

“WE FEEL SADLY THE EFFECTS”: AMERICA’S CIVIL WAR, COLONIZATION,  
AND LIBERIA’S STRUGGLE TO BUILD UP A NATION

by

Beth Garcia  
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Committee:

\_\_\_\_\_ Director

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Department Chairperson

\_\_\_\_\_ Program Director

\_\_\_\_\_ Dean, College of Humanities and Social  
Sciences

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Fairfax, VA

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Doctor of Philosophy at George Mason University

by

Beth Garcia  
Master of Arts  
George Mason University, 2008  
Bachelor of Arts  
St. Mary’s College of Maryland, 2005

Director: Dr. Yevette Richards Jordan, Associate Professor  
Department of History

Fall Semester 2020  
George Mason University  
Fairfax, VA

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## **ABSTRACT**

**“WE FEEL SADLY THE EFFECTS”: AMERICA’S CIVIL WAR, COLONIZATION,  
AND LIBERIA’S STRUGGLE TO BUILD UP A NATION**

Beth Garcia, Ph.D

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Dissertation Director: Dr. Yvette Richards Jordan

This dissertation explores the impact of the American Civil War on the Liberian nation-building project. While the American Civil War serves as an end point in most studies of colonization and the making of Liberia, this dissertation argues that the war was a pivotal moment in the Liberian nation-building project, a moment when conflicting ideas about how to build up a nation were most forcefully articulated as colonizationists and Liberians competed to define the Liberian nation.

While most African Americans rejected colonization as a ploy to secure slavery, on the eve of America’s war, nearly 13,000 had settled in Liberia. Though shrouded in the pretext of building up an African nationality, Liberia, at mid-century, remained a nation of African American emigrants. Founded on Western tenets of Christianity and civilization that effectively excluded the majority indigenous population, the infant republic would endure only so long as emigration from America continued. Thus, when



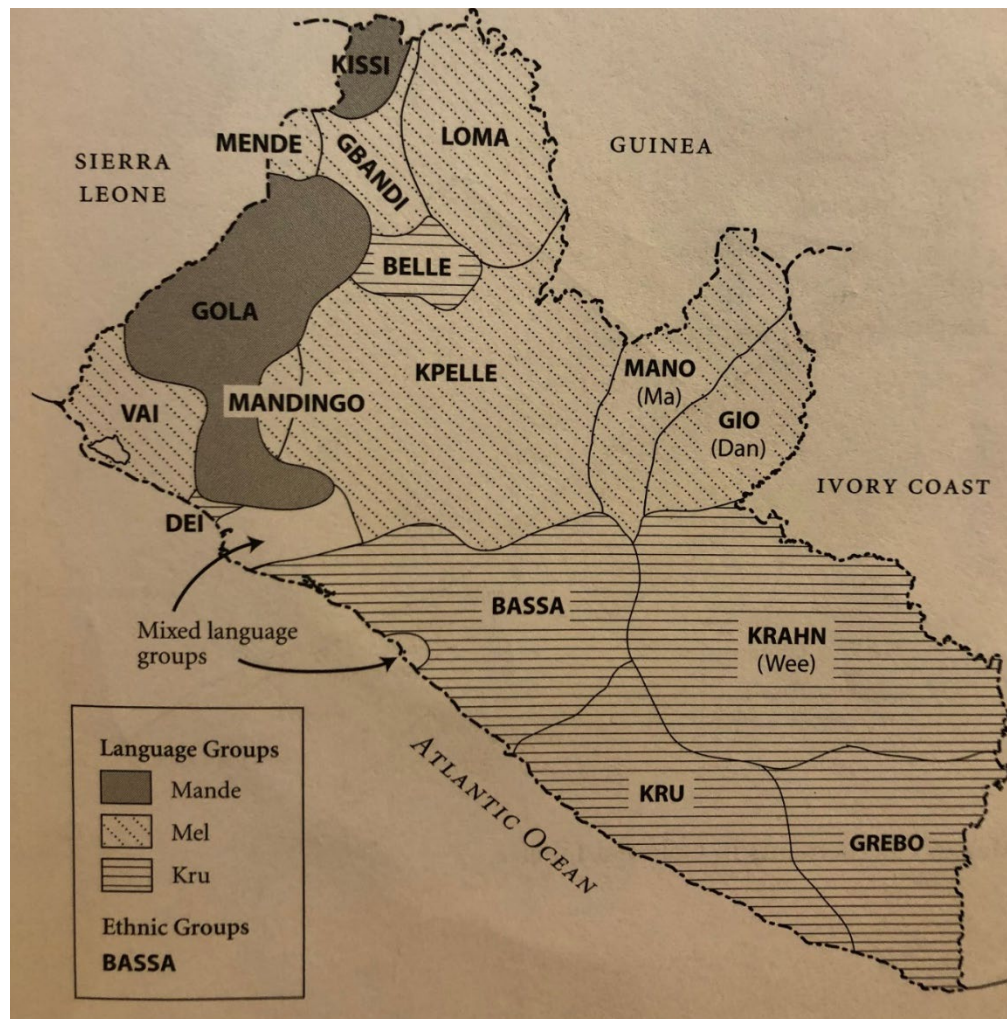
America's war broke out and emigration virtually ceased, those invested in building up an African American republic were forced to rethink their Liberian project. Though a failed attempt to secure federal colonization funds and an unsuccessful experiment in Barbadian emigration seemed to foretell the end of the Liberian project, the racial violence and economic desperation that America's newly-freed men and women confronted turned many towards emigration. However, as the American Colonization Society (ACS) began to land these emigrants in Liberia by the hundreds, Liberians pleaded that no more such emigrants be sent. Utterly destitute by condition of enslavement and thrown upon the struggling west African nation with no means of support, their suffering convinced Liberians that more was needed than African American population to build up a nation. Against pleas for increased emigrant aid and support for education, the ACS continued to send out shipload after shipload of destitute freedmen, upholding race as the sole determinant of nation.

With the ACS recommitted to emigration, Liberians turned inward after the American Civil War to the hundreds of thousands of indigenous peoples that had long been excluded from their nation-building efforts. However, unwilling to abandon the tenets of classical black nationalism upon which they had built up their young nation, Liberians did not extend any meaningful terms of inclusion. Rather, they would continue their nation-building project for another century until Liberia's own civil war finally dismantled the remnants of the colonization project.

Despite its enduring connection to the United States, Liberia is notably absent from Civil War historiography. While this dissertation adds to recent historiography by expanding the geographic boundaries of Civil War scholarship, it also reveals much about how African Americans understood freedom and how they envisioned both the American and Liberian nation. Ultimately, this is a study of nationalism. In examining the impact of America's Civil War on Liberia, it explores the ways that various nationalisms coexisted and competed in the struggle to build up the Liberian nation.



**Figure 1: Map of Liberia.** Included in George T. Fox, *A Memoir of the Rev. C. Colden Hoffman, missionary to Cape Palmas, West Africa*. New York: A.D. F. Randolph, 1868



**Figure 2. Distribution of Major Ethnic and Language Groups in Liberia. Nineteenth Century.** Map from Jeremy Levitt. *The Evolution of Deadly Conflict: From 'Paternalitarianism' to State Collapse.* (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2005), ix.

## INTRODUCTION

On February 8, 1868, from Monrovia, West Africa, Henry Dennis, an agent for the American Colonization Society (ACS), penned a lengthy letter to the Society's Financial Secretary in Washington DC. With the Society's steamer recently departed, Dennis sent his communication by the English mails to ensure its arrival in Washington before the ship's next fitting. Dennis, a free black man from Maryland, emigrated to Liberia in 1833 as part of an ACS-sponsored party. As an "enterprising and industrious young man" and "good accountant", he was appointed an agent for the Society in 1851 on recommendation of Liberia's first president.<sup>1</sup> Over the course of nearly two decades, Dennis drafted dozens of letters to the Society's white leadership in the United States, painting a picture of the nation that these men had founded but that most of them would never visit. To them, he regularly reported on the arrival of new emigrants and their acclimation to the harsh African climate. Nestled in between account summaries, he informed of emigrant deaths, with a detachedness that accepted mortality as the cost of settling a new nation. Though Dennis was keenly aware of the challenges that awaited

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<sup>1</sup> "Roll of Emigrants to Liberia, 1820-1843."

[https://www.disc.wisc.edu/archive/Liberia/Liberia\\_pubs/emigrant2c.pdf](https://www.disc.wisc.edu/archive/Liberia/Liberia_pubs/emigrant2c.pdf)

Accessed May 1, 2020; JJ Roberts, Monrovia, to James Lugenbeel MD, Washington, DC, October 10, 1851. (American Colonization Society Records, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.), microfiche, Reel 155.

emigrants in Liberia, he encouraged the Society throughout the 1850s to send out more “honorable, industrious, and frugal persons” as the infant Republic was “always happy in welcoming [them] to assist in the perpetuation of our institutions and government.” In them, he wrote, “Liberia benefitted as well as themselves.”<sup>2</sup>

However, when Dennis sat down that February afternoon to report on the most recent emigrants sent out by the ACS, he expressed none of the optimism that marked his earlier letters.

It seems uncertain whether the ship will return. It may perhaps be well if no other companies are sent and especially if they come as destitute and unprepared to shift for themselves as the generality of those who have already come in the ship...the masses of this country are hard up and there is a good deal of suffering among them...and now emigrants coming with no means of their own and having to make a start in a new country with poverty and dissatisfaction all around them, the money of the country unavailable, they become discouraged. I believe the greater number of all that have come in the past 3 or 4 years would return if could pay for passage.

Despite his earlier pleas for more emigrants, Dennis viewed those that the Society now sent, not as a benefit but as a burden to the young Liberian nation. Denied the benefits of their labor under the slave system that America’s war had just abolished, the freedmen and women that Dennis saw landed on Liberian shores in the postwar period were a destitute class and, as he lamented, “unprepared to shift for themselves” unlike the many thousands who had come before. As Liberia, suffering its own consequences of America’s war, had not the capital to support these new emigrants, Dennis doubted whether they might contribute to building up the infant nation. Fearing this influx would

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<sup>2</sup> H.W. Dennis, Monrovia, to William McLain, Washington DC, January 18, 1854. Included in *African Repository (AR)* (1854), 133.

be the end of the Liberian project he envisioned, Dennis concluded his letter with an ominous warning for the Secretary and the Society. “It is not impossible for Liberia to prove a failure after all.”<sup>3</sup>

Liberia was founded in 1822 by the American Colonization Society, a self-described philanthropic organization whose purpose was to “promote and execute a plan for colonizing [with their own consent] the free people of color residing in our country.” Though various and sometimes conflicting motivations attracted men and women in nineteenth-century America to colonization, the ACS united them in the belief that blacks and whites could never live in freedom together.<sup>4</sup> Colonization and particularly the Society were rejected by most African Americans who viewed its mission to remove free blacks as a scheme to secure slavery, but on the eve of America’s Civil War, nearly 13,000 had emigrated to Liberia.<sup>5</sup> Whether they departed as free men and women, seeking to improve their social or economic circumstances or left on condition of

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<sup>3</sup> H.W. Dennis, Monrovia, to William McLain, Washington DC, February 8, 1868. ACS, Reel 162.

<sup>4</sup> Though the ACS represents the most organized colonization effort, it was not the first to advocate removing blacks from America. Thomas Jefferson expressed his interest in colonizing African Americans as early as 1776, the same year the words “all men are created equal” were enshrined in the Declaration of Independence. A proponent of scientific racism, Jefferson believed there existed fundamental differences between black and white, and that people of African descent were by nature “inferior in the faculties of reason and imagination.” Though he referred to slavery as a “hideous blot” (despite enslaving more than 600 people over his lifetime), he could not conceive of black freedom. Jefferson continued to contemplate colonization until his death, going so far as to posit the forced removal of infants to eliminate “breeders” in 1824, but he expressed little interest in the Society. See James Campbell, *Middle Passages: African American Journeys to Africa, 1787-2005*. (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 40-41; David Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 262; “Jefferson and Slavery” at Monticello.org.

<sup>5</sup> Accounts range from 11,000 to 13,000. Karen Younger, “Liberia and the U.S. Civil War” in *This Distracted and Anarchical People: New Answers for Old Questions about the Civil War-Era North*. Andrew L. Slap, Michael Thomas Smith, ed. (Fordham University, 2013), 162.

manumission, freed simply to remove from the United States, the ACS aided their removal.<sup>6</sup>

Though the establishment of Liberia had been shrouded in the pretext of building up an African nationality, at mid-century, it remained a nation of African American emigrants. From an initial encounter that saw land ceded at gunpoint to ACS officials, it was clear that indigenous Africans were not included in the Liberian project that the ACS envisioned nor in the Liberian nation that settlers sought to upbuild.<sup>7</sup> Rather, Liberia would be sustained by the import of new emigrants from America. Despite any “romantic imaginings of a pristine ancestral homeland and a global, transcendent black kinship between people of African descent everywhere,” those who removed to Liberia had been reared in America and carried these traditions with them to Africa.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, this

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<sup>6</sup> For a comprehensive history of the ACS, see Amos J. Beyan, *The American Colonization Society and the Creation of the Liberian State: A Historical Perspective, 1822-1900*. (Lanham and London: University Press of America, Inc., 1991.)

<sup>7</sup> The ACS sent out its first expedition in 1820. A disastrous failure, marked by the death of more than a quarter of those landed, the ACS made two more failed attempts to establish a settlement before Dr. Eli Ayers, a white ACS agent, and Robert Stockton, a white U.S. Naval Captain, approached Cape Mesurado in December 1821, a small strip of land some 250 miles south of Free Town, Sierra Leone. After King Peter, a representative of the Dei, the majority ethnic group in the region, refused to relinquish the Cape, the men persisted until a treaty had been signed ceding Cape Mesurado plus territory stretching 130 miles down the coast and 40 miles inward to the ACS. In exchange, King Peter, together with several other “kings, princes and headmen” who set their mark to the agreement, received guns, rum, tobacco, and other “trinkets.” Though Ayers attributed their success to Stockton’s “dexterity at mixing flattery with a little well-timed threat” and not the cocked pistol that Stockton pressed to King Peter’s head, this encounter laid the foundation for the Liberian nation that the ACS and then the settlers would build on the West coast of Africa. The Dei subsequently attacked the settler colony, marking the first of an endless series of deadly conflicts between settlers and indigenous Africans that began in 1822 and lasted until the twenty-first century. See Jeremy Levitt, *The Evolution of Deadly Conflict in Liberia: From ‘Paternaltarianism’ to State Collapse*. (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2005), 25; Archibald Alexander, *A History of Colonization on the West Coast of Africa* (Philadelphia, 1846), 169-172; Campbell, 53; Charles Henry Huberich, *The Political and Legislative History of Liberia* (New York, 1947), 190.

<sup>8</sup> Claude Clegg, *The Price of Liberty: African Americans and the Making of Liberia*. (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004.)



“Americanness” lie at the very core of the Liberian project. In upholding civilization and Christianity as fundamental tenets of their colonization enterprise, the ACS, from the beginning, distinguished between free black persons from America who would impart these virtues and indigenous groups in Africa that would receive them. Black settlers who understood Liberia as a site for economic and social advancement established homesteads, Christian churches and schools, and a republican form of government, essentially creating a “coloured America on the shores of Africa.”<sup>9</sup> Despite claims that Liberia would civilize and Christianize the “heathen” peoples of Africa, demands for territory and interference in local affairs only stoked hostilities with indigenous Africans who had no interest in joining the emerging settler state. With the majority population thus excluded, Liberia could sustain only so long as emigration from the United States continued.

While emigrants left for Liberia in greatest number during times of economic hardship or increased racial violence in America, they relied on the ACS to transport them across the vast ocean and deliver support on arrival.<sup>10</sup> Despite ebbs and flows in

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<sup>9</sup> Marie Tyler-McGraw. *An African Republic: Black & White Virginians in the Making of Liberia*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007.)

<sup>10</sup> The ACS chartered the ships that carried emigrants across the Atlantic (averaging \$10,000 per charter) and provided provision for emigrants on board and for six months after arrival in Liberia. Colonization was an expensive affair that the Society hoped the federal government would help underwrite. Though President Monroe would not lend the government’s official stamp to the Society’s colonization scheme, he did give an unofficial endorsement and the financial aid that the project needed when he approved an appropriation of \$100,000 for the care of recaptives, or those captured on board vessels illegally trading in slaves, in the Slave Trade Act of 1819. Though this money was to be spent on transporting recaptives to the ACS settlement and providing for their temporary care, less than 1,000 recaptives were deposited on Liberian shores before 1858, most disembarking from just one ship. With federal funding tied to recaptives, the government would not be the financier of the Society’s colonization enterprise. Rather, this task would fall to the local auxiliaries that emerged within each state. However, even with state support, colonization remained a heavy financial burden for the Society to bear. Thus, in 1847, when

emigration throughout the nineteenth century, it was not until Civil War broke out in America that those invested in building up an African American Republic were forced to rethink their Liberian project. After a near cessation of emigration during the war, war's end brought a surge in applications. However, as those that now applied were freedmen and women who had been denied opportunities to acquire land, resources, or education under slavery, they arrived in Liberia destitute and unprepared. Witnesses to their suffering, Liberians pleaded that no more such emigrants be sent. In making appeals for increased aid and support for education, Liberians challenged the underlying ACS assumption that race was enough to build up a nation. But, as the ACS recommitted to emigration in the postwar period and continued to send out shipload after shipload of destitute emigrants, it became apparent that their Liberian project had been founded on little more than race.

Unlike most scholarship on colonization and the upbuilding of the Liberian nation, this study does not use the Civil War as an end point. Rather, it views the Civil War as a pivotal moment in the Liberian nation-building project. It was a moment when the future of colonization and Liberia hung in the balance and ideas about how to sustain an enterprise and build up a nation were forcefully articulated. Though the ACS and Liberians had been engaged in the same effort to build up a black nation on the west

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Liberia indicated its intention to declare independence, the Society lent its support, hoping that independence would release the Society from the financial burden of maintaining a colonial government. But, as Liberia had yet to develop its own resources, the republic continued to rely on the ACS for emigrants and their care and for many of the goods it imported. See *AR* (1833), 29; Karen Younger, "Liberia and the Last Slave Ships," *Civil War History*, Vol. 54, No. 4, (December 2008), 425.

coast of Africa, the Civil War and its aftermath revealed starkly different understandings of what this black nation was to be.

In his pivotal text on the origins and spread of nationalism, Benedict Anderson defines nation as an “imagined political community that is imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign”- imagined because its members “live in the image of their communion” even if they will never know each other, limited because it recognizes finite boundaries beyond which exist other nations, sovereign because it is free, and a community because, despite dissent or inequalities, it is conceived as a comradeship so deep that its members will willingly sacrifice their own lives.<sup>11</sup> Even before territory was purchased, Liberia was an imagined community, but it was imagined differently by the white Society that founded it and the black Americans that settled it. Though both envisioned Liberia as the site for the upbuilding of a black nation, they were less united in their ideas about what this actually meant. The ACS presented Liberia as the only place where African Americans might achieve social, economic, and political equality for racial prejudice would always thwart their efforts in America. Depicting racism as an insurmountable obstacle while at the same time upholding Africa as the “true” home of African Americans, the ACS equated race with a specific nation and, at the same time, “removed blacks from the possibility of American citizenship in favor of their “natural”

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<sup>11</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Rev. ed. (London and New York: Verso, 2016), 6-7.

African citizenship.”<sup>12</sup> Born during the era of good feelings and the moment of “awakening” of American nationalism, the Society posited racial exclusion as a fundamental tenet of early America’s nationalist ideology. Indeed, many of the Society’s founding members were staunch early nationalists- Henry Clay, Andrew Jackson, and James Monroe. Though they presented colonization as an opportunity for America’s free blacks to build up their own nation on the west coast of Africa, it was more genuinely a means towards creating a white American nation.<sup>13</sup>

The majority of African Americans rejected colonization and despised the white Society that promoted it. Even those who had earlier expressed interest in emigration now turned away from Africa.<sup>14</sup> Publication of the Society’s inaugural proceedings which

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<sup>12</sup> David Kazanjian, *The Colonizing Trick: National Culture and Imperial Citizenship in Early America*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 4.

<sup>13</sup> Historians deem the period following the War of 1812 and the subsequent demise of the Federalist Party as an era of intense nationalism. Dubbed the “era of good feelings,” the postwar years were seen as a time of national unity and the end of partisan politics. For more on the rise of nationalism during the early national period, see David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (on the emergence of the ACS during this period, see Chapter 6.) (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Alan Taylor, “Dual Nationalisms: Legacies of the War of 1812,” in Pietro Nivola and Peter Kastor, eds. *What So Proudly We Hailed: Essays on the Contemporary Meaning of the War of 1812*. Brookings Institution Press, 2012.

<sup>14</sup> The first African American settlement in Africa was founded by refugees from the Revolutionary War who had abandoned their enslavers to serve the loyalist cause, lured by promises of freedom. Of the thousands that left the United States for British colonies, 1,200 would cross the Atlantic (from their refugee settlement in Nova Scotia) in 1792 to found Free Town, Sierra Leone. In 1815, Paul Cuffe, a New England sea captain of Native American and African ancestry, led another expedition to Sierra Leone, marking the first black-led emigration movement to Africa. Though this effort would not fulfill Cuffe’s larger African vision of civilizing and Christianizing Africa’s indigenous peoples and deterring them from the slave trade, he did earn the support and respect of many prominent African Americans including James Forten and AME founder Richard Allen. However, when the ACS attempted to pick up Cuffe’s torch after his death in 1817, Forten, Allen, and other of Cuffe’s allies turned away from Africa. See Maya Jasanoff. *Liberty’s Exiles: American Loyalists in the Revolutionary World*. (New York: Vintage Books, 2011); Jill Lepore, “Goodbye, Columbus: When America won its independence, what became of the slaves who fled for theirs?” in *The New Yorker* (May 1, 2006), <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2006/05/08/goodbye-columbus>; Paul Cuffe. “Paul Cuffe.” *National Intelligencer* (January 11, 1814); Campbell, 39. For more on African American interest in

included assurances from John Randolph, a Virginia planter, that the ACS would not interfere with slavery, but “as far as it goes, must materially tend to secure the property of every master in the United States over his slaves,” affirmed for many African Americans that the Society was indeed a proslavery organization dedicated to preserving the institution, not to improving their condition.<sup>15</sup> So great was black opposition to the Society that historians point to its founding as a critical moment in the evolution of African American racial consciousness and identity formation. Seeking to invalidate the ACS’s claim that Africa was their natural home, African Americans turned away from Africa and efforts to raise a diasporic African nation and towards finding individual opportunity “where they could best fulfill their dreams of living American lives.”<sup>16</sup>

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colonization before the establishment of the ACS, especially as it contributed to the development of an African American national identity, see Dickson Bruce, “National Identity and African American Colonization, 1783-1817,” *The Historian*. Vol. 58, No. 1 (Autumn 1995), 15-28.

<sup>15</sup> The “American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Color of the United States” held its inaugural meeting on December 21, 1816. Other prominent statesmen, including Supreme Court Justices Elias Caldwell and Bushrod Washington, George Washington’s nephew and heir, Francis Scott Key, and Andrew Jackson, joined Randolph as early supporters of the ACS. While Randolph may have provoked the strongest reaction, others similarly stoked the ire of the free black community. Henry Clay, Speaker of the House of Representatives and southern slaveowner, began his address with reassurances that slavery was not an issue that the Society intended to take up, but that their objective was to remove a “useless and pernicious, if not a dangerous portion of its population.” Though Clay supported gradual abolition, he could not conceive of an America where two races lived in freedom side by side. He considered free blacks the “most vicious of all the classes of our population” for they “contaminated themselves, spread their vices all around them, to the slaves and the whites.” See ACS Tenth Annual Report (1827), 21; A View of Exertions Lately Made for the Purpose of Colonizing the Free People of Color in the United States, in Africa, or Elsewhere. (Washington, 1817), 9-10.

<sup>16</sup> James Sidbury. *Becoming African in America: Race and Nation in the Early Black Atlantic*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.) While he argues that race activists had begun to articulate their own “African” identity beginning in the late eighteenth century, one that rebuked the savage and primitive elements of a European-created African identity and encouraged a sense of race pride and unity amongst all Africans in diaspora, the rise of the ACS and its racist implications spurred a rethinking of this pan-African identity.

While the majority of African Americans believed they could best fulfill such dreams by remaining in the United States, some pursued this quest to Liberia. James Sidbury posits that African Americans in Liberia similarly began to emphasize personal advancement over any pan-African nationalist vision. But even as these emigrants sought to upbuild an American society in West Africa, they did not eschew African identity. Rather, they embraced pan-Africanism. Indeed, from Liberia's founding through America's Civil War and beyond, Liberia's most prominent black leaders frequently cloaked their appeals to emigrants- whether in the United States or the West Indies- in pan-Africanist language. They appealed to their "African brethren" to come over and help build up an "African nationality." They proclaimed "oneness" and "brotherhood" with indigenous Africans, though they predicated this shared racial identity on indigenous Africans adopting American traditions of Christianity, commerce, and civilization. In asserting a black nationalist vision that was pan-African in its rhetoric but exclusionary in its practice, Liberians did not reject African identity but sought to define its terms.

For these men and women, Liberia stood not as a slaveholders' ploy but as a vision of hope against racial oppression and freedom from enslavement. It was a nation whose Constitution restricted citizenship to "persons who are Negroes or of negro descent" but it was an imagined community united by more than skin color. Bound by a concept of racial unity, those who emigrated to Liberia sought to improve their conditions, to resist persecution, and to build up a nation on principles of political self-determination and race pride. Though their status as free or enslaved in America shaped distinct experiences and similarly influenced their decisions to remove from the United

States, African American emigrants shared “a sense of linked fate and common struggles” that bound them together even before they landed in Liberia.<sup>17</sup> Though nationalism does not necessarily imply a demand for national territory, as David Brion Davis asserts, those who emigrated to Liberia shared a determination to shape their own lives.<sup>18</sup>

The term black nationalism has been interpreted differently by scholars over the years and been applied to a wide range of phenomena. Scholars John H. Bracey, Jr., August Meier, and Elliott Rudwick define black nationalism as “a body of social thought, attitudes, and actions ranging from the simplest expressions of ethnocentrism and racial solidarity to Pan-Negroism or Pan-Africanism.” They assert that black nationalism can exist anywhere along this spectrum.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, not all black nationalists in nineteenth-century America advocated separation. Nor did all those who emigrated to Liberia support the same brand of nationalism. Often referred to as the Father of Pan-Africanism, Edward Blyden, for example, in contrast to the majority of settlers who deemed assimilation the best means of incorporation, advocated more meaningful inclusion of Africa’s indigenous people in the Liberian nation (though he sought to exclude mulattoes.) However, most emigrants practiced what Wilson Jeremiah Moses labels “classical black nationalism.” In his foundational text on the subject, Moses describes classical black nationalism as “absolutist, civilizationist, elitist, and based on Christian

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<sup>17</sup> Julie Saville, “Foreword: Nations beyond Nations” in *Race and Nation in the Age of Emancipations*. Whitney Nell Stewart and John Garrison Marks, ed. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2018), x.

<sup>18</sup> David Brion Davis. *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Emancipation*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014), 127, 129.

<sup>19</sup> John H. Bracey, Jr., August Meier, and Elliott Rudwick, ed. *Black Nationalism in America*. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1970)

humanism.” In the nineteenth-century, he concludes, it was “much concerned with preserving Anglo-American values and transmitting them, in modified form, to the black community.”<sup>20</sup> The settlers did, for the most part, adhere to the tenets of classical black nationalism. They believed their own culture was more advanced than that of the Africans they encountered, that God prophesied Africa’s redemption, and that they would effect this change. While this commitment to classical black nationalism helped forge the world’s second black-ruled republic, it also excluded Liberia’s majority population who did not adhere to its Christianizing and civilizing precepts; indeed, this exclusion helped define Liberians and the Liberian nation.<sup>21</sup>

The emigrants who arrived in Liberia in the postwar period similarly conceived of Liberia in black nationalist terms and held in common with early settlers a determination to shape their own lives. However, as slavery had left them utterly destitute, the thousands of freedmen and women who crossed the Atlantic after America’s war instead endured incredible hardship. Impoverished and largely illiterate as these emigrants were, Liberians doubted whether they were prepared for the tasks of nation-building. They worried that these new emigrants would undermine Liberia’s claims to independence and

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<sup>20</sup> Wilson Jeremiah Moses. *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850-1925*. (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 7, 11.

<sup>21</sup> For more on the construction of Liberian identity and its dependence on categories of difference, see Clegg, *The Price of Liberty*, especially pages 240-241. For a larger discussion on how power relies on maintaining difference, see Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005.) Cooper argues that empires must define and reproduce difference to maintain power and that race became a primary marker of difference to sustain imperial politics in the nineteenth century. He also claims the space of empire as one where ideas of difference were contested as colonial powers had to balance differentiation with incorporation of the people they colonized. In Liberia, the settlers differentiated between “civilized” emigrants and “uncivilized” indigenous persons but maintained that difference could be overcome through adoption of “civilized” habits.



self-governance that secured their entrance into the family of nations. Against pleas that no more emigrants be sent to suffer in Liberia, the ACS pursued its prewar emigration strategy, sending out thousands of freedmen and women. It thus became apparent in the postwar period that, though engaged in the same effort to build up a black nation on the west coast of Africa, the ACS and the African Americans who settled Liberia envisioned this nation very differently. While Liberians sought to upbuild a black nationality, the ACS's Liberian project was founded on little more than a desire to remove blacks from the American nation. As the ACS continued in its emigration strategy, Liberians turned inward after the American Civil War to the hundreds of thousands of indigenous peoples that had long been excluded from her nation-building efforts. However, unwilling to abandon the tenets of classical black nationalism upon which they had built up their young nation, Liberians did not extend any meaningful terms of inclusion. Rather, they would continue their nation-building project for another century until her own Civil War finally dismantled the remnants of the colonization project.

Chapter 1 examines the material effect of America's Civil War on Liberia, demonstrating the ties that continued to bind the ACS and Liberia forty years after its founding. Sustained by the import of new emigrants from the United States and financial aid from the Society, Liberia saw both decline during the war years. While the withdrawal of financial resources inflicted "hard times" on Liberians, the near total cessation of emigration from the United States sparked anxiety that the young nation might not endure the war. While making clear Liberia's continued dependence on the

ACS, this chapter also details why Liberians, surrounded by hundreds of thousands indigenous Africans, needed the Society and the settlers that it delivered to build up their Liberian nation.

Though Liberia had begun to feel the impact of America's war and her own dependence virtually at its onset, Chapter 2 explores the wartime efforts by both the ACS and Liberia to save their Liberian project. Seeing it fade for want of funds and emigrants to sustain it, the ACS and Liberian officials hoped Lincoln might prove their saving grace. Shortly after he came into office, Lincoln professed his support for colonization and approved appropriations of \$600,000 towards this end. While those invested in the Liberian project hoped Lincoln's endorsement would turn the tide towards Liberia, the emancipationist measures that frequently accompanied colonization proposals only amplified the objections of free and freed blacks to removal. As interest in emigration further declined during the war, it became apparent that neither the federal government nor black emigrants from America would pull Liberia through.

Chapter 3 examines the emigration of nearly 350 Barbadians to Liberia in 1865. Though Liberia was founded as a home for "free persons of color from the United States," wartime circumstances pushed ACS and Liberian officials to revise this vision as they turned their gaze to the West Indies. They appealed to Barbadians as members of the same nation-building project, urging their "brethren" to "come over and assist in helping build up a nationality." Eager to escape dire conditions at home, many Barbadians heeded Liberia's call. However, in Liberia, these West Indian emigrants were relegated to the periphery of the nation-building project, their inclusion born from wartime necessity

rather than a commitment to any larger pan-African vision. Their exclusion would be made most apparent at war's end, when emigration from the United States again peaked.

Chapter 4 explores how the Liberian project began to splinter in the aftermath of America's war as thousands of freedmen and women arrived on Liberian shores. Though initially encouraged by the rise in emigration sentiment, Liberians soon began to protest, charging that the emigrants the ACS now sent out were destitute and unprepared for the task of nation-building. Despite reports of increased suffering in Liberia, the ACS continued to send out as many emigrants as it was able. Ignoring voices from Liberia, the ACS maintained that Liberia was the only home for America's blacks and made race the sole determinant of nation, both in America and West Africa.

While Liberians protested the ACS's postwar strategy, reports of destitution and suffering in Liberia prompted a similar response from some of the Society's own members. Chapter 5 examines the schism that emerged between those who supported the national Society and its continued commitment to emigration and those who viewed this postwar strategy as an impediment to Liberia's nation building efforts. Calling for increased means of support and greater attention to education – of both Liberians and indigenous Africans- this dissenting faction gave credence to Liberians' voices. However, as support for colonization faded with time and distance from the war, neither of these postwar visions could be fully implemented. Rather, Liberia would have to be built up from within.

This study concludes with a brief examination of Liberia's nation-building efforts after the dust from America's Civil War settled and support from the ACS retracted.

Though the war had revealed Liberia's dependence, spurring a turn inward, Liberia did not abandon the Liberian project that the ACS had begun nearly half a century earlier. Clinging to a vision that upheld Christianity and civilization as the principle determinants of national belonging, Liberia continued to exclude indigenous peoples from her nation-building project. Her failure to meaningfully incorporate the majority of her population portended another century of violent conflict in Liberia.

## CHAPTER ONE

### America's War Comes to Liberia

On May 1, 1858, Martha Nelson boarded the *Mary Caroline Stevens*, together with her two young children, Alexander, 5 years, and Allen, 2 years, and twenty-nine others from the Nelson plantation in Craven County, North Carolina. Martha and her fellow passengers had only just been released from slavery per the terms of their enslaver's will, a freedom granted on condition they be "sent to Liberia by the Collinisation Society."<sup>1</sup> After an ocean voyage of just over forty days, the Nelsons stopped at Monrovia before removing to Careysburg, a new settlement located about twenty miles from the capital. Whether Martha, just twenty years old, fretted a new life in Africa, she was certainly relieved to disembark the *MC Stevens*. The ship had been plagued by an outbreak of measles that afflicted nearly half of its passengers. One of its number, Susan Nelson, just seventeen, gave birth to a child en route to Liberia but died shortly thereafter having never set foot on African soil.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "North Carolina Probate Records, 1735-1970," images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:S7WF-S16B-Q9?cc=1867501&wc=32LL-829%3A169766501%2C170756601> : 21 May 2014), Craven > Wills, 1760-1890 > image 878 of 1001; county courthouses, North Carolina. (Accessed 15 March 2020).

<sup>2</sup> AR (1858), 185, 302. Martha Nelson, Careysburg, to William McLain, Washington DC., January 1, 1861. ACS, Reel 160.

Just weeks after landing at Careysburg, the Nelson emigrants began to write back to the United States. Their former enslaver, Colonel Wiley Nelson, had further stipulated in his will that any properties not assigned to his heirs or creditors be sold and the proceeds delivered to the ACS to fund the transportation of his “negroes” to Liberia. After this expense was met, the Society was to “pay the balance over to the said negroes for their support after they arrive at Liberia.”<sup>3</sup> Despite complaints that Careysburg was too distant from any export market for its settlers to thrive, the Nelsons managed tolerably well, drawing frequently on the account now managed by the ACS. Financial Secretary William McLain answered the Nelsons’ requests for breadstuffs, tools, cloth and shoes, and tradable goods such as tobacco. In October 1861, he sent a box of muslin, calico, and things for other members of the family; included in the box was a black silk dress requested by Martha.<sup>4</sup>

Correspondence with McLain and the goods it produced were a part of life for the Nelson emigrants. When they found themselves in need- of flour, sugar, tobacco, books, “cloth for the children” -or in want of less essential items such as a black silk dress, they drew on McLain, an ocean away. Their new lives in Liberia remained tied to the United States. Thus, when America’s war broke out, Liberia’s settlers, including the Nelsons, felt its effects. By fall 1861, letters to McLain had already begun to depict a growing desperation in Liberia, fueled by the Society’s earlier decision to suspend its regular May expedition. In October, twenty-five year old Lavinia Nelson reported that the people

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<sup>3</sup> “North Carolina Probate Records,” Wiley Nelson (1856), 878.

<sup>4</sup> McLain, New York, to Parthenia Nelson, Careysburg, October 24, 1861; McLain, New York, to Martha Nelson, Careysburg, October 24, 1861.

“were so hard hearted” that they “do not want to do the least thing for a widow” before begging McLain to send money for her support.<sup>5</sup> By September 1863, Martha’s letters too had taken on a different tone, one that reflected a more dire experience in Liberia. She requested McLain to please send money for her sons, “about 50 dollars, as we are hard up for some money in this Country.” She continued, “I have never seen the time so hard as it is now with us in this Country. I am a lone woman and no husband to support me and the children and this is the place persons oblige to have means to support in this our ancestors country.”<sup>6</sup>

The Civil War is one of the most robustly researched events in American history. Historians have penned countless accounts investigating everything from battlefield strategies to Lincoln’s thoughts on race and slavery while the public has remained equally enamored by nearly every aspect of the war. While the Civil War has generally been fixed in an American setting, as an insular affair between North and South, recent studies have begun to situate the war in a broader context. As part of a wider historiographical trend towards transnational history, scholars have demonstrated that the Civil War’s impact did indeed reach beyond the United States. In *The Cause of All Nations: An International History of the American Civil War*, Don Doyle examines the efforts undertaken by leaders of both the Union and the Confederacy to sway European public opinion during the 1860s. This “soft power” approach was just as significant to the

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<sup>5</sup> Beginning in February 1859, Sylvie Nelson began signing her letters Silvey Franklin, indicating she had married. See Silvey Franklin, Careysburg, to William McLain, Washington, DC, February 16, 1859. ACS, Reel 159. Silvey Nelson, Careysburg, to William McLain, Washington DC, September 30, 1861. ACS, Reel 160.

<sup>6</sup> Martha Nelson, Monrovia, to William McLain, Washington DC, October 2, 1863. ACS, Reel 160. Unlike all previous letters, this one is addressed from Monrovia. When Martha relocated to Monrovia is unknown.

war's outcome as it ultimately won support for the Union's cause and prevented intervention on the side of the Confederacy, a cause which became equated with slavery in the public mind.<sup>7</sup> Though scholars have generally lauded Doyle's work, its omissions, especially as it is presented as an "international" history, have also received attention. Noting that Doyle does not include much on the Pacific world or South America, historian and reviewer Michael Vorenberg found the inattention to Liberia as the book's "oddest omission."<sup>8</sup>

Since *The Cause of All Nations*, other historians have tried to include non-European nations in transnational histories of the Civil War. In fact, it was at Doyle's encouragement that a group of scholars convened in 2014 to begin to address this deficiency, around the same time that *The Cause of All Nations* was being published. This conference resulted in a series of essays examining America's civil conflict and its influence on France and Britain more familiarly, but also on Latin America including Mexico, Cuba, and Brazil.<sup>9</sup> Other scholars have similarly made additions to this transnational trend. In *Civil War as Global Conflict: Transnational Meanings of the American Civil War*, contributing authors apply a more global approach to studies of the Civil War, but unlike many earlier works, they move beyond diplomacy to examine such issues as gender and war nursing, race and popular culture, and ethnic nationalism in a

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<sup>7</sup> Don Doyle, *The Cause of All Nations: An International History of the American Civil War*. (New York: Basic Books, 2015).

<sup>8</sup> Michael Vorenberg. Review of *The Cause of All Nations: An International History of the American Civil War*, by Don H. Doyle. *Journal of Southern History* 82, no. 2 (2016): 441-443. [doi:10.1353/soh.2016.0122](https://doi.org/10.1353/soh.2016.0122).

<sup>9</sup> Andre M. Fleche. Review of *American Civil Wars: The United States, Latin America, Europe, and the Crisis of the 1860s*, edited by Don H. Doyle. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017.) *Journal of the Civil War Era*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (March 2018), pp. 139-141.



global perspective. While collections such as these contribute to a growing transnational historiography, Liberia remains an odd omission in these and other transnational histories of the American Civil War. This study seeks to address this omission by expanding the boundaries of Civil War scholarship to include Liberia. Established just forty years before the outbreak of America's war by an American institution, Liberia still relied on the ACS for both funds and emigrants. Drawing primarily on Society correspondence and letters from Liberia, this study explores how the withdrawal of both during America's war impacted the Society's operations and Liberia's efforts to build up the young African Republic.

### **The "Golden Age" of Colonization**

Just prior to the outbreak of war in America, the ACS experienced a surge in its operations. Part of this resurgence can be attributed to Liberian independence, declared in 1847. Since Liberia's founding, foreign powers, especially Britain, had continuously flouted Liberian trading laws, claiming that Liberia was not a formal state and thus had no authority to make and enforce laws against foreign governments. To enforce its claims, the young nation, backed by a Society eager to relinquish some of the expense of running a colonial administration, declared its independence. This declaration made Liberia the first African Republic and appealed to some African Americans who had long spurned the idea of colonization. Though the United States would withhold recognition for fear of agitating the slavery question (by receiving a black diplomat in Washington), other powerful nations, including Great Britain, quickly established diplomatic relations

with the new Republic, further legitimizing the Liberian project in the eyes of many African Americans.<sup>10</sup> In a “Memorial to the Legislature of Ohio” begging support for the Society, an ACS agent credited Liberia’s declaration and its subsequent recognition by nations that had already abolished slavery as inspiring emigration sentiments among America’s black men and women. “The recognition of its independence by England and France, and the neglect of our government to extend to it the same courtesy, is beginning to dispel the illusion that African colonization is a scheme of the slaveholder. The prejudices of colored men against colonization are now beginning to yield.”<sup>11</sup> At the same time, blacks in America were confronting increasingly repressive laws as tensions over race and slavery continued to escalate. New York, in an 1846 referendum, voted overwhelmingly to retain a property qualification that effectively barred blacks from voting in that state while Indiana, in its 1851 Constitution, prohibited any “negro or mulatto” from “com[ing] into or settling” there.<sup>12</sup> In 1854, Oregon became the first and only free state to be admitted to the union with an exclusion clause as part of its constitution.<sup>13</sup>

Interest in colonization rose as a result of these circumstances but it was passage of the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850, requiring free states to aid in returning runaway slaves, that sparked the greatest reaction. Outrage over the new law rippled throughout the

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<sup>10</sup> Brandon Mills. ““The United States of Africa”: Liberian Independence and the Contested Meaning of a Black Republic.” *Journal of the Early Republic* 34, no. 1 (2014), 84-85.

<sup>11</sup> AR 1849, 71.

<sup>12</sup> Paul Frymer. “A Second Removal?: The Rise and Defeat of Black Colonization.” In *Building an American Empire: The Era of Territorial and Political Expansion*, 220-62. Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2017.

<sup>13</sup> Greg Nokes, “Black Exclusion Laws in Oregon,” [https://oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/exclusion\\_laws/#.XrBFZm5Fxyx](https://oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/exclusion_laws/#.XrBFZm5Fxyx). Accessed May 1, 2020.

northern states, inciting public protests among both white and black communities. While newly-formed committees strategized on how best to obstruct implementation efforts, free blacks confronted the very real threat of capture and [re]enslavement. Harriet Jacobs, a runaway slave, described the anxiety and fear that the law wreaked on northern black communities, writing how she “dreaded the approach of summer, when snakes and slaveholders made their appearance.”<sup>14</sup> The law’s passage saw hundreds of fugitives and their families cross the northern border to settle in Canada. While most immediately impacting those who had escaped slavery, the Fugitive Slave Act had far greater reach. It became evidence to many that conditions were indeed worsening for blacks in the United States. The Dred Scott decision in 1857, a legal determination that African Americans were not citizens and had “no rights which the white man was bound to respect”, confirmed this fact.

From these deteriorating conditions, interest in leaving the United States grew. Emigrationist sentiment rose among African Americans, with prominent black voices lending their support to various emigration schemes.<sup>15</sup> In 1858, abolitionist and former slave Henry Highland Garnet, once opposed to emigration, founded the African Civilization Society. While maintaining that its mission was “the Evangelization and

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<sup>14</sup> Eric Foner. *Gateway to Freedom: The Hidden History of the Underground Railroad*. (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Co, 2015), 135. For more on the Fugitive Slave Act, see Jonathan Daniel Wells, *Blind No More: African-American Resistance, Free Soil Politics and the Coming of the Civil War* (Athens: University of Georgia, 2019), Chapter 3.

<sup>15</sup> African Americans frequently distinguished emigrationism from colonization, upholding the former as a black-led voluntary movement for self-determination and depicting the latter as a scheme by whites to rid societies of blacks. For more on this distinction, see Floyd John Miller, *The Search for a Black Nationality: Black Emigration and Colonization, 1787-1863* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975); for more on how these ideologies converged, see Moses, *Black Nationalism*, 34-38.

Civilization of Africa, and the descendants of African ancestors wherever dispersed,” the Civilization Society also promoted the development of a cotton industry in Africa that might disrupt slavery in America. Emphatically distinguishing itself from the Colonization Society as one devoted to the abolition of slavery, the Civilization Society advocated the development of a nation in Africa “of which the colored American could be proud.” In Africa, blacks -African American as well as indigenous Africans- had the opportunity to achieve commercial and political success as they would be free from the weight of racial oppression that hindered their efforts in America. In demonstrating blacks’ capacity for industry and self-government, Garnet’s African nation would serve as proof of African and African American capability and thus elevate black men and women in America and around the world. Despite these lofty ambitions, Garnet struggled to win over African Americans who believed Garnet was advocating a separate nationality, and thereby their removal from the American nation. Some even accused Garnet of unwittingly promoting the agenda of the ACS which the majority of African Americans continued to reject. The African Civilization Society dissolved only a few years after its founding, having never sent any emigrants to Africa.<sup>16</sup> Yet this movement was significant not only because it reflected the growing despair over the future of blacks in America but because it revealed an emerging pan-Africanism that upheld Africa as the home for all Africans and as the site to develop black nationalism.

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<sup>16</sup> See Richard MacMaster. "Henry Highland Garnet and the African Civilization Society." *Journal of Presbyterian History* (1962-1985) 48, no. 2 (1970): 95-112.

Similarly, Martin Delany, a leading black intellectual of the period who became the “Father of Black Nationalism”, radically reversed his anti-emigration position during the 1850s. Though Delany had supported a strategy of moral suasion, confident that blacks exhibiting habits of industry and temperance might convince whites that they deserved a place in the American body politic, the failure of moral suasion was becoming apparent by the late 1840s. Passage of the Fugitive Slave Law sounded the death knell for Delany’s integrationist approach. “By the provisions of this bill, the Colored people of the United States are positively degraded beneath the level of the Whites.” They were “slaves in the midst of freedom, waiting patiently, and unconcernedly . . . indifferently, and stupidly, for masters to come and lay claim” to them.<sup>17</sup> Convinced that blacks needed to establish an independent nationality, separate from whites, Delany turned to emigration. He sailed for Africa in 1859 as part of an exploratory commission to locate territory for an Industrial Colony to establish a competing free-labor cotton industry that would undermine slavery in the U.S. South and aid blacks in building up a black nationality. Despite earlier references to the ACS as “one of the most arrant enemies of the colored man” and Liberia as “a poor miserable mockery,” Delany’s shift in thinking in the 1850s led him to adopt a different view. By the time he departed Africa eleven months later, Delany was describing Liberia as a “glorious country” to which he pledged “the heart and hand of a brother to stand by them in one common cause.”<sup>18</sup> Though they

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<sup>17</sup> Tunde Adeleke, “Martin Robison Delany: The Economic and Cultural Contexts of Imperialism” in *UnAfrican Americans: Nineteenth-Century Black Nationalists and the Civilizing Mission*. (University Press of Kentucky, 1998), 46.

<sup>18</sup> *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and. Destiny of the Colored People of the United States* (Philadelphia, 1852); NY Colonization Journal 1860. For more on Delany’s reversal on emigration, see Adeleke, “Martin Robison Delany...”)

differed in their opinions of the Colonization Society, both Garnet and Delany had reversed their anti-emigration positions by the 1850s. As deteriorating conditions in America forced their gaze outward, both turned to Africa as the place where blacks might build up a separate nationality. As historian Nemata Blyden asserts, “All African Americans had the shadow of Africa thrust upon them, as this part of their history was constantly resurrected by their detractors and supporters alike.” Though Garnet and Delany were Americans, “their ancestral ties to Africa motivated their interest in what happened to Africa.”<sup>19</sup> Even Frederick Douglass, a staunch opponent of colonization and the Society, expressed some interest in emigration by the end of the decade, though he never wavered in his detestation for Liberia and its promoters.

