

**“The Bounds of Habitation”: The Geography of the American Colonization Society,
1816-1860**

by

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	ii
List of Figures	vi
Abstract	vii
Introduction	1
Chapter	
1: Colonization in Historiography and History	9
2: A History of the American Colonizationist Movement	74
3: Colonization in the South	139
4: Colonization in the North	192
5: Colonization in National Discourse	257
Conclusion	303
Bibliography	309

List of Figures

Figure		
1 – Total Donations	. . . . .	82
2 – Board of Managers representation	. . . . .	111
3 – Vice Presidential representation	. . . . .	111
4 – Per white resident contributions	. . . . .	135
5 – Slave State Vice Presidential representation	. . . . .	136

Abstract

The American Colonization Society (ACS) was founded in 1816, with the mission of transporting African American emigrants from the United States to Africa. This dissertation examines changes in the ideology of the colonizationist movement across both space and time, and concludes that while there was relatively little regional variation among the colonizationist arguments advanced in different sections of the country, the ACS's goals shifted over time, from an early emphasis on emancipating slaves, to a later focus on free black emigrants. Supporters of colonization were united by a shared vision of "racial geography," an ideal of global segregation and racially defined citizenship.

A quantitative analysis of the ACS's regional fundraising data demonstrates that the organization had a national support base; the Society received significant donations from nearly every section of the country. Other research sources include published examples of colonizationist and anti-colonizationist rhetoric, the private correspondence of supporters, fictional representations of the colonization scheme, and records of political debates over the plan. Chronological and geographical comparisons of these sources contribute to a comprehensive account of the ACS as an enduring national institution in the antebellum United States.

The impact of the antebellum colonization movement should be measured not by the small numbers of emigrants enrolled in the scheme, but rather by the ACS's rhetorical successes. The Colonization Society had powerful friends and powerful enemies, but its ideology and arguments were part of the national discourses of slavery and race for both

supporters and detractors. Abolitionists and proslavery writers defined themselves in contrast to colonizationism. The ACS had its own large body of supporters, who believed that racial homogeneity was essential to an effective American democracy. Colonizationism helped to promote racial definitions of citizenship, and encouraged white Americans to exclude African Americans rhetorically and legally from the nation's body politic.

Introduction

In 1862, when New Jersey minister Alexander McGill delivered a speech in favor of the American Colonization Society (or ACS), the sectional war that the organization had so long labored to prevent had already begun. But McGill still held out hope that the ACS's project of removing African Americans from the United States and settling them in Africa could resolve the conflict rending the nation. "Colonization . . . , in this dark hour, is the only hope of America."¹ Only African colonization could remove the institution that had caused the war, by "open[ing] a great and effectual door to voluntary manumission at the South."² And if the war brought slavery to an end more quickly than had been previously anticipated, "if millions [of former slaves] were to be released tomorrow, and come trooping to the side of Federal power and victory—Colonization is the only scheme within the whole compass of man's imagination which would not be confounded with such a result."³ For McGill, victory in the war against slavery was attended with as many dangers as defeat; he could not conceive that the country could find a way to incorporate millions of African Americans into its citizenry. This failure of imagination was typical of colonizationists. Like most ACS supporters, McGill sought an end to slavery, but could not envision a place for former slaves on the North American continent.

¹ Alexander T. McGill. *The Hand of God with the Black Race: A Discourse delivered before the Pennsylvania Colonization Society* (Philadelphia: William F. Geddes, 1862), 18.

² *Ibid.*, 16.

³ *Ibid.*, 18-19.

McGill chose for the epigraph to his speech a quotation from the Bible: God “hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation.”⁴ McGill asserted that all races were equal before God, and suggested that white Americans should feel a fraternal interest in the success of the country’s black population. However, blacks “in our country are strangers and servants ‘in a land that is not theirs.’”⁵ God had ordained a separate home for African Americans. “The most obvious proof of this . . . , and one which forces itself upon the candor of all unprejudiced men, is the stamp of [their] features and structure of [their] skin, which God has made to dwell within the tropics.”⁶ McGill perceived both scriptural and physiological evidence that blacks and whites had been created for different parts of the globe; only colonization presented a method to restore the natural order, and to return African Americans to the “bounds of habitation” divinely ordained for them. Certainly blacks could never hope to find acceptance in the United States, where “[i]nflexible caste precludes [them] from every thing, that kindles the aspirations of freemen—from all rank and honor and power, and even eminent usefulness.”⁷ This ideology was shared by most of the ACS’s white supporters, who were motivated by some combination of genuine concern for African Americans, and the desire to homogenize the American racial landscape through the removal of a population seen as anomalous to the United States’ citizenry.

The colonization scheme listed some powerful friends among its supporters.

Thomas Jefferson, who established the Democratic-Republican party, famously endorsed

⁴ Ibid., 3.

⁵ Ibid., 6. This was a reference to Genesis 15:13, in which God warned Abraham that a similar fate would befall his people.

⁶ Ibid., 10.

⁷ Ibid., 16.

a plan to remove both slavery and slaves from his native Virginia. Kentucky politician Henry Clay, who rose to national prominence as a founder of the Whig party, was one of the ACS's strongest supporters, and served for many years as the Society's president. Abraham Lincoln, the first successful national candidate of the Republican party, also thought the scheme necessary to ending American slavery. The plan to colonize African Americans was thus strongly supported by the founding members of three of the antebellum period's five major political parties. And the ACS could also demonstrate at least nominal support by the founding members of the remaining two parties. George Washington, the nation's first Federalist, was dead before the creation of the ACS, but the Society enlisted his nephew and heir Bushrod Washington as its first president. Andrew Jackson, who redefined the Democratic party in the 1830s, had also served as one of the Society's vice presidents. The ACS could thus at least tangentially claim the support of the five men who (arguably) had the most influence in shaping American politics prior to the Civil War.

One might expect that an organization with such an illustrious list of supporters would find a prominent place in histories of the period. However, antebellum historiography has accorded the scheme little attention.⁸ I hope that this dissertation will

⁸ Since I am largely arguing against an absence in the literature, it is somewhat difficult to define the opposition. I will cite two examples illustrating my point. Charles Sellers's magisterial *The Market Revolution*, a purportedly comprehensive account of the Jacksonian period, devotes all of a paragraph to colonization, in which he argues, "The Society's project . . . could be promoted among southern slaveholders as removing a population dangerous to slavery and among antislavery northerners as reducing bondage through gradual manumission and deportation." Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America 1815-1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 126. Daniel Walker Howe's equally imposing *What Hath God Wrought* concludes a slightly more substantial discussion by suggesting that "the colonization plan was ultimately killed [before the Civil War] by resistance from two opposite quarters: southern masters and African-Americans themselves." Daniel Walker Howe. *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 265-266. Both authors present lengthy analyses of the role of race and slavery in American politics, but dismiss colonization as a minor footnote in this debate. This is representative of the treatment colonizationism receives in most histories of the period. The movement is dismissed as insignificant because (as Sellers

help to rectify this situation, by demonstrating the strength of ACS support across the country and throughout the antebellum period. Of course, as a practical plan to influence American racial demographics (let alone to remove all African Americans to their Biblically-ordained “bounds of habitation”), the Colonization Society was doomed to failure. But colonizationist arguments remained an important part of the national discourse of slavery and race until the Civil War (and beyond, though that falls outside the purview of this dissertation). Certainly, not all antebellum Americans subscribed to colonizationist ideology, and only a small minority of the country’s citizens contributed anything to the Society. However, colonizationist rhetoric was sufficiently ubiquitous throughout the country that nearly all Americans were aware of the scheme, and defined their own attitudes and expectations, at least in part, in reaction to the Colonization Society’s arguments. Though the Society’s practical accomplishments were meager, its ideology was influential, and it helped to define antebellum conceptions of slavery and citizenship. Many white Americans from across the country were tempted by the ACS’s promises to remove slavery safely and gradually, and to ensure the egalitarian homogeneity of the nation’s populace. Though several groups arose to contest the wisdom and morality of the Society’s plans, it gained supporters throughout the antebellum period, and continued to propagandize for the cause until the Civil War. For at least a significant minority of Americans, the ACS helped define their vision of the United States as a nation of exclusively free white citizens, and provided a shared platform by which the country could hope to escape sectional discord.

argues) it lacked internal ideological consistency, or because (as Howe claims) it declined well before the Civil War. These are the images of the ACS that prevent the organization from receiving more than a few paragraphs or pages of attention in most histories of the period. As this dissertation will demonstrate, these common understandings of colonizationism are based in misconceptions.

In Chapter 1, I summarize the historical literature on the ACS. Historians have long been preoccupied with defining the Colonization Society's positions on slavery and race, and the organization has been at various times described as everything from sincerely humanitarian to bitterly racist. I align myself with a recent wave of scholars (most prominently including Claude Clegg, III and Eric Burin) who have emphasized the Society's emancipationist goals. I also summarize the (many) arguments offered by the ACS in order to analyze the organization's ideological premises. I contend that colonizationism was defined by a unified ideology, centered around a sense of the globe's "natural" racial geography (as suggested above). Colonizationists argued that African Americans were capable of advancing in civilization, but only once removed from the United States; racial homogeneity was thus described as prerequisite to egalitarian democracy.

Chapter 2 consists of a historical narrative of the colonization movement from the eighteenth century through the Civil War. My major historical contribution in this chapter is a database I have constructed of donations received by the ACS between 1826 and 1860. This, alongside a tally of regional representation among the Society's managers, provides a measure of the Society's regional support over time. Although the Colonization Society flirted with insolvency throughout its existence, the donations it received in fact increased during the antebellum years. However, my most important finding from these figures is simply that the ACS received substantial financial support from every region of the country throughout the antebellum period. This chapter also describes evolutions in ACS rhetoric over time, the most important of which was a conservative turn in the Society's discussion of slavery. By mid-century, the

organization had largely abandoned its earlier emancipationist language, partially in response to increasing Southern defensiveness on the subject, and partially simply because of the scheme's practical difficulties, which made it increasingly difficult to argue for the feasibility of colonizing all the nation's slaves.

Chapters 3 and 4 turn to a regional examination of colonization, based on an analysis of surviving records of state ACS auxiliaries and regional publications arguing for the scheme. Part of my purpose in these chapters is to evaluate the extent to which colonizationist rhetoric varied regionally (that is, whether the ACS offered different inducements to different sections of the country). I hope that my findings will finally put to rest the shibboleth so often repeated in historiography, that the Colonization Society presented its scheme as proslavery in the South and antislavery in the North. As these chapters demonstrate, the Society's emancipationist message was repeated with little variation in all sections of the country. Of course, the organization faced different objections on each side of the Mason-Dixon Line. In the South its primary opponents were apologists for slavery, who accused the Society of seeking to disrupt slaveowners' property rights. In the North, colonizationists were attacked by abolitionists, who described the scheme as a method to perpetuate slavery. In both cases, however, the ACS (and its regional auxiliaries) responded largely by reemphasizing previous arguments. Across the country, colonization was described as a method to remove the nation's slaves, by gently encouraging slaveowners to emancipate. In fact, the most significant shifts in colonizationist rhetoric were not regional, but the chronological trend toward conservatism discussed in Chapter 2, which was also evident among the nation's auxiliary colonization societies. Although these chapters parallel each other in their

respective discussions of regional colonizationist activity in the slave and free states, they are organized somewhat differently. In Chapter 3, which discusses colonizationism in the South, I have divided the chapter into sections on the Upper and Lower southern states. The context of colonization in the two regions was sufficiently distinguished to merit separate discussion of each. (In the Upper South, colonization was a visible, practical enterprise, while in the Lower South it was dominated by eccentric visionaries.) Colonization activity in the North demonstrated less regional variation, and so I have employed a chronological structure for Chapter 4, which primarily chronicles how Northern colonizationists responded to the abolitionist challenge in the 1830s, and then became less vocal about slavery in the 1840s and '50s. Both of these chapters also discuss African American responses to colonization; in all regions of the country, the majority of blacks viewed the scheme as a hostile attempt to deport them from their native country. Free blacks made their opposition to the scheme clear, and articulated a claim to American citizenship in response to the threat posed by colonization.

Chapter 5 considers the role of colonization in two very different venues of the national discourses of slavery and race: fiction and politics. First, I survey the place of colonizationism in the wave of plantation novels that followed in the wake of *Uncle Tom's Cabin's* success. The ACS did not ignore this opportunity to promote its arguments, and supporters produced several polemical novels which presented fictionalized accounts of the scheme's success. But colonization also found a place in abolitionist and proslavery novels, including *Uncle Tom's Cabin* itself, which concludes with the emigration of its major surviving black characters to Africa. Colonization was less frequently discussed in the halls of the national congress, where the scheme

frequently fell victim to informal or formal prohibitions on the discussion of slavery, but a significant minority of legislators supported the ACS, though they met vehement opposition from Southern Democrats. In both fiction and congressional debates, colonization was usually represented as a method of gradual emancipation (in fact, even after the ACS itself had largely retreated from such rhetoric).

This dissertation's subtitle, "The Geography of the American Colonization Society," has a double meaning. By considering colonization on the national level, I have been able to analyze the Society's role and representation across the American landscape. The following pages represent the most comprehensive published account of the movement's national scope and antebellum duration. But what is most striking about the Society is how little it varied regionally; the ACS maintained significant support bases in nearly every section of the country, and presented similar arguments to supporters from Maine to Mississippi. Throughout the United States, colonization was urged as a method to reinscribe the globe's natural racial order. Only when confined within the geographic "bounds of habitation" set out for them by God could both whites and blacks advance toward democratic perfection.

Chapter 1

Colonization in Historiography and History

The American Colonization Society has received broad if shallow attention by historians of the antebellum United States. The colonization movement is granted at least passing mention in nearly every major account of race and American politics of that era, but until recently the ACS was the subject of relatively little substantial research. This relative neglect has contributed to a distorted view of the colonization movement in the general historical literature. The ACS is frequently mentioned in the context of antebellum politics, but the organization's failure to obtain substantial governmental sponsorship has led to a frequent portrayal of the Society as marginal and unsuccessful. The most-cited studies of the Society have further contributed to this trend, describing a divided movement in decline after the 1830s. Few historians have accorded the ACS much influence in antebellum politics, or taken seriously colonizationists' own claims to represent a united ideological movement. Of course, by any practical measure, the Colonization Society was a miserable failure. By the Civil War, it had transported (with much fanfare and at great expense) just under 11,000 African Americans to Liberia, falling ludicrously short of its ambitions to transform the United States' demographic makeup. But I believe that the ACS's importance should be measured not by its practical impact, but by the influence of its ideas. By this standard, colonization should be recognized for its important role in shaping antebellum American racial politics. In this chapter, I will review the historiography of the colonization movement, and will argue

that the ACS represented a coherent ideology. Subsequent chapters will explore the evolution of this ideology over time, its elaboration in different regions of the country, and its influence in the national discourse of slavery and race. This influence, I would argue, far outweighed the ACS's practical accomplishments. Of course, it was no mean feat to found and maintain a colony 4,000 miles from the United States, funded almost entirely by private donations, but Liberia proved to have less impact on the United States than did the *idea* of Liberia. Throughout the antebellum era, the ACS remained a powerful advocate for its own racial vision: a segregated globe of racially homogeneous societies all converging toward millennial perfection.

Historiography

The first histories of the American Colonization Society were written by the ACS itself. Throughout the antebellum period, written publications were one of the primary methods that colonizationists used to publicize their cause. The national ACS, its state auxiliaries, and various individuals affiliated with colonization all contributed to an enormous volume of pro-colonization literature. A large percentage of colonizationist publications included at least some brief historical background of the ACS, including hagiographies of its founders, and some standard shibboleths about the righteousness and achievements of the colonizationist cause. ACS member Archibald Alexander's 1846 book-length *History of Colonization on the Western Coast of Africa* is a more ambitious project than most of these, but the boosterish tone is familiar, and Alexander himself falls squarely into the colonizationist camp: "The best method of disposing of the free people of colour, so as to promote the highest interests both of them and of the citizens of this

country, among whom they dwell, is a subject of momentous consequence.”⁹ This is not so much history as propaganda, and Alexander, like his colonizationist peers, describes the ACS as motivated purely by benevolent ideals, and boasts of every accomplishment while minimizing the importance of any setbacks and obstacles to the cause. It is worth noting as well that colonizationist histories often portrayed the society’s origins differently in order to appeal to different audiences. In order to assuage the fears of Southerners worried that colonization might undermine slavery, Mathew Carey contended that the idea “originated in [Virginia,] the great leading slave state,”¹⁰ while a year later Joshua Danforth, reassuring a Northern audience, suggested that although if “the Society [had] been formed in the heart of a slaveholding State, it might have justly been suspected as a device . . . to perpetuate the system of slavery . . . , it was formed in the city of Washington, [and] commenced its operations before the eyes of the nation.”¹¹ Colonizationists thus employed the history of their own cause as propaganda supporting the scheme, sometimes in specific (and even contradictory) ways to appeal to diverse audiences.¹²

⁹ Archibald Alexander. *A History of Colonization on the Western Coast of Africa*, Reprint, (1846; repr., New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), 5.

¹⁰ Mathew Carey, *Letters on the Colonization Society, and on Its Probable Results; Under the Following Heads: The Origin of the Society; Increase of the Coloured Population; Manumission of Slaves in this Country; Declarations of Legislatures, and Other Assembled Bodies in Favour of the Society; Situations of the Colonists at Monrovia, and Other Towns; Moral and Religious Character of the Settlers; Soil, Climate, Productions, and Commerce of Liberia; Advantages to the Free Coloured Population, by Emigration to Liberia; Disadvantages of Slavery to the White Population; Character of the Natives of Africa Before the Irruptions [sic] of the Barbarians; Effects of Colonization on the Slave Trade; With a Slight Sketch of that Nefarious and Accused Traffic, Addressed to the Hon. C.F. Mercer, M.H.R.U.S., by M. Carey, Second Edition, Enlarged and Improved* (Philadelphia, 1832), 7.

¹¹ Joshua N. Danforth, *Twelve Reasons Why All the People of New England Should Engage Heart and Hand in Supporting the Colonization Society, with Notices of Some Popular Objections* (Boston, 1833), 1.

