remain comparatively lifeless, were he to spend among us his underling existence.”<sup>5</sup> For supporters like Underwood, colonization could demonstrate the transformative power of unfettered political and economic liberty. Others were even more expansive in their expectations for the new colony. The Young Men’s Colonization Society of Philadelphia distributed a flyer to attract adherents to their cause in 1834 which argued that the “establishment of a *single colony*” should not be the “*limit* of American enterprise” but that it would be the “first in a series of future colonies,” which would expand “like our own Republic, by the union of many confederate States, into one great and free Commonwealth.”<sup>6</sup>

While the rhetoric of the African colonization movement in the United States focused on the colony’s potential for realizing the blessings of citizenship, self-government, and nationhood, the actual governance of the colony was primarily undertaken by white colonial agents from the United States. From Liberia’s earliest days

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<sup>5</sup> Joseph R. Underwood, *Judge Underwood’s Address* (Frankfort, KY: A.G. Hodges, 1832), 7.

<sup>6</sup> Young Mens Colonization Society of New York, *Address and Constitution of the Young Men’s Colonization Society* (Philadelphia, PA, 1834).

in the 1820s, black settlers who expected greater involvement in the governance of the colony made numerous complaints to the board of the ACS. Settler discontent first came to a head early in 1824 when Jehudi Ashmun, a white colonial agent, was forced out of the colony for his role in unjustly rationing supplies from the colonial store and distributing lots of land within the colony's capital. Ultimately, ACS officials restored order before the colony broke into open rebellion, but resentment about the leadership of the colony persisted for the next two decades as expectations of citizenship in the settlement met the realities of colonial governance.<sup>7</sup>

This tense dynamic between settlers and officials ultimately led to the creation of a new constitution in 1839 by the ACS board of managers which allowed for a settler-elected Commonwealth Legislative Council. Despite the formation of this council as a concession to settlers by colonial authorities, the office of the colonial governor had far greater power and was largely controlled by the ACS.<sup>8</sup> In addition to the minimal authority of African American colonists, the colony faced external assaults on its political claims to sovereignty over the West African region it claimed. Throughout the first half of the 1840s, the Liberian colony frequently clashed with indigenous groups and British traders who operated in the region as both disputed Liberia's ability to regulate their existing trading relationships.<sup>9</sup>

After several traders tested the legitimacy of Liberia's political status, the British government communicated with the United States to clarify whether it had any authority over matters in the colony. An 1843 letter by US diplomat Edward Everett to the Earl of

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<sup>7</sup> Shick, *Behold the Promised Land: A History of Afro-American Settler Society in Nineteenth-Century Liberia*, 37-8.

<sup>8</sup> Beyan, *The American Colonization Society and the Creation of the Liberian State*.

<sup>9</sup> George William Brown, *The Economic History of Liberia* (Washington D.C.: Associated Publishers, Inc., 1941), 127-130.

Aberdeen argued that “extra-continental possessions” were not extended the protections “to which colonies are entitled from the mother country by which they are established.” While denying that the United States had a formal colonial relationship with Liberia, Everett warned that British encroachments on this “independent political community” would be a “fatal blow to its very existence.”<sup>10</sup> President John Tyler’s administration also solicited advice from ACS agent R. R. Gurley who explained that “the Government of the United States has never assumed any control over the government of the colony; and since Liberia has entered into no political relations with Europeans or other civilized countries, it would seem entitled, politically, to the character of an independent State.”<sup>11</sup> In an 1844 letter to Governor Joseph Roberts, Commodore Jones of the British ship “Penelope” summarized the conflict: “The rights in question, those of imposing custom duties, and limiting the trade of foreigners by restrictions, are sovereign rights, which can only be lawfully exercised by sovereign and independent states, within their own recognized borders and dominions. I need not remind your Excellency that this description does not yet apply to “Liberia” which is not recognized as a subsisting state, even by the Government of the country from which its settlers have emigrated.”<sup>12</sup>

The British crisis over sovereignty made news in the United States and some began to call for Liberia to declare itself an independent nation. The prominent New York newspaper, the *Commercial Advertiser*, suggested that Britain should not infringe on the colony’s right to existence, and by extension US interests in the region. Editors at

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<sup>10</sup> “Edward Everett to Earl of Aberdeen, December 30, 1843,” in *H.R. Doc. No. 162*, 28th Cong. 1st Sess., 1844, 5.

<sup>11</sup> “R.R. Gurley to John Tyler, February 2, 1844,” in *H.R. Doc. No. 162*, 28th Cong. 1st Sess., 1844, 11.

<sup>12</sup> Comm. W. Jones, September 9, 1844, Records of the Massachusetts Colonization Society, Massachusetts Historical Society; Charles Henry Huberich, *The Political and Legislative History of Liberia*, vol. 1 (New York: Central Book, 1947), 774.

the Northeastern anti-slavery paper concurred with this sentiment, taking it a step further by suggesting that the US “government acknowledge the nationality of Liberia, as it has of Texas, and as it has not of Haiti, and then our government will have just as much right to interfere to preserve the separate *independence* of Liberia, as Great Britain has to interfere to preserve the *separate* independence of Texas.”<sup>13</sup> While some in the United States viewed Liberia in the same framework as the settler colony in Texas, commercially-minded politicians had already begun to investigate the potential for a new kind of US colony in Liberia. In the early 1840s, the Commerce Committee in the US Congress examined the possibility of making Liberia a more formal colony of the United States. A report issued to the committee argued that the United States’ had a compelling interest in establishing a formal colonial relationship with Liberia because it could serve as a model of US expansion. In the 1842 report, Representative John P. Kennedy outlined a vision of US colonial governance in Africa:

The idea of an American colony is a new one. It is manifestly worth of the highest consideration. The committees see nothing in our Constitution to forbid it. We have establishments of this nature but somewhat anomalous in the character of their dependence on our Government, in the Indian tribes which have been placed beyond the limits of the States, on purchased territory of the Union. The African settlements would require much less exercise of political jurisdiction, much less territorial supervision, than is presented in the case of these tribes ... they would stand in need of the highest commercial privileges in their intercourse with the mother country; and the reciprocation of such privileges, on the part of the colonies to our own citizens, would doubtless be an object to be secured on our side.<sup>14</sup>

Building on the notion that the US administration of Native American territory had laid the groundwork for adopting a formal colony in Africa, Kennedy argued that a more

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<sup>13</sup> “Trouble in Liberia,” *Emancipator and Weekly Chronicle* (July 2, 1845).

<sup>14</sup> “Mr. John P. Kennedy’s Report on Our African Colonies and Commerce,” *Daily National Intelligencer* (November 8, 1843).

decentralized management structure would be more desirable than the complicated and costly management of Indian nations. He suggested that this new type of colony might remain politically independent from the United States, yet it would serve national interests as both a repository for African Americans and a sphere of commercial influence in the region.

Despite this plan's potential for solving a complicated diplomatic situation, the notion of formally adopting Liberia as US colony received little traction, likely because it conflicted with the vision that most supporters of colonization had long held for the colony. Shortly after Kennedy's Commerce Committee inquiry, the *African Repository* published a response to the efforts on Capitol Hill arguing that while "such a political connexion would, no doubt, give great enlargement to these infant colonies... their character would be changed." The article argued that this fundamental change in the nature of the colony would alter the consciousness of the colonists who "would no longer be actuated by the same spirit of enterprise and independence." While asserting that Liberia should become a "great and virtuous republic" they still imagined a large presence for the US in the region: "let the American Government become the ally and protector of these colonies. Let them assist them to complete the purchase of those portions of territory, the title of which has not yet been acquired from the natives. Let them avail themselves of the advantages which these colonies present, for prosecuting that valuable commerce, which is now opening to the world."<sup>15</sup>

Responding to this broader diplomatic debate, Joseph Tracy, an important secretary in the Massachusetts branch of the ACS, asserted that Liberia, as a Commonwealth, already had the features of sovereign nation and should be treated as

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<sup>15</sup> "Reviews," *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 20, no. 3 (March 1844).

such. Tracy made this argument to colonization supporters in an April 1845 article in the *African Repository*: “It should be universally known and admitted that the Commonwealth of Liberia is a sovereign State, having its own constitution, government, and laws, and rightfully claiming all the powers, prerogatives, and privileges essential to sovereignty.” Alluding to the complicated relationship between the United States and Liberia, the author argued, “No acknowledgement by other nations is necessary to *confer* the rights of sovereignty. On the contrary, sovereignty must exist, and manifest itself, before it can be acknowledged.” Tracy diminished Liberia’s need for “independence” from the ACS because it is “wholly unnecessary to sunder the relation of the commonwealth to the Colonization Society, as some have proposed, for the purpose of establishing or perfecting its sovereignty.”<sup>16</sup> Shortly after writing this defense of Liberia’s already existing rights to sovereignty, Tracy explored the possibility of severing ties between the ACS and the Liberian nation by asking for the advice of fellow colonization supporter Simon Greenleaf, then the dean of Harvard Law School. In April of 1845 Tracy wrote a letter to Greenleaf noting that the diplomatic disputes with the imperial powers of Europe had driven to a head the issue of Liberia’s sovereignty. He argued “there is a strong presumption in the minds of many of our friends, that for this purpose, the Commonwealth of Liberia must be made wholly independent of the Colonization Society.” From Tracy’s perspective the central issue with how to proceed in this transition was: “How can we keep our hold on public confidence, when we can no longer be responsible for the character of the laws of Liberia, or for their administration?”

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<sup>16</sup> Joseph Tracy, “Sovereignty of Liberia,” *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 21, no. 4 (April 1845).

In response to these issues, Tracy asked Greenleaf to study the issue and “show us, in the light of the principles of jurisprudence and international law what ought to be done.”<sup>17</sup>

As Tracy acknowledged, the issue of public confidence in colonization posed a particular threat to the movement because the appearance of ACS control over the government of Liberia had aided the legitimacy of the operation. While the movement had built the concept of independent nationhood into much of its theoretical apparatus from the outset, the guiding hand of the white-led ACS had always tempered any fears that African Americans were excessively involved in the colony’s governance. Tracy’s efforts to involve Greenleaf in settling Liberia’s sovereignty dilemma would ultimately result in a provisional draft of the constitution for the Republic of Liberia. The Colonization Society’s insistence that Liberia had always been a sovereign territory and that independence would be a matter of “public confidence” illustrates that the performance of independence would be central to the success of the transition of governance in Liberia. This would become evident in the way that colonization was embraced by the public after 1847 in a manner that relied on a picture of a Liberian nation that was not disruptive to the racial order in the United States and was in fact commensurate with US interests by its emulation of the symbols and governing structure of the United States.

While the ACS attempted to control and manage the transition to independence, some Liberians, led by editor of the *Liberia Herald*, Hilary Teage, attempted to frame the independence of Liberia as one of global significance. In a December 1846 speech he argued, “Fellow Citizens! We stand now on ground never occupied by a people before— However insignificant we may regard ourselves, the eyes of Europe and America are

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<sup>17</sup> Joseph Tracy to Simon Greenleaf, April 26, 1845, Simon Greenleaf Papers, Harvard Law School Library.

upon us, as a germ destined to burst from its enclosure in the earth... Rise fellow citizens! Rise to a clear and full perception of your tremendous responsibilities...you are to give the answer, whether the African race is doomed to interminable degradation.”<sup>18</sup>

Despite the relatively mundane and practical legal situation that hastened a firm declaration of Liberian nationhood and sovereignty, Teage and other members of the settler elite attached more significant meaning to Liberian independence by emphasizing its role as a pioneering black nation.

Aware of the growing nationalist sentiment among settlers, William McClain, the ACS Secretary, expressed his concerns about independence to the colonial governor, Joseph Roberts and indicated his desire for a smooth transition in “carrying on the work of Colonization under the new regime. [emphasis in original]” McClain called on Roberts, as the principal representative of the Colonization Society within the Liberian government, to ensure that “no hasty change be may be made either in the men now in office in Liberia, or the policy now in present advancement.” Perhaps fearing a future of diminished ACS control of a colony governed largely by black settlers, McClain ominously warned, “The time of change is always a time of danger, all political revolutions need to be guarded and guided with the profoundest wisdom and discretion. [emphasis in original]”<sup>19</sup> Acting on these concerns of a radical break in Liberia’s governance, the ACS passed along Professor Greenleaf’s draft of a constitution a few

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<sup>18</sup> Hilary Teage, “Oration,” *Liberia Herald* (February 5, 1847).