Indeed, the ACS benefitted from this “renaissance of national interest” in the idea of black removal.<sup>20</sup> The year after Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Act, the Society would raise more money than in any year prior.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, spurred by the same conditions that led to the rise in emigrationist sentiment, the number of emigrants that the Society would send to Liberia increased significantly. In the decade following independence, the Society sent out nearly five times as many emigrants as it had in the previous ten years. From 51 emigrants in 1847, over 400 would be transported in 1848, the year following Liberia’s Declaration of Independence; upon passage of the Fugitive Slave Act, this number nearly doubled, reaching 783 in 1853.<sup>22</sup> In 1856, with the support

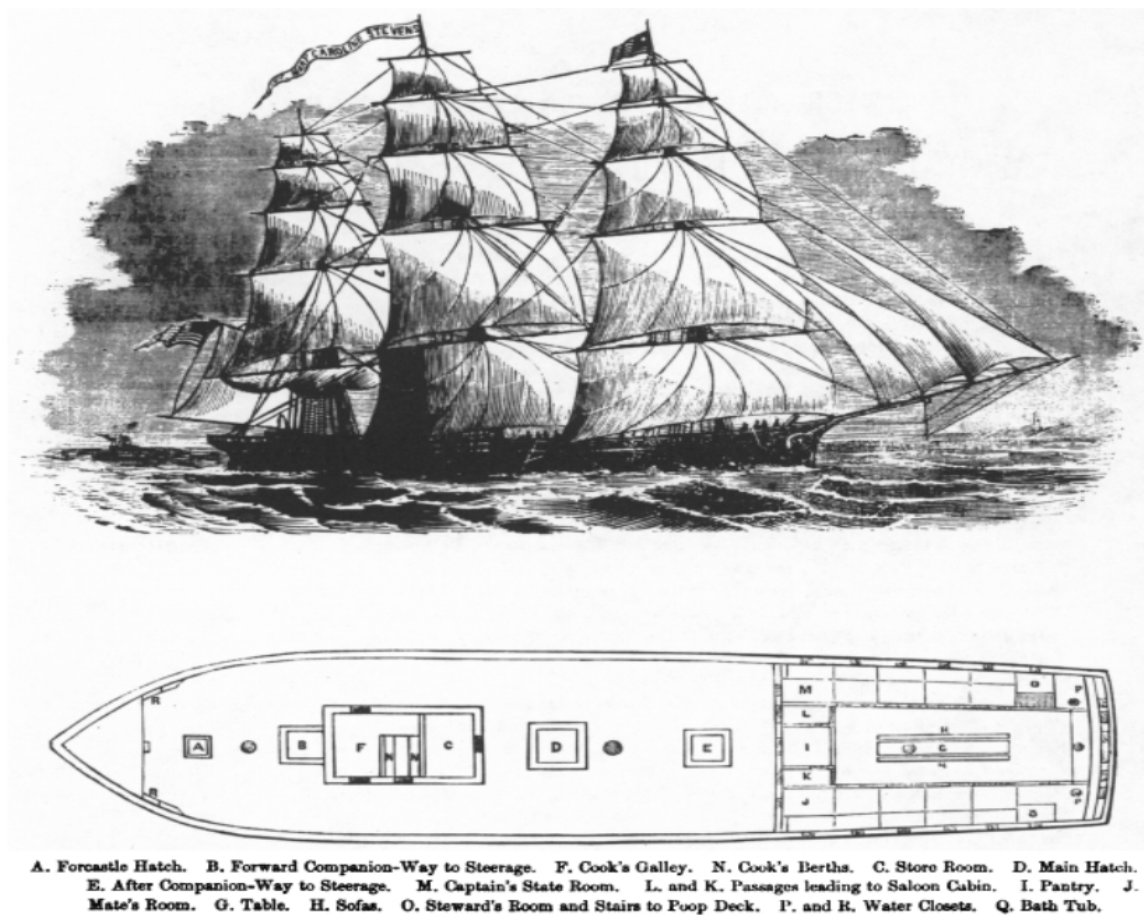
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<sup>19</sup> Nemata Blyden, *African Americans and Africa: A New History*. (Yale University Press, 2019), 114.

<sup>20</sup> Clegg, 173

<sup>21</sup> Wiley. *Slaves No More*, 2

<sup>22</sup> Calculated from the table of emigrants included in *the Semi-Annual Memorial of the Semi-Centennial Anniversary of the American Colonization Society, celebrated at Washington, January 15, 1867. With Documents Concerning Liberia*. (Washington D.C.: Washington Colonization Society Building), 1867.



**Figure 3: Mary Caroline Stevens**, purchased by the ACS in 1856. Image from Memory F. Mitchell, “Freedom Brings Problems: Letters from the McKays and Nelsons in Liberia.” *North Carolina Historical Review* 70 (October 1993), 435.

of a significant donation from John Stevens of Talbot, MD, the ACS purchased its own ship. The *Mary Caroline Stevens* (*M.C. Stevens*) made its maiden voyage that same year with 217 African American emigrants on board.<sup>23</sup>

The Society succeeded in sending almost 5,000 African Americans to Liberia in the decade preceding the start of war in the United States.<sup>24</sup> But, just as conditions in

<sup>23</sup> Semiannual Report, 188.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 186-189

America had incited this movement, so too would conditions in America work to slow it. By the end of the decade, operations were stalling and came to a virtual standstill by the start of the Civil War.

### **“Have Mercy on Us”: Colonization’s Decline During the Civil War**

As Civil War loomed closer in the American nation, colonization lost much of the momentum that had fueled it during the politically and racially charged decade of the 1850s. Various factors contributed to this decline.

The election of Abraham Lincoln to the White House in the fall of 1860, while foreshadowing a conflict between North and South, stirred hope in millions of African Americans that a change in condition was approaching. Booker T. Washington recalled in his autobiography the anticipation with which slaves viewed the Republican victory as many “felt in their hearts” that freedom might indeed be on the horizon.<sup>25</sup> The ACS understood the election in much the same way and observed similar expectations of freedom: those “who could go have high anticipations that an important change will be wrought by [the war] in their favor, and that their political and social condition will be so improved as to relieve them from the necessity of seeking a home elsewhere.”<sup>26</sup>

However, arguing that African Americans would continue to suffer no matter any practical or legal change in their condition, the ACS worked diligently to convince African Americans that Africa still held out the best hope for freedom. In January 1861,

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<sup>25</sup> Steven Hahn. *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration*. (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003.)

<sup>26</sup> Quoted in “Emigration,” *AR* 41 (1865), 36.



the Society's Traveling Secretary, Rev. John Orcutt, traveled to Ohio on direction of the Board of Managers to get up a party of emigrants for Liberia from among a group of Arkansas refugees that had recently settled there. The Board had appropriated \$10,000 for this effort. For four weeks, the Secretary presented the case for Liberia to families who had fled Arkansas and various audiences of free blacks. Despite reports of some interest, Orcutt found none ready to accept the ACS's proposal. Rather, he reported a sense among his listeners that "the blacks of the United States have a duty to perform towards their brethren in bondage and ought not to leave the country till the rights of all in this land were fully secured and respected."<sup>27</sup> Similar reports came in from other Society agents. Despite "visiting as many places as [he] could", the traveling secretary for the New England region reported a preference among the masses of colored people "to wait for the 'good time' *here*" rather than remove to Africa.<sup>28</sup> Some members of the ACS blamed abolitionists for discouraging emigration. "Their frantic friends (the extreme abolitionists) say Amen and shout 'Glory Hallelujah' to 'ole John Brown,'" commented ACS agent Franklin Butler when blacks in Boston resolved to remain there.<sup>29</sup>

As the war waged on and the country moved closer to emancipation, interest in leaving the US only further declined. The Confiscation Act of 1861 enabled the federal government to seize "property" -including enslaved persons- being used to support the Confederacy. This legislation was followed by a second more comprehensive act

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<sup>27</sup> John Orcutt in *AR* (1861), 46.

<sup>28</sup> Franklin Butler, Windsor, to James Hall, Baltimore, May 24, 1862. Maryland State Colonization Society Papers (MSCS), 1827-1871, Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore, MD), microfiche, Reel 8.

<sup>29</sup> Franklin Butler, Windsor, to William McLain, Washington DC, May 16, 1862. ACS, Reel 93.

enabling the federal government to free slaves in fallen rebel territories. Both acts were precursors to the Emancipation Proclamation, issued in January 1863, freeing all enslaved persons in Confederate states. That same year, the ACS was able to send out only 23 emigrants to Liberia.

The decision by the Lincoln administration to allow African Americans to serve in the Union Army further hindered ACS recruitment efforts. Military service was viewed by many African Americans as an important step in the path towards citizenship and equality. Many agreed with the soldier who wrote to *The Christian Recorder* that sacrifice on the battlefield would “strike a decisive blow for God and the Union...in order that our down-trodden and oppressed kindred might be elevated and brought more on an equality with the white race.”<sup>30</sup> Martin Delany rather abruptly gave up his African dream when the war began, enlisting in the Union Army when the opportunity arose. In 1863, he was commissioned the Union’s first black combat major.<sup>31</sup> During its June 1863 meeting, the Corresponding Secretary for the Pennsylvania Society cited a growing interest among the colored people to join the Union ranks as a prime reason for declining emigration.<sup>32</sup> Though they would serve in segregated units initially for lesser pay than their white counterparts, nearly 180,000 African Americans would enlist in the Union Army before war’s end.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> *The Christian Recorder*, “A Soldier’s Letter” July 9, 1864. Philadelphia.

<sup>31</sup> Adeleke, 68.

<sup>32</sup> Meeting Minutes of the Pennsylvania Colonization Society, April 30, 1861. Accessed via Lincoln University.

<sup>33</sup> Foner, *Short History of Reconstruction*, 4.

While the possibility of freedom may have had the most significant impact on decisions to remain in the US, other factors undoubtedly deterred potential emigrants. During the months leading up to war, prominent American newspapers reported on a mass influx of recaptured slaves into Liberia.<sup>34</sup> While the US government, with aid from the ACS, had supported this policy of landing in Liberia Africans recaptured from vessels illegally engaging in the slave trade since 1819, only a few hundred had ever been deposited on Liberian soil. This changed in the 1860s when political pressures- including threats by the British to intervene on American ships and accusations by the Republican Party that the Buchanan administration was not enforcing the slave trade law- led to a surge in the number of slavers captured. In 1860 alone, the US Navy seized eight slaving ships, depositing nearly 3,500 recaptured Africans in Liberia.<sup>35</sup>

*The New York Times* painted a picture of a Liberia overrun by barbarity in its reporting on the capture of a slaver and the return of its cargo to Africa: "Liberia, diluted by monthly additions of chattering savages taken out of slave-ships will certainly never prove the elixir which is to vivify the African continent. What it wants is not more negroes to educate but more "colored persons" from this country to keep the light which it already possesses from burning out."<sup>36</sup> The *North American* included a report from the US's newly-appointed minister resident at Monrovia that described the new arrivals in similar terms, contrasting them with Liberia's African American emigrants. Rev. John

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<sup>34</sup> "Liberated Native Africans," *Chicago Tribune*, December 17, 1861; "Arrival of the Captured Slaver," *Baltimore Sun*. December 11, 1860.

<sup>35</sup> Karen F. Younger. "Liberia and the Last Slave Ships." *Civil War History* 54, no. 4 (2008), 442.

<sup>36</sup> "Negroes rescued from slavers sending them back to Africa," *New York Times*. June 26, 1860.

Seys informed that he had ordered several hundred yards of common calico just to provide enough covering to land the “cargo” of the *Storm King* as “every principle of humanity, decency, and purity” prevented landing “the naked savages... among the civilized and refined Christians of Monrovia.”<sup>37</sup> Though the ACS had often touted the missionizing element of its mission, such depictions of barbarity and un-civilization did little to encourage emigrants for whom most conversion was not a strong inducement. Taking account of the reasons for declining emigration in their 1861 annual report, the New York auxiliary noted that “Such an element of ignorance and heathen vice excited apprehension of danger and easily destroyed thoughts of emigration not firmly rooted.”<sup>38</sup>

Beyond its inability to attract African American emigrants during the war, the ACS struggled to raise enough money to even stay afloat. The uncertainties of the political climate combined with the prospect of heavy taxation worked to diminish voluntary contributions. “The war is consuming friends of the ACS,” lamented one Society official in 1862.<sup>39</sup> Further, states that had previously contributed funds towards colonization began to repeal appropriations. Maryland had allocated funds for colonization since as early as 1826, and in 1831, its legislature appropriated \$200,000 to be paid in annual installments in support of its own colony in Liberia. However, in 1861, confronting conditions of war, the state repealed its appropriation for colonization. Other auxiliaries applied to their respective state legislatures for financial aid, but these requests

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<sup>37</sup> “Liberated Africans,” *North American* (Philadelphia), March 6, 1863.

<sup>38</sup> *AR* (1861), 166.

<sup>39</sup> A.N. Hensen, Dayton, to William McLain, Washington DC, May 28, 1862. ACS, Reel 93.

too were unsuccessful.<sup>40</sup> With voluntary contributions drying up and states withholding financial support for colonization, the ACS again made an appeal to the federal government, forwarding a request for assistance directly to President Lincoln.<sup>41</sup> As times before, the request for federal funding was denied.

With limited funds to carry out its mission, the ACS and its state auxiliaries began to take steps that might ensure their survival through the war. As early as May of 1861, the Pennsylvania Society had begun to implement retrenchment measures, reducing agent salaries and cutting distribution of their monthly journal. The national society took similar measures to reduce operating costs. Financial Secretary McLain ordered that schools in the receptacles be discontinued and their teachers discharged before eventually ordering suspension of salaries to agents and doctors in Liberia.<sup>42</sup> McLain bemoaned the state of affairs in a letter to the Society's doctor at Bassa before ordering him to "take a 'vacation' both in work and pay." The ACS agent in Monrovia was urged to "save every penny" as the possibility of total suspension loomed over the Society. From \$105,000 in 1860, the ACS's annual receipts totaled just \$46,000 in 1862.<sup>43</sup> Regretting the awful condition of the country, McLain lamented to an agent in Liberia, "you cannot imagine it all- I cannot begin to describe it. When or how it will end, none can tell. In the meantime,

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<sup>40</sup> James Hall. "An Address to the Free People of Color of the State of Maryland," Baltimore, 1859; James Hall, Baltimore, to Caleb Smith, Washington DC, October 9, 1862. MSCS, Reel 14; Meeting Minutes, 1862. Pennsylvania Colonization Society.

<sup>41</sup> James Hall, Baltimore, to Caleb Smith, Washington DC, October 9, 1862 and Hall to William McLain, October 11, 1862. MSCS, Reel 14.

<sup>42</sup> William McLain, New York, to James Deputie, Cape Mount, October 22, 1861. ACS, Reel 240.

<sup>43</sup> "Cost of African Colonization," *AR* 42 (1866), 223.

what is to become of our Society? May heaven have mercy on us!<sup>44</sup> Before the war was over, the ACS would see the *MC Stevens* sold at auction.

The war significantly hindered the ACS's mission of colonizing free blacks of the United States as those to be colonized were not interested in leaving and there was no money to send them. Despite these obstacles, the Society did not abandon the cause of colonization during the war. Rather, the Society urged "keeping the cause before the public eye" and continued to send out its recruitment agents to get up parties of emigrants.<sup>45</sup> Whether the war was decided in favor of freedom or continued bondage, the ACS maintained that the races could never live together and continued to focus its efforts on removing African Americans from the United States. But as they prepared for the great emigrations that they were sure would ensue at war's conclusion, the Society paid less attention to those whom they had already settled in Liberia. Liberians felt the effects of America's war in significant ways even as it was being fought an ocean away.

### **Transatlantic Ties: The American Conflict Reaches Liberian Shores**

Despite declaring its independence in 1847, Liberia had never truly broken its dependence on the ACS. The Society continued to serve as the Republic's primary supplier of both people and goods. From the time that Liberia became an independent Republic to the start of the American Civil War, the ACS sent out approximately 450 emigrants annually.<sup>46</sup> Once landed, these emigrants were housed in ACS receptacles

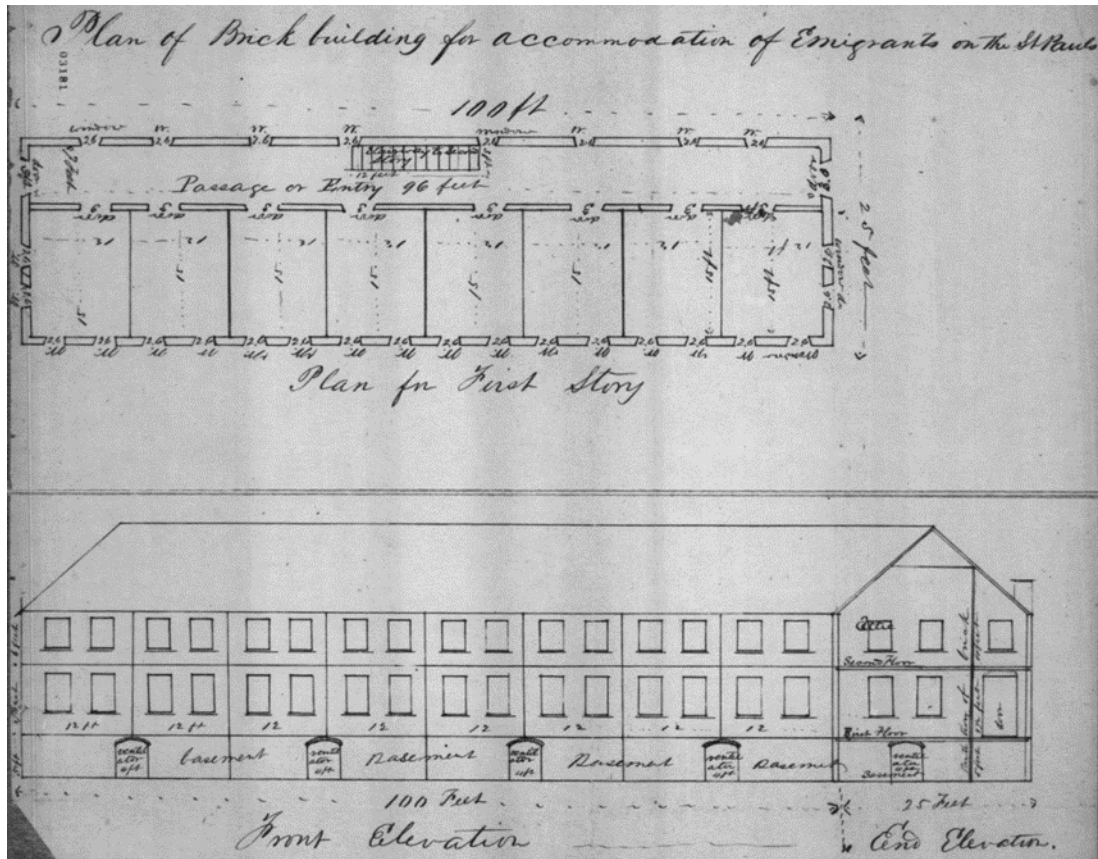
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<sup>44</sup> William McLain, New York, to Henry Dennis, Monrovia, October 21, 1861. ACS, Reel 240.

<sup>45</sup> Franklin Butler, Windsor, to William McLain, Washington DC, June 16, 1862. ACS, Reel 93.

<sup>46</sup> Calculated from emigrant table in *Semi-Annual Memorial of ACS*, 1867.

during an acclimation period of six months and provided provisions for their support during this time.<sup>47</sup> Doctors, employed by the ACS, tended to incoming settlers while teachers were employed to provide instruction as emigrants prepared to leave the receptacles.



**Figure 4: “Plan of Brick building for accommodation of Emigrants on the St. Paul’s.”** Sketch of Buchanan Receptacle. Included in letter from Stephen A Benson, Monrovia, to Ralph Gurley, May 8, 1854. The first floor included plans for a sitting room (27.6 x 17.1) and a dining room (41.6 x 17.6). The second floor consisted of 16 rooms, each 17.6 x 13.6, and a basement level housed the kitchen, storage unit, and wash house.

<sup>47</sup> The ACS sponsored construction of receptacles or lodging facilities to provide temporary housing for incoming emigrants. How many emigrants one receptacle could accommodate varied by settlement, but none housed “more than 200 each.” While residing in the receptacles, settlers were expected to build their own houses and cultivate their lands so that, by the end of six months, they had established self-sufficiency enough that they could be removed from the receptacle and from the ACS’ rolls of support. See Joseph Tracy, Boston, to William McLain, Washington, DC, August 30, 1866. ACS, Reel 99.



**Figure 5: ACS Warehouse in Monrovia.** American Colonization Society/ Liberia Collection. Not dated (1860s?) PP161. Prints and Photographs Division, Maryland Historical Society.

When the ACS found it had not the bodies nor the funds to justify sending out a ship in May 1861, those emigrants whom the Society had already settled in Liberia mourned its absence. “The Stevens not coming out as usual was a great disappointment and loss to many in this country,” wrote William Burke, a former slave emancipated in 1853 on condition that he remove to Liberia. He continued, “this must be the severest affliction that ever visited the people of the United States...and although we are separated



from the scene by the Atlantic yet we feel sadly the effects of it in this country.”<sup>48</sup>

At the time that the war broke out in America, approximately 13,000 African Americans had been settled in Liberia. Dispersed across 600 miles of coastline and stretching 150 to 250 miles into the interior, Liberia remained sparsely populated. Despite proximity of various indigenous groups- or rather because of- Liberians relied on the continual import of new settlers. When Alexander Crummell, an Episcopal missionary of free black ancestry, wrote to an ACS official in 1864 to inquire whether “contrabands” might be sent to Liberia, he warned that settlements would revert to barbarism in the absence of emigrants from the United States and that indigenous Africans “will almost own Africa if we don’t take care of ourselves.”<sup>49</sup> Though Crummell supported a black nationalist vision that included indigenous Africans, he rooted this vision in the same colonizationist discourse that depicted indigenous Africans as barbarous and unenlightened. Like the ACS, Crummell posited that African Americans, while finding refuge from racial oppression in America, would also carry a civilizing and Christianizing influence to Africa and African peoples, thus redeeming a continent.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> William Burke, Clay Ashland, to Ralph Gurley, Washington DC, September 23, 1861. ACS, Reel 160.

<sup>49</sup> Alexander Crummell, Monrovia, to William Coppinger, Washington DC, October 5, 1864. ACS, Reel 160.

<sup>50</sup> Though Crummell and the ACS presented civilization and Christianization as fundamental tenets of the Liberian project, critical distinctions separated them. While the ACS posited the redemption of Africa as a positive consequence of removing black men and women from the American Republic, Crummell never contended that America was not the black man’s home. Rather, he believed Liberia might serve as a necessary foundation for the struggle against slavery and prejudice by demonstrating blacks’ capacity for self-government and economic self-sufficiency and thereby advancing their claim for equal rights in the United States. The ACS never fully reconciled the obvious contradiction in sending African Americans, whom they depicted as “degraded” and “ignorant”, to civilize, Christianize, and ultimately redeem a continent, an irony not lost on contemporary scholars. See, for example, Robert Murray, “Whiteness in Africa: Americo-Liberians and the Transformative Geographies of Race.” PhD diss, University of Kentucky, 2013, 90.

While indigenous Africans did enter settler societies- as laborers, as apprentices, as students, as congregants- they were not fully embraced as members of these societies. America's war and the "clamor for emigrants" that it excited among Liberians only made this distinction more apparent.

Since their earliest arrival, African Americans remained a minority population in Liberia, significantly outnumbered by local African peoples. Relationships were often hostile, especially during the early years of settlement as the ACS and emigrants sought to lay claim to African lands. In 1822, months after the first ACS-sponsored emigrant ship set sail, an American steamer arrived on the west coast of Africa to remove survivors of this ill-fated venture to Cape Mesurado, near present-day Monrovia, a territory "bartered" (at gunpoint) for guns, gunpowder, tobacco and other goods. Shortly thereafter, indigenous Africans launched an attack on the Cape Mesurado settlement. While the settlers were able to repel this first major attack- long celebrating this day as Liberia's second Independence Day- conflict over land would remain a defining feature of settler-African relations throughout the century and beyond.<sup>51</sup> Differing views toward the land whereby Liberians emphasized ownership and Africans use was at the heart of most land disputes. In time, almost all the African chiefs from whom settler leaders claimed to have purchased territory denied ever having sold their lands.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Amos Beyan. *The American Colonization Society and the Creation of the Liberian State: A Historical Perspective, 1822-1900*. (Lanham and London: University Press of America, Inc. 1991), Chapter 3; John Peter-Pham, *Liberia: Portrait of a Failed State* (Reed Press, 2004), Chapter 1; James Ciment, *Another America: The Story of Liberia and the Former Slaves Who Ruled It*. (New York: Hill and Wang, 2013), 41.

<sup>52</sup> M.B. Akpan. "Liberia: Theatre for Afro-American/ African Relations," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (June 1977), 15.

In addition to territorial disputes, Africans resented settler interference in economic affairs. Along the coast, Liberians, selling their own palm oil and camwood, created economic competition for indigenous Africans engaged in trade with European and American merchants. But it was efforts to intervene in the African slave trade that created even greater tensions between settlers and indigenous groups. Indeed, abolition of the slave trade was upheld as a primary tenet of the ACS's mission in Liberia. In its 1820 petition to Congress requesting financial assistance, the ACS argued that eradication of the slave trade and the civilization of Africans were "measures of indispensable connexion" as indigenous peoples, under the "civilizing" influence of African Americans, would soon abandon slave trading for more legitimate commercial pursuits.<sup>53</sup>

For their part, the settlers did take action against Africa's slave trade. In the colony's earliest years, any militia force organized by the settlers was too small and too ill-equipped to take more than a defensive posture, thus limiting any military action against slave traders. By the end of the first decade of settlement, however, settler numbers had increased enough to effect more organized campaigns. The ACS supplied guns and cannon to local militias while British and American squadrons, whose respective governments were signatories to the Slave Trade Act of 1807, provided reinforcements against foreign slavers participating in the trade. This support emboldened settlers (under the authority of ACS agents until independence in 1847) to launch their first attacks against the slave trade. After destroying a smaller slave factory in 1825,

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<sup>53</sup> "American Colonization Society: A Memorial to the United States Congress," Washington DC, February 1, 1820. Available at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part3/3h483t.html>.

militia forces attacked a notorious slave mart at Trade Town, approximately 100 miles southwest of Monrovia, in 1826. Encountering resistance from Kru inhabitants of the town and their Spanish allies, the colonists succeeded in battle and forced the King to sign a peace treaty stipulating no further engagement in the slave trade.<sup>54</sup> While some African ethnic groups more readily submitted to settler rule, often as a means of protection against slave traders, efforts to end a trade that Africans had participated in for centuries and who viewed this traffic as central to their economy and culture more frequently spurred resentment.

Not all exchanges between settlers and Africans were antagonistic. Africans traded produce and other goods for western imports, establishing networks of trade relationships. Indeed, from the earliest years of settlement, Liberians had relied on indigenous peoples for many of the goods and foodstuffs that they consumed; rice and cassava (a root plant virtually unknown in the African American diet) were the primary sources of calories for indigenous Africans and soon became staples in the settler diet as well. In addition, settlers relied on indigenous peoples to share their knowledge of the landscape and local growing conditions as the African environment did not support many of the crops to which settlers were accustomed. In a guide for settlers, published in 1835, one of the Society's first agents in Liberia cautioned that "American crops and the American modes of tillage must nearly all be given up."<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Harrison Akingbade. "The Liberian Settlers and the Campaign against the Slave Trade, 1825-1865," *Africa: Rivista trimestrale di studi e documentazione dell'Istituto italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente*, 38, no. 3 (1983), 340-342.

<sup>55</sup> Jehudi Ashmun, quoted in William Allen, "Liberia and the Atlantic World in the Nineteenth Century: Convergence and Effects" *History in Africa*, Vol 37 (2010), 24.

Further, Africans engaged with American immigrants as laborers on settler farms or in service to merchants on the coast. Though they worked for lower wages than their American peers (earning twenty-five cents a day while Liberians earned up to seventy-five cents), their labor often brought greater prosperity than could be earned locally.<sup>56</sup> More intimate relationships also developed between settler and African. African children served as wards in settler households where they were “assigned domestic duties to develop industrial habits and other accomplishments to insure them a livelihood”; in exchange, settlers were to care for their wards and provide an education.<sup>57</sup> Per an 1838 law governing Liberia’s system of wardship, “native” boys and girls who adopted western culture and thus became “civilized” were then eligible for citizenship.<sup>58</sup> While sources indicate that settlers did exploit indigenous children turned over to their care, scholars have also uncovered evidence that more affectionate bonds sometimes developed.<sup>59</sup> Tom Schick cites multiple instances where settlers included wards in their wills, bequeathing them property or money at death (though most of the cases Schick references are conditioned on the ward remaining “civilized”).<sup>60</sup> Moreover, scholars have

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<sup>56</sup> Bronwen Everill. ‘The Colony has Made No Progress in Agriculture’: Contested Perceptions of Agriculture in the Colonies of Sierra Leone & Liberia” in *Commercial Agriculture, the Slave Trade and Slavery in Atlantic Africa*. Robin Law, Suzanne Schwarz and Silke Strickrodt, eds. (Boydell & Brewer, 2015), 195. Some settlers reported this wage differential as the cause of their hardship in Liberia. In a letter to his former enslaver, Peyton Skipwith informed that “some from America have no chance to make a living for the natives do all the work...As it respects farming, there is no chance of it unless we would get the natives.” Peyton Skipwith to John Cocke (1834) in Wiley, 36.

<sup>57</sup> Roberts, J. W. (Bishop) Africa 1857-1868. Methodist Episcopal Church Missionary Correspondence, 1846-1912: Africa. January 7, 1857; September 1865.

<sup>58</sup> William Allen, “Liberia and the Atlantic World,” 31.

<sup>59</sup> US Dept of State Exec Docs (1872-1873), 336; Pinney in AR (1836), 249-250.

<sup>60</sup> Tom Schick. *Behold the Promised Land: A History of Afro-American Settler Society in Nineteenth Century Liberia*. (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), Chapter 6.

recently begun to recognize African agency in settler-African relationships. In her study of violence and democracy in Liberia, anthropologist Mary Moran refutes that “civilization” was brought by the colonists and imposed on a barbarous people. Rather, Africans, specifically the Glebo in southeastern Liberia, had adopted many elements of “civilization” before the settlers had arrived in Liberia. From Episcopal missionaries who had preceded the settlers, the Glebo learned the English language and tenets of Christianity, and like other ethnic groups, developed their own sector of “civilized” indigenous Africans. They allowed African American emigrants to settle among them on condition they provide education and Christian religion for their children. In Moran’s analysis, the Glebo are equal agents in this historical exchange, giving meaning to the term “civilization” by rooting it in the Glebo’s own historical narrative.<sup>61</sup>

While daily exchanges may have been less hostile, reports from the late 1850s and early 1860s reveal that confrontations with indigenous Africans continued to plague Liberian settlements four decades after the first American ship landed. In 1857, tensions that had flared intermittently since the establishment of the Maryland colony in 1833 exploded when the settler administration ordered the Grebo to leave the territory. The resulting war forced an appeal to the Liberian government for assistance in repelling the Grebo. The President’s decision to deploy government forces to quell the upheaval led

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<sup>61</sup> Mary Moran. *Liberia: The Violence of Democracy*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006). For further example of scholarship depicting greater African agency in settler-African relations, see Jane Martin, “Krumen “Down the Coast”: Liberian Migrants on the West African Coast in the 19th and Early 20th Centuries.” *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (1985), pp. 401-423

subsequently to the annexation of the Maryland colony to Liberia.<sup>62</sup> In 1861, on the eve of Civil War in America, settler-African tensions continued to run high in Liberia. In a letter to ACS Secretary Ralph Gurley in February 1861, emigrant Martha Ricks justified its brevity, writing that “the rumor of war bothered my mind today.”<sup>63</sup> Months later, the capture of a Spanish slaver off of the Liberian coast stirred anxiety among Liberians who feared attacks incited by a “great excitement among the natives in the hope of the slave trade being revived.”<sup>64</sup> Liberia’s interior settlements were especially vulnerable as they were the newest and most sparsely populated, and lacking in arms and men to render a formidable defense. A visit to the interior settlements in 1862 “depressed [James Hall] horribly.” He warned McLain that “they must be replenished or removed or sure the natives will crush them some day, not far distant.”<sup>65</sup> Thus, when immigration plummeted during America’s war years, many settlers undoubtedly felt vulnerable, fearing that indigenous Africans might exploit this weakness, and that they would not have the men or the resources to defend and protect themselves or their new nation.

Beyond the physical threat to their settlements, many Liberians worried about the social dissolution that might ensue should immigration cease. In letters from Liberia, settlers consistently emphasized the significance of churches and schools to the development of their communities. In an 1860 letter to their former enslaver, Tibey and Mary Scott expressed their satisfaction with Careysburg, writing that “both of the boys

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<sup>62</sup> Pham, 13; US Dept of State Exec Docs (1875-1876); Harrison Ola Abingbade. “The Settler-African Conflicts: The Case of the Maryland Colonists and the Grebo 1840- 1900,” *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 66, No. 2 (Summer, 1981), pp. 93-109.

<sup>63</sup> Martha Ricks, Clay Ashland, to Ralph Gurly, Washington DC, February 21, 1861. ACS, Reel 160.

<sup>64</sup> LaRandemie to William McLain, Washington DC, January 7, 1862. ACS, Reel 160.

<sup>65</sup> James Hall, Baltimore, to William McLain, Washington, DC, February 20, 1862. MSCS, Reel 14.

gos to chule we have the pleasur of goin to church three times a week.” They were particularly pleased with the improvement to their “little town” wrought by new immigrants.<sup>66</sup> In 1861, emigrant London Evans similarly stressed the importance of these institutions in a letter to his former enslaver: “and now as to society we have as good a chance as that as is in the world. Good school good churches. All well attend day and night.”<sup>67</sup> And when the Southern Board of Missions withdrew its support from Liberia during the war years, William Burke regretted that schools and churches in Clay Ashland were suffering in consequence.<sup>68</sup>

For many African Americans, church and school were central to how they understood freedom. Black churches in America frequently preached messages of freedom and equality with the story of Exodus commonly resonating with black congregants. But black churches provided their communities with more than religious instruction. They served as gathering sites whereby African Americans shared information, disseminated news, pooled resources, and lent support. Scholars frequently point to churches as centers of resistance or political activity. Certainly, black churches and their African American leaders played a critical role in mobilizing communities in the US, especially in the fight for abolition. Supporters of colonization similarly understood the power of the institution and its potential to mobilize mass audiences.

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<sup>66</sup> Tibby Scott and Mary Scott, Careysburg, to Dr. James H. Minor and Elizabeth Minor, January 19, 1860. “Letters from former slaves of Terrell settled in Liberia, 1857-1866,” Accession # 10460, Special Collections Dept., University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Va. [<https://ead.lib.virginia.edu/vivaxtf/view?docId=uva-sc/viu01228.xml>]

<sup>67</sup> London Evans, Cape Palmas, to Charles Howard, January 15, 1861, MSCS, Reel 8.

<sup>68</sup> William Burke, Clay Ashland, to R.R. Gurley, September 29, 1863. ACS, Reel 160.



While they may have interpreted the meaning of freedom differently, colonizationists frequently delivered addresses intended to recruit emigrants for Liberia in black churches.

Though blacks in the South could not congregate on their own and were commonly made to attend services where the message of obedience to master was reinforced, the church remained a meaningful institution. Beginning with the revivals of the mid-eighteenth century, enslaved persons were introduced to an evangelical message that emphasized itinerant preaching, personal salvation, and the word of the Bible over more formal indoctrination. As this emergent evangelical Protestantism preached a message of spiritual equality, black men and women increasingly entered white church communities, becoming part of the visible church institution. However, free black and enslaved persons adopted their own Christian forms, informed by both their African heritage and their American experience. They incorporated African dance and music in their spiritual rituals and imagined an afterlife of just rewards for black Christians. While many of these forms found expression in the invisible institution of the slave quarters where enslaved persons risked corporal punishment to “pray for better things,” they served as the foundation for the independent black churches that emerged in the early nineteenth-century.<sup>69</sup> Religion and church gained such significance among free and enslaved blacks- indeed, forging part of an evolving African American identity- that black Christians devoted what little time and money they had to their churches. While emancipation would see a wholesale withdrawal of blacks from biracial churches, the

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<sup>69</sup> Laurie Maffly-Kipp, “African American Christianity, Pt 1: To the Civil War” (2005).  
<http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/nineteen/nkeyinfo/aareligion.htm>.

urgency with which freed men and women established their own churches in the post war period reveals the significance of church to the black community and its centrality to ideas about freedom.<sup>70</sup> Settlers carried this urgency with them to Liberia. Upon landing in Careysburg in 1857, James Hunter Terrell's former slaves (of Virginia) helped construct the Union church even before drawing their lands and building their own homes.<sup>71</sup> The significance of church can also be seen in the number of churches established in new settlements. For example, in a town where an ACS agent counted 40 houses, four churches stood to accommodate the settlement's worshipers.<sup>72</sup>

So it was with education. Like church, education was upheld as an important marker of freedom. Having been barred from learning to read or write in most slave states and denied opportunities for formal education in free states, those who emigrated to Liberia prioritized literacy and education in establishing new settlements. Like the men and women who would be freed by war, Liberia's settlers rushed to establish institutions of learning. Harriet Beecher Stowe captured this enthusiasm: "they cried for the spelling book as bread, and pleaded for teachers as a necessity of life."<sup>73</sup> Scholars have long

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<sup>70</sup>The distinction between visible and invisible religious institutions is elaborated by Albert Raboteau. See *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978.) For more on the significance of evangelical Protestantism in the shaping of African American identity, see Sylvia Frey and Betty Wood. *Come Shouting to Zion: African American Protestantism in the American South and British Caribbean to 1830*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998.) For more on the significance of church to black community and interpretations of freedom, see Hahn 230-236; See also Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction*, 41-42.

<sup>71</sup> William Douglass. *Liberian Letters: William Douglass to Reverend W. Slaughter 1857 April 24*. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Library, 1857, [search.lib.virginia.edu/catalog/uva-lib:501750](https://search.lib.virginia.edu/catalog/uva-lib:501750).

<sup>72</sup> John Brooke Pinney, November 10, 1868. John Brooke Pinney journals, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library. New York.

<sup>73</sup> Harriet Beecher Stowe quoted in James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*. (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 5. Stowe included this comment after first perpetuating a racist stereotype that freed people would flock to the "grog shop."

recognized this yearning for education as a critical component of the African American quest for self-determination in a post-emancipation era. Settlers in Liberia pursued education with the same vigor, building schoolhouses upon arrival and frequently sending requests to former masters and ACS officials for books to support them. One struggling emigrant, “quit poor,” requested from the ACS “any good old books you have no use for I will be very thankful for them.”<sup>74</sup> By 1836, Monrovia had established six day schools for children and an evening school for adults.<sup>75</sup> In its Declaration of Independence, signed a decade later, Liberia cited its numerous and well-attended schools as a measure of its success.

In a letter to his former enslaver, emigrant William Douglas wrote: “We all have a good Chance here, we have the worship of God regularly twice a day, we also have a school which we attend daily & at night so that these 6 months if we don’t improve it will be our own fault.”<sup>76</sup> To settlers like William Douglas, religion and education were the foundation of the society that they sought to build in Liberia. Thus, when the war slowed the tide of emigration to Liberia, Liberians worried that their infant institutions would not endure. There was validity to this concern. Within months of the outbreak of war, the ACS’s Board of Directors ordered the closure of all schools in ACS receptacles and the discharge of their teachers. Though ACS agent salaries would eventually be cut as well, the decision to terminate educational services as one of its first retrenchment measures

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<sup>74</sup> Jones, Sinoe, to R.R. Gurley, Washington, DC, January 1861. ACS, Reel 160.

<sup>75</sup> Clegg, 82.

<sup>76</sup> William Douglas to Dr. James Minor and Frank Nelson, March 8, 1857. UVA Library.

demonstrates that the Society did not place the same emphasis on education as those who had long been denied learning opportunities.

America's war made apparent Liberia's dependence on the ACS to deliver the emigrants that would defend their settlements and build up their institutions. It also revealed Liberia's financial dependence. At the onset of war in the US, Liberia had yet to develop a sustainable economy. The ACS regularly shipped goods to Liberia to support emigrants during acclimation or to be sold or otherwise delivered to settlers. An agreement between Liberia and the ACS, signed in 1848 though informally in place since Liberia's founding, gave the ACS the right to import (duty-free) and sell articles in the Republic with the proceeds directed to the support of immigrants upon their arrival.<sup>77</sup> What goods the Society shipped were in part determined by ACS agents on the ground who had a better understanding of settler demands and local economic conditions (i.e. an abundance of locally grown rice lowered the price to the point that any imported would not be sold.) In addition, the Society often filled requests from manumitted slaves; some of these emigrants were able to draw on legacy monies that had been transferred to the ACS for disbursement, others maintained communication with former enslavers who financed their requests but relied on the ACS to manage shipment. Typical of emigrant requests was Silvey Nelson's to Secretary McLain in 1859: "Sir what funds you have in hand for Isaac you you [sic] please to forward if to me. in goods to me. namely, one Sacke. of Salt, one Barrel, of flower, one half barrel, of porke. & Same Trad Cloth. &

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<sup>77</sup> Huberich, 39.

Some cloth for Childrens Clothes ...& fifty pounds of Sugar. One Keg of powder &. one bag of large Shot.”<sup>78</sup>

Though the ACS had intended that emigrants would cultivate the land and become independent farmers, many settlers found trade with the indigenous Africans preferable to agricultural labor, frustrating Society officials. Writing from Cape Palmas in 1862, an agent of the ACS expressed his dismay, “I think this place will be a failure as a settlement unless there be a considerable emigration to this point as those who are already here sit supinely down and depend entirely on the natives for all their supplies. They will not even cultivate their small patches of ground around them to relieve their necessities.”<sup>79</sup> “Laziness” was a common charge hurled against the settlers, when much of the land appropriated for settlement was in fact intractable, deterring many emigrants from laboring to produce what could be procured through trade. In addition, some African Americans were eager to abandon agricultural work, associating it with slavery and an exploitative labor system that they had left behind.<sup>80</sup> Others were inexperienced in agriculture, having practiced various trades in the United States. Alexander Crummell regretted that “there was no spontaneous desire to develop the resources” among the stonemasons, coopers, barbers, and other tradesmen who, according to Crummell, were

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<sup>78</sup> Silvey Franklin, Careysburg, to William McLain, Washington DC, August 10, 1859. ACS, Reel 159.

<sup>79</sup> RL McGill, Cape Palmas, to James Hall, Baltimore, June 15, 1862. MSCS, Reel 8.

<sup>80</sup> For an alternate argument, see William Allen “Rethinking the History of Settler Agriculture in Nineteenth-Century Liberia.” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 37, no. 3 (2004). Allen argues against the common contention that emigrants abhorred agricultural labor. Rather, agriculture suffered as a consequence of labor scarcity caused by high mortality, low immigration, and family migration patterns; lack of capital for any large-scale production; and the unsuitability of the tropical soil for cultivation of commercial crops.

“unaccustomed to hard labor.”<sup>81</sup> To meet settler demand, Africans bartered basic foodstuffs such as rice and cassava for various imported goods including tobacco, spirits and, as Silvey Nelson requested, cloth, powder, and shot.

Beyond trading for provisions, some settlers pursued trade as a preferable method of earning a livelihood. During the early nineteenth century, a foreign market emerged for goods produced in West Africa, especially camwood, an African dyewood, and palm oil, an oil used in food and manufacturing of soap and candles. It was not long before Liberians found a niche serving as middlemen between Africans and foreign traders, moving goods up and down the Liberian coast. Relatively inexperienced in the world of commerce, few emigrants would achieve the commercial success of “merchant princes” such as future President of Liberia Joseph Jenkins Roberts or James McGill, but many Liberians continued to try their hand at trade. In time, large trading firms began to replace smaller ventures and Liberia’s commercial fleet expanded with a steady increase in the number of vessels in operation.<sup>82</sup> As commercial markets expanded, the Liberian government saw trade as an opportunity to raise its revenue and passed a series of laws restricting trade to established ports of entry, making it easier to collect taxes on imported goods. (It was the violation of such laws by British merchants who refused to recognize the legitimacy of a nation established by a benevolent organization that pushed Liberia to declare its independence in 1847.) Though foreign competition began to undercut

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<sup>81</sup> Emigrants Database, Virginia Emigrants to Liberia, Virginia Center for Digital History, University of Virginia; Alexander Crummell in *AR* (1861), 272.

<sup>82</sup> Roberts, Liberia’s first and seventh President, became one of Liberia’s most successful merchants; McGill was a partner in the commercial firm, the McGill Brothers. See Dwight Syfert. “The Liberian Coasting Trade, 1822-1900.” *The Journal of African History* 18, no. 2 (1977), 227.

Liberia's role in trading from the 1850s as Europeans began to make more regular runs along the coast, it remained that Liberian merchants could engage at all in this commercial network "provided desirable items of trade could be procured from America."<sup>83</sup>

Thus, when America's war depleted the Society's resources and limited the number of ships arriving in Liberia, Liberians soon felt the impact. Reporting on the sad state in which Liberia found itself by January of 1862, one ACS agent wrote, "Money is very scarce, trade has been very languishing during last year. A considerable decrease in the revenue has taken place, govt very much embarrassed indeed."<sup>84</sup> By this time, Secretary McLain had already begun denying requests from Liberia, regretfully informing ACS agents that their orders for goods could not be filled as "the times are too hard."<sup>85</sup>

While a decrease in goods affected trade relationships, the ACS ships "not coming out as usual" denied Liberians' provisions on which they had come to rely. In letter after letter written to the ACS during the war years, emigrants complain of "hard times" in Liberia. "Lavinia Nelson, a manumitted slave from North Carolina who arrived in Careysburg in 1858, penned a letter to Secretary McLain in September 1861 explaining that she was "not able to separte [her]self without some healpe" adding that "the peopel is so harde hirted that they do not want to do the leas thing for a widdow."

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<sup>83</sup> Wiley, 6.

<sup>84</sup> LaRandemie to McLain, Washington DC, January 7, 1862. ACS, Reel 160.

<sup>85</sup> William McLain, New York, to JS Smith, Bassa, October 31, 1861. ACS, Reel 203.

Two years later, Lavinia's situation had not improved. She wrote to McLain for a double-barrel shot gun and fine powder "or money" and requested that he send bacon and flour, repeating "times is very hard."<sup>86</sup> Around this same time, Isabella Smith, a former slave who had settled on the St. Paul's River, sat down to pen a similar letter to McLain. In it, she pleaded for help as she "never was so poor," admitting that, without assistance, she feared she "must die a beggar" in Liberia.<sup>87</sup> The ACS had served as a regular channel of support for Liberians since the colony's founding. When the war ruptured this network, the consequences of this dependence were felt by Liberia's settlers as they struggled to support themselves.

Exacerbating the situation was the problem caused by the mass influx of recaptured Africans to Liberia in 1860-1861. When the U.S passed the Slave Trade Act in 1819, it committed federal funds for the return of Africans rescued from US vessels illegally trading in slaves to the West Coast of Africa. Though funding would be provided by the federal government, the ACS served as steward of these monies. Once landed, recaptives or "Congos"- a term that settlers and Society officials applied to all recaptured slaves landed in West Africa-were housed in ACS receptacles until apprenticed out to settler families, firms, or mission stations.<sup>88</sup> A revision to the existing

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<sup>86</sup> Lavinia Nelson, Careysburg, to William McLain, Washington, DC, June 19, 1863. ACS, Reel 160.

<sup>87</sup> Isabella Smith, St. Paul's River, to William McLain, Washington DC, June 11, 1863. ACS, Reel 160.

<sup>88</sup> The term "Congo" first entered the ACS lexicon in 1827 when the US determined that slaves aboard a captured slave vessel being held in Georgia were to be transported to Liberia. In Liberia, they were located in a new settlement, New Georgia. Many of these recaptives claimed to be from the "Congo", a vast region in West Central Africa that was home to various ethnic groups, though Africans of other regions and ethnicities also became recaptives. According to historian Sharla Fett, "By 1860, with the mass entrance of thousands of recaptives, "Congoes" became an ethnic designation that merged a



colonial law governing wardship extended its terms to Liberia's recaptive population, binding these forced immigrants to settler households for seven to fourteen years, depending on the age they entered apprenticeship. Some were bound out as individuals, others as members of groups of up to forty captives. Writing of the captives under his care, one emigrant reported, "My entire farming operations are carried on with them [Congos]. . . . My sugar-maker, cooper and fireman are Congos."<sup>89</sup> The firm of Payne, Yates, and Co., recruited around 10 Congos to labor in its sugar mill (displacing Liberians who commanded higher wages.)<sup>90</sup> In exchange for their labor, captives, like indigenous wards, were to be provided care and instruction in "civilized life."