¹² Carey and Danforth’s accounts are not as contradictory as they might at first appear. It was true that Virginians (famously including Thomas Jefferson) were among the first to explore the possibility of colonizing African Americans outside the United States, and the Virginia Assembly passed a resolution endorsing colonization in December 1816, which coincided with the formation of the ACS. However, the ACS itself did place its headquarters in Washington, DC (though probably as much with an eye towards gaining federal support as with the intention of balancing sectional interests). The point here isn’t that

Colonizationists were not the only ones interested in constructing a narrative of the movement, however. Opponents of the cause also published much less laudatory accounts of the society's purposes, and often deployed historical narratives to attack the society (in much the same way that colonizationists promoted their scheme in propagandistic histories). Though abolitionists were not the only group to attack the ACS, they were some of the most public and persistent opponents of colonization, frequently publishing negative accounts of the ACS's motives, and hampering its popularity in the northern states. White abolitionists' attacks on the ACS were inaugurated in 1832 by William Lloyd Garrison's *Thoughts on African Colonization*, which portrayed the ACS as an institution that supported the indefinite continuation of slavery. Here, the organization's history was used as ammunition for Garrison's attack, and his book was based almost entirely upon the society's own publications over the years of its existence. He investigated "the original design of the Society" because he believed that "it is still strictly adhered to."¹³ Garrison and other abolitionists argued that, from the start, the ACS had been dominated by slaveowners, and that the Society had ever sought to preserve the institution of slavery.

Early academic histories of colonization drew heavily from these colonizationist and abolitionist sources. Historians' first accounts tended to repeat and endorse colonizationists' accounts of the movement's benevolent intentions. In 1917, historian Henry Noble Sherwood contended that "[i]t seems . . . safe to conclude that the

Carey or Danforth were lying, but that they could mold the history of the colonization movement in a way to appeal to specific audiences, or address specific criticisms.

¹³ William Lloyd Garrison, *Thoughts on African Colonization*, Reprint, (1832; repr., New York: Arno Press, 1968), part 1, p. 40. The "original design" of the ACS, according to Garrison, was of course the "pledge . . . not to interfere with the system of slavery, or in any manner to disturb the repose of the planters." Ibid.

colonization movement of 1816-17 was . . . sincere in its purpose and straightforward in its aims.”¹⁴ In his dissertation on the ACS that same year, Early Lee Fox is similarly moved to defend colonizationists from the charge of insincerity: “[T]hanks to the vituperation of the Garrisonians . . . , the motives of the Colonizationists have been widely misrepresented since 1831. It is the purpose of this study to . . . demonstrate that [the ACS’s] aims were as sincerely expressed as sound policy would admit.”¹⁵ Fox attacked abolitionist histories of colonization that portrayed the ACS as a proslavery organization controlled by the South, and argued, on the contrary, that “[c]olonization was essentially a moderate, a middle-State movement, counting among its supporters the moderate men of every part of the Union. . . Extremists of the far North and the far South were unable to enter into its feelings.”¹⁶

Fox’s portrayal of colonization as a “middle-State movement” is among the first in a long line of historians’ attempts to determine the ACS’s sectional base. After all, the society embraced members and auxiliary organizations from all regions of the country, including some whose views on slavery were diametrically opposed. Garrison and other abolitionists solved this conundrum by portraying the ACS as dominated by Southern

¹⁴ Henry Noble Sherwood, “The Formation of the American Colonization Society,” *The Journal of Negro History* 2, no. 3 (July 1917): 226.

¹⁵ Early Lee Fox, *The American Colonization Society, 1817-1840* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1919), 127.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 49. Of course, these histories were also being produced during a time when the field of African American history was dominated by racist scholars like Ulrich Phillips. Much of Phillips work describing American plantation slavery remains valuable, but he also trafficked in racial stereotypes about African Americans, whose traits he delineated as “an eagerness for society, music and merriment, a fondness for display whether of person, dress, vocabulary or emotion, a not flagrant sensuality, a receptiveness toward any religion whose exercises were exhilarating, a proneness to superstition, a courteous acceptance of subordination, an avidity for praise, a readiness for loyalty of a feudal sort, and last but not least, a healthy human repugnance toward overwork.” Ulrich Bonnell Phillips, *American Negro Slavery: A Survey of the Supply, Employment and Control of Negro Labor as Determined by the Plantation Regime* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1918), 291. Insofar as such racist beliefs were prevalent in the academy of the early twentieth century, (white) historians may have retained some sympathy for the colonizationist idea of global segregation.

slaveholders (after all, the presidency of the organization was often filled by Southern men, including Bushrod Washington, Henry Clay, and Francis Scott Key), and supported by misguided Northerners unaware of its true intentions. Fox, rejecting this depiction of colonizationists, argued (accurately) that ACS presidents were more figureheads than active decision-makers, and (also more or less accurately) that whenever colonizationists expressed views of slavery, they “deviated consistently on the side of emancipation.”¹⁷ According to Fox, then, the ACS was largely controlled by antislavery residents of the mid-Atlantic states who, in keeping with “the Colonization method of cooperation and sympathy,”¹⁸ commiserated with slaveowners in order to gain their support. Fox’s contemporary Sherwood, on the other hand, dealt with the issue of the ACS’s sectional support in a simpler manner, contending that

it is highly probable . . . that . . . arguments were designed for different sections of the country and different classes of people—to remove the dangerous element would make a strong appeal to the slave-holder and the South, for it was believed that the free black contaminated and ruined the slave; to civilize and Christianize Africa would appeal to . . . the North.¹⁹

Sherwood’s formulation – that the ACS used different arguments to appeal to diverse audiences, and ultimately, that colonization meant different things to different people – became a historical canon, and has remained remarkably persistent in historical writing about colonization. Nearly a century after Sherwood described the ACS as made up of sectional factions seeking different – and even contradictory – goals, historians still repeat the same formula. In 1993, for example, John David Smith argued, “Antebellum colonizationists had mixed motives. . . Many . . . opposed slavery on humanitarian grounds. . . Others interpreted colonization as a safeguard . . . against the emergence of a

¹⁷ Fox, *American Colonization Society*, 50.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 158.

¹⁹ Sherwood, “Formation of the ACS,” 224.

sizable and menacing free black population.”²⁰ This perspective has also allowed some historians to dismiss colonization as an unstable movement whose national popularity owed simply to its inconsistency, and whose place in political or social history was therefore not worthy of much study. Ronald Walters quickly dismissed the ACS in his otherwise comprehensive account of contemporary reform movements: “Without much consistency, idealism, or practicality to recommend it, the Colonization Society . . . profited from [an] ability to satisfy contradictory viewpoints.”²¹

Throughout the twentieth century, historians continued to debate the demographics and true motives of colonization supporters, whether, as Ralph Flanders argued in 1933, the ACS “advocated gradual emancipation and deportation”²² or, as Rayford Logan contended a decade later, “contributed mightily to the development of hostile attitudes against the Negro.”²³ Over time, however, historians increasingly distanced themselves from Fox’s portrayal of colonizationists as benevolent moderates seeking an eventual end to slavery. Where Fox accepted colonizationists’ statements at face value – “[it is] safe to assume that those leaders who left behind them a record . . .

²⁰ John David Smith, ed., *The American Colonization Society and Emigration: Solutions to “The Negro Problem,” Part II* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1993), xxv. Historians have sometimes carried these depictions of factional divisions within the ACS to extremes. Bell Wiley, for example, discerns not only proslavery and antislavery wings within the colonization movement, but also one group “interested mainly in using black émigrés as instruments of converting heathen Africans,” another seeking “an effective means of restricting the activities of ‘slave-catchers’ operating on the African coast,” and yet another faction “motivated largely by the desire to create in Africa a colony which would . . . enrich American trade.” Bell I. Wiley, ed., *Slaves No More: Letters from Liberia 1833-1869* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1980), 1. Wiley is certainly correct that all of these arguments (and more) were marshaled in support of the ACS during the antebellum period, but it is reductive (especially without demographic evidence) to assume that each of these arguments reflected an entirely separate wing of the colonization movement, uninterested in other goals.

²¹ Ronald Walters, *American Reformers, 1815-1860* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1978), 78.

²² Ralph Betts Flanders *Plantation Slavery in Georgia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1933), 282.

²³ Rayford W. Logan, “Some New Interpretations of the Colonization Movement,” *Phylon* 4, no. 4 (4th Quarter, 1943): 328.

have spoken from their hearts”²⁴ – later writers often concluded that “[b]eneath all of the attractive arguments which embellished colonization was race prejudice.”²⁵ As historians of the mid-twentieth century increasingly came to view the ACS as an inconsistent, contradictory bundle of diverse groups and motivations, they also became distrustful of colonizationists’ own accounts of their benevolent motives, and discerned racial antipathy lurking behind colonizationists’ writings and arguments.

Fox had sought to defend the ACS and its supporters from abolitionists’ charges of encouraging race prejudice, and the next major student of the colonization movement would also feel called upon to defend colonizationists. In his 1961 monograph on the American Colonization Society, Philip Staudenraus did not perhaps directly oppose the growing scholarly indictment of colonizationists’ racism, but he did follow Fox in portraying the colonizationist leadership as privately emancipationist. Most colonizationists “personally wished to emphasize the antislavery mission of the Colonization Society, but . . . feared loss of all support south of the Potomac if the parent society too boldly embraced antislavery.”²⁶ According to Staudenraus, colonizationists may have sought to achieve “an all-white America,” but this necessitated “a gradual and peaceful obliteration of slavery.”²⁷ Staudenraus is more sensitive than Fox to colonizationists’ racism and desire for a segregated globe, but his basic portrayal of the ACS leadership – privately inclined towards gradual emancipation, but careful to avoid giving offense to potential Southern supporters – is similar to Fox’s.

²⁴ Fox, *American Colonization Society*, 47.

²⁵ Charles I. Foster, “The Colonization of Free Negroes, in Liberia, 1816-1835,” *The Journal of Negro History* 38, no. 1 (January, 1953): 47.

²⁶ Philip John Staudenraus, *The African Colonization Movement 1816-1865* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), 205.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 249.

Primarily, however, Staudenraus sought to defend colonizationists not from the charge of racism, but rather of impracticality. He described the founders of the ACS as “sedate, honorable, judicious gentlemen. Nothing in their characters betokened a visionary or impractical turn of mind. As lawyers, politicians, clergymen, and businessmen . . . , they appreciated well-formed judgments and cautious assertions.”²⁸ Here, Staudenraus was responding not only to criticisms of colonizationists’ racism, but also the portrayal of colonization as a wild scheme with no chance of success. By the 1960s, historians were increasingly pointing out the audacity of colonizationist hopes to relocate the hundreds of thousands of free African Americans living in the United States, let alone millions of slaves. In retrospect, the project does seem somewhat preposterous. In the nearly half-century of the ACS’s existence prior to the Civil War, the organization succeeded in transporting less than 11,000 black colonists to Liberia – not nearly enough to have any demographic effect in the United States. Worse, the Society constantly struggled with overextended finances and debt to reach even this modest achievement. Viewing this dismal record, James McPherson contended that “[a]s a practical solution of the Negro question, colonization was a failure from the beginning,”²⁹ and Don B. Kates, Jr. argued that “the combined treasuries of the United States and the several states could scarcely have borne [the] utterly unremunerated expense [of deportation of the country’s free black population].”³⁰ By portraying the ACS’s leadership as “sedate, honorable, and

²⁸ Ibid., 28.

²⁹ James M. McPherson, “Abolitionists and Negro Opposition to Colonization During the Civil War,” *Phylon*, 26, no. 4 (4th Quarter, 1965): 399.

³⁰ Don B. Kates, Jr., “Abolition, Deportation, Integration: Attitudes Toward Slavery in the Early Republic,” *The Journal of Negro History* 53, no. 1 (January, 1968): 45. Historians were not the first to accuse colonizationists of impracticality, and these critiques followed those of colonization’s antebellum opponents, who also often emphasized the absurdity of the ACS’s expectations of transplanting millions of African Americans across the Atlantic. Colonizationists devoted much energy to addressing these complaints and trying to demonstrate the mathematical and financial plausibility of their scheme through

judicious,” Staudenraus contended with historians who portrayed the movement as wild-eyed and impractical.

In order to portray colonizationists as a rational group, Staudenraus emphasized that the ACS always expected to receive governmental support for their plan. The ACS “was to be unique among benevolent associations in that it would depend largely on federal assistance.”³¹ Colonizationists were aware that their plans were grandiose and expensive, and therefore turned to the federal government as the only sponsor that might realistically be able to finance a large-scale colonization effort. Focusing on the hope of federal support, Staudenraus argues, colonizationists only reluctantly turned to the development of the network of auxiliary societies that was typical of contemporary reform efforts. “Believing auxiliaries to be merely supplemental to the larger goal of federal assistance, the colonizationists made only feeble and haphazard efforts to build local societies.”³² But as the decades passed without Congressional adoption of the project, as the financially conservative Democratic party grew ascendant, and as critical voices were raised across the nation, colonizationists’ hopes of convincing the federal government to foot the bill faded. (The rapid growth of the slave population of the South, which tripled between 1820 and 1860, also made the possibility of any ultimate abolitionist agenda appear increasingly remote.) For Staudenraus, the ACS languished along with these hopes. He describes the society as “sick and feeble after 1837,”³³ and though his monograph is titled *The African Colonization Movement 1816-1865*, only its slim last chapter takes the story past the Panic of 1837. Although Staudenraus himself

plans to transport only the “natural increase” of black populations, with calculations that often dramatically underestimated the cost of emigrants’ transportation.

³¹ Staudenraus, *African Colonization Movement*, 19.

³² *Ibid.*, 69.

³³ *Ibid.*, 249.

notes that receipts steadily increased after bottoming out in 1838, the ACS amended its constitution that year to weaken the central organization and give more power to the state auxiliaries, and waged a constant battle with debt for the next three decades. From the perspective of the ACS balance sheet, it is easy to see why Staudenraus minimized the colonization movement's importance during the 1840s and '50s. Transporting colonists across the Atlantic proved much more expensive than predicted, and the colony of Liberia could not support itself, and was a constant drain on ACS coffers until its 1847 independence. With these unanticipated expenses, and with federal assistance appearing more unlikely than ever, ACS finances were often in the red, and the idea that the colonization movement could have a significant effect on the racial makeup of the North American continent began to appear far-fetched, even to loyal colonizationists. Staudenraus ended his account in the late 1830s because his overall goal was to demonstrate the "practicality" of colonization's grandiose aims, and the Society's financial struggles throughout the 1840s and '50s made it increasingly unlikely that colonizationists' most ambitious plans would ever come to fruition.³⁴ By 1846, the ACS organ *The African Repository* was (falsely) claiming that "the Society has never undertaken to remove the whole colored population. It has indeed avowed the belief, that the entire separation of the white and colored races . . . would be highly beneficial to both . . . , but it openly professes its own inability" to fund such an enterprise.³⁵ But despite the ACS's financial embarrassments and reduced expectations, donations actually

³⁴ Staudenraus is not alone among historians of the ACS for focusing more on the early than the late antebellum period. Early Fox, for example, ended his account of the ACS in 1840 because his overall goal was to defend the colonization movement from charges of supporting slavery and "[n]o one who is even tolerably acquainted with the Society's history . . . can have the slightest well-founded suspicion that . . . it pursued a proslavery policy" after that time. Fox, *American Colonization Society*, 12. (Given that the ACS's emancipationist rhetoric decreased rather than increased over time, Fox's claim is a strange one.)

³⁵ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 22, no. 8 (August, 1846), 242.

significantly *increased* during the 1840s and '50s; colonizationists during this period might have been less “practical” by Staudenraus’s standards, but they seem to have been more numerous and generous.

George Fredrickson, writing in 1971, repeated and extended many of Staudenraus’s arguments. Like Staudenraus, Fredrickson portrayed the ACS as fundamentally (if gradually) emancipationist: Colonizationists “sought support in the deep South by disclaiming any intention of interfering directly with . . . slavery. . . , but they generally made it clear that their real aim was to increase voluntary manumissions as part of a movement toward the total elimination of black servitude in the United States.”³⁶ And like Staudenraus, Fredrickson thought that colonizationism had outlived its relevance by the end of the 1830s. Fredrickson, however, explains this (supposed) decline in colonization’s support in the context of a broader argument that colonizationism represented an older, conservative reform tradition that was supplanted in the 1830s by “a new reform spirit . . . that found abhorrent the basic premises of colonization.”³⁷ Colonizationists perceived entrenched racial prejudice against blacks in the United States (though they often claimed that they did not share it), and, according to Fredrickson, their fundamentally conservative nature encouraged them to seek a form of segregation rather than combat the prejudice: “[H]uman thought and action were largely determined by an inherited fabric of well-established customs, institutions and prejudices . . . , which it would be foolish to and dangerous to think of altering in any fundamental

³⁶ George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 9-10.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 27. In Fredrickson’s view, these new radical reformers “reflected new aspirations for the liberation of the individual from the historical and institutional limitations taken for granted by [colonizationists].” *Ibid.*

way.”³⁸ Fredrickson’s argument confirms colonizationists’ emancipationist intentions, but also reinforces the idea that colonization became irrelevant in the 1830s as, in Fredrickson’s view, a new perfectionist reform movement emerged, which portrayed human prejudices as malleable rather than immutable.

Penelope Campbell’s 1971 *Maryland in Africa* also maintains Staudenraus’s basic outlook on the colonization movement. Like Staudenraus, Campbell ends her account on a note of failure: “Measurement of domestic colonization goals against achievements . . . produces a . . . woeful tale.”³⁹ Like the national organization, the Maryland State Colonization Society (MSCS) perpetually flirted with insolvency, and never came close to achieving its goal of substantially affecting the size of free black populations in the state. By focusing on the Maryland society, Campbell also inevitably emphasizes sectional divisions in the national colonization movement. Maryland was not the only state to attempt separation from the national ACS organization; Mississippi, Louisiana, Kentucky, New York, and Pennsylvania all experimented with separate, semi-independent Liberian settlements specifically for emigrants from their respective states. These attempts at independent action were all short-lived, and the settlements founded by state societies besides Maryland’s were all quickly reincorporated into Liberia. Maryland had by far the most success as an independent organization, largely due to a relatively generous annual appropriation from the state legislature.

Campbell’s history serves as a useful study of the issues splintering the national colonization movement. As will be discussed in more depth in Chapter 3, Maryland’s colonizationists were dissatisfied with and abandoned the national ACS for two basic

³⁸ Ibid., 19.

³⁹ Penelope Campbell, *Maryland in Africa: The Maryland State Colonization Society, 1831-1857* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971), 242.

reasons. First, colonizationist boosters in Maryland thought the main Liberian colony lacking in financial planning and moral character. Secondly, Maryland colonizationists decided to separate themselves from the national ranks because they perceived the national movement as already splintering.