<sup>19</sup> William McLain to Joseph Roberts, May 1846, American Colonization Society Papers, Outgoing Correspondence.



months later in a letter to Roberts, while making clear that it should be used as a guide for the colonists.<sup>20</sup>

Members of the ACS expected that proposing the outline of the new constitution, in particular retaining the organization's property rights in the colony, could continue to shape Liberia's future in crucial ways. In contrast, most of the settlers expected that the ACS would continue to support the colony financially but they privately bristled at the organization's attempts to insert itself directly into the process of independence. The momentum for independence came from the necessity for a shift in legal relations between the ACS and the colony as well as the increasing desire by some black settlers to exert more control over Liberian affairs. While the settler elite that were directly involved in fostering independence maintained an amicable relationship with the ACS and were never moved towards independence in open defiance against the organization, their differing approaches to the question demonstrate underlying tensions regarding the meaning and scope of nationhood. This is evident in the manner in which the formation of the Liberian constitution proceeded. The process of constitution-making illustrates the settlers' aspirations to manage their own political affairs and hasten a transition to official recognition within the world community. However, they were also careful not to openly reject the guidance of the white ACS officials who continued to have a paternalistic attitude towards the emigrants.

While the ACS implicitly endorsed the movement towards independence by Liberian settlers, its members were also uneasy about a subsequent loss of control of the society and public perceptions of an independent nation governed by African Americans.

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<sup>20</sup> William McLain to Joseph Roberts, August 28, 1846, American Colonization Society Papers, Outgoing Correspondence.

During the annual meeting of ACS board of directors in 1847, many members expressed their concern over how the move towards independence was unfolding. Concerned that “this Society and its general rights in Liberia, should be in some form recognized in the Constitution,” the Board of Managers recommended “that commissioners on the part of Liberia should come here and have a full and free conference with us before a constitution is framed.” They also suggested that the ACS should retain all rights to property in the colony as well as the ability renegotiate future relations with Liberia at the behest of the Colonization Society. Again, Simon Greenleaf was asked by members of the ACS board to draw up documents that would allow them to retain its property interests in the Republic of Liberia.<sup>21</sup>

Secretary William McClain passed along additional Greenleaf-penned sections in an April 12 letter to Joseph Roberts noting that, “The letter contains sentiments that we fully endorse. I earnestly trust that the [actions] proposed by the society will be incorporated into the Constitution.” He went on condemn the “unkind and uncalled for” things some settlers had been saying in the newspapers by suggesting that the ACS was forcing them into becoming an independent state. McClain demanded that Roberts set the record straight in the Liberian press by “setting forth all that has been done in Liberia and in this country touching the Independence of the Commonwealth and bringing prominently to view the fact that the Society has never urged the Commonwealth to declare its independence, but that we should be perfectly satisfied that you continue as you are.”<sup>22</sup> This letter reflected increasing agitation in the ACS about the perceived lack

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<sup>21</sup> “Minutes, Board of Directors”, January 20, 1847, American Colonization Society Papers, Business Papers.

<sup>22</sup> William McLain to Joseph Roberts, April 12, 1847, American Colonization Society Papers, Outgoing Correspondence.

of respect that Liberian settlers had for the role of the organization in founding and supporting the colony. As the settlers progressed towards independence, the lack of direct control over the process became more evident. Significantly, Joseph Roberts never publicly defended the ACS in the Liberian press. Roberts, ever a consummate politician, was astutely aware of the political implications of aligning with the ACS in the midst of an independence movement that was becoming increasingly nationalistic.

Several participants in the Liberian constitutional convention publicly denounced the heavy-handed approach of the ACS. However, the convention's final document represented a synthesis between Greenleaf's suggestions and the input from a committee of settlers headed by Colin and Hilary Teage.<sup>23</sup> In July of 1847, the convention placed a constitution before the settlers for a vote and three months later it was ratified by popular vote of Liberian settlers. Mirroring the colonial and gendered assumptions within US political representation, neither women nor indigenous Africans were represented within the constitutional process. Indeed, the republican government claimed by the settlers held an extremely tenuous claim to authority in the region. The Republic of Liberia controlled only a few coastal settlements while indigenous groups such as the Bassa, Vai, Kru, Gola, and Grebo largely rejected the legitimacy of the settler state and exercised autonomy within much of the territory claimed by the nation. Nearly half of the settler population, primarily from Bassa, Montserrado and Sinoe counties, abstained from the constitutional vote in protest of the colony's domination by the coastal mercantile elite. In particular, dissenting settlers objected to the land clauses proposed by the ACS, which they believed would maintain improper US involvement in the colony's affairs and

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<sup>23</sup> Robert T. Brown, "Simon Greenleaf and the Liberian Constitution of 1847," *Liberian Studies Journal* IX, no. 2 (January 1980).

benefit the elite Liberian leadership with strong connections to the organization. With dissenting colonists largely absent from the early national formation, Liberia maintained a continuity of elite leadership by electing Joseph Jenkins Roberts, the former ACS-selected governor of the colony, to become the republic's first president.<sup>24</sup>

While most evidence indicates that Liberian settlers were principally responsible for penning their own constitution, members of the ACS continued to claim that Greenleaf played a prominent role in writing it. In a letter a year after independence, Elliott Cresson, a primary ACS agent, continued to credit Greenleaf with a crucial role in authorship. In a letter to Greenleaf, Cresson wrote that with “the independence of the young Republic having been happily achieved” they owed him a “deep debt of gratitude for your admirable chart of their future course.”<sup>25</sup> This narrative of the convention prevailed because the only extant account of the proceedings of the convention comes from fragments of a journal kept by James Lugenbeel, a white ACS agent and medical doctor who had lived in the colony for several years.<sup>26</sup> Lugenbeel painted a harshly critical portrait of the convention, which he considered to be beyond the abilities of those involved. He noted that one of the delegates claimed authorship of a constitutional draft which was “almost an *exact copy* of the Constitution which was sent out, as a model, by Professor Greenleaf.” Lugenbeel found it even more troubling that Wilson suggested that “the people of Liberia do not require the assistance of ‘white people’ to enable them to

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<sup>24</sup> Jeremy I. Levitt, *The Evolution of Deadly Conflict in Liberia: From “paternalitarianism” to State Collapse* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2005), 89-92; Brown, “Simon Greenleaf and the Liberian Constitution of 1847.”; Charles Henry Huberich, *The Political and Legislative History of Liberia*, vol. 2 (New York: Central Book, 1947).

<sup>25</sup> Samuel Benedict to Simon Greenleaf, April 4, 1848, Simon Greenleaf Papers, Harvard Law School Library.

<sup>26</sup> While at least two other accounts of the convention were kept at the time, including the convention's official minutes, both were either lost or destroyed, making the sections of Lugenbeel's journal sent in a letter to the ACS the only record of its proceedings.

make a Constitution for the government of themselves” which he found to be “really sickening, coming as they do from so ignorant a man.”<sup>27</sup>

James Lugenbeel’s perception of Liberia’s debt to Greenleaf was shaded by his racially-tinged assessment of the colonists’ abilities. His reaction revealed what the ACS had largely assumed since the beginning of the constitutional process: black settlers largely were incapable of authoring their own framework for a political community in Liberia. The convention delegate’s critique of the Colonization Society’s paternalistic racism illustrates the organization’s contempt for the development of settler democracy in Liberia which diverged from its own vision for independence. More broadly, such conflicts illustrated the tension at the core of the colonial model which asserted independence but also required it to be subordinate to the United States. Despite Liberia’s formal and legalistic origins, in the years following of independence, the young republic would be freighted with symbolic weight by both white and black audiences who viewed the nation alternatively as the triumph of US democracy, a reflection of black national pride, or an example of the duplicity of the colonization movement.

### **PROMOTING AN INDEPENDENT LIBERIA**

Although conflicts between the ACS and the settlers about the precise meaning of independence punctuated Liberia’s process of nationhood, white observers frequently diminished black settlers’ agency by viewing it through an imperial lens which celebrated the nation’s reproduction of the features of US nationalism. Following independence, Northern newspapers and periodicals largely presented a positive portrait of Liberian

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<sup>27</sup> J.W. Lugenbeel to William McLain, October 9, 1847, American Colonization Society Papers, Incoming Correspondence.

independence as an indication of the United States' expanding influence in the world. A year after independence, Liberian Supreme Court Justice Samuel Benedict noted his astonishment at the positive reception of Liberian independence in the United States: "We did not think at the time that our own feeble labors could have been so generally sanctioned."<sup>28</sup> Indeed, during a period when most whites were highly skeptical of the capacity of African Americans for self-government, the level of support for independence was notable. The reaction by white audiences to Liberian nationhood reflected the same rejection and celebration of black citizenship rights as in the constitutional conventions examined in the previous chapter. This irony would be heightened as the outpouring of rhetorical support for the Republic of Liberia was accompanied by the United States government's conspicuous non-recognition of the nation and African Americans' increasing critiques of the nation's diplomatic standing.

In the months following Liberian independence, several national periodicals observed the news with a great deal of curiosity. The widely read *Niles' National Register* closely covered the events leading to independence in a series of articles published in 1847. Shortly after Liberia announced its independence, the *Register* printed a story that was a typical example of newspaper coverage of the event, describing the new nation's US-modeled Declaration of Independence, constitution, structure of government, and flag. The article described the peaceful transition of power between the ACS and the new Liberian government: "Everything connected with the organization of the government seems to have been conducted with admirable order... A flag was presented to the president by the ladies of Monrovia, on which occasion the military were

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<sup>28</sup> Benedict to Greenleaf, April 4, 1848.

out in great force.”<sup>29</sup> Other national press reports were quick to point out Liberia’s striking allegiance to US symbols and forms of government, sometimes framing the nation in an expansionist role connected to the broader context of US empire. An article from the *Journal of Commerce* proclaimed that an independent Liberia is “one of the most remarkable phenomena of modern times” and claimed that the “infant Republic shall expand its fame and extend its influence over the whole African continent, becoming alike the asylum and the glory of the free colored man.”<sup>30</sup> The nationally influential *New York Sun* proclaimed Liberian independence with great flourish and situated its independence as an example of US expansion in both the Eastern and Western Hemisphere. “Well may our country rejoice over this other triumph of her benevolence and missionary zeal, the counter part of that glorious achievement in the Pacific Ocean. Within the brief period of twenty five years, American missionaries and benevolence have founded the kingdom of the Sandwich Islands on this hemisphere, and laid a sure, and we hope lasting, foundation for the Republic of the United States of Africa on the eastern hemisphere.”<sup>31</sup>

Smaller regional newspapers in the Northeast covered the news of Liberia’s independence in a similar fashion.<sup>32</sup> The *Hartford Courant* published an article which

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<sup>29</sup> “Liberia,” *Niles’ National Register* 22, no. 7 (April 17, 1847); “Liberia,” *Niles’ National Register* 22, no. 9 (May 1, 1847); “National Convention of Colored People,” *Niles’ National Register* 23, no. 11 (November 13, 1847); “Republic of Liberia,” *Niles’ National Register* 23, no. 14 (December 4, 1847); “The Republic of Liberia,” *Niles’ National Register* (December 25, 1847).

<sup>30</sup> *Journal of Commerce* article cited in: “The Republic of Liberia,” *Pittsfield Sun* (March 23, 1848).

<sup>31</sup> “A Republic in Africa,” *New York Sun*, January 5, 1847; Reprinted in: “A Republic in Africa,” *Western Literary Messenger* 7, no. 23 (January 9, 1847); “A Republic in Africa,” *New-Hampshire Patriot* (January 14, 1847).

<sup>32</sup> I narrowed my focus to the Northeast because in many of these states colonization had a long history of support despite having relatively small numbers of black residents. To get a sampling of Northern newspaper coverage I searched several online databases (19<sup>th</sup> Century US Newspapers [Gale-Thompson], America’s Historical Newspapers [Readex], American Periodical Series) for collections of mid-size regional Northeastern newspapers with articles covering Liberian independence. While this survey likely favors some papers already sympathetic to colonization, it is significant to note that I came across virtually

proclaimed that Liberia's independence "places her claims upon new ground. It is for an Independent Republic we plead, and the more glorious for being composed of colored men."<sup>33</sup> While acknowledging the nation as an achievement for African Americans, coverage of independence made little direct commentary on the actions of black colonists focusing instead on the constitution by frequently quoting large sections of it, which seemed to justify its claim that "The Republic of Liberia now takes its place among the independent nations of the earth." Descriptions of the constitution nearly always mentioned that it was based on, or even directly copied from, the constitutions found in the state and federal governments of the United States. One noted: "The new Constitution is very much after our own model—a President, Vice President, Senate and House."<sup>34</sup> Some articles furnished minimal lists of members of government and particular details about legislative deliberation as if to demonstrate that the government was indeed modeled on US institutions.<sup>35</sup> Others focused on the fact that the Liberian flag was modeled on that of the United States.<sup>36</sup>

While most coverage focused on the abstracted details of nationhood that paralleled the history of the United States, newspapers' celebrations of the newest democracy had a clear racial subtext. Newspaper accounts gave little agency to the settlers themselves in these descriptions, suggesting, as Lugenbeel had, that they had

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no negative coverage of the event suggesting that even editors skeptical of the colonization movement either published positive accounts or remained silent on the topic.

<sup>33</sup> "Independence of Liberia," *Hartford Daily Courant*, November 30, 1847.