While captives were legally akin to Liberia's indigenous population, settlers and ACS officials expressed an ambivalence towards captives that, from the beginning, distinguished them from Liberia's indigenous people. Though "savages" who arrived in a "rude and barbarous state," captives were also viewed as a "blessing" to Liberia, a tractable and dependent source of labor and a buffer between settler and indigenous communities.<sup>91</sup> While some did resist and even attempted escape to find their way home, such efforts usually ended in defeat with the fleeing party being returned to the settlement. Liberia's Secretary of State reported that the Agent for Captives had had the "greatest difficulty in trying to keep them from straying off," but that the government's

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generalized geographic origin with a historically specific experience of Atlantic displacement." See Sharla Fett, *Recaptured Africans: Surviving Slave Ships, Detention, and Dislocation in the Final Years of the Slave Trade*. (University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 165. See also William Allen, "Liberia and the Atlantic World in the Nineteenth-Century: Convergence and Effects", 25.

<sup>89</sup> Quoted in Younger, 438.

<sup>90</sup> AR (1861), 62.

<sup>91</sup> Fett, 159, 156.

offer of three dollars for each recovered resulted in the quick return of all who had “wandered off”. Though “wandering off” was not an uncommon occurrence, the reality for recaptives landed in Liberia was that the experience of capture and forced migration had left them destitute and alone in a foreign place. As their shared suffering aboard a slave ship and their subsequent communal experience in Liberia bound recaptives together, their designation as “Congo” by the settler class also shaped a distinct experience. Congos were almost universally apprenticed out to settler households where their training in civilization and Christianity was expected to meld them into the settler population. William Burke, who had taken twelve recaptives into his household, had the “most likely hope and prospects in the most of them” as they seemed “to be very fond of civilization.” As he found churches and sabbath schools every sabbath “crowded with them”, Burke viewed the “whole matter in regard to these natives being brought among us as a wise and gracious act of Providence designing them to be a blessing to us and us to them.”<sup>92</sup>

While settlers like Burke welcomed the opportunity to indoctrinate incoming recaptives and others eagerly embraced the free labor apprenticeship provided, government support for care of the recaptives also incentivized settlers to accept “wild Africans” into their homes and communities. For each cargo landed, the ACS contracted with the US government for the recaptives’ care. The Liberian government submitted accounts for recaptives as they were received in Liberia to the ACS, monies that were

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<sup>92</sup> William Burke, Clay Ashland, to R.R. Gurley, Washington DC, September 23, 1861. ACS, Reel 160.

subsequently paid out to settlers. There was little objection to this arrangement before the 1860s as only 1,000 recaptives had been resettled from 1820-1858.<sup>93</sup>

However, when ships began to deposit hundreds upon hundreds of recaptured Africans onto Liberian shores, those responsible for their care in Africa began to voice their protests. Within just a year's time, nearly 3,500 were delivered to Liberia, prompting Liberia's President, Stephen Benson, to pen a desperate and urgent plea to the ACS's Corresponding Secretary: "For humanity's sake, relieve us! And the poor unfortunate creatures cast among us as soon as possible."<sup>94</sup> Neither the US government nor Society officials warned the Liberian government that thousands of recaptives would soon be landed nor had funds for their care been transferred. Liberia's Secretary of State, in a letter to Secretary McLain, lamented that the government was not prepared to support these thousands, writing "our regret is more felt when the demands are constantly made on the govt for the boarding and care of the Africans while we have not the funds to satisfy the claimants." He blamed the ACS for this regrettable situation. "We feel quite

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<sup>93</sup> Younger, 425. Karp suggests the reason that so few recaptives were resettled in Liberia before the 1860s was that a powerful proslavery faction exerted significant influence in matters of U.S. foreign policy before the Civil War. Fearing abolition in the British colonies would create a "cordon of freedom" around the South and other slaveholding states including Cuba and Brazil, this "southern foreign policy elite" consistently denied Britain's "right to search" vessels under the protection of the United States flag suspected of illegally trading in slaves. In 1842, this faction supported signing the Webster-Ashburton Treaty which allied the US and Britain in forming a joint naval squadron to police the illegal slave trade off the coast of Africa. While seemingly a measure to suppress the illicit trade in persons, Karp argues that this "southern foreign policy elite" actually supported the treaty because they believed it forced Britain to abandon its claim to "right to search," thereby strengthening slavery where it existed. See Matthew Karp. *This Vast Southern Empire: Slaveholders at the Helm of American Foreign Policy*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016), 51-52. "Cordon of freedom" is a term coined by James Oakes to refer to the gradual emancipation policy that defined Republican strategy before military emancipation. See James Oakes. *Freedom National: The Destruction of Slavery in the United States, 1861-1865*. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2013.)

<sup>94</sup> President Stephen Benson quoted in *AR* (1861), 1.

certain that we have carried out faithfully the agreement with the US govt as could be done and such is the opinion of the US agent sent here to represent your govt.” So outraged was President Benson by the lack of warning and the withholding of funds that he demanded a renegotiation of the recaptive contract with the US government, arguing that funds should be directly in the control of the Liberian government. Previous experience with the ACS likely also motivated President Benson and the Liberian government to seek a new arrangement. In the past, the ACS had placed conditions on the release of monies it received from the US government. Just prior to this influx, the ACS Board of Directors informed Liberian officials that it would pay out only \$1,500 of a \$3,500 installment, relinquishing the remainder once the road to Careysburg had been completed. The ACS intended to send more emigrants to Careysburg to build up that interior settlement and thus determined that “the road must be made,” and that support of the recaptives be “subservient to the accomplishment of that great work.”<sup>95</sup>

Under pressure from the Liberian government which threatened to surrender all responsibilities of care, a new agreement was signed in December 1860 that transferred control of all recaptive contracts for the previous six months to the Liberian government rather than the ACS. Despite this revised contract, the Liberian government still struggled to collect monies due for the care of recaptives. In February 1861, Congress had yet to approve appropriations for the 1,400 recaptives aboard the *Cora* and *Bonita*, the most recent captures landed in the fall of 1860, despite reports of concern from Liberia. Liberia’s president admitted “great apprehensions of a scarcity of provisions next year

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<sup>95</sup> William McLain, Baltimore, to Joseph Roberts, Monrovia, October 31, 1859. ACS, Reel 202.

owing to the influx of recaptives.” An ACS official in Monrovia reported a “great commotion in the country about the landing of the recaptives” and that “citizens generally were anxious that they be destitute among them.”<sup>96</sup> Citing a stipulation in the contract that required submission of detailed accounts, the US government continued to delay its payments. Consequently, the Liberian government struggled to pay claims of those housing recaptives. Settlers were greatly disappointed in the amount that the government was granting in 1861: \$36 annually for each recaptive.<sup>97</sup> In communication with the ACS, Benson admitted that his government was unable to care for the recaptives per the terms of contract as it had not the means to do so.<sup>98</sup> Despite continual inquiries and attempts to reconcile accounts to the US government’s satisfaction, the final payment would not be made to the Liberian government until 1865.<sup>99</sup>

Some Liberians, though regretting the difficulties that now befell their young nation, saw the war and the withdrawal of ACS support as an incentive to develop Liberia’s resources and establish a more independent Republic. The threefold rise in coffee prices on the world market during the 1860s encouraged some Liberians to engage in its cultivation. Edward Morris who would become Liberia’s most successful coffee planter branded the crop Liberia’s “remedy” to its financial woes.<sup>100</sup> The demand for sugar also spiked during this period as sugar production in the United States, which had

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<sup>96</sup> Stephen Benson, Monrovia, to R.R. Gurley, November 22, 1860. ACS, Reel 160; Henry Dennis, Monrovia, to William McLain, Washington DC, November 28, 1860. ACS, Reel 160.

<sup>97</sup> Dennis, Careysburg, to [likely R.R. Gurley], February 20, 1861. ACS, Reel 160. David Brion Davis notes that the US government allocated \$150 for annual maintenance and rehabilitation for “wards” adopted by settlers. See Davis, *Slavery in the Age of Emancipation*, 117.

<sup>98</sup> S.A. Benson, Monrovia, to G.W. Hall, Baltimore, March 6, 1861. ACS, Reel 160.

<sup>99</sup> Department of State, Monrovia, to James Hall, Baltimore, August 26, 1863. MSCS, Reel 8.

<sup>100</sup> William Allen, 41; Edward Morris, Philadelphia, to unknown, February 23, 1865. ACS, Reel 97.

been growing since the 1850s, suffered as a consequence of war. Liberia saw this as an opportunity to increase its sugar exports to America, creating a “mania for sugar estates” across the Republic.<sup>101</sup> Liberian President Daniel Bashiel Warner (1864-1868) advised ACS Secretary William Coppinger that the best way to aid Liberia in the absence of emigration was to send the country sugar mills. Even among emigrants who found they had not the means to support themselves “under present circumstances”, there emerged a recognition that more should be done to break dependence on the ACS. An emigrant in Careysburg regretted that “the Society is not in a condition to do more for me or Liberia especially, I think however we may be benefitted by being forced to depend more upon our own resources.”<sup>102</sup> Alexander Crummell, missionary and leading black voice in the colonization movement, criticized those who would continue to look away from Liberia for the national good and insisted on the need for Liberians to begin to help themselves.

As Liberians struggled during America’s war years to sustain themselves and their settlements, the war put a magnifying glass to Liberia’s dependence. Bishop Payne, a missionary sent to Liberia in 1837, penned a letter in June 1862 regretting “very much the state of affairs in your country, the effect of which is in no little degree felt by us generally and more to be regretted by every Liberian for it is a great impediment to their most magnificent institution called the American Colonization Society.”<sup>103</sup> As the

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<sup>101</sup> AR (1865), 121.

<sup>102</sup> Daniel Warner, Monrovia, to William Coppinger, Washington, DC, August 1, 1864. ACS, Reel 160. Daniel Laing, Careysburg, to William McLain, Washington, DC, February 18, 1863. ACS, Reel 160.

<sup>103</sup> John Payne, Sinoe, to William McLain, Washington, DC, June 14, 1862. ACS, Reel 160.

primary provider of immigrants and money, the ACS was indeed Liberians' most magnificent institution. But when it could provide neither during the war, both the ACS and Liberia had to contemplate how they might survive these long years. They thought they had found an answer when measures began to pass in the United States freeing America's slaves. Despite recognitions of Liberian dependence, Liberia, nor the ACS, was quite ready to abandon a hope that Liberia would become a home for African Americans.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **Liberia's Saving Grace: Lincoln**

On December 3, 1861, President Lincoln stood before Congress to deliver his first annual address. The firing on Fort Sumter eight months prior had “extinguished the last ray of hope of preserving the Union peaceably” and war continued to consume the nation. Though Lincoln made no direct mention of slavery or its abolition during his address, his views on the subject were not wholly absent. To those radical Republicans who called for more immediate emancipationist measures, he replied that all indispensable measures must be employed to preserve the Union but that “we should not be in haste to determine that radical and extreme measures, which may reach the loyal as well as the disloyal, are indispensable.” In other words, enslaved people may be emancipated but the time had not yet come. Lincoln also urged Congress to recognize the sovereignty of Haiti and Liberia, a recognition that the United States had withheld since their respective declarations of independence. Such a move, long avoided to appease pro-slavery forces, would admit of blacks’ capabilities and capacity for self-government and thus undermine one of the principal justifications for slavery. It is likely that Lincoln’s call for recognition of both Haiti and Liberia was tied to another of the recommendations that he proposed to Congress during his address.

Under and by virtue of the act of Congress entitled "An act to confiscate property used for insurrectionary purposes," approved August 6, 1861, the legal claims of



certain persons to the labor and service of certain other persons have become forfeited, and numbers of the latter thus liberated are already dependent on the United States and must be provided for in some way. Besides this, it is not impossible that some of the States will pass similar enactments for their own benefit respectively, and by operation of which persons of the same class will be thrown upon them for disposal. In such case I recommend that Congress provide for accepting such persons from such States, according to some mode of valuation, in lieu, pro tanto, of direct taxes, or upon some other plan to be agreed on with such States respectively; that such persons, on such acceptance by the General Government, be at once deemed free, and that in any event steps be taken for colonizing both classes (or the one first mentioned if the other shall not be brought into existence) at some place or places in a climate congenial to them. It might be well to consider, too, whether the free colored people already in the United States could not, so far as individuals may desire, be included in such colonization.<sup>1</sup>

For the American Colonization Society and Liberian officials, Lincoln's message could not have been more perfectly timed. A war that had threatened to end the Society and cripple Liberia now seemed that it might become Liberia's saving grace. Those who saw their Liberian project fading hoped that recognition might strengthen ties between Liberia and the United States and help spur emigration. This, combined with the federal government's endorsement of colonization, would reverse Liberia's course. But, as federal support for colonization was so frequently tied to emancipationist measures, support among would-be emigrants continued to decline. Expectations aroused by Lincoln's early support for colonization and heightened by passage of a supplemental Congressional appropriation would shrink by the end of the war as African Americans committed to remain in the United States. In the meantime, those who had already

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<sup>1</sup> Abraham Lincoln, "President's Message" in *The Sun*. December 4, 1861.

departed for Liberia continued to suffer “hard times” as the ACS, convinced that federal support would pull Liberia through the war, focused their energies in Washington.

“The Civil War years may well constitute the high-water mark of federal interest in the entire colonization enterprise,” writes historian Phillip Magness.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, before the end of 1862, the federal government had established an Emigration Office; appointed a Colonization agent, contracted for colonization of African Americans outside of the United States, and appropriated \$600,000 to implement colonization efforts. This interest in colonization during Lincoln’s administration has been the subject of many historical studies, with Lincoln’s views on race and colonization dominating the scholarly landscape. Two schools of thought have generally dominated the discussion. The first, supported by such preeminent Civil War historians as James McPherson, argues that Lincoln supported colonization as a politically expedient move intended to placate opponents of emancipation. Removing blacks that might otherwise settle among whites would make any policy to free the slaves more palatable to emancipation’s opponents. This “lullaby thesis” has been refuted by those who argue that Lincoln’s views on race evolved as the war carried on and that it was this “change of heart,” not political pandering, that led the President to abandon his support for colonization.<sup>3</sup> While this

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<sup>2</sup> Phillip Magness, “The Changing Legacy of Civil War Colonization” in *New Directions in the Study of African American Recolonization*. Beverly Tomek and Matthew Hetrick, eds. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2017), 305.

<sup>3</sup> James McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 508. For more on the “change-of-heart” thesis, see Eric Foner, *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery* (New York: WW Norton & Company, 2010). It should be noted that Lincoln expressed interest in colonization as early as 1852 when he delivered a eulogy for Henry Clay, the man he referred to as “my beau ideal of a statesman.” Clay supported gradual emancipation linked to colonization, a proposal that appealed to Lincoln. In an 1854 speech, Lincoln asserted his “first impulse” regarding the

scholarly debate over Lincoln's motivations continues, historians have shifted the Lincoln discussion to various other fields of analysis.

In *Lincoln's Proclamation*, contributing scholars use the Emancipation Proclamation as a starting point that moves the conversation beyond Lincoln's racial views- views that most agree were more complicated than a racist or not racist dichotomy depicts. In his contribution, historian Steven Hahn turns this long-standing debate on its head, noting that it might be useful for scholars "to devote a bit less time to the question of what Lincoln thought about slavery and slaves and a bit more time to the question of what slaves thought about Lincoln- about who he was, what he represented, what he intended to accomplish- and what they did as a result."<sup>4</sup> How slaves interpreted Lincoln's election and his broader aims for the Civil War, Hahn argues, helped forge a political consciousness that influenced "what slaves did and did not do" during the war. While Hahn's focus is on the enslaved in the United States, his analytical framework is useful for understanding also what colonizationists and Liberians thought about Lincoln and what they did and did not do in turn.

When Lincoln publicly advocated recognition and then colonization, they looked to him as the one to save their nation-building project. Despite Lincoln's insistence that preservation of the Union was his only goal, whether that meant freeing all the slaves or none at all, Society and Liberian officials heard only his colonization message. Even as

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issue of slavery was to free the enslaved and send them to Africa, their "long lost fatherland." See Foner, *Fiery Trial*, 18-19, 127. See also Michael Vorenberg, "Abraham Lincoln and the Politics of Black Colonization," *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association*, Vol. 14. No. 2 (Summer 1993), 25.

<sup>4</sup> William Blair and Karen Fisher Younger, ed. *Lincoln's Proclamation: Emancipation Reconsidered*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009.) Steven Hahn, "But What Did the Slaves Think?" in *Lincoln's Proclamation*.

the slave system began to disintegrate, forced by thousands of enslaved persons who rushed across Union lines, the ACS and Liberia still held out hope that colonization, backed by the federal government, would be the answer to the nation's "Negro question." Indeed, they debated recruiting "contrabands" after DC freed its enslaved and still none showed interest in leaving the United States. However, Lincoln's endorsement, even when backed by a \$600,000 Congressional appropriation, was not enough to turn the tide toward Liberia or to emigration more broadly. Encouraged by Lincoln's words, the ACS and Liberians overlooked the primary obstacle that had long stood in their way and that Lincoln's election had only reinforced. African Americans, free or freed, were not interested in removing from their native land. Thus, as Lincoln's words stirred optimism among Society and Liberian officials that their hope of building up an "Anglo-Saxon Negro nationality" on the West Coast of Africa might be fully realized, these same words demonstrated to America's enslaved that freedom was indeed on the horizon and that their futures lie on this side of the Atlantic. Drawing on correspondence between and among Society and Liberian officials, legislative acts and federal reports, Presidential documents, and newspaper accounts, this chapter examines Lincoln's and the federal government's support for colonization during the war years, an interest that both the Society and Liberia believed would save their nation-building project but that ultimately failed to deliver either the emigrants or funds that it needed.

Just weeks after Lincoln gave his public endorsement to colonization, voices rang out in Washington advocating various sites for resettlement of America's freed men and

women. Eager to move the Society to the forefront of the debate, Corresponding Secretary for the New York State Colonization Society recommended that they act “very forcibly” to convince Congress to turn their attention to Africa. He suggested to the national Society that a visit to Washington be planned after the holidays to sway minds towards Liberia.<sup>5</sup> An ACS delegation did not travel to the capital, but the Society did present its case in a Memorial to the United States Congress on January 1, 1862. In it, they sought “an annual appropriation to aid the removal and support of such persons in Liberia,” as will “result in great benefits to those people and the United States.”<sup>6</sup> The ACS hoped to take advantage of the opportunity that Lincoln’s address presented and to divert attention from other potential schemes by reminding its audience that the Society had been engaged in the colonization enterprise for more than four decades. During this time, Liberia had suppressed the slave trade, civilized thousands of “barbarians,” and established numerous social and religious institutions. Liberia had proven itself a home to “the colored race” and was ready to receive any and all that the government was now prepared to send.

Beyond this direct appeal for federal support, the Society also accelerated their pleas for recognition of Liberian independence. When Liberia became an independent republic in 1847, the ACS and Liberian officials expected that the United States would recognize Liberia’s status as a sovereign nation. Both expressed regret when it became apparent that this acknowledgment was not forthcoming. While they believed that an

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<sup>5</sup> JB Pinney, New York, to RR Gurley, Washington, DC, December 23, 1861. ACS, Reel 92.

<sup>6</sup> AR (1862), 29-30.

independent black republic would appeal to many potential emigrants, they also expected that formal recognition would open the purse strings of the federal coffers and establish a trade relationship to place Liberia on more secure commercial footing. “It is not too late” wrote Liberian President Joseph Jenkins Roberts in 1849. “I do hope that your government will now, not only recognize our independence, but will aid us pecuniarily that we may be able to carry out more effectually and speedily the great objects for which these colonies were established, viz: as an asylum for the people of color of the United States.”<sup>7</sup> The ACS and Liberians urged the United States to take favorable action, but, for fear of riling pro-slavery forces, none was taken. In 1850, the US government commissioned its own agent to travel to Liberia and report on conditions there. In his report to the Secretary of State, Ralph R. Gurley, who had served as Corresponding Secretary for the ACS since 1838, submitted a recommendation that the government of the United States recognize the independence of Liberia and appropriate \$50,000 annually for ten years “to enable that republic to carry out the principles of its constitution, for the happiness of those from this country who are seeking a home upon its soil.”<sup>8</sup> Legislatures from northern states forwarded resolutions to Congress in support of Gurley’s recommendation but still no action was taken towards formal recognition.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> AR (1849), 226.

<sup>8</sup> AR (1839), 25; United States, and Ralph Randolph Gurley. *Report of the Secretary of State, Communicating the Report of the Rev. R.R. Gurley, Who Was Recently Sent Out by the Government to Obtain Information in Respect to Liberia. September 14, 1850. Read. September 16, 1850. Ordered to Be Printed.* (1850), 33.

<sup>9</sup> Roland P. Falkner. “The United States and Liberia.” *The American Journal of International Law* 4, no. 3 (1910), 539.

Thus, in 1861, when Lincoln made it clear that he supported establishing diplomatic relations with an independent Liberia, ACS officials saw their greatest chance to achieve what they had not been able to in 14 years. John Crozer of the Pennsylvania auxiliary expressed his optimism in a letter to the Executive Committee of the ACS: “Never was a period when so favorable an opportunity offered for a fair and free consideration of the subject in the Congress of the United States.” Lincoln’s support for colonization made it urgent that the matter of recognition “be pressed upon Congress at every session till our country does its duty in the premises.”<sup>10</sup> In its January 1 Memorial to Congress, the ACS “observe[d] with great interest” the President’s recommendation that Liberia be recognized as independent before making its case for African colonization.<sup>11</sup> The Society understood that recognition by the United States government would lend support to their larger mission of colonizing African Americans in Liberia. A bill to authorize the President to appoint a diplomatic representative to Liberia passed the Senate in February, prompting an expectation among Society and Liberian officials that it would quickly become law. It was not until September that President Lincoln attached his signature to the bill.

### **Freed to Remove by Legislative Act: Colonizing DC’s Emancipated**

While the bill for formal recognition slugged through Washington’s bureaucratic channels, the President and Congress pushed forth on other colonization measures. In

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<sup>10</sup> John Crozer, Pennsylvania, to the Executive Committee of the American Colonization Society, Washington DC, December 1861. ACS, Reel 92.

<sup>11</sup>AR (1862), 29.

March 1862, Congress was debating a bill on emancipation in the District of Columbia. The bill, while freeing all enslaved persons in the district, would compensate owners forced to surrender their “property” so long as they could prove their loyalty to the Union. Reports of slaveowners sending their slaves into Maryland to avoid having to free them circulated in the press.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, reports that a bill of emancipation was before Congress prompted some enslaved people to cross into DC territory. Anticipating the bill’s passage, members of the Society saw an opportunity to resuscitate their waning efforts. In a letter to the Secretary of the ACS, John Brooks Pinney, Corresponding Secretary of the New York State Colonization Society, expressed encouragement that freed slaves might be sent to Liberia: “I see that hundreds of Virginia Africans are coming into Washington daily, and Congress will in a few days pass an act for freedom in the district. Can’t you make up a vessel load of them? It would be the most popular action our Society could do and be in the line of our duty.”<sup>13</sup>

The bill for compensated emancipation in the District of Columbia did pass on April 16. It freed all persons held to labor or service in DC by reason of African descent and abolished slavery and involuntary servitude thereafter. Loyal persons whose slaves were “discharged” were entitled to compensation of up to \$300 per person. All said,

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<sup>12</sup> “Removal of Slaves from the District of Columbia.” *Chicago Tribune*, Apr 4, 1862; “Outrages of Slaveowners in the District of Columbia.” *Chicago Tribune*, Apr 11, 1862.

<sup>13</sup> J.B. Pinney, New York, to R.R. Gurley, Washington, DC, March 15, 1862. ACS, Reel 92.



approximately 3,200 enslaved people gained their freedom as a result of the bill's passage.<sup>14</sup>

In partial answer to the question of “what will become of the freed?”, the bill included an additional provision. One-hundred thousand dollars was appropriated to be expended by the President “to aid in the colonization and settlement of such free persons of African descent now residing in said District, including those to be liberated by this act, as may desire to emigrate to the Republics of Hayti or Liberia, or such other country beyond the limits of the United States as the President may determine.”<sup>15</sup> Though Lincoln's support for colonization was well-known, this was the first legislative step taken towards that end by the administration. Further, DC's Compensated Emancipation Act marked the first instance that federal funds were allocated expressly for the purpose of colonization.

Given the declining state of affairs for both the Society and Liberia, officials from the ACS and the Liberian government reacted quickly to news of the law's passage. McLain immediately penned a letter directly to President Lincoln expressing the ACS's desire to contract with the government to colonize in Liberia any of those persons recently freed who desired to go. In the meantime, on behalf of the Liberian government, an agent recently appointed by President Stephen Allen Benson, President Roberts'

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<sup>14</sup> US Congress. 37<sup>th</sup> Cong, 2<sup>nd</sup> sess. Apr 16, 1862. *An Act for the Release of certain Persons held to Service or Labor in the District of Columbia*, Library of Congress. <https://www.loc.gov/law/help/statutes-at-large/37th-congress/session-2/c37s2ch54.pdf>. Accessed Oct 29, 2019; Kenneth Winkle, “Emancipation in the District of Columbia” in *Civil War Washington*. Edited by Susan C. Lawrence. University of Nebraska Press, (2015), 73. For more on emancipation in DC, see Winkle. Also see Lynn Price, “To Enjoy the Blessings of Freedom”: Slavery, Manumission, and Emancipation in the District of Columbia (1790- 1862)”, Phd diss. (George Mason University, 2018), Chapter 5.

<sup>15</sup> US Congress, *An Act for the Release of certain Persons*.

successor, to “itinerate among the colored people” in the United States, met with President Lincoln to urge that the freed slaves be sent to Liberia.<sup>16</sup>

Despite a professed commitment to the same end, McLain was surprised and annoyed that the Liberian Commission seemed to be pursuing independent action. He and the Society were aware that a three-man delegation had been sent by Liberian President Benson to try to recruit among African Americans. Indeed, the Society had agreed to send out any free blacks that the commission could sign. However, pursuing negotiations with federal officials and receiving an audience with the President himself riled McLain and other members of the Society who believed that they were the best qualified to speak for the “colored race.” “I think it unfortunate for Liberia to send any more Liberians to Washington or that those here should stay. These are times of excitement in the district just now. The case is peculiar and I do not think the state of Liberia or the colored race is likely to be advantaged by the personal appearance on the stage of any Liberian.”<sup>17</sup>

Pennsylvania’s Corresponding Secretary agreed with McLain, writing that:

The friends of that Republic in this country can do more for its citizens than they can possibly do for themselves were all of them to come to our shores. The tax bill calls up the black man, the confiscation bill calls up the black man. The District of Columbia bill calls up the black man, the war is in consequence of the presence of the black man. The emancipation and colonization of the black man is pressed upon the country; and it seems to me that the mission of Mr. Benson and other Liberians to the United States just at this critical period in our affairs must produce very much harm and bad feeling.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Stephen Benson, Monrovia, to RR Gurley, Washington, DC, April 29, 1862. ACS, Reel 160; AR (1862), 243; Franklin Butler, Windsor, to R.R. Gurley, Washington DC, April 19, 1862. ACS, Reel 93.

<sup>17</sup> William McLain, Washington DC, to John Seys, Springfield, May 6, 1862. ACS, Reel 203.

<sup>18</sup> William Coppinger, Philadelphia, to RR Gurley, Washington City, April 3, 1862. ACS, Reel 93.

The frustration vented by ACS officials admitted of the prejudice that existed against the black man in America. But it also made clear that they deemed themselves leaders of the Liberian enterprise and best able to speak on its behalf. This racial paternalism had been a defining feature of the ACS since its beginning. Indeed, the Constitution for the Government of the African Settlement, drafted by ACS officials in 1820 before land had even been acquired for a settlement, granted the Society permission to make rules they “[thought] fit for the government”, judicial power to decide disputes, and authority to appoint all officers. As historian Charles Huberich asserts in his frequently cited history of Liberia, “The Board was deeply convinced, despite all their outward protestations to the contrary, that the Negro race was incapable of governing a civilized state, and feared any participation of the settlers in the government.”<sup>19</sup>

The ACS and the Liberian government were not the only ones watching and anticipating events in DC. As the issue of emancipation was being debated, various colonizationists converged on the city to lobby their case. Assuring his fellow Society members that he would “not rest” until he had secured a contract with the government, Secretary McLain acknowledged that, in Washington, he had “many things and persons

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<sup>19</sup> The settlers mounted protests against the Society, accusing it of reneging on its promise of self-rule. In response, ACS agents in Liberia threatened to withhold rations and expel detractors. In its 1825 publication of the “Constitution, Government, and Digest of the Laws of Liberia”, the ACS Board of Managers conceded some authority by creating a council of elected settlers to aid and advise the ACS’s Resident Agent, but this measure was largely superficial as the Agent maintained the right to revoke any appointment. Over time and in response to settler opposition, the ACS made further concessions, though none overruled the ACS’s near-absolute authority. *ACS Board of Managers Constitution of the Government of the African Settlement*, adopted in Washington, DC (June 26, 1820) in Levitt, 38; *Constitution, government and digest of the laws of Liberia, as confirmed and established by the board of managers of the American colonization society*. (Washington City: Way & Gideon, May 23, 1825); Huberich, 329.

to contend with- some for Haiti, some for Central America, and some for Liberia!”<sup>20</sup>

Representatives for each of these locations tried to convince Lincoln and the African Americans who they planned to colonize that theirs was the best place for black people and the only answer to the nation’s so-called “negro question.”

In early 1862, Haiti seemed the greatest distraction from Liberian colonization. The idea of Haitian emigration was not new. In the 1820s, an agent sent by the Haitian government to recruit African Americans for settlement in the island nation succeeded in convincing thousands of free blacks to remove to Haiti. They were provided free passage and promised land and four months of support. While Haiti’s President, motivated by a “higher order”, touted Haiti as an asylum to “the unfortunate men who have the alternative of going to the barbarous shores of Africa,” the Haitian venture was short-lived as emigrants quickly returned, reporting on poor conditions there.<sup>21</sup>

During the 1850s, when conditions for blacks in the United States seemed to be rapidly deteriorating and emigrationist sentiment was running high, Haiti again entered the national debate. James Redpath, a self-proclaimed “practical abolitionist”, believed colonization offered the best opportunity to prove blacks’ capacity for self-government. After making three trips to Haiti during the decade, he determined that Haiti was the only place in the Western world “where the people whom America degrades and drives from

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<sup>20</sup> William McLain, Washington DC, to James Hall, Baltimore, April 24, 1862. ACS, Reel 203.

<sup>21</sup> Loring Daniel Dewey. “Correspondence Relative to the Emigration to Hayti, of the Free People of Color in the United States. Together with the Instructions to the Agent Sent Out by President Boyer.” 1824; Andrew Diemer, “America, Africa, Haiti” in *The Politics of Black Citizenship: Free Black Americans in the Mid-Atlantic Borderland, 1817-1863*. University of Georgia Press, 2016; Willis Boyd. “James Redpath and American Negro Colonization in Haiti, 1860-1862,” *The Americas*. Vol 12. No 2 (Oct. 1955), 169.

her” could become “rulers, judges, and generals . . . authors, artists, and legislators.”<sup>22</sup> Beyond its potential for black uplift, colonization in Haiti served another end, according to Redpath. It carried out “the programme of the ablest intellects of the Republican Party,- of surrounding the southern states with a cordon of free labor, within which, like a scorpion girded by fire, Slavery must inevitably die.”<sup>23</sup> Subsequently, he inquired with Haiti’s President on what terms African Americans might emigrate to Haiti. Finding such terms agreeable, Redpath established the Haitian Emigration Bureau, headquartered in Boston, with funding of \$20,000 from the Haitian government.<sup>24</sup>

Redpath’s initial efforts bore success. Beginning with its first charter in December 1860, Redpath’s Bureau managed to send out a ship each month in 1861, transporting approximately 1,200 African Americans to Haiti that year.<sup>25</sup> In addition, some of the nation’s most prominent black leaders lent their support for Haitian emigration. Frederick Douglass, that most outspoken of colonization’s critics, had warmed to the idea of emigration by early 1861, persuaded, like many, by deteriorating conditions in the United States. In contrast to the common argument made on behalf of Liberian emigration, Douglass supported removal only if driven by a desire for “food, clothing, property, education, manhood, and material prosperity” and not “by the charms of a Colored Nationality.”<sup>26</sup> Though Douglass’s abhorrence for the Society and any colonization scheme that sought only to separate the races continued, he made arrangements with

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<sup>22</sup> Redpath quoted in Boyd, 173, 171.

<sup>23</sup> Oakes, 277.

<sup>24</sup> John McKivigan. *Firebrand: James Redpath and the Making of Nineteenth Century America* (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 2008), 67.

<sup>25</sup> McKinigan, 76.

<sup>26</sup> David Blight, *Frederick Douglass: Prophet of Freedom*. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2018), 337-339.

Redpath to travel to Haiti in April, but these plans were diverted by the outbreak of war. Despite a promising start, Redpath's emigration venture began to flounder by early 1862 as financial difficulties combined with reports of suffering and poor conditions began to take their toll. Thus, in an effort to reverse course, Redpath found himself in Washington DC that spring, alongside McLain and the Liberian commissioners. In a move threatening to the ACS, Redpath gained an interview with President Lincoln. His primary objective was to lobby for Haiti's recognition but, with federal funds up for grabs, the ACS worried that Redpath and Haitian colonization might secure the federal government's endorsement.

Redpath spent most of his energy in the capital trying to convince African Americans that white racism would continue to deny them freedom rather than pleading for federal funds. As a man with a "deep abhorrence for slavery...and a sincere desire to promote the welfare of all emigrants," Redpath was hesitant to accept federal or state support for colonization.<sup>27</sup> Arguing that "these grants would be given in a spirit of hatred to the Blacks-in order to get rid of them," Redpath could not "consent to insult that class of our people by accepting money so appropriated."<sup>28</sup> Despite this espoused reluctance, the American Colonization Society believed that Redpath's presence in Washington undermined their own efforts. Indeed, Redpath often did malign the ACS in his support for Haitian emigration, charging that colonization in Africa would be interpreted only as a "white man's victory" as it was they who had cultivated the Liberian scheme since its

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<sup>27</sup> William Lloyd Garrison quoted in McKinigan, 83.

<sup>28</sup> Redpath quoted in Boyd, 175.

beginning. Anxious that present and future moneys to be furnished for colonization might all be expended in Haiti, the ACS presented its case against settlement there:

There can be no doubt that Liberia is far better adapted for the American negroes than Hayti, which has the Catholic religion, and foreign language, manners, and customs —the French; whilst the Liberians have the same Protestant religion, the same language, and the same manners and customs which they left behind them in America. The negroes of the United States should desire to create a flourishing Anglo-Saxon- Negro nationality on the coast of their fatherland, which has been so well commenced by the pioneers who for 40 years have been preparing the way for their comfortable residence in Liberia.<sup>29</sup>

From his efforts, Redpath did manage to send some 150 African Americans to Haiti, but these were not supported by the federal government. Rather, the eyes of Lincoln and his administration were on another colonization scheme that spring.<sup>30</sup> Ambrose Thompson, representing the Chiriquí Improvement Company (CIC), wrote directly to Lincoln shortly after passage of the DC Emancipation Act to advocate for colonization in Chiriquí, a province in the Republic of New Granada in South America (now part of Panama).<sup>31</sup> Chiriquí was familiar to some in Washington as the CIC had previously approached the Buchanan administration to solicit a contract that would provide coal and transit rights to the US military. Despite interest, no agreement was reached under the Buchanan administration.<sup>32</sup> However, with Lincoln in the White House

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<sup>29</sup> AR (1862), 205.

<sup>30</sup> Kate Masur, "The African American Delegation to Abraham Lincoln: A Reappraisal," *Civil War History*, Volume 56, Number 2, (June 2010), 123.

<sup>31</sup> Ambrose Thompson to Abraham Lincoln. April 25, 1862. *Abraham Lincoln papers: Series 1. General Correspondence. 1833 to 1916*. Manuscript/Mixed Material. Accessed via Library of Congress. <https://www.loc.gov/item/mal1569300/>.

<sup>32</sup> Sebastian Page. "Lincoln and Chiriqui Colonization Revisited." *American Nineteenth Century History*, 12:3 (2011), 295.

and support for colonization growing in Washington, Thompson saw a ripe opportunity to renew his appeal.

After disparaging Liberia as a barbarous country and Haiti as “notoriously unhealthy” in a letter to Lincoln, Thompson described a land of congenial climate and rich natural resources, with “room for every branch of industry.” More significantly, Chiriquí was a country “which abound[ed] in everything that would conduce to the comfort of the negro and aid his elevation to the dignity of separate political existence- a country...a country in which the negro could himself work out, with every advantage on his side, the social problem of his race.” Thompson understood the anxiety that was swirling in Washington over what to do with America’s enslaved once freed. Colonization in Chiriquí would answer the “negro question” posited by those recently emancipated by legislative act in DC. And, according to Thompson, it could also resolve the issue posed by slaves being freed “by their own actions in leaving their masters.”<sup>33</sup>

Lincoln had expressed interest in Chiriquí before, tasking administration officials with investigating the CIC’s proposal and Chiriquí as a site for colonization even before the DC Emancipation Act had appropriated funds toward such an end.<sup>34</sup> This interest was enhanced when Secretary of the Interior, Caleb Smith, submitted his recommendations on colonization to the President in early May. As Liberia and Haiti earned particular mention in the emancipation act recently passed, Smith began with objections against both of these schemes.

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<sup>33</sup> Thompson to Lincoln, April 25, 1862.

<sup>34</sup> Page, “Lincoln and Chiriqui,” 295.



All the information I have been able to obtain relative to the wishes of the colored population of the district induces the belief that very few of them would consent to emigrate to Liberia upon any terms,” Smith began. “The unhealthiness of the climate, as well as the great distance from this country appears to be regarded as insuperable objections.” In addition to this lack of interest among freed blacks, Smith cited the expense of colonizing in Liberia- \$100 per emigrant- too great to achieve meaningful results under the current appropriation.<sup>35</sup>

While admitting that Haiti met with greater favor among potential emigrants, Smith pointed out that objections persisted against that venture as well- objections that the ACS had also raised. The prevalence of Catholicism, the low level of civilization, and the threat of foreign intervention served as deterrents to any large-scale emigration to Haiti. After review of other colonization proposals, though without any input from those who would be colonized, Smith concluded that Chiriquí was the most advantageous site for colonization and settlement of the District’s newly emancipated.

Smith’s endorsement of Chiriquí and his discouragement of other colonization schemes made it improbable that the ACS or any other of Liberia’s proponents would receive the funds appropriated by the DC Act. Despite expectations of Society and Liberian officials, it is not likely to have made much difference. After “industrious inquiry,” the ACS found only one freed man desirous of removing to Liberia.<sup>36</sup> The Liberian Commission did not fare much better in their recruitment efforts. Their list of interested persons included just ten names.<sup>37</sup> In fact, so opposed to colonization were African American residents of DC that they worked actively to thwart the efforts of

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<sup>35</sup> Smith to Lincoln May 9, 1862. Included in Senate Executive Documents. 39<sup>th</sup> Cong, 1<sup>st</sup> sess. Ex. Doc. No. 27. (1865-’66), 485.

<sup>36</sup> *AR* (1862), 241.

<sup>37</sup> J.D. Johnson and Alexander Crummell to Caleb Smith, May 6, 1862. (Interior Dept. Records Relating to the Suppression of the African Slave Trade and to Negro Colonization, 1854-72, NARA, Washington, D.C.), microfiche, M160.

colonization agents in their city. After hearing that one of the Liberian commissioners had suggested compulsory removal, members of a local organization presented him a letter charging engagement in “acts inimical and treasonable to the interest of the colored people of this community and country generally” before demanding he leave Washington. When the commissioner did not abide this demand, he was subsequently assaulted.<sup>38</sup>

Though the colonization provision of the DC Emancipation Act was intended to answer the problem posited by its passage- what to do with the freed slaves- and even allocated funds towards that end, it quickly became apparent that colonization anywhere was not supported by those who were to be colonized. Rather, upon passage of the DC Act, the freed men and women of the nation’s capital found themselves in a “paradise of freedom.”<sup>39</sup> Most left their owners immediately. Many took advantage of wartime opportunities, finding work in the city or with the Union Army, while others headed north to start new life among the free black communities there.<sup>40</sup> Eventually, some of DC’s freedmen would enlist for the Union cause. Whatever their future, DC’s former slaves, the first to be freed by legislative act, determined that they would be worked out on American soil.

### **A Freedom Uncertain: Colonizing the “Contrabands”**

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<sup>38</sup> Another colonization agent, Joseph E. Williams, advocating removal to Central America, was also assaulted. See Masur, “The African American Delegation,” 126.

<sup>39</sup> William McLain, Washington DC, to John Orcutt, Newark, April 30, 1862. ACS, Reel 203.

<sup>40</sup> For more on emancipation in D.C., see Kate Masur, *An Example for All the Land: Emancipation and the Struggle over Equality in Washington, D.C.* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010); see also Price, “To Enjoy the Blessings of Freedom.”

Finding DC's emancipated unwilling to depart, colonizationists remained hopeful that the war would yet produce results favorable to their cause. The Lincoln administration had not yet given up on its colonization agenda and, to many, the "negro problem" seemed to have no real solution beyond a separation of the races. The response of DC's freedmen and women was not enough to convince Lincoln nor other colonizationists to alter their course. Rather, those freed by the stroke of a pen "were expecting such changes as would make the District the most desirable place for their residence" and thus were not yet ready to emigrate. But there was another class of persons that might be more inclined to leave the United States. "Contrabands"- a more desperate class than DC's freedmen- would be spurred by "feeling[s] of insecurity and dread...to remove."<sup>41</sup>

Immediately after war broke out in America, enslaved people began to flee across Union lines. With no official policy in place dictating what should be done with these persons, military commanders began issuing their own orders. Some upheld the validity of the Fugitive Slave Law, prohibiting runaway slaves from entering Union lines or abetting the return of those who did. Others determined that fleeing slaves were effectively free when they crossed into Union territory. In late May 1861, Union General Benjamin Butler, a staunch Democrat and Southern sympathizer, presented a less radical solution, but one that tended toward the latter position. When the owner of three runaways arrived at Fortress Monroe to reclaim his "property", Butler refused to turn over the men on grounds that they were now "contraband" or property legitimately seized

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<sup>41</sup> AR (1862), 243.

because they had been used in war against the Union. Butler's position became federal policy when the First Confiscation Act was signed in August 1861.<sup>42</sup>

Around the time that the First Confiscation Act was passed, approximately 900 refugees from slavery had already arrived at Fortress Monroe. By May of 1863, this number had increased ten-fold, with an estimated 10,000 escaped slaves seeking refuge in its contraband camp.<sup>43</sup> This act included runaway slaves as "lawful subject[s] of prize and capture" and allowed for the seizure and confiscation of persons whose service or labor was claimed to have been employed in hostile service against the Government of the United States.<sup>44</sup> An additional article of war, passed the following spring, expanded on this definition to prohibit the return of any fugitive slave.<sup>45</sup> However, despite the order that runaways were not to be returned to their owners, the First Confiscation Act did not explicitly free any enslaved persons. Rather, these "contrabands" remained in a state of limbo while Lincoln and the nation tried to work out their futures.<sup>46</sup> As historian Kate Masur writes, "They were neither property with a clear owner (as in slavery) nor free people, but something in between."<sup>47</sup> Technically, the term "contraband" referred to those who had been actively engaged in wartime actions against the Union, but as Masur

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<sup>42</sup> For full text of the First Confiscation Act, see U.S., *Statutes at Large, Treaties, and Proclamations of the United States of America*, vol. 12 (Boston, 1863), p. 319.

<sup>43</sup> Kate Masur, "'A Rare Phenomenon of Philological Vegetation': The Word 'Contraband' and the Meanings of Emancipation in the United States." *The Journal of American History* 93, no. 4 (2007), 1055; McCurry 273.

<sup>44</sup> U.S., *Statutes at Large*, 319.

<sup>45</sup> For full text, see U.S., *Statutes at Large*, 354.

<sup>46</sup> The term "contraband", though employed by Butler to refer to those slaves whose owners had engaged them in cause against the Union, quickly came to encompass all slaves who crossed into Union lines. See Stephanie McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning: Power and Politics in the Civil War South*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 272-273. See also Masur, "'A Rare Phenomenon.'"

<sup>47</sup> Masur, "'A Rare Phenomenon,'" 1051.

points out, all men, women, and children who fled to Union lines quickly became contraband in the eyes of the public. With support for colonization still mounting, this uncertain state of freedom troubled some colonizationists, including some members of the ACS who argued that the Society was restricted by constitutional mandate from colonizing any but free blacks. Others, including Liberia's government, were more receptive to accepting contraband camp refugees as they saw their numbers swell and the question of what to do with them consume Washington. The debate intensified in the summer of 1862 when Congress appropriated an additional \$500,000 for colonization.

Beginning with the first enslaved persons who crossed Union lines, military commanders and soon the federal government confronted a problem to which they had no established solution. No matter the initial reports of runaways arriving at Union camps, none were prepared for the massive influx that subsequently ensued. General John Eaton who oversaw contraband operations in the Department of the Tennessee described the inpouring of escaping slaves to Union lines thus: "The negroes...flocked in vast numbers- an army in themselves- to the camps of the Yankees...The arrival among us of these hordes was like the oncoming of cities."<sup>48</sup>

In the absence of federal guidance, military commanders dealt with these "hordes" as best they could. Many tasked the men entering their camps with building barracks or military defenses or otherwise serving the Union Army. Men and women were employed as cooks, teamsters, nurses, or servants in military camps. Others were

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<sup>48</sup> John Eaton. *Grant, Lincoln, and the Freedmen: Reminiscences of the Civil War*, (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1907), 2.

assigned to foraging parties or sent to gather crops from abandoned rebel plantations to help sustain their burgeoning populations.<sup>49</sup> The government, along with northern missionaries and benevolent societies, provided rations and clothing for the men, women, and children who entered the hastily constructed contraband camps or colonies. But, arriving “very destitute” with “many, not enough to cover their nakedness,” these former slaves, in their sheer numbers, exhausted scant resources.<sup>50</sup>

As contraband camp populations continued to grow, a second Confiscation Act was circulating in Congress. Lyman Trumbull, an anti-slavery senator from Illinois, was the first to introduce the bill in late 1861. Trumbull’s bill expanded on the first Confiscation Act by stipulating that any and all property belonging to any persons in rebel states was to be subsequently forfeited and confiscated to the United States. This included claims to service or labor of persons who would herewith “become forever thereafter freed persons.” To address concerns over what would become of these freed persons, Trumbull inserted a provision for the transportation, colonization, and settlement beyond the United States of those whom the act would free.<sup>51</sup>

Though the DC Emancipation Act had yielded virtually no emigrants, colonization remained a popular position among Republicans. Some, like Trumbull, tied colonization to emancipationist bills to allay fears that freed blacks would swarm

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<sup>49</sup> Cheri LaFlamme, “The Contraband Camp at Grand Junction, Tennessee: Report of Research Findings,” New York Historical Society (2010), 9. Eaton, 42; Masur, “A Rare Phenomenon,” 1063.

<sup>50</sup> Hahn, 72-79; James Mitchell, General Superintendent of Contrabands in the Department of the Tennessee to the Headquarters of the Department. Answers to Interrogatories. Memphis, April 29, 1863. UMD: Freedmen and Southern Society Project. Accessed via University of Maryland. <http://www.freedmen.umd.edu/Eaton.html>.

<sup>51</sup> “Senator Trumbull's bill for confiscation and emancipation,” *Chicago Tribune*. January 21, 1862.

northern and western territories and to increase the probability of passage. He recognized, “There is a great aversion in the West- I know it to be so in my State-against having free negroes come among us. Our people want nothing to do with the negro.”<sup>52</sup> Others, like Lincoln, continued to support colonization, certain that emancipation would not bring social equality nor racial harmony. Thus, though a series of amendments primarily intended to moderate Trumbull’s emancipation clause stalled immediate passage of the bill, its eventual approval – and monies to support it- was expected throughout Washington and beyond. While politicians worked out the details, colonizationists began crafting their appeals.