The heated arguments, the discord, and the general confusion . . . convinced Maryland observers that a compromise between the two factions could never be effected. Southern participants complained that northern society members dominated its policies; they insisted that abolition rather than colonization, was becoming the organization's objective and that they were about to be deprived of their right, guaranteed by law, to possess slaves. Representatives from the North alleged that the parent society's trend was to perpetuate slavery because it would not undertake a crusade against the institution in the South but, rather, contented itself with colonizing free blacks and slaves freed for settlement in Liberia.⁴⁰

By focusing on sectional divisions in the national colonization movement, Campbell joined the chorus of historians who have portrayed colonizationists as a splintered, conflicted amalgam of various factions. However, despite Maryland's slave-state status, Campbell demonstrates that in the national schism over slavery predicted by Maryland colonizationists, the MSCS aligned itself with the cause of emancipation. "The . . . objective was to convert Maryland into a free state and to make the Potomac River, rather than the Mason-Dixon line, the slaveholding states' boundary."⁴¹ Campbell argues that the MSCS was trying to position itself "to be heirs of Liberian interest in the United States following the probable disintegration of the American Colonization Society."⁴² Expecting the national movement to splinter, Marylanders thought themselves well-positioned to take the lead in future colonization plans. Northerners would support the MSCS for explicitly seeking to end slavery (and black residency) in the state, while Southerners would trust Maryland's population not to violate their rights to hold slaves,

⁴⁰ Ibid., 61-62.

⁴¹ Ibid., 60.

⁴² Ibid., 62.

and Baltimore would become a central port for emigrants all over the country. In this way, although the MSCS's desertion from ACS ranks represents the most prominent example of sectional conflict within the national colonization movement, the MSCS actually mirrored the ACS in its utopian plans and its desire to seek a middle ground between proslavery and antislavery positions.⁴³

Staudenraus's and Campbell's descriptions of colonization as a failed movement, and Campbell's emphasis on divisions among colonizationists, probably helped to contribute to the relative lack of attention that the colonization movement would receive in subsequent years. Following Campbell's *Maryland in Africa*, it would be over three decades before the next academic monograph on the antebellum colonization movement was published. Many historians accepted Staudenraus's argument that the colonization movement ground to an early halt under the increased pressure from all sections of the country. As Bruce Rosen wrote in 1972, "By 1834 the American Colonization Society had lost most of its appeal, both North and South. In the South it was considered too radical, and in the North too conservative."⁴⁴ Campbell's description of the ACS as splintered between North and South also became canonical, as Frankie Hutton concurred in 1983: "Southerners hoped the movement would rid the South of free blacks, whom they perceived as a nuisance and as potential troublemakers. . . [M]any northerners

⁴³ Campbell's text also repeats the idea that colonizationism embraced supporters with diverse ideological perspectives, including those who "supported colonization for selfish, evil reasons" (primarily strengthening slavery by removing troublesome free black populations) and others who "deplored slavery in any form, and . . . considered the Negro capable of the same improvements accomplished by white men." Ibid., 242.

⁴⁴ Bruce Rosen, "Abolition and Colonization, the Years of Conflict: 1829-1834," *Phylon* 33, no. 2 (2nd Quarter, 1972): 191.

continued to view colonization as a missionary project and perhaps a means of ending slavery.”⁴⁵

As historians often portrayed colonization as a schizophrenic movement divided between those who sought to reinforce slavery and those who sought to undermine it, those historians who have attempted to define colonization’s core principles have also found themselves divided. Some historians maintained (following Staudenraus’s and Campbell’s lead) that “most colonizationists in the upper South were genuine, if overly cautious, opponents of hereditary bondage.”⁴⁶ James Brewer Stewart has argued for colonization’s importance as a precursor to the full-fledged abolitionist movement (in similar terms as George Fredrickson): “[T]he Society served as an important transition for abolitionists-to-be. . . . The American Colonization Society . . . foreshadowed radical abolitionism.”⁴⁷

However, subsequent scholarship demonstrated a growing focus on the Southern wing of the colonizationist movement, and on colonizationists’ racism and proslavery tendencies. This trend was symbolically initiated by Douglas Egerton, who wrote an article in 1985 challenging traditional accounts of the founding of the ACS by New Jersey Presbyterian minister Robert Finley, and proposing that credit for founding the society should rather belong to Virginia politician Charles Fenton Mercer. Egerton’s

⁴⁵ Frankie Hutton, “Economic Considerations in the American Colonization Society’s Early Effort to Emigrate Free Blacks to Liberia, 1816-36,” *The Journal of Negro History* 68, no. 4 (Autumn, 1983): 378.

⁴⁶ Jeffrey B. Allen, “‘All of Us are Highly Pleased with the Country’: Black and White Kentuckians on Liberian Colonization,” *Phylon* 43, no. 2 (2nd Quarter, 1982): 97.

⁴⁷ James Brewer Stewart, *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1976), 31. Robert Abzug takes a similar view of the colonization movement, which he places in the second of three successive waves of antebellum reform (religious revivalism, moral reform, and radical social change), each more ambitious than the last. In this conception, colonization was a conservative scheme which sought to reform society but stopped short of the abolitionists’ more radical efforts to expand conceptions of American citizenship. Robert H. Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 79-80, 127-128, and *passim*.

claim, based on the proposition that an early colonizationist letter from Finley has been misdated, may be of relatively little importance in itself. (After all, the man who laid the foundation for the creation of the ACS, whichever of them it was, must have borrowed from earlier ideas and models such as Britain's Sierra Leone colony.⁴⁸) But, Egerton argues, "[b]ecause the kindly Finley harbored vague abolitionist tendencies, the society has generally been placed on the conservative, religiously motivated end of the abolitionist spectrum."⁴⁹ But if the ACS was in fact founded by a proslavery Southerner like Mercer, then perhaps the men who controlled the Society were actually slaveowners who "struggled to remove free blacks, who 'endangered' their 'peace' and 'impaired the value' of their 'private property.'"⁵⁰

Historians' increasing suspicions that colonizationists harbored proslavery motives were also promoted by the burgeoning literature focusing on African American subjects. Floyd Miller's 1975 *The Search for a Black Nationality* inaugurated the study of black participation in the colonization movement. Viewing antebellum colonization from an African American perspective required Miller to point out that "Most Afro-Americans viewed the organization as a deportation society whose members believed both in black inferiority and in the necessity of ridding the country of its free black population in order to preserve the institution of slavery."⁵¹ However, Miller's focus is on the minority of free blacks "who decided that, regardless of the motives of the Colonization Society's members, planting an Afro-American colony in West Africa

⁴⁸ Nor is Egerton the first to notice that both Finley and Mercer laid plausible claim to paternity of the ACS. Even in 1917, Henry Noble Sherwood contended that the two men's early support of colonization was "concurrent . . . but apparently . . . independent." Sherwood, "Formation of the ACS," 213.

⁴⁹ Douglas R. Egerton, "'Its Origin Is Not a Little Curious': A New Look at the American Colonization Society," *Journal of the Early Republic* 5, no. 4 (Winter, 1985): 463.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 479-480.

⁵¹ Floyd J. Miller, *The Search for a Black Nationality: Black Emigration and Colonization 1787-1863* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975), 54.

would free blacks from the degradation they experienced in the United States.”⁵² Blacks who supported colonization, Miller suggests, did so for entirely separate reasons from those held by white colonizationists; antebellum black emigrants were motivated by

proto-Pan-Africanism . . . , a belief in the interconnectedness of all black peoples—historically, culturally, and politically— . . . and [the belief] that Africa and her peoples possessed a grand, heroic past which must be rescued from the darkness to which European and American prejudice had consigned it.⁵³

In focusing on black interest in colonization, Miller’s book follows a strange chronology; the first section ends in the 1820s, and the second picks up in the 1850s. During the intervening two decades, Miller suggests, there simply was not any organized black interest in colonization to describe (though of course individuals continued to emigrate to Liberia). Though in some respects this chronology mirrors the traditional account of white colonizationists’ decline during the 1830s and ‘40s, Miller almost entirely ignores the history of white colonizationists; his goal is to chronicle the growth of black nationalist sentiment.⁵⁴

Where Miller considers white colonizationists’ motives as largely irrelevant to his tale, other historians investigating the African American perspective on colonization have tended to be very critical of the ACS’s goals. Ella Forbes accurately points out that “Blacks played a leading role in the antislavery movement and in the defeat of

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., 271.

⁵⁴ Historian Tom Schick has followed Miller’s lead in describing the antebellum rise of black nationalism among Liberian emigrants. In fact, Schick argues that many emigrants saw the creation of Liberia as a black nationalist stroke against slavery in the U.S.; these emigrants believed “that slavery would never end until the capacity of the African race to manage its own affairs had been demonstrated to the world. . . [T]he uplifting of the African race could only be accomplished outside of America; once there were strong, independent Negro states, the days of slavery would be numbered.” Tom S. Schick, *Behold the Promised Land: A History of Afro-American Settler Society in Nineteenth-Century Liberia* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 7. Schick carries his investigation of black nationalism into Liberia, and describes the society that African American emigrants created there – one that attempted (and largely failed) to unite natives and recaptured slaves in a prosperous Christian republic.

colonization,” but her reading of black opposition to colonization leads her to claim that “[c]learly, the American Colonization Society was not interested in abolishing slavery, but supporting it.”⁵⁵ Another student of the African American perspective on colonization has claimed that antebellum blacks “stripped away the façade of philanthropy, [and] revealed the ACS had no antislavery goals, no sincere concern for the condition of free blacks, and no serious commitment to Christian missions in Africa.”⁵⁶ Ira Berlin concurred with the idea that black opponents of colonization had accurately assessed the movement: “Free Negroes had no illusions about the motives of the colonizationists. Whites wanted to get rid of them and cared little how they did it.”⁵⁷ Leon Litwack, meanwhile, argued that Northern colonizationists were motivated by fear of free black populations rather than any abolitionist impulse: “In northern legislatures and constitutional conventions, speakers often coupled demands for Negro disfranchisement, anti-immigration laws, and other racial restrictions with proposals to promote African colonization.”⁵⁸ Some historians have also hinted that colonizationists were behind anti-abolitionist riots and other episodes of violence in the antebellum North.⁵⁹ Paul Goodman has contended that the ACS “provided political and ideological

⁵⁵ Ella Forbes, “African-American Resistance to Colonization,” *Journal of Black Studies* 21, no. 2 (December, 1990): 223, 218.

⁵⁶ Haroon Kharem, *A Curriculum of Repression: A Pedagogy of Racial History in the United States* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 100.

⁵⁷ Ira Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 356. Berlin is talking here (and throughout this book) specifically about Southern colonizationists, and not necessarily the national movement, though he seems to believe that Southerners represented the heart of the colonizationist base.

⁵⁸ Leon F. Litwack, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961), 22.

⁵⁹ Lorman Ratner discusses the role of the colonizationist newspaper *The Boston Recorder* in inciting violence against abolitionists, and Henry Mayer writes that “[c]olonization and ‘Negro-phobia’ worked hand in glove,” and contends that the famous violent response to Prudence Crandall’s 1833 attempt to found a Connecticut school for black girls was motivated by colonizationist impulses. (Hugh Davis, on the other hand, points out that abolitionists praised “‘pious and respectful colonizationists’ . . . who . . . opposed the . . . outrage.”) Lorman Ratner, *Powder Keg: Northern Opposition to the Antislavery*

cover for an expansionist slave South,” and that “the extraordinary, chameleonlike character of colonization ideology” obscured the organization’s goal of “removing the onus of slavery from the shoulders of Southerners.”⁶⁰ Though these historians were undoubtedly correct to point out the racism and conservatism of the colonization movement, portrayals of the ACS as a proslavery institution represent at best an oversimplification of colonizationists’ intentions.

Despite the general historiographical turn towards portraying the colonization movement in more critical terms as a racist, proslavery institution, the traditional account of the ACS as a divided institution endured. Colonizationists continued to be described as “at one extreme . . . , Southern slaveholders who . . . advocated free black emigration from fear that this ‘incendiary’ population would subvert white authority, [and] at the other . . . anti-slavery reformers who felt that assimilation was a desirable but unrealistic goal.”⁶¹ The ACS’s success in maintaining a national support base from all sections of the country, then, could be dismissed as due to the fact that its project “could be promoted among southern slaveholders as removing a population dangerous to slavery and among antislavery northerners as reducing bondage through gradual manumission and deportation.”⁶² Since most historians continued to view colonizationism as a confused movement without any central unifying ideology (and the ACS’s influence was thought to be on the wane by the 1830s), many writers have simply not taken

Movement 1831-1840 (New York: Basic Books, 1968), 101-102. Henry Mayer, *All on Fire: William Lloyd Garrison and the Abolition of Slavery* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998), 117. Hugh Davis, “Northern Colonizationists and Free Blacks, 1823-1837: A Case Study of Leonard Bacon,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 17, no. 4 (Winter, 1997): 669.

⁶⁰ Paul Goodman, *Of One Blood: Abolitionism and the Origins of Racial Equality* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 16, 18.

⁶¹ Ryan, Susan M., “Errand into Africa: Colonization and Nation Building in Sarah J. Hale’s Liberia,” *The New England Quarterly* 68, no. 4 (December, 1995): 560.

⁶² Sellers, *Market Revolution*, 126.

colonizationism very seriously as a force in the antebellum discourse and politics around slavery. It is some indication of the stagnant nature of the historical literature on colonization that in 1994, William Freehling felt compelled to address “posterity’s judgment that [the colonization scheme] was preposterous.”⁶³ Freehling wanted to demonstrate that in the context of antebellum America, colonization seemed to its supporters a reasonable scheme – especially when, as he points out, the exodus was expected to take at least a century to be complete, and could be financed by profit from Liberian trade, or by the African American emigrants themselves. Freehling describes the nineteenth century as an age of mass migrations – of westward expansion and European immigration. In this context, Liberian colonization did not appear so far-fetched. “In an age of forced exoduses, forced Americanization, and massive movements of peoples, a purifying federal migration experiment with blacks looked as pragmatically American as a Trail of Tears.”⁶⁴ Freehling’s emphasis on the racism of the colonization scheme is thoroughly modern, but the point he is trying to make – that colonization appeared feasible in the antebellum perspective – is substantially the same argument that Staudenraus advanced in 1961 (though Freehling’s emphasis on historical context is original and noteworthy).

Despite the relatively static character of historians’ discussion of the colonization movement over the past several decades, there have been a few significant recent interventions, and a resurgence of interest in the subject in just the past few years. First, John Quist’s 1998 *Restless Visionaries* represents an important contribution to the literature on colonization. Quist’s subject is not colonization, but rather the broader

⁶³ William W. Freehling, *The Reintegration of American History: Slavery and the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 148.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 154.

landscape of antebellum benevolent reform movements (and specifically in rural settings), and his discussion of colonization is limited, though revealing. His book investigates reform movements in Washtenaw County, Michigan, and Tuscaloosa County, Alabama. However, the colonizationist movement never gained much support or attention in Michigan (though the ACS was quite popular in neighboring Ohio), and Quist's observations are therefore limited almost entirely to Tuscaloosa, which was not itself a particular hotbed of colonizationist activity. Quist also repeats the well-worn canard that "[t]he genius behind the colonization movement was its ability to represent different things to different people."⁶⁵ Nevertheless, his analysis of colonization is worth mentioning. First, even his decision to discuss colonization in the context of a broader study of antebellum reform is somewhat unusual. Though the ACS's organization, fund-raising techniques, and millennial aims were clearly (and explicitly) modeled after contemporary organizations such as the American Bible Society, American Tract Society, and American Temperance Society, most histories of antebellum reform movements give colonization little, if any, attention.⁶⁶ Quist discovers, though, that colonizationists shared many traits with supporters of other reform societies in Tuscaloosa. In fact, they were often the same people: Of nineteen Tuscaloosa residents who were charter members of the Alabama Colonization Society, "9 of the 19 . . . participated in activities

⁶⁵ John Quist, *Restless Visionaries: The Social Roots of Antebellum Reform in Alabama and Michigan* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998), 315.

⁶⁶ Since the Bible Society and Colonization Society were both formed in 1816, and the national Tract and Temperance Societies not for another decade, it's entirely possible that the Colonization Society developed the model for benevolent organizations as much as it followed any pre-existing one. It is difficult to evaluate any such claim because historians of antebellum reform movements have not investigated other societies' possible debts to the ACS. In any case, if Staudenraus is to be believed, the ACS didn't seriously address itself to voluntary donations as a significant revenue source until the 1820s and '30s, when it became obvious that federal funding would not be forthcoming. The ACS leadership may have instituted fund-raising practices during this time adopted from other organizations, even if the ACS's foundation preceded theirs.

connected with the benevolent empire such as a Sunday school or a Bible, tract, or missionary society, and . . . 7 of these 19 were temperance activists.”⁶⁷ This is unsurprising, given the commonly remarked overlap among the antebellum reform organizations of the “benevolent empire.” These organizations “propagated the same world-view, tapped the same financial resources, and had many of the same men on their boards of directors.”⁶⁸ Quist discovers that colonizationists shared other traits with other Tuscaloosa reformers; like members of other contemporary reform organizations, colonizationists were of Southern origin, relatively wealthy, and professional. They attended the same evangelical Protestant churches and voted for the same Whig political candidates. There were some differences, however, between colonizationists and other reformers: “[W]hen compared with the other Tuscaloosa voluntary societies . . . , Alabama colonizationists . . . were more likely to own slaves, [and] to work as professionals. . . More than any other reform . . . in antebellum Tuscaloosa, colonizationists came from the ranks of the elite.”⁶⁹ Quist suggests that the “predominance of large slaveholders [in the colonizationist movement] suggests that they may have supported colonization because they saw it as a means to strengthen slavery by

⁶⁷Quist, *Restless Visionaries*, 323. “Additionally, at least ten of . . . thirty-six contributors to colonization [in 1846] participated in the temperance crusade, and thirteen were active in local Bible, tract, missionary, or Sunday-school societies. Eight colonizationists embraced both temperance and at least one benevolent cause.” *Ibid.*, 332.

⁶⁸Walters, *American Reformers*, 33.

⁶⁹Quist, *Restless Visionaries*, 332. Quist may exaggerate his own conclusions somewhat regarding the greater wealth of colonizationists compared to the members of other societies. Of the colonizationists he tracks in the 1850 census, he finds the mean value of their real estate holdings to be \$5,259, with a median of \$2,500, and a median slaveholding of seven slaves. Of the twenty-three Tuscaloosa Temperance Society members for which Quist was able to find slaveholding data in the 1850 census, twenty-one owned slaves, with a median holding of twenty slaves, and the mean real-estate holdings of households contributing to the Female Benevolent Society in 1850 was \$5,222 (median \$2,500). This evidence might seem to contradict Quist’s contention that colonizationists were significantly wealthier than their counterparts in other reform efforts. *Ibid.*, 331, 221, 87.

ridding the state of free blacks,”⁷⁰ but hesitates to reach any definite conclusions on the matter. Quist’s work is notable for being the first significant attempt to describe the demographic base of the colonizationist movement, and although his findings are severely limited in geographic scope, *Restless Visionaries* provides at least a hint that colonizationists were of similar backgrounds as the membership of other contemporary benevolent reform movements, if perhaps somewhat more economically advantaged.