<sup>34</sup> "The Republic of Liberia," *Wachusett Star* (November 23, 1847); "A Republic in Africa," *Christian Observer* 26, no. 47 (November 18, 1847); "The Republic of Liberia," *Barre Patriot* (November 19, 1847); "Liberia," *New Hampshire Sentinel* (December 23, 1847); "The Republic of Liberia," *Hartford Daily Courant*, January 8, 1848.

<sup>35</sup> "Meeting of the Legislature," *Morning News (New London, Connecticut)* (March 8, 1848); "Appointment by the President of Liberia, with the consent of the Senate," *Hudson River Chronicle* (July 11, 1848).

<sup>36</sup> "Liberia," *Vermont Chronicle* (December 29, 1847); "Flag and Seal of the Republic of Liberia," *Wachusett Star* (January 18, 1848); "Liberia," *The Ohio Observer* (January 19, 1848).



dutifully copied US institutions with little input themselves. One paper reported that Liberia's independence was done "at the suggestion and by the advice of the American Colonization Society." However, the article also implied that as citizens of independent nation the Liberian people might more effectively represent US interests by making themselves "a people respectable and influential for good." The newspaper's support for Liberia was provisional, however, as they considered it a trial of "whether emancipated colored men are capable of maintaining among the nations of the world a free, independence and enlightened government."<sup>37</sup> A Connecticut newspaper favorably quoted US Naval Officer, Lieutenant Henry Bell, who claimed independence might in time, "give the African mind and manners a wiser and more liberal direction."<sup>38</sup> A month later the same paper posted a short and blunt headline and story: "TURN ABOUT IS FAIR PLAY.---The constitution of the new Republic of Liberia declares that no white man shall be a voter in that Republic."<sup>39</sup> This short article implied, just as many in state constitutional conventions had, that the "liberal direction" evidenced by the Liberian republic would reproduce and mirror the racial exclusivity of white citizenship in the United States.<sup>40</sup> Another stated, "The proudest slaveholder, should he pay a visit to Liberia, would be constrained to treat the colored man as his equal. And indeed, the tables are turned in a country as regards political rights, none but colored men being entitled to citizenship."<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> "Republic of Liberia," *Farmer's Cabinet* (Amherst, New Hampshire) (November 18, 1847).

<sup>38</sup> "Republic of Liberia," *Morning News* (New London, Connecticut) III, no. 310 (November 12, 1847).

<sup>39</sup> "Turn About is Fair Play," *Morning News* (New London, Connecticut) 4, no. 22 (December 24, 1847).

<sup>40</sup> In a later collection of news bulletins the paper included in its three sentence description of Liberian independence a sentence explaining that "no white man can vote in Liberia." "Events of 1847," *Morning News* (New London, Connecticut) (February 2, 1848).

<sup>41</sup> Article of the Christian Statesman published in: "Frederick Douglass and Augustus Washington," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, September 4, 1851.

The early press coverage of Liberian independence revealed, amplifying the rhetoric of republican nationhood could tap into a base of support for colonization which linked racial nationalism and expansionist impulses among white Americans. As such, some colonization supporters looked on independence as an opportunity to re-brand African colonization despite their initial wariness over how political sovereignty would be maintained in Liberia. In the years following independence, the ACS emphasized its own role in the creation of a black nation rather than the actions of black settlers. Even before formal independence, some ACS members saw the potential for promoting colonization through such rhetoric. In 1846, Dr. S. M. E. Goheen, a missionary and physician who had worked in Liberia, advocated independence to other colonization supporters noting, “Free persons of color, it is well known, have been so prejudiced against the Colonization Society as to refuse to go to Liberia under any circumstances” and that independence from the Colonization Society would remove the obstacle “which deprived Liberia of a class of citizens who alone can make it what it should be.”<sup>42</sup> The idea that African Americans would be more likely to support the independent nation of Liberia came to dominate the case for colonization in the coming decade.

By the time it seemed that independence was inevitable, the ACS had decisively begun to adopt rhetoric that ascribed grand significance to Liberian nationhood. The Society’s 1847 annual report issued on the eve of independence described the organization’s anticipated result from independence: “they may prove to a demonstration, and show to the world that *their race* is capable of *self-government*” arguing that “there are thousands of their own color in this country, who do not believe that they can ever

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<sup>42</sup> From the Liberia Advocate, May 1846 printed in “Liberia an Independent Republic,” *Christian Advocate and Journal* (May 20, 1846).

maintain a respectable government themselves.” The report continued: “Many would go to Liberia” if it rose to “a respectable standing among the nations of the earth.” The ACS report emphasized that citizenship rights were very important to the respectability of nationhood: “How important it is, therefore, that all should be able to cast their eyes across the sea, and behold on the shores of Africa a free and happy republic, composed and governed entirely by colored men, where every honest citizen feels that the incubus which pressed him down in every land is gone, and that he stands upon an equality, as to rights, privileges and prospects, with any other man in the world.”<sup>43</sup> Following independence, the ACS periodical, the *African Repository*, directed its energy towards demonstrating the viability of the newly independent republic to both white and black supporters. One article asserted, “Interest, pride, ambition, self-love, self-respect, benevolence, faith, hope and charity, all combine to lead them to Liberia, as the home for themselves and their children, and the field for the most perfect development and display of their powers, and the most extensive and intense usefulness!”<sup>44</sup> As in the newspaper articles, the ACS appealed to the historical significance of an independent black republic to generate support from both black and white audiences.

After Liberian independence, the African colonization movement increasingly situated the event within the narrative of historical development modeled after the United States. While the colony had long been depicted as a parallel to the imagined origins of the United States in the Virginia and Plymouth colonies, Liberian independence completed the narrative and added nationalistic force to the argument. In Henry Clay’s 1848 annual address as president of the ACS he drew the comparison between the

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<sup>43</sup> “Thirtieth Annual Report of the American Colonization Society,” *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 23, no. 3 (March 1847).

<sup>44</sup> “But will they go?,” *The African Repository* 26, no. 10 (October 1850): 292.

progress of Liberian colonies to the early colonies of North America as seeds for an expansive empire: “Jamestown and Plymouth both languished for years...yet now, what land is there on the broad surface of the habitable globe, what sea spreads out its waste of waters, that has not been penetrated and traversed by the enterprise, the skill, and the courage of our New England brethren?” He noted that in only twenty-five years the colony had grown into an independent nation and “immense numbers of the natives are crowding into the colony to obtain the benefits of education, of civilization, and of Christianity.”<sup>45</sup> An article published a few years later in the *African Repository* entitled “Analogy between the Anglo-American and the Liberian” predicted, “The year 1820 is destined to be ever memorable in the annals of Africa. It will be regarded by the black man as the year 1620 is by the descendents of the Puritans; and Sherbro will be his Plymouth... May we not hope that the analogy will continue and that Liberia will become the United States of Africa?”<sup>46</sup> Before its independence, the Liberian colony invited comparison to the American colonies in British North America, and the post-independence nation was held up as an example of how republican virtues could flourish abroad under American tutelage.

With respect to indigenous populations in the colony, colonization supporters often compared the position of the Liberian nation on the African continent with the United States in North America. A 1849 speech by John McClung contended that “at least 15,000 natives have already become subject to their [Liberia’s] influence,” claiming that their “grade of civilization is about equal to that of the Indian in his wildest states.” McClung contended that the native populations had “adopted a civilized costume and

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<sup>45</sup> “Thirty-first Annual Report of the American Colonization Society; 18 January, 1848.,” *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 24, no. 3 (March 1848).

<sup>46</sup> Starks, “Analogy between the Anglo-American and the Liberian.”

habits, and are ardently seeking to elevate themselves to a level with the colonists.” He established a parallel between settler colonialism in the United States, attributing Liberia’s “success” in civilizing native populations to the nation’s establishment as an independent republic: “There is not a [former] Spanish colony at this day, where civil and religious rights are as well understood, and as firmly established, as in the infant Republic of Liberia. The little colony maintains democratic institutions in peace and in security, administers justice, and levies taxes, maintains a prodigious ascendancy among the surrounding tribes, who regard her with admiration and wonder, without a standing army, and without tumult or disorder.”<sup>47</sup> Such claims that Liberia’s example of democratic governance would make it a civilizing force in Africa were typical of colonization advocates after independence.

Other ACS members favorably ranked Liberia’s achievement against other movements for representative democracy worldwide. In an 1848 meeting of the New York Colonization Society, George Washington Bethune, an influential clergyman in the Reformed Dutch Church, compared Liberia to the republican revolutions taking place in Europe at the time. While Bethune was interested in “the mighty changes going on in Europe” he still “looked with more interest on the republic of Liberia, which is the only black republic that had ever been established in the world. They learned the principles of liberty in the United States” and he predicted that “every despotic nation in Europe will perish before Liberia.”<sup>48</sup> During the same year, prominent supporters of African colonization in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania produced resolutions of support for the Republic of Liberia, noting that the African “experiment of self-government attracts comparatively

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<sup>47</sup> John A. M’Clung, *Proceedings of the annual meeting of the Kentucky Colonization Society* (Frankfort, KY: A.G. Hodges, 1848), 17-20.

<sup>48</sup> “New York State Colonization Society,” *The New York Herald* (May 10, 1848).

little notice amid the stirring events which now fill all Europe.” Although the resolutions claimed to “sympathize with all the oppressed nations struggling for free institutions” the historical relationships between the United States and Liberia “demand especial efforts for the encouragement of the Liberia Democratic Government.” The resolution concluded: “It is perhaps better that slowly and in silence the process of African Colonization and of republican self-government in Africa should go on.”<sup>49</sup>

The Colonization Society’s strategy of promoting Liberian independence during the late-1840s found success in Midwestern states where the surge in interest for colonization, detailed in the previous chapter, was frequently linked to rhetoric that claimed the advancement of citizenship rights in the newly independent republic. White leaders within these states followed Liberia’s independence with interest, particularly as their governments looked towards more active restrictions of black populations within their borders. Advocates of colonization in Ohio used the prospect of Liberian Independence to bolster their efforts to exclude African Americans from citizenship in the United States. A Cincinnati newspaper reported on the fact the colonizationists in Ohio were inspired by the independence of Liberia to generate funds for a establishing another “a *new state*, in connection with the Republic of Liberia” that would be offered to “the colored people of Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois.”<sup>50</sup> A few years later, the state legislature of Ohio passed a resolution that supported the recognition of Liberia noting, “Intelligent colored men in the United States, who might be eminently useful in Africa, are unwilling to emigrate to Liberia until its independence shall be acknowledged by the

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<sup>49</sup> “The Republic of Liberia,” *Daily National Intelligencer*, May 5, 1848.

<sup>50</sup> “Noble Enterprise--Ohio in Africa,” *Cincinnati Daily Gazette* (August 26, 1848).

government of the United States.”<sup>51</sup> In 1853, the Ohio Senate considered a bill that would build on the recent constitution which outlawed black citizenship in the state by preventing “the further settlement of blacks and mulatto person in this State” and imprisoning non-residents in the County jail. The bill also contained language that based such a law on the fact that “the Republic of Liberia declared its independence as a sovereign nation more than five years since, and has been acknowledged as such by France, England, Belgium, Prussia, and Brazil,” recommending the United States do as well.<sup>52</sup> While the Ohio legislature had voted to support Liberian independence in 1853, they had rejected efforts to amend the state constitution to grant citizenship to blacks and had introduced measures to prevent further immigration of African Americans into the state.<sup>53</sup> At the same moment that many states took steps to explicitly place black residents outside of the bounds of citizenship, they also argued that Liberia should be considered a legitimate nation within the world community. Many whites saw that the promise of independent nationhood and political sovereignty in Liberia was crucial to appeals for colonization among free blacks in the North precisely because black citizenship was increasingly undermined in the United States.

A handful of white women writers, unaffiliated directly with the colonization movement, echoed the formal and informal campaigns to promote independence by producing narrative literature about Liberian nationhood. While literary scholars have fruitfully analyzed these works for their insight into gendered ideologies of empire, they should also be considered as examples of the significant public interest in post-colonial

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<sup>51</sup> “Annual Report of the American Colonization Society,” *The African Repository* 27, no. 3 (March 1851).

<sup>52</sup> “Blacks and Mulattos,” *The Liberator*, January 7, 1853.

<sup>53</sup> “Annual Report of the American Colonization Society,” *The African Repository* 27, no. 3 (March 1851).

Liberia.<sup>54</sup> The first of the three books published was Helen Knight's *The New Republic* (1850), which was one of the first extensive accounts of Liberian independence. Knight was a Northeastern reformer who wrote novels under her own name as well as working for the evangelical reform organization, the Massachusetts Sabbath School. Written in partially narrative form, Knight's text was clearly aimed at a broad audience that was only vaguely familiar with either the history of the colony or its recent nationhood.