Beginning in spring of 1862, James Mitchell, recently appointed head of the newly established Office of Emigration, received numerous proposals from foreign governments interested in colonizing America’s fleeing slaves. In response to the President’s ongoing support for colonization, “distant nations throw open their tropical possessions to receive people of color,” Eaton observed. Refugees in contraband camps drew especial attention from colonies looking to increase their laboring population. The Netherlands submitted that it would transport “free colored laborers” to their colony of Surinam while the British proposed colonizing “persons of the African race accustomed to agricultural labor” who might cultivate sugar cane in British Guiana. Denmark too submitted a proposal for its colony of St. Croix, expressing a preference for “those who have been accustomed to field labor” and showing little interest in removing those freed

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<sup>52</sup> John Syrett. "The Second Act: Divided Republican Support and Flawed Result." In *The Civil War Confiscation Acts: Failing to Reconstruct the South*, 35-54. (New York: Fordham University, 2005), 46.

by the DC Emancipation Act.<sup>53</sup> And an agent for the British Honduras Company expressly requested “contrabands” in his communications with the Emigration Office. “I hope before long you will manage to send me emigrants from this class. It is the contrabands that I depend upon to hire as good continuous laborers.”<sup>54</sup> As runaway slaves in the plantation south, refugees in contraband camps were especially desirable for their presumed experience in the field.

Representatives for Liberia also submitted colonization proposals to Mitchell. The question of the contrabands, however, stirred division between the national society and some state auxiliaries and Liberian government officials. Since its founding, the ACS had maintained a neutral position on the issue of slavery, never endorsing it but refusing to assert an anti-slavery stance. While anti-slavery men and some abolitionists supported their cause, many leading members of the Society had been and many were prominent slaveholders. The ACS did not want to alienate any swath of potential supporters by taking a side on the slavery debate, especially now as the outcome of the war was still uncertain. Even against the vehement attacks of William Lloyd Garrison and radical abolitionists in the 1830s that theirs was a proslavery organization intent on protecting the institution by removing free blacks, the Society did not waver.

With the issue of the contrabands now before the public and Congress, the ACS once again felt the pressure to assert its position on the issue of slavery. Republicans offered colonization as a conciliatory measure meant to make universal emancipation

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<sup>53</sup> James Mitchell, “Report on Colonization and Emigration.” (Washington, 1862), 8-19.

<sup>54</sup> Magness and Page, 50.



more acceptable to northerners who feared its consequences: racial equality. It was also part of a larger strategy to convince border states to abolish slavery on their own. Colonization, combined with federal compensation for emancipation, would incentivize loyal slave states to abolish slavery and, in turn, help create a “cordon of freedom” around the slaveholding South that would eventuate in slavery’s total eradication. But, as James Oakes writes, “the racists were not appeased and the Border States were not impressed.”<sup>55</sup> Northern Democrats, who had split with Southern Democrats over the issue of slavery’s extension into the territories, sided with representatives from the border states in rejecting proposals for federal compensation and colonization. Though Republicans maintained that neither was an infringement on states’ rights, opponents understood colonization and compensated emancipation as efforts by the federal government to interfere with slavery in the states. It is in this context that the ACS re-committed to its middle-ground policy and looked away from the tens of thousands of potential emigrants residing in contraband camps. As northern Democrats and border state representatives continually rejected Congressional bills aimed at eroding slavery, the ACS feared that removing persons whose free status was less than certain would effectively place the Society on the side of abolition and the Republicans, forever turning non-Republicans away from their cause. Thus, the ACS determined to retain its neutral position, a decision that did not make any meaningful difference in terms of financial or

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<sup>55</sup> Oakes, *Freedom National*, 282.

political support but that certainly strengthened African American opposition to the Society.<sup>56</sup>

The contraband issues and whether any attempts should be made for the former slaves' colonization in Liberia attracted the attention of Society officials early on. In January 1862, just weeks after Trumbull introduced his emancipation and colonization bill, Director of the Massachusetts Society Rev. Joseph Tracy wrote to the Rev. John Orcutt, Traveling Secretary of the ACS, advising that caution be exercised in any forthcoming negotiation with the government.

We know so indefinitely what the govt [sic] intends to do that we need to keep strictly non-committal as to any cooperation in particular. There will be persons zealous to entangle us in party politics and to make us so entirely a northern society, pledged to a northern policy, that we can never be national again even after national unity is restored. I do not expect that we shall have many "contrabands" to send off "with their own consent". What increase there will be of emigration among the free, we can better judge when we know the inducements are to be offered. In all this uncertainty, it seems very important to avoid committing ourselves to any new policy, to any definite policy of which we are not obliged to speak.<sup>57</sup>

Orcutt agreed with Tracy's warning, writing "It is no time for anybody- especially our Society-to agitate the question of emancipation."<sup>58</sup> Though the nation had taken

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<sup>56</sup> For more on the opposition of Northern Democrats and border state representatives to gradual abolition proposals, see Oakes, *Freedom National*, Chapter 8: "A Cordon of Freedom." Oakes also suggests that, despite continuous inclusion of colonization in its gradual abolition proposals, Republicans were more committed to proving the superiority of free labor. This lackluster support for federal colonization helps explain why no African Americans were actually removed. For more on the split between Northern and Southern Democrats, see Graham Peck, *Making an Antislavery Nation: Lincoln, Douglas, and the Battle over Freedom*. (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2013), conclusion; Michael Todd Landis, *Northern Men with Southern Loyalties: The Democratic Party and the Sectional Crisis*. (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 2014.)

<sup>57</sup> Joseph Tracy, Boston, to R.R. Gurley, Washington, DC, January 6, 1862. ACS, Reel 93.

<sup>58</sup> John Orcutt, Hartford, to William McLain, Washington, DC, March 7, 1862. ACS, Reel 93.

various steps towards abolishing slavery by mid-1862, it was not certain that the institution would meet its ultimate death as a result of the war. Leading members of the Society pushed the “good ole’ way as the only safe way” forward. At a meeting of the Pennsylvania Society in April, communications were read from some state delegates as well as from the President of the national society urging that nothing should yet be done among the “contrabands.”

Not all Liberian colonizationists supported this position, however. President Benson contemplated pursuing a contract directly with the federal government for colonization and settlement of the contrabands. The Liberian commission, while in Washington on the Liberian government’s behalf, indicated their intention to take a company of some 250 refugees to Liberia who had expressed interest in emigrating to Africa. To this possibility, Secretary McLain, already annoyed by the commission’s independent appeal for the DC appropriation, penned a clear response to Commissioner Johnson that the Society would support the commission in sending any and all emigrants that were ready to go to Liberia “provided always they are not contrabands.”<sup>59</sup> In other words, the ACS would continue to provide support but only on the terms they established.

Though the official stance of the national society was that no action should be taken to colonize “contrabands”, members from certain state auxiliaries challenged this position. At a time when neither emigrants nor money was forthcoming, some members

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<sup>59</sup> ACS Business Papers, Board of Directors Executive Committee Journal, May 9, 1862. ACS, Reel 292; William McLain, Baltimore, to JD Johnson, Washington DC, May 26, 1862. ACS, Reel 203.

of the Society viewed the swelling contraband camps as a potential solution to see them through the war. A second confiscation bill, expected to pass with an accompanying appropriation, would provide the bodies as well as the money to keep colonization and Liberia alive during these uncertain times. From New York, Secretary Rev. J.B. Pinney prodded the leaders of the national society: “Why don’t you accept the condition of events and send emigrants from among the contrabands from the rebels? I really think it would do no loyal citizen any harm and it would certainly not be lending aid to the enemies of our nation.”<sup>60</sup> The national society disagreed. In early June 1862, it passed a resolution affirming that it would not send “contrabands” to Liberia “both on account of their anomalous condition, and the bearing which our constitution has upon them or rather upon our sending such to Liberia.”<sup>61</sup> Until the government more clearly defined their condition as free persons, the ACS would not commit to their removal.

This declaration by the national society on the issue of the refugees in contraband camps did not prevent some members from continuing to press the issue. Finding it nearly impossible to raise money in Boston as wartime taxes were “making an appearance,” agent Franklin Butler encouraged the Society to rethink its position. “A loud- VERY LOUD clamor for help for a large emigration would doubtless aid us especially if contrabands should lift up their voice since the popular interest is on this class of beings just now.”<sup>62</sup> Recruiting within the contraband camps would not only keep the ACS’s cause before the public, but could provide much needed funds. The poor and

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<sup>60</sup> J.B. Pinney, New York, to William McLain, Washington DC, April 16, 1862. ACS, Reel 93.

<sup>61</sup> Statement of the Proceedings of the Executive Committee, January 1, 1863. ACS, Reel 286.

<sup>62</sup> Franklin Butler, Windsor, to William McLain, Washington, DC, June 16, 1862. ACS, Reel 93.

suffering “contraband”- a popular trope born from the pens of northern missionaries and abolitionists- had inspired the creation of numerous benevolent societies committed to their care. Should refugees express an interest in Liberia, donations might be redirected toward that end.

Butler’s was a more practical argument, one that would see the Society through the war, and one that he presented in private letter. The Board of the New York Society, on the other hand, expressed its disagreement with the parent society in a more blatant display. Just days after the resolution against sending refugee slaves was passed by the ACS, the New York Board voted in favor of sending them to Liberia. Though the reluctance of the national society to send out “contrabands” was born from fear of losing southern support, the New York Society voted to send refugees in contraband camps under the presumption that this class would soon be made legally free. In a note of reassurance to the national society, Pinney wrote that the “confiscation bill is likely to be sweeping enough to remove all questions of the contrabands.”<sup>63</sup>

The Second Confiscation Act passed on July 17, 1862, the day after *An Act making supplemental Appropriations for sundry Civil Expenses of the Government for the Year ending June thirtieth, eighteen hundred and sixty-three, and for the Year ending June thirtieth, eighteen hundred and sixty-two, and for other Purposes* was passed appropriating an additional \$500,000 to help carry out colonization of DC’s freedmen and “to colonize those to be made free by the probable passage of a confiscation bill...to be used at the discretion of the President in securing the right of colonization of said

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<sup>63</sup> JB.. Pinney, New York, to William McLain, Washington, DC, Jul 14, 1862. ACS, Reel 93.

persons made free, and in payment of the necessary expenses of their removal.” With this supplemental act, the federal government significantly increased the amount available for colonization of America’s blacks, bringing the total to \$600,000. Backed by federal funding, the Second Confiscation Act was signed into law, deeming all slaves of persons engaged in rebellion against the Union “captives of war” who “shall be forever free of their servitude” once coming under the control of the government of the United States.<sup>64</sup>

Wanting for emigrants as they were, the Society did not interpret the second Confiscation Act as support enough to overturn their decision. They were still reluctant to undertake any action that might imply they were an abolitionist society and risk alienating southern support. In its January 1863 meeting, six months after passage of the Second Confiscation Act, the ACS Executive Committee recorded that it was their belief that none had yet been made free under this act and “therefore none of the fund was at our command for that purpose.” Notes from their meeting continue: “Had we consented to take the contrabands, we might have sent a few more persons to Liberia. But would that have counterbalanced the evils which might have resulted from it! Amid the turbulence of the times, we have felt that duty requires us to adhere strictly to our constitutional principal and to so exist ourselves as to impart a right direction to the chaotic elements of the whole negro question.”<sup>65</sup> In the meantime, Pinney, affirmed in his

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<sup>64</sup> US Congress. 37<sup>th</sup> Cong, 2<sup>nd</sup> sess. Jul 16, 1862. *An Act making supplemental Appropriations for sundry Civil Expenses of the Government for the Year ending June thirtieth, eighteen hundred and sixty-three, and for the Year ending June thirtieth, eighteen hundred and sixty-two, and for other Purposes*. Accessed via Library of Congress. <https://www.loc.gov/law/help/statutes-at-large/37th-congress/session-2/c37s2ch182.pdf>. For text of Second Confiscation Act, see U.S., *Statutes at Large*, 589–92.

<sup>65</sup> Executive Committee Report, January 1, 1863. ACS, Reel 286.

position that “contrabands” were freedmen, traveled to Washington to see what could be done about getting up a company for Liberia.<sup>66</sup>

Though committed to a no-contraband policy, the ACS still saw passage of the second Confiscation Act and its supplemental appropriation as evidence that the administration was wholly committed to its pursuit of colonization. On August 14, 1862, McLain and former President Roberts who was in Washington to settle the recaptive account, met with President Lincoln to again plead the case for Liberia as the best destination for free blacks. According to McLain, Lincoln expressed enthusiasm for the plan and gave his endorsement to Liberian colonization. “He had said that for all the colored race that wanted to be anything and do anything for themselves and their race, Liberia was the place for them!” Thus, when word reached McLain that Lincoln had endorsed a different colonization scheme just hours after their meeting, he was outraged.<sup>67</sup>

Upon bidding farewell to McLain and Roberts, Lincoln hosted an African American delegation at the White House. It was his intent to engage leaders of the free black community in a discussion about emigration outside of the United States. After putting forth his reasons for supporting emigration- namely, that black and white both suffer when forced to live together-, Lincoln recognized the opposition that persisted against certain schemes. In particular, he understood that many African Americans were unwilling to depart for Liberia as they “would rather remain within reach of the country

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<sup>66</sup> J.B. Pinney, New York, to R.R. Gurley, Washington DC, April 22, 1863. ACS, Reel 94.

<sup>67</sup> William McLain, Washington, DC, to R.R. Gurley, Haddenfield, August 26, 1862. ACS, Reel 93.

of [their] nativity.”<sup>68</sup> He presented Chiriquí as his preferred location, citing its proximity to America, its location on a line of travel, and its coal deposits as prime inducements for African American settlers. Though the delegates left the meeting without giving Lincoln an answer, simply that they would get back to him shortly, the plan was already in motion. Lincoln had recently appointed Senator Samuel Pomeroy, an ardent abolitionist, as colonization agent to help enact the colonization provisions of the Second Confiscation Act. Specifically, Pomeroy was to investigate the terms and approve the contracts that the government had provisionally made with Ambrose Thompson for settlement of free blacks at Chiriquí .<sup>69</sup>

McLain fumed when he learned of these developments, especially as he thought that he had just secured the support of the President. He angrily penned a letter to Secretary Gurley, editor of the *African Repository*, that, were he the editor, he “would come down mightily on the temporizing speculating scheme of the president and his dear friend and commissioner Mitchell...out upon all such men and such schemes!” Pinney too expressed outrage as he read about the government’s Chiriquí plan. “The movement of Mr. Pomeroy is watched with interest here... Will they despise the govt [sic] of Liberia with its govt [sic] well constituted and go to be governed by strangers! So they love liberty! The whole scheme is based on prejudice and if conducted by inexperience is likely to prove even more disastrous than that did to Haiti.” Pinney gave voice to an

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<sup>68</sup> Abraham Lincoln. *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, Vol 5. 373.

<sup>69</sup> Pomeroy states that he began his work as colonization agent “from about the first of August.” Pomeroy, Washington DC, to JP Usher, Washington DC, February 4, 1864. NARA, Communications Relating to SC Pomeroy, Reel M160.



accusation that was gaining in favor among some Society officials. In promoting Central America and sites other than Liberia, the government was acting in its own self-interest and not that of the black man. Chiriquí, according to Pinney, was evidence that the government was simply trying to get rid of blacks as expeditiously as possible. Regardless of the truth of the allegation, the ACS once again saw its hopes dashed that the federal government would be the life raft to pull Liberia and the Society through the war.

The Chiriquí venture started out strong. It was advertised in newspapers and among refugees in contraband camps in a speech by Commissioner Mitchell. Pomeroy drafted his own appeal to the free and freed colored people of the United States, presenting Chiriquí as the best way for America's blacks to achieve "social position and independence."<sup>70</sup> It was not long before Pomeroy had recruited 500 emigrants for a planned October voyage and \$25,000 was allocated from the recent colonization appropriation.

The October departure date came and went as news from New Granada stalled emigration plans. Governments of Central American states near Chiriquí had protested the settlement of African Americans there, believing that they were to be employed in the service of the US military. Lincoln officially suspended the operation on October 7, but by this time, reports of its abandonment were already circulating.<sup>71</sup> From the initial

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<sup>70</sup> Masur, "The African American Delegation," 138. SC Pomeroy, Washington DC, J.P. Usher, Washington DC, February 4, 1862. NARA, Communications Relating to SC Pomeroy, Reel M160; "The Colonization Scheme: Senator Pomeroy of Kansas Appointed to Organize the Movement His Address to the Colored People," *New York Times*, August 26, 1862.

<sup>71</sup> Vorenberg, 36; "From Washington: The Negro Colonization Scheme Abandoned," *Chicago Tribune*, September 1, 1862.

outrage over the President's decision to promote Chiriquí over Liberia, the ACS now saw opportunity. The Executive Committee passed a resolution that a committee be formed to inquire with the President whether the expedition intended for Chiriquí might be diverted to Liberia. Though the first expedition was to carry 500 emigrants, with thousands more applying for passage, some Society officials were reluctant to accept them. The \$25,000 allocated to Pomeroy had been pulled from the July 16 appropriation for colonizing DC's freed persons and those freed by the Second Confiscation Act. As some of Pomeroy's emigrants were certainly freed men and women, certain ACS members warned against making any appeal for their colonization. After all, a recent appeal from the MD Society for aid to colonize free persons of color of that state had been rejected on grounds that monies were only available for colonizing "free persons of color in the District of Columbia and those from the states freed under the confiscation act."<sup>72</sup> While recognizing the restrictions imposed by the Confiscation Act, McLain wondered whether those monies, if they could be used to send free people to Chiriquí, might be used to colonize "free blacks from free states."<sup>73</sup> But, as Lincoln's colonization plan was intended to strike at the rebel South and make emancipation more acceptable to border states, the federal government was not interested in sending out free blacks in loyal states. In a war of North versus South, the ACS's attempt to remain a neutral party prevented it from receiving monies appropriated for political expediency.

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<sup>72</sup> James Hall, Baltimore, to Caleb Smith, Washington DC, October 9, 1862, MSCS, Reel 8; Caleb Smith, Washington DC, to James Hall, Baltimore, October 11, 1862. NARA, M160.

<sup>73</sup> William McLain, Washington DC, to Abraham Lincoln, Washington DC, August 27, 1862. ACS, Reel 204.

Though all of its efforts to secure federal support for their cause had thus far come to naught, the New York State Colonization Society made one final attempt to secure a large emigration in the spring of 1863. Its Board of Managers passed a resolution recommending that the ACS aid as many emigrants to remove to Africa by the *MC Stevens*’ next trip “as can be obtained irrespective of any bounty to be received from the government.”<sup>74</sup> Pinney planned to travel to Washington and to Fortress Monroe to recruit emigrants from among free blacks and refugees, “treat[ing] every man as free unless somebody shows me a claim.” However, Secretary of War Edwin Stanton soon put a halt to such plans as contraband camps became key recruitment sites for colored soldiers after the Emancipation Proclamation declared that they could serve in the Union Army. Stanton subsequently denied Pinney the requisite pass to enter Fortress Monroe, citing “military reasons.”<sup>75</sup> Though colonization officials as well as Liberians continued to raise the question of the “contrabands”, this move effectively answered that refugees would not be sent to Liberia in any great number. “Secretary Stanton seems to have spoken with more effect than I could,” Rev Dr. Tracy, long a skeptic of colonizing “contrabands,” wrote.<sup>76</sup> Maryland’s Secretary James Hall agreed, writing “And so ends the contrabandity.”<sup>77</sup>

The ACS nor Liberia succeeded in getting any of the \$600,000 appropriated by the federal government for colonization during the war.<sup>78</sup> Twenty-five thousand dollars

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<sup>74</sup> J.B. Pinney, New York, to R.R. Gurley, Washington DC, April 22, 1863. ACS, Reel 94.

<sup>75</sup> Journal of the Executive Committee, May 18, 1863. ACS, Reel 292.

<sup>76</sup> Joseph Tracy, Boston, to John Orcutt, June 3, 1863. ACS, Reel 236.

<sup>77</sup> James Hall, Baltimore, to William McLain, Washington DC, April 30, 1863. ACS, Reel 94.

<sup>78</sup> With the exception of \$285 to colonize three DC residents- a man, his wife, and their child- in 1863.

was allocated for the Chiriquí venture in preparation for Pomeroy's maiden voyage-monies that would not be recovered when the scheme failed in the fall of 1862.<sup>79</sup> Another federally-supported colonization venture was attempted in early 1863 but mismanagement of the project led to dire conditions for the emigrants who landed at Île-à-Vache, Haiti, many of whom died or returned to the US. While federal support for colonization may have peaked during the Civil War years, it was never enough to surmount the one obstacle that had hindered colonization from the start: lack of interest among free and freed blacks. Indeed, the colonization measures that passed during the war were the same measures that moved the nation closer to emancipation and the enslaved closer to freedom. With more blacks changing from enslaved to free status every day that the war raged, Lincoln determined that colonization would be the answer to the "negro question." Congress appropriated funds for removal and the ACS and the Liberian government joined other colonizationists in appeals to the federal government for the nation's colored population. But it remained that, despite federal support for colonization, the majority of African Americans rejected the "whole scheme of expatriating colored people from the land of their birth as unnecessary, impolitic, and unjust."<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Pomeroy requested \$10,000 for expedition supplies and another \$15,000 transferred to Ambrose and the CIC. Interpreting the administration's decision as a temporary suspension, Pomeroy made no effort to reclaim any monies until months later when vendors then refused to issue refunds, claiming their goods had degraded. See Pomeroy, "Statement of Accounts to Feb 4, 1864" included in letter from Pomeroy to John P. Usher, February 3, 1864; Page, "Lincoln and Chiriqui Revisited," 22.

<sup>80</sup> "The Colored People of Brooklyn upon the Proclamation and the Colonization of the Contrabands." *New York Times*. October 3, 1862.

Further, for all their efforts to obtain federal funds for Liberian colonization, the leaders of the ACS and the Liberian government gave less attention to whom they were seeking to colonize. The debate over contraband policy centered around the refugees' legal status and whether that status precluded the ACS from sending them to Liberia. However, the debate rarely included any discussion of or with the actual men and women who were "contrabands" of war. Reports of contraband camps painted a grim picture of destitution and suffering. "In some few cases they have brought horses or other stuff, sufficient when sold to keep from hunger. But in the large majority of cases, they bring nothing."<sup>81</sup> "There were men, women, and children in every stage of disease or decrepitude, often nearly naked, with flesh torn by the terrible experiences of their escapes."<sup>82</sup> Those emancipated during the war entered freedom under very different circumstances than those born free or manumitted before the war under condition of emigration. They had never experienced the same autonomy as free born blacks nor had they been "prepared" for freedom as many manumitted slaves had been before the war. Largely, freed men and women were an impoverished class. But at a time when declining emigration threatened to end the ACS and the Liberia project, such considerations were irrelevant. What Liberia needed to endure the war was emigrants. Bluntly stated by an agent for the Maryland Society, "What the colony wants most is men, next is men, and lastly is men."<sup>83</sup> When the war finally did end and freed men and women began to flock to Africa's shores in greater numbers, Liberia confronted a new emigrant population, one

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<sup>81</sup> "Sufferings of the Contrabands." *Chicago Tribune*, March 4, 1862.

<sup>82</sup> Mitchell, "Report on Colonization," 24.

<sup>83</sup> James Hall, Baltimore, MD, to Ralph Gurley, Washington DC, October 15, 1862. ACS, Reel 93.

that prompted them to rethink their calls for indiscriminate African American immigration.

In the meantime, Liberians continued to struggle during America's war years. Reports of hard times and requests for aid continued to cross ACS officials' desks, but were ignored. Silvia Franklin, whose earlier appeal for help earned no reply, implored Secretary McLain again: "I have writen [sic] to you once before but have not received [sic] any answer as yet I want you write and let me know what you are going to do whether are going to send the thing I sent for or not for I need them very bad at present as the times is very hard."<sup>84</sup> The ACS agents in Liberia whose salaries had been reduced or cut off altogether informed of the ill effects of such measures and requested adequate compensation and provisions to carry out their duties. From Greenville, Isaac H. Snowden, a physician employed by the ACS to care for emigrants at Sinou County, though 'willing to bear [his] share of the inconvenience' for a "just war", pleaded with the Society to send out medicines for those under his care. "I cannot hesitate to ask in the name of charity and humanity for the medicines. The people can't pay, they will get sick but they must not die for all that."<sup>85</sup> It is unlikely that the Society responded favorably to Snowden's plea as he was still asking for assistance three years later- a plea to which McLain responded tersely: "I can sympathize with you though I cannot do anything to

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<sup>84</sup> Silvia Franklin in Mitchell, "McKays and Nelsons," 462.

<sup>85</sup> I.H. Snowden, Greenville, to William McLain, Washington DC, September 11, 1862. ACS, Reel 160.

help you.”<sup>86</sup> Preoccupied at home by its own efforts to “save” Liberia, the ACS did little to save those who were already there.

Further, with emigration at a virtual standstill, some Liberians began to look inward for answers as to how their infant nation might survive these lean years. Former President Roberts penned multiple letters to ACS officials urging support for education in Liberia. “Now that there is, and likely to be for a few years, a lull in emigration to Liberia, I think no interest connected with the future of Liberia has a greater claim upon the favorable consideration of the Society than that of education. To be capable of self-government and maintain unimpaired republican institutions the mass of the people must to an extent, be educated.”<sup>87</sup> Towards this end and to meet the void left by the withdrawal of missionary schools, occasioned by a sharp reduction in contributions during the war, the Liberian government passed legislation to establish common schools in every county.<sup>88</sup> Lacking the funds to adequately support such a measure, Liberia appealed to the “friends of Liberia in the United States” for pecuniary aid. While the New York Society established an education fund in response, the national society made no such commitment. Rather, it remained steadfast in its mission to colonize free people of color, a decision that would divide the ACS and its state auxiliaries in the post-war years.

America’s war threatened to end the ACS and its colonization project, but, when Lincoln proclaimed his support for colonization, the Society anticipated that its fortune

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<sup>86</sup> William McLain, Washington DC, to I.H. Snowden, Sinou, August 5, 1865. ACS, Reel 205.

<sup>87</sup> J.J. Roberts, Monrovia, to William Coppinger, Washington DC, May 20, 1864; See also Roberts to R.R. Gurley, Washington DC, February 23, 1863. ACS, Reel 160.

<sup>88</sup> AR (1863), 8; J.J. Fitzgerald. *Seven Years in Africa. Liberia as It Is*. (Columbus, 1866), Preface.

might be reversed. Despite its failures to earn the federal government's endorsement, owing largely to the fact that the ACS could not enlist free and freed blacks to remove to Liberia, the ACS persisted in its appeals for federal support- this to the neglect of those already settled in Liberia. They had determined that what Liberia needed most was population and that the federal government could provide it. They pursued this end, despite voices from Liberia that spoke to the contrary.

By the spring of 1863, federal support for colonization had begun to wane. The Emancipation Proclamation in January of that year effectively quashed any lingering emigrationist sentiments among African Americans, and the ill-fated Île-à-Vache venture dissuaded Congress from supporting any future colonization schemes. On July 2, 1864, Lincoln signed a bill repealing the colonization appropriation.<sup>89</sup>

With the repeal, it became evident that the federal government would not be the saving grace that the ACS and Liberia had hoped it would be. Rather, Lincoln and his administration edged the nation closer to general emancipation which served as a strong deterrent to emigration. Yet unwilling to abandon its Liberia project, the Society began to look beyond the shores of the United States.

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<sup>89</sup> Vorenberg, 42.



## CHAPTER THREE

### To Our “Exiled Sons of Africa”: The Barbados Experiment in Liberia

“Two powerful causes always lead to emigration: the repulsions of the old home and the attractions of the new.”

*John Latrobe, President of the American Colonization Society*<sup>1</sup>

On May 10, 1865, the British American brigantine *Cora*, a “fine vessel” chartered by the American Colonization Society to carry emigrants across the Atlantic, laid anchor off the Liberian coast. After a “pleasant” but uneventful voyage of 34 days, the ship’s passengers were eager to disembark. Relieved that not one of their number had been lost to ship fever, the 346 men, women and children who landed on Liberia’s shores that day gazed upon their new home with excitement and certainly a measure of anxiety.<sup>2</sup> They

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Caree Banton. ““More Auspicious Shores”: Post-Emancipation Barbadian Emigrants in Pursuit of Freedom, Citizenship, and Nationhood, 1834-1912.” PhD diss. Vanderbilt University, Nashville, 2013, 109.

<sup>2</sup> Disease could spread easily in the confined space of an emigrant ship, and thus, “ship fever” could refer to a variety of illnesses including cholera or measles. See Campbell, 86 and AR (1858), 302. Though none had died en route, President Warner would, by August, attribute the high mortality among the Barbadians to “ship fever”. See DB Warner, Monrovia, to William Coppinger, Washington, DC, Aug 21, 1865. ACS, Reel 160. Much more common, however, was malaria or “the disease of acclimatization” that ravaged emigrant populations, particularly during the early years. A census conducted by the ACS in 1843 indicated that nearly half of the 4,472 emigrants that had settled to that point had perished. Historian Antonio McDaniel argues that African American emigrants to colonial Liberia suffered the highest mortality ever accurately recorded. He further asserts that “the medical lore of the time held that migration to the tropics exacted its price in immediate mortality,” but that “those who survived became partially acclimatized. The implication for migration policies was, therefore, to maintain the pace of immigration and to dismiss the horrendous mortality as the price that needed to be paid.” See Antonio McDaniel and Samuel Preston. “Patterns of Mortality by Age and Cause of Death Among Nineteenth-Century Immigrants to Liberia,” *Population Studies*, Vol. 48, No. 1 (March 1994), pp. 99-115.

had chosen to uproot and remove to Africa, but their futures there were yet unknown. President Daniel Bashiel Warner (1864-1868), who had seen only seven immigrants arrive in Liberia in the past year, enthusiastically embraced these newcomers, inviting leaders of the party to the State Hall to take a glass of wine.<sup>3</sup> He penned his impressions of this addition to Liberia's populace in a letter to the ACS official who had organized their passage. "As far as my observations have gone, the people just landed seem, upon the whole, to be a well selected company, and may be regarded as a valuable acquisition to our young Republic. To your large experience in the kind of materials required here for the upbuilding of this offspring of American philanthropy, and the further development of the country and the character of the people in it, and your sagacity in selecting those materials, is due the very respectable and promising immigration with which we have just been favored."<sup>4</sup>

The "well-selected company" to which Warner referred, unlike the 13,000 emigrants who had landed in Liberia before them, did not set sail from the eastern coast of the United States but from a British island in the West Indies. Though the ACS and Liberian officials had made every effort to recruit African American emigrants during the war, their final hope dimmed when Congress repealed the colonization appropriation in 1864. It was then, in the near total absence of emigration from the United States, that leading members of the Society and Liberia began to rethink their Liberian project. To attract an emigrant population that might see Liberia through the war, officials began to

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<sup>3</sup> AR (1865), 243.

<sup>4</sup> D.B. Warner, Monrovia to William McLain, Washington DC, May 13, 1865. ACS, Reel 160.

look beyond America's borders. When interest peaked in the West Indies, officials of both the Society and Liberia found they had to articulate a new vision for Liberia, one that extended beyond "free persons of color from the United States." President Warner directly appealed to his "brethren in the West Indies," imploring them to come over and "assist in building up an African nationality."<sup>5</sup> Many of the Barbadians who responded to Warner's plea viewed their emigration "back to Africa" in similar terms, forming themselves into the Barbadian Fatherland Union for Liberia.<sup>6</sup> While this appeal to a common black nationality did spur emigration, the experience of Barbadians in Liberia exposed the limitations of a racially-inclusive rhetoric born more from wartime circumstance than any larger pan-African vision. By the end of 1866, Warner's call for the upbuilding of an "African nationality" had indeed constricted. He wrote McLain again: "give us forever the blacks from America."<sup>7</sup>

In the larger historiography of Liberia and Liberian emigration, Barbados receives but a passing mention in most scholarly accounts. Typical is the tendency to lump all African Americans from outside the United States into a broad peripheral category such as Tom Schick does when referring to the ACS's unsuccessful efforts to "attract immigrants from other African-descent populations, such as from the West Indies," or to neglect their role in the project of Liberian nation building altogether. In one of the most comprehensive and well-regarded studies of the upbuilding of the Liberian Republic,

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<sup>5</sup> Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the MA Colonization Society, (Boston, 1865), 16.

<sup>6</sup> Banton, 2.

<sup>7</sup> D.B. Warner, Monrovia, to William Coppinger, Washington DC, September 1866. ACS, Reel 160.

Claude Clegg focuses on identity construction and the ways in which migration across the Atlantic shaped ideas about race, nation, citizenship, and freedom. He argues that North Carolinians, like other black Americans, while creating “culturally hybrid” yet “often politically unstable” communities consisting of settlers, indigenous people, and recaptives, also exercised an exclusionary and sometimes oppressive settler politics. While the subjects of Clegg’s study construct identities in relation to indigenous Africans and those recaptured from slave ships, an examination of how African American settlers viewed themselves in relation to West Indian immigrants- a group considered more culturally akin – could shed further light on how they “reimagined themselves as Liberians, as free people, and as settlers once they left the United States.”<sup>8</sup>

One scholar who has been working to include Barbadians in the Liberian narrative and particularly in the history of Liberian nation-building is Caree Banton. Like Clegg and other Liberian scholars (Mary Tyler McGraw, for example), Banton traces the movement of black emigrants across the Atlantic to explore ideas about race, citizenship, and freedom. However, Barbados and not the United States serves as her starting point. In her dissertation-turned-book and in her recent scholarship, Banton argues for the significance of diasporic identities in shaping immigrant experiences in Liberia.<sup>9</sup> In diaspora, Barbadians identified as black and African, an identification that helped spur decisions to remove to a black Republic on the western coast of Africa. It was when they

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<sup>8</sup> Clegg, 5.

<sup>9</sup> Caree Banton. *More Auspicious Shores: Barbadian Migration to Liberia, Blackness, and the Making of an African Republic*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019); Caree Banton, “Who is Black in a Black Republic?” in Garrison and Stewart, 121-142.

confronted Liberia's indigenous and recaptive populations that this collective identity began to splinter and immigrants sought to distinguish themselves from these "other" blacks. While acknowledging that Barbadians were a "floating group" in Liberia- not judged as indigenous Africans but not quite accepted as Americans- Banton tends to overestimate the "cultural capital" that Barbadians carried with them to Liberia. She insists that "Even before their arrival, the ACS and Liberian officials had incorporated them into the nation based on their diasporic experiences of enslavement and suffering, perceived level of civilization, and pan-Africanist articulations."<sup>10</sup> But, as the words of colonizationists and Liberians make clear, extensive debate surrounded the decision to recruit from Barbados and over the "suitability" of Barbadian emigrants for Liberia's nation-building project. The common diasporic experiences which Banton describes may have made Barbadians a more desirable group than either indigenous persons or recaptives to build up the Liberian nation, but these experiences were not enough to override difference or warrant full incorporation into the nation. Barbadians were not recruited to fulfill some larger pan-African vision for Liberia but because, at the time, they furnished "the only known opening for furthering emigration to Liberia."<sup>11</sup>

As the 346 emigrants who arrived by the *Cora* represent the only organized movement of Barbadians to Liberia, their presence, comparatively diminutive, might account for their oversight in scholarship on Liberia. However, despite their small

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<sup>10</sup> Banton, "Who is Black in a Black Republic?" 129.

<sup>11</sup> Pennsylvania Colonization Society. "Minute Book, 1864-1877," (November 1864). Accessed via Lincoln University, <https://www.lincoln.edu/node/1340/special-collections-and-archives/digital-collections/library-colonization-society>

number, the Barbadian emigrants provoked various concerns among the ACS and Liberian officials, both before and after their arrival. Through an examination of letters between and among Society officials and agents and Liberian officials, minute books of the state colonization societies, and correspondence from Barbadians themselves, this chapter seeks to understand why the ACS and Liberia recruited from Barbados in 1865 and how the emigration of African Americans from outside the United States altered the Liberian nation-building project. In diverging from a constitutional mandate that restricted colonization to free black Americans, the ACS and Liberia were forced to articulate a new Liberian vision, one that included African-descended persons from beyond the United States. Liberia appealed to its “exiled sons of Africa” in the West Indies to “come over and help” build up an African nationality. But, the treatment of Barbadians as a distinct group even before their arrival in Liberia revealed the limitations of such pan-African rhetoric. Their relegation to the periphery of the nation-building project was solidified when war’s end saw a brief revival of African American emigration to Liberia.

### **To Our “Brethren in the Antilles”**

Edward Wilmot Blyden was one of the first Liberians to directly appeal to blacks in the West Indies. As one of the three Liberian commissioners appointed by President Stephen Allen Benson (1856-1864) in early 1862 to travel to the United States, Blyden was particularly distraught by the cool reception that he met, and even moreso by the personal incidents of discrimination that he experienced. In a letter to the *Liberia Herald*,

Blyden expressed his frustration, “All the way to Washington a feeling of degradation held possession of me...I thought how sad it was that so many colored people seem disposed to cling to this land- fearing to go to Liberia lest they die of fever. But are they living in this country? If they all went and died it would be a noble sacrifice to liberty.”<sup>12</sup> Blyden tried to convince African Americans that “an African nationality” was their “great need” and that Liberia was the means to achieve that end.<sup>13</sup> But, while disagreeing with Blyden’s conviction that freedom could only be meaningfully realized when blacks separated from whites and built up their own nationality, many African Americans did share his commitment to building up a black nationality. When nationalism is defined by racial pride and the will of a people to determine their own lives, then those who declined Blyden’s pleas were not necessarily dismissive of his message; they just believed that a black nationality could be achieved on American soil.<sup>14</sup>

Blyden’s personal connection to the West Indies likely influenced the decision to recruit from the islands. He had been born on the island of St. Thomas in 1832 to a relatively privileged family, emigrating to the United States in 1850 to attend theological college. However, after being denied entrance to three separate institutions on account of his race, Blyden determined to remove from the US. He had been introduced to the colonization movement by Presbyterian ministers during his brief sojourn and came to

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<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Howard Temperley. “African-American Aspirations and the Settlement of Liberia” in *After Slavery: Emancipation and Its Discontents*, edited by Howard Temperley. (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2000), 73.

<sup>13</sup> Teshale Tibebu, *Edward Wilmot Blyden and the Racial Nationalist Imagination*. (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2012), 86.

<sup>14</sup> Davis, 127, 129.

view colonizationists as the colored man's "true friends."<sup>15</sup> Convinced that Liberia was the site to build up a "great Negro nation," he departed for West Africa just months after arriving in America.<sup>16</sup>

In Liberia, Blyden became a powerful voice for the upbuilding of an African nationality, first as a Presbyterian minister, then as Professor of Liberia College, and eventually as Secretary of State. He touted Liberia as a home for "colored men of every rank and station in every clime and country" and as a place to demonstrate the "character of a whole race." While including indigenous Africans in his "great Negro nation," Blyden tasked African Americans and other "civilized" blacks with Africa's redemption, calling on them to pass the light of civilization "from tribe to tribe," until they had "encircle[d] the land in a glorious blaze."<sup>17</sup> Seeing little hope of attracting African Americans to Liberia during the war, Blyden turned to West Indians to fill Liberia's great need for a "more civilized population."<sup>18</sup>

Blyden traveled to the West Indies- first to St. Thomas and then to Bermuda- in late 1862, after the Liberian Commission's failed recruitment mission to the United

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<sup>15</sup> AR (1862), 244.

<sup>16</sup> Hollis Lynch. *Edward Wilmot Blyden: Pan-Negro Patriot 1832- 1912*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 18; Tibebe, 93.

<sup>17</sup> Tibebe, 93. In an argument that seems to echo that made by many of slavery's apologists, Blyden argues that enslaved persons, forcibly removed from Africa, were introduced to Christianity and "civilization." He writes, "the very means which, to all human appearance, seemed calculated to crush them out from the earth, have been converted into means of blessing. In the countries of their exile, they have come under the influences of Christianity." However, Blyden does not attribute Africans' education or "civilization" to slavery but argues instead that the enslaved "received these blessings in spite of their condition, in spite of the brutifications of that atrocious system." Indeed, though he similarly asserts that Africa needs to be civilized and educated, he blames Europeans and their insatiable demand for African labor for Africa's underdeveloped state. See Tibebe, 26-31.

<sup>18</sup> Edward Blyden, Monrovia, to William Coppinger, Washington DC, March 6, 1864. ACS, Reel 160.



States. In a circular printed in August of that year and widely distributed throughout the islands, he presented the same message to West Indian audiences as he had to African Americans, addressing them as members of the same nation-building project. While informing that lands were readily available to any who would cultivate them, Blyden also conveyed the “ardent desire that the exiled sons of Africa from all parts of the world should return and unite their efforts in building up on this benighted shore a house for themselves and their posterity.”<sup>19</sup>

Shortly after his return to Liberia in 1863, word arrived that Blyden’s circulars had been received with enthusiasm. In particular, it seemed interest had peaked in Barbados. Blyden was eager to get up a company from the island especially as the British threat to Liberia’s northwest boundary had grown more intense in recent months. He encouraged a quick response lest Liberia “shall be gradually encroached upon by foreigners until we have more trouble from that source than from the aborigines.”<sup>20</sup> By the time Blyden penned a reply to members of the Barbados Company who had inquired about the particulars of settlement in Liberia, the Liberian legislature had already passed an act authorizing the appropriation of \$4,000 to facilitate immigration from the islands.<sup>21</sup> Around this same time, Liberia’s President issued a proclamation to further entice his West Indian brethren to cross the Atlantic and settle in West Africa:

Now, therefore I, Daniel Bashiel Warner, President of the Republic of Liberia, do hereby declare and proclaim to the descendants of Africa throughout the West Indies, who may be desirous to return to their fatherland and assist in building up

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<sup>19</sup> Edward Blyden, Monrovia, to Alfred Smith et al (members of Barbados Company), Barbados, W.I, March 10, 1864. ACS, Reel 160.

<sup>20</sup> Edward Blyden, Monrovia, to William Coppinger, Washington DC, March 6, 1864. ACS, Reel 160.

<sup>21</sup> “The Barbados Company,” AR (1865), 37.

an African nationality, that the Government and people of this Republic are anxious to welcome them to these shores. A grant of twenty-five acres of fresh fertile land will be made by the Government to each family and of ten acres to each single individual.<sup>22</sup>

Recognizing the urgency of the need for immigrants in Liberia, Warner accepted Blyden's counsel (as Secretary of State) that Liberia must look beyond the United States. He, like Blyden, addressed blacks in the West Indies as participants in the same effort to build up an African nationality. Unlike Sierra Leone, which had been a British colony since 1787, Liberia was an independent nation and "the most suitable starting point from which the returning exiles" might establish "a home and a nationality," according to Warner.<sup>23</sup> While Warner made an appeal on grounds of a common race identity, he also harbored more practical motivations for reaching out to West Indians.

"Pecuniary independence is the besetting problem of Liberia," asserted Warner during his 1864 annual message. Warner understood that, without development of its resources and a focus on self-sufficiency, Liberia would "be forever bound by the primitive difficulties of a new country."<sup>24</sup> Liberians needed to become producers as well as consumers, "looking more to her soil than to her traffic with natives for her wealth and prosperity."<sup>25</sup> Encountering a nearly bankrupt treasury when he entered office in 1864, Warner was acutely aware of the economic challenges confronting Liberia. In the West Indies, Warner saw an opportunity to pull Liberia out of financial dependence.

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<sup>22</sup> Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the MA Colonization Society, (Boston, 1865),16.

<sup>23</sup> Quoted in Banton, *More Auspicious Shores*, xiv.

<sup>24</sup> Daniel Bashiel Warner, "Annual Message to the Legislature December 1864" in D. Elwood Dunn, ed, *The Annual Messages of the Presidents of Liberia, 1848-2010*, Volume 1. (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2011), 185.

<sup>25</sup> D.B. Warner, Monrovia, to William Coppinger, Washington DC, March 10, 1864. ACS, Reel 160.

Writing to the ACS's Corresponding Secretary in March of 1864 to inquire about using the Society's ship to bring Barbadians to Liberia, Warner emphasized the positive impact that Barbadians might have on Liberia's agricultural development. As Barbados was one of the primary sugar-producing regions during the nineteenth century, Warner and other Liberian officials believed that emigrants from that island might help to develop Liberia's sugar industry and establish a profitable export economy. "We have long needed men here who thoroughly understand the cultivation of canes and the manufacture of sugar," wrote former President Roberts. This assumption or expectation that Barbadians would be successful sugar producers justified the government's promise of 25 acres, a promise that allotted Barbadians more than two times the land typically granted to African American immigrants.<sup>26</sup>

While this offer of 25 acres certainly appealed to many Barbadians, to uproot family and home for an unknown future was a decision inspired by more than just an "attraction to the new world." In the 1860s, the "repulsion of the old world" was strong in Barbados.

### **Barbadians Heed Liberia's Call**

While Americans were engaged in a war that would determine the ultimate fate of slavery in the states, the British West Indies had decided this issue thirty years earlier. In 1833, the British Parliament passed the Abolition Acts outlawing slavery throughout the

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<sup>26</sup> AR (1865), 119.

British Empire.<sup>27</sup> Though legally emancipated, former slaves throughout the West Indies encountered new struggles as colonial officials and planter elites sought to perpetuate the plantation economies of the islands. Newly-emancipated West Indians found themselves competing against indentured laborers or became themselves the objects of indenture. In Barbados, planters lobbied for the passage of legislation that would restrict any out-migration of free laborers.<sup>28</sup> Though planters were successful in getting the colonial legislature to pass regulations on migration, total restrictions on emigration were never implemented. Subsequently, when agents from surrounding islands, particularly Trinidad and British Guiana, arrived in Barbados shortly after emancipation to recruit laborers, many responded, lured by promises of higher wages.

Emigration from the island declined in 1846 after the British repealed protective tariffs on West Indian sugar, leading to a decline in the price of sugar and hence a decline in wages.<sup>29</sup> Though emigration virtually halted, population pressures in Barbados continued to grow. Debates over emigration moved to the fore in the summer of 1863 when a severe drought struck the island, leading to food shortages, unemployment and general unrest. Given the severity of conditions, Barbadian authorities began to view migration as a necessary means of relief and extended official approval. At the same

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<sup>27</sup> Emancipation occurred gradually and unevenly across the British West Indies. While slavery came to an abrupt end in some states, others implemented a system of apprenticeship that delayed freedom until 1840. For more on emancipation on the British empire, see Banton, *More Auspicious Shores*, Chapter 1.

<sup>28</sup> G.W. Roberts. "Emigration from the Island of Barbados." *Social and Economic Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (September, 1955), 247-248.

<sup>29</sup> Laurence Brown. "Experiments in Indenture: Barbados and the Segmentation of Migrant Labor in the Caribbean 1863-1865." *New West Indian Guide*, Vol. 79, No. 1/2 (2005), 32.

time, other West Indian governments were only too eager to recruit laborers who now found themselves in desperate circumstances.

Barbadians who were suffering under drought conditions were receptive to emigration schemes. In the summer of 1863, Barbadians began to move across the Caribbean, landing on the shores of Antigua, British Guiana, St. Croix, and other nearby islands.<sup>30</sup> Ultimately, these men (and few women) were anxious to find relief and accepted emigration as a means toward this end. This intra-Caribbean migration was fueled primarily by economic conditions. But, even as emigration agents from the surrounding islands continued their recruitment of Barbadian laborers, Blyden's circular—several thousand copies of which were published in Barbados only months earlier—continued to circulate. Though Blyden had urged West Indians to “come over and help us” build up an African nationality, the material promises included in Liberia's appeal undoubtedly swayed many now destitute Barbadians to consider life in Liberia.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, it was early in 1864 that Blyden informed the Barbados Company that the terms of immigration had been amended to provide West Indians with twenty-five acres of land. It was this convergence of circumstances in 1864 that would draw Barbadians into the Liberian project. Just as Liberian officials contemplated how to resolve the problem of declining emigration from the United States during the Civil War years, Barbadians were looking for ways to escape a growing discontent.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 36-39.

<sup>31</sup> Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the MA Colonization Society, (1865), 14.