Where *Restless Visionaries* provides a new glimpse at colonization in the South, Joanne Melish’s *Disowning Slavery*, also published in 1998, contains an important perspective on colonizationism in the North. Melish asserts, in fact, that “[t]he ideal of African colonization as espoused by the American Colonization Society gained nearly universal support in the northern states between its inception [in 1816] and the mid-1830s.”⁷¹ Melish’s overall goal is to demonstrate the ways in which the history of slavery in the North was effaced in the early nineteenth century as New England portrayed itself as a “free” space contrasted with the slave South.

Having largely disconnected people of color from their historical experience of oppressive enslavement in the New England states, whites could insist that the only way to account for the often impoverished condition of people of color there was their innate inferiority; at the same time, this conclusion enabled most whites to disclaim social responsibility for that condition.⁷²

The colonization scheme both resulted from and encouraged this perception of the black presence in the North as unnatural and without historical precedent:

⁷⁰ Ibid., 325.

⁷¹ Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and “Race” in New England, 1780-1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 193. As much as I respect Melish’s attempt to resuscitate the ACS’s importance in the historical literature, I think she may overstate her case here. Colonization may have had no prominent or organized detractors prior to the rise of immediate abolitionism in the early 1830s (besides free blacks, whose views on the subject were generally ignored by whites), but this does not necessarily imply “nearly universal support.” And certainly the frequency and urgency with which the ACS appealed for public financial support in the 1820s and ‘30s might be taken as some indication that pro-colonization sentiment was, if broadly shared, tepid.

⁷² Ibid., 3.

[B]y consistently representing people of color as a permanent class of strangers, native only and always to Africa, it contributed to the effacement of their local history of enslavement and undermined their claims of entitlement to citizenship. In so doing, it further encouraged whites to regard the nineteenth-century presence of people of color in New England as anomalous and unaccountable.⁷³

Northern colonizationists could not conceive of a place in society for free African Americans, Melish argues, because they consistently viewed free blacks as “strangers,” external to the American society and body politic. Colonizationists “strengthened New England claims to a uniquely white, uniquely moral . . . regional identity that could be contrasted sharply with the immorality, Africanization, and backward agriculturalism of a South fatally compromised by slavery.”⁷⁴ In this view, Northern colonizationists did not so much cater to Southern supporters as condescend to them, and New England colonizationists were actually less concerned about any potential effect on Southern slavery than they were with making their own communities racially homogeneous to match their conceptions of New England as an exclusively white space. In many respects, the inability to imagine a social space for black citizens which Melish imputes to New England whites could be extended to describe colonization supporters across the country, as well. However, my own reading of colonizationist rhetoric in New England and across the North differs substantially from hers. As will be discussed in Chapter 4, I find this rhetoric to focus on the removal of Southern slaves rather than Northern free blacks. (In any case, as the vast majority of Liberian emigrants were drawn from Southern states, colonization was not a very good tool for the task of racially homogenizing New England.)

⁷³ Ibid., 198.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 217.

Recent years have also seen an increased attention to the role that gender played in the colonization movement, no doubt inspired by the burgeoning literature on women's participation in abolition and other antebellum reform efforts.⁷⁵ While the historiographical consensus is that women's participation in these moral reform movements allowed women increasingly to voice their opinions on political matters, and also fostered the development of the nascent women's rights movement, historian Bruce Dorsey contends that "sizable numbers of white women were peculiarly absent among colonizationists."⁷⁶ Dorsey suggests that the colonization society's comparative lack of female support was due to its national and political focus, while other contemporary organizations were less political and more directly (and locally) philanthropic: "From its inception, colonizationists framed their reform activity within a definitively masculine public arena, giving colonization a gendered—that is, masculine—character. . . . [T]he colonization society maintained a political cast to its operations from the outset."⁷⁷ Furthermore, Dorsey argues, the entire nineteenth-century concept of "colonization" was gendered as a masculine activity: "Colonization supporters exploited these notions of manly migration and entrepreneurial industry when defending their cause, thereby connecting manliness with their particular brand of activism."⁷⁸ Although white colonization supporters would not themselves be undertaking the colonizing mission to

⁷⁵ For examples of this growing body of scholarly literature, see: Lori D. Ginzburg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990); Nancy A. Hewitt, *Women's Activism and Social Change: Rochester, New York, 1822-1872* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984); Julie Roy Jeffrey, *The Great Silent Army of Abolitionism: Ordinary Women in the Antislavery Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Mary Ryan, *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825-1880* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1998); and Anne Boylan, *The Origins of Women's Activism: New York and Boston, 1797-1840* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

⁷⁶ Bruce Dorsey, "A Gendered History of Colonization in the Antebellum United States," *Journal of Social History* 34, no. 1 (Autumn, 2000): 78.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 84.

Africa, they understood the project in gendered terms, granting black emigrants a masculine identity as African colonists that was unimaginable in the American context: “[T]he power of colonizing as a sign of civilization meant that emigrating to Africa would eventually make men out of African American men.”⁷⁹

Karen Younger, on the other hand, contends that Dorsey has underestimated the importance of female participation in the colonization movement. In fact, she argues that women’s auxiliaries and other support mechanisms created by women became increasingly important during the crucial period of the 1830s:

The heyday for female support occurred during [this] brief but intense period. . . It was during this time that the ACS was losing its centrality in the political imagination. As a consequence, benevolent activity became more compelling to the organization, and a more defined role for women took shape as volunteerism and moral suasion became privileged over politics.⁸⁰

As the ACS’s dream of federal support began to slip in the 1830s, and the Society attempted to recast itself as a benevolent agency worthy of charitable contributions from the public, evidence of women’s participation in the movement was employed as a demonstration of the cause’s philanthropic merit: “Colonization leaders argued that female participation in colonization proved the righteousness of colonization efforts.”⁸¹ Younger argues that women’s participation in the colonization movement did not lay the foundations for the women’s rights movement in the same way that abolitionist activism did: “Unlike female abolitionists who came to see their own oppression reflected in the experiences of slaves, female colonizationists refused to identify with African American

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Karen Virginia Fisher Younger. “‘Africa Stretches Forth Her Hands Unto You’: Female Colonization Supporters in the Antebellum United States,” PhD diss., Pennsylvania State University, 2006, 13.

⁸¹ Ibid., 101.

women.”⁸² However, women’s participation in the colonization movement, as in other contemporary reform societies, justified women’s voice and opinions on some of the most important public issues of the day: “[T]he very presence of female supporters legitimized the assumption that women had a duty to bring their moral principles concerning race and slavery into the public sphere.”⁸³ Younger points out that in the 1840s and ‘50s, women’s colonization support became increasingly restricted to more traditional “domestic” agendas such as education and missionary work. Despite their very different arguments (one emphasizing women’s participation in the colonization movement, and the other the relative lack thereof), both Younger and Dorsey agree that the Society’s political focus in its early years differentiated it from other contemporary reform efforts, and contributed to a gendered conception of the colonization effort as a “masculine” cause.

The past few years have also seen the publication of three new studies of the colonization movement – the first published monographs in over three decades, all of which share some remarkable similarities. Claude Clegg’s 2004 *The Price of Liberty*, Eric Burin’s 2005 *Slavery and the Peculiar Solution*, and Marie Tyler-McGraw’s 2007 *An African Republic* all focus on the colonization movement in the South, but these historians largely diverge from the tradition of authors such as Egerton, Berlin, Litwack, and Melish, who have emphasized colonizatonists’ racism and proslavery tendencies. Burin, in fact, writes that “[b]y the 1990s, many authors no longer considered the ACS an antislavery institution,” but argues that his own work will help to “place . . . the Society .

⁸² Ibid., 10.

⁸³ Ibid., 102.

. . . back in the antislavery circle.”⁸⁴ Clegg is less definitive in his conclusions, but he focuses on the unique context of the colonization movement in North Carolina, where Quakers dominated the ranks of colonizationists. In fact, “[f]or all intents and purposes, the Friends *were* the colonization movement in North Carolina.”⁸⁵ By the late eighteenth century, Quakers in North Carolina were turning against slavery, but since North Carolina law prohibited manumitting slaves without providing for their transportation outside the state, the Quaker community was left with nominal ownership over a group of quasi-free African Americans. The Quaker leadership of the North Carolina State Colonization Society (NCSCS) created an anomalous situation in North Carolina:

Although the stated primary purpose of the ACS was to rid the country of free blacks, the Liberian emigration movement in North Carolina was an instrument of emancipation from the beginning. In the hands of Quakers, colonization had always been coupled with the manumission of quasi-free blacks, whom state laws had made it near impossible to liberate.⁸⁶

And although North Carolina Quaker support of colonization declined by the 1830s, due to a combination of factors including the reduction of slaveholdings by the Quaker community, increasing questions about Liberia’s suitability, and white Quakers’ own

⁸⁴ Eric Burin, *Slavery and the Peculiar Solution: A History of the American Colonization Society* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), 2. In an endnote, Burin also credits Clegg as being part of the same movement. *Ibid.*, 175n4.

⁸⁵ Claude A. Clegg, III, *The Price of Liberty: African Americans and the Making of Liberia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 75. For another take on Quaker involvement in the American Colonization Society, see Emma J. Lapansky-Werner and Margaret Hope Bacon, eds., *Back to Africa: Benjamin Coates and the Colonization Movement in America 1848-1880* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005). Lapansky-Werner and Bacon help to explicate the circumstances of the “Hicksite schism” of 1827 which divided the Quaker church between abolitionist followers of Elias Hicks, and a more conservative Orthodox wing. They are also somewhat critical of the motives of Coates and other Quaker colonizationists, contending that “social isolation from their black neighbors led many white Quakers . . . to an insensitivity to the needs, wishes, desires, and opinions of the black community.” Lapansky-Werner and Bacon also suggest that Coates may have been motivated partially out of pecuniary desire. Coates’s attempt to foster cotton cultivation in Africa may have been connected to his own textile business: The colonization scheme “could . . . help white men of conscience—like Coates himself—obtain the raw materials they needed.” *Ibid.*, 21, 38.

⁸⁶ Clegg, *Price of Liberty*, 188.

emigration from North Carolina, the NCSCS subsequently became a vehicle primarily for slaveowners wishing to dispose of their slave property.

Tyler-McGraw, who focuses on colonizationism in Virginia, complicates this portrait of colonization as largely a movement of emancipatory slaveowners. Although she concurs that “[t]he ACS in Virginia began as essentially antislavery in the older gradual-emancipation tradition,” she argues that the decline of the Virginia Colonization Society into nonactivity “by the mid-1830s demonstrated that Virginia was [not] able to move toward emancipation politically. . . . And when it was revived, in the late 1840s, its membership was dominated by men whose concerns were . . . in sympathy with the slaveholder.”⁸⁷ According to Tyler-McGraw, early Virginian colonizationists believed that the scheme would eradicate the sin of slavery in the state, but by 1849, when the defunct Virginia Colonization Society was revived with an annual appropriation from the state legislature, the organization no longer sought to emancipate slaves, and focused solely on transporting troublesome free black populations.

However, while Burin, Clegg, and Tyler-McGraw portray colonization in the South as primarily a method for slaveowners to emancipate their slaves legally, these authors also emphasize that slaveowners’ motives were less than purely philanthropic. Clegg writes that “[m]any slave owners . . . repudiated black bondage less on moral grounds than as part of a series of politically expedient and economically driven transactions designed to ensure the well-being of themselves and their heirs.”⁸⁸ He points out that the vast majority of these emancipations were testamentary – made in the wills of dying slaveowners only willing to emancipate their slaves at the time of their own death.

⁸⁷ Marie Tyler-McGraw, *An African Republic: Black & White Virginians in the Making of Liberia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 4, 60.

⁸⁸ Clegg, *Price of Liberty*, 188-189.

Slaves were thus “rewarded” with Liberian freedom only when their masters had quite literally outlived the use of their labor. These emancipations were often subject to contestation by heirs and sometimes courts, and in many cases, slaves were expected to pay the cost of their own transportation through years of hired labor. Like Clegg, Burin sees this practice of testamentary manumissions as an attempt by slaveowners, in a sense, to have it both ways. “In the emancipators’ view, a well-worded will could help one achieve earthly objectives and otherworldly ambitions. . . . Postmortem liberations not only wrung more labor from bondpersons, but they theoretically improved the quality of work extracted.”⁸⁹ Even North Carolina’s Quakers, though “no doubt animated by compassion and humanity regarding their efforts to liberate African Americans—and themselves—from slavery . . . tended to wash their hands of both bondage and blacks, just as many other whites were inclined to do” once they had emigrated to free states.⁹⁰ Unlike previous writers who often sought to understand colonization’s place in the black-and-white debate between proslavery and antislavery, both Clegg and Burin are more sensitive to emancipators’ complicated and often conflicted motivations. “[A]n individual might be attracted to the cause for a variety of intertwined reasons, not all complementary.”⁹¹

⁸⁹ Burin, *Peculiar Solution*, 54-55.

⁹⁰ Clegg, *Price of Liberty*, 137.

⁹¹ This passage is worth quoting at length: “Complicating the array of motives behind the colonization movement, many of the perspectives outlined here were often alloyed with others, and thus an individual might be attracted to the cause for a variety of intertwined reasons, not all complementary. For example, those who spouted religious rhetoric about the possibility of christianizing Africa with black American settlers could also oppose increasing the U.S. free black population, despite its increasingly Christian character. Moreover, those who disapproved of slavery on philosophical or moral grounds were not necessarily at odds with those who despised blacks as a race or used the banner of Free Soil to prohibit African Americans, free or enslaved, from migrating to the Midwest. For many, colonization was not to be wholly equated with either abolitionism or the perpetuation of slavery, though it could sometimes seem conducive of both ends.” *Ibid.*, 34. Like previous students of the colonization movement, Clegg lists the variety of colonizationists’ arguments and motivations. What is new in Clegg’s approach, however, is the

Burin's *Slavery and the Peculiar Solution* focuses specifically on manumissions in the Upper South, which provided the majority of emigrants that the Colonization Society ever transported to Liberia. These emancipations were primarily either testamentary or conceived as a long-term project "subjecting carefully selected bondpersons to unspecified amounts of religious indoctrination, educational instruction, and occupational training"⁹² before consenting to allow their emigration. These "experimental" emancipation projects, like testamentary emancipations, ensured the continued use of slave labor while the date of manumission was delayed, and also encouraged slaves' continued labor and diligence by positioning Liberian freedom as a reward for loyalty and long service. Nevertheless, Burin believes that for the slaveowners effecting these manumissions, colonization represented a cautious critique of the system of slavery. Colonizationist manumitters sincerely believed in the paternalist ideal of slavery, but came to believe that "[t]he inherent nature of the institution prevented bondpersons from identifying with their owners."⁹³ In a way, Burin argues, these slaveholders believed more firmly in the paternalist ideal of slavery than in slavery itself. Colonization became a method of emancipating slaves while maintaining the paternalist burden of education and control. Continuing correspondence between Liberian emigrants and their former masters indicates that these forms of relationships

proposition that these various motives might coincide in the person of a single colonization supporter, rather than representing a series of opposing interest groups.

⁹² Burin, *Peculiar Solution*, 41.

⁹³ Ibid., 38. The paternalist ideal of slavery was a concept pioneered by Eugene Genovese, who wrote that "[p]aternalism defined the involuntary labor of the slaves as a legitimate return to their masters for protection and direction." Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), 5. Slaveowners and slaves were not equal partners in the paternalist view, but they were partners of a sort – trading labor for protection. Burin argues that slaveowners in the Upper South only turned to colonization during the 1840s and '50s when economic instability rendered paternalism increasingly problematic. "There were too many large-scale forces that prevented the realization of the paternalist ideal, contended the liberators." Burin, *Peculiar Solution*, 40.

could outlast slavery itself. Maryland merchant John McDonogh, for example, constructed a typical colonization plan that his slaves could only take advantage of after long service and demonstrating moral preparedness for freedom. Following their emancipation and settlement in Liberia, McDonogh's former slaves continued to correspond with him, "salut[ing him] variously as 'Dear Father,' 'Honored Parent,' 'Dear Beloved Benefactor,' 'Dear friend & benefactor,' 'Dear Beloved Sir,' 'Dear master and friend,' and 'Dear Sir.'"⁹⁴ Such (quite literally) paternal salutations, combined with the general tone of the letters in which McDonogh's former slaves repeatedly requested monetary support and advice, indicates how colonization allowed slaveowners to maintain the paternalist ideal, even while divesting themselves of their slaveholdings (a subject I shall return to in Chapter 3).

Manumitting slaves for Liberian colonization was largely a phenomenon of the Upper South (and even Lower South manumitters were often themselves transplants from Upper South states). From 1820 to 1840, 85 percent of slaveowners who emancipated their slaves for Liberian colonization were of Upper South origin, and though the practice of Liberian manumission became somewhat more common in the Lower South over time, by the 1850s, 75 percent of colonizationist manumitters still were Upper South natives.⁹⁵ Manumitters were also fairly well along in life – the average age in the 1850s was fifty-nine – and Burin describes them as "old-time throwbacks of a long-gone era."⁹⁶ The

⁹⁴ Wiley, ed., *Slaves No More*, 117.

⁹⁵ Burin, *Peculiar Solution*, 36, 46.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 46, 48. Given that testamentary manumissions were the most common method of freeing slaves for colonization, it should not be surprising that manumitters tended to be of advanced age. I would find Burin's argument that manumitters were a declining breed much more convincing if he presented evidence that their average age increased over time, or that manumission declined over time. In actuality, however, manumissions significantly *increased* over the antebellum era, and more manumitted slaves traveled to Liberia in the twelve years prior to the Civil war than during the entire previous history of the ACS. *Ibid.*, 170.

advanced age of manumitters may also reflect the fact that most only undertook colonization projects when their financial position was secure, and the financial impact of foregoing slave labor and property would be minimized. Burin also remarks that women were overrepresented among ACS manumitters – because, he writes, “southern gender norms sensitized them to some of the institution’s injustices and left them vulnerable to sex-specific forms of servile resistance.”⁹⁷ Unsurprisingly, women found it even more difficult than men to live up to the paternalist ideal of slavery, and turned to colonization partially as a way to ensure slaves’ loyalty. Tyler-McGraw also notes the preponderance of women among ACS manumitters and supporters in the South, though she suggests (somewhat implausibly, in my view) that women engaged in colonizationist behavior not to support slavery but to undermine it. Upset at the “habits of tyranny encouraged in their children and the sexual license granted their male relatives” by slavery, these women came to view “slave emancipation . . . as their own emancipation. It would allow them to escape the daily domestic chaos of slavery and the enforced sociability of the Virginia gentry that they believed shackled them to the household.”⁹⁸ White Southern women’s marginal position in slave society doubtless contributed to their relatively greater support of colonization, whether the goal was to shore up a weakened position of authority (as Burin argues) or to undermine an institution from which they could not fully benefit (as Tyler-McGraw contends).