One section of the book was even reprinted in some newspapers, under the title "The New Republic—A Thrilling Sketch." The title and style of the excerpted portion of the novel clearly drew very clearly from the genre of sensationalist literature that commonly produced narratives about the recent expansionist war with Mexico.<sup>55</sup> The sketch published in the newspaper included no scenes from the recent history of independent Liberia, but told the story of the Liberian colony's founding in 1821 which featured US Naval officer Robert Stockton, who was known for his important role in the war between the United States and Mexico. The excerpt told the well-known story of Robert Stockton's efforts to secure a location for the colony by forcing King Peter, a leader of the region's indigenous inhabitants, to sign a land treaty at gunpoint. The scene concluded when "the American Flag was hoisted on Cape Mesurado—Three cheers for the American flag" and the "little band" was congratulated for "laying the foundation of that new Republic, which is to bless and benefit Africa, with the light of its Christianized civilization."<sup>56</sup> In aligning the recent public interest in independent Liberia with US

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<sup>54</sup> Ryan, "Errand into Africa: Colonization and Nation Building in Sarah J. Hale's Liberia."; Kaplan, "Manifest Domesticity."; Taketani, "Postcolonial Liberia: Sarah Josepha Hale's Africa."; Taketani, *U.S. Women Writers and the Discourses of Colonialism, 1825-1861*.

<sup>55</sup> Streeby, *American Sensations: Class, Empire, and the Production of Popular Culture*.

<sup>56</sup> "The New Republic - A Thrilling Sketch," *Farmer's Cabinet (Amherst, New Hampshire)* 48, no. 37 (April 25, 1850); Helen C. Knight, *The New Republic* (Boston, MA: Massachusetts Sabbath School Society, 1851), 64-70; the book was also republished under the title *Africa Redeemed. Africa Redeemed:*



nationalism, sections such as this drew on associations between the establishment of the colony and US imperial expansion, both in its allusions to the dispossession of indigenous populations and the recent war with Mexico.

While the first several chapters of *The New Republic* concerned the early difficulties involved in establishing the colony, the book very carefully catalogs the symbols of nationhood that much of the popular discourse of Liberian independence focused on. The book quoted Liberia's entire declaration on independence, and described the features of the nation's constitution and flag that were shared with the United States in great detail. Finally, the book concluded the story of independence of Liberia with scenes of the handover of power from the ACS to the people of Liberia.<sup>57</sup> The last chapter in the book detailed the successful diplomatic efforts of the young nation to secure diplomatic recognition by France, England and Belgium and concluding this narrative with the exclamation, "Behold, then, Liberia! a free, independent, recognized sovereignty among the civilized nations of the world."<sup>58</sup> The text concluded with a plea for US audiences to appreciate the importance of supporting a nation that was based on the democratic institutions of the United States: "Liberia is the child of our own institutions, bearing our likeness, breathing our spirit, and bestowing our privileges...may this American Republic stretch out its own strong arm, and with honest pride and fearless independence, give her a just and honorable *recognition* among the sovereignties of the world."<sup>59</sup> This culminating plea revealed the political purpose behind the novel to garner support for the United States' diplomatic recognition of the colony. It seems Knight was

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or, *The Means of Her Relief Illustrated by the Growth and Prospects of Liberia* (London, UK: James Nisbet & Co., 1851).

<sup>57</sup> Knight, *The New Republic*, 228-235.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 241.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 247.

at least partially successful in this goal. The *Colonization Herald* claimed that the book had “extensive circulation” and was successful in making “many new friends” to support an independent Liberia.<sup>60</sup> Ultimately, Knight’s text articulated themes that were already present in the media by asking readers to tap into imperial pride by connecting the stories of US and Liberian nationalism.

Two years after *The New Republic* was published, Harriet Beecher Stowe’s monumental *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was published and it included a brief but controversial passage in which the one of the main characters, George Harris, left the United States to settle in Liberia near the end of the novel. Harris is a resourceful and defiant slave who eventually escapes to Canada. In Harris Stowe depicted precisely the type of intelligent and energetic individual that colonizationists imagined would make a productive citizen in a democratic Liberia. However, after fleeing to Canada and eventually to France, where he received a university education, Harris comes to the conclusion that his talents would be wasted if he returned to the United States, and he decides to take his family to Liberia. In a letter to his friends and family he wrote of his reasons for choosing to finally settle in Liberia, “On the shores of Africa I see a republic,--a republic formed of picked men, who, by energy and self-educating force, have, in many cases, individually, raised themselves above a condition of slavery. Having gone through a preparatory stage of feebleness, this republic has, at last, become an acknowledged nation on the face of the earth,--acknowledged by both France and England. There it is my wish to go, and find myself a people.”<sup>61</sup> In having the novel’s most capable black candidate for citizenship leave the United States, the passage reflected the sentiment that republican nationhood

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<sup>60</sup> “Review of The New Republic, by Helen C. Knight,” *Colonization Herald*, July 1850.

<sup>61</sup> Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Co., 1993), 374.

had finally made the Liberian nation a suitable home for African Americans. Moreover, Stowe's Harris character echoed the imperial vision of spreading and reproducing waves of colonization in Africa, "*Our nation shall role the tide of civilization and Christianity along its shores, and plant there mighty republics, that, growing with the rapidity of tropical vegetation, shall be for all coming ages.*"<sup>62</sup>

In 1853, Sarah Hale, the editor of the women's periodical *Godey's Lady Book*, published a book entitled, *Liberia or Mrs. Peyton's Experiments* that was conceived in part as a response to Stowe's famous novel published a year earlier. Hale also acknowledged a debt to Knight's *New Republic* in the preface. Unlike Stowe, Hale depicted the institution of slavery as a largely benevolent institution and the story centered around a kind and paternalistic owner's quest to secure favorable terms of freedom for his slaves. Despite her national prominence, the impact of this novel was nowhere near that of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Literary scholar Susan Ryan pointed out that Hale's book was almost purposefully ignored within the abolitionist press at the time while the relatively brief passage on Liberia in Stowe's book received considerable debate.<sup>63</sup>

*Liberia* is a fictional story about Virginia planter Mr. Peyton, who decides to emancipate his slaves and send them to Liberia. The "experiments" alluded to in the title refer to Peyton's attempts to establish a new life for his emancipated slaves, first as landowners in the rural south and then as laborers in the urban North. Both of these attempts fail miserably leading them to leave the United States for the newly established Republic of Liberia. Once the main characters make it to Liberia, the character-driven

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 375.

<sup>63</sup> Ryan, "Errand into Africa: Colonization and Nation Building in Sarah J. Hale's *Liberia*," 563.

narrative falls away and Hale spends the last three chapters extolling the importance of Liberia's status as an independent nation.

Hale's novel engaged in the usual tropes of coverage that establish Liberia as a nation modeled on American principles. In a scene in which Mr. Peyton meets with President Joseph Roberts, Peyton calls him a "fair specimen of a Liberian" and hopes that "the time will come when from that little spot the laws and principles will go forth that will control all Africa." In Liberia, Hale's characters tour the country and witness all the elements of a well-established basis for a nation, including a prosperous national capital in Monrovia, a thriving black-run newspaper press, a successful system of agriculture, and functioning democratic government. An extensive appendix concluded the novel and supplied a compilation of letters written by African Americans who had emigrated to Liberia, including all the symbols of nationhood the press mentions: the declaration of independence, constitution, and Liberian flag.<sup>64</sup> Amy Kaplan has argued that Hale's novel was primarily concerned with shaping the contours of the US foreign and domestic space. However, when placed within the broader context of attention an independent Liberia, the novel can also be seen as part of many whites' imagined role for African Americans in a geography of US power where the political forms of the United States could be reproduced while carefully maintaining racial hierarchies.<sup>65</sup>

Despite the differing perspectives of these novels, they all reflected the shift in discourses about colonization resulting from the announcement of Liberia's independence. Both Knight's and Hale's books were concerned with promoting the idea of an independent Liberia, but with slightly different emphases. Knight's book was

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<sup>64</sup> Sarah J. Hale, *Liberia or, Mr. Peyton's Experiments* (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1853), 194, 202-229.

<sup>65</sup> Kaplan, "Manifest Domesticity."

consciously aimed at a white audience, and paid scant attention to the perspectives of African American emigrants. In attracting a white audience, Knight was ultimately concerned with placing the national journey of Liberia within a larger narrative of the United States' expansionist energy, which was evident in her account of the colony's founding by a US naval officer. In emphasizing such stories, she served her apparent agenda to promote recognition of the Republic of Liberia by the United States government. While Hale's novel had a similar strategy of garnering support for the new nation, the book's use of black main characters and her inclusion of a long appendix with a collection of testimonials from black writers about Liberia added the objective of allowing free black readers to imagine themselves as participating in the building of an African American republic.

While Harriet Beecher Stowe's discussion of Liberia was not a central concern of her novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* clearly had the most national impact of these three books. The brief section of the novel generated wide debate within the abolitionist movement, whose core identity had long been forged against the colonization movement. Literary critic, Michelle Burnham has argued that "the colonizing gesture" was "central to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*" because it implicitly negated "the 'alarming' possibilities of a black colony not in the service of the Christian and maternal empire of white America."<sup>66</sup> Regardless of the passage's relative importance to the book as a whole, it is significant that Stowe, who expressed ambivalence about the colonization movement, took the opportunity to insert it as a resolution for George Harris. The widely circulating discourse about the significance of Liberia as the first independent republic in Africa and its imperial ties to

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<sup>66</sup> Michelle Burnham, *Captivity & Sentiment: Cultural Exchange in American Literature, 1682-1861* (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 1997), 121, 146.

the United States likely inspired her to look past her own skepticism regarding the colonization movement and place these ideas within the language of black nationalism that Harris' character articulated. It is a testament to the power of these ideas that she chose to insert the language of Liberian-American national pride into a scene she surely knew would be controversial.

### **THE CONTESTED MEANING OF A BLACK REPUBLIC**

While the conclusion to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was the most high profile example of the broader discussion about Liberian nationhood in the years following independence, the reaction to this aspect of the novel among black abolitionists reflects both African Americans' reconsideration of post-independence Liberia and the reconfiguration of black critiques of colonization. Edward Wilmot Blyden, an African American clergyman who emigrated to Liberia in the early 1850s, approved of Stowe's nod to Liberian nationality in her novel. In an 1853 letter that was published in some anti-slavery newspapers, Blyden wrote that he was, "very agreeably surprised" that Stowe's novel depicted "an intelligent colored man in America, educated abroad, as expressing a desire for an 'African nationality,' and as intending to emigrate to Liberia; thus favoring the idea that is the position which every intelligent colored man should take."<sup>67</sup> His response alluded to the fact George Harris's comments not only echoed white discourses that celebrated Liberian independence, but they also resonated with ideas about the necessity of creating an "African nationality" within black communities. Yet, the abolitionist community viewed the idea the Stowe's novel was pro-colonization as damaging to the anti-slavery movement. At their annual meeting, members of the New York Anti-Slavery

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<sup>67</sup> E.W. Blyden, "Letter from Mr. E.W. Blyden," *The African Repository* 30, no. 8 (August 1854).

Society worried about the “evil influence” of the George Harris section and hoped “something would be done to counteract the Colonization influence” of Uncle Tom’s Cabin.<sup>68</sup> The backlash was so fierce that Stowe eventually circulated letters within the abolitionist community denouncing the colonization movement and expressing regret for including the passage. In her defense, Stowe claimed that she only included it because she believed the establishment of Liberia was a “fixed fact” which afforded an opportunity “of sustaining a republican government of free people of color.”<sup>69</sup>

Around the same time, black abolitionist Martin Delany wrote a scathing critique of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* in a public letter to one of Stowe’s defenders, Frederick Douglass. In the letter, which was published in Douglass’s own newspaper, Delany questioned Douglass’s support for Stowe’s anti-slavery efforts and wondered whether she had “any sympathy ... for the African race at all” noting that she “sneers at Hayti—the only truly free and independent civilized black nation ... on the face of the earth—at the same time holding up the little dependent colonization settlement of Liberia in high estimation?” Delany concluded that he saw no difference between her distinction between these two black nations, other than the fact that, “one is independent of, and the other subservient to, white men’s power.” Douglass published Delany’s letter, followed by his own response to it, which argued that he would not “allow the sentiments put in the brief letter of George Harris, at the close of Uncle Tom’s Cabin, to vitiate forever Mrs. Stowe’s power to do us good.” Making a distinction between the colonization movement and the nation of Liberia, Douglass argued that the ACS has “systematically, and almost universally, sought to spread their hopelessness among the free colored people” but that

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<sup>68</sup> American & Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, *The Thirteenth Annual Report of the American & Foreign Anti-Slavery Society* (New York, NY, 1853), 192-3.

<sup>69</sup> Stowe’s letter is quoted in: Ibid.

“we are *far* from saying this of many who speak and wish well to Liberia.”<sup>70</sup> The intensity of the debate over Liberia in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* reflected the fact that many African Americans, previously nearly universal in their rejection of the idea, became attracted to new arguments for colonization that were based on the national status of Liberia. The public discussion of colonization by both official and unofficial promoters of colonization as well as the state governments on behalf of colonization efforts and against black citizenship helped to renew interest in the Republic of Liberia.