## Rethinking Liberia

Given the need for settlers in Liberia and the desire to emigrate in Barbados, it seemed reasonable that West Indians would emigrate to West Africa. However, there were various obstacles that would have to be overcome before this plan could be implemented. First, neither the Liberian government nor the Barbadians who wanted to emigrate had the means to fund such a venture. It was true that the Liberian government had appropriated \$4,000 towards this end, but this was hardly enough to charter a ship to cross the Atlantic. There was little hope of raising more than this amount in Liberia as trade continued to languish and revenues to decline. So depleted was the Liberian treasury that Pinney, serving as Consul General to Liberia in 1864, suggested to the ACS's Executive Board that they approve a loan of \$20,000 to Liberia. "Their treasury is in need of aid... Warner has not been paid a dollar on account of his salary... they certainly need sympathy in their present embarrassment."<sup>32</sup>

Despite its desire to receive emigrants from the West Indies, Liberia was not financially able to support such an expedition. Nor could the Barbadians pay for a transatlantic voyage. Though presented as an "intelligent and respectable" class, reports also recognized that they were "poor."<sup>33</sup> Joseph Atwell, speaking on behalf of the Barbados Company for Liberia, a group organized to advance emigration efforts on that island, reiterated the Barbadian interest in removing to Liberia, but he also expressed concern over how this migration might be financially accomplished. "...There being no

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<sup>32</sup> J.B. Pinney, New York, to William Coppinger, Washington DC, May 6, 1865. ACS, Reel 97.

<sup>33</sup> Quoted in "The Barbados Company for Liberia", *AR* 41 (1865), 19.

ship running between Barbados and Liberia, sad disappointment has befallen this poor but well-meaning Company, and unless means can be raised for the charter of a vessel, their object cannot be realized. It is a settled point that this cannot be accomplished without foreign aid.”<sup>34</sup> Viewing Barbadian emigration to Liberia as the solution to both waning emigration to Liberia and overpopulation and poverty in Barbados, interested parties on both sides of the Atlantic contemplated ways that they might fund this venture. This quest for financial assistance quickly revealed a second obstacle that would need to be overcome before any Barbados emigration plan could be realized.

The ACS had been the primary sponsor of emigration to Liberia since its founding, issuing the funds that transported and supported thousands of African Americans over four decades. When emigration from the United States stalled during America’s war years, the ACS saw its future and the future of its Liberian project threatened. Thus, when inquiries arose about the possibility of sending a Barbados company to Liberia, it seemed that a solution had presented itself that might save both the Society and the Republic. But, despite facing the prospect of dissolution, the ACS was reluctant to embrace the Barbadians. Article I of the ACS Constitution explicitly defined only one class of persons to which the Society would provide aid:

This Society shall be called the American Society for colonizing the Free People of Color in the United States the object of which its attention is to be exclusively directed is to promote and execute a plan for colonizing (with their own consent) the free people

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

of color residing in our country, in Africa, or such other place as Congress shall deem expedient.<sup>35</sup>

For forty years, the ACS operated under this fundamental assertion, but the wartime reality that no free people of color in the United States were willing to remove to Africa pushed the ACS to rethink its Liberia project.

Members of the ACS were first made aware of an interest among Barbadians in emigrating to Liberia in 1857 when the Secretary of the Massachusetts Society received a letter from a fellow colonizationist who had just returned from the island. Recognizing that a “marked line of distinction” existed to prevent the African and English races there from “meeting on the same level in the intercourse of social life,” this observer suggested that the Society render pecuniary aid to transport those “intelligent colored people” of the island who wished to emigrate to Africa.<sup>36</sup> With the exception of a few letters between Society officials, no action was taken to further emigration from Barbados to Liberia. After all, the Society was transporting African Americans to Liberia in record numbers during this period and, therefore, there was no need for the Society to deviate from its course.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> AR 15 (1839), 24.

<sup>36</sup> Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the MA Colonization Society, (1865), 13.

<sup>37</sup> See letters from Joseph Tracy to various ACS officials. June 1857. ACS, Reel 82. A small company of Barbadians, including future emigrant Anthony Barclay, directly petitioned President Roberts in 1855 for aid to remove to Liberia. They requested he use his “great influence with the Colonization Society of America” to obtain the necessary means. No evidence suggests that Roberts made any appeal to the ACS on their behalf. What is certain is that the ACS did not fund any Barbadian expedition to Liberia nor any other West Indian venture during the 1850s. See Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the MA Colonization Society, (1865), 11-12.



The question of Barbados was again brought before the Colonization Society in early 1864 after word of a favorable response to Blyden's circular was received in Liberia. After the ACS expressed a reluctance to aid the emigration of West Indians to Liberia, Secretary of State Blyden wrote again in an effort to assuage Society concerns. "We do not propose that your Society should "colonize" West Indians in Liberia for we know that your operations are limited by Constitution to the US but we only wish to effect a kind of charter of the "Stevens" to carry out a project for which the Society will in nowise be responsible."<sup>38</sup> But, in September, the prospect was still "not flattering" to the ACS.<sup>39</sup> Shortly thereafter, the *Stevens* was sold.

It was in October of 1864 that the Society began to give greater consideration to the Barbados proposal, encouraged by members of the Pennsylvania auxiliary. Representatives of the Barbadian emigration parties had written both the state and national societies that hundreds of applications had already been received and that thousands more were desirous of emigrating to Liberia. Leaders of the Pennsylvania Society were particularly receptive to pleas from the island, acknowledging the gloomy prospects for getting up any emigrants from the United States. They recommended that the parent society ascertain the number of suitable emigrants wishing to go to Liberia and how many might be able to pay a portion of their passage. In December, the Pennsylvania Society welcomed Joseph Atwell, representative of Barbados company, to speak on the character of the emigrants to help rally support for a West Indian migration. Atwell

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<sup>38</sup> Edward Blyden, Monrovia, to William Coppinger, Washington, DC, July 5, 1864. ACS, Reel 160.

<sup>39</sup> William McLain, Washington DC, to Edward Blyden, Monrovia, September 1864. ACS, Reel 204.

described “hundreds of persons, of intelligence and moral worth, well versed in trades and agricultural employment of a tropical climate” anxious to remove to Liberia.<sup>40</sup>

Though the Colonization Society expressed little interest in aiding Barbadian emigration when interest first peaked in 1857, the emigration tide had shifted considerably by 1864. In that year, Congress repealed its colonization appropriation, quashing any hope of federal support; the ACS, in financial decline, sold its ship at auction; and just 23 African Americans departed for Liberia under the auspices of the Society. On recommendation of the Pennsylvania Society and attestation of suitability by Barbados representatives, the subject was brought before the ACS’s Board of Directors at its January meeting; they found it “by no means free from embarrassments.”<sup>41</sup> It seemed evident that the Society was constitutionally restricted from aiding free persons of color not from the United States. Indeed, this had been the primary argument against the Barbadian enterprise from the beginning. However, this seemingly insurmountable obstacle was removed rather quickly when “able counsel advised that it might be done to such an extent as would be conducive to the most successful ‘colonization of free persons of color residing in the US.’” The Barbadians, “represented on respectable authority” were “industrious, moral, and intelligent” with a “knowledge of sugar-making and other forms of tropical industry” that might ensure “their emigration would conduce to that end.”<sup>42</sup> In other words, Barbadians owned the “civilized” traits to build up Liberian society and the agricultural skills to develop its resources. Believing that the post-war reality for many

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<sup>40</sup> PA Colonization Society. “Minute Books 1864-1877,” (December, 1864).

<sup>41</sup> MA Annual Report (1865), 19.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid; AR (1865), 72.

African Americans would reignite their interest in Africa, ACS officials expected that the Barbadians might fill Liberia's population need until that time came.

There was yet another reason that the Society agreed to support Barbadian emigration, one that would similarly be conducive to the colonization of free African Americans. Ever since slavery had been abolished in 1833 in Barbados, the men and women of that island had been living in freedom. As many African Americans were only just beginning to experience freedom, ACS officials looked to Barbados to set an example for newly-freed blacks in the United States. If, after three decades of freedom and equal rights before the law, Barbadians still sought their futures in another land, then why should African Americans believe that their experience would be any different? The ACS came to view Barbados as the most persuasive means to recruit future African Americans for Liberia. Thomas Malcolm of the Pennsylvania Colonization Society proclaimed the merits of aiding Barbados emigration most forcefully when he wrote to the President of the Maryland chapter: "We cannot afford to lose such emigrants. They are superior to any 300 we have ever sent. Their removal from beneath the flag of Great Britain will do more to promote the future emigration of colored persons from the US than two times the amount spent in letters and printed documents. Example is far more powerful than precept."<sup>43</sup> Another ACS official, Joseph Tracy, writing on behalf of the Massachusetts State Colonization Society, inquired with McLain regarding the "negro mind in Barbados." It was Tracy's intent to publish an article that would demonstrate to

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<sup>43</sup> Thomas Malcolm, Philadelphia, to James Hall, Baltimore, December 24, 1864. MD Colonization Society, Reel 8.

the newly emancipated what they might expect in freedom over time.<sup>44</sup> Given that Barbadians were seeking to emigrate, this is likely the conclusion that Tracy expected African Americans might draw.

Having resolved the constitutional issue, the Board of Directors voted to appropriate \$10,000 to aid emigration from Barbados to Liberia, to be expended as directed by the Committee. Secretary McLain was dispatched to Barbados in February 1865 to “judiciously select” a company of emigrants from among the hundreds who had applied for passage.<sup>45</sup> Leaders of the Barbados companies had represented that their parties were composed of “tradesmen and mechanics, sugar-boilers, and useful agents in raising the produce of tropical countries,” labeling each head of family a “director of agricultural labor.”<sup>46</sup> But in Barbados, McLain began to question the veracity of such claims. He found on the list of potential emigrants a number of destitute women and children, single men, and but a handful of persons familiar with sugar processing. He reported back to Washington that “the great body of the 372 are from about town. But few are from the plantations and only might pretend to understand the toiling, clearing, and graining of sugar.”<sup>47</sup> Despite earlier warnings from Liberia that it would be “disastrous to send any not cultivators of the soil,” McLain and the ACS pressed forward in their plans.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Joseph Tracy, Boston, to William Coppinger, Washington, D.C., May 18, 1865. ACS, Reel 97.

<sup>45</sup> AR (1865), 72, 18, 242.

<sup>46</sup> AR (1865), 37.

<sup>47</sup> Joseph Atwell, Philadelphia, to William Coppinger, Washington, DC, April 14, 1865; McLain, Barbados, to William Coppinger, Washington, D.C. March 21, 1865. ACS, Reel 97.

<sup>48</sup> John Seys, Springfield, to William Coppinger, Washington, DC, November 10, 1864. ACS, Reel 96.

In earlier letters to the ACS, Barbadians had inquired simply about transportation to Liberia. Upon meeting with leaders of the Barbados Company and the Fatherland Union, McLain reported that it remained their desire that the Society transport as many as possible, foregoing the usual six months support, until all the members of both societies were sent. While the ACS had voted in support of this strategy, McLain, now with greater knowledge of the emigrant party to be sent, seemed to anticipate negative results. After chartering a ship to carry them across the Atlantic, McLain wrote to the ACS agent who would receive them in Liberia: “If they are not all exactly the kind of people you need in Liberia then are as near to it as I can make them. They only asked us for passage- for transportation! I have done much better than this- having furnished everything necessary for their passage and the substantials of pork, beef, fish, and breadstuffs for three months in Liberia!”<sup>49</sup> This decision to transport as many as possible at the cost of their support once in Liberia would have a devastating effect on these new emigrants.

### **Barbadians in Liberia:**

In early May 1865, after a month at sea, the *Cora* approached the Liberian coast. Having received just a trickle of emigrants since the war began, Liberians were anxious to greet the more than 300 men, women, and children who would disembark that day. Former President Roberts, who had cautioned against sending any but farmers and mechanics who would embrace Liberia’s republican institutions, expressed a favorable first impression of the newly-arrived Barbadians. As Liberia “long needed men who

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<sup>49</sup> William McLain, Barbados, to Edward Blyden, Monrovia, April 4, 1865. ACS, Reel 204.

thoroughly understand the cultivation of canes," Roberts found that these immigrants seemed "to have correct ideas of the circumstances and capabilities of the country."

Beyond their potential to help develop the economy, Roberts was hopeful that, this large number settled together, would "slide into our republican feelings and sentiments and soon find themselves entirely identified with the country."<sup>50</sup>

But alongside this hope ran a current of apprehension. Almost immediately, Liberians began to express concern for the future welfare of the Barbadians. Though the ACS had committed itself only to the transportation of these emigrants, the failure to provide medicines disappointed the tending agents in Liberia who were only too familiar with the consequences. Dr. Laing in Careysburg warned, "that there will be much suffering is evident."<sup>51</sup> The likelihood of hardship was exacerbated by the fact that they had arrived at the beginning of the rainy season. Indeed, they confronted the "most excessive rains seen on the coast in years."<sup>52</sup> While McLain had indicated that these emigrants would be able to provide for themselves once landed in Liberia, many had arrived destitute. Without medicines and proper care, this seemed highly unlikely. Reporting that a "large majority of them seem to have little or no means," agent Dennis expressed "much anxiety about their welfare...still I could wish that you sent a less number, that is only the number the amount that was appropriated would support for six

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<sup>50</sup> J.J. Roberts, Monrovia, to William Coppinger, Washington DC, April 25, 1865; Roberts to Coppinger, May 15, 1865. ACS, Reel 160.

<sup>51</sup> Daniel Liang, Careysburg, to William McLain, Washington DC, May 8, 1865. ACS, Reel 160.

<sup>52</sup> PA Col Society, "Minute Books 1864-1877," (September 1865).

months. I fear that there will be considerable suffering among them and perhaps mortality among them.”<sup>53</sup>

The decision to transport as many as possible without providing for their support created challenges for these new immigrants that would prove difficult to overcome. But there were other factors that forebode the difficulties that Barbadians encountered in Liberia. Despite assurances to the contrary, there was a general lack of opportunity for skilled laborers. Anthony Barclay, who had been a shopkeeper in Bridgetown before emigrating, was dismayed at what he encountered in Monrovia. In correspondence with ACS Secretary William Coppinger, Barclay described a more grim reality than that which he seemed to have expected: “When I wrote to you about the passage alone and informed you that the tradesmen would turn to work immediately, on arrival, we found, to our astonishment, no workshops, the city quite dead and dull, no money in circulation...The govt is poor and the necessities of life cannot be obtained for want of love or money.”<sup>54</sup> Some of the cause’s leading men, understanding the desirability of agricultural labor to a young Republic, exaggerated the field experience of the Barbadian emigrants. From letters from Liberia, McLain and other ACS officials were made aware that Liberia did indeed want more “cultivators of the soil” not tradesmen. Reverend John Seys had informed that there was an surplus of skilled labor already in Liberia; former President Roberts cautioned that the expense of sending any but industrious farmers would be “useless”; and Edward Morris, a leading American merchant and cultivator of

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<sup>53</sup> Henry Dennis, Monrovia, to William McLain, Washington, DC, June 5, 1865. ACS, Reel 160.

<sup>54</sup> Anthony Barclay, Monrovia, to William Coppinger, Washington DC, August 21, 1865. ACS, Reel 160.

Liberian coffee, upon hearing of the decision to send a company from Barbados, expressed his hope that “working men and not professors” would be transferred to Liberia.<sup>55</sup> Despite Liberians’ insistence that what their nation needed was immigrants to develop the land and its resources, the ACS shipped “but few” agricultural laborers in a company of nearly 350.

When the Barbadians arrived, the Liberian government determined to settle them together at Crozerville, named after Philadelphia colonizationist Samuel Crozer who had accompanied the first group of African American settlers to Liberia in 1820. The site was located off the Careysburg Road, adjacent to Careysburg and about 20 miles from Monrovia. Though generally considered a healthier climate with enough land to fulfill the government’s promise of 25 acres, Careysburg and the surrounding region remained sparsely populated and under-developed. Located “back in the country,” it was laborious and expensive to transport goods to or from the settlement as a road had not yet been completed. Crozerville was certainly not an ideal place of settlement for tradesmen and skilled laborers, many who had emigrated with similar expectations of opportunity as Anthony Barclay.<sup>56</sup> Writing of the Society’s decision to send skilled emigrants to interior settlements, Davis regretted that “men and women, who have passed all of their previous life in cities and towns and who have trades and businesses well suited for towns are sent 15-20 miles into the interior and then a piece of wild land is given to them, and they are

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<sup>55</sup> Seys to Coppinger, November 10, 1864; Roberts to Coppinger, April 25, 1865; Edward Morris, Philadelphia, to William Coppinger, Washington, DC, April 28, 1865. ACS, Reel 97.

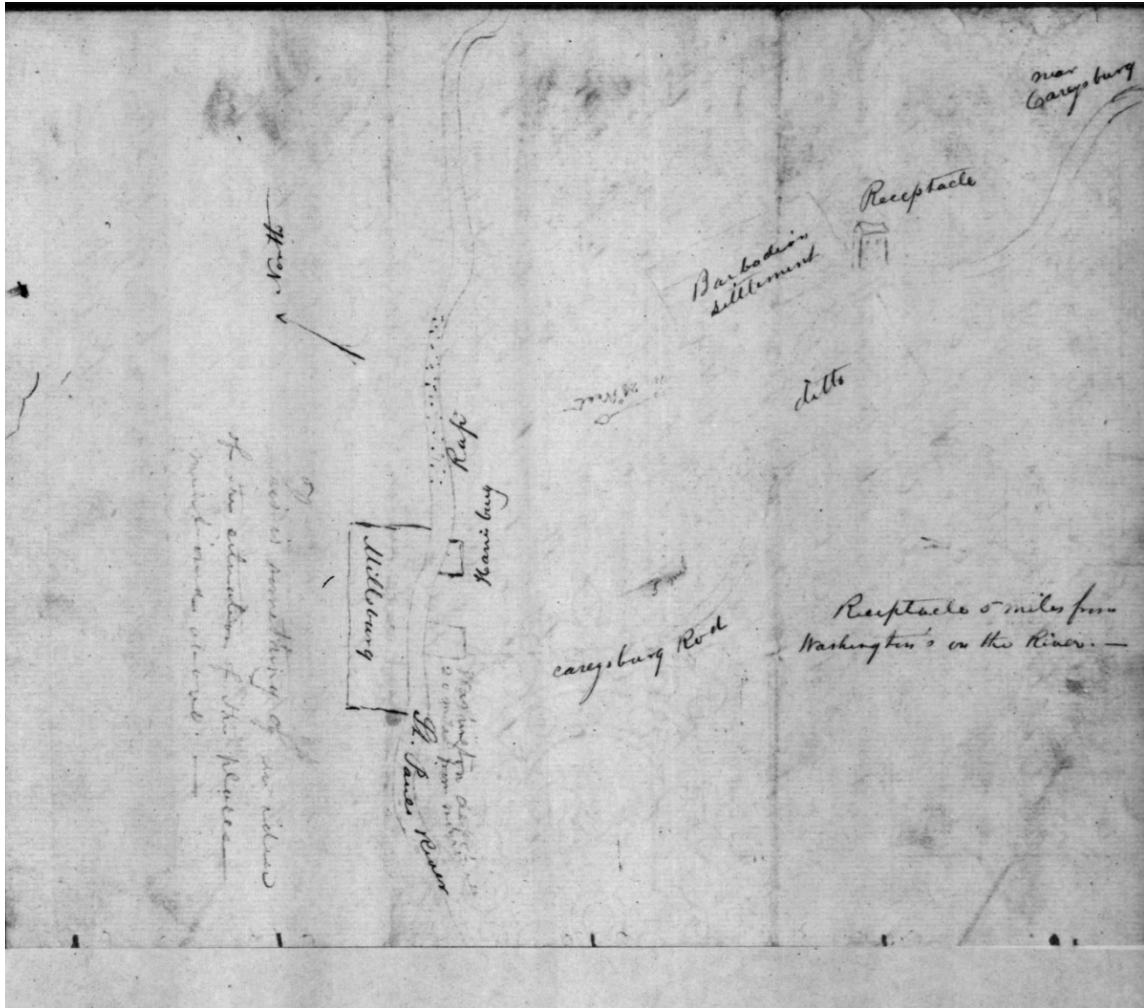
<sup>56</sup> Banton, 201-202; Alexander Cowan, *Liberia As I Found It, in 1858*. (Frankfort: A.G. Hodges, 1858), 59; Dennis, Monrovia, to William McLain, Washington, DC, January 6, 1866. ACS, Reel 160.



told to get to work and help build up the nation by cultivating the soil.” Such immigrants were destined to leave a “country where they won’t let him live and work where he can and then try to make him work and live where he cannot because gentlemen in America who can know nothing of the peculiar circumstances say that he shall and he shan’t.”<sup>57</sup> It was in fact the Liberian government and not the ACS who had selected a site adjacent to Careysburg for Barbadian settlement. This ran contrary to the custom of allowing emigrants to choose their settlements as had prevailed since Liberia’s earliest years. The selection of Crozerville was influenced by Liberia’s own desire for a laboring population and an exaggerated depiction of the emigrants as laborers. It did not take into account Barbadians’ expectations but determined their value to the Republic would be demonstrated through their labor.

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<sup>57</sup> Davis, Monrovia, to William Coppinger, Washington, DC, January 24, 1868. ACS, Reel 161.



**Figure 6: Sketch of Careysburg by Liberian President Daniel Warner included in letter from Warner to William Coppinger.** Warner writes: "The accompanying diagram will perhaps give you a faint idea of the locality of Careysburg, and of the settlement on the road leading thither, of the Barbadian company of immigrants." DB Warner, Monrovia, to William Coppinger, Washington DC, Aug 21, 1865. ACS, Reel 160

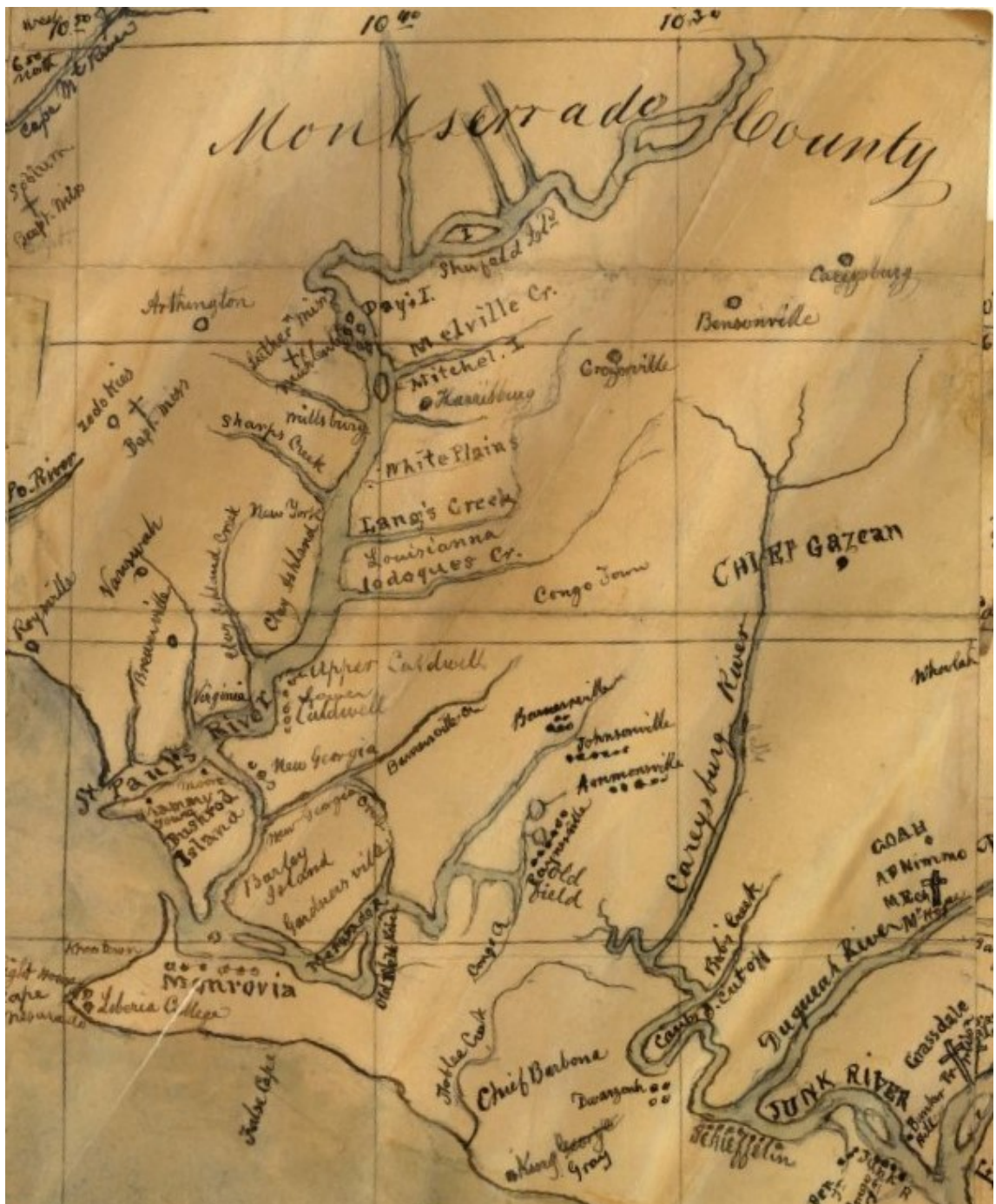


Figure 7: "North west part of Montserrado County, Liberia: in ten mile squares." Map. Nineteenth century [nd]. Cropped to fit. Accessed via Library of Congress. <https://www.loc.gov/item/96684997/>.

As agent Dennis had predicted, there was much suffering and mortality among the Barbadians. By August, nearly 40 deaths had been reported. The decision to deny support on arrival had dire consequences as provisions were quickly expended and the government found itself utterly unprepared to provide necessary relief. Subscriptions were taken up by some Liberian citizens, led by women's benevolent organizations, and ACS agents informed they were doing what they could to prevent more from dying. Despite an initial decision not to provide the usual supply of medicines, McLain, upon receiving word of illness and death, instructed Dennis to provide medicines gratis to those who could not pay (though he placed blame for the Barbadians' fate squarely on the organizing parties.)<sup>58</sup> These efforts were not enough to convince all who had left their island home for "more auspicious shores" to stay.<sup>59</sup> As relayed by one Barbadian: "I am sorry to inform you that many of my people- i.e. the Barbadians- were disappointed, rather dissatisfied and left... We suffered very much not having the quantity of provisions to last us the 6 months." "Disheartened," his fellow emigrants "went over to Sierra Leone."<sup>60</sup> Reports of Barbadians leaving for Sierra Leone continued to surface for many months after their landing in Liberia. Those who were satisfied to remain were farmers, according to agent Dennis, while tradesmen and mechanics chased better opportunities to Sierra Leone.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> William McLain, Washington DC, to HW Dennis, Monrovia, September 4, 1865. ACS, Reel 205; McLain to Dennis, April 4, 1865. Reel 204.

<sup>59</sup> See Banton, *More Auspicious Shores*, xi.

<sup>60</sup> Forbes, Careysburg, to William McLain, Washington DC, August 15, 1867. ACS, Reel 161.

<sup>61</sup> H.W. Dennis, Monrovia, to William McLain, Washington DC, September 5, 1866. ACS, Reel 160.

## **The End of Barbadian Emigration**

As the Barbadians suffered in Liberia, blacks in America were experiencing the end of a war that abolished slavery and emancipated four million African Americans. What this meant for the colonization cause was not immediately evident but McLain felt confident enough to write to the President of the Barbados party in August 1865 that African Americans were beginning to “wake up” and that he expected to send out a party from the United States as early as the fall. With interest among “our people” stirring, McLain informed that there was very little possibility the ACS would aid further migration from the island to Liberia.<sup>62</sup> In January 1866, this position was solidified when the ACS Executive Board voted against lending support to any future Barbados expedition. Corresponding Secretary Coppinger, learning of two potential emigrant parties in Virginia, justified this vote: “we need resources for our own people.”<sup>63</sup>

It is doubtful that the Barbadian emigration convinced many African Americans to remove to Liberia or that it “conduced to that end.” Rather, “black codes” and racial violence were responsible for pushing many out. But it did serve to bring bodies into Liberia at a time when both the Society and Liberia believed that an increase in population would secure their futures. The ACS aided the Barbadian venture because wartime circumstances seemed to preclude any other option. Thus, when the tide seemed to be turning on African American emigration in the aftermath of war, it was easy for the Society to separate from Barbados and the West Indians that they had helped settle in

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<sup>62</sup> William McLain, Washington D.C., to J.H. Shannon, Bridgetown, August 15, 1865. ACS, Reel 97.

<sup>63</sup> William Coppinger, Washington DC, to William Pettit, Philadelphia, January 31, 1866. ACS, Reel 210.

Liberia. While they agreed not to support further efforts, ACS officials also began to blame the Barbadians for their fate in Liberia. It was not the refusal to lend six month's aid nor the denial of sufficient medicines that led to their suffering in Liberia, but the very character of the emigrants. As McLain oft repeated, these men and women were the very best of those that desired to go to Liberia. "If best offered were of such poor material, then what would the masses prove if transferred?"<sup>64</sup> The ACS had done its part to see Liberia through the war, and now it could return to its constitutionally-mandated mission of colonizing America's free people of color.

Like that of the ACS, the Liberian government's interest in the West Indies waned after the war. Though the 1864 appeal had been made to Liberia's "brethren of the Antilles...to come to Liberia to build up an African nationality," by the beginning of 1866, Liberians had begun to rethink this plea. On first arrival, the Barbadians were viewed with sympathy and compassion. Efforts were made to relieve their suffering, a consequence, some posited, of limited provisions and lack of medicines. However, within months, perceptions of these newcomers began to shift. Compassion fatigue likely helped motivate this change as the influx of Barbadians taxed the Republic's limited resources even as reports of hard times among the Liberian settlers continued to circulate. And, as reported by agent Dennis, Liberia's already depressed government went into considerable debt on their behalf.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> William McLain, Washington DC, to H.W. Dennis, Monrovia, June 23, 1866. ACS, Reel 205; William Coppinger, Washington DC, to William Pettit, Philadelphia, June 20, 1866. ACS, Reel 210.

<sup>65</sup> Dennis, Monrovia, to McLain, Washington, D.C., August 22, 1865, ACS, Reel 160.

But it was also that the Barbadians did not adhere to their proper role in building up the Liberian nation. The discourse supporting Barbadian emigration had emphasized their “civilized” qualities. It was approvingly noted that they intended to settle together as families in Liberia and that they were “Christian people of the Wesleyan, Episcopalian, and Moravian churches.”<sup>66</sup> As carriers of a common “civilization”, the Barbadians would contribute to building up an African nationality, one predicated on Liberian ideals. Further, represented as tradesmen, mechanics, sugar-boilers, and tropical producers, the Barbadians were expected to build up the Liberian nation with their labor. Twenty-five acres of “fresh, fertile land” was promised to each Barbadian family so that they might fulfill this end.<sup>67</sup>

The Barbadians had expressed similar expectations of life in Liberia. They sought the “improvement of their condition by diligent labor” and held “the noble desire of assisting to elevate their fatherland.”<sup>68</sup> But, alongside these loftier expectations ran more practical ones: provisions on par with that provided to the settlers, government aid during acclimation, and the liberty to select lands wherever they pleased.<sup>69</sup> The hardships that the Barbadians endured when these expectations were not met led some to inquire about return just months after arriving in Liberia. While the repulsions of the old world helped push them out of Barbados, it seemed that the attractions of the new world, misrepresented as they were, were not enough to keep them in Liberia.

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<sup>66</sup> *AR* (1865), 19

<sup>67</sup> Banton, 114.

<sup>68</sup> *AR* (1865), 19.

<sup>69</sup> H.W. Dennis, Monrovia, to William McLain, Washington DC, June 5, 1865; and August 22, 1865, ACS, Reel 160; “A Proclamation By the President of the Republic of Liberia” included in Edward Blyden, Monrovia, to William Coppinger, Washington DC, March 8, 1864. ACS, Reel 160.

As the Barbadians struggled just to survive that first year in Africa, Liberia began to hear news that African Americans were once again showing interest in emigrating. In particular, the Society indicated that a large company of emigrants was expected to sail from Virginia in November. Many Liberians echoed the enthusiasm of Edward Morris when he wrote back to Washington, “I rejoice to hear of the *Cora* but more particularly of the prospect of work with our own people!”<sup>70</sup>

The Society did in fact send out its first party of the post-war period in the fall of 1865: 176 freedmen from Lynchburg, Virginia. The ACS predicted that hundreds more would soon follow these “pioneers of the freedmen.” In its monthly journal, the Society informed “other companies have been formed...and are now multiplying at such a rate, as to require increased energy and liberality, to make suitable provisions for the growing number of emigrants...the time, therefore, has evidently come, in which the Treasury needs to be replenished as formerly, and there is little doubt, even more abundantly.”<sup>71</sup> As excitement grew in Liberia at the prospect of renewed immigration from the United States, the pan-African rhetoric that had welcomed Barbadians to Liberia began to retract. Increasingly, Liberians drew distinctions between African American settlers and those that had arrived from the West Indies.

Though acknowledging a want of medicines and provisions contributed to the Barbadians’ suffering, Liberians began to temper this charge with accusations of poor character. It was the Barbadians and their “uncivilized” habits that was the cause of their

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<sup>70</sup> Edward Morris, Philadelphia, to [unknown], July 10, 1865. ACS, Reel 97.

<sup>71</sup> *AR* (1866), 118, 26.



struggling condition in Liberia. They were “dirty” and “uncleanly”; “imprudent” and “careless”.<sup>72</sup> Dennis, who had earlier described the Barbadians “as good as any that we have had from the US and in some respects better”, changed his opinion of “them and their usefulness to Liberia”, writing to McLain in the fall of 1866, “I don’t think these are the kind of people that will materially benefit Liberia.”<sup>73</sup>

It was the opinion of President Warner that changed most dramatically, however. He asserted the urgent need for an industrious and intelligent population since he came into office and early on, showed interest in recruiting from the West Indies. Though he had crafted his proclamation to his “brethren in the Antilles” as an appeal based on a shared African nationality, Warner’s interest in West Indians was always rooted in a desire for a laboring population. In his first inaugural address, delivered in January 1864, Warner acknowledged the dependent state in which Liberia had always thrived. He asserted that the war in America, while disrupting trade to Liberia and creating hardship for Liberians, had made this point most apparent. “Every country but ours seems to have taken advantage of the three year's suspension of those wonderful supplies which once issued from the great American Republic... We are daily being thrown upon our own resources, and if these do not raise us, we shall not be raised at all...I cannot at this very trying crisis, forbear insisting upon this point: that this country will have to work out its own destiny.”<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Charles Deputie, Careysburg, to William Coppinger, Washington, DC, March 23, 1866; Daniel Laing, Careysburg, to William McLain, Washington, D.C., April 22, 1866; H.W. Dennis, Monrovia, to McLain, Washington D.C., Oct 13, 1866. ACS, Reel 160.

<sup>73</sup> Dennis, Monrovia, to Coppinger, Washington, DC, August 22, 1866; Dennis, Monrovia, to McLain, Washington DC, September 5, 1866. ACS, Reel 160.

<sup>74</sup> “Annual Message of President Warner”, *AR* (1865), 80.

In his earliest letters to Society officials broaching the subject of Barbados, Warner encouraged support on the grounds that these emigrants would contribute to Liberia's agricultural development; through their labor, Liberia might become the nation of producers that Warner envisioned. To aid in this endeavor, Warner and the Liberian legislature issued land grants two and a half times the size of those to Americans in Liberia's vast and under-developed interior. Three months after the Barbadians had disembarked on Liberian shores, Warner expressed his satisfaction with the company, writing that they were of "industrious habits: pious, seemingly withal" and that he expected them to "prove as valuable an acquisition to the country as the same number of the American population that have come into it have done."<sup>75</sup>

However, by September 1866, Warner's impression of the Barbadians had drastically reversed. He confided to Coppinger, "I am ashamed now of what I wrote of these people since I have fully understood them." As the Barbadians, unable to care for themselves and unprepared to tend the soil, left for Sierra Leone in increasing numbers, Warner branded them unfit for the task of building up a nation. They abandoned Liberia because "gold could not be picked up as early by our *Cora* friends as they had expected...the majority of them are persons who have all of their lifetime, worked for someone else. They seem to be unaccustomed to managing anything of importance themselves."<sup>76</sup> Though Warner had appealed to Barbadians as a people "one in origin and

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<sup>75</sup> D.B. Warner, Monrovia, to William Coppinger, Washington, D.C., August 21, 1865. ACS, Reel 160.

<sup>76</sup> Warner to Coppinger, September 6, 1866. ACS, Reel 160.

destiny” with Liberians, it was their labor that would make them a part of (or exclude them from ) Warner’s espoused African nationality.

At the same time that Barbadians were departing Liberia, the Society’s predictions that African Americans would seek their homes in Africa at war’s end were coming true. As the number arriving from America edged toward 600 at the end of 1866, Warner declared Liberians, “all of us, well-cured of our West Indian emigration mania.” The immigration of 350 Barbadians had made clear the distinction between American and English blacks. Despite the distinction made by the Society in withholding provisions and by Liberia in deciding their site of settlement, Warner determined that American blacks were better adapted to the newness of the country, and implored the Society to “give us forever, the blacks from America.”<sup>77</sup> While he had promoted emigration from the West Indies in his first annual address, in his second, Warner turned back to the United States, declaring Liberia “the asylum for the oppressed American negro.”<sup>78</sup>

The emigration party that disembarked in Monrovia in 1865 represents the only organized movement of Barbadians to Liberia. Though many departed shortly after arrival- some by emigration, others by death- some Barbadians did remain in Liberia. Despite their initial hardships, many Barbadians would eventually incorporate into the Liberian nation, aided by commonalities of language, religion, and contempt for indigenous Africans. Some, like the Barclays, would even become leaders of the

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> *Memorial of the Semi-Centennial Anniversary of the American Colonization Society, celebrated at Washington, January 15, 1867. With Documents Concerning Liberia. Washington Colonization Society Building, 1867.* Accessed via Internet Archive. <https://archive.org/details/memorialofsem00amer>, 27.

Republic.<sup>79</sup> But, in the immediate post-war period, their futures in Liberia were less certain. The African nationality that they had been recruited to upbuild, they quickly found, was much less inclusive in its actual terms. When African American emigration resumed at war's end, the urgent need for population that had motivated the Barbadian venture dissipated. And with it, so too did any pretext of building up an African nationality. With interest renewed in America, the Society and Liberia returned to their original project of building up an African American nationality.

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<sup>79</sup> For more on Barbadians in Liberia, see Banton, *More Auspicious Shores*, Chapter 5.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **For a “Free-er” Freedom: The Postwar Emigration Surge**

On April 9, 1865, Confederate general Robert E. Lee, his army besieged by Union forces and his men suffering for want of food and provisions, dispatched a note to Union General Ulysses S. Grant. After four years of battle and bloodshed, Lee understood that the end had finally come. “Dressed in full uniform” yet wearing “an impossible face”, Lee sat across the table from Grant in the front parlor of Wilmer McLean’s home in Appomattox Court House, Virginia, to sign the terms of surrender.<sup>1</sup> The war that had divided a nation and claimed the lives of over 600,000 of its men was officially over.

When news of Lee’s surrender was published the following day, the Union’s allies rejoiced. In the capital, a crowd gathered outside of the White House to celebrate the northern victory. Amidst a chorus of patriotic songs and shouts of “Rally Around the Flag”, the President led the revelers in cheering Grant and the Union forces.<sup>2</sup> In Pamplin, Virginia, just miles from the Appomattox home where Lee submitted to Grant, a white flag was hoisted in the city square, signifying the surrender of the Confederate army. While this scene was devastating for white Virginians who had staunchly supported the Confederacy, it sparked celebration among the city’s African American population.

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<sup>1</sup> Ulysses S. Grant quoted in Richard Goldstein’s *Mine Eyes Have Seen: A First-Person History of the Events that Shaped America*. (New York: Touchstone, 1997), 111.

<sup>2</sup> “Rejoicings over the Surrender.” *The New York Herald*, April 11, 1865, front page.

Viewing the raising of the flag side by side with her mistress, house servant Fannie Berry recalled the feeling of jubilation that took hold among those now freed.

Glory! Glory! yes, child the Negroes are free, an' when they knew dat dey were free dey, ... began to sing...

Mamy don't yo' cook no mo',

Yo' ar' free, yo' ar' free.

Rooster don't yo' crow no, mo',

Yo' ar' free, yo' ar' free.

Ol' hen, don't yo' lay no mo' eggs,

Yo' free, yo' free.

Sech rejoicing an' shoutin', you never he'rd in you' life.<sup>3</sup>

From this initial euphoria, however, questions about what this freedom meant – for the nation and for the freed people themselves- began to emerge. Nearly a year later, this question still had no clear answer. Before his Congressional peers, James Garfield posited in February 1865: “What is freedom? Is it a mere negation? the bare privilege of not being chained? If this is all, then freedom is a bitter mockery, a cruel delusion.”<sup>4</sup> But if more than simply not being enslaved, what rights and privileges did it include? Freedom became central to the definition of nation itself following the northern victory but, as freedom is an “essentially contested idea”, the post-war years were a period when contending factions including radical Republicans, white southerners, and freed blacks

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<sup>3</sup> *Federal Writers' Project: Slave Narrative Project, Vol. 17, Virginia, Berry-Wilson. 1936. Manuscript/Mixed Material.* <https://www.loc.gov/item/mesn170/>.

<sup>4</sup> James Garfield in Eric Foner, *The Story of American Freedom*. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998), 100.

competed to define it.<sup>5</sup> While the federal government sought to define freedom through policy and legislation, former slaves asserted freedom in less overt but no less meaningful ways. Lucy Skipwith, who had “lived a life of trouble” with her husband Armistead under slavery, now “turned loose from under a master,” found freedom in leaving him. In a more bold assertion of her new status as freed woman, Lucy wrote to her former enslaver to inform him that, “having looked over [her] mind in regard to going to Liberia,” she decided that she would not go but thanked him for his advice.<sup>6</sup>

Despite efforts to fully exercise the freedom won by a Civil War, those who had fought on the side of slavery were yet unwilling to embrace any social or political system built on equal rights. Though legally free, the formerly enslaved found their freedom tempered by the prejudice and racial violence of a scornful South. Former slave Wyatt Moore, after a year of living as a free man in the post-war South, experienced racism and discrimination as insurmountable obstacles to his freedom. In collaboration with other freed men and women in his community, Moore penned a letter to the Colonization Society in July 1866: “We the citizens of Macon have concluded that we can never be what we desire to be in this country and we determine to leave this continent for Liberia.”<sup>7</sup> Moore and his fellow citizens of Macon were not alone in their desire to leave the United States. Ironically, while expectations of freedom had squashed emigration

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<sup>5</sup> Eric Foner. “The Civil War and the Story of American Freedom,” *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies*, Vol 27, No. 1 (2001), 12. Foner admits this is an oversimplification.

<sup>6</sup> Lucy Skipwith, Hopewell, AL to John Cocke, December 7, 1865. Cocke Family Papers, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, VA.

<sup>7</sup> Wyatt Moore, Macon, GA, to William McLain, Washington DC, July 13, 1866. ACS, Reel 99.

during the war years, the reality of freedom at war's end sparked a sharp rise in applications for removal.

This seeming change in emigration sentiment was enthusiastically received by the ACS and Liberia. After all, the thousands of freed men and women now seeking passage to Liberia were the same persons that they had worked so hard to recruit during the war. But as the number of emigrants landing in Liberia swelled to the thousands, Liberians began to reconsider their embrace of America's freed people. The majority of the postwar emigrants were former slaves of the plantation south who found that emancipation had not freed them from poverty nor discrimination. In spite of calls for "thousands and tens of thousands of those in America" to come over and help build up a nationality, the freed men and women who heeded this call at war's end were not the emigrants that Liberia had imagined in its nation-building project.<sup>8</sup> By 1868, Liberians "expressed the opinion that the emigration for the last two years had been rather a damage than a benefit" to their young nation.<sup>9</sup> As agent Dennis warned, Liberia might prove a failure after all.

Despite such warnings, the ACS insisted its duty was to aid and encourage those who desired to return to their fatherland, and continued to send out emigrants by the hundreds, purchasing a new ship in 1866 to help carry out this mission. However, though nearly all post-war inquiries represented that the freedmen wishing to remove were poor, the ACS made no accommodations for this distinction. Reiterating a commitment to colonize free blacks from America, the "ACS assisted virtually all the blacks it could find

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<sup>8</sup> D.R. Fletcher, Harper, to William Coppinger, Washington, DC, March 11, 1868. ACS, Reel 161.

<sup>9</sup> Pinney Journal. November 8, 1868.



who were willing to go” in the immediate postwar years, even as Liberians protested and the new emigrants suffered.<sup>10</sup> In sending out shipload after shipload of destitute freedmen, the Society’s postwar colonization strategy amounted to little more than removal. Determining that Liberia was the only home for America’s free blacks, yet ignoring the condition of the new emigrants in Liberia and that of Liberian settlers and officials, the national Society made race the sole determinant of nation, both in America and West Africa.

In *The Long Emancipation*, Ira Berlin writes that “the Civil War changed nothing and everything.”<sup>11</sup> Though millions of enslaved men and women were legally emancipated as a result of the war, the struggle for black freedom itself was not new; the Civil War merely expanded it in scope and size. Berlin builds on a tradition begun by W.E.B. Du Bois eighty years before that emphasizes the primacy of black persons, free and enslaved, in the struggle for black freedom and in the subsequent battles over what that freedom meant. In a story told largely through freedpeople’s own words, Leon Litwack illuminates how freed men and women defined freedom as they moved away from the plantations of their former enslavers, asserted their rights to control their own labor, withdrew from white churches to worship in their own, and thronged schoolhouses that had barely just been built. Some historians have followed this thread to Liberia. Upholding kin networks as essential to black conceptions of freedom, Steven Hahn

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<sup>10</sup> Cohen.

<sup>11</sup> Ira Berlin. *The Long Emancipation: The Demise of Slavery in the United States*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 158.

asserts that the quest to create or reconstitute families and communities on a more stable foundation, away from the oversight of whites, drew some to Liberia. David Brion Davis argues that the desire for dignity and economic and political self-determination influenced decisions to emigrate across the Atlantic or at least to contemplate this option.<sup>12</sup> While Liberia figures in both Hahn's and Davis's work as part of a larger discussion on black freedom, both root their analysis in the United States, focusing primarily on conditions that spurred African Americans to emigrate. By following the thousands of freedmen and women that left for Liberia in the postwar years, this study expands the geographic boundaries of emancipation and Reconstruction, adding to a growing trend to analyze the American Civil War in a transnational or global context.

More than that, it shows how freedpeople's efforts to realize freedom were circumscribed even after they left the United States. Without proper means of support, the postwar emigrants struggled merely to survive in Liberia. As they suffered, Liberians protested their arrival, demanding no more such emigrants be sent. Drawing on correspondence between ACS officials and letters to Liberians, reports from Society officials in Liberia, missionary accounts, correspondence from Liberia's prewar settlers and postwar emigrants, and inquiries and accounts of former slaves, this work shows how the influx of freedmen to Liberia during America's postwar period prompted a rethinking

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<sup>12</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois. *Black Reconstruction in America: An Essay Toward a History of the Part of Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880*. (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1935.) Leon Litwack. *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery*. (New York: Vantage Books, 1979.) Steven Hahn. *A Nation Under Our Feet*; David Brion Davis. *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Emancipation*.

of nation among colonizationists and Liberians who determined that more was needed than simply African American population if the Republic was to succeed.

During America's war years, emigration from the United States to Liberia stood at a virtual standstill as African Americans anticipated a great change in condition would follow. However, the ACS was less certain that the war would bring meaningful change for America's blacks and predicted that interest in Liberia would again surge when the fighting ended. In the February 1865 edition of the *African Repository*, the Society posited that "the end of the war will be but the beginning of the negro question... Instead of four or five hundred thousand free people of color, there will be millions for whose welfare the philanthropist and the Christian will be solicitous." For these colonizationists, "emigration alone" would prove the answer.<sup>13</sup>

When former slave Mack Nuckles wrote to William McLain in July 1865 expressing his confidence that he could get up a party to go to Liberia that fall, it seemed that the Society's prediction was coming true. Nuckles, a skilled brickmaker who was "esteemed among the citizens of Lynchburg," was one of the four million slaves freed by the war.<sup>14</sup> As one who "could do as well here as any of his race," Nuckles stood as evidence to prove one of the ACS's core arguments: even with freedom under the law, blacks would never be able to rise to equal status in America.<sup>15</sup> An agent for the Pennsylvania Society affirmed: "They are looking not only for the rights of suffrage but

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<sup>13</sup> AR (1865), 36.

<sup>14</sup> Mack Nuckles, Lynchburg, to McLain, Washington DC, July 10, 1865. ACS, Reel 97.

<sup>15</sup> AR (1865), 370.

for social equality- whatever may be the issue as to the former, the latter they never can have as mingled with us in the US- they can only have it as an independent nation in Africa.”<sup>16</sup> In choosing to remove from the United States, the ACS posited that Nuckles understood this. And so too did the 172 freed persons of the Lynchburg Emigration Society who joined Nuckles in emigrating to Liberia in November 1865.