If Burin and Tyler-McGraw describe colonizationist manumitters as somewhat ambivalent critics of slavery, their colonization projects still caused some consternation among their slaveowning neighbors. Manumitters often faced social ostracism for their

⁹⁷ Ibid., 49-50.

⁹⁸ Tyler-McGraw, *African Republic*, 84, 88.

decision, and in at least one case in Mississippi, a mob gathered to prevent a proposed manumission. Manumitters, especially in the rural Lower South, often requested confidentiality in their correspondence with the ACS, and courts debated whether slaves could legally choose between continued enslavement and Liberian freedom. By the Civil War, several states had made testamentary emancipations illegal. And if Southern colonizationists seeking to emancipate their slaves often faced opposition from their neighbors, they also received limited assistance from the North. Voluntary manumissions for Liberian colonization were often trumpeted in the North as evidence of the ACS's benign influence in discouraging slavery, but Northern colonizationists usually expected manumitters to pay the cost of transporting their former slaves to Liberia, in addition to the financial sacrifice of emancipation. Furthermore, manumissions often became tense and difficult affairs; state laws prohibiting manumitted from slaves remaining in the state after a certain period following emancipation sometimes required urgent fundraising to prevent manumitted from reverting to slavery, and potential emigrants also often refused to leave the country without family members who were owned by other masters. In rare cases, as Burin discusses, the Pennsylvania Colonization Society raised funds to help purchase a potential emigrant's spouse, but such actions were controversial: "Abolitionists could charge that PCS advocates were comfortable regarding African-Americans as chattel."⁹⁹ Burin portrays colonizationist manumitters as ambivalent critics of slavery, viewed with suspicion by their Southern neighbors. These neighbors were right to be nervous, he suggests, because "ACS manumissions rippled outward, destabilizing slavery in their wake."¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Burin, *Peculiar Solution*, 92.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

While Burin concerns himself largely with the motivations and challenges confronting colonizationist manumitters, Clegg's project is more focused on the experience of the manumitted slaves in Liberia. *The Price of Liberty* "is the first [book] to probe deeply into both the American background and postmigration experiences of a significant number of Liberian emigrants."¹⁰¹ This interest is shared by Burin and Tyler-McGraw, both of whom include significant material on the experience of African American emigrants in Liberia. Clegg is particularly interested in the identities assumed by emigrants in Liberia. Once removed from

the homogenizing power of white racism and racialized slavery which defined blacks in collective terms and which conditioned their responses to oppression in a similarly corporatist manner . . . , notions of race among many immigrants shifted and relocated away from black/white, slave/free dichotomies that were prevalent in the United States to settler/native, Christian/heathen, civilized/uncivilized, and other divisions and imaginings of self and others that embodied self-interests, expediency, and even fantasy in Africa.¹⁰²

The ACS encouraged emigrants to think of themselves as civilized missionaries to brutish Africa, and the Liberian society which developed became stratified between Western colonists and "savage" African natives, who were not included in Liberia's democratic government, and were often exploited and sometimes even enslaved by the African American colonists. "The price of liberty" of Clegg's title was paid by native Africans: "African American liberty in Liberia . . . meant African loss of independence, property, and lives, a steep price to pay for the enfranchisement of foreigners."¹⁰³ In a similar vein,

¹⁰¹ Clegg, *Price of Liberty*, 6.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 239-240.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 247. Though Clegg makes this point eloquently, he is hardly the first to do so. Histories of Liberia have often perceived the roots of the ultimate failure of the Liberian state in the nineteenth-century social segregation between native and colonist Liberians, and the failure of these colonists to develop a shared national identity. See, for example: G.E. Saigbe Boley, *Liberia: The Rise and Fall of the First Republic* (Hong Kong: MacMillan, 1983); Yekutiel Gershoni, *Black Colonialism: The Americo-Liberian Scramble for the Hinterland* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1985); and Amos Sawyer, *The Emergence of Autocracy in Liberia: Tragedy and Challenge* (San Francisco: ICS Press, 1992). It is not always clear what

Tyler-McGraw writes that “[d]istinctions of class, color, and education . . . were exacerbated in Liberia,”¹⁰⁴ and describes a society in which an elite class of mixed-race merchants dominated trade and politics, to the detriment of darker-skinned emigrants with fewer resources. Both of these authors emphasize that the society founded in Liberia was deeply unequal, and that the enrichment and success of a small number of Liberian emigrants came at the expense of a larger group of impoverished colonists and disenfranchised native Africans.

If Clegg’s, Burin’s, and Tyler-McGraw’s books represent a small recent resurgence of interest in the antebellum colonization movement, the themes and topics they share might provide some indication of the merits and limitations of this recent scholarship. All three authors present a more nuanced picture of colonizationists’ motives than had previous scholarship; they not only provide a corrective to the trend of literature portraying colonization as simply a racist, proslavery measure, but also are attuned to the complex and conflicted reasons that could lie behind colonizationists’ decision to support the movement. Burin and Clegg argue that throughout the antebellum period, Liberian colonization remained a viable way for slaveowners to efface their own association with the institution of slavery while maintaining the ideal of a benevolent, paternalist relationship with the slaves they emancipated. Tyler-McGraw suggests that in

Clegg gains from juxtaposing this material about Liberian society with his discussion of the colonization movement in the United States. His focus on North Carolina makes sense as a geographical limit in the context of his American discussion, but his continued focus specifically on North Carolina emigrants in Liberia can sometimes be jarring, considering that he does not demonstrate that these emigrants’ experience differed substantially from that of other Liberian colonists, or that North Carolinian emigrants continued to identify in any notable way with their state of origin. Tyler-McGraw’s book has a similar structure, but her continued focus on Virginian emigrants in Liberia makes more sense, given that “Liberians from Virginia dominated public offices in the colony.” Tyler-McGraw, *African Republic*, 7. (The large proportion and relative wealth of emigrants from Virginia gave them power to shape the fledgling society, and, to a certain extent, to bar other groups’ access to leadership positions.)

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 152.

the decade prior to the Civil War, the Virginia Colonization Society would retreat from its previous moderate emancipationist position, and adopt an overtly proslavery position. However, if colonizationism did come to be viewed as a proslavery measure in Virginia, this happened relatively late. The majority of Tyler-McGraw's evidence concerns the earlier generation of emancipationist colonizers, and her depiction shares much with Burin's and Clegg's accounts. It is significant that all three authors portray colonization (at least in the Upper South) primarily as a means to dismantle slaveholdings, rather than as a way to reinforce slavery by removing problematic free black populations (at least until the 1850s, when Tyler-McGraw argues that this became a significant motivation in Virginia). This recent scholarship is also to be commended for addressing black agency and experience in the colonization movement – a subject in which the previous literature had been sorely lacking. These books bridge the gap between American and Liberian history, chronicling the ways in which African Americans in Liberia created a society that reflected their origins, and the ways in which African Americans in the United States negotiated conflicting reports from Liberia. But these recent monographs' focus on the Upper South does little to resolve lingering questions about sectional divisions within the colonization movement, and their geographically specific focus limits their analysis of colonizationism's role in the national discourse of slavery and race.

Overall, the historiography of the colonization movement demonstrates a continuing debate concerning some very fundamental unresolved questions: Who were ACS members and supporters? What motivated them to advocate for African American removal and colonization? Were they antislavery Northerners seeking a gradual end to slavery, proslavery Southerners trying to increase the security and value of their slave

property, or emancipationist slaveowners attempting to soothe their consciences through manumission and colonization? Or did the ACS appeal to diverse audiences with various agendas? The historian seeking to answer these questions must attend to colonizationists' own rhetoric. Certainly the ACS left behind no shortage of self-description and explanation of colonization's benefits. For most of the antebellum period, the Society published annual reports, a monthly periodical, and numerous pamphlets and broadsides. As most of these materials were distributed nationally, they reflect arguments designed to appeal to supporters across the country. The sheer volume of these publications itself forms a powerful argument that supporters from diverse geographic backgrounds shared common beliefs and understandings of the scheme. But I also argue that despite some regional and temporal variation, a coherent ideology emerges from antebellum ACS publications. Below, I shall summarize the arguments put forward by the ACS in defense of the colonization scheme, and to analyze colonizationists' vision of their nation and their world.

The Colonizationist Argument(s)

From its foundation, the American Colonization Society proclaimed that the scheme of colonizing American blacks in Africa would produce benefits for many groups. As the longtime ACS secretary (and probably the single most influential individual in the antebellum colonizationist movement) Ralph Randolph Gurley put it in a letter to a supporter,

By the execution of this scheme, we expect to relieve our country from a great evil; improve the condition of those whom we remove; and by introducing into Africa knowledge, industry, and religion, contribute to the suppression of the slave trade, and to the instruction and civilization of the African tribes.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 3, no. 10 (December, 1827), 290.

African colonization, it was argued, would benefit both the African Americans settling in Liberia and the native Africans already there. But the plan was not wholly charitable; colonization would also “relieve our country from a great evil.” As to the nature of this “great evil,” Gurley may have been intentionally vague.

Many colonizationists viewed the continued existence of slavery on American soil to be an evil, and advanced the colonizationist scheme as a plan of gradual emancipation. This view was a plank in the ACS’s national platform, and for most of the antebellum period was openly avowed in the Society’s national publications. “[I]s the Society to be held up as odious and dangerous, because it entertains and avows the opinion that slavery is an evil?” the ACS asked. “Is not this truth inscribed as it were upon the firmament of heaven and the face of the world and the heart of man?—Would not the denial of it, be a denial of the fundamental principle of all Free Government?”¹⁰⁶ Though this sort of rhetoric may have alienated some Southerners, especially in staunchly pro-slavery states like South Carolina, this view of slavery as an “evil” marked most colonizationist supporters from across the country. The consistency with which this argument was advanced in ACS propaganda makes it hard to countenance the arguments of historians like Ella Forbes, Ira Berlin, and Paul Goodman that the Society was a Southern-dominated, proslavery organization.

However, slavery was not the only “evil” that colonizationists hoped to remove from the United States. The free African American population that the Colonization Society planned to transport to Africa was also sometimes described as an evil whose removal would greatly benefit the nation. One 1849 colonizationist memorial requesting financial assistance from the state government of Virginia described free black

¹⁰⁶ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 6, no. 7 (September, 1830), 205-206.

populations as “an incubus on society without profit to themselves or any definable benefit to society. They form an excrescence on the body politic, which requires amputation.”¹⁰⁷ Although colonization was often viewed as a gradual emancipationist measure, it entailed the removal of free blacks in addition to slaves; indeed, the ACS’s constitution officially limited the Society to “colonizing . . . the free people of colour.”

Benevolence

The diversity of aims advocated by the Colonization Society presents the historian with a dilemma. Colonizationists often portrayed their cause as conducive of a range of good ends; the variety of positive results that would be accomplished by colonization was in fact often noted by supporters. A typical supporter wrote that colonization

certainly promises much good to ourselves—it will improve the character of those whom we hold in bondage, as well as the condition of those who have been emancipated. It will extinguish the slave trade. It will introduce civilization and Christianity into Africa. It will benefit the cause of religion, freedom, and humanity.¹⁰⁸

As I have observed above, many historians have succumbed to the temptation to assume that this espoused range of goals served only to obscure the single, real motivations for individual colonizationists’ support of the ACS. Many historians have described the Colonization Society as a divided institution, which contained Northern supporters seeking gradual emancipation through colonization and Southern supporters seeing in the scheme a way to safeguard slavery. But a close reading of the ACS’s antebellum publications does not lend much credence to this view. If any Southerners supported colonization because they believed that it would render their slave possessions more secure, their voices are not recorded in the ACS’s national publications. Though the

¹⁰⁷ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 25, no. 3 (March, 1849), 77.

¹⁰⁸ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 1, no. 1 (March, 1825), 7.

ACS's antebellum literature did occasionally describe free blacks as an irritant to the smooth functioning of slavery (and such descriptions were useful to William Lloyd Garrison and other abolitionists in their attacks on the Colonization Society), the very same texts usually presented gradual emancipation as the eventual goal of the colonizationist scheme. The ACS's Virginia auxiliary, for example, contended that

it is not true, as has been most erroneously supposed by some objectors, that the movement of our Society is either designed, or at all likely to interfere, in any manner whatever, with the rights of masters over their slaves, as established by law, but that, on the contrary, it is most clear that it must rather tend to make those rights more secure, while it shall be deemed expedient to retain them¹⁰⁹

But it then went on equally to excoriate the

false . . . and injurious . . . charge . . . that the enterprise in which we are engaged, is either intended or calculated to perpetuate the existence of slavery in our Southern States, but that, on the contrary, it is most apparent, both from the benevolence of its principles and the history of its operations, that it must tend to increase and multiply cases of voluntary manumission, and so to aid the cause of Liberty and Humanity in the most safe and desirable manner.¹¹⁰

Northern auxiliaries could be even more direct, like the Pennsylvania Colonization Society, which declared that "the moral influence of the Society work[ed] legitimately and unexceptionably for the entire abolition of Slavery."¹¹¹ Such open avowals of the ACS's antislavery intentions were prevalent, at least in the first few decades of the Society's operations. It would have been very difficult for any potential antebellum supporters of the ACS to have read the organization's publications without coming to the conclusion that the Society sought the eventual end of slavery.¹¹² The image of the

¹⁰⁹ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 11, no. 3 (March, 1835), 91.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 8, no. 4 (June, 1832), 125.

¹¹² This end, however, was usually *very* eventual. Even the most ambitious colonizationist schemes contemplated nothing faster than the removal of all African Americans from the United States "[i]n something less than one hundred years." *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 6, no. 10 (December, 1830), 292. Though the ACS usually openly avowed its goal of gradual emancipation, it never aimed to

Southern slaveowner seeking through colonization to increase the security and value of his property, so prevalent in abolitionists' descriptions and in some historians' accounts of the Colonization Society, does not appear in the ACS's own publications, and is probably largely apocryphal.

As following chapters will demonstrate, the rhetoric of the Society and its auxiliaries throughout the country continued to claim the goal of gradual emancipation (though colonizationist rhetoric gradually retreated from this agenda over the course of the antebellum period). There is evidence that the ACS leadership held a more strongly emancipationist perspective than they were willing to espouse in public. In an 1822 private letter, longtime ACS secretary Ralph Randolph Gurley expressed frustration with the failure of Southern Society members to set an example by emancipating their own slaves. "If *New England fails to afford assistance in the African cause*," he wrote, "I must say that I believe it will be *the fault of the South*. Christian planters in the Southern States should be willing to make sacrifices to advance so holy & so grand a design."¹¹³ This complaint may demonstrate conflict within the Society, but it also reveals the sincere antislavery convictions of the ACS leadership.

If some historians have exaggerated the divergence of the aims sought by various colonization supporters, it may be because the Society claimed that many different groups would benefit from the colonization scheme. African colonization was presented as a foreign mission that would stop the Atlantic slave trade and spread Christianity and "civilization" in Africa; as a charitable agency that would place "degraded" American

end slavery in anything less than several generations, and thus never posed a very direct threat to the property or way of life of Southern slaveholders.

¹¹³ Ralph Randolph Gurley to Mary Lee Custis, Aug. 22, 1822. Mary Lee Custis Papers, Virginia Historical Society.

blacks into an equitable society in which they could develop their capabilities; and as a venture that would benefit white America's interests by removing problematic free black populations and opening profitable trade routes to Africa. But this diversity of goals does not necessarily imply variance among the scheme's supporters. Colonizationists themselves, even as they remarked on the variety of good ends that the plan could achieve, emphasized their unity of purpose: "It would seem as if Providence, (that there might be no failure of incentives to prosecute it with vigor,) has surrounded the interprise [sic] with all the inducements which can move a politic or excite a generous heart."¹¹⁴ Though to some extent individual colonization supporters may have been more or less moved by various specific arguments and goals, there is no reason to presume that the Colonization Society was more splintered into ideologically distinct factions than any other contemporary benevolent societies or reform movements. Of course, like any antebellum national organization (and especially as one that crucially touched on issues of slavery and race), the ACS had to confront sectional and political divides. But the organization's unified national message and continued organizing and fundraising success across the country, I believe, speaks more to the accord of its members than their differences. In short, there is an underlying ideological unity to the antebellum colonizationist movement. Recognizing this unity will help not only to comprehend the motives of colonizationists across the country, but also to understand the role of the movement in antebellum cultural and political debates about slavery and race.

The Colonization Society positioned itself squarely in the tradition of other contemporary organizations seeking benevolent ends.

¹¹⁴ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 12, no. 5 (May, 1836), 151.

The Bible Society is on its right hand,—the Missionary Society is on its left hand,—close by it is the Sunday School,—the Tract Society finds in it an agency that can be used as the colporteur of a continent; and even total [prohibition] was a provision in the Constitution of Maryland in Liberia, before Maine laws were dreamed of here.¹¹⁵

The ACS has to be understood in the context of the contemporary benevolent and reform societies that blossomed during the antebellum era, embracing such causes as temperance, missionary work, and educational reform (among many others). As many historians have argued, the antebellum reform movement grew out of the religious perfectionism of the Second Great Awakening and the chaos of economic and political upheavals during this period. Like many of its fellow societies, the ACS sought to reform what it perceived to be a morally and economically problematic population, and thus to promote the smooth functioning of the American democracy and economy. Colonizationists aligned themselves with other reform causes, and, alongside them, sought the millennialist perfection of human societies. A Georgia auxiliary society proclaimed that

the American Colonization Society may be justly ranked with the greatest means employed at this time, with a view to the accomplishment of those events which are indispensable as a prelude to that happy day (and which cannot be distant) when violence and oppression shall be driven from the world, and the ‘knowledge of God shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea . . .’¹¹⁶

The ACS frequently presented the colonization scheme as a mission to Africa, and a method of extending Christianity and Western civilization in the continent. Liberia was destined to become a great economic power and Christian republic, following the American model. The ACS painted a glowing picture of the Liberian future: “The United States of Africa, sustained and cherished by the mother country, till they assume her

¹¹⁵ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 30, no. 3 (March, 1854), 72.