In the late-1840s and early 1850s, the advent of Liberian independence was situated within the emerging debates about emigration and colonization within black communities. As the national divide over the issue of slavery widened, more African Americans in the North were attracted to the idea of emigrating from the United States. The heightened sense of urgency was ushered in by the extension of slavery resulting from the Mexican War and the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 which threatened the further expansion of slavery into Northern states. Black leaders, such as Henry Highland Garnet and Martin Delany, promoted various plans for emigration to the Caribbean, Central America, and Africa by theorizing that the black “nation” within the United States that needed to be active in its own liberation.<sup>71</sup> Many African Americans attracted to the concept of emigration ceased to identify with the United States, and saw themselves as part of a nationality that bound together many peoples of African descent. In *Exodus*,

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<sup>70</sup> “Mrs. Stowe’s Position,” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, May 6, 1853; For another harsh critique of Stowe’s narrative fate for George Harris see: C.V.S., “George Harris,” *Provincial Freeman* (July 22, 1854).

<sup>71</sup> Floyd John Miller, *The Search for a Black Nationality: Black Emigration and Colonization, 1787-1863* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1975), 94-231; Sterling Stuckey, *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1987), 138-192; Sterling Stuckey, *The Ideological Origins of Black Nationalism* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1972); Kwando Mbiassi Kinshasa, *Emigration Vs. Assimilation: The Debate in the Antebellum African-American Press* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1988); Howard Holman Bell, “The Negro Emigration Movement, 1849-1854: A Phase of Negro Nationalism,” *Phylon* (Summer 1959).



Eddie Glaude argued, “African Americans’ uses of nation language in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century stand as a peculiar expression of their ambivalent relationship to America.” He noted that African Americans’ use of the nationalist thinking during the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century reflected a set of struggles against an increasingly racialized national identity in the United States.<sup>72</sup>

African Americans who advocated emigration often arrived at the same premise as white supporters of colonization: that African Americans could never live on equal terms within the United States. Both groups argued that some form of nationhood, aligned with racial identity, would be the vessel for liberation; however black emigrationists’ concept of nationhood was far less fixed than the Liberian model, which was heavily burdened by its designation as a vessel for US national interests. While scholars have often inaccurately conflated colonization and emigration, it is also misleading ignore the overlap between the two positions. Both emigration and colonization celebrated the idea of establishing a racially-based nation which would stand as an example of black self-government and both embodied common assumptions about race, nationality, civilization, and colonialism.<sup>73</sup> The convergences between emigration and colonization in the 1840s and 50s provided an ideological framework for imagining black nationhood which fueled the resurgence of the colonization movement following Liberian independence. Within this context, the Republic of Liberia provided an opportunity for some African Americans could imagine a redemptive nationality that could counteract the exclusionary racism of US national identity. Although most free black communities had spoken forcefully against African colonization since its inception,

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<sup>72</sup> Glaude, *Exodus!*, 7, 62.

<sup>73</sup> On the conflation of colonization and emigration see: Greene, “Against Wind and Tide: African Americans’ Response to the Colonization Movement and Emigration, 1770-1865,” 370-376.

the advent of Liberian independence, alongside the proliferation of other black-led emigration plans, fractured the previously unified voice within some communities. The independent status of Liberia, national racial tensions, and the greater popularity of both emigrationist and black nationalist positions conspired to generate a new context for African American support of colonization.<sup>74</sup>

Following the announcement of Liberian independence, some black leaders aligned themselves with the public campaigns of newspapers and by the ACS to promote the international significance of the event. In many cases, black supporters of an independent Liberia used language that closely mirrored to the rhetoric of the broader popular discourse circulating at this moment. At an 1847 National Convention of Colored People in Troy, New York, a black supporter of colonization, Geo. H. Baltimore, argued that despite the faults of the ACS, Liberia has been prosperous and is “now on the eve of taking a stand among the independent nations of the earth. Already England and France are making proposition to them for the purpose of trade, and American naval officers stationed on the western coast of Africa, are appealing to the government of the United States, not to be backward in doing the same.” Baltimore also combined this rhetoric with appeals to black racial pride, as expressed through nationalism, by encouraging his audience to “share in the glory and honor of the Liberians, in building their villages and cities, constructing their canals, raising their ships, and above all the suppression of that evil, the slave trade.”<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> This is partially reflected in the fact that during this nine year period the American Colonization Society sent 4,268 colonists to Liberia, while the previous nine years (1838-1846) saw only 1,057. Staudenraus, *The African Colonization Movement, 1816-1865*, 251.

<sup>75</sup> “National Convention of Colored People.”

Black leaders' public support for Liberian independence relied on familiar nationalist symbolism to persuade African Americans to emigrate. Edward Blyden recounted the general impressions about Liberia he had overheard among black residents of a boarding house in New York: "They see in Liberia colored men rising to the most dignified stations that white men can fill in this country. They see them projecting, and governing themselves by wise and prudent laws,--- acknowledged as a Republic by some of the most potent and enlightened nations of Europe." While he noted their considerable interest in the prospect of Liberian nationhood, when he lamented that nevertheless, most African Americans he encountered "prefer to fight it out here." Blyden argued that African Americans lacked the collective will as a race necessary to achieve the nation's imperial destiny on the African continent: "if the colored people in this country had half the energy and enterprising spirit of the Anglo-Saxon race, how soon would the Republic of Liberia include within its limits the dark regions of Ashantee and Dahomey."<sup>76</sup> At the Free Colored People's Convention held in Baltimore in 1852, a black delegate, James A. Handy, argued that the convention should endorse emigration to Liberia because, "the infant republic of Liberia [was] attracting the attention of all the enlightened nations of the earth...acknowledged by England, France, Russia and Prussia—four of the greatest powers on earth." Handy followed this celebration of Liberia's independence by connecting the nation's potential glory to the "genius of American enterprise," which was "unbolting the massive door and securing the commerce of China and Japan." Ultimately, he surmised that expansion of US commerce around the world in concert with support for this independent nation would bring "the redemption of Africa."<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> "Duties of Colored Men," *New York Colonization Journal* (December 1850).

<sup>77</sup> "The Free Colored People's Convention," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, August 13, 1852.

The letters that aspiring emigrants sent to the ACS during this period provide some indication of the impact of Liberian independence had within some free black communities.<sup>78</sup> During the five years following independence, the ACS national office received an unprecedented volume of letters inquiring about how to reach the new Republic of Liberia.<sup>79</sup> The letters touched on a variety of concerns such as how to obtain transport to the nation, the costs of emigration, and their prospects for land and work in Liberia. In disclosing the reasons for their interest in Liberia, these writers drew on some of the themes of nationhood which some black leaders and the press promoted about the necessity of building a republican government in which citizens were allowed to reach their full potential through institutions modeled after those in the United States.<sup>80</sup> The historian Patrick Rael has argued that “African Americans in public appropriated the ideas of antebellum society, only to reformulate hostile notions into potent sources of empowerment and uplift.”<sup>81</sup> Emigration to Liberia often did not mean the wholesale rejection of the United States, but an appropriation of US nationalism for their own purposes.

Some aspiring emigrants saw themselves as emulating, or as part of a grand narrative of the United States’ progress, and used terms such as ‘freedom,’ ‘liberty,’ ‘citizenship,’ and ‘rights’ in conjunction with US nationalism. One writer claimed, “I

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<sup>78</sup> In quoting from these letters I have corrected some grammar and spelling errors to allow for the best readability. A word in brackets indicates that it has been changed to reflect the likely intention of the writer.

<sup>79</sup> Carter G. Woodson’s indispensable volume *The Mind of the Negro* compiled a significant number of the letters written to the ACS from 1817 to 1860. Of the letters compiled by Woodson, more than half came from the six years following the independence of Liberia in 1847. Woodson, *The Mind of the Negro as Reflected in Letters Written During the Crisis, 1800-1860*.

<sup>80</sup> I read these letters as not necessarily pure reflection of the writers’ underlying motivations for emigration to Liberia. Instead, I view these documents as crafted with their audience of ACS official in mind they might believe would respond positively to such declarations about Liberian nationhood and they serve as evidence of the saturation of this language within the general discourse of colonization during this moment.

<sup>81</sup> Rael, *Black Identity and Black Protest in the Antebellum North*, 3.

have [tried] a great [many places in these United States] and I find that ... Liberia is the [only] place” that “colored men” can “[enjoy] the rights of man.”<sup>82</sup> Others were more suspicious of these ideals and believed they would never receive the blessings of citizenship while they remained in the United States. One letter denounced the “mock freedom for the [colored] man in the United States,” arguing that Liberia was the most viable alternative for those “who have not lost all love for liberty and mental elevation.”<sup>83</sup> Another writer argued that he could do much more good in Liberia because on “this side of the Atlantic” he was not recognized as a citizen.<sup>84</sup> One man was pleased to hear that more African Americans had emigrated to Liberia because they “had seen that [the United States]” was not “[their] country of liberty and freedom,” and that they way to achieve freedom was to “leave this land to [establish] a free government of [our] own.”<sup>85</sup>

Despite their critiques of citizenship rights in the United States, many potential emigrants used the history of the United States as a model for the trajectory of the colony. Following independence, the ACS began to produce copies of the Liberian flag and constitution for distribution to African Americans. Several aspiring emigrants’ letters requested both of these articles, which they regarded as significant and tangible manifestations of black nationhood. One writer explicitly connected the colonization of North America with the founding of Liberia and hoped that “by [our] industry it may be in time as richly covered with [cities] farms and [commerce] as the [great] United States

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<sup>82</sup> Peter Butler to the American Colonization Society, 17 November 1848, *Letters received by the American Colonization Society*, October to December, 1848.

<sup>83</sup> N. D. Artist to the American Colonization Society, 18 July 1849, *Letters received by the American Colonization Society*, July to September, 1849.

<sup>84</sup> Nathaniel Bowen to the American Colonization Society, 26 April 1853, *Letters received by the American Colonization Society*, April to June, 1853.

<sup>85</sup> Lewis Holbert, to the American Colonization Society, 2 October 1847, *Letters received by the American Colonization Society*, October to December 1847.

of [America] which 300 years ago was [a] wilderness.”<sup>86</sup> Another writer hoped that Liberia would inspire his brethren to “let national pride be kindled up in their hearts” by making “a great nation of our own” with cities, laws, taxes, military, and politicians modeled on the institutions of the United States.<sup>87</sup> Consistently, the writers of these letters saw themselves as reproducing the United States and the democratic ideals which they believed the nation came to embody.

In these letters written by men for an audience of other men, the language of colonization and nationhood was thoroughly infused with gendered notions. Historian Bruce Dorsey argued that the gendered discourse within the colonization movement often used the language of emigration as an act of masculine redemption, even while it frequently questioned the masculinity of African American men.<sup>88</sup> This tendency was particularly evident in the colonization rhetoric following independence. An editorial from the *African Repository* described the development of Liberia, which “with the strength of manhood, [is] about to enter a career of independence and freedom, which will [it] a name, and, we doubt not, an honorable place among the nations of the world.”<sup>89</sup> Another article described the recent ratification of the Liberian constitution as an “act, by which a young community throws off the yoke of its tutelage, and asserts its character of political manhood.”<sup>90</sup> In line with the representations offered by white colonizationists, the language of masculinity undergirded many African Americans’ desire to construct a

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<sup>86</sup> Lewis Holbert, to the American Colonization Society, 7 September 1847, *Letters received by the American Colonization Society*, July to September, 1847.

<sup>87</sup> S. Wesley Jones, *African Repository* 28, No. 5 (May 1852): 149.

<sup>88</sup> Bruce Dorsey, “A Gendered History of African Colonization in the Antebellum United States,” *Journal of Social History* 34, no. 1 (2000): 94; See also: Bruce Dorsey, *Reforming Men And Women: Gender in the Antebellum City* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), 136-194.

<sup>89</sup> “African Colonization,” *The African Repository and Colonial Journal* 23, No. 6 (June 1847): 186.

<sup>90</sup> “Remarks on the Constitution by the Editor of the Liberia Herald,” *The African Repository and Colonial Journal* 24, No. 1 (January 1848): 13.

nation. Another potential emigrant argued that with the colony of Liberia “the African [will] be able to show to the whole world, that he can be a man.”<sup>91</sup> Another individual spoke of the building of a nation in the terms of a masculine labor. H.B. Stewart wrote to the ACS that he knew machinists, tailors, engineers, masons, blacksmiths, farmers and ministers who wanted to “Be useful citizens] to that young [republic].”<sup>92</sup> He argued that a man of color must “till that [piece] of earth with his own hands and water it with the sweat of his brow he must plant the tree of liberty, and [build] a temple sacred to religion and [justice].”<sup>93</sup> In this description, African Americans were an independent people engaged in the manly work of fostering a vital nation. Other writers saw the enactment of racial manhood through the creation of a national state. S. Wesley Jones argued that through the creation of national state with armies and navy, colleges, schools and doctors, African Americans would “cease to be ‘hewers of wood and drawers of water,’ and be men.”<sup>94</sup>

The struggle over the meaning of citizenship and black nationhood within the discourses of masculinity was evident in a brief public debate between two well-known African Americans in 1851, Frederick Douglass and Augustus Washington. Augustus Washington was a prominent daguerreotypist from Hartford, Connecticut, who emigrated to Liberia in 1851 after being inspired by its ascendance to independent nationhood.<sup>95</sup> Washington published a letter in the *New York Tribune* which praised the attention given

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<sup>91</sup> Benjamin S. Bebee to the American Colonization Society, August 1850, *Letters received by the American Colonization Society*, July to September 1850.