Though these “first fruits” stirred excitement that the flood would soon follow, the Society’s failure to recruit any significant number for its spring expedition showed that such expectations might have been premature. Eyes of the formerly enslaved were fixed on Washington where debates over the rights of freedmen and the meaning of emancipation raged. In January 1866, Lyman Trumbull, a moderate Republican from Illinois and co-author of the Thirteenth Amendment, introduced two measures before the Senate. The first was a bill to extend the life of the Freedmen’s Bureau, a federal agency established in March 1865 to provide relief to displaced southerners and freed African Americans. Not only did the Bureau provide essentials such as food, shelter, and medical services, it also helped establish schools, oversaw labor contracts between freedmen and employers, and managed confiscated and abandoned lands. Trumbull, while careful to reiterate that the Bureau was a temporary institution, proposed that its date of expiration be lifted and its agents be granted greater authority to intervene when blacks’ rights were denied.<sup>17</sup> Trumbull’s second bill was more sweeping- an act to secure civil rights for

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<sup>16</sup> Crozer, Pennsylvania, to Coppinger, Washington, DC, January 12, 1866. ACS, Reel 98.

<sup>17</sup> “Freedmen’s Bureau Acts of 1865 and 1866,” U.S. Senate Archives; <https://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/generic/FreedmensBureau.htm>; Foner, *Short History of Reconstruction*, 110.

blacks on equal terms as whites, including the right to make and enforce contracts and that to own and sell property. It also included an enforcement clause that removed judicial oversight from state courts, giving greater meaning to its equal rights provisions. Though President Johnson, in the “most disastrous miscalculation of his political career”, would veto the Civil Rights Act (shortly after giving his veto to the Freedman’s Bureau Bill), the House overrode the President in a near unanimous decision and the Civil Rights Bill was passed into law on April 9, 1866. Declaring all persons born in the United States citizens of the same “without regard to race, color or previous condition [of servitude],” the bill granted all citizens the “full and equal benefit of all laws and proceedings for the security of person and property.”<sup>18</sup>

While freed people hailed news of the Act’s passage, the Society received it with less optimism. Having failed to raise an emigrant party to follow on the heels of the Lynchburg expedition, Coppinger expressed his frustration in a letter to a fellow colonizationist, citing passage of the Civil Rights Act as having “done more than any or all other things combined to prevent emigration this spring.”<sup>19</sup> Like other colonizationists, Coppinger argued that it mattered not what rights were afforded by legislation because race prejudice would always hinder black achievement. He blamed the “northern influence,” including the Freedman’s Bureau, teachers, and missionaries, for instilling false expectations among freed people and for actively discouraging

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<sup>18</sup> With the exception of territorial Indians. “JUDGE TRUMBULL'S BILLS.: Bill for the Impartial Protection of Civil Rights,” *Chicago Tribune*. January 11, 1866; “The Civil Rights Bill of 1866.” U.S. House of Representatives. <https://history.house.gov/Historical-Highlights/1851-1900/The-Civil-Rights-Bill-of-1866/>

<sup>19</sup> Coppinger, Washington DC, to John Latrobe, Baltimore, MD, April 23, 1866. ACS, Reel 210.

emigration. He noted with incredulity that freedmen and women were heeding advice from a “new element of population from the north, white and colored alike” to remain in the United States and wait for the good day coming.<sup>20</sup>

The campaign for equal rights gained greater legitimacy in June when the Fourteenth Amendment was submitted to the states for ratification. As an effort to strengthen the Civil Rights Act by embedding it in the U.S. Constitution, the Fourteenth Amendment granted citizenship to all persons born or naturalized in the United States and declared that no state shall “deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.” Though the amendment stopped short of black suffrage, it presented to millions of freed men and women the radical promise of equality before the law. Against the ACS’s earlier expectations that emancipation would spur emigration, by late spring 1866, Coppinger lamented that prospects of a large emigration “had vanished like the snow and ice.”<sup>21</sup>

While Republicans in Washington were busy drafting legislation that might secure freedmen’s rights, blacks in the post-emancipation South were engaged in a daily struggle to give meaning to their freedom. Though the war had brought a legal change in status, emancipation proved not a “shotgun moment of liberation,” as Jim Downs argues in *Sick from Freedom: African-American Illness and Suffering during the Civil War and Reconstruction*, but a “long, protracted process.”<sup>22</sup> The feats that freedmen and women

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<sup>20</sup> Coppinger, Washington DC, to Thomas Malcolm, Philadelphia, April 28, 1866. ACS, Reel 210.

<sup>21</sup> Coppinger, Washington DC, to J.J. Roberts, Monrovia, April 30, 1866. ACS, Reel 210.

<sup>22</sup> Downs, 13.

achieved in the immediate post-war period are indeed extraordinary when viewed against the obstacles that they confronted. Rushing to escape white authority, free blacks established independent schools, churches, benevolent societies, and political organizations virtually overnight. Indeed, scholars view this immediate post-war period as that when the modern black community gained its roots.<sup>23</sup>

But, the post-war years were also a period of great suffering for millions of former slaves. Those who had fled from slavery or crossed into Union camps during the war experienced this suffering even before the last battle was waged. As Union armies approached, enslaved men, women, and children escaped in droves to federal army camps, viewing them as sites of liberation, protection, and safety. The reality of the contraband camps, hastily constructed and inadequately resourced for the thousands that would enter them, was much starker. “The children are emaciated to the last degree and have such violent coughs and dysentery that few survive...the poor Negroes die as fast as ever.”<sup>24</sup> As this commenter observed, the camps were seedbeds for sickness and death as masses of freed people congregated where no infrastructure of care or provision yet existed. Though the Freedmen’s Bureau was established in early 1865 to help alleviate such suffering, certain of its policies acted against this end. While “able-bodied” men were recruited for labor, those deemed less than able-bodied were left without the same means of support. The Bureau frequently structured aid so that women and children received rations and medical services per their husband’s or father’s relationship with the

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<sup>23</sup> Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction*, 45.

<sup>24</sup> Leon Litwack. *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 133.

Bureau. In exchange for their labor or military service, the Bureau would provide food and shelter to a freed man's dependents. Though the standard of care varied across the South, women, children, the disabled, and the elderly not tied to a kin network confronted especial hardship as they were provided less rations and minimal provisions. A northern teacher described the sight of destitute women, children, and disabled men left in a Virginia camp after the able-bodied had been carried off as a "Government Poor House."<sup>25</sup>

This migration away from sites of enslavement only increased when the war finally ended. Free to leave the plantation and their enslaver, the black population of many southern cities exploded after the war. Though these former slaves were anxious to assert a freedom of movement and find employment beyond the plantation, newly-freed men and women often found their expectations that freedom was "free-er" in the cities disappointed. As the wage economy was unable to keep up with the influx of labor, they were pushed into the lowest-paying and least desirable positions; shanty towns emerged on the outskirts of cities to accommodate this growing population of black urban poor.<sup>26</sup>

Despite this migration to the cities, land remained central to most freed peoples' conceptions of freedom. A representative of Northern cotton manufacturers observed: "The sole ambition of the freedman at the present appears to be to become the owner of a

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<sup>25</sup> Lucy Chase before the American Freedmen's Inquiry Commission, May 10, 1863, quoted in Downs, 123. For more on the recruitment of freedmen and its impact on freedwomen and other dependent classes, see Downs, Chapter 5. For more on sickness and suffering endured by freed people in the wake of emancipation more generally, see Downs, *Sick from Freedom*. See also Leslie Schwalm, "Surviving Wartime Emancipation: African Americans and the Cost of Civil War," *Journal of Law, Medicine & Ethics*, Vol. 39 (Spring 2011), 21-27; Chandra Manning, "Working for Citizenship in Civil War Contraband Camps," *Journal of the Civil War Era*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (June 2014), pp. 172-204.

<sup>26</sup> Litwack, Chapter 6.



little piece of land, there to erect a humble home, and to dwell in peace and security at his own free will and pleasure.”<sup>27</sup> By war’s end, some freed men believed that they had already achieved this end as they had been living and working on lands confiscated from rebel forces by the federal government. However, President Johnson, as part of his lenient Reconstruction plan, ordered that all land be returned to its prewar owners, provided they pledged loyalty to the Union. Such a policy displaced thousands of ex-slaves across the South. One such freedman, Bayley Wyat, delivered a speech in Virginia before his fellow freedmen after learning that he and others were to be removed from their land. Jacob H. Vining, Superintendent of Friends' Freedmen's Schools, recorded Wyat’s address in the stereotypical representation of black speech. “Now we has orders to leave, or have our log cabins torn down over our heads. Dey say “de lands has been 'stored to de old owners, and dey must have it.” And now where shall we go? Shall we go into the streets, or into de woods, or into de ribber? We has nowhere to go! and we now wants to know what we can do?”<sup>28</sup>

Southern states had answered this question when they passed “black codes” in the aftermath of emancipation. A primary intention of these codes was to keep former slaves on the plantations and under the authority of white planters and thus they required that freed persons sign labor contracts each year. Typical was that signed by freed slaves on John Cocke’s Virginia plantation stipulating that they “in good faith agree to remain and

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<sup>27</sup> A. Warren Kelsey, quoted in Foner, *Short History of Reconstruction*, 48.

<sup>28</sup> Bayley Wyat. “A FREEDMAN'S SPEECH,” (late Dec. 1866), enclosed in S. C. Armstrong to Bvt Brig. Gen. O. Brown, 26 Jan. 1867, A-78 1867, Registered Letters Received, series 3798, VA Assistant Commissioner, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, & Abandoned Lands, Record Group 105, National Archives. Accessed via Freedmen and Southern Society Project. <http://www.freedmen.umd.edu/Wyat.html>

do service with John Cocke to be governed by the same rules and regulations for food, clothing, labor and discipline as has been customary on the place before the war” -before the war of course meaning when they were enslaved.<sup>29</sup> Refusals to enter into such contracts were subject to punishment by way of fine or imprisonment. While tasked with overseeing contracts between free laborers and employers to ensure fair treatment, the Freedman’s Bureau, ever fearful of creating a permanent class of dependents and desirous of building a free labor South, nevertheless pushed emancipated blacks to sign contracts with their former enslavers. Despite any feeling of security that registering a contract with the Bureau may have evoked, white employers, frustrated by the Bureau’s meddling, consistently flouted contract terms. Appealing to a local Bureau agent after his employer seized his crops, Richmond Body encouraged the official to conduct an investigation in his county, writing “my case is only but one of the many who have been treated like me.”<sup>30</sup>

Though freed people envisioned a freedom where they could assert ownership over land and labor, most postponed this dream in the aftermath of war, finding it necessary to enter contracts or otherwise serve as hired labor to support themselves and their families. Minnie Fulkes remained with her mother on the Virginia plantation where they both had been enslaved even after they were freed, explaining years later:

The mistress tole her she wus free, an’ she (muma)  
could cook fer her jes the same dat she would give her something to eat an’ help

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<sup>29</sup> “List of Negroes, their wages at Lower Breemo, and agreements to work.” September 4, 1865. Cocke Papers, UVA, Box 173.

<sup>30</sup> Richmond Body to Col. John B. Callis, December 6, 1866, vol. 59, pp. 47–48, Letters Received, series 112, Huntsville AL Subassistant Commissioner, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, & Abandoned Lands, Record Group 105, National Archives.

clothe us chillun, dat wus ef muma continual' to sta wid her an' work.  
You see, we didn't have nuthin an' no whar to go, um, um, um so we all, you  
know, jes took en stayed til we wus able wid God's help to pull us selves together.  
But my God it wux 'ginst our will, but, baby, couldn't help ourselves.

Confronting the desperate decision to stay on or leave the place where one had been enslaved, others chose the latter. Fulkes remembered some freed slaves who fled to the woods and “got along best they could after freedom was declared. Slaves who had mean masters would rather be there than where they lived.”<sup>31</sup>

The freed men and women who stayed on with their former enslavers, like those who abandoned plantation life despite having no means of support, did so because they had no other options. They were now legally free, but their enslavement had kept them from owning land or otherwise achieving self-sufficiency. Such dire circumstances stirred some to thoughts of emigration. With upward mobility in the US blocked, they looked to lateral mobility out of such oppressive conditions. Freedmen in Edenton, North Carolina, expressed a desire to remove to Liberia for the advantages it might provide for their children, “added to the home to be given to them.”<sup>32</sup> However, throughout the post-war South, it was the enduring prejudice and racial violence more than anything else that incited thousands of freed people to emigration at war's end.

Complaints to the Freedmen's Bureau abound with accusations of violence enacted by white southerners against freedmen. From Bienville Parish, Louisiana, Green Jones, a freed man who rented land on a Mr. Reagans' plantation, reported that he and the

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<sup>31</sup> *Federal Writers' Project: Slave Narrative Project, Vol. 17, Virginia, Berry-Wilson.* (1936), 16-17. Manuscript/Mixed Material. <https://www.loc.gov/item/mesn170/>.

<sup>32</sup> [illegible] Raulhal, Edenton, to Coppinger, Washington, DC, August 18, 1866. ACS, Reel 99.

two former slaves whom he had hired to help him cultivate his land were brutally attacked by a group of white assailants. He described the incident thus:

Two of them stood on my head and arms and they whipped me with a leather strap fastened to a stick. they must have given me about 300 lashes they cut me up badly and kicked me in the face (bruises and wounds exhibited) When they were through they asked me if I could be obedient to every little white child and could call every white man and woman Master and Mistress and raise my hat to every white man I met and never to leave home without a pass... They told me that they would not allow negroes to live off to themselves.<sup>33</sup>

Similar reports of race violence emerged throughout the South.<sup>34</sup> A freedwoman in Alabama was whipped for refusing to obey her employer's son; a freedman in Texas was beat with a cane for reporting a previous instance of abuse to a Bureau official; a fifteen-year old freed girl in Tennessee was raped repeatedly by the man to whom she was contracted; freedmen in Kentucky who undertook to farm for themselves rather than under white employers were threatened with death if they did not contract or immediately leave the county.<sup>35</sup> In bringing charges against the perpetrators of race violence and

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<sup>33</sup> Statement of Green Jones, 18 August 1866, enclosed in Capt N B Blanton to Capt A F. Hayden, August 31, 1866, B-58 1866, Letters Received, series 1756, Department of the Gulf, U.S. Army Continental Commands, Record Group 393 Pt. 1, National Archives. <http://www.freedmen.umd.edu/GJones.html>

<sup>34</sup> For more on racial violence and African Americans' responses to racial violence in the post-Civil War era, see Kidada Williams. *They Left Great Marks on Me: African American Testimonies of Racial Violence from Emancipation to World War I*. (New York: New York University Press, 2012.)

<sup>35</sup> Fanny Tipton vs. Richard Sanford, 24 March 1866, vol. 84, pp. 5–8, Docket of Trials, series 117, Huntsville AL Superintendent, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, & Abandoned Lands, Record Group 105, National Archives; Affidavit of Gabriel Hubbard, 13 May 1867, enclosed in Byron Porter to Bvt. Brig. Genl. James Oakes, 16 May 1867, P-194 1867, Registered Letters Received, series 3620, TX Assistant Commissioner, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, & Abandoned Lands, Record Group 105, National Archives; Loucy Jane Boyd vs. L. W. Willis, 24 May 1866, enclosed in D D Holman to Brevt Maj Gen O. O. Howard, 18 Sept. 1866, H-201 1866, Registered Letters Received, series 3379, TN Assistant Commissioner, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, & Abandoned Lands, Record Group 105, National Archives; Black injions to John Abraham and william perry, [late February 1867], filed as P-21 1867, Letters Received, series 15, Washington Headquarters, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, & Abandoned Lands, Record Group 105, National Archives. All available online as part of the Freedmen and Southern Society Project.

presenting their claims before the Freedman's Bureau, these former slaves asserted their rights as freed persons.

Though Congress has drafted civil rights legislation and bestowed enforcement powers with Bureau agents and federal courts that provided the formerly enslaved some recourse, some freed men and women grew increasingly disillusioned with conditions in the post-war South. As Jim Downs asserts, the nation that was focused on the economic, legal, political, and social consequences of emancipation paid very little attention to its very real human consequences. For some, these consequences were enough to turn them away from the United States.

When Wyatt Moore wrote to the ACS that he and his fellow citizens had determined to leave Macon, Georgia, concluding that they “could never be what they desired to be” in America, even in freedom, he appended “if we can get sufficient aid.” In his subsequent letters, Moore reiterated that the company - approaching 200 by August - was “very poor.”<sup>36</sup> He inquired whether the ACS might send its vessel to Savannah as the emigrants lacked the means to make it to Charleston, the Society's typical southern port of embarkation. Similar applications were made by freedmen in other Georgia counties as well as Tennessee and South Carolina. While some applicants mimicked Moore in requesting the ship stop closer to their departure cities, others asked directly if the Society

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<sup>36</sup> Wyatt Moore, Macon, to McLain, Washington, DC, July 17, 1866. ACS, Reel 99.

might provide transportation to the seaport having not the means to get there themselves.<sup>37</sup>

Unlike these and the thousands of other freedmen that dominated the ACS's postwar emigrant rolls, those who removed to Liberia before the war had been born free or emancipated for the express purpose of going to Liberia. Many of the earliest emigrants to Liberia were free blacks who had attained some level of education and owned property, and almost all were of white and African heritage. These traits were representative of the larger free black community in antebellum America.<sup>38</sup> Despite their elevated status in the United States, these early emigrants elected to remove to an unknown future in Liberia. Joseph Jenkins Roberts, who would become one of Liberia's most successful merchants before being elected Liberia's first black president (and reelected twenty years later), was one of these early emigrants. Though Roberts prospered in Petersburg, Virginia, as a partner in a successful trading firm, he boarded the Liberia-bound *Harriet* in 1829 with his mother and seven siblings. In crossing the Atlantic, Roberts found an opportunity to expand the trading venture that he and his partners had begun in America. And while not all free blacks found the same success as Roberts either in Liberia or in America, many who decided to emigrate shared his same quest for legitimacy- "a recognized position in a society that honored ancestry, business

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<sup>37</sup> E.M. Pendleton, Sparta, to McLain, Washington, DC, July 11, 1866. ACS, Reel 99.

<sup>38</sup> Howard Bodenhorn and Christopher Ruebeck. "Colourism and African—American Wealth: Evidence from the Nineteenth-Century South." *Journal of Population Economics*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (July 2007), 601.

acumen, and traditional cultural institutions.” They determined that “if they could not be citizens in the United States, they would make themselves citizens elsewhere.”<sup>39</sup>

Beginning in the 1830s, the number of freed African Americans arriving in Liberia began to outpace the number of free blacks. Before 1835, approximately one hundred slaveholders had sent at least some of their slaves to Liberia.<sup>40</sup> In the decade following, more than 1,600 enslaved persons would be manumitted and sent to Liberia.<sup>41</sup> Nat Turner’s 1831 rebellion, a “slaveholder’s nightmare come true”, compelled some manumissions as fearful enslavers came to view removal as the only way to prevent future uprisings.<sup>42</sup> Others were influenced by the rise of the abolitionist movement in America. In 1832, William Lloyd Garrison, the most famed abolitionist, published “Thoughts on African Colonization,” a scathing critique of the ACS and colonization. He accused the Society’s members of being nothing more than “supporters and apologists of Slavery” who stood “in might array with a black flag, on which are seen, in bloody letters, ‘African Colonization.’”<sup>43</sup> Though the rise of militant abolitionism had sparked a defiant response from the South, solidifying the divide between anti- and pro-slavery factions, the ACS refused to take a stance for fear of alienating one or the other swaths of

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<sup>39</sup> Andrew Wegmann, “To Fashion Ourselves Citizens: Colonization, Belonging, and the Problem of Nationhood in the Atlantic South, 1829–1859” in Marks and Stewart, eds., 41, 37.

<sup>40</sup> Eric Burin, “The Strange Career of John Cocke: Contextualizing American Colonization Society Manumissions,” *Liberian Studies Journal*, Vol. 25, Issue 2. (2000), 66.

<sup>41</sup> Bronwen Everill, “Destiny Seems to Point Me to that Country: Early Nineteenth-Century African American Migration, Emigration, and Expansion.” *Journal of Global History*, 7 (2012), 57.

<sup>42</sup> Campbell, 62.

<sup>43</sup> 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*. (Boston: Garrison and Knapf, 1832), xiv, 11, 138. Accessed via Google Books.

its support.<sup>44</sup> While this refusal further hindered free black support for their cause, slaveholding colonizationists looked to Liberia in increasing numbers.

John Cocke of Virginia had been a member of the ACS since its early years. He was a large slaveholder but denounced the institution, believing that the enslaved were capable of improvement but that they could never live in freedom alongside whites. As the debate over slavery grew more contentious during the 1830s, Cocke lost faith in the strategy of gradual abolition and began to pursue colonization with more urgency. In 1833, he manumitted Peyton Skipwith, a mason and stonecutter with an “intelligent and to some degree cultivated mind” and the one whom Cocke deemed best prepared for freedom, and his family. Despite poor reports from the Skipwiths in Liberia, Cocke remained committed to colonization, eventually purchasing land in Alabama to serve as sites of religious and educational training for future emigrants. While being “prepared” for emancipation through such training, the enslaved were to labor on Cocke’s cotton plantations until they had earned enough to purchase their freedom- Cocke estimated five to seven years. Under this scheme, only fourteen enslaved persons ever left for Liberia from Cocke’s plantations.<sup>45</sup> However, Cocke was not alone in questioning the positive good of slavery. Upon his death in 1834, Dr. Aylett Hawes of Virginia manumitted 110

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<sup>44</sup> In the wake of Garrison’s screed and increasing calls for immediate abolition, supporters of slavery began to abandon the necessary evil argument that had to that point prevailed- namely, that, though slavery was a blight on the American nation that degraded both blacks and whites, it was a necessary evil to control the black population. Rather, slavery became a “positive good” whereby the enslaved, childlike and incapable of caring for themselves, were looked after and protected by their white enslavers. This defense of slavery was less apologetic than the necessary evil argument. It was codified in the passage of new manumission laws that made removal from the manumitting state mandatory and in the appropriations of new money for colonization.

<sup>45</sup> Michael Nicholls, ed. “News from Monrovia, 1834-1846: The Letters of Peyton Skipwith to John Hartwell Cocke.” *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 85, No. 1 (January 1977), 65.



of his slaves for conveyance to Liberia; in 1836, Isaac Ross of Mississippi freed by will 300 enslaved persons on condition of removal; Thomas Potts of Virginia manumitted 59 of his slaves in 1837; by the time general emancipation came, another 450 enslavers had manumitted their slaves to go to Liberia.<sup>46</sup>

Though some of the earlier free-born settlers who had established themselves as Liberia's ruling class discriminated against these new immigrants, the manumitted slaves sent to Liberia, like the free-born emigrants before them, were a more literate group than the general black population and generally had access to greater resources. Slaves manumitted on condition of removing to Liberia often continued to receive financial support from their emancipators. Dr. James Hunter Terrell of Albemarle County, VA, emancipated his slaves per the terms of his will provided they agree to emigrate to Liberia. He further stipulated that one of his plantations be sold and its proceeds reserved for the benefit of those he manumitted. Terrell's former slaves continued to draw on his

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<sup>46</sup> Eric Burin, "Rethinking Northern White Support for the African Colonization Movement: The Pennsylvania Colonization Society as an Agent of Emancipation," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 127, No. 2 (April 2003)," 210; Alan Huffman, *Mississippi in Africa: The Saga of the Slaves of Prospect Hill Plantation and Their Legacy in Liberia Today*. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010). Ross's will was contested, delaying conveyance to Liberia until 1848. Burin, "The Strange Career," 76.

It should be noted that enslaved persons manumitted on condition of emigrating to Liberia were given little choice. State laws often mandated that freed persons leave the state within a specified period of time or face re-enslavement. If they refused the option of removing to Liberia, enslaved persons maintained their hereditary slave status and risked future separation of family through slave sale. Free blacks, especially those in the North, had a larger though still circumscribed choice. For a case study that illuminates the challenges enslaved persons confronted when given the "choice" to go to Liberia, see Ted Maris-Wolf, "To Liberia and Back" in *Family Bonds: Free Blacks and Re-Enslavement Law in Antebellum Virginia*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015.)

estate for nearly a decade after their arrival in Liberia.<sup>47</sup> In letter after letter to ACS officials, manumitted slaves requested goods be delivered and drawn against their former enslaver's accounts.

The freedmen and women who appealed to the ACS in the aftermath of war had neither the resources acquired through experiences in freedom nor the prospect of support from their former enslavers. They may have been "turned loose from under a master" but most entered freedom with little more than the clothes on their backs. The war had devastated the southern economy and the passage of black codes only further restricted economic opportunities for freed blacks. Though their motivations for removing to Liberia were not entirely different from those who emigrated before the war- to better one's condition, to escape prejudice- their material circumstances were generally poorer. When southern freed people began to express interest in leaving the United States during the early Reconstruction period, the ACS supported emigration of as many as it was able. However, despite the reports of destitution that the ACS received from both sides of the Atlantic, the Society extended no additional aid to account for any material difference in condition. The Society's post-war activities took a great toll not only on the emigrants who removed to Liberia but on the Liberian nation that they and those before them hoped to upbuild.

At the same time that interest seemed to be peaking among freed people in the South, the Society continued its decline. Support for the cause dwindled after the war as

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<sup>47</sup> "Letters from Former Slaves of Terrell Settled in Liberia, 1857-1866," Accession # 10460, -a, Special Collections Dept., University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Va.  
[https://ead.lib.virginia.edu/vivaxtf/view?docId=uva-sc/viu01228.xml#scopecontent\\_1.1](https://ead.lib.virginia.edu/vivaxtf/view?docId=uva-sc/viu01228.xml#scopecontent_1.1)

many now believed that emancipation had made colonization and the Society that promoted it obsolete. In a piece published in May 1867, the *Boston Herald* referred to the Colonization Society as “an antiquated concern in Washington” whose real object was “to support a lot of old, fossilized office-holders who get together once a year and talk about their own humanity as illustrated in the sending off, once in twelve months, of a cargo of colored men to Liberia.”<sup>48</sup> State societies had virtually ceased operations. Some who had previously supported colonization argued that emancipation had ushered in a “new era” where “those who had heretofore desired to leave our country will desire now to remain with us.” The Society continued to express frustrations that the freedmen and their agents were diverting all the nation’s philanthropic attention, just as abolitionists and equal rights proponents continued their assaults against the colonization enterprise. The ACS further blamed Yankee soldiers, federal agents, and northerners in the South more generally for speaking against the Society in efforts to secure the freedman’s labor and his vote.<sup>49</sup>

Accusations also began to swirl that the Society was “drumming through the south for a cargo” and “pushing the negroes aboard ship,” reviving the old charge that the Society simply sought to get rid of America’s blacks. Though the Society maintained that the southern freedmen’s interest in emigration was a spontaneous movement, the ACS certainly attempted to push freed persons in that direction.<sup>50</sup> The Society sent thousands

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<sup>48</sup> AR (1867), 154.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 151; Boyd, 364; Coppinger, Washington DC, to JJ F[illegible], Athens, February 24, 1868. ACS, Reel 211.

<sup>50</sup> Boyd, 377.

of tracts for distribution to its “friends” in the South including emigrants who expressed an interest in Liberia, even inquiring whether the Freedman’s Bureau might facilitate distribution; it sent its agents southward to encourage emigrants; and it enlisted prominent black men such as H.W. Erskine, a minister from Knoxville residing in Liberia, to present the case for colonization to southern black audiences.<sup>51</sup> In an attempt to refute the charge that they were just trying to get rid of them, (and to raise money after their own petitions failed), Society officials repeatedly implored southern freedmen to make their appeals directly to Congress.<sup>52</sup>

But, despite the challenges it encountered during this “new era”, the Society did not [or would not] abandon colonization. Its leading members continued to assert that blacks would never rise to equal status so long as they lived alongside whites. Analysis of ACS letters reveal that certain colonizationists were more sincere in their support for this argument, but, notwithstanding varied motivations, the Society exerted significant efforts to raise funds in the postwar period. Its agents attempted to solicit donations during visits to the South and pleaded for contributions in its monthly journal. However, seeing only a paltry bump in individual giving, the ACS determined once again to solicit government aid, both at the state and national level. Petitions to ten state legislatures resulted in but one positive response: New Jersey agreed to grant \$1,000 for three years to the Society’s state auxiliary to aid colonization.<sup>53</sup> Though the Society did not expect any significant

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<sup>51</sup> Coppinger, Washington DC, to John Latrobe, Baltimore, April 23, 1866; Coppinger to H.W. Erskine, Knoxville, August 17, 1866; Coppinger to GW Samson, Columbia College, April 23, 1866, ACS, Reel 210.

<sup>52</sup> Coppinger, Washington DC, to Phillip Monroe, Columbus, February 19 and 27, 1868; Coppinger to Seabon Ashley, Marion, February 27, 1868, ACS, Reel 211.

<sup>53</sup> Boyd, 371.

support from the federal government, they submitted an appeal in hopes that it might at least bring increased attention to their cause.<sup>54</sup> Their request for a \$50,000 appropriation "for the purpose of aiding the American Colonization Society by furnishing conveyance and support to such parties as may desire to emigrate to the Republic of Liberia" was unsurprisingly voted down. Its reception in the House of Representatives made it clear that federal support for colonization had indeed died with the war. According to a Representative from Pennsylvania, it was now nothing more than "a chimerical experiment."<sup>55</sup>

The Society admitted that its great need was money, yet it failed to secure any significant contributions. This failure did not divert the Society from its mission to colonize free blacks of America in Liberia. Rather, the Society purchased a ship in September 1866 to accommodate the swelling demand, pushing expenditures that year to exceed receipts by more than \$25,000. This new vessel, the *Golconda*, set sail from Charleston on November 21, 1866, carrying 600 emigrants who were, "with but few exceptions of the class known as freedmen."<sup>56</sup>

The majority of these emigrants hailed from Macon, Georgia, Newbury, South Carolina, and Knoxville, Tennessee. Seventy-eight reported their occupation as farmer, 33 as laborer, and another 70 were recorded as practitioners of some skilled occupation. The ACS emphasized that this was a pious and intelligent party, a "first rate company of

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<sup>54</sup> Coppinger, Washington DC, to S.H. Huntington, Washington DC, February 23, 1868. ACS, Reel 211.

<sup>55</sup> Boyd, 373.

<sup>56</sup> AR (1867), 38-39.

people.”<sup>57</sup> However, it made no mention of the impoverished condition of the emigrants, though letters of application had certainly made this fact known to Society officials. The representative for the Newbury company wrote that most of the 130 that he had enlisted by August were very poor and would be unable, on account of a short crop season, to pay for more than travel to Savannah. In a follow-up letter, penned just weeks later, he reiterated that his party was anxious to go as they were all poor and desirous of bettering their condition. Though the Society was aware of the destitution of the emigrants that it now prepared to send, it made no additional provision for their support. In fact, it acknowledged that it was more expensive to colonize freedmen but expended only \$40,000 on the expedition - \$65 per emigrant or \$35 less than typically allotted per emigrant. The Society seemed to anticipate that objections would be raised against these new emigrants in Liberia. McLain attempted to absolve the Society of any blame when he reported that such “gentlemen” as H.W. Erskine and Reverend John Seys, recently appointed Consul General to Liberia, were on board the *Golconda*. These men had “fair opportunity of judging the character of emigrants and each of them spoke approvingly of them as promising well for themselves and Liberia.”<sup>58</sup>

McLain’s suspicion turned out to be correct. Months after the *Golconda* landed just over 50 of its emigrants at Cape Palmas, Dempsey Fletcher, physician and ACS agent at Cape Palmas, wrote to James Hall, President of the Maryland State Colonization Society: “Certainly there has never been an expedition of emigrants so bare and destitute

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<sup>57</sup> AR (1866), 374.

<sup>58</sup> AR (1869), 82.

as those by the *Golconda*. Many of those who come to Palmas and I hear it so at other places had no more clothes than was on their backs and that not sufficient to protect modesty.” Finding the emigrants in such a state, Fletcher felt “compelled” to purchase cloth and have clothes made for them. Beyond this, he reported that the emigrants were ill-supplied to undertake any tasks of clearing and planting. Fletcher subsequently provided axes, hoes, and hatchets to the emigrants so that they might make a start in their new home. Impoverished as they were, the emigrants were to pay for these tools within four months “unless the Society donates otherwise.” Before repeating his request that a receptacle be built at Cape Palmas, Fletcher regretfully concluded that the condition of recently-arrived emigrants “was sad indeed but true.”<sup>59</sup>

While it was not customary for the Society to provide clothing or tools for emigrants, that they carried no provisions would have been noted by Coppinger who was superintending the emigrants at Charleston.<sup>60</sup> Regardless, the Society had represented that those by the *Golconda* were “well supplied with agricultural implements, mechanical tools...and the requisites to render industry and economy sources of comfort and plenty.”<sup>61</sup> If the ACS could blame a lack of tools on the emigrants, it could not do the same for a lack of food and medicine. Both were to be provided on the passage and for six months after arrival. In a letter to Coppinger, a passenger aboard the *Golconda* described the passage across the Atlantic as “perfect misery.” Fresh provisions gave out quickly as but little had been put on board, according to William Loans. With no means

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<sup>59</sup> Dempsey Fletcher, Cape Palmas, to James Hall, Baltimore, April 12, 1867. MSCS, Reel 8.

<sup>60</sup> William McLain, Washington DC, to Daniel Liang, Careysburg, October 24, 1866. ACS, Reel 205.

<sup>61</sup> AR (1867), 39.

of washing themselves, Loans described the stench of the emigrants as “enough to breed a pestilence,” forcing him to take up quarters on the ship’s poop deck.<sup>62</sup> The many that took sick saw their illnesses prolonged by a terrible lack of medicines on board, exacerbated by crowded and poorly ventilated conditions. All combined to make “the “middle passage” more odious than delicate ones like.”<sup>63</sup>

In Liberia, the lack of provisions provoked further protest. Daniel Laing, the ACS physician at Careysburg, expressed disappointment at not receiving the medicines that he had requested. Seeing the freedmen disembark and finding insufficient medicines on board, Laing certainly fretted about their future in Liberia. The Lynchburgers who had settled in Careysburg the previous year had suffered a very large mortality, owing in part to the fact that Laing had not enough medicines to attend them and no means of procuring more.<sup>64</sup>

Dr. Snowden at Sinou, after railing against the poor conditions on board the *Golconda* and the lack of care in provisioning the ship, requested from the Society a receptacle to replace a house “rotting down” and medical instruments for the care of the emigrants. Snowden, noting that his requests might be considered “extravagant,” acknowledged that the Society’s finances were strained but justified the expense. “I honestly and truly believe that it would be true economy to grant them... would it not conduce to the interests of the Society, the health of the emigrants, and all parties concerned?” Two months later, Snowden reported back to the Society that he had been

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<sup>62</sup> William Loans, Cavalla, to William Coppinger, Washington DC, February 9, 1867. ACS, Reel 161.

<sup>63</sup> J.H. Snowden, Greenville, to William McLain, Washington DC, February 9, 1867. ACS, Reel 161.

<sup>64</sup> Daniel Laing, Careysburg, to McLain, February 8, 1867. ACS, Reel 161.



forced to amputate with a carving knife, having not received the instruments, including an amputation case, he had previously requested.<sup>65</sup>

Complaints that the provisions provided directly for emigrants were insufficient and that the impoverishment of this group was great continued against the ACS. At the same time, Henry Dennis, whom the ACS had just appointed lead agent in Liberia, expressed concern that the goods delivered per the *Golconda* would not yield any significant profit. Ordinarily, some of the support for emigrants in Liberia was to come from the sale of goods purchased by the ACS in Washington and sold by its agents in Monrovia. However, upon inspecting the *Golconda*'s cargo, Dennis- the agent responsible for overseeing sales and provisioning- informed that much of the goods delivered were of an inferior quality. Though the flour was dark and heavy, the cheeses spoilt, Dennis continued, "Mr. McLain seems to expect considerable profit on what we may sell...but I fear I shall not be able to sell much just now." Dennis further reported that some goods were not even delivered. There was a deficiency in the amount of flour and rice landed and too few hoes, hatchets, and axes. The presence of other trading vessels on the coast, selling at "fair rates", only further depressed Dennis' prospects for earning enough to adequately provide for the new emigrants.<sup>66</sup>

When the *Golconda* arrived in late 1866, Liberia had still not recovered from its "hard times." Liberians frequently noted the depreciated state of the national currency,

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<sup>65</sup> J.H. Snowden, Greenville, to William McLain, Washington DC, February 9, 1867; Snowden to McLain, May 2, 1867. ACS, Reel 161.

<sup>66</sup> H.W. Dennis, Monrovia, to James Hall, Baltimore, February 2, 1867. MSCS, Reel 8; Dennis to McLain, February 8, 1868. ACS, Reel 161.

citing its virtual worthlessness as a medium of exchange, some even indicating an interest in soliciting foreign aid to remove it from circulation. President Warner himself recommended that the Society input \$25,000 in provisions or greenbacks to stabilize the Liberian economy.<sup>67</sup> Settlers such as Maria Nelson, who had pleaded for goods from the ACS during America's war, continued their pleas for assistance. The frequency of Maria's letters during the post-war years indicates a growing desperation. In April 1867, Maria requested a lengthy list of goods before soliciting also for her granddaughter's moneys. The next month, she informed that her son was now of age and with a family in great need. Maria asked the Society to send James' part before she penned a second inquiry about her granddaughter's portion. In July, Maria was still inquiring about family members' moneys, revealing that her daughter had died on the passage to Liberia and her granddaughter in the receptacle upon arrival.<sup>68</sup>

Maria wrote from Careysburg, near where the 346 Barbadian emigrants had been settled in May 1865 and the Lynchburg emigrants in the fall of that same year. Despite Maria's reports of hard times in Careysburg, and the many letters detailing the suffering of both the Barbados and Lynchburg companies, the Society sent nearly a third of the emigrants per the *Golconda* to that place.<sup>69</sup> While the ACS [and the Liberian government] hoped that emigrants would help develop Careysburg and facilitate trade with Africans in the interior, the experience of earlier settlers indicated that such

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<sup>67</sup> James Deputie, Careysburg, to William Coppinger, Washington DC, April 16, 1867; D.B. Warner, Monrovia, to Coppinger, May 18, 1867. ACS, Reel 161.

<sup>68</sup> Maria Sims, Careysburg, to William McLain, Washington DC, March 24, 1867; Ibid, May 23, 1867; Ibid, May 26, 1867; Ibid, July 30, 1867. Maria Nelson, in her March 24 letter, wrote that she had married and her name was now Maria Sims. ACS, Reel 161.

<sup>69</sup> AR (1867), 23.

expectations were not likely to be fulfilled, at least not without a greater investment of resources. Owing to the difficulty in getting products to market for want of a road, and the high price of everything imported, Dennis wrote to McLain not long after the *Golconda* landed more emigrants at Careysburg that those settled there indeed “have a tough time of it.”<sup>70</sup>

The emigrants to Careysburg traveled as families, like those to other ACS-sponsored settlements. The ACS had always encouraged family migration as they viewed it as the best means of establishing permanent settlements and as a way to demonstrate the piety of its emigrants. Emigrants similarly understood Liberia, not as a place to sojourn, but as a place offering a better home for themselves and their families. For some, emigration was the means to reclaim control over both family and labor that had been forcibly denied them under slavery.<sup>71</sup> A glimpse of the *Golconda*’s emigrant rolls reaffirms the significance of family reunification to freed persons’ understandings of freedom; men and women traveled in near equal number, children as young as a few months traveled alongside elders as old as 100; shared last names and common points of origin further support that passengers per the *Golconda* arrived as familial units in Liberia.<sup>72</sup> To these emigrants, Liberia afforded an opportunity to rebuild families and achieve a fuller freedom. But families were especially challenged by the harsh realities of life in Liberia.

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<sup>70</sup> H.W. Dennis, Monrovia, to William McLain, Washington DC, June 1, 1867. ACS, Reel 161.

<sup>71</sup> Hahn, 322.

<sup>72</sup> AR (1867), 11-23.

In a letter to McLain, Dr. Laing, after expressing his frustration at the lack of medicines shipped with the new emigrants, bluntly described the problem posited by the ACS's post-war emigration efforts.

There is not sufficient variety of employment in Liberia to enable the communities to thrive or even keep their own. The hard outdoor labor and consequent exposure, the excessive wear and tear of the system falling mostly upon the male head of the family as it does here is sapping the life blood of our communities. And as our numbers increase, the difficulties increase and the waste of energy becomes greater, from the increased demand of the weak and the feeble who are unable to contribute to the common stock. The country is without capital; we have no manufactories and as a consequence no indoor employment for women and children. Youths from 12 years who might be earning something to help support the family go about dirty, ragged, half fed, idle.<sup>73</sup>

Some women in Liberia did find opportunities that may not have been afforded had they stayed in America. Charlotte Herring, for example, upon the death of her husband, managed to turn a small profit selling crops from her garden, comprised of but a sixteenth of an acre.<sup>74</sup> Other women served as missionaries or as teachers, some in the schools that were housed in the Society's receptacles. While some single women did emigrate to Liberia, the majority departed as members of a family unit. They came as mothers and wives, but Liberia's notoriously high mortality rate made widows of many women not long after their arrival. Some, like Mrs. Herring, managed to eke out a living; however, the abundance of letters from "poor widows" in Liberia requesting aid from the Society indicate that most struggled to get by when forced to support themselves. As Eric Foner asserts in his discussion of "the meaning of freedom" during Reconstruction, many

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<sup>73</sup> Daniel Laing, Careysburg, to William McLain, Washington DC, February 8, 1867. ACS, Reel 161.

<sup>74</sup> Edward Blyden, Monrovia, to William Coppinger, Washington DC, February 10, 1868. ACS, Reel 161.

black freedwomen withdrew from field labor in the aftermath of emancipation. Deprived of the opportunity under slavery, they chose to give greater attention to their children and domestic responsibilities. Freedmen who were now able to exert some authority over the organization of family labor often supported women's withdrawal to the household. Viewing this reorganization of labor as a central tenet of freedom, freed men and women carried it with them to Liberia.<sup>75</sup> But the harsh conditions in Liberia that contributed to its high mortality rate- an inhospitable climate, disease, a depressed economy- supplanted this vision. In its place stood the reality that Laing described: an expanding population of dependents with no means of support. Laing ominously concluded his letter, "You have an idea in America that these settlements can sustain themselves and build up without capital. This cannot be done."<sup>76</sup>

Despite this warning from Laing and the stream of letters from agents and emigrants in Liberia describing the destitution of these new emigrants and their lack of support, the Society persisted in its efforts to get up companies of freedmen. In its monthly journal, the ACS presented a much less grim picture than that painted by Liberians. The *Golconda* had made a pleasant run, landing its emigrants all in good health and spirits. Those who had removed passed through their acclimation with remarkable success, and were now eager for their friends to "join them in sharing the freedom and prosperity of that Republic."<sup>77</sup> A letter from Wyat Moore upholding Liberia

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<sup>75</sup> Litwack, Chapter 5; Hahn 170-171; Foner, *Short History of Reconstruction*, 38-39.

<sup>76</sup> Daniel Laing, Careysburg, to William McLain, Washington DC, February 8, 1867. ACS, Reel 161.

<sup>77</sup> AR (1867), 173, 190.

as the black man's home was included on the Repository's pages but absent was the one where he worried that the provisions shipped would not last the six months.<sup>78</sup>

Whether the southern freed persons who would remove to Liberia read Moore's letter in the *African Repository* is not known. Regardless, on May 30, 1867, the *Golconda* sailed again, this time with 326 emigrants on board, many departing from the same cities as those who had migrated six months prior. Not long after these emigrants disembarked in Liberia, reports of their impoverishment and suffering began to reach ACS officials in Washington. These reports echoed those penned after the *Golconda* deposited its first emigrants on Liberian soil.

The agent superintending at Bexley described a general state of destitution, detailing that the emigrants landed there had not even a change of clothing until provided by the "liberality of our good citizens." From Cape Palmas, rumors swirled that the emigrants were all in a very miserable state and that "numbers of them were going around daily begging for something to eat." In Careysburg, it was reported that the emigrants, who complained generally of having no money and nothing to eat, wished to return to the United States. Of those at Buchanan, the tending agent there wrote Coppinger that the Society's agents and the community had extended what aid they could but that the emigrants' "peculiar conditions render[ed] them objects of special and general charity." He went on to implicate the ACS in their suffering. "Ordinary assistance provided by the ACS was not sufficient to meet their case...I would say more of their

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<sup>78</sup> AR (1867), 174; Wyatt Moore, Greenville, to William Coppinger, Washington DC, April 9, 1867. ACS, Reel 161.

wretched state but as you attended them at embarkation at Charleston, you must have noticed their true condition.”<sup>79</sup>

When the ACS dispatched the *Golconda* in November 1867 with another 312 freedmen on board, complaints to the ACS intensified. Dennis, receiving yet another cargo of inferior goods condescendingly wrote to McLain “you seem to have forgotten that there are expenses of support beyond the food for emigrants.” Receptacles to house the emigrants needed to be maintained, transportation to various settlements secured, and doctors and agents employed to superintend new arrivals. Understanding that an inferior cargo would not bring means sufficient to attend all of these costs, Dennis blamed McLain and the Society for not taking more care in selecting articles that could be sold more readily. The masses were suffering, Dennis continued, and “now emigrants are coming with no means of their own and having to make a start in a new country with poverty and dissatisfaction all around them, they become discouraged. I believe the greater number of all that have come in the past three or four years would return if they could pay for passage.”<sup>80</sup> Dennis concluded his letter with a plea that no more large companies with no means be sent to Liberia.

For those freedmen that had already been settled in Liberia, those charged with their care made requests for proper means to support them. From Careysburg, Dr. Laing hoped that the ACS might provide assistance to establish a dispensatory and hospital to “avert a great deal of suffering and prevent almost necessary decay which must result

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<sup>79</sup> J.S. Smith, Buchanan, to William McLain, Washington DC, August 23, 1867; H.W. Dennis, Monrovia, to McLain, September 10, 1867; Daniel Laing, Careysburg, to McLain, September 12, 1867. ACS, Reel 161.

<sup>80</sup> Dennis to McLain, February 8, 1868. ACS, Reel 161.

without some such aid.”<sup>81</sup> From Cape Palmas, repeated appeals were made for the construction of a receptacle to house the emigrants. From Sinou, the plea was the same. Across settlements, physicians inquired after their salaries. The ACS denied each of these requests, claiming it had not the money to build receptacles and denying that the physicians were owed.<sup>82</sup>

While it ignored voices from Liberia, the ACS maintained its focus on raising monies to send out its next party of emigrants. In February 1868, it made yet another appeal to Congress for pecuniary aid to assist the 2,000 freedmen it claimed were now applying to remove to Liberia. These freedmen needed help to emigrate as they “have been barely able to procure the necessities of life for themselves and their families.”<sup>83</sup> Though Congress again rejected the ACS’ petition, it did not stop the Society from sending out nearly 500 of these freedmen in 1868.<sup>84</sup>

The 2,200 freed persons that arrived in Liberia at war’s end raised questions about what was needed to upbuild a nation and who had the authority to make that determination. Though the prewar emigrants certainly endured suffering as pioneers in a new land, their status as free blacks or manumitted slaves in America shaped an experience far different from that of the thousands of freedmen and women who would follow. The idea that all Liberia needed was [African American] population united the

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<sup>81</sup> Daniel Laing, Careysburg, to William McLain, Washington DC, January 25, 1868. ACS, Reel 161.

<sup>82</sup> McLain to various, Cape Palmas, March 15, 1869. ACS, Reel 207.

<sup>83</sup> American Colonization Society. This appeal is made by order of the Board of directors of the American colonization society. We entreat you give it your earnest consideration; and show it to some of your firnedes, and get them to help too. Two thousand freedmen and pleading for. Washington, 1868. Accessed via Library of Congress. <https://www.loc.gov/item/rbpe.23602000/>.

<sup>84</sup> AR (1868), 173-182.