¹¹⁶ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 1, no. 3 (April, 1825), 92.

likeness, bask[ing] in the beams of her splendor, reflect[ing] back the glory of her greatness, attain[ing] and exercis[ing] all her moral and intellectual and physical energies.”¹¹⁷ Colonizationists also claimed that Liberia’s civilizing influence would grow to influence the entire African continent. One typical supporter wrote to the *African Repository* that “Liberia will be a radiating point, from which the blessings of civilization and christianity will be diffused to the African nations generally.”¹¹⁸

Liberia would not only extend Western culture and religion across Africa, colonizationists predicted, but would check the continued slave trade bearing slaves across the Atlantic. The importation of African slaves had been made illegal in the United States in 1808 (eight years before the foundation of the ACS, and twelve years before the foundation of Liberia), but illegal sales of African slaves in the United States and legal importations of slaves into Caribbean and South American nations continued. While the ACS’s critiques of slavery were always careful to express sympathy for American slaveowners (emphasizing that if slavery was an evil, it was a necessary one), the Society spared no mercy in its excoriation of Atlantic slave traders: “How have the sacred ties of nature been ruthlessly sundered, the peaceful village and the quiet home violated by those who would tear children from their parents, and bind even a mother’s limbs in fetters of iron!”¹¹⁹ This emphasis may have been partially calculating; suppressing the African slave trade was the colonizationist goal most actively supported

¹¹⁷ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 6, no. 1 (March, 1830), 26.

¹¹⁸ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 5, no. 5 (July, 1829), 174. There are dissenting voices in the ACS record. Early prominent colonization donor Gerrit Smith (who would later renounce colonization for abolition) argued that “it is quite wrong, to intimate, that the Colonization Society will be a failure, unless it Christianize and civilize Africa; when in fact, neither its Constitution, nor its members contemplate such a work for it.” *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 11, no. 4 (April, 1835), 107. Smith supported colonization primarily as a charitable agency towards free African Americans, and rejected the goal of Christianizing Africa because he doubted the ACS’s ability to accomplish it. Most colonizationists, however, did not share Smith’s sense of realism.

¹¹⁹ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 4, no. 10 (December, 1828), 316.

by the United States government, and the only significant federal funding that the ACS received was for the purpose of “resettling” recaptured slaves confiscated by the U.S. Navy from Atlantic slave ships. But the argument that colonization would suppress the slave trade was used to rouse private as well as public support. (This argument also allowed colonizationists to position the ACS as antislavery without directly attacking the practice of slavery in the United States.)

But if colonizationists predicted that their scheme would produce a new age of prosperity and Westernization in Africa, they did not claim benefits for Africans only. Rather, the African American colonists in Liberia were also supposed to obtain great benefits under the ACS’s plan. “It is clearly evident,” the *African Repository* proclaimed,

that there is something in Liberia—whether the exciting effects of the climate, or more probably the freedom of thought, of speech, and of action, operating in connexion [sic] with a consciousness of privileges never before enjoyed—certainly there is something, which, in many cases, causes an expansion of intellect, and a development of powers, beyond the highest point of mental attainments to which those same individuals would have arrived, had they remained in this country.¹²⁰

Colonizationists provided several arguments for why blacks would fare better in Africa than in the United States. For one, the black race was supposed to be naturally suited for the tropical African climate. This idea of racialized geography was used to argue not only that blacks would succeed in Liberia, but also that *only* blacks could survive there, and thus complete the ACS’s civilizing mission: “While various melancholy facts have shown that white men cannot expect to live long in the Colony, evidence, no less conclusive, has been given, that the climate is congenial to the constitution of the negro,

¹²⁰ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 26, no. 8 (August, 1850), 248.

and that Africa is his proper home.”¹²¹ Though colonizationists often emphasized the lethality of the African climate for whites, they also painted it as an agricultural paradise where “[t]wo hours work a day regularly will afford [the Liberian colonist] comfortable subsistence, if he has not the spirit to wish for any thing more. He will have no biting winter cold to consume his profits; he need be at no expense for firewood, so important in cold countries.”¹²² However, it was not only the weather that would lead to African American colonists’ blossoming in Liberia, but also the colony’s inchoate democracy: “[T]he *children* of the colonists grow up under the influence of their free institutions, with the same feelings of independence as do the free children of our own republic.”¹²³ Although Liberia was governed until 1847 by an ACS-appointed white governor, who had veto power over the democratically elected Liberian government (which was itself

¹²¹ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 6, no. 10 (December, 1830), 298. Though the ACS recognized the mortality of Liberia colonization for whites, they continually denied that black colonists suffered similarly from the “acclimating fever” (probably malaria). Modern demographers have observed that “[t]he life tables created for African American immigrants to Liberia appear to embody the highest mortality ever reliably recorded.” Antonio McDaniel, *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot: The Mortality Cost of Colonizing Liberia in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 104. The ACS’s blithe ignorance of this extreme mortality is troubling, to say the least. The ACS did recognize large numbers of deaths among the colonists transported on some ships, but portrayed these cases as unfortunate exceptions to the general rule of health. Deaths after the first few months of the “acclimating fever” were not recognized as due to the same disease. The ACS’s refusal to recognize the high mortality among African American colonists may also demonstrate the strength of colonizationists’ belief in racialized geography, despite all contravening evidence: “Tropical Africa is the cradle of the negro race; and nothing seems to us more improbable than that the original seat of a people is not a fit habitation for them.” Philip Slaughter, *The Virginian History of African Colonization*, Reprint, (1856; repr., Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1970), x.

¹²² *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 14, no. 7 (July, 1838), 205. This concept of Africa’s tropical plenty also influenced colonizationists’ views of native African cultures. The supposed ease with which the necessities of life could be obtained from Africa’s fruitful soil produced lassitude in African populations. “[A]ll the wants and pleasures of a negro are gratified without occasioning to him the least trouble either of mind or body; his soul hardly ever rouses itself from its quiet and peaceful indolence; all violent passions, inquietudes, and fears, are almost unknown to him; his fatalism makes him neither hope nor dread any event; he never murmurs, but submits to all, and his life passes in unruffled calmness, in voluptuous indolence, which constitutes his supreme pleasure; hence we may reckon the negro among the most favoured and happy productions of nature.” *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 2, no. 2 (March, 1826), 16. Colonizationist portrayals of African cultures were often schizophrenic; Africans were depicted as happily free from the pressures of modern life, but also as degraded savages who must be introduced to modernity.

¹²³ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 16, no. 8 (April 15, 1840), 114.

only representative of the African American colonists, and not of the country's significantly more numerous native population), the Society always portrayed Liberia as a democracy on the American model, in which American blacks could grow from the degraded, reprobate populations they represented in the United States into independent Liberian citizens.

But, according to colonizationist thought, more important than the superior climate and government that the colonist would find in Liberia was what he would leave behind in America. Blacks could never succeed in the United States, colonizationists argued, because prejudice on the part of whites would always prevent African Americans from fully incorporating into American society. The ACS denied that they had sponsored or encouraged this prejudice (a frequent abolitionist charge), but the Society still viewed it as a permanent and unmoveable facet of (white) American culture: "This prejudice we believe to be wrong, radically wrong; and we would remove it, if we could, but we cannot. It is too deeply rooted—too strongly ingrafted into the social compact—to be eradicated by any influence or agency, that has yet been brought to bear upon it."¹²⁴ Only in Liberia, freed from the reach of this prejudice, could blacks succeed. Indeed, it was only by leaving the United States and building Liberia into an ideal democracy and economic power that they could combat American prejudice. As the early substantial ACS contributor Gerrit Smith (who would later desert the ACS for the abolitionist cause) put it, "As Africa rises in the scale of improvement and sends out over the earth a respect for her name and her people, so shall we look with increasing interest and sympathy upon her degraded children that are cast on our own shores."¹²⁵ American racism,

¹²⁴ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 29, no. 6 (June, 1853), 163.

¹²⁵ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 6, no. 7 (August, 1830), 172.

colonizationists argued, was unconquerable, as evidenced by “the peculiarly marked difference of features and colour, [which] will always be an insurmountable barrier to general amalgamation.”¹²⁶ Colonizationists often presented social equality and sexual amalgamation as inseparable, and taunted their abolitionist rivals that

When the Anti-Slavery party, as they style themselves, shall set the example of intermarrying with the blacks, there will be some reason for believing that their asserted horror at this “prejudice” is sincere; but while no such evidence is furnished, and especially since their late solemn disclaimer, as of an imputed crime, of any matrimonial designs on their coloured brethren and sisters, the conclusion is inevitable that they disbelieve, like their adversaries, in the possibility of a physical amalgamation, and consequently of a social and political equality between the two races.¹²⁷

Rhetoric such as this makes it clear that the ACS did appeal to the racial prejudice that it claimed to decry, but the organization treaded a careful line, careful never openly to avow blacks’ racial inferiority. In several cases where speeches or articles published in the *African Repository* implied a belief in racial hierarchy, editorial interventions deflected this interpretation. When one author quoted (erroneous) census statistics showing higher proportions of black than white Americans to be mentally ill or to be criminals, an editorial footnote claimed that “[n]othing is further from the author’s meaning than to intimate constitutional or original inferiority, as belonging to the negro race—descendants of the ancient fathers of civilization and the arts. It is their circumstances that depress them.”¹²⁸

This caution on the part of the ACS may represent an attempt to accommodate diversity of opinion within the colonizationist ranks, but it also reflects a psychological balancing act on the part of many colonizationists – who, though they saw no place for

¹²⁶ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 10, no. 2 (April, 1834), 35.

¹²⁷ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 10, no. 8 (October, 1834), 230.

¹²⁸ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 16, no. 23 (December 1, 1840), 363.

blacks in American society, preferred to think of themselves as bowing to the unconquerable force of prejudice than as accomplices in persecution. After all, colonizationist rhetoric frequently contended that, freed from American prejudice, African Americans would prove capable of responsible democratic citizenship and modern industrial development. The Society portrayed prejudice between races as a natural phenomenon, but allowed its white supporters (probably confident in their racial superiority) to think of themselves as great philanthropists to the black race, rather than as its persecutors. In Liberia, African Americans were

removed from a theatre where their inferiority of position must ever have been felt with discouraging and crushing weight; they are now a free, happy, prosperous people; in a climate natural to them, and where they can walk erect among equals, and say of the soil, and of the improvements, and of the government, "*these are our own.*"¹²⁹

As will be discussed in greater depth in Chapters 3 and 4, the African American communities who were supposed to be one of the plan's primary beneficiaries were almost unanimous in opposition to the Society. But while colonizationists recognized the antipathy with which their plan was viewed in most free black communities, this opposition did not faze them, or make them doubt colonizationism's benevolent nature. First of all, the ACS was nearly always able to find at least small numbers of willing free emigrants or slaves emancipated by colonization-friendly slaveowners (who were typically given only the choice between Liberian colonization or continued slavery). The limiting factor on ACS operations was not a shortage of willing emigrants, but a lack of funding with which to transport those who volunteered (or who were volunteered by their owners). Colonizationists viewed current black opposition to their scheme as a temporary inconvenience. They claimed that free blacks were had been misled by

¹²⁹ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 29, no. 3 (March, 1853), 93.

abolitionists. The ease with which colonizationists dismissed the opposition of the supposed beneficiaries of their scheme, and their assumption that this opposition was aroused only by (white) abolitionists' misrepresentations of the Society reveals something of the ACS's paternalism. But it may also to some extent indicate the sincerity of colonizationists' belief that Liberian colonization would be to the benefit of African Americans. Colonizationists viewed black opposition to the scheme as unfortunate, but African Americans' eventual conversion inevitable: "The very first principles of human nature will cause them to go to Liberia of their own accord . . . when they are thoroughly convinced that it will afford them all those privileges and blessings which *we* know it will."¹³⁰ Insofar as colonizationists anticipated a glorious future for Liberia as the center of African trade and as an outpost of American democratic ideals and Christian religion, they argued that American free blacks could not help but be drawn to the superior economic, social, and political advantages of Liberia. As Liberia radiated civilization and Christianity and rescued native Africans from the slave trade and pagan debasement, it would also pull American blacks out of the degradation and oppression that were their fate so long as they remained in the United States. In these ways, colonization was represented as a grand benevolent scheme, benefitting multiple groups and leading the world closer to a millennial ideal of universal Christianity, prosperity, and democracy.

Interest

But if colonization was a benevolent enterprise, Africans and African Americans were not to be its only beneficiaries. The white supporters of the ACS anticipated

¹³⁰ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 16, no. 23 (December 1, 1840), 355.

benefits for themselves as well.¹³¹ Colonizationism thus appealed to personal interest, as well as altruistic motives. As I have argued, these interests did not include (at least in official ACS publications) increased security and value of slaveholdings. But the ACS nevertheless frequently portrayed free blacks as a nuisance, whose removal would benefit (white) Americans. One Tennessee colonizationist contended that “[i]f the free negro is benefitted by his emigration to Africa, so too, but in a less degree, are the white population he leaves.” Of these free blacks, “too large a portion of them are proverbially idle and worthless or vicious; and as a general rule . . . , they are looked upon by the whites as a sore upon the social body, which it would be a matter of congratulation to see removed.”¹³² Colonizationists viewed free blacks as degraded, immoral, and untrustworthy populations who “contribute neither to the security nor the prosperity of the community.”¹³³

But the problem of black residence in the United States was often posed in starker terms. Colonizationists portrayed free African Americans not only as a troublesome nuisance, but also often as a growing threat:

There are at present, in the United States about *two millions seven hundred and fifty thousand* free blacks and slaves; which number will augment, at the rate of the last ten years’ increase, to the enormous and fearful number of more than ten millions in forty years from the present time! As the whole mass of coloured population grows in number, the free and manumitted portion of it will accelerate

¹³¹ Colonizationists were often uncomfortable admitting any selfish motives. One supporter wrote to the *African Repository* to object that too many Americans viewed the ACS as a scheme “to get clear of a surplus colored population.” He, however, “never can attribute a motive so selfish to that of the Society; nor do I believe there can be found one among them who does not know that the increase by births in this country, is greater than the number they can transport to Liberia in any given year. Their objects then can only be the laudable ones of bettering the condition of an injured people, diminishing slavery in our country, and the civilization of Africa . . .” *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 6, no. 4 (June, 1830), 117. But unlike this writer, many colonizationists (especially as early as 1830) maintained the hope that the ACS could transport large enough numbers to decrease black populations in the U.S. While some colonizationists proclaimed themselves above selfish motivations, most anticipated benefits to themselves from the removal of free black populations.

¹³² *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 25, no. 9 (September, 1849), 271.

¹³³ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 6, no. 7 (September, 1830), 204n.

its increase to an appalling degree of rapidity, operated upon, as it will be, by various causes; and if already this miserable caste crowd our prisons and poor-houses, corrupting by their vicious and idle example, one part of the community, and depending for subsistence on the depredation or charity of the other part. . .¹³⁴

By this logic, colonization was not only a benevolent cause, but an urgent matter of self-preservation. Insofar as most colonizationists saw no long-term role for African Americans, either bond or free, in the American republic, growing numbers of the black population could only be seen as a burgeoning problem. It was no coincidence that the ACS so often produced calculations of the cost of colonizing the “natural increase” of the nation’s populations of free blacks, or of all African Americans. Colonizationist propaganda returned again and again to these calculations: the cost of each individual’s transportation, multiplied by the annual growth in the United States’ African American population. Other considerations might help to keep this cost low: The Virginia state auxiliary of the ACS followed in a long tradition of colonizationist thought when it proposed,

If . . . a judicious discrimination could be made between the old and infirm and the young and enterprising, leaving the former to spend the barren remainder of their days amongst us, and the latter could be induced to emigrate, it is easy to perceive that the entire free colored population, leaving but a small and inoffensive remnant, might be removed. . .¹³⁵

Colonizationists could not cast such discussion as motivated only by benevolence; clearly, at least a segment of the arguments offered in colonizationist publications focused on the anticipated benefits to the (white) nation from a removal of blacks.

Even the goal of ending slavery could be cast as a self-interested measure.

Slavery was viewed by many colonizationists as a curse not to slaves, but to slaveowners (and, by extension, to any region where slavery existed). “That slavery is a curse, and a

¹³⁴ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 12, no. 3 (March, 1836), 83.

¹³⁵ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 27, no. 8 (August, 1851), 244-245.

grievous curse, to the States where it generally prevails, is readily admitted by all who have considered the subject uninfluenced by prejudice.”¹³⁶ The ACS portrayed the possession of slaves as not a privilege to be enjoyed, but a burden to be shouldered. The Society frequently proclaimed that slave labor was inferior to free labor in efficiency and productivity: “A free population of labourers cause the earth to produce vastly more, and of that production they themselves consume vastly less than a slave population.”¹³⁷

Colonizationists drew comparisons between border states, and found the states on the slave side of the border wanting – with lower land values, less industry, and fewer opportunities for profit. This nascent free-labor ideology might be expected to have had appeal in the North, but this argument was probably most fervently advanced by colonizationists from the Upper South. Maryland colonizationist Francis Scott Key, for example, believed that immediate emancipation would prove too dangerous to be practicable, but still believed so strongly in the superiority of free labor that he proposed the inevitable law – “as fully [demonstrated] as any demonstration in Euclid” – that “[a] slave State, lying by the side of a free State, will become a free State.”¹³⁸ As will be discussed in Chapter 3, many colonizationists from the Upper South saw the plan as a method of ridding their states of slavery. Emancipation, then, could be viewed not only as a moral benefit, but also as a self-interested financial one:

Indeed we hardly know how to estimate in dollars and cents, the value of a measure, that by withdrawing from us, our free coloured population, should open the way for the ultimate extinction of slavery, throughout the whole extent of our territory. Could such an event be instantaneously brought about—could the whole coloured population of our country be suddenly converted, by the magic touch of some enchanter’s wand, into a free and industrious white population,

¹³⁶ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 5, no. 7 (September, 1829), 215.

¹³⁷ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 3, no. 4 (June, 1827), 107.

¹³⁸ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 15, no. 7 (April, 1839), 125.

what price should we not be willing [to] pay, what terms should we not readily grant for so signal a blessing?¹³⁹

But if the substitution of free for slave labor was not sufficient financial incentive to motivate potential colonization supporters, the ACS also offered more direct profits – to be gained in trade with the Liberian colony. “They want to send to us their camwood, their palm oil, their ivory, their gums, and their coffee — and they want from us in return our tobacco, and our powder, and the thousand articles which teem from our manufactories.”¹⁴⁰ Especially in the later antebellum period, the ACS occasionally predicted that the income of this trade would eventually supplant private donations as the major funding source for transporting Liberian emigrants. Liberia could secure for the United States the benefits of an international colony, but, since it would be populated by African Americans rather than white American citizens, it would not require continual colonial oversight. Although white men were supposedly barred from Liberian citizenship both by law and by increased susceptibility to tropical diseases, they could still partake of the profits of Liberian trade, either directly, as merchants, or indirectly, as American citizens benefitting from the expansion of American trade. “Civilizing” and “Christianizing” African natives would have the positive side effect of creating new African markets for American goods. “[T]he labor of the natives will be directed to objects favorable to civilization, which will give rise to new wants, and induce new efforts to supply them.”¹⁴¹

Toward a Unified Understanding of Colonizationist Ideology

¹³⁹ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 4, no. 9 (November, 1828), 260.