<sup>92</sup> H. B. Stewart to the American Colonization Society, 17 July 1848, *Letters received by the American Colonization Society*, July to September 1848, 85.

<sup>93</sup> N. D. Artist to the American Colonization Society, 5 October 1851, *Letters received by the American Colonization Society*, October to December 1851.

<sup>94</sup> S. Wesley Jones, *African Repository* 28, No. 5 (May 1852), 149.

<sup>95</sup> Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *Liberian dreams: Back-to-Africa narratives from the 1850s* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 181-3.

to the “infant Republic of Liberia” by both “the enlightened nations” and “the press of both England and America.” Echoing the sentiments featured in letters sent to the ACS, Washington urged African Americans to emigrate there because he believed it was the only place “the colored people of this country” could find “a home on earth for the development of their manhood.”<sup>96</sup> A few weeks after the letter was published, Douglass responded by scoffing at the uptick in black support for colonization, and offered his own version of masculinity to support it: “When will our people learn that they have the power to crush this viper which is stinging our very life away? And still more, when will they have the energy, the nerve, and manliness, to use it?”<sup>97</sup> The *Christian Statesmen*, a white pro-colonization paper, analyzed this exchange by praising Washington’s initial letter, contending that in advising African Americans to “go to a country where they will at once be liberated from every political and social trammel” and become “the governing class” he has shown “a nobler sentiment of self-respect, and of respect for his race.” The paper noted that, in contrast, Douglass advised “his colored brethren to doggedly remain ... without the shadow of a hope” does not display “an independent and manly spirit.”<sup>98</sup> The conflict over these conceptions of masculinity demonstrated that the colonizationists’ claim that political statehood would provide a basis for black masculinity contradicted the abolitionist notion that manhood depended on a rejection of colonization’s implicit capitulation to racially exclusive citizenship in the United States.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Augustus Washington, “African Colonization By a Man of Color,” *New York Daily Tribune*, July 3, 1851.

<sup>97</sup> “African Colonization,” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, July 31, 1851.

<sup>98</sup> “Frederick Douglass and Augustus Washington,” *Christian Statesman*, August 9, 1851.

<sup>99</sup> On how the abolitionist movement upheld middle class notions of masculinity see: Kristin L. Hoganson, “Garrisonian Abolitionists and the Rhetoric of Gender, 1850-1860,” *American Quarterly* 45, no. 4 (December 1, 1993): 558-595.



Although colonization was increasingly considered a viable option by some in the late 1840s and early 1850s, the idea remained controversial to most free African Americans. This was evident in black newspapers, black political conventions of the era, and books and pamphlets designed to dissuade African Americans from emigrating to Liberia. African American critics argued that despite the different motivations of black and white colonization supporters, support for Liberia ultimately served the same ends. An 1846 convention in Cleveland, Ohio passed resolutions declaring, “Colonization is, and ought to be condemned by the colored people” and that “the *colored* colonizationist is as bad as the *white* colonizationist.”<sup>100</sup> Black residents in Indiana responded negatively when William Findlay, an African American man from Indiana, published a public appeal “to the colored people of Indiana” which claimed that for African Americans “to be *truly* independent” they needed to travel to Liberia to “enjoy rights and privileges *as broad* and *as liberal* as those enjoyed by the citizens of the United States.”<sup>101</sup> His argument for gaining political privileges through colonization rang hollow to most African Americans in a state where discussions of colonization were explicitly tied to the diminishment of citizenship rights. A group of black residents from Fort Wayne, Indiana chastised black supporters of colonization, who they perceived as traitors. At an 1849 meeting they stated, “We feel insulted when asked to emigrate to Liberia; and when a colored man becomes the tool of such [a] society, or on his own responsibility advocates Colonization, we look upon him as recreant to the best good of his race.”<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> “Thirtieth Annual Report of the American Colonization Society,” *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 23, no. 3 (March 1847). “Thirtieth Annual Report of the American Colonization Society” [find proper citation for convention].

<sup>101</sup> William W. Findlay, “Appeal of Wm. W. Findlay, To the Colored People of Indiana,” *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 25, no. 6 (June 1849).

<sup>102</sup> “No Colonization,” *The North Star*, August 17, 1849.

A number of African Americans in the United States similarly seized on the disingenuous manner in which Liberian nationhood was promoted by both white and black leaders as a symbol of US values and interests even while the colonization movement actively worked to deny political power for black citizens in the United States. While many African Americans opposed colonization on the grounds that it worked to prevent the possibility of citizenship for African Americans in the United States, they also were acutely aware that the promise of nationality and citizenship promised by colonization would be another form of indignity wrapped in the language of freedom. An 1851 report from the black political convention in New York cautioned, “All kinds of chicanery and stratagem will be employed to allure the people thitherward... the independence of its inhabitants; the enjoyments and privileges of its citizens, will be pictured forth in glowing colors, to deceive you.”<sup>103</sup> Some African American onlookers viewed the government of Liberia as an ironic exercise in political theater wielding little real power of its own. A delegate at a black political convention in Ohio expressed this sentiment when he wryly told his audience, “Go to Liberia become President, Senator, Judge or what not. Come to this country and see how the founders of this scheme will treat you.”<sup>104</sup> A year after independence, the Colored National Convention passed a resolution contending that colonization was among the most “deceptive and hypocritical” of the “oppressive schemes” enacted within the United States because it was “clothed

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<sup>103</sup> “Proceedings of the State Convention of Colored People Held at Albany, New-York, On the 22nd, 23rd and 24th of July, 1851,” in *Proceedings of the Black State Conventions, 1840-1865*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), 67.

<sup>104</sup> “Minutes and Address of the State Convention of the Colored Citizens of Ohio, Convened at Columbus, January 10th, 11th, 12, & 13th, 1849,” in *Proceedings of the Black State Conventions, 1840-1865*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), 223.

with the livery of heaven to serve the devil in,' with President Roberts, a colored man, for its leader.”<sup>105</sup>

African Americans in the United States frequently criticized Joseph Roberts, Liberia's first President, because of his long relationship to the power structure of the ACS. In an article published in the *North Star*, Martin Delany commented on the manner in which the parallels between Liberian and US nationalism were disingenuously manipulated by promoters of independence. In critiquing the condemnation of President Roberts by supporters of colonization in the United States, he noted that Henry Clay, “that venerable slave-breeder and pre-eminent negro-dreader,” had pronounced Roberts “to be equal to the most eminent executives and statesmen in our country.” The article went on to point out that after Roberts' first major diplomatic tours as a head of state to gain official recognition by England and France, he wrote to an official in the ACS “giving him an official report of his proceedings as the Minister of Liberia, an independent nation!” Delany illustrated that while he had publicly travelled the world “clothed in paraphernalia of a nation's representative and armed with the proud panoply of a freeman's rights” he still was required to report “his official doings [to] a private white man in the United States.”<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> *Report of the proceedings of the Colored National Convention held at Cleveland, Ohio, on Wednesday, September 6, 1848* (Rochester, NY: Printed by John Dick, 1848), 16.

<sup>106</sup> “Liberia,” *The North Star*, March 2, 1849; Delany had a personal history with Liberia and racism which may have contributed to his skepticism about Liberian nationhood. In 1849, he was admitted to Harvard Medical School on the grounds that he would leave the United States and practice medicine in Liberia upon completion of his degree. Despite this precondition, the white student body vigorously protested his admission to the program. Eventually, he and other black students were expelled from the program. On the medical school episode see: Brooks to Medical Faculty of Harvard University, October 22, 1850; H.H. Childs to Oliver Wendell Holmes, December 12, 1850, Petitions and Correspondence RE: Admission of Colored Students, Countway Library, Harvard Medical School; Takaki, “Aesculapius Was a White Man.”; Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 21-22.

Delany extended this critique in his definitive statement of support for emigration and the establishment of a black nation, *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States*. In the book, he argued that African Americans were “a nation within a nation” and that the establishment of a black nation somewhere in the world would prove the capacity of African Americans for self-government. This argument was not dissimilar to the arguments that both African Americans and whites made in favor of Liberian nationhood. However, in the book Delany expressed his deep skepticism about Liberian sovereignty when he claimed in 1852, “Liberia is not an Independent Republic: in fact, *it is not* an independent nation at all; but a poor *miserable mockery*—a *burlesque* on a government.”<sup>107</sup> Delany was critical of a government that he believed was ironically touted as a product of US principles and interests. Around the same time, a book written by William Nesbit also criticized the hollowness of the Republic of Liberia in a similar fashion. Nesbit was an African American man from Pennsylvania who had spent a few months in Liberia in 1853 and returned to the United States disenchanted with his experience there. In his book, Nesbit critiqued the Liberian government’s thin veneer of legitimacy by paraphrasing Delany’s famous assessment, in observing, “Its laws are a burlesque on a free country.” Nesbit commented on the nation’s empty usage of institutions borrowed from the United States: “they assume to be [a] republic, to have copied their forms and laws from the United States” and “to give color to it, they pretend to have vested their power and authority in

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<sup>107</sup> Martin Robison Delany, “The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States,” in *Martin R. Delany: Documentary Reader*, ed. Robert Steven Levine (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 204; Paul Gilroy has argued that Delany rejected Liberia as an “autonomous, black nation state” because it “was not an adequate or sufficiently serious vehicle for the hopes and dreams of black citizen soldiers,” Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, 23.

executive, legislative, judicial, and all other departments, cabinets and bureaus known in the government of nations.” However, he argued that despite the election of representatives and senators, this apparatus meant little because most of the colony’s power remained in the office of President Joseph Roberts, who he suggested, was “but a tool in the hands of the Colonization Society.”<sup>108</sup> Nesbit, Delany, and other black critics grounded their commentary in a reversal of the inflated claims of equivalency between the United States and the Republic of Liberia.

Skepticism about an independent Liberia among African Americans came not only from decades of distrust of the motives of colonizationists, but also from careful observation of the fragile position Liberia occupied on the world stage. Many noted the disparity between widespread support for African colonization and the US government’s official rejection of Liberian nationhood. An 1851 black political convention in New York issued a report that condemned Liberian colonization. In making the argument against colonization, the report referred to the unsuccessful efforts made by the Republic of Liberia to be formally recognized by the United States by offering it dramatic trade concessions. The report contended, “[The Liberians] are willing, in substance, to bow slavishly to the worst sense, feelings, and views of the American government, by offering ... citizens of that republic [the United States] any business it might desire transacted in Africa ... Was there ever such a treaty formed and ratified in the history of civilized nations?”<sup>109</sup> Delegates of the New York convention recognized that despite Liberia’s independent status and the origins of Liberian settlement and the inherent disparity in

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<sup>108</sup> William Nesbit, *Four Months in Liberia or, African Colonization Exposed* (Pittsburgh, PA: J.T. Shyrock, 1855), 29, 33-4, 50, 56.

<sup>109</sup> “Proceedings of the State Convention of Colored People Held at Albany, New-York, On the 22nd, 23rd and 24th of July, 1851,” 69.

power would structure the nation into a neo-colonial relationship with the United States. At a national convention two years later, some African Americans had expanded this critique to position Liberia as an agent of US empire in Africa. The 1853 Colored National Convention issued a scathing report on the Republic of Liberia that situated its development within the broader context of European colonial expansion. The report drew comparisons between the Dutch and British colonization of Southern Africa and documented numerous injustices the colonizers committed against the indigenous populations. The report predicted, “Africa is destined to be the theatre of bloody conflict, between her native sons, and intruding foreigners, black and white, for a century yet to come. The British in the South and North, the French in the south-east and the Americans on the west, speculating in lands, cheating and warring, afford little promise of a political millennium for the land of Ham.” Decades before the “scramble for Africa,” some African Americans recognized that the creation of a black republic would be entangled with the expansion of Euro-American power on the African continent. The report continued, “The Liberians themselves, with their government backing them, are pursuing precisely, the same policy, that other colonizers have for the last hundred years in Africa: They boast that they have made their arms so often felt, that ‘no combination of the natives can be induced to fight them.’”<sup>110</sup> The convention argued that five years after independence, Liberia was already following a destructive model of colonialism that relied on violence against indigenous populations.

## **CONCLUSION**

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<sup>110</sup> *Proceedings of the Colored National Convention, Held in Rochester, July 6th, 7th and 8th, 1853* (Rochester, NY, 1853), 55.