ACS and Liberians before the war, but the arrival of masses of destitute emigrants at its conclusion created a rift in this vision. Though some state auxiliaries would protest the ACS's post-war strategy, the national Society, in a state of decline, continued in its mission to colonize free blacks, affirming that this meant little more than removing them from America. Witnessing the suffering of the new emigrants but lacking the means to relieve it, Liberia determined that it needed more than population to build up a nation. As Liberia began its turn inward in the postwar period, shifting its nation-building efforts to education and a greater inclusion of indigenous Africans, it would soon realize that this push for independence came too late.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **Colonization after the War: A Movement Divided**

On January 18, 1870, members of the American Colonization Society's Board of Directors gathered at the Society's Washington office on the corner of Pennsylvania Avenue and Four-and-a-Half Street to convene their 53<sup>rd</sup> annual meeting. In usual fashion, the President of the Society, Hon. John H.B. Latrobe, took his chair and welcomed those in attendance before requesting New Jersey's Rev. Craven lead the Board in an opening prayer. The ceremony continued predictably as Corresponding Secretary Coppinger read aloud the ACS's annual report and Financial Secretary McLain presented the annual statement of the Executive Committee. The meeting was then turned over to the Committee on Credentials for a report on the named delegates appointed by each state auxiliary for that year. This was a rather perfunctory task but one that was complicated in January 1870 when two sets of delegates presented themselves as legitimate representatives of the New York auxiliary. While New York's financial contributions for the preceding year had entitled it to six delegates at the annual meeting, twelve arrived to claim their seats. Six of this number represented the New York State Colonization Society (NYSCS), which had served as the official New York auxiliary for over thirty years. The other half appeared on behalf of the New York Colonization Society, a body formed in November 1869, just two months prior. Despite its infancy, the

NYCS gained legitimacy as the parent society's auxiliary when the Committee on Credentials ruled that its delegates were entitled to seats. Though an appeal to a second committee would seat also the six representatives from the NYSCS, the schism in the colonization movement was apparent.<sup>1</sup> In siding with the newly-established New York auxiliary, the parent organization made clear that the New York State Society's "notion of colonization" was no longer "in harmony with the legitimate objects of the Society."<sup>2</sup>

Nearly fifty years after its colonization project began, the Society now found itself at a crossroads. Confronting reports that depicted heavy suffering in Liberia, should the Society continue in sending out more emigrants or should its attention turn to those who had already been colonized? This was the fundamental question that now divided the Society. Despite letters from Liberians doubting whether the emigrants now sent would indeed help build up their young nation, the national society remained steadfast in its mission. "The basis of the organization of the parent society, its object and aim, is colonization of free people of color in Africa...to that end the whole efforts of the society must be directed." In this, they asserted, their "duty was plain."<sup>3</sup> Even against accusations that the Society bore responsibility for the new emigrants' suffering- that the Society was sending out more people than means enough to support them- the ACS did not stray. In ignoring voices from Liberia, the ACS reasserted an authority it had claimed since Liberia's founding, one that dictated the terms of nation-building and deemed Liberians

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<sup>1</sup> Eli Seifman. "Education or Emigration: The Schism within the African Colonization Movement, 1865-1875." *History of Education Quarterly*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Spring, 1967), 47-48; AR (1870), 66; *Statement of the New York State Colonization Society as to Its Differences with the American Colonization Society*. New York. (March 1870), 14.

<sup>2</sup> John Orcutt, New York, to William Coppinger, Washington, DC, June 29, 1868. ACS, Reel 102.

<sup>3</sup> *Statement of Differences*, 7-8.

unfit to determine their own future. This paternalitarianism- a term coined by Jeremy Levitt- was the foundation of the ACS's Liberian project and one to which they recommitted in the postwar period.

However, some colonizationists, especially those of the NYSCS, questioned the soundness of the ACS's postwar policy, giving greater credence to voices from Liberia. After sending their own Corresponding Secretary to investigate conditions in Liberia, the NYSCS determined that emigration, at least of the sort that the Society sponsored in the postwar years, was not the way to strengthen Liberia. Rather, it was the obligation of the "real friends of Africa and the African race" to consider a different policy, one that took account of the changes of the last decade.<sup>4</sup> The NYSCS maintained that America's war and the flood of freedmen that it brought had sunk Liberia into a "life struggle with poverty and ignorance." But, as they turned to education as the best means "practicable" to strengthen Liberia in the postwar period, they took for granted that Liberia's indigenous peoples would embrace a colonization-sponsored education that upheld the superiority of Western culture and traditions. Proclaiming that it must now be the Society's mission to "aid in building [Liberia] up into a state which shall become the civilizer of Africa," the NYSCS advocated education as part of a larger civilizing mission.<sup>5</sup> Guided by what Emily Conroy-Krutz calls Christian Imperialism, the NYSCS envisioned education as a means to convert thousands of Africans to Christianity and civilize them in western patterns of land use and development, trade, dress, architecture,

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<sup>4</sup> Benjamin Coates, Philadelphia, to Coppinger, January 15, 1869. ACS, Reel 104.

<sup>5</sup> New York State Colonization Society. *Circular* (New York, 1867), 3; *Statement of Differences*, 16.

and governance. Though the NYSCS understood the necessity of incorporating Liberia's indigenous peoples, the decision to place assimilation of the majority population at the core of its postwar nation-building project would hinder any efforts to build Liberia up from within.

The rift between the national society and its state auxiliary emerged alongside debates over the "Negro question" that occupied the national mind in postwar America. What was to become of the four million African Americans that the war had freed? Without land or resources, what responsibility did the nation owe for their care? Scholars have pursued various paths of inquiry to answer these questions, producing a plethora of studies on the Freedman's Bureau and freedmen's education, equal rights legislation and political participation, and white backlash and racial violence.<sup>6</sup> In an examination that focuses on the role of female reformers during the era of Radical Reconstruction, historian Carol Faulkner argues that tensions arose over "laissez-faire and interventionist approaches" to the aftermath of slavery. While the majority of the nation believed that the success of emancipation rested on the immediate self-sufficiency of the former slaves, the women in Faulkner's study pushed for greater material assistance, arguing that the federal government owed a social debt to the millions that had been held in bondage. Poverty and dependency were the result of slavery, not a characteristic of race, and thus,

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<sup>6</sup> See Eric Foner, *The Second Founding: How the Civil War and Reconstruction Remade the Constitution*. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2019); Douglas Egerton, *Wars of Reconstruction: The Brief, Violent History of America's Most Progressive Era*. (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014); Henry Louis Gates, Jr. *Stony the Road: Reconstruction, White Supremacy, and the Rise of Jim Crow*. (New York: Penguin Books, 2020.)

it was the nation's responsibility to provide aid until freed people could support themselves.<sup>7</sup> As it waged in the United States, this debate was mooted among colonizationists whose first answer to the "negro question" was removal, but, as they continued their efforts in the postwar period, sending out thousands of freedmen and women, colonizationists engaged in a similar debate over what responsibility they bore for the formerly enslaved. Just as Faulkner's female reformers viewed material aid as necessary if freedmen and women were to succeed in the reconstituted American nation, the NYSCS believed the Society owed more to the emigrants that it now sent, destitute and illiterate by condition of slavery, if the Liberian nation was indeed to endure. This study thus engages scholarship on freedmen and Reconstruction policy but shifts the focus to West Africa where colonizationists similarly divided over what duty was owed to freedmen and women and to the nation they sought to upbuild.

In addition, this study adds to the scholarship on the American Colonization Society. Historians have long debated the motivations of the American Colonization Society, citing its founders' southern origins and its membership rolls as the greatest evidence that the Society was indeed a pro-slavery organization. In most stark terms, "The ACS was a racist organization that sought only to create a racially homogenous America."<sup>8</sup> Other scholars have since pushed back on this argument, positing that certain of the ACS' actions -i.e. helping to effect manumissions and supporting recaptives- did

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<sup>7</sup> Carol Faulkner. *Women's Radical Reconstruction: The Freedmen's Aid Movement*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007.)

<sup>8</sup> William Cohen. *At Freedom's Edge: Black Mobility and the Southern White Quest for Racial Control, 1861-1915*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991.)

weaken slavery in America and that the Society was supported by men (and women) of various and sometimes conflicting motivations.<sup>9</sup> While these scholars use the Civil War as an endpoint in their examinations of the Society and colonization, this study uses it as a primary site of analysis. As the freedom of America's four million slaves had compelled questions about the society's very existence, colonizationists were forced to give greatest articulation to their mission and why it needed to endure in the wake of emancipation. In examining the split between the parent society and its New York auxiliary, this chapter demonstrates that the Society, weakened by emancipation and the possibility of equal rights for African Americans, was not a unified movement, but one fractured by different ideas about how to build up a nation and who deserved a voice in making that determination. Drawing on correspondence between and among Society officials and that of their auxiliary members, published statements and journal entries, and letters from Liberia, this study explores how the removal of thousands of freedmen at war's end and Liberia's response to this postwar emigration revealed a schism among colonizationists over what colonization actually meant that ultimately divided the movement.

On October 2, 1867, the *Golconda* arrived back in Baltimore after having carried over 300 freed men, women, and children from the coast of South Carolina to the shores of Liberia. "Small and inexpensive" repairs were immediately undertaken as the Society

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<sup>9</sup> See Eric Burin, *Slavery and the Peculiar Solution: A History of the American Colonization Society* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005) and Karen Younger. "Liberia and the Last Slave Ships." *Civil War History* 54, no. 4 (2008).

was eager that its fall expedition not be delayed.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, another 300 freed men and women, primarily from Columbus, GA, and Dover, TN, were making their way to Charleston where they would board the same ACS-owned packet bound for the west coast of Africa. Added to the number sent since fall 1865, this party would bring the ACS's postwar emigrant tally to nearly 1,500, the most sent in any same period with the exception of the early 1850s. As these emigrants prepared for embarkation, a "large number of freedmen assembled at the depot to see them." Bracing for a long ocean voyage and the uncertainty of life in Liberia, the scene was marked by a "good deal of praying, talking, and crying among squads of the emigrants and their friends."<sup>11</sup>

As these southern freed men and women huddled at the Charleston port, awaiting the arrival of the ship that would carry them to a new life, letters from Liberia about those who had recently gone began to land on the desks of Society officials. While leading members of the national Society tended to disregard reports of emigrant suffering - as demonstrated in the last chapter- the growing frequency of such letters raised doubts in the minds of some colonizationists as to the soundness of their postwar emigration policy. In particular, the New York State Colonization Society challenged the ACS's decision to send out emigrants in such large numbers, "having received information from Liberia indicating that a majority of the recent emigrants...were in a suffering condition, and were a burden rather than a benefit to the republic."<sup>12</sup> As Liberians urged that no more be

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<sup>10</sup> *AR* (1868), 67.

<sup>11</sup> "The Recent Departures for Liberia". *New York Times*, November 22, 1867. This refers to emigrants from the United States. Nearly 4,500 recaptives had been landed in Liberia in one year, 1860-1861. See Willis Boyd, "The American Colonization Society and the Slave Recaptives of 1860-1861: An Early Example of United States-African Relations." *The Journal of Negro History* 47, no. 2 (1962), 113.

<sup>12</sup> *Statement of Differences*, 14.



sent to “come and suffer and die as they have lately,” the NYSCS began to question whether the Society’s mandate should remain the same in the aftermath of a war that had wrought such radical change. Without education and any means of support, were the freedmen and women that the Society now shipped equipped to help build up a nation? While the ACS made preparations to send its next company of postwar emigrants to Liberia, the NYSCS hesitated to lend its support. Instead, it voted to send their Corresponding Secretary, Rev J.B. Pinney to Liberia to investigate Liberians’ claims.

### **Pinney’s Liberia**

John Brooks Pinney, who would become the leading figure in the charge against the ACS, was born in Baltimore, MD in 1806. A religious revival during his senior year converted him to Presbyterianism and ultimately led Pinney to become a missionary among the “great Negro nations” in Africa’s interior. In a short memorial prepared at the request of the NYSCS upon Pinney’s death in 1882, Rev J.D. Wells wrote, “From that time until his death- a period of fifty years- his heart was steadfast in its devotion to the people of that great continent.”<sup>13</sup>

Pinney’s decision to minister in Africa may have been influenced by the timing of his entrance into the Presbyterian church. At the time of his conversion, the church was just beginning to develop its foreign mission enterprise. It established its Western Foreign Missionary Society (WFMS) in 1831 for the purpose of “conveying the gospel to

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<sup>13</sup> J.D. Wells, “In Memoriam” and Rev. John Brooke Pinney, LL.D. John Brooke Pinney journals, 1868-1877. Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library. New York.

whatever parts of the Heathen, and antichristian world the providence of God may enable this Society to extend its evangelical exertions.”<sup>14</sup> To Pinney and its other communicants, the Presbyterian church presented missionizing as an essential part of its function. It was “not an optional interest” but “the obligation of the Church in her essential character and that every member of the Church is committed to this obligation.”<sup>15</sup> The WFMS selected West Africa, that “benighted and long neglected part of the globe,” as the site for its first mission and Pinney as its first missionary to this field (another Princeton-educated missionary was to accompany Pinney but died just before the date of departure.)

The WFMS supported the colonization cause, encouraging Presbyterian churches to take up collections in aid of the ACS, though their intent was to “carry the movement further” by sending out missionaries to Africa. This link between the church and the Society contributed to Pinney’s appointment as the Society’s temporary colonial agent when the post was vacated by the sudden departure of the previous agent. Though he would fill this role for only a brief period, returning to the United States in 1835, he retained his connection with the colonization cause, becoming Corresponding Secretary for the Pennsylvania Society shortly thereafter. He accepted the office of Corresponding Secretary for the New York State Colonization Society in 1848, a position he held with few interruptions until 1872.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Presbyterian Historical Society. Constitution of the Western Foreign Missionary Society, enclosed in a letter from Elisha P. Swift to Rev. Ashbel Green in Philadelphia, November 20, 1831.

<https://www.history.pcusa.org/history-online/topics-note/history-world-mission>

<sup>15</sup> James Anderson Kelso, ed. Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. Presbytery of Pittsburgh. The Centennial of the Western Foreign Missionary Society, 1831-1931 (Pittsburgh, 1931), 20.

<sup>16</sup> Wells, “In Memoriam”; Huberich, 479.

On August 5, 1868, Pinney embarked on the fifth of eight trips that he would make to the West African Republic in his lifetime. Not long after departure, Pinney opened a journal. Reporting on the purpose of his travel, he wrote:

I go to Liberia, at the request of the NYSCS to get by personal observation and inquiry a full and accurate idea of the condition of the Republic in all its material and moral interests.

More specifically, Pinney would investigate:

- 1.) What was the result of recent emigration?
  - a. How many deaths?
  - b. How many contented?
  - c. What improvements are desirable in medical care and supplies, provisions, &c &c
- 2.) Education. Schools &c

He also determined to learn more about the rights of indigenous Africans, the state of Liberia's colleges and churches, and commerce, agriculture, and manufacturing, though the latter three garner considerably less attention in Pinney's journals.<sup>17</sup>

After an Atlantic journey lasting just over one month- the average time it took to complete the ocean voyage- the *Thomas Pope* dropped anchor off the Liberian coast on September 11, 1868. Before disembarking, Pinney led his fellow passengers in a concluding prayer to tender thanks for a safe passage. He then accompanied the captain on shore where he was greeted by President Warner who "at once took [Pinney] to his home for breakfast and dinner."<sup>18</sup> From his disembarkation point in Monrovia, Pinney spent the next two months traveling throughout Liberia. Though Pinney was frequently

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<sup>17</sup> Pinney Journal, August 8, 1868.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, September 11, 1868.

aided in his travels by Krumen who plied the coast, paying them in tobacco or other goods, his journal nonetheless reveals that Liberia was often a difficult terrain to navigate. Encountering a wide creek but no bridge to cross to Careysburg, Pinney wrote that “for the first time [he] was fain to call in requisition a Krooman.” Having had to mount his shoulders to cross the water, Pinney admitted great relief that “it was soon over.”<sup>19</sup> The hot, humid weather and chronic rains also took their toll on newcomers. The country was persistently damp, a state created by the combination of rain and chronic bodily perspiration. Pinney endured the consequences of the Liberian climate, writing frequently of his agitated lumbago and his efforts to relieve it by applying a boiled African pepper mixture supplied by ACS physician, Dr. Smith.<sup>20</sup> Despite such challenges, Pinney was “determined to inform himself of all matters,” and visited “most of the people in person.”<sup>21</sup> From Monrovia, he traveled to Schieffelin, Crozierville (the Barbados settlement), Robertsport, Buchanan, and as far inland as Careysburg, approximately 47 kilometers from coastal Monrovia.<sup>22</sup> On November 13, 1868, Pinney took to his journal to write “Today I have arrived back from a visit to the Junk River & Bassa River ...this completes all the settlements of Liberia.”<sup>23</sup>

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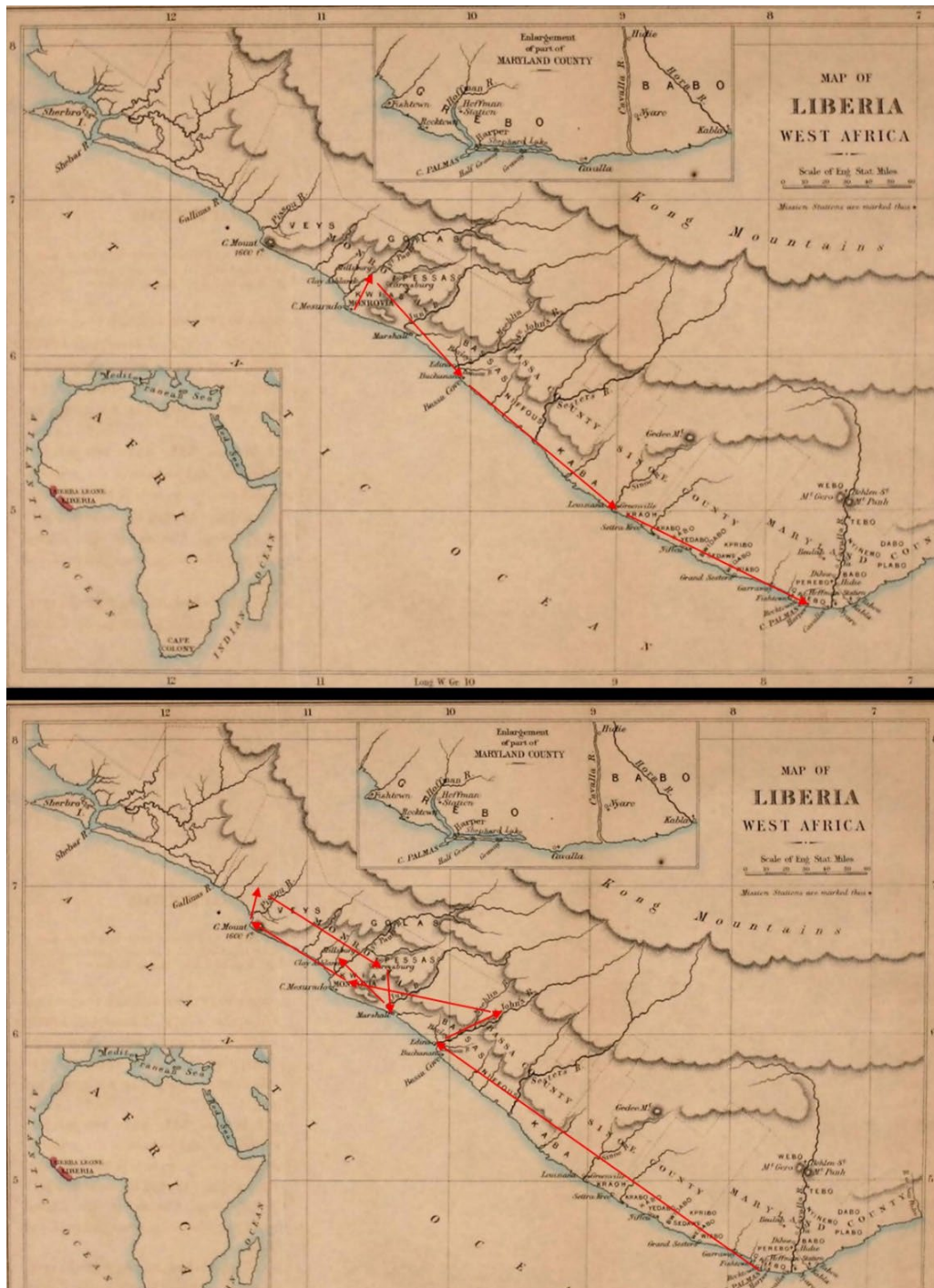
<sup>19</sup> Ibid, November 1868.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, September 18 and 21, 1868.

<sup>21</sup> Henry Dennis, Monrovia, to William Coppinger, Washington DC, November 11, 1868; Daniel Warner, Monrovia, to William Coppinger, Washington, DC, November 23, 1868. ACS, Reel 161.

<sup>22</sup> Dennis to Coppinger, November 11, 1868. ACS, Reel 161.

<sup>23</sup> Pinney Journal, September through November 1868, various dates.



**Figure 8: Map of Pinney's Travels, 1868.** The top image shows Pinney's travels down the coast while the images at bottom trace Pinney's journey back up and to the interior settlements of Careysburg and Crozierville. Map of Liberia from A Memoir of the Rev C. Colden Hoffman (1868). Route details from Pinney's journal, 1868.

Pinney's journal entries reveal a rather bleak picture of Liberia, confirming what Liberians had reported to the ACS. Though he noted some "fine farms" and buildings to "indicate prosperity", such observations are the exception in Pinney's writings. Rather, he found emigrants residing in thatched houses and many of the receptacles in a state of "desolation and decay."<sup>24</sup> Pinney also commented frequently on the poor condition in which he found many of the recent emigrants. At the Buchanan receptacle, he saw "a man lying by a sick infant only a few weeks old the mother had been buried this morning." At Cape Palmas, he noted that a "native boy" was better dressed than the "poor paupers" that were the settlers; at Bexley, he met a widow left destitute with no means to provide for five small children.<sup>25</sup>

Referring to the settlers as "poor people" and "paupers", Pinney blamed their condition in great part on the Society's failure to provide tools and adequate rations.<sup>26</sup> Of the recent emigrants to Careysburg, Pinney wrote, "No firewood now supplied, nor impediments to cut the bushes...the society had not supplied them with tools of any kind. They regretted much not to have brought their little all. Some said [they] were fooled."<sup>27</sup> As these emigrants lamented not having brought their "little all" with them, the suggestion that the Society had misled those it carried across the Atlantic was not new. In 1865, emigrant H.W. Johnson had complained to Coppinger that the goods he and other emigrants had been advised to leave behind were not readily available in Liberia contrary

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<sup>24</sup> Pinney Journal, August 11, October, 28, 1868.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, September 22; October 9 and 26, 1868.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, October 9 and 28, 1868.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, November 2, 1868.

to what an ACS agent had told them. He deepened the charge against the ACS by indicating that this ill advice was intentional and that the Society had delivered it simply in the interest of saving money. In his letter to McLain on the same subject, Johnson expressed the disappointment of the emigrants when they found themselves “stripped of everything and not able to purchase” and admonished the ACS, “If they are not able to defray the expense, and the Society will not, then, as a choice of two evils, I think they had better stay home.”<sup>28</sup>

Claims made to Pinney that the Society had misrepresented conditions in Liberia were substantiated by published reports and letters from recent returnees from Liberia.<sup>29</sup> J.J. Fitzgerald who had served as a missionary in Liberia for seven years produced one of the most scathing reports against the ACS. Published in 1866, Fitzgerald’s *Liberia as It Is* charged the Society with gross misrepresentations of the conditions in Liberia before elaborating his own observations. The mass of emigrants landed in Liberia were poor not by indolence, Fitzgerald noted, but by necessity. They were poor on arrival and then unable to accumulate any wealth as their presence created a surplus of labor that sufficiently depressed wages. He concluded not to recommend Liberia as a home for the mass of America’s blacks as to do so “would be to stain [his] hands with the blood of those whom [he] would thus deceive and betray to a premature grave.” In his opinion, the

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<sup>28</sup> H.W. Johnson, Monrovia, to William Coppinger, Washington, DC, August 10, 1865. ACS, Reel 160.

<sup>29</sup> “The Recent Emigration to Liberia-Discouraging Reports,” *New York Times*. New York. August 1867; “Discouraging Reports from Liberia,” *Chicago Tribune*. Chicago. August 3, 1867.

ACS's postwar policy of sending "ship loads of destitute freedmen to Liberia" was "but little better than wholesale murder."<sup>30</sup>

The ACS's own agent offered evidence to support emigrant claims against the Society. In letters to Secretary Coppinger, agent Dennis informed that emigrants were complaining that they had not received the tools they had been promised before they left America. Nor had they received rations that they expected such as butter, cheese, and coffee. While reporting on these accusations against the ACS, Dennis also warned of Pinney's dismay over the Society's recent efforts. "He doubts the policy of sending out such emigrants as the ship has been bringing unless the society will do more for them in supplying them with tools clothing and other necessities...He is fully satisfied in his own mind that no more such people should be sent."<sup>31</sup>

In a journal heavy with his own observations, Pinney also took note of how Liberians viewed the recent emigrations and their impact on the young Republic's nation-building efforts. The opinion rendered by three settlers at Careysburg was that the emigration of the last two years had been a burden and the destitution appalling. Delayed on his way down the St. Paul River, Pinney wrote that he met a woman he called Mrs. D who said of the last emigrants to Liberia: "a woman came out with no legs & three small children, an old couple man and woman helpless, a one legged man. They had no changes of garments and few had pots or kettles or anything. Their destitution made them a heavy

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<sup>30</sup> Rev. J.J. Fitzgerald. *Seven Years in Africa: Liberia As It Is*. (Columbus, 1866), 13-16, 18.

<sup>31</sup> H.W. Dennis, Monrovia, to William McLain, Washington, DC, November 5, 1868 and Dennis to William Coppinger, November 23, 1868. ACS, Reel 161.



burden on Liberia.”<sup>32</sup> Mrs. D’s description of the dependent condition of many of the new emigrants further implicated the ACS in their suffering as such observations could not have gone unnoticed by Society officials overseeing emigrant departures. ACS Agent Dennis confirmed that the addition of the new emigrants had done nothing to strengthen Liberia.<sup>33</sup>

The destitution that Pinney witnessed in Liberia only affirmed what Liberians had been reporting to ACS officials since the first freedmen landed on Liberian soil and that ACS officials had continued to ignore. Around the same time that Pinney was making his observations in Liberia, Secretary McLain was writing a response to Dr. Smith, the ACS agent at Bassa, who had recently informed of the wretched state of the most recent emigrants. Smith described the emigrants upon arrival in a “low and debilitated” state; severe diarrhea and measles had taken their toll on the majority of the ships’ passengers and their suffering was only exacerbated by the heavy rains that commenced once they came ashore. Annoyed by Smith’s letter and the implication that the Society was at fault for not sending enough medicines, McLain penned a condescending response to Smith: “We did think you would all be glad to see some more people coming to you, but instead, you begin to cry “No enough!” You must not be surprised if the country takes you for your word! There are plenty of people who want to go but they are poor, just like the people we have been sending- against whom such an outcry is being made by many in

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<sup>32</sup> Pinney Journal, November 6, 7, 1868.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

Liberia as a curse and a hindrance to the country.”<sup>34</sup> Though complaints to the ACS, like Smith’s, emphasized the impoverished condition of the emigrants and the lack of resources for their support, McLain refused to acknowledge any culpability. Rather, in a reassertion of paternalitarianism, McLain expected that Liberia should be grateful for the emigrants that the ACS continued to send.

Though Pinney could not overlook the destitute state in which he found many of Liberia’s new immigrants, he was also determined to investigate the state of education in Liberia. Since his first visit to Liberia, Pinney had expressed interest in expanding education there. In 1835, he requested the WFMS “send a few persons to teach schools, in the colony and native villages in its vicinity, until acclimated, and then go forth to the interior” that “great good” might be done.<sup>35</sup> In his earliest report to the ACS from Monrovia, Pinney indicated that some of the problems he encountered, including poor administration and heavy expenses, were a consequence of not having established adequate schools to train Liberia’s leaders. He cautioned then, in 1834, that so long as education was neglected in Liberia, “let no one complain we do not prosper.”<sup>36</sup> Thus, viewing education as critical to Liberia’s development, Pinney lamented the condition in which he found Liberia’s schools when he was sent by the NYSCS nearly 35 years later.

In some settlements including those where the emigrants had recently located, Pinney recorded there were no schools in operation. In others, he found schools operating

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<sup>34</sup> J.S. Smith, Buchanan, to William McLain, Washington DC, September 7, 1868. ACS, Reel 161. McLain to Smith, October 27, 1868. ACS, Reel 205.

<sup>35</sup> *AR* (1835), 152.

<sup>36</sup> Huberich, 446.

but observed that they were terribly ill-provisioned, often lacking books, desks, and other “apparatus”.<sup>37</sup> Many of the schools Pinney visited were not even in session as he found teachers were absent tending farms, recuperating from illness, or, had withdrawn from the field altogether on account of their salaries being cut or withheld. Pinney was “gratified” when he encountered Mrs. B leading students in “well-recited lessons.” Replete with books, benches, and desks, the Methodist Episcopal Mission school where Mrs. B taught was “an oasis in a desert.”<sup>38</sup> Even at Liberia College, Pinney found nobody on campus on his initial visit. While the President of the College had departed for the United States (to advocate for the College), the few students enrolled were also absent. The death of one, the relocation of another, and the feeble state of yet one more had dropped total enrollment in the College to just seven students.<sup>39</sup>

As he made his way from settlement to settlement, Pinney also recorded schools exclusively for “Congos” and others for indigenous Africans but it was not uncommon that he found either in attendance at the same schools as the settlers.<sup>40</sup> The majority of the recaptives or Congoes landed in Liberia in the decade before Pinney’s arrival had been apprenticed to settler households that were to provide instruction in “civilized life” and Christian doctrine.<sup>41</sup> While their placement in settler households was to effect this end,

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<sup>37</sup> Pinney Journal, October 14, 1868.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, October 5, 1868.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, September 10, 1868.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. See also AR (1862), 112.

<sup>41</sup> Fett, 173. Settlers who accepted indigenous youths were to enroll them in a day school for at least three months out of the year, provided one existed in that settlement. *Constitution, government and digest of the laws of Liberia, as confirmed and established by the Board of Managers of the American Colonization Society*, May 23, 1825.

mission schools were also eager to receive new pupils that they might convert to Christianity and make members of the church.

The indigenous students that Pinney encountered were similarly connected to settler households, pawned by indigenous parents who understood that benefits could accrue from knowledge of the English language and western customs. As the Liberian coast was plied by European and American traders, learning English gave the competitive advantage to indigenous Africans who could barter and exchange in the trader's tongue. During an earlier visit to Liberia, Pinney found the desire to train children in settlers' customs and language so great that parents turned them over to "act as servants, to bring wood and water, and go on errands, and perform all sorts of servile offices, for the sake of obtaining a smattering of the English tongue." Though he seemed to recognize the exploitative nature of the relationship, Pinney nonetheless viewed pawnship as a positive good to build up the Liberian nation he envisioned. "Imbued with our ideas and prepared to imitate our habits," Pinney wrote, Liberia's indigenous youth were "the germ of Africa's future improvement."<sup>42</sup> When Pinney advocated education in Liberia, he was advocating for a system that would instill in indigenous Africans western customs and traditions and forward the civilizing mission in Africa.

While Pinney lamented the current state of education in Liberia, he was encouraged by the eagerness he observed among Liberia's settlers that a better system of

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Although laws existed to govern the relationship between settlers and their wards, sources indicate that those under settler care were often exploited. See Auer, Cavalla, to Coppinger, Washington, DC, 1870 (no date); United States Department of State / Executive documents printed by order of the House of Representatives. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1868-1873.

<sup>42</sup> Pinney in *AR* (1836), 249-250.

schools be built up. After less than a month in Liberia, Pinney reported as “far as [he] could hear or learn”, public schools in Liberia were a “poor affair.”<sup>43</sup> But, while Pinney recorded the lack of supplies at most of the schools he visited (and often the absence of a teacher), the presence of such schools demonstrated an interest in education that was widespread among Liberians. At various settlements, emigrants entreated Pinney for aid in establishing schools and provisioning them. To one settler’s request, Pinney advanced the money to open a school against his own salary.<sup>44</sup> Settlers may have objected to the import of new emigrants, but, according to Pinney, they were eager for education.

### **A Revised Vision: Building a Nation through Education**

When Pinney arrived back in the United States in early 1869, he was invited to deliver his report before the national society at their annual Board of Directors meeting. From his own observations of the suffering among recent emigrants and the financial inability of the Liberian government to aid them, Pinney recommended first that the Society increase the term of support from six to twelve months and provide tools to make settlers “useful.”

In addition to material aid, Pinney presented a resolution to the Executive Committee recommending the ACS devise a plan to improve and enlarge the common schools of Liberia. In a follow-up letter to Coppinger, penned less than a week later, Pinney emphasized the significance of education to the future of Liberia, writing, “I do

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<sup>43</sup> Pinney Journal, September 24, 1868.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, October 13, 1868.

not wish to anticipate the action of your Ex Com on the resolution...if we can raise up those that are there now and educate and incorporate the native races a great work of philanthropy will be wrought. While to increase the present amount of ignorance will tend to destroy everything we have done.”<sup>45</sup> Though Pinney understood education as part of a larger civilizing mission in Liberia, he ultimately pressured the Society to shift course. While positing a new role for the Society, Pinney, at the same time, warned of Liberia’s failure if the Society failed to heed his advice.

For Pinney and those who would come to back him, education became the best means of building up Liberia in the postwar period. The war had effected changes of which the Society must now take account, they argued. First, freed men and women now had greater access to educational opportunities in the United States, opportunities that had been denied during slavery. If the Society was to remain steadfast in its emigration mission and Liberia was to attract new emigrants, it would have to extend the same inducements. Benjamin Coates, a prominent anti-slavery man and colonizationist who collaborated frequently with ex- Liberian President Roberts on the cause of education, posited in a letter to Coppinger, “Would [education here and there] not induce the most enterprising and capable from America, with capital and skilled labor, who will make valuable citizens of that country and a blessing to the world?”<sup>46</sup> Coates even recommended the removal of most of the old members of the Society in favor of more “active men” and particularly those engaged in the education of freedmen in the south.

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<sup>45</sup> J.B. Pinney, New York, to William Coppinger, Washington DC, January 25, 1869. ACS, Reel 104.

<sup>46</sup> Benjamin Coates, Philadelphia, to William Coppinger, Washington, DC, January 8, 1869. ACS, Reel 104.

To this recommendation he added, the Society “should bring intelligent and educated colored men into our councils...especially if education work is to have greater attention.”<sup>47</sup> From Liberia, President Warner echoed colonizationists such as Coates, citing the development of schools as a necessary inducement and compensation for emigrants who, in coming to Liberia, “lost the advantages of an enlarged education afforded them in their native country.”<sup>48</sup>

Moreover, the freed men and women that the Society now shipped out en masse, would continue to grow up in ignorance without aid to develop Liberia’s educational resources. While they had been denied the opportunity to attend school when enslaved, their impoverished condition now prevented them from establishing their own schools. The Liberian Legislature had passed a law during its 1868-1869 session authorizing the establishment of a system of common schools throughout Liberia, but the government did not have the funds to meaningfully implement this measure. President James Spriggs Payne (1868-1870) hoped that the “friends of African colonization in the United States” would lend aid to help Liberia build up its educational institutions, as he was “quite certain” that it would require more than the government could provide.<sup>49</sup> In fact, at the same time that Pinney was traveling through West Africa, former Liberian President Joseph Roberts was in the United States attempting to solicit aid for schools in Liberia.

Education was critical to the nation-building effort, so argued Pinney and his supporters, because it developed the necessary moral and intellectual capacities to

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid, January 12, 1869.

<sup>48</sup> Daniel Bashiel Warner, Annual Message to the Legislature, December 6, 1866. Included in Dunn, 201.

<sup>49</sup> NY Circular, 3.

maintain a free and republican government. It was this argument that had spurred support for a college in Liberia in the late 1840s. At that time, it was the Massachusetts Colonization Society (MACS) that led the charge for higher learning in Liberia, but the NYSCS, shortly thereafter, lent its support (the national society, though declaring its support for a college, deemed it “expedient to leave this matter to be matured” by those in Massachusetts.)<sup>50</sup> The college, which finally opened its doors in 1862, was intended to train Liberia’s citizens in “all the duties of public and private life.” This training included instruction in Greek, Latin, mathematics, and history, courses of study determined by the MACS and the NYSCS which together had formed the Board of Trustees of Donations.<sup>51</sup> As the fundraising arm of the College, the American-based Board managed all funds for the college and retained control over decisions of faculty and curriculum.

Pinney, though convinced by his recent visit that common schools were more urgently needed in Liberia, similarly viewed education as a critical step in the establishment and maintenance of a republican form of government. If Liberia was to endure and “carry forward the march of African civilization,” then it must have the means to educate its people “both its citizens and its aboriginal population.” Positing that “popular government can exist only upon the foundations of virtue and intelligence,”

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<sup>50</sup> Gardner Allen. *The Trustees of Donations for Education in Liberia: A Story of Philanthropic Endeavor, 1850-1923*. (Boston, 1923), 9.

<sup>51</sup> “Resolution of the Massachusetts Colonization Society, May 30, 1849, in Gardner Allen,” in Gardner Allen, 7; Thomas Livingston, “The Exportation of American Higher Education to West Africa: Liberia College 1850-1900.”

*The Journal of Negro Education*, Vol. 45, No. 3 (Summer, 1976), 255.



Pinney argued that education was necessary if Liberia was to be able to receive thousands more freedmen “without imperiling its national existence.”<sup>52</sup>

Finally, the looming reality that emigration was not sustainable convinced Pinney and his allies that Liberia’s large indigenous population must be incorporated and made “one people” with the settlers. Though the Society had managed to send out record numbers of emigrants in the immediate postwar years, distance from the war and shifting politics in America managed to slow this flood to a trickle by the end of the decade. Despite its continued efforts, the ACS recruited only enough to send out one expedition in 1869 and 1870, each of less than 200 persons.<sup>53</sup> This recruitment problem was exacerbated by a general belief that the “occupation of the colonization society was gone by reason of freedom and the franchise given to the negro.”<sup>54</sup> The Society’s growing irrelevancy in the public mind took a heavy toll on contributions; just four years after the Society had purchased its emigrant packet, the *Golconda*, the ship was sold for want of funds to maintain it. While the Pinney faction believed that a shift to education might encourage donations for a Society whose mission now seemed obsolete, they also understood the necessity of strengthening Liberia from within.

In a circular issued not long after Pinney’s return from Liberia, the NYSCS posited education of indigenous Africans as the best means to ensure Liberia’s future strength and safety. “In their midst, and all around them in their immediate neighborhood, are tens of thousands of aboriginal Africans...To bring the children of these persons into

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<sup>52</sup> NY Circular, 5.

<sup>53</sup> AR (1872), 79.

<sup>54</sup> J.K. Converse, Portland, to William McLain, Washington, DC, February 13, 1869. ACS, Reel 104.

schools with Liberian children and rear them into useful citizens of the Republic, it is believed, is the readiest method practicable at present, to strengthen the state and render it at no distant day an inviting abode to every son and daughter of Africa in other lands.”<sup>55</sup>

To rear them into useful citizens was to train them in settler culture- to teach them English, western agricultural practices, and Christian doctrine. Education, thus, while lifting former slaves from ignorance and preparing them for the task of nation-building, would also strip indigenous Africans of their heathenness and make them a part of the Liberian nation. The fundamental tenets of colonizationist discourse- civilization and Christianity- would be imparted through education to meld settler and indigenous into “one people”. Though Pinney and the NYSCS included Liberia’s indigenous peoples in their revised nation-building plan, they based this inclusion on assimilation, a fact that would forever hinder any efforts to build up Liberia from within.

### **Education or Emigration: The Split**

While Pinney waited for the national society to make a decision on the resolution to aid education in Liberia, he took action to move the Society towards this end. Just weeks after returning from his West Africa sojourn, Pinney shipped a large assortment of books and stationary to former President Warner for Liberia’s schools with instruction to sell them to those able to purchase and give to those who could not.<sup>56</sup> He encouraged the formation of a NYSCS sub-committee to gather information and make recommendations

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<sup>55</sup> J.B. Pinney, New York, to William Coppinger, Washington, DC, January 25, 1869. ACS, Reel 104.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

on how Liberia's schools might be improved.<sup>57</sup> Further, Pinney convened a meeting with several missionary societies to discuss Liberia schools, asserting "cooperation is very important if we can do anything to advantage." Shortly after this meeting, the Presbytery of New York, acknowledging that some of the original arguments in favor of colonization were no longer valid but recognizing it as a useful means to spread Christian civilization in Africa, gave its "hearty approval" to the NYSCS's proposal to support education in Liberia.<sup>58</sup> This attempt to "unite the several missionary boards into one great educational effort in Liberia" riled some members of the national society who believed Pinney was leading the society away from emigration.<sup>59</sup> This belief was confirmed shortly thereafter when the New York auxiliary presented a resolution to the ACS requesting they remove their traveling agent from the New York field.

The NYSCS justified its request by asserting the folly of keeping a double agency in New York. During the war, the NYSCS had granted permission for the ACS to solicit donations in their state as the "indisposition to emigrate" that then prevailed led them to suspend their own operations.<sup>60</sup> However, with the war concluded, the NYSCS voted to resume operations, and thus, it was impolitic to keep two agents and two offices in New York to represent the colonization cause. In his letter to Coppinger informing that such a resolution had just been passed, Pinney offered reassurance that the NYSCS still supported colonization "in the sense of transporting emigrants," but he also indicated

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<sup>57</sup> J.M. Goldberg, New York, to Coppinger, Washington, DC, January 30, 1869. ACS, Reel 104.

<sup>58</sup> Pinney, New York, to Coppinger, Washington DC, February 2, 1869. ACS, Reel 104; *Synopsis of the Effort Made in Behalf of the American Colonization Society to Get Control of the Field of the New York State Colonization Society*. (New York: S.W. Green, 1870), 13.

<sup>59</sup> John Orcutt, New York, to Coppinger, Washington, DC, February 5, 1869. ACS, Reel 104.

<sup>60</sup> *Statement of Differences*, 4.

disapproval of the ACS's recent efforts. "Nothing would make me happier than to see a thousand well-fitted emigrants sent out, provided for and selected according to the resolution passed at Washington city in January."<sup>61</sup> In this subtle accusation, Pinney implied that the Society was not sending out "well-fitted" emigrants nor providing sufficient support. He cautioned the Society to rethink its postwar policy of sending out any emigrants that would go without considering the impact on Liberia or on the emigrants themselves.

The NYSCS's resolution that the national society remove its agent prompted responses from various colonizationists. Rev. Dr. John Orcutt, the agent whom the resolution targeted, emphasized to the Executive Committee the importance of having an agent and an office in New York, "the great money depot for benevolent societies", that was in sympathy with the parent society" (his emphasis).<sup>62</sup> Dr. MacLean of the New Jersey auxiliary and Life Director of the national Society, argued for Orcutt's continued presence in New York, positing that, if left to Pinney, no monies collected in that state would be expended under the direction of the ACS, implying no monies collected would be spent on sending out more emigrants. In his letter of support, MacLean addressed Pinney's allegations that the Society was sending out unprepared emigrants directly, writing that they were of "little force, even if there be some foundation for them."

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<sup>61</sup> The resolution to which Pinney referred committed the ACS to "increased care in the selection from those applying for passage...so as to secure the most promising class of the people of color, and that those hereafter sent be provided with a more liberal outfit and followed with longer attention and support, if necessary, in their new homes, with a view to make their settlement as successful as it can possibly be made." See AR (1869), 63. Pinney, New York, to William Coppinger, Washington, DC, February 23, 1869. ACS, Reel 104.

<sup>62</sup> Orcutt to Coppinger, 1869. ACS, Reel 104.

We do not expect that the emigrants sent by our Society to Liberia will at once upon their arrival there turn out to be perfect angels. We sent them to that country that they may improve in their morals as well as in their outward estate, and we doubt not that in years to come, as in years past, they will improve, and that many of them will become valuable citizens of that Commonwealth.<sup>63</sup>

Such a defense did not admit any fault on the part of the ACS. Rather, it placed the burden of “improvement” on the emigrants with no indication of how this might be done.

Though a few colonizationists would weigh in on the side of the NYSCS (Benjamin Coates, for example, offered a middle ground solution that would leave Pinney in New York and Orcutt to establish a society in every western state), the national society ultimately ruled against Pinney and his supporters. Despite an “earnest desire to continue in full harmony with them,” the ACS informed that it could not accede to the NYSCS’s request to remove its agent from their field. In its resolution affirming this decision, the ACS informed that its object would remain the same and that their whole efforts would continue to be directed to colonization of the free people of color in Africa.<sup>64</sup> Their agent would remain indefinitely in New York, the ACS concluded.

While the parent society did not trust that the NYSCS would labor on its behalf, nor did the NYSCS believe that the ACS had any intent of changing course, even with Pinney’s report before them. In answer to the parent society’s refusal to remove their agent from the New York field, the NYSCS passed a resolution in May 1869 that fundamentally altered its mission and cemented the rift between them and the ACS.

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<sup>63</sup> MacLean, February 20, 1869. ACS, Reel 104.

<sup>64</sup> *Statement of Differences*, 7-8.

Resolved, That in view of the present condition of education in Liberia, and the want of means among her citizens to maintain public schools...until the indications of Providence suggest a different course, [this Society] will direct its efforts chiefly to aid the people of Liberia in the establishment and maintenance of schools.<sup>65</sup>

Thenceforth, in New York, two interpretations of colonization competed for support. While Pinney solicited support for education in Liberia, Orcutt canvassed for monies for the Society's fall expedition. Though the split was apparent, formal separation did not come until a few months later when, in November 1869, members of the NYSCS, allying with Orcutt, formed themselves into a new auxiliary, the New York Colonization Society (NYCS).

### **Emigration Prevails: A Second New York Society**

The parent society had expressed its disapproval of the NYSCS's actions even before Pinney delivered his report. They opposed the resolution passed by the NYSCS to send Pinney to Liberia in 1868, siding with the minority faction that had voted against it. Moses Allen, a Vice-President of the ACS and member of the New York auxiliary, charged that Pinney was being sent to "spy out the colony" so that he might report on "all that was objectionable to the American Colonization Society's proceedings." He implored Coppinger to send an official of the parent society by the same vessel to inform the Liberian government that they disapproved of Pinney's mission.<sup>66</sup> Orcutt, the ACS traveling secretary and the man who would voice the loudest protest against Pinney and

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<sup>65</sup> NY Circular, 2.

<sup>66</sup> Moses Allen, New York, to William Coppinger, Washington, DC, July 28, 1869. ACS, Reel 104.

the NYSCS, similarly advised Coppinger to write immediately to the Liberian government informing of the same, adding a postscript that the letters remain strictly confidential.<sup>67</sup> Allen and Orcutt viewed the NYSCS's resolution as an attempt to "revolutionize" the Society's policy by shifting away from emigration.<sup>68</sup> They hoped that the national society would send out its own representative to counter any influence Pinney might effect and ensure that Liberia would not spurn their postwar efforts.

In forming a new auxiliary, the NYCS had to articulate the reasons for its formation. The defecting members of the NYSCS claimed first that the proposal to establish and sustain a system of common schools in Liberia was extremely impracticable. Education was a feat better left to the Liberian government (though it had not the funds to build any significant educational infrastructure), and missionary societies who had traditionally supported schools in Liberia.<sup>69</sup> Methodists and Baptists, representing the majority of the early settlers, had indeed established missions in Liberia virtually at the point of the colony's founding. Presbyterians, Lutherans, and Episcopalians followed shortly thereafter.<sup>70</sup> A common tendency of foreign missions was to establish school alongside church at mission sites. "Schools...could Westernize young people as well as Christianize them" and help effect a "dual cultural and spiritual conversion."<sup>71</sup> Though missionary operations had retracted in Liberia in recent years in consequence of the war and its financial burden, Orcutt declared that missions were

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<sup>67</sup> John Orcutt, New York, to William Coppinger, Washington, DC, July 23, 1869. ACS, Reel 104.

<sup>68</sup> Joseph Tracy, Boston, to William Coppinger, Washington, DC., August 31, 1868. ACS, Reel 102.

<sup>69</sup> John Orcutt, New York, to Rev J.P. Durbin, July 29, 1869, included in NY Circular.

<sup>70</sup> Schick, 63.