¹⁴⁰ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 25, no. 2 (February, 1849), 57. Camwood, or African sandalwood, was used in the manufacture of dyes, and was one of Liberia’s most important nineteenth-century exports.

¹⁴¹ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 16, no. 16 (August 1, 1840), 243.

The variety of arguments advanced in defense of colonization can, at first glance, be bewildering. The ACS promised to regenerate Africa, to help African Americans fulfill their full potential, to combat racial prejudice, to end slavery (whether for moral or economic reasons), and to rid the United States of troublesome free black populations. These arguments run the gamut from altruistic to selfish, and undoubtedly individual colonizationists supported the cause for diverse reasons. But underlying the diversity of colonizationist argument is a shared ideological framework. Whether seeking Christian redemption of Africa or increased homogeneity among the U.S. citizenry, colonizationists tended to demonstrate a shared set of core beliefs. The most fundamental of these beliefs was a sense of racialized geography. Africa was the “natural home” of blacks, and, by extension, America was the “natural home” for people of European descent.

The ACS’s understandings of racial geography had some clear parallels in contemporary cultural understandings of, and federal policy toward, the United States’ native population. During the Jacksonian era, as the Colonization Society unsuccessfully advocated the removal of the country’s African American population, the federal government oversaw what one historian calls the “tremendously and horribly effective”¹⁴² removal of tens of thousands of Native Americans from southeastern states to the west. Indian removal was justified through similar arguments as those advanced by the ACS for African American removal; western resettlement would permit each race (white and Indian) to occupy its own separate sphere, and would preserve Native Americans from the competition they would face in any biracial society. R. Douglas

¹⁴² Stephen J. Rockwell, *Indian Affairs and the Administrative State in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 188.

Hurt has noted the central paradox of this policy, which “championed isolation and segregation to achieve assimilation and acculturation.”¹⁴³ For modern observers, there appears to be a discrepancy between the ends sought and the means employed; segregation from white Americans seems a curious method to inculcate Indians with white American cultural values. However, for many white Americans of the Jacksonian era (including Andrew Jackson himself), the idea made perfect sense. “[H]umanitarian interests saw removal as the best way to *protect* the Indians, by . . . relocating them in a distant place where civilization initiatives . . . and reduced contact with whites . . . would in the long run help Indians assimilate successfully to white ways.”¹⁴⁴ Indians were vulnerable to competition with more sophisticated whites; only segregation among their own “race” (defined to include all Native nations) would allow them to advance through the stages of civilization.

The ACS recognized the parallels between their own project and the contemporary efforts to remove Native Americans from the eastern states. Colonizationists most frequently referenced Native Americans to demonstrate the impossibility of multiracial societies. The decline of Native American populations in the face of white expansion was regarded as a sad inevitability: “You might bestow upon them any amount of annuity, and place them in the richest land, and give them perpetual possession of it, yet so long as they were surrounded by white men, what had all their history invariably proved? They had passed away like a dream.”¹⁴⁵ (The ACS also occasionally referenced Indian removal as a precedent demonstrating the constitutionality

¹⁴³ R. Douglas Hurt, *The Indian Frontier 1763-1846* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2002), 162.

¹⁴⁴ Rockwell, *Indian Affairs*, 178.

¹⁴⁵ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 12, no. 6 (June, 1836), 185.

of appropriations for large-scale migration projects.) Though blacks, like Indians, could not hope to share a portion of white-dominated American territory, they could be rescued from their American fate of oppression or extermination by removal to Africa. The colonization movement and the nation's contemporary Indian removal policy shared a vision of the United States as homogeneously white, while American cultural values would be promoted in the homogeneously non-white settlements of those expelled from the nation. However, there were significant differences between the two cases. As Christine Bolt has pointed out, Native Americans were generally portrayed as culturally backwards, but less racially distant from whites than African Americans.¹⁴⁶ At least officially, Indian removal sought not permanent segregation, but to enable the complete assimilation of (significantly smaller) Native American populations into the American public. Indian removal was usually justified as a humanitarian measure to protect a declining population, while the ACS frequently described growing African American populations as a threat to the (white) country. And of course, Native Americans were "removed" to other American territory, while Liberian emigrants traveled to another continent. No one suggested that Native Americans were congenitally unfit for the North American climate, while Africa was seen as the "natural" home for American blacks, where climate, disease, and custom would forever bar whites from entry.

Just as whites would have no place in Liberian society, colonizationists could not imagine a role for African Americans in the society of the United States. Colonizationist William Fitzhugh decried

the anomaly in a republican government of a class of freemen enjoying none of the privileges and advantages of freedom. Is it either safe or prudent to retain

¹⁴⁶ Christine Bolt, *American Indian Policy and American Reform: Case Studies of the Campaign to Assimilate the American Indians* (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1987), 14.

amongst us a large population, on whom we can place no reliance, but from the control which the laws exercise over it? can this class be animated by any feelings of patriotism towards a country by which they feel themselves oppressed? They are not trained for the defence of the country, nor do we look to any period when they are to be called on to make any exertion for it.¹⁴⁷

African Americans, by this logic, were simply not American citizens, and thus held an untenable unincorporated position in American society. They would not be capable of shouldering the responsibilities of citizenship and democracy: Colonizationists recoiled in horror from the idea that blacks might achieve citizenship and suffrage, and imagined any future in which “our most sacred liberties committed, in a great measure, to their guardianship; or, rather, to the guardianship of the interested politicians who might obtain the management of them” would be dystopian and disruptive of American democracy.¹⁴⁸

The ACS argued that blacks, at least in their present degraded state, could never be entrusted with the sacred responsibilities of the vote, and could never be expected to participate fully in the United States’ political, social, or economic systems. The idea of African Americans acting as sober, responsible American citizens was literally unimaginable to colonizationists. “When the first ship-load of slaves was landed, under colonial rule, in the Chesapeake,” ACS President John Latrobe protested, “the wisest of the Virginia ‘adventurers’ never dreamed that a day would come when the descendants of the captives would be the alumni of colleges, distinguished members of the liberal professions, and filling, because fit to fill, political offices of the highest civilization.”

And in fact, this multiracial fantasy was laughably impossible: “[T]he experience of all history has shown that two races which could not so amalgamate, could exist in the same

¹⁴⁷ American Colonization Society, *The Ninth Annual Report of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour of the United States, with an Appendix* (Washington City: Way & Gideon, 1826), 6.

¹⁴⁸ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 13, no. 11 (November, 1837), 344.

land in no other relations than those of master and slave, or, where both were nominally free, of the oppressor and the oppressed.”¹⁴⁹

The ACS did not always need to appeal to the benefit of any group – Africans, African Americans, slaves, slaveowners, or white Americans – to make its case. Rather, it could appeal to the universal and “natural” maxim that “two distinct races of people, nearly equal in numbers, and unlike in color, manners, feelings and state of civilization . . . cannot dwell together in the same community, unless one is in subjection to the other.”¹⁵⁰ Colonizationists were fond of citing historical precedents, from the Old Testament experience of Jews in Egypt to the Haitian revolution, to demonstrate the impossibility of interracial societies. Colonization was proposed as a way of rectifying the “unnatural” presence of multiple races in North America. Colonizationists were not motivated by racial prejudice or political self-interest, they claimed, so much as they simply sought to follow the implacable laws of nature: “The constitution and habits of the black man are so different from those of the white man—nature has drawn the lines of distinction so plain and so palpable between the two races, that it appears to be impossible they should live together in mutual and unlimited intercourse and equality.”¹⁵¹ Colonizationists did not often enter into antebellum racial debates of monogenesis versus polygenesis (they had nothing to gain by alienating supporters of either theory), but they did see the globe in racially divided terms. Africa was the “black man’s country,” and North America properly belonged to the whites.

But if natural racial geography would prevent whites from colonizing Africa, Western ideals would nevertheless be carried into Africa by African American Liberian

¹⁴⁹ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 29, no. 11 (November, 1853), 322.

¹⁵⁰ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 14, no. 9 (September, 1838), 258.

¹⁵¹ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 16, no. 9 (May 1, 1840), 136.

colonists. The slave trade had disrupted the globe's natural racial geography, but it had also made possible Africa's regeneration. African American emigrants to Liberia would carry American cultural, religious, and political ideals with them to Africa. Thus, although colonizationists did not view American slavery as a permanent institution, it had served its historical purpose as a force in spreading Christianity and civilization: "It was the purpose of God in bringing Africans here, that a large portion of them should return to the land of darkness from which they came, to carry light to those who seek it."¹⁵² Colonizationists were accustomed to perceiving temporary utility in slavery; after all, the idea that slavery was only temporarily necessary to prevent the social and economic catastrophe of immediate emancipation was a fundamental plank in the Society's platform.

Like any national organization, the ACS contained a diversity of opinion, but a close reading of colonizationist propaganda during the antebellum era produces a sense of the connections between various colonizationist arguments, and the underlying ideas that drew so many white Americans from around the country to the movement. First and foremost, the ACS sought to reify its concept of racialized geography. The prejudice that would forever oppress blacks in the United States might be in some sense regrettable, the ACS argued, but it was also a natural reaction – a response to the indelible gulf of difference between the two races. Racial difference was of "natural" or divine origin (few antebellum Americans would have drawn a distinction between these categories), and racial prejudice was simply a natural psychological response to this difference. Only complete global racial segregation could save African Americans from oppression by whites, and enable the United States to live fully up to its egalitarian democratic ideals.

¹⁵² *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 16, no. 7 (July, 1850), 197-198.

“He that has made us all, placed the mark of separation [of African Americans] from us; who socially and politically can never mingle with the white man as his equal in the same land.”¹⁵³ Since the global separation of races was in colonizationists’ eyes a natural process, it was a process that could not be denied: “[T]he separation of the free colored race from the whites of this country is inevitable, and essential to the happiness of both parties.”¹⁵⁴ Most of the various arguments produced for colonization (and the benefits anticipated from its success) derived from this shared fundamental goal of reifying racial geography. Slavery was a curse to slaveowners as much as to slaves, and slaveowners would slowly replace their workforce with more efficient free white laborers, while the entire nation would be rid of a degraded, criminal population of free blacks. Liberian emigrants would be freed from white competition and prejudice, and become able to develop fully into responsible citizens. They would carry with them to Africa the torch of Christianity and civilization, justifying the temporary disruption of natural racial geography, as the entire African continent would grow in civilization and participate in global trade. Colonizationists foresaw a world divided among racial groups, but a world conquered by the universal truths of Christianity and democratic principles. In this millennial vision, all of the globe’s peoples would – separately – continue their development toward the ideals of Western civilization.

To a sometimes surprising degree, colonizationist rhetoric focused on this long-term vision. Even as the ACS failed to secure substantial government funding and struggled to pay debts to continue operating; even as their ships fell far short each year of transporting the “natural increase” of African American populations; even as slavery

¹⁵³ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 26, no. 1 (January, 1850), 45.

¹⁵⁴ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 29, no. 11 (November, 1853), 329.

grew ever more economically and culturally entrenched in the Lower South; even as free blacks almost unanimously renounced the scheme; even as large numbers of white Americans attacked the plan as immoral, unnecessary, or impractical, colonizationists continued to proclaim a vision of an Africa “civilized,” and an America whitened. Temporary setbacks could not prevent the operation of the natural law of racial separation. The ACS counseled its followers to be patient: “Those who complain of the tardy operations of the Society should recollect that great national enterprises are not to be speedily executed, like those of individuals, in the short span of the life of one person.”¹⁵⁵ After all, the colonizationist scheme, like the natural division of races, was from God, and its final triumph could not be prevented: “Providence never fails for want of means; and he will find the means to colonize Africa.”¹⁵⁶

Colonizationists’ moral imaginations fell short of the abolitionist vision of an America both racially heterogeneous and socially harmonious. But if colonizationists thought American prejudice insurmountable, and racial separation inevitable, their goals were nevertheless ambitious. Colonization would be responsible not only for a thoroughgoing demographic transformation of the United States, but also for the advancement of Protestant American values around the globe. However limited the colonizationist imagination may have been with respect to a multiracial republic, their vision encompassed a world in which both blacks and whites could advance toward social utopia and millennialist Christian perfection. In the eyes of colonizationists, only global segregation would permit the achievement of this vision. This colonizationist

¹⁵⁵ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 14, no. 1 (January, 1838), 18. Colonizationists also often accused their “immediatist” abolitionist rivals of impatience. By an excess of enthusiasm and a lack of patience, abolitionists would hinder the slow, orderly, gradual process of emancipation by colonization.

¹⁵⁶ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 33, no. 4 (April, 1854), 101.

ideal of racialized geography was shared by ACS members from across the country and throughout the antebellum period, and represented the major colonizationist contribution to the antebellum national discourse about slavery and race.

Chapter 2

A History of the American Colonizationist Movement

Colonizationism Pre-1816

As I have argued in the previous chapter, colonizationism represented a largely coherent and consistent ideology of race and American identity throughout the antebellum era. Despite this general consistency, the ACS's tactics and ideology did evolve over time as the organization faced new challenges in the tumultuous decades preceding the Civil War. In this chapter, I will provide a chronological narrative of the colonization movement, while attempting to summarize and explicate changes in the ACS's rhetoric and organization over time. I will also make use of several measures of the Colonization Society's sectional support to evaluate temporal shifts in different regions' representation in the organization's fundraising and leadership.

Of course, the idea of colonizing African Americans outside the United States long predated the 1816 foundation of the American Colonization Society. Proposals for removal and colonization of African Americans had been circulated for at least a century.¹⁵⁷ The idea had little impact during the colonial period, but at least one prominent American patriot turned to consideration of African American colonization in the immediate aftermath of the American Revolution. Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia*, which he wrote and revised between 1781 and 1783 (but which would not be published for general circulation until 1787) presented the most developed

¹⁵⁷ Burin identifies a colonization proposal in New Jersey dating back to 1714. Burin, *Peculiar Solution*, 7.

argument for African American removal to that date. Jefferson's discussion of race has received much attention, and it is worthy of note that the lengthiest disquisition on slavery and race in the book was presented in support of his proposal to emancipate all of Virginia's slaves after reaching majority, "when they should be colonized to such place as the circumstances of time should render most proper, sending them out with arms, implements of household and of the handicraft arts . . . , &c. to declare them a free and independent people."¹⁵⁸ Jefferson admitted that Virginia would require white immigration to replace the labor force of departing slaves, but argued that separation was necessary for American polity and society to live up to its egalitarian ideals.

Deep rooted prejudices entertained by the whites; ten thousand recollections, by the blacks, of the injuries they have sustained; new provocations; the real distinctions which nature has made; and many other circumstances, will divide us into parties, and produce convulsions which will probably never end but in the extermination of the one or the other race.¹⁵⁹

This argument – that immovable white prejudice, black resentments, and irrevocable racial divisions would forever prohibit a multiracial American democracy – anticipated the ACS's rhetoric. But Jefferson was more open and vocal than later colonizationists about his doubts of African American abilities – "never yet could I find that a black had uttered a thought above the level of plain narration" – and about the horrors of slavery: "The whole commerce between master and slave is a perpetual exercise of the most boisterous passions, the most unremitting despotism on the one part, and degrading submissions on the other."¹⁶⁰ *Notes* represented Jefferson's attempt to work through the implications of Virginia's newfound independence, and he could not reconcile

¹⁵⁸ Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, ed. Merrill D. Peterson, Reprint, (1787; New York: Library of America, 1984), 264.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 266, 288.

democracy with either perpetual slavery or racial heterogeneity. This argument laid the groundwork for later colonizationist ideology, although the ACS was often more cautious than Jefferson in its critiques of slavery, and never so bald in implying African American inferiority.

The year 1787 saw not only the publication of *Notes on the State of Virginia*, but also the foundation of the English colony of Sierra Leone, which was established to remove the unwanted “Black Poor” from London. Sierra Leone was an important model for early American ventures into colonization, including African American entrepreneur Paul Cuffee’s transportation of thirty-eight free blacks there in 1816, shortly before the foundation of the ACS. Americans continued to advance colonization proposals in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, especially in Jefferson’s native state of Virginia, where other prominent residents embraced and elaborated on his colonization plan. Planter Ferdinando Fairfax, writing in 1790, repeated Jefferson’s argument that whites and blacks, absent slavery, would represent inherently opposed parties in American society, and further developed a plan that in many respects presaged ACS proposals. Fairfax argued that Congress should establish a colony for free blacks in their “native climate” of Africa, where

They will . . . be at such a distance as to prevent all the . . . inconveniences of intercourse [with white Americans], &c. at the same time that they are situated within the neighborhood of other nations of the same kind of people, with whom they may, after a little time, maintain the most intimate intercourse without any inconvenience.

Like the later ACS, Fairfax praised the missionary benefits of the scheme. Like Jefferson, he advanced the scheme explicitly as a method for gradual emancipation of the

nation's slaves; federally sponsored colonization would remove the practical barriers preventing white Americans from granting slaves their "natural right" of liberty.¹⁶¹

Jefferson and Fairfax may have publicly suggested colonization schemes in the late 1700s, but it was not until the turn of the century that any serious attempt would be made to realize any such plan. Unsurprisingly, the effort originated in Virginia, which had produced so many early colonizationist proposals. Unnerved by a thwarted 1800 insurrectionist plot by the slave Gabriel in the Richmond area, the Virginia legislature authorized Governor James Monroe to open a secret correspondence with Thomas Jefferson, now President, "on the subject of purchasing lands without the limits of this State, whither persons obnoxious to the laws or dangerous to the peace of Society may be removed." This may have been intended to refer only to the several dozen participants in Gabriel's rebellion who had been arrested and now faced mass execution, but it is indicative of Monroe's and Jefferson's racial ideologies that they expanded the consideration of "persons obnoxious to the laws or dangerous to the peace of society" to include all African Americans, and not just those who had conspired with Gabriel to overthrow Virginia's government. Monroe, suggesting an "enlarged construction of the resolution," bemoaned the "existing evil, which commenced under our colonial system," and argued that "it is necessary that the field of practicable expedients be opened to its election on the widest possible scale."¹⁶² This language was certainly circumspect, and the correspondence private, but Monroe and Jefferson were quietly considering a governmental colonization program which might result in the extirpation of slavery.

¹⁶¹ Ferdinando Fairfax, "Plan for liberating the negroes within the united States, by Mr. Ferdinando Fairfax," *American Museum, or Universal Magazine, containing essays on agriculture, commerce, manufactures, politics, morals and manners* 8, no. 6 (December, 1790), 286, 285.

¹⁶² Quoted in Slaughter, *Virginian History*, 1, 2.