After nearly a decade of independence, the Republic of Liberia was still not officially recognized by the United States government. A newspaper published by the black emigrant community in Canada believed this lack of recognition illustrated the hollowness of rhetoric which promoted a government modeled after the United States, “The colonizationists of the United States have unquestionably the control of the United States Government; how happens it that they have not recognized the independence of Liberia? Why have they never recognized the independence of any black government in any part of the world? The treatment of colonizationists towards black citizens of the United States, towards Liberia, and towards other black governments, is a true key to real colonizationism.”<sup>111</sup> Indeed, many of the most powerful politicians in Washington D.C., including several Presidents, had been public supporters of the colonization movement. However, efforts by Congress to pass a bill granting Liberia diplomatic recognition had been consistently shelved or defeated. The simple explanation for the failure of these efforts was the solid block of Southern congressmen who, despite occasional support for colonization, believed that recognizing an independent black nation fundamentally undermined the institution of slavery by publically admitting African Americans’ capacity for self-government.

Aside from the practically-minded motivation of slaveholders, the United States’ non-recognition of Liberia points to the profound tension between the promise that Liberia would become an equivalent of the United States in a “world of nations” and its seemingly indefinite status as a second-class republic. This tension had been present in the concept of colonization since its inception, but it was magnified by the prospect of

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<sup>111</sup> “Colonization. This scheme of our Yankee enemies is gathering,,” *Provincial Freeman* (March 24, 1854).

independence and was also evident in the subtle internal struggles between colonists and ACS officials over the nation's constitution and the particulars of post-independence. In contrast to the normative meanings colonization advocates and US audiences attached to independence, the disputes over the authorship of the constitution demonstrate that the meaning of "independence" was always deeply contested. In the end, Liberia's constitutional convention did not produce a document radically at odds with the wishes of the colonizationists, and despite the settlers' apparent dissatisfaction with ACS paternalism, the change in regimes was relatively seamless. Ultimately, the Republic of Liberia succeeded in superficially emulating US institutions through a smooth, rather than revolutionary, transition into independence in a fashion that resonated with US audiences. In the United States, the symbolism of independence overshadowed the reality on the ground: the colony had always considered itself sovereign, black settlers had long played significant roles in the governance of the colony, and Liberia continued their relationship with the ACS long after becoming independent.

While Liberia's independence might have been marginal in practical terms, the transition in colonial governance was infused with considerable meaning by observers in the United States. Observers in the United States who followed the details of early nationhood consistently emphasized that independence was a distinct break from the colonial relationship and a validation of United States' ability to shape the world in its image. Most assessments of Liberian independence focused on the superficial symbolism of the event: the declaration of independence, its national constitution, and its republican form of government, its President and its US-inspired flag. However, African Americans' critiques confronted popular perceptions of independence by exposing



Liberian nationhood as a disingenuous act of political theater. While these critical observations held considerable truth, other African Americans found real meaning in the prospect of helping to build a proud black nation, and even inspired some to leave the United States. Many leaders attempted to push back against the increased interest in Liberia from within black communities by framing Liberia as a nation that did not receive equal footing on the world stage and one that was largely engaged in serving US interests. Despite an increase in black interest in the idea, these leaders were largely successful in dissuading emigration to Liberia precisely because the bold claims made by advocates of independence clashed with the reality of a US nation that refused to give African Americans any citizenship rights at home or even recognize Liberia as a legitimate state. This contrast between promoting democratic nationhood while undermining the value of its sovereignty would develop into a hallmark of US policy in subsequent decades.

## CHAPTER 6

### EPILOGUE

In June of 1862, President Abraham Lincoln signed a bill into law that established official diplomatic relations with the republics of Liberia and Haiti.<sup>1</sup> By removing one of African Americans' primary critiques of emigration to these nations, Lincoln had hoped to attract settlement in both countries after emancipation. These diplomatic moves were only two of his varied attempts at promoting colonization in the early years of his presidency, which also included his serious, and ultimately frustrated, pursuit of a new colony in the Chiriquí province of Panama. Historians have primarily viewed these projects and diplomatic overtures as evidence of Lincoln's desperate wartime maneuvering within politics of slavery or as reflections of his personal racial beliefs.<sup>2</sup> However, these actions also developed from the long trajectory of republican rhetoric behind colonizationism and the recent actions of Lincoln's Republican Party, who had advocated colonization policies during the 1850s, often by linking them to strategies of US expansion. In this light, Lincoln's colonization plans both renewed and validated the

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<sup>1</sup> Two years later, diplomatic relations were fully secured when the United States signed treaties of friendship, commerce, and navigation with both nations. See: Charles H. Wesley, "The Struggle for the Recognition of Haiti and Liberia as Independent Republics," *The Journal of Negro History* 2, no. 4 (October 1917): 381-2.

<sup>2</sup> Burin, *Slavery and the Peculiar Solution: A History of the American Colonization Society*, 160-7; Phillip W. Magness, "Benjamin Butler's Colonization Testimony Reevaluated," *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association* 29, no. 1 (Winter 2008); Lerone Bennett, *Forced into Glory: Abraham Lincoln's White Dream* (Chicago: Johnson Pub. Co, 2000); Michael Vorenberg, "Abraham Lincoln and the Politics of Black Colonization," *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association* 14, no. 2 (Summer 1993): 23-46; G. S. Boritt, "The Voyage to the Colony of Linconia The Sixteenth President, Black Colonization, and the Defense Mechanism of Avoidance," *The Historian* 37, no. 4 (August 1975): 619-632; Charles H. Wesley, "Lincoln's Plan for Colonizing the Emancipated Negroes," *The Journal of Negro History* 4, no. 1 (January 1919): 7-21; Wesley, "The Struggle for the Recognition of Haiti and Liberia as Independent Republics."

concept of a black racial republic while gesturing towards an emerging vision for US empire.

While recognizing Haiti and Liberia reflected only a portion of Lincoln's many plans for post-war colonization, it is critical to consider the symbolic weight of pairing these two nations. For more than a half century, the United States had withheld recognition from Haiti, the second independent republic in the Western hemisphere, because it challenged the notion that legitimate self-government required a foundation of white supremacy. The United States' refusal to recognize Haiti, and implicit disavowal of its revolutionary claims, had been instrumental to legitimating white nationhood and was fundamental to the US identity as the most liberal and modern in the world.<sup>3</sup> As illustrated in the first chapter, the counter-revolutionary context created by the Haitian Revolution was the seedbed for early conceptions of colonization. Over the next several decades, the movement to create Liberia reformulated conceptions of a black republic away from the revolutionary example of Haiti and towards a 'United States of Africa,' which could be comfortably integrated into the US imperial imagination. Supporters of colonization lobbied for the United States to recognize the Republic of Liberia for more than a decade on the grounds that it mirrored the political and racial foundations of US nationhood.

However, whites in the United States did not support Lincoln's diplomatic recognition of these nations, or his colonizing ventures in Central America, only because they promised to protect and enshrine the rights of African Americans. Many colonizationists believed that these independent colonies would generate the political and economic linkages that could develop into critical components of US strategic and

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<sup>3</sup> Fischer, *Modernity Disavowed*; Hunt, *Haiti's Influence on Antebellum America*.

commercial expansion. The connection between racial republicanism and the expansion of US capital is evident in the wave of support for black colonization in Central America which developed during the 1850s. One of Lincoln's central advisors on colonization matters was Frank Blair, Jr., a US Representative from Missouri, who had become a prominent advocate for making colonization a central plank of the Republican Party platform in the years leading up to the 1860 election. Blair argued that the colonization of African Americans in Central America could help produce like-minded republics that would provide a powerful bulwark to British commercial dominance of the region. By the early 1860s, the cultivation of trade advantages had increasingly become a selling point for the African colonization movement as well. John H. B. Latrobe, the President of the American Colonization Society in early 1860s, often linked the importance of recognizing Liberian independence with the United States' ability to economically develop West Africa. In his 1862 annual address to the ACS, Latrobe encouraged Lincoln's efforts at "recognizing the Government of Liberia" which he believed should have no difficulty passing once US leaders were able to acknowledge "the benefits that would be derived from it." Latrobe argued that as "a nation of manufacturers" the United States has "fought for markets in China, and spent hundreds of thousands of dollars in obtaining them in Japan" while "we voluntarily exclude ourselves from almost the only virgin market in the world." After noting the progress of the French and British empires in securing territory in Africa, he lamented that the United States was unable to draw on the "peculiar facilities, which its relationship to Liberia naturally afford" and feared that if the United States continued to neglect its "commercial destiny" in Africa this opportunity could be "lost to it forever."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> John H. B. Latrobe, "Annual Meeting of the American Colonization Society," *African Repository* 38, no.

Lincoln's colonization efforts were also supported by a prominent purveyor of US expansionism, Robert Walker, whose advocacy illustrated the convergence between the ideologies of territorial expansion, commercial empire, and the recognition of racial republics. Walker was a former US Senator and Secretary of the Treasury, as well as a businessman with an eye for land acquisition. During the 1840s, he became a central figure in advocating for the annexation of Texas through his publication of a famous letter which argued the United States should acquire Texas in order to prevent it from being commercially and politically dominated by Great Britain.<sup>5</sup> Nearly two decades later, he urged Lincoln and other politicians to consider the potential value of African Americans as ambassadors of American interests through a colonization program aimed at creating colonies in Central America. Walker emphasized the commercial and geopolitical benefits of colonies situated on "one of the great interoceanic routes" remarking that, "it is a great object to secure the control of this isthmus by a friendly race, born on our soil, and the selection corresponds with the views expressed in my Texas letter of 1844." Walker's support for Lincoln's colonization plans in Panama not only developed from his ideology of continental empire, but also from his history of advocating the exploitation of commercial advantages in Liberia which he had done for more than a decade, partially in his capacity as Secretary of the Treasury. In the same editorial, he praised the economic potential of Liberia, which saw as even more

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2 (February 1862).

<sup>5</sup> On Walker's role in the annexation debate see: Sam W. Haynes, "Anglophobia and the Annexation of Texas," in *Manifest Destiny and Empire: American Antebellum Expansionism* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1997), 128-9.

promising because that “great republic” had already “reclaimed from barbarism, for civilization, Christianity, liberty and the English language, 700 miles of the coast.”<sup>6</sup>

As evidenced in Walker’s advocacy for the Republic of Liberia, Lincoln’s various colonization efforts developed from a longer tradition of interest in turning Liberia into a profitable trading partner as well as a ‘home’ for African Americans. As mentioned in the previous chapter, during the early 1840s the US Commerce Committee had investigated the possibility of making Liberia a new kind of US colony that would have minimal “political jurisdiction” but the “highest commercial privileges.”<sup>7</sup> Although US politicians shelved the idea of transforming Liberia into an indirectly managed colony, independence afforded an opportunity for many whites to redeploy their interest in commercial development within the language of republican nationhood. Shortly after Liberian independence, Congress considered setting aside naval appropriations to subsidize a fleet of steamships that would travel between the United States and Africa. Supporters of the fleet envisioned that it would facilitate direct commerce in West Africa, transport black emigrants to Liberia, and serve as auxiliary to the US Navy. Representative Fred P. Stanton, the chairman of the Naval Committee, submitted a Congressional report concluding that the size of the navy “has by no means kept pace with that of other great commercial nations.” Stanton believed that this disparity was accentuated by the acquisition of US costal lands following the expansionist war with Mexico: “the recent increase of our territory, on the Pacific and in the Gulf of Mexico,

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<sup>6</sup> Robert J. Walker, “The Union,,” *The Continental Monthly: devoted to literature and national policy* 2, no. 5 (November 1862): 576; Walker had a long history in supporting commercial development through colonization. As Secretary of Treasury in the Polk administration, Walker had argued for a system of commercial development in West Africa through a line of mail steamships which would be facilitated by the “new republican empire on the shores of Africa.” *Remarks on the Colonization of the Western Coast of Africa by the Free Negroes of the United States, and the Consequent Civilization of Africa and Suppression of the Slave Trade* (New York, NY: W.L. Burroughs’ Steam Power Press, 1850), 24.

<sup>7</sup> “Reviews” *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 20, no. 3 (March 1844).

forms an additional reason for a considerable augmentation of our steam navy.” The report concluded that “Liberia is the door of Africa, and is destined to develop the agricultural and commercial resources of that continent, besides being the means of regenerating her benighted millions.”<sup>8</sup>

Several newspapers and journals promoted this line of steamships as an unparalleled opportunity for US capital. An article in the *African Repository* argued that the political independence of the Republic of Liberia was the first step to accessing the vast and untapped markets of the African continent: “How shall a market be opened there for all the articles manufactured in the United States, and for the surplus productions of our soil? How shall the inexhaustible treasures of that immense continent be brought to supply our wants, and increase our wealth and our glory?” The article noted that, “the 150,000,000 inhabitants of Africa, now all naked, must be *clothed*, and will be as civilization advances among them.”<sup>9</sup> An editorial in one of Indiana’s leading newspapers proclaimed that the development of commercial trade with Africa would be of great “advantage to our country” as it would “open up to us an immense commerce, as with us they would be more inclined to trade than with any other nation. Their feelings and sympathies would remain with us.”<sup>10</sup> When the proposals for a line of Liberian steamships faltered in Congress, colonization supporters portrayed this as a missed opportunity for cultivating trade with a nation inherently sympathetic to US interests. An editor promoting colonization noted that with a foundation “already laid just after the order of the United States” it was “about to be one of the greatest Republics of the

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<sup>8</sup> United States. Congress. House. Committee on Naval Affairs, *Report of the Naval committee to the House of representatives, August, 1850, in favor of the establishment of a line of mail steamships to the western coast of Africa* (Gideon and Co., 1850), 4, 7, 21.