<sup>71</sup> Joel Tishken, "Neither Anglican nor Ethiopian: Schism, Race, and Ecclesiastical Politics in the Nineteenth-Century Liberian Episcopal Church." *Journal of Africana Religions*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (2014), 71.

expending upwards of \$50,000 annually in Liberia and were not likely to do less in the future. It was not the Society's place to take the "business" of schools out of the hands of missionary societies, especially as the Society was struggling to raise monies, so argued Pinney's opponents. Rather, the Society must continue to attend to its specific work.<sup>72</sup>

Beyond this logistical argument, members of the new NYCS charged that Pinney and his supporters held views not representative of many who labored for colonization in New York nor were they in line with the views of the parent society. The NYSCS, through its late actions, had diverged from the mission of the Society's founders and those who had since joined the cause. The ACS was an "Emigrant Aid Society" and this it must remain. The difference was "one of principles and measures" and "one that admits not of compromise."<sup>73</sup>

The Civil War, and the questions that postwar emigration raised, revealed that colonizationists held fundamentally different views of the object of colonization and the duty of the colonization society. Pinney and his fellow members of the NYSCS believed that the Society had an obligation to those it removed to Liberia to aid and sustain them in their efforts to improve themselves and gain in "usefulness." It was an obligation that the Society was failing in by "smother[ing] out their endeavors to elevate themselves by throwing upon them, in their feebleness, an avalanche of ignorant persons whose faculties have all been dwarfed by slavery."<sup>74</sup> The national society was pursuing nothing more

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<sup>72</sup> Orcutt, New York, to William McLain, Washington, DC, February 16, 1869; Joseph Tracy, Boston, to William Coppinger, Washington DC, February 13, 1869. ACS, Reel 104.

<sup>73</sup> *Exposition of the Errors of the New York State Colonization Society in Its Late Attacks on the American Colonization Society*. (New York: Macdonald and Palmer, 1870), 35.

<sup>74</sup> *Statement of Differences*, 16.



than a policy of removal. In fact, in its “Statement of Differences”, the NYSCS charged that the national society had always tended towards this policy, attracting criticism early on for helping to secure slavery, and thus prompting the establishment of the New York society whose principles were “more distinctly benevolent.”<sup>75</sup>

To rebut this more serious charge, the NYCS enlisted Joseph Tracy of the Boston Society to prepare a formal response. Though not directly involved in the quarrel between New York’s competing auxiliaries, the ACS likely selected Tracy for their defense as he was a member of the Board of Trustees for Liberia College but also a supporter of Orcutt and the NYCS. After accusing Pinney of misrepresentations and “mis-recollections” in his report, Tracy worked to refute the NYSCS’s charge that removal was the parent society’s only intent, a charge that he rejected as “decidedly wrong.” Tracy argued that neither the ACS’s Constitution nor any other of its documents ever distinguished between “colonizing” and “building up a nation.” Rather, the Society “always intended that its “colonizing” should result in “building up a nation,” Tracy posited. He continued:

What is “colonizing?” What is a colony? It is not a mere unorganized multitude of men, women and children, but a regular community organized for permanence and growth. And “colonizing” includes the providing of the necessary means of permanence and healthy growth. Among these means, schools are indispensable.<sup>76</sup>

While this interpretation seemed congruous with that of the NYSCS, Tracy added an important caveat: the ACS would support schools so long as it was “most conducive to colonizing.” In other words, the ACS had the authority to expend its funds on any means

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>76</sup> Joseph Tracy, Boston, to John Orcutt, New York, September 16, 1869, in *Synopsis*.

it deemed advantageous to its emigration efforts. Thus, in refutation of Pinney's charge, Tracy posited that the parent society was not restricted by constitutional mandate from supporting education or common schools in Liberia. Rather, the Society was expressly authorized to do so if it determined that education would attract emigrants to Liberia.<sup>77</sup> The Society's recent actions- i.e. dismissing Pinney's report, refusing to remove Orcutt from the New York field, denying an appropriation for education- demonstrated that it did not deem education "most conducive" to their colonizing mission. Rather, Tracy affirmed that the Society's mission remained emigration and, more significantly, that the sole authority for determining what was needed to build up Liberia rested with the ACS.

While the NYCS voiced opposition to education plans, they had to justify their existence at a more fundamental level as disinterest in colonization mounted after emancipation. They maintained that colonization was still necessary, because, even in freedom, social barriers would continue to prevent blacks from achieving their full potential no matter what legal status they attained. "Suppose he obtains and is secured in every civil and political right that you and I enjoy, will that release him from the curse of caste that is now and will be forever crushing him down?"<sup>78</sup> The ACS answered with a resounding no. Despite the hope that emancipation and civil rights legislation had stirred, the ACS was ready to deem Reconstruction a failure almost before it began. Blacks needed a nation of their own, separate from whites, if they were ever to achieve civic and social equality. Towards this end, the Society would aid as many as desired to go for, "so

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> *AR* (1867), 7.

long as he remains here he will be a negro...he will hew our wood, and draw our water, and fight our battles for us, and not for himself.”<sup>79</sup> Despite this professed aim, however, the Society paid little attention to these elements of nation-building once it landed emigrants in Africa.

The Society increasingly came to emphasize the missionary aspect of its mission in Liberia in the postwar period because they believed this gave them the strongest case against those who continued to oppose colonization. Admitting that a large part of the colored population was bitterly opposed to the Society and African emigration generally, Benjamin Coates “did not know of any educated and respected colored man who would object to the plan of extending civilization through Africa.”<sup>80</sup> Coates, as an advocate for education in Liberia, likely envisioned that the extension of “civilization” would occur in the classroom, but the Society’s policies assumed that civilization and Christianity would spread organically across the continent simply by the presence of African Americans on West African shores. Coppinger, for example, cited recent emigrant statistics- i.e. how many of the recent emigrants were communicants of some evangelical denomination (24%), able to read (12%), or read and write (.05%) - to “prove” that colonization was the “largest civilizing and missionary operation now in progress in the world.”<sup>81</sup> While this literacy rate was higher than that of the general black population, it seems insignificant in

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<sup>79</sup> William Coppinger, Washington DC, to Arthur Benton, Philadelphia, May 8, 1869. ACS, Reel 211-212.

<sup>80</sup> Benjamin Coates, Philadelphia, to William Coppinger, Washington DC, January 15, 1869. ACS, Reel 104.

<sup>81</sup> William Coppinger, Washington DC, to Rev. Samuel Hohnan, Philadelphia, February 25, 1868. ACS, Reel 211-212.

view of the monumental task assigned by the ACS of civilizing and Christianizing 600,000 indigenous Africans.

Despite the Society's presumption or claim that African Americans would convert a heathen continent, letters from Liberia challenged that the recent emigrants would fulfill this mission. "Tis easy to pen "more settlements extending interior, spreading gospel, light, and civilization into benighted regions, Ethiopia stretching forth her hands and all that... How are the people to get along?...the means furnished are entirely inadequate to the ends required."<sup>82</sup> Without even means to "get along," it was unlikely that emigrants would give much attention to missionizing. They were more concerned with surviving acclimation and establishing homes and farms than converting their "heathen" neighbors. Some in Liberia even warned that without means of improvement, emigration might have the reverse effect: settlers would fall into heathenism. The ACS continued to uphold colonization as a grand missionary scheme to redeem Africa even as it received reports from Liberia indicating otherwise. Before departing Monrovia for his mission station in an indigenous town, James Deputie, ACS agent and Methodist missionary, regretfully wrote to Coppinger, "I am sorry to say that there is little interest by the mass of the citizens on behalf of Africa's sons."<sup>83</sup>

The ACS may have touted the missionary aspect of colonization in hopes of reviving a dying cause, but missionaries in Liberia found that the Society's commitment

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<sup>82</sup> James Hall, Mesurado Roads, to William McLain, Washington, DC, December 23, 1869. ACS, Reel 161.

<sup>83</sup> James Deputie, Monrovia, to William Coppinger, Washington, DC, May 18, 1868. ACS, Reel 161. For an analysis comparing Liberia as a colony to Liberia as a mission site, see Emily Conroy-Krutz, *Christian Imperialism: Converting the World in the Early American Republic*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015), Chapter 6.

to the redemption of Africa was not as strong as such rhetoric suggested, or at least they differed in their ideas about how conversion was to be exacted. The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) had been friendly to the ACS since its founding, believing their professed civilizing mission aligned with their own missionary efforts. In 1833, they sent John Leighton Wilson, a white Southern missionary, to West Africa on an exploring tour to locate the best site for an African mission. Wilson, like the Board, believed the settlers and the ACS-sponsored administration in Liberia would be an ally in their missionary endeavors. Colonization, Wilson wrote, had “been dignified by the appellation of a missionary enterprise, and every colonist has been represented as a missionary going forth to carry the bread of life to his perishing fellow men.”<sup>84</sup> Indeed, the establishment of the Liberian colony was viewed by Wilson and the Board as a providential sign that the time had come to bring West Africa into the light of Christianity, a vision guided by what historian Conroy-Krutz terms Christian Imperialism.

Wilson was encouraged by the friendly relationship he had established with the governor of the Maryland colony in Liberia and by the receptiveness of the “somewhat civilized” Grebo there to locate the mission at Cape Palmas. However, it was not long before Wilson realized that the colony and the mission had different understandings of their role in Liberia. Redeeming Africa was not a priority among settlers or the colonial administration, Wilson found. Perhaps more problematic for the mission was the tense relationship that had developed between the settlers and the neighboring Grebo who the

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<sup>84</sup> Conroy-Krutz, 158, 171.

mission hoped to reach. While Wilson was outraged that more attention was not paid to education and especially that indigenous children pawned to settler households were not being educated, conflict between settlers and indigneous Africans primarily arose over territory. The colonial administration claimed that the Grebo had ceded the rights to the Cape Palmas territory, a claim that the Grebo tirelessly disputed, and thus had placed the land and its peoples under colonial jurisdiction.<sup>85</sup> The policies of the administration, especially as it shifted from a strategy of incorporation to one of removal to accommodate a growing settler population, bred feelings of “disgust and hatred” among the Grebo who now viewed settlers “as their enemies and oppressors.” The Society may have presented itself as an ally in the civilizing mission, but its actions in Liberia quickly convinced Wilson that “missionaries and colonization schemes can never and will never go hand in hand.”<sup>86</sup>

When the Society renewed its emphasis on colonization’s missionary aspect in the postwar period, they did not alter their emigration strategy but continued to link civilization to emigration. In positing that African Americans would civilize a continent simply by their presence among a heathen Africa, the Society did not need to give attention to education, especially not to that of Liberia’s indigenous population. The ACS contrasted with both missionaries and colonizationists who believed “civilization” demanded they play a more active role. They maintained that expatriation of “the

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 161, 171; James Milton Turner, Monrovia, to Hamilton Fish, Washington, DC, September 7, 1875. Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, Transmitted to Congress, with the Annual Message of the President, December 6, 1875, Volume II.

<sup>86</sup> Conroy-Krutz, 171, 178.

descendants of those torn from the land” that were “here prepared for the purpose” would fulfill the civilizing mission that the ACS sponsored.<sup>87</sup>

### **Colonization’s Decline**

In his analysis of conflict in Liberia, Jeremy Levitt argues that the ACS established a system of, what he calls, paternalitarian governance that worked to shape the trajectory of Liberian history from the colony’s founding. The Society’s paternalistic and authoritarian rule relegated the black settlers to a subject role, denying them any voice in the sociopolitical order that they imposed. In fact, as Levitt points out, the ACS crafted the general laws for their colony even before its first settlement was founded, ensuring that the black settlers it sent would have no input in how it was to be governed. Fifty years later, the ACS continued to ignore settlers’ voices.

The ACS recommitted to colonization in the postwar period, against advice from those with more intimate knowledge of Liberia’s condition and its postwar needs. Pinney, who agent Dennis in Monrovia informed had “the sympathy of the people,” pressured the Society to shift its focus to education after his own experience in Liberia convinced him that sending more emigrants, unprepared and ignorant, would “undo everything [they had] done.”<sup>88</sup> His call for more common schools was only an echo of what Liberians had informed ACS officials was needed to upbuild Liberia. President Payne expressed his

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<sup>87</sup> John H.B. Latrobe, “The Christian Civilization of Africa. An Address Delivered before the American Colonization Society.” Washington City (January 16, 1877), 5.

<sup>88</sup> H.W. Dennis, Monrovia, to William McLain, Washington, DC, November 11, 1868; J.B. Pinney, New York, to William Coppinger, Washington DC, Jan. 25, 1869. ACS, Reels 161 and 104.

hope that Liberia's friends in America might contribute to building up schools in his country. Former President Roberts, in a letter to Coppinger, regretted the Society's decision to deny his request for pecuniary aid for Liberia College; he cautioned his reader that Liberia was "still an experiment" whose "success depend[ed] on the education of her people."<sup>89</sup> Former President Warner too had emphasized the significance of education to building up Liberia. In his inaugural address and subsequent annual addresses, included in the ACS's Memorial publication, Warner admitted a great need for a system of common schools in Liberia, one that would allow indigenous children in settler districts to study on the same terms as emigrants. Alexander Crummell, after repeated letters to the Society indicating the same, bluntly wrote to Secretary Coppinger, "what [Liberia's] people need is education and schools."<sup>90</sup> More specifically, as the Society learned from their own agent in Monrovia, many settlers found the NYSCS's plan to establish more schools "very desirable."<sup>91</sup>

Against these entreaties, however, the Society determined to continue its emigration efforts to the neglect of education. It was not that the Society was restricted by its constitution to colonization of the free people of color, as they had already refuted this charge, but that they deemed themselves best to determine how to build up the Liberian nation. The national society's continued commitment to emigration in the postwar period spurred the NYSCS to divorce from its parent as emigrants whom the ACS had

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<sup>89</sup> J.J. Roberts, Monrovia, to William Coppinger, Washington DC, February 9, 1867. ACS, Reel 161.

<sup>90</sup> D.B. Warner in *Memorial of the Semi-centennial Anniversary of the American Colonization Society*, (January 15, 1867), 174; Alexander Crummell, Monrovia, to William Coppinger, Washington, DC, October 30, 1867. ACS, Reel 161.

<sup>91</sup> H.W. Dennis, Monrovia, to Coppinger, Washington, DC, May 28, 1870. ACS, Reel 161.



previously settled began to protest. Pinney himself confirmed that the policy of sending freedmen and women to Liberia, unprepared and uneducated, was impeding the young Republic's nation-building efforts. Its strength as a nation would come not from more emigrants but from support and education of its people. While Pinney and the NYSCS gave credence to the words of Liberia's settlers when they revised their Liberian project, they did not extend the same to Liberia's indigenous population. Though Liberia's indigenous peoples were to be included in the nation, it was to be through an education that would strip them of their "heathen" ways and instill right virtues of civilization and Christianity.

Tensions between the ACS and its original New York auxiliary would continue for years after their official split, finding outlet in a never-ending series of pamphlets and letters. However, the inability of both parties to raise significant funds in the postwar period seriously hindered their efforts to implement either vision, slowly pushing the Society into irrelevancy even as Liberia struggled to survive. Though Liberia would continue to seek support from colonizationists in the United States for decades to come, America's Civil War had forced a realization among many Liberians that emigration could not be relied upon as the means to build up a nation. If the Liberian nation was to endure, it would have to turn inward, to the hundreds of thousands of indigenous persons in its midst. To them must fall the responsibility of building up a nation, a nation built upon colonizationist principles.

## CONCLUSION

### A Turn Inward: The Failure of the Liberian Project

Daniel Bashiel Warner, a free black emigrant from Maryland who emigrated to Liberia in 1823, stood before the Liberian legislature in December 1864 to deliver his first inaugural address. Liberia was in the midst of a “very trying crisis,” Warner began. Government finances were in such a poor state that revenues were barely sufficient to meet much more than half of the government’s expenses. While other nations had seemingly taken advantage of the lull in trade that accompanied America’s Civil War to develop their own resources, Liberia had sat idly by, Warner admonished. They continued to consume foreign provisions at the cost of Liberia’s “pecuniary independence.” Without the development of its own resources, Warner warned, Liberia would “never escape [its] ignoble dependence upon foreigners” but be “forever bound by...the primitive difficulties of a new country.”<sup>1</sup>

But the war exposed more than Liberia’s financial dependence. In the year of Warner’s inauguration, just twenty-three emigrants landed on Liberia’s shores.<sup>2</sup> Though a postwar surge would delude some into thinking that emigration would continue as it had before the war, Warner and others understood that immigration was too unstable a

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<sup>1</sup> D.B. Warner, Annual Message to the Legislature, December 6, 1864, in Dunn, 185-186.

<sup>2</sup> *Semi-Annual Memorial*, (1867), 189.

foundation on which to build up a nation. Rather, Liberia must turn inward. It must establish common schools and provide education to uplift its “downtrodden brethren, unaccustomed as they are to the duties and responsibilities of building up new states.” More critical for its survival, however, was the incorporation of the hundreds of thousands of indigenous Africans that resided within its borders and parts adjacent. Though they had been “shamefully neglected” in the past, Liberia’s indigenous peoples now had to be incorporated into the body politic and made to bear the responsibilities of nation.<sup>3</sup> Insisting that Liberia had “to work out its own destiny,” Warner urged “upon the country to look more to itself for support.”<sup>4</sup>

While colonizationists in the United States debated their post-war strategy for Liberia, Liberians too began to rethink their nation-building project as they grappled with the consequences that America’s war had wrought. No longer could they rely on the Society- the body that had sustained them for over forty years- for either aid nor emigrants. But, in shifting its gaze inward, Liberia did not fundamentally alter its national vision but sought to meld indigenous Africans into the settler mold. In assuming that “native tribes...will easily assimilate,” Liberians attempted to incorporate indigenous Africans into a nation that they had had no part in building.<sup>5</sup> Though America’s war and the independence it forced upon Liberia presented an opportunity for Liberia to pursue a more inclusive national vision, it also created an urgency for people and money that the

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<sup>3</sup> Alexander Crummell, Monrovia, to Benjamin Coates, Philadelphia, November 1868, included in letter from Coates to William Coppinger, Washington DC, January 15, 1869. ACS, Reel 104.

<sup>4</sup> Warner, 1864, in Dunn, 186.

<sup>5</sup> Warner, Annual Message to the Legislature, December 16, 1867, in Dunn, 203.

ACS had long provided but that it could no longer deliver. This urgency was only exacerbated by the poor financial state in which Liberia found itself after the war and the perpetual threat of European incursion. Understanding the need to incorporate indigenous Africans but failing to provide terms of meaningful inclusion, Liberia would reap the consequences for the next one hundred years.

Sociologist and leading scholar on how nations are formed, Andreas Wimmer, identifies political integration and national identification as “two sides of the nation-building coin.” If nation-building is to succeed, argues Wimmer, then the national government must establish ties of alliance with groups of varied ethnic backgrounds built on meaningful representation in national government. This representation is a precondition for national identification. In the wake of America’s war and amidst dwindling finances and declining emigration, Liberia’s leading men determined that Liberia must indeed strengthen ties of alliance with the thousands of indigenous men and women surrounding it. However, despite expectations that indigenous Africans would contribute to the Liberian nation and conform to the “civil compact,” Liberians’ emphasis on taxation and compulsory settler-styled education to the neglect of political representation did not create any binding ties. This lack of political integration remained a defining feature of the Liberian landscape until, as predicted by Wimmer’s nation-building theory, Liberia eventually deteriorated into its own civil war.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Andreas Wimmer. *Nation Building: Why Some Countries Come Together While Others Fall Apart*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2018), Introduction.

While the history of Liberian nation-building is commonly reduced to a “black colonialism” argument- that America’s black settlers oppressed the indigenous African peoples in a manner akin to that of European colonial regimes in Africa- Liberians did not have the military or administrative capabilities to assert such a role.<sup>7</sup> Unlike many of the powerful European nations that claimed African territories in the late nineteenth-century, Liberia was not a “leviathan thwarting its immense power on weak indigenous tribes.”<sup>8</sup> Nor were Liberia’s settlers spurred by the same motivations. It was not profit that they sought, though the promise of better economic opportunity certainly weighed in decisions to emigrate. Rather, the free and freed men and women that emigrated to Liberia sought to escape the oppressive racism that kept political and social freedoms out of reach in the United States. Though, as Christina Whyte asserts, Liberia’s settlers sought “through language, dress, housing and education to maintain a ‘rule of difference’ from the native population,” they also shared with indigenous Africans a racial identity that prevented domination based on racial difference. The settlers maintained the superiority of their own settlements but left open the possibility that indigenous Africans (and recaptives) could integrate into settler society if they adopted Christianity and other settler customs. Thus, unlike Europe’s colonizers who dominated indigenous majorities, Liberians pursued a middle ground between meaningful integration and total subjugation.

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<sup>7</sup> For examples of the black colonialism thesis, see J. Gus Liebenow, *Liberia: The Evolution of Privilege* (Cornell, 1969) and Monday Akpan, "Black Imperialism: The Americo-Liberian Rule Over the Peoples of Liberia" *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 7: 217-236.

<sup>8</sup> Levitt, 253.

Scholars generally point to the Berlin Conference and Europe's partitioning of Africa in the late nineteenth-century as the moment when Liberia began to move away from this middle ground approach and towards developing "the administrative and coercive capabilities essential for establishing state control."<sup>9</sup> It is true that the scramble for Africa emboldened both Britain and France to press their claims for Liberian territory, Britain pushing for Liberia's northwest and France for its southeast territory. But, while threats to its sovereignty in the late nineteenth century, both external and internal, prompted Liberia to pursue a more aggressive policy towards indigenous groups, this was merely the culmination of a process that began in the aftermath of America's Civil War. When emigration and foreign aid- the bedrocks of the Liberian nation- dried up during the war years, and virtually evaporated in the postwar period, Liberia was left alone to complete the nation-building project that it and the ACS had begun nearly five decades earlier. Now, in need of a population that would contribute to the maintenance of a Republican government and strengthen its numbers against domestic and foreign threats, Liberia sought to incorporate indigenous Africans into the body politic and make them "an effective part of [themselves]."<sup>10</sup> However, the determination by Liberia's leaders that the government should take a more direct role in "civilizing" indigenous Africans to bring them into the Liberian state only worked to further alienate the indigenous population. In the end, Liberia's failure to meaningfully incorporate indigenous Africans

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<sup>9</sup> Amos Sawyer, *Beyond Plunder: Toward Democratic Governance in Liberia*. (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2005), 14.

<sup>10</sup> Warner, Annual Message, December 6, 1864, in Dunn, 187.

foretold the conflict that would ensue for decades to come and the demise of a nation-building project founded on colonizationist principles.

In a letter to the ACS's Corresponding Secretary in Washington in 1868, penned during Warner's third year in office, Rev. Alexander Crummell heaped praise on Liberia's third president. Elected during America's war, when the "monetary affairs of the country were in a deplorable condition" and emigration had virtually ceased, Warner committed to developing a more independent Liberian nation, one not reliant on foreign aid or accessions for its success.<sup>11</sup> In particular, it was Warner's attention to Liberia's indigenous peoples that earned Crummell's admiration. As a prominent black nationalist whose ideology was founded on civilizationist principles, Crummell supported the idea that Africa was a benighted nation in need of redemption. In Warner, he saw a means towards this end. Warner had sparked a "revolution in public sentiment" that now saw all of Liberia's "foremost, most enlightened men best educated to come forward and demand a better treatment and a high cultivation of our aboriginal population." The "crowning acts" of Warner's administration, according to Crummell, were the visits that the President himself made to indigenous chiefs and Warner's repeated proclamations of "oneness and brotherhood" with Liberia's indigenous peoples.<sup>12</sup>

Crummell was right in his reporting that Warner directed greater national attention to Liberia's indigenous population. Indeed, barely a mention is made of Liberia's indigenous people in any of his predecessors' annual addresses beyond what

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<sup>11</sup> D. B. Warner, Monrovia, to William Coppinger, Washington DC, April 9, 1864. ACS, Reel 160.

<sup>12</sup> Alexander Crummell, Monrovia, to Benjamin Coates, Philadelphia, November 1868, included in letter from Coates to William Coppinger, Washington DC, January 15, 1869. ACS, Reel 104.

territories had been ceded or what wars had been waged.<sup>13</sup> That Warner intended to make Liberia's indigenous people more fully a part of the Liberian nation was evident in his first inaugural address. Regretting that he had not the time to elaborate on "the question of the native tribes around us," Warner continued:

I think the time has come when greater efforts should be put forth by the government to teach them our fraternal connection with them, and the nature of the feelings which should subsist between us...the State should take a more direct part in the work of civilizing the natives, and in imbuing all classes of our civilized population with a deep sense of the advantage of speedily training and incorporating them among us.<sup>14</sup>

The state needed to assert a more direct role over Liberia's indigenous peoples for both political and commercial reasons. Politically, Liberia could not achieve that great African nationality that Liberians "were daily picturing in [their] minds" if it continued to rely on scant accessions from America, Warner argued. Liberia must instead turn to the indigenous peoples in its midst, whose civilization and conversion should become priorities of the state and the nation. Assimilation would ally indigenous peoples to the Liberian state, strengthening its numbers and granting Liberia a "respectable and permanent national existence."<sup>15</sup> Properly civilized and Christianized, Liberia's indigenous population would build up the great African nationality that Warner espoused.

There were commercial reasons as well that made incorporation more imperative. Since the 1850s, when British vessels began making more regular calls in West Africa, fueled by the transition to steam power, Liberian schooners had been increasingly pushed

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<sup>13</sup> See Dunn. *Annual Messages*.

<sup>14</sup> "Inaugural Address of President Warner" in *AR* (1864), 105-106.

<sup>15</sup> Warner, Address December 16, 1867, in Dunn, 204.



out of the coastal trade. Trade suffered a further decline when war broke out in the United States, “interrupting a fairly active American trade in Liberia.” Liberian palm oil became less desirable on the foreign market as production did not keep pace with changing practices, rendering Liberian palm oil of an inferior quality and unsuitable as a lubricant.<sup>16</sup> These economic woes were only exacerbated by mismanagement of the Congo monies recently paid by the United States government and “much irregularity and looseness in keeping the public accounts.”<sup>17</sup> Confronting such a bleak financial situation, Warner urged greater development of Liberia’s own resources. In Liberia’s interior lie “immense wealth”, Warner declared. To reap the commercial advantages of Liberia’s vast but yet-undeveloped resources, Liberia must pursue a more regular intercourse with distant tribes. While opening up trade with the interior would bring economic benefit, Warner posited that such a course might also “convince them of our brotherly connection and our good-will towards them.”<sup>18</sup>

Warner’s inaugural address set the tone for the policies that were to follow. One of the first laws that the Warner administration implemented was the Port-of-Entry Act.<sup>19</sup> The Port-of-Entry Act restricted foreign vessels to trading only at designated ports to ensure collection of customs duties. The law identified six ports for lawful trade, a restriction that cut off many indigenous people who did not live near these designated

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<sup>16</sup> Syfert, 230; Davis, 238.

<sup>17</sup> Warner, 1864 Inaugural Address in *AR* (1864), 106; Leigh Gardner. “The Rise and Fall of Sterling in Liberia, 1847- 1943.” *The Economic History Review*, Vol. 67, No. 4, Special Issue: *The Renaissance of African Economic History* (November 2014), 1094.

<sup>18</sup> Warner inaugural; *AR* (1865) 106.

<sup>19</sup> The Act was passed under the Benson administration but did come into force until January 1865.

locations from the trading activities that were their livelihood.<sup>20</sup> While the law was intended to increase Liberia's revenues at a time when the nation desperately needed funds, it was also intended as a demonstration of Liberian authority against foreign traders who frequently violated Liberia's commercial laws and their indigenous trading partners.<sup>21</sup> Warner blamed the "cynical and utter disregard of the authority of Liberia" by Europeans trading on the coast for inspiring "the natives with feelings of insubordination." The Port-of-Entry Act was thus necessary, according to Warner, to "check these evils...to neutralize the baneful influence now playing upon our aboriginal population."<sup>22</sup>

Since the point of Liberia's founding, foreign powers, particularly Britain and France, had challenged its sovereignty. Historical records recount a conversation between Elijah Johnson, one of the passengers on the first Liberia-bound ship, and the commander of a British vessel. After seeing disease claim many of his fellow emigrants and battling indigenous Africans, Johnson was relieved when a British ship arrived off Cape Mesurado with an offer to send aid to the struggling party. In return, the commander proposed, the settlers would cede a small territory upon which he might hoist the British flag. To this offer, Johnson is said to have replied, "We want no flag-staff put up here that

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<sup>20</sup> The six ports were Robertsport, Monrovia, Marshall, Grand Bassa, Greenville, and Cape Palmas. See Harrison Abingbade. "The Settler-African Conflicts: The Case of the Maryland Colonists and the Grebo 1840-1900." *The Journal of Negro History*, Summer, 1981, Vol. 66, No. 2 (Summer, 1981), 100.

<sup>21</sup> British traders often argued that Liberia did not have legal claim to certain territories and thus had no legal grounds to collect customs duties. See Warner to Coppinger April 7, 1864. ACS, Reel 160; see also Ronald Davis. "The Liberian Struggle for Authority on the Kru Coast." *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (1975), 230, and Akpan, "Black Imperialism," 221.

<sup>22</sup> Warner, Annual Message, December 6, 1864, in Dunn, 183.

will cost more to get it down again than it will to whip the natives.”<sup>23</sup> Twenty years later, the threat of foreign encroachment still hung over Liberia. British and French traders continued to repudiate Liberian sovereignty by ignoring its trade laws, arguing that Liberia was nothing more than a private enterprise of the ACS. It was this infringement on its political and economic sovereignty that pushed Liberia to declare independence in 1847.

Despite its claim to independence, Liberia did not have the capability to fend off more powerful European nations. “In reality, all that resulted from Liberian independence was that Monrovia was now free to exercise authority it did not have.”<sup>24</sup> Thus, when Warner came into office in 1864, the British and the French were still circumventing Liberian laws. While Warner implemented the Port-of-Entry law as a demonstration of Liberian authority over territories that, Warner claimed, had been legitimately purchased, he also intended it as an assertion of the state’s authority over indigenous peoples. In bringing them under “rule and subordination,” the law would bind Liberia’s indigenous peoples to the state and “obviate the necessity of going to war with them.”<sup>25</sup> Consequently, the British and French would be denied a potential ally and the Liberian government would be spared the costs of waging battle. However, despite Warner’s professed intention, the law had the opposite effect. Hostility toward the state only intensified.

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<sup>23</sup> Huberich, 226; Helene Cooper. *The House at Sugar Beach: In Search of A Lost African Childhood*, Kindle ed. (New York: Simon & Shuster Paperbacks, 2008), Chapter 1.

<sup>24</sup> Davis, “Struggle for Authority,” 233.

<sup>25</sup> Warner, Annual Message, December 6, 1864, in Dunn, 183.

Tensions rose especially high on the Kru Coast, where the new legislation threatened indigenous traders who now found their activities restricted to only a few ports. These ports were far distant from some indigenous groups who produced considerably; with limited means of transporting goods to port and intergroup tensions that often prevented free intercourse, some indigenous peoples resisted. In response, the government reasserted its authority by laying an interdict on all domestic trading points under their jurisdictions.<sup>26</sup> Feeling the impact of the trade prohibition, those who resisted soon submitted to the government, and it seemed that Warner's "plan to inaugurate some system to effect a more political fraternization with [Liberia's] aboriginal population" might be achieved.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, the government's successful move against Settra Kroo, one of the largest and most significant Kru settlements, convinced other indigenous groups that accommodation or negotiation with the Liberian state might be more advantageous than maintaining a hostile posture. This became especially true as British commercial

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<sup>26</sup> In Trade Town, Grand Bassa County, Prince Boyer, an indigenous chief, presented the loudest protest against the Port of Entry law. Boyer first seized and detained one of the Senators he held responsible for the law's passage. He then, according to the Liberian government, "repeatedly and openly manifested his disloyalty to the Liberian government" by threatening war on the people of Grand Bassa county should a port of entry not be opened at one of the trading points under his control. Warner sent commissioners to Trade Town to negotiate with Prince Boyer but, finding Boyer "persistent in his obstinacy," Warner ordered munitions of war be sent to Grand Bassa to strengthen its defenses. When the government laid its interdict on trade to Trade Town, Boyer quickly capitulated to its demand to release the Senator; he implored that the interdict be removed as it could have no other effect than to "crush him." See M.B. Akpan. "Liberia: Theatre for Afro-American/ African Relations," 24; Senate Minutes, December 15 and 16, 1865. Liberian Government Archives I, 1828-1911. Accessed via Online Archives at Indiana University. <http://purl.dlib.indiana.edu/iudl/findingaids/lcp/VAB6927>; Warner, Annual Message, December 15, 1865, in Dunn, 192; "Prince Boyer" in AR (1867), 104. The government imposed a similar interdict on trade to Settra Kroo. The interdict was lifted after the inhabitants of the territory presented a proposal that ceded Settra Kroo and bound its inhabitants "politically and absolutely with the Liberian Republic." See Joseph Yannielli, "Princeton and Liberia." <https://slavery.princeton.edu/stories/princeton-and-liberia>; Warner, Annual Message, December 6, 1866, in Dunn, 199; Payne Presidential Address, December 10, 1868, in Dunn, 213.

<sup>27</sup> Warner, Annual Message, December 16, 1867, in Dunn, 204.

activity on the coast waned throughout the decade, eliminating a source of potential alliance.<sup>28</sup> However, as these ties between the government and indigenous peoples were forged more from desperation and convenience than any true national affiliation, they were tenuous at best. Twenty-five years later, Liberian President Hilary Johnson wrote that the difficulty between the government and the indigenous groups that resisted its authority was apparently settled when the interdictions were removed. “But,” he continued, “for a quarter of a century, the impatience, the restlessness, under what [was] considered unreasonable restraint, has been growing in other directions.”<sup>29</sup> Though more than a dozen village-states had entered into treaties of friendship and cooperation with the Liberian government by the time Johnson had entered the Presidency, the failure of the state to provide opportunities for meaningful political participation ensured tensions continued to brew just beneath the surface.<sup>30</sup>

In addition to the Port of Entry law, Warner believed it important that indigenous peoples be made to contribute financially to the Liberian government. “The government,” Warner explained to the members of the Liberian legislature, “being for mutual advantage, is one that calls for mutual support...like the civilized population, they should give something in return for the protection and redress which our courts always, and our armies often, are required to render them...and when they shall have been convinced that

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<sup>28</sup> Davis, “Struggle for Authority,” 239, 242. It was also true that other indigenous groups continued to resist Liberian authority. In particular, settlements at Sasstown, Picaninny Cess, and Grand Cess continued to violate Port of Entry regulations. See Davis, 239.

<sup>29</sup> Hilary Richard Wright Johnson, Annual Message to the Legislature, December 11, 1888, in Dunn, 364.

<sup>30</sup> Levitt, 125.

the civilization of which the Republic is the nucleus, must spread far and wide over the continent...I am sure they will become willing coadjutors.”<sup>31</sup>

Warner’s recommendation that indigenous peoples be made to bear the burden of nation found force in the institution of a head tax against persons who left Liberia for work outside of Liberian borders.<sup>32</sup> Such legislation would have disproportionately affected Krumen for whom work outside of Liberia was a way of life. Since the establishment of Sierra Leone in 1787, Krumen had plied the West African coast, finding opportunities to earn wages abroad as crewmen aboard foreign vessels, as laborers on plantations, or as middlemen in trading factories. From Sierra Leone to Nigeria, Krumen in the nineteenth-century “assumed almost any task for a fee.”<sup>33</sup> Though Liberia lacked the administrative resources to enforce a system of taxation against such a transitory population (though it would appoint a Commissioner of Internal Revenue in 1870 to oversee tax collection), Warner’s successor, James Payne, declared before the Liberian legislature in 1868 that a “portion of the aboriginal population have borne taxation with as much ease as civilized inhabitants.” While Payne touted this fact as “strong evidence”

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<sup>31</sup> Warner, Annual Message, December 6, 1866, in Dunn, 196. The Liberian government had served as mediator in conflicts between ethnic groups and, in some instances, deployed military forces in aid of one ethnic group against another.<sup>31</sup> However, the government also disavowed most indigenous forms of justice and called for indigenous peoples to set forth their grievances in a “proper manner.” See Abingbade, 98. Warner, Annual Message, December 1866, in Dunn, 199. President Payne (1868-1870) recommended the adoption of a plan whereby the government might “directly exert” her influence to undermine “ancient customs of superstition and cruelty.” In particular, Payne directed attention to the practice of sassywood (trial by poison ingestion) and called for a prohibition on suits for the recapture of fugitive slaves. See James Spriggs Payne, Annual Message to the Legislature, December 10, 1868, in Dunn, 214.

<sup>32</sup> Shawn Mosher. “Competing Ideals: How Commerce, Christianity, and Civilization Shaped Nationhood in Nineteenth-Century Liberia.” PhD diss. (Vanderbilt University, 2018), 150.

<sup>33</sup> Jane Martin, 405.

that indigenous peoples understood the necessity of increasing internal revenue to the upbuilding of the Liberian nation, impending conflict between the Liberian government and those targeted by such measures suggests a different understanding.<sup>34</sup>

In 1872, Joseph Roberts again was elected to the Presidency. Though he had upheld the civilization and Christianization of benighted Africa as cherished objectives during his first tenure, by the time he retook office, Roberts asserted a greater role for government in achieving this end. Like his predecessors in the postwar period, Roberts understood the necessity of incorporating Liberia's indigenous population. Indeed it lie at "the very foundation of Liberia's permanent advancement and ultimate success."<sup>35</sup> His message in 1872, however, differed from his earlier addresses in that it conveyed a sense of urgency previously lacking. To his "fellow-citizens and members of the Legislature", Roberts could not urge too strongly that measures be taken to "accelerate the elevation of the aboriginal population" and to effect their "more rapid improvement." For its part, the government should "act firmly, decisively, and in a manner distinctly to impress upon them the ability of the Government to maintain its authority."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> "An Act Creating Commissioner of Internal Revenue", Approved February 7, 1870. Acts Passed by the Legislature, Republic of Liberia During the Sessions: 1869-70. Accessed via Cornell University, Law Collections: Liberian Law Collection. <https://lawcollections.library.cornell.edu/liberian/catalog/liber:011>; Payne, Annual Message, December 10, 1868, in Dunn 218. In 1875, war broke out between Liberia and the Grebo Kingdom, a recently-established confederation of various Grebo ethnopolitical groups. Though the issue of land ownership lay at the heart of the conflict, a spark was ignited when the Kingdom unilaterally adopted a series of laws pertaining to the employment and treatment of Krumen in the Cape Palmas area in Maryland County, the majority of whom were ethnically Grebo. The regulations passed targeted foreign merchants who employed Kru laborers and thus were not a direct repudiation of government policy. However, as the Liberian government claimed ownership over Grebo lands in Maryland County, it viewed the Kingdom's actions as a serious infringement on Liberian state authority. According to historian Jeremy Levitt, "The kingdoms calculated imposition of the employment regulation elevated preexisting tensions" and "served as an operational cause of the war." See Levitt, 87.

<sup>35</sup> Joseph Jenkins Roberts, Annual Message to the Legislature, December 9, 1872, in Dunn, 241.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 242; "Inaugural Address of President Roberts," in *AR* (1872), 111.

Like Warner, Roberts viewed an alliance with indigenous peoples as critical to Liberia's defense against foreign powers. At the time of his election, Liberia was still engaged in a dispute with Great Britain over Liberia's northwest boundary (bordering the British colony of Sierra Leone). Refusing Britain's proposal that indigenous testimony be given to affirm Liberia's claim to the disputed territory, Roberts instead entered Liberia in an agreement calling for each government to appoint two commissioners to settle the dispute "on the spot" and arbitration by the United States in the case of non-settlement.<sup>37</sup> Per Liberian statute, any Africans residing within Liberian borders fell under Liberian authority. Thus, settlement of the boundary dispute (by third parties) would determine who was a part of the Liberian nation. Though Roberts hoped that claims to territory and incorporation of Liberia's indigenous peoples would strengthen the Liberian state, the silencing of indigenous voices in the drawing of political boundaries did not evoke feelings of national identity. To the contrary, when the dispute over the northwest territory rose again following the Berlin Conference in the late nineteenth-century, Liberia would not have the support of indigenous allies. By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, Liberia had been forced to cede nearly 44% of its territory.<sup>38</sup>

The need to incorporate indigenous Africans was made more urgent by the acquisition of a British loan secured by President Edward Roye in 1871. While financial woes had plagued Liberia nearly since its founding, the direness of Liberia's economic situation only worsened during America's war, plummeting yet further in the postwar

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<sup>37</sup> James Skivring Smith, Annual Message to the Legislature, December 4, 1871, in Dunn, 227-28.

<sup>38</sup> United States Department of State / Executive documents printed by order of the House of Representatives. 1910. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1910); Shellum, 4.



period. By the 1860s, the Liberian government had begun issuing unbacked paper currency to meet its expenses. Merchants accepted the bills in exchange for lesser goods only to sell them back to the government at par in the form of customs duties.<sup>39</sup> In letters from Liberia during this period, requests for greenbacks abound as Liberian currency depreciated virtually to worthlessness.<sup>40</sup> Exacerbating the problem was a growing national debt, brought on by an inadequate revenue system (supported primarily by customs duties and the sale of public lands) and a failure to develop an export economy. Against warnings of fellow Liberians, President Roye negotiated a £100,000 loan with a British bank.<sup>41</sup> The terms of the loan discounted the amount deposited into the Liberian treasury by 30% and a requirement of advanced interest payments shrunk the amount Liberia actually received even further.<sup>42</sup> Though the loan would be Roye's downfall- he was accused of embezzlement and deposed in 1871- Liberia suffered under the weight of this debt for years to come, eventually incurring new debts to pay it off, a pattern that continued throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Inheriting such a poor state of financial affairs, Roberts viewed alliance with indigenous Africans all the more imperative. Conflict was costly for the government and a chronic impediment to Liberia's development, eating up funds that had been earmarked for agriculture, construction, and trade.<sup>43</sup> When Roberts spoke of the necessity of

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<sup>39</sup> Leigh Gardner, 1095.

<sup>40</sup> D.B. Warner, Monrovia, to William Coppinger, Washington DC, May 18, 1867; H.W. Dennis, Monrovia, to William McLain, Washington DC, February 8, 1868; Dennis to Coppinger, April 8, 1870. ACS, Reel 161.

<sup>41</sup> Warner, in his 1864 annual message to the legislature, warned against reliance on foreign provisions and encouraged Liberians to develop their own resources. See Warner, Annual Message, December 6, 1864, in Dunn, 185-186; see also Dennis to Coppinger, July 30, 1870. ACS, Reel 161.

<sup>42</sup> Pham, 25; Beyan, 135.

<sup>43</sup> Levitt, 107

bringing Liberia's indigenous groups into closer alliance with the state, he recognized the financial toll that war would continue to exact on an already-depleted national treasury. He urged the "more rapid improvement of the condition of the native tribes" to spare the nation the "trouble and expense...incurred in repressing such of their barbarous practices that still cling to them" including a propensity to commit attacks against "peaceable citizens."<sup>44</sup> While Roberts tried to convince his fellow Liberians of the folly of keeping poor relations with the indigenous population, he blamed indigenous peoples for tensions, a message not likely to bind them to the state. Nor was it likely that Roberts' continued emphasis on assimilation would evoke loyalty. In making the abandonment of indigenous practices a precondition for national inclusion, Roberts ensured that indigenous peoples would continue to resist state authority. While various indigenous groups also desired peace, they would not accept it "at the expense of assimilation, acculturation, and subjugation."<sup>45</sup>

Against Liberia's continued calls for improved relations with its indigenous population, tensions continued to mount. At the same time that Roberts was urging greater alliance with the Liberian state, warring Grebo ethnopolitical groups were negotiating peace treaties among themselves, resulting in the creation of a powerful union, the kingdom. Perhaps as a means to counteract the kingdom's influence and relieve growing tensions, the Liberian legislature passed a resolution in February 1874 (a month after the kingdom was established) stating that "the President shall invite...one or

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<sup>44</sup> Joseph Jenkins Roberts, Annual Message, December 9, 1872, in Dunn, 241-242.

<sup>45</sup> Levitt, 133.

two of the leading chiefs [two from each county] to be present each year at the meeting of the Legislature, to sit in each branch as referees and advisers on all matters effecting or appertaining to the particular locality to which said chief belong” with the expense to be borne by the government.<sup>46</sup> When Roberts delivered his annual address before the legislature later that year, he directed attention to the indigenous chiefs in attendance. Selected for their “intelligence and influence,” these representatives would “by their counsel and advice...render important assistance in whatever measure [the legislature deemed] it proper to adopt for the elevation and improvement of this people.”<sup>47</sup>

Though the government touted this act as a significant step in bringing indigenous peoples into the Liberian state, it offered only superficial political representation. Selections of chiefs were conducted by government officials and often ignored indigenous power structures; as “referees and advisers,” they were denied any real political voice; and, restricted to matters relating to their particular localities, indigenous representatives were excluded from larger issues of state, including decisions on national spending and foreign relations. Moreover, whatever “assistance” might be rendered was only to support measures that the legislature deemed necessary for indigenous peoples’ own improvement. Issues that might be of most concern to indigenous groups in late nineteenth-century Liberia- land, trade, true political participation- would continue to be ignored unless and until the legislature judged them relevant to indigenous peoples’

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<sup>46</sup> Acts Passed by the Legislature of the Republic of Liberia during the Session 1873-1874. Accessed via Cornell University Law Collections: Liberian Law Collection.

<https://lawcollections.library.cornell.edu/liberian/catalog/liber:015>

<sup>47</sup> Joseph Jenkins Roberts, Annual Message, December 17, 1875, in Dunn, 263.

elevation. Though they were seated at the legislative table “for the first time in the history of the Republic,” Liberia’s indigenous population was still politically excluded and denied any meaningful participation in Liberia’s postwar nation-building project.<sup>48</sup> It was not until the presidency of William S. Tubman (1944-1971) that indigenous peoples gained legitimate representation in Congress (though they remained vastly underrepresented).<sup>49</sup>

The Liberian project began in 1816 when the ACS penned its Constitution committing itself to the colonization of “the free people of color residing in our country.”<sup>50</sup> Whether colonization entailed more than simply removal of black bodies from the American polity was a question that the Society would have to come to terms with when the dust from America’s Civil War settled and thousands of freedmen departed for Liberia. Liberia too had its day of reckoning in the postwar period. Though its Declaration of Independence upheld Liberia as “an asylum from the most grinding oppression” for those who were “originally the inhabitants of the United States of North America,” the emigrants that arrived from America at war’s end and the absence of

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<sup>48</sup> Joseph Jenkins Roberts, Annual Message, December 17, 1875, in Dunn, 263.

<sup>49</sup> Tubman is best known for his Open Door economic policy and his National Unification Plan. His unification policy was officially intended to bridge the divide between indigenous Liberians and Americo-Liberians (beginning with the dismissal of the Americo-Liberian moniker for the more inclusive “Liberian”.) He implemented a policy of universal suffrage, extended education opportunities to Liberia’s interior; and brought indigenous Africans into government positions. Though he is widely hailed for his work in uniting Liberia, Tubman has also been criticized for repressing his political opponents and installing an extensive system of patronage. For more on Tubman’s rule and policies, see Kaakyire Duku Frempong. “The Liberian Civil War: The Tubman Factor.” *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, New Series, no. 4/5 (2000): 123-30; see also Tuan Wreh. *The Love of Liberty... the rule of President William V. S. Tubman in Liberia, 1944-1971*. (London: Hurst, 1976.)

<sup>50</sup> AR (1865), 18.

emigrants that then followed challenged Liberia's commitment to this principle.<sup>51</sup> The stark realization of Liberian dependence that the war evoked motivated a turn inward. It became evident to Liberia's leaders that Liberia, if it were to endure, would now have to be built up from within. With a new urgency, spurred by low prospects of immigration, a rapidly collapsing economy, and the chronic threat to its sovereignty by British and French powers, the Liberian state sought to incorporate the hundreds of thousands of indigenous people that resided within its borders. However, even as Liberians recognized a shared racial identity and espoused oneness with their African brethren, a commitment to American traditions of Christianity and "civilization" kept indigenous Africans on the periphery of Liberia's nation-building project. Though the American Civil War forced an independence on Liberia that opened the door to a more inclusive nation, its insistence on assimilation and its failure to politically integrate the majority of its population foretold a different future.

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<sup>51</sup> "The Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the Republic of Liberia (as amended through May 1955)" The Liberian Collections Project at Indiana University. [http://onliberia.org/con\\_1847.htm](http://onliberia.org/con_1847.htm)

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## **BIOGRAPHY**

Beth Garcia graduated from George Mason University in 2008 with a Master of Arts. She worked as an analyst for the federal government before moving to Tokyo, Japan in 2010. In 2013, she enrolled again at George Mason University, this time as a student in the History Department's doctoral program. She resigned a teaching assistantship after two years to help her husband open a law firm. Since then, she has worked in an educational nonprofit, interned with the American Red Cross and the US State Department and conducted research for the UN.