<sup>9</sup> *The African Repository* 26, no. 5 (May 1850).

<sup>10</sup> “A line of steamers to Africa,” *Indiana State Journal* (September 14, 1850).

world.” The author worried that the opportunity for investment would be lost in inter-imperial competition with the British empire who were “doing a first-rate business, running full of freight both ways... in two years they will get all of it!” The article pleaded that the United States need to develop diplomatic and trade relationships with the country, “When will our Government look a little after its interests in that direction?”<sup>11</sup>

Colonization supporters’ advocacy of commercial opportunities alongside the diplomatic recognition of Liberia had begun to rebrand colonization as an economic, as well as, a social program. This shift was particularly apparent in the plans to build black republics within Central America. Following the US-Mexico War, many people in the United States turned their eyes to Central America as a frontier for expansion and commercial competition. This was most evident in the wave of attempts at private military conquest of lands in the region, known as filibustering. An American adventurer named William Walker led the most famous of these expeditions and succeeded in briefly establishing a “republic” in Nicaragua with himself situated as the central ruler. Most of these filibustering campaigns were supported, or led, by slaveholders who were interested in expanding slavery, as well as US territory, further to the South.<sup>12</sup> Thus, the black colonies proposed in Central America were conceived as a response to the slaveholders’ filibusters through their fusion of racial republicanism with emerging hemispheric economic interests. Indeed, Liberia itself, as an independent settler colony, was similar to filibustering operations or the colonization of Texas. Given such resonances, it is

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<sup>11</sup> “Interesting from Liberia,” *Daily National Intelligencer* (March 15, 1854).

<sup>12</sup> Robert E. May, *Manifest Destiny’s Underworld: Filibustering in Antebellum America* / (Chapel Hill, NC, 2002); Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire*; Streeby, *American Sensations: Class, Empire, and the Production of Popular Culture*.



unsurprising that some politicians aimed to use black colonization to imagine a different kind of expansion in the region.<sup>13</sup>

Frank Blair, a US Representative from Missouri, was the plan's most prominent advocate and in 1858 he introduced a bill which proposed that Congress acquire "territory either in the Central or South American states" for the purposes of colonizing African Americans. Blair believed that creating such colonies would help "sustain free institutions under stable governments" and help develop "the incredible riches of those regions" by opening "them to our commerce, and the commerce of the whole world." Echoing the long-standing colonization rhetoric about the diffusion of US political ideals, Blair believed that African Americans could "reinvigorate the feeble people of the Southern Republics." Through infusing these nations with African Americans capable of teaching democratic ideals he argued that his colonization endeavor would act as a counterweight to the Southern filibusters which would "subject those regions, in [William] Walker's own language, 'to military rule,' and exclude them from the people of the northern states."<sup>14</sup> Horace Greeley, the influential editor of the *New York Tribune*, praised Blair's plan and concurred that African Americans would be ideal people to "preach and practice democratic equality in Central America."<sup>15</sup> Blair's plan was complimented by a similar plan put forward in the Senate by the Wisconsin Republican,

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<sup>13</sup> Eric Foner has examined these proposals primarily as part of the ideological landscape of Republican Party politics during the late 1850s. Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War*. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1970), 267-280; on Central and Southern American colonization, also see: James D. Bilotta, *Race and the Rise of the Republican Party, 1848-1865* (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 1992); Gerald Horne, *The Deepest South: the United States, Brazil, and the African Slave Trade* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2007), 172-197; Richard H Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom: Antislavery Politics in the United States, 1837-1860* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1976), 324-5.

<sup>14</sup> *Congressional Globe* 35th Cong., 1st sess. (1858): 293; Blair's speech was also reprinted in pamphlet form for wider distribution. Frank P. Blair Jr., *Speech of Hon. Francis P. Blair, Jr., of Missouri, on the Acquisition of Central America; Delivered in the House of Representatives, January 14, 1858* (Washington D.C.: Congressional Globe Office, 1858).

<sup>15</sup> *New York Tribune* (February 25, 1858).

James Doolittle. The Republican Senator from Iowa, James Harlan, argued in support of Doolittle's bill, arguing that the United States should secure "a home and an abiding place" in Central America for African Americans. Harlan argued, "Let him there, as in the colony of Liberia, demonstrate to the world his capacity for self-government" where "[he could] build up for himself a country" that would be under "the temporary protection of the stars and stripes of the Union."<sup>16</sup>

To build support for Central American colonization, Representative Blair gave speeches to mercantile societies in Boston, New York and Cincinnati asking that they also consider colonization as a business, rather than merely a political or benevolent venture. In one speech, he argued that battles over federal authority for colonization had been rendered moot by the removal of Native Americans. He noted that the government had already commonly used its power to set apart territory "for the occupation of a particular race of people—that has been done often, and it is being done every day. When the Indians began to encumber our Northwestern and Southwestern Territories, we bought their old homes, purchase new homes for them [and] paid for their removal to these new homes." Blair pointed out that while this practice of relocation was practiced on "enemy" population of Indians, it could be even more profitably exercised with African Americans. He argued they could profitably convey the influence of US institutions in the critically strategic location in Central America because they had received, "an amount of instruction and knowledge in government, religion, and all the

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<sup>16</sup> *Congressional Globe* 36st Cong., 1st sess., Appendix (1860): 57.

arts of civilized life, which makes them superior, as a people, to any of the coloured races of the world.”<sup>17</sup>

While Central American colonization and Liberian commercial exploitation were only mildly successful in attracting support during the polarized political climate of the late-1850s, they provide crucial context for Abraham Lincoln’s varied colonization plans and efforts to recognize black republics. Although the ideal of a militarized white settler empire prevailed during the Jacksonian-era, the renewal of colonization plans portended another path for US expansion that was more along the lines imagined by advocates of racial republics during the 1820s and 30s. In contrast to this earlier era, US expansion had considerably altered the continental landscape of North America by the early 1860s. The United States had displaced most eastern native populations, engaged in expansionist wars and developed an ideology of Manifest Destiny which precluded any possibility of a territorially permanent and sovereign Indian republic like the one proposed by Indian colonizationists. Additionally, the formal independence of Liberia had largely eliminated nagging questions about its precedent for creating a “colonial system” which expanded federal power. The Republic of Liberia’s independent, yet subordinate, relationship to the United States seemed to indicate what the colonizationists had maintained all along: that the United States could create a new kind of empire based on republican independence and racial nationhood.

However, these differing approaches to empire continued to clash throughout the 1840s and 1850s. During the war with Mexico, Whig opponents sometimes compared the militaristic war of expansion to the purportedly benevolent model offered by

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<sup>17</sup> Frank P. Blair Jr., *Colonization and Commerce. An address before the Young Men’s Mercantile Library Association of Cincinnati, Ohio, November 29, 1859* (Cincinnati, OH, 1859), 2, 5.

colonization. In 1847, *The National Intelligencer*, a prominent Whig paper, noted that, “we doubt whether the prospects of Colonization are, just now, much brightened by our national operations in another quarter: our benevolent plans can hardly proceed at once on all sides; and African colonization must probably yield to Mexican. Our ‘manifest destiny’ call us in another direction; to havoc, not restoration; to spreading desolation over an unhappy land, not making the waste bloom and blossom like the rose; to trampling on the weak, not raising up the afflicted and depressed.”<sup>18</sup> Despite such attempts to draw a contrast between benevolent and violent expansion, others believed that continental Manifest Destiny could exist alongside the empire of independence suggested by an independent Liberia. In 1847, the *Richmond Republican* celebrated Liberia’s US institutions by noting portions of the Liberian constitution that were “copied from the State Constitutions of the U. States” and detailing Liberia’s system of government. The article concluded by linking the US role in fostering this independent nation to continental expansion at home: “Let those whose daily task is to malign our country, look upon the monument of wisdom and benevolence she has quietly rented upon that benighted continent, while pursuing her own magnificent ‘destiny’ at home.”<sup>19</sup>

While the ideology of Manifest Destiny was built from Jackson’s militaristic and anti-federal vision of empire, such sentiments indicate that the liberal empire promised by colonization could easily co-exist with it. The renewed popularity of colonization during the early 1850s likely points to the racial tensions inherent to the ideology of Manifest Destiny. As the United States continued to expand onto territory with racially ‘undesirable’ populations, the promise of an empire that maintained racial separation had

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<sup>18</sup> “Notes on New Books,” *Daily National Intelligencer* (January 2, 1847).

<sup>19</sup> “Republic of Liberia,” *Richmond Republican* (October 1847).

ongoing appeal. Scholars examining the ideology of continental empire have pointed to US racial anxieties stemming from the potential annexation of large territories with populations considered to be racially inferior. Paul Foos has noted that this consideration animated the post-war treaty between the United States and Mexico and that US officials favored commercial expansion over an even larger territorial acquisition. Foos argued, “Ultimately, US capitalism would solve the quandary posed by expanding American investment, industry, and markets far beyond national boundaries, thus obviating the ‘problem’ of providing citizenship rights to culturally alien peoples.”<sup>20</sup> Shelley Streeby has also noted this in the post-Civil War efforts to establish trade in Cuba by northern abolitionist expansionists “for whom formal annexation and political incorporation were less important than the securing of trade routes and the maintaining of U.S. economic hegemony.”<sup>21</sup> These issues of racial incorporation continued to be central to the discussions of annexation and expansion as the United States asserted itself as a global empire in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>22</sup>

Following the independence of Liberia and the US-Mexico War at the end of the 1840s, the long-standing ideals of racial republicanism and became aligned with a more recent interests in hemispheric and commercial expansion. Plans for the colonization of Central America articulated a new context for the racial republic in a region that was viewed as more strategically crucial to US interests than West Africa. Promoters of colonization argued that black emigration to Panama, Haiti, or Liberia would not only

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<sup>20</sup> Foos, *A Short, Offhand, Killing Affair*, 151.

<sup>21</sup> Streeby, *American Sensations: Class, Empire, and the Production of Popular Culture*, 246.

<sup>22</sup> For examples of the continuing importance of racial ideology in limiting the practices of US empire see: Eric Tyrone Lowery Love, *Race Over Empire: Racism and U.S. Imperialism, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Kramer, *The Blood of Government*.

solve racial problems at home, but it would help secure US dominance in the Caribbean basin and open new markets on the west coast of Africa.

In examining the plans for colonization during this era, it is clear that visions of continental and global empire were resituated with respect to the ideologies of race and republicanism in the late antebellum period. Since the Jacksonian era, the United States had been engaged in securing a continental empire, largely through decentralized white settler colonialism backed by military power. Leaders who hoped to reproduce the political economy of southern slavery were behind the policies associated with Manifest Destiny: Indian removal policy, the colonization and annexation of Texas, US-Mexico War, and filibustering campaigns. This mode of expansion was often opposed by the supporters of African colonization, generally represented by the Whigs, and later Republicans, who favored more regulated and commercially-minded expansion that benefitted northern economic interests.

The dominant approach to expansion illustrated by Manifest Destiny was focused on expanding the physical territory of a white republic. Adherents of this ideology generally had little interest transforming or integrating 'racially inferior' populations and explicitly undermined the sovereignty of republican governments in the cases of the Cherokee nation and Mexico. In contrast, the imperial thinking favored by colonizationists aimed to foster compatible forms of political sovereignty by repositioning marginalized non-white populations in a way that would be favorable to US interests while maintaining racial hierarchies. Through separation, expansion could be achieved without the perceived racial complications created on the frontiers of an expanding settler empire. Although colonization and plans for the creation of racial

republics were largely unrealized, the debates and discussion about these ideas illustrate the United States' new vision for projecting power abroad. If the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century revealed the fissures over the meaning and scope of US empire, by the 1860s there was greater convergence between territorial and global expansion. The proposals for Central American colonization were similar to filibustering schemes, but employed the language of free labor and liberal democracy, rather than the slaveholding empire favored by Southerners. Through recognizing Liberia and Haiti, the United States formally accepted the racial republic long advocated for by colonizationists in a way that merged concerns about post-emancipation racial identity with the objectives of expanding political and commercial power. In the ideal cultivated by colonizationists, the United States would be both teacher and beneficiary of liberal governments around the world while carefully maintaining racial hierarchies at home. This idealistic and self-serving conception of empire would become an enduring aspect of US ideology as it continued to expand its power globally in the coming century.

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