However, neither Jefferson nor the Virginia legislature was willing to take the lead in commencing a concrete plan of colonization, and after a few years of fitful correspondence and a decline of the fears aroused by Gabriel's rebellion, this initial exploration of a government-sponsored colonization project produced no results.

Nevertheless, the secret communication between Monroe and Jefferson may indirectly have helped to usher in the next wave of colonizationist activity. In 1816, Charles Fenton Mercer, a member of the Virginia House of Delegates, stumbled upon the records of this correspondence, and was inspired to reintroduce the resolution requesting federal assistance, this time publicly. Mercer's rediscovery of the colonizationist cause may or may not have been the initial impetus for renewed interest in the idea, but his advocacy was at least coincident with a new surge of colonizationism; two days before Mercer's resolution was passed by wide margins in the Virginia legislature, other likeminded men with whom Mercer had been in correspondence (including Francis Scott Key, Robert Finley, and Elias Caldwell) met in Washington to plan the formation of the American Colonization Society. The supporters of the nascent ACS followed the tradition of authors such as Jefferson and Fairfax, who had described the impossibility of incorporating whites and blacks into the same citizenry and society. But unlike these earlier colonizationist thinkers, who had explicitly considered colonization as connected with a broader plan of emancipation, the founders of the ACS were cautious to disclaim any intentions of interfering with slavery. At the initial preparatory meeting in Washington, Henry Clay declared that the ACS would focus solely on free blacks, and that "it constituted no part of the object of this meeting to touch or agitate, in the slightest degree, a delicate question connected with another portion of the coloured population of

our country” – slaves. Fellow attendee John Randolph went further, proclaiming that colonization “must materially tend to secure the property of every master in the United States, in, to, and over . . . slaves.” Though the Society would render slave possessions more secure, Randolph also suggested that colonization would promote slave emancipations by masters seeking to “relieve themselves from the cares attendant on [the] possession [of slaves].”¹⁶³ As colonization moved from abstract recommendations toward a more concrete plan of action, proponents of the scheme retreated somewhat from the explicitly emancipationist context of early proposals. In 1801, Jefferson discussed only in private the scheme that he had publicly advocated in 1787, and the men who gathered to found the ACS in 1816 were quick to reassure slaveowners that their fledgling organization harbored no abolitionist agenda (although colonization was supposed to encourage voluntary manumission).

Not every expression of colonizationist sentiment after 1816 was produced or sanctioned by the American Colonization Society¹⁶⁴, but the ACS became the dominant institution advocating African American colonization through the antebellum era. After 1816, the history of the colonization movement in the United States is basically synonymous with the history of the ACS and its auxiliaries. The ACS established precedents and set standards for colonizationist rhetoric, argument, and strategies for supporters across the country. Although, as I have argued in the previous chapter, the Colonization Society was fairly consistent in its rhetoric and ideology, a close study of its

¹⁶³ “The Meeting on the Colonization of Free Blacks,” *Daily National Intelligencer*, December 24, 1816.

¹⁶⁴ For example, in 1835, Georgian iconoclast John Jacobus Flournoy criticized “the slow and imbecile Colonization Society,” and “name[d his] own Society the Efficient Instantaneous Expulsion Association of Philosophic and fearless Patriots.” John Jacobus Flournoy, *An Essay on the Origin, Habits, &c. of the African Race; Incidental to the Propriety of Having Nothing to do with Negroes: Addressed to the Good People of the United States* (New York: 1835), 3, 4. It does not, however, appear that Flournoy’s EIEAPFP ever got off the ground.

publications and propaganda does reveal some notable and important shifts over time. But in order to tell the story of the ACS's evolution during the antebellum era, we must also attend to events and trends affecting the colonizationist movement and the country as a whole, as well as shifting geographical patterns of support. In this chapter, I will be making use of several measures of this support. The most important of these is the ACS's record of financial contributions from supporters. Starting in 1826 (and continuing well past the Civil War), the Society published accounts of donations received in its monthly periodical *The African Repository and Colonial Reporter*, usually including some indication of the location from which these contributions had been collected. I have compiled data from this source to create a database of financial contributions between 1826 and 1861. Records of the officers and leadership of the ACS provide another measure of sectional support. The Society's annual reports between 1817 and 1860 list the names and residency of the organization's board of vice-presidents (a mostly honorary position designed more to advertise prominent men's endorsement of colonization, and involving little managerial responsibility) and of the Board of Managers responsible for overseeing most of the ACS's day-to-day activities; I have compiled databases of these data as well. In all of these cases, I have attended to the state of origin, and grouped the states into larger regions: New England, the Mid-Atlantic, the West, the Upper South, and the Lower South. Of course, this approach effaces diversity between and within states of each region, but in most cases a finer level of geographical distinction was impossible, and my purpose here is to describe patterns of regional support on the broadest level of the entire nation. The measures I have mentioned (donations and representation among the Society's vice presidents and board of

managers) provide some partial indication of shifts over time in the ACS's sectional support base, and in its own management structure.¹⁶⁵ In this chapter, I will explain these shifts, as well as those in colonizationist rhetoric, in a chronological narrative which places these changes in their historical context.

The first thing to note about these various measures of colonization support is that, although they demonstrate some regional variation over time, they also indicate a consistent broad base of support. Between 1826 and 1861, the ACS obtained an average of 51.2% of its donations, 44.9% of its Managers, and 42.6% of its vice presidents from

¹⁶⁵ As noted above, these figures are drawn from the ACS's annual reports and monthly periodical *The African Repository and Colonial Journal*, and constitute a database (hereafter ACS Database). Although these data should provide some indication of the ACS's sectional support, it is important to note that all of these measures have severe limitations. First of all, I am relying on the ACS's own reporting for all these figures, which may not have been in all cases scrupulously accurate or complete. Additionally, the regional origin of some donors and board members was not noted in ACS publications. I have attempted to divine these origins when I could (for example, cross-referencing other ACS publications and biographical sources for indications of residency). But I have not always been able to determine geographical origin. Between 1826 and 1832, I have been unable to find the geographical source for 4.7% of the contribution dollars collected by the ACS (the organization's publications later became more explicit in identifying the regional source of collections). The residency of slightly less than one percent of the ACS's managers throughout the antebellum period also could not be determined. I have also discounted (except where otherwise noted) donations and supporters listed as from Washington, DC, which included politicians and federal employees from diverse geographical backgrounds. (The ACS was also not always conscientious about distinguishing between private donations and federal appropriations in the region.) These accounted for a substantial 19.6% of all donations listed, 21% of managers, and 7.8% of vice presidents. Obviously, if these figures were included with those from the Upper South (after all, Washington permitted slavery), they would substantially increase that region's representation. Each of these measures also has unique limitations. Since vice presidents were more figureheads than overseers (and their names were publicized in order to raise awareness and support), the diversity of their regional backgrounds is probably more reflective of the Society's desired support base than its actual one. Donations were aggregated in such a way that it is in many cases impossible to distinguish between widespread small donations and single large donations, limiting these statistics' use as a measure of popular support. The ACS's process for choosing its managers changed over time (especially during its 1838 reorganization), which means that these figures do not represent a stable basis for chronological comparison. (After 1838, I have included both the "Board of Managers" and the "Executive Committee," which together comprised the Society's managerial body.) For some years (specifically 1840-1844, 1847-1850, and 1857), only managers who were present at the Society's annual meeting were listed. Also, as the Board of Managers was intended to provide regular oversight of the ACS's operations, its members usually resided near the Society's Washington, DC offices (and often held positions within the federal government). In cases where I have been able to determine managers' residency before migration to Washington, I have listed their state of origin, but these figures may overstate the involvement of states in the vicinity of Washington. Most importantly, during the 1830s and '40s, several state auxiliaries founded separate colonies in Liberia and separated their finances from the national organization. As my figures are limited to the ACS, they exclude separate fundraising and managerial efforts by these state auxiliaries. The defection of state auxiliaries undoubtedly affected all of the measures that I have collected, which understate colonizationist support in these states.

free states, while slave states comprised an average of 39.5% of its donations, 25.6% of its managers, and 44.8% of vice presidents. (Percentages do not add to 100 because I have excluded donations and supporters from Washington, DC or outside the United States.) The Board of Managers did come to be dominated by representatives of Northern states in the 1840s (as will be discussed below), but diverse regions accounted for significant proportions of ACS donations and vice presidents throughout the antebellum period. At no point was the ACS reliant on a single region for the vast majority of its support. As indicated by Figure 1, Northern and Southern contributions kept pace for much of the Society’s history, only diverging very significantly for the last decade prior to the Civil War. Even though the ACS’s fundraising patterns demonstrated increased volatility in this period, both North and South continued to represent substantial sources of donations.

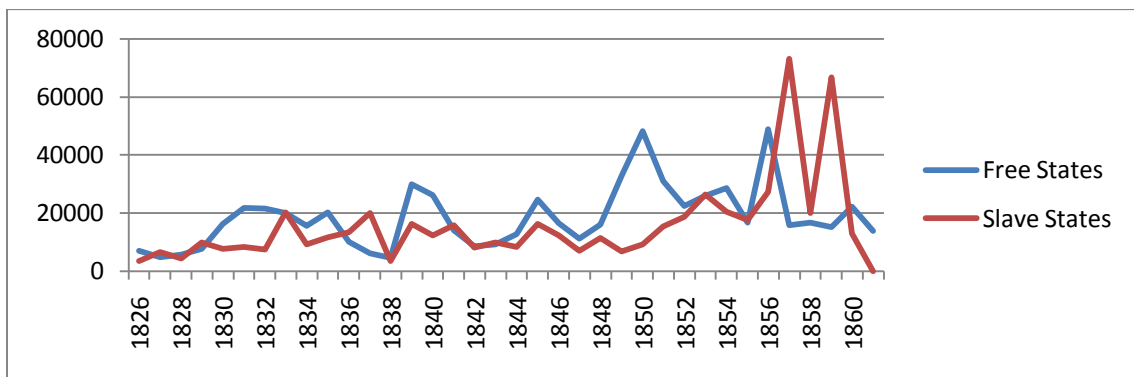


Figure 1 -Total Donations

It is also important to note that overall donations actually significantly increased over the antebellum period, easily outpacing inflation. From its foundation until 1825, yearly donations averaged \$3,925. Between 1826 and 1835, the average was \$26,057, between 1836 and 1845, \$37,962; between 1846 and 1855, \$62,191; and between 1856 and 1860,

\$101,088.¹⁶⁶ Donations did undergo periods of decline (for example in the immediate aftermath of the Panic of 1837), but the general trend was steadily upward. In part, this probably reflected a greater focus on private fundraising over time, as the ACS's initial hope for federal sponsorship appeared ever more distant. But these figures should suggest that the Society gained support over the antebellum era; historiographical reports of the ACS's slide into irrelevance and inactivity in the two decades before the Civil War have been greatly exaggerated.

1816-1830: Expansion and the Search for Government Support

The men who gathered in Washington in December, 1816 to create the Colonization Society defined the goals and structure of the fledgling organization in its founding document, the ACS's constitution. "The object to which its attention is to be exclusively directed," they wrote, "is to promote and execute a plan for colonizing (with their consent) the free people of colour, residing in our country, in Africa, or such other place as Congress shall deem most expedient."¹⁶⁷ No mention was made of slavery; as one might expect from the speeches of Henry Clay and John Randolph at the founding

¹⁶⁶ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 42, no. 7 (July, 1866), 223. These figures do not include additional funds raised by the Maryland State Colonization Society and other state societies who separated themselves and their finances from the national ACS. Because these rogue auxiliaries split from the national organization in the 1830s and '40s, these figures underestimate the increase in donations over the course of the antebellum years. These numbers are also not corrected for inflation; prices in the antebellum period remained generally stable, but the period did see some slight deflation, which further demonstrates that these numbers understate the rise in donations. The consumer price index averaged thirteen percent lower in the 1830s than in the 1820s and eleven percent lower in the 1840s than in the 1830s, before increasing by three percent between the 1840s and 1850s. Lindert, Peter H. and Richard Sutch, "Consumer price indexes, for all items: 1774–2003." Table Cc1-2 in *Historical Statistics of the United States, Earliest Times to the Present: Millennial Edition*, ed. Susan B. Carter, Scott Sigmund Gartner, Michael R. Haines, Alan L. Olmstead, Richard Sutch, and Gavin Wright (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), accessed April 15, 2011, <http://dx.doi.org.proxy.lib.umich.edu/10.1017/ISBN-9780511132971.Cc1-65>.

¹⁶⁷ American Colonization Society, *Eighth Annual Report of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour of the United States*, Reprint, *The Annual Reports of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour of the United States, Volumes 1-10, 1818-1827* (1825; repr., New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), 36.

meeting, the Society restricted itself “exclusively” to colonizing free blacks. This mission statement also reveals the development of an ideology of racial geography. The white men who founded the ACS laid claim to the United States as “our country” – a nation to which African Americans could not belong, despite their status as residents. The constitution parenthetically promised to obtain the consent of all emigrants, but the ACS did not initially appear overly concerned with enlisting free black support. Soon after the formation of the Society, the wealthy African American businessman James Forten arranged a protest rally for free blacks in Philadelphia, attended by three thousand African Americans. This convention issued a memorial declaring, “We . . . , a portion of those who are the objects of this plan . . . renounce and disclaim every connexion with it; and respectfully but firmly declare our determination not to participate in any part of it.”¹⁶⁸ The widespread and intense opposition to colonization by its supposed beneficiaries did not appear to worry the fledgling Society greatly, as it declared in its first annual report, “The objection on the part of the colored people, it is readily seen, springs from first impressions, and is the result entirely of ignorance and misapprehension,”¹⁶⁹ and it devoted its attention to soliciting the support not of free blacks, but of the federal government.

In 1816, when the American Colonization Society consisted only of a group of twenty men gathered in a Washington tavern, and long before the organization made any practical preparations for removing colonists, the Society’s founding members had already identified Africa as the preferred destination for African American emigrants.

¹⁶⁸ Quoted in Garrison, *Thoughts*, part 2, p. 11.

¹⁶⁹ American Colonization Society. *First Annual Report of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour of the United States*, Reprint, *The Annual Reports of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour of the United States, Volumes 1-10, 1818-1827* (1818; repr., New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), 4.

Given the trouble and expense of transporting colonists across the Atlantic, Jefferson had contemplated various potential locations in the Western hemisphere, and considered Africa “a last and undoubted resort, if all others more desirable should fail us.”¹⁷⁰ But ACS supporters argued that Africa’s advantages outweighed its disadvantages. Clay contended that Africa’s “climate is best adapted to [African American] constitutions,” and that African American emigrants would be uniquely well positioned as missionaries to “that benighted quarter of the world.”¹⁷¹ Colonizationists praised the example set by Sierra Leone.

But if the founding members of the ACS thought Africa the preferred destination for emigrants from the United States, they were willing to defer to Congress’s wishes on the subject. From the start, the ACS sought federal sponsorship for its scheme, and when the newly formed Board of Managers held its first meeting in January, 1817, the first order of business was to draft a petition to Congress. In this memorial, the Society tried to make the case that its scheme would further vital national interests: “It is now reduced to be a maxim, equally approved in philosophy and practice, that the existence of distinct and separate castes, or classes forming exceptions to the general system of policy adapted to the community, is an inherent vice in the composition of society; pregnant with baleful consequences, both moral and political, and demanding the utmost exertion of human energy and foresight to remedy or remove it.”¹⁷² In short, the United States’ free black population represented a threat to its social and political unity, and Congress should sponsor African American colonization under its constitutional powers to “provide for the common defense and general welfare of the United States.” Furthermore, the ACS

¹⁷⁰ Quoted in Slaughter, *Virginian History*, 4.

¹⁷¹ “The Meeting on the Colonization of Free Blacks,” *Daily National Intelligencer*, December 24, 1816.

¹⁷² Quoted in Alexander, *History of Colonization*, 92.

argued that African American colonies on the coast of Africa would help to enforce the ban on the Atlantic slave trade, illegal in the U.S. since 1808. But federal sponsorship was not as forthcoming as the ACS hoped; the House committee to which its memorial was referred declined to recommend funding any colonization schemes, suggesting instead that African Americans who wished to emigrate might find the existing colony of Sierra Leone a hospitable destination.

This rebuff set a longstanding pattern for the ACS's activities. From the beginning, colonizationists recognized that any demographically significant transportation of African Americans across the Atlantic would be an expensive proposition. In the ACS's early years, the Society devoted much of its energies to the search for federal or state appropriations. "We candidly acknowledge that private charity is inadequate to the consummation of our designs," the Society admitted. "We look to the power of the State legislatures and to the national Government, but as these powers are controlled by popular opinion, it is this . . . through which the Society must communicate its influence and secure to its purpose the resources and energy of the nation."¹⁷³ In other words, the Society's primary goal was to popularize the colonization idea with the American electorate. American voters would then demand the federal government to adopt the scheme. Even once the Society had founded a colony in Africa, and commenced transporting emigrants there – funding the enterprise almost solely through private donations – the entire venture was often described as nothing more than a test case, demonstrating the practicability of African colonization for a larger eventual public project. In retrospect, of course, it is clear that this plan to attract government support ended in failure. But from the perspective of the ACS's early years, it seemed a

¹⁷³ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 1, no. 12 (February, 1826), 380.

plausible expectation. The federal budget was growing (1816, the year of the ACS's foundation, also saw the introduction of the nation's first major protectionist tariff), and the colonization scheme had yet to arouse any organized opposition. Federal adoption of the colonization plan would have required widespread popular support across the country, but colonizationists believed that their scheme would appeal to most white Americans, if properly presented. (Though the plan did not gain traction at the federal level, several state legislatures passed resolutions in support of the ACS, as will be discussed below.)

It is some indication of the priorities of the newly founded ACS that it repeatedly sought government aid before attempting any private exercise in colonization. After Congress's initial refusal to sponsor the Society's project, Virginian Representative (and founding ACS member) Charles Fenton Mercer introduced a new bill in Congress in 1819, which authorized the U.S. Navy to patrol the American and African coastline in pursuit of slave traders, and the President "to appoint a proper person or persons, residing upon the coast of Africa, as agent or agents for receiving the negroes, mulattoes, or persons of color, delivered from on board vessels, seized in the prosecution of the slave trade, by commanders of the United States' armed vessels."¹⁷⁴ The act also appropriated \$100,000 to fund this effort of repatriation. Despite coming up for debate in the House the same day as Missouri's controversial application to be admitted to the Union as a slave state, Mercer's bill passed, and was signed into law. This small victory in hand, ACS officials turned their attentions to President James Monroe and his Attorney General William Wirt. As governor of Virginia, Monroe had attempted to persuade Jefferson to adopt a federal plan for African American removal. But like Jefferson, Monroe's colonizationist ardor had been somewhat diminished by the responsibilities of the highest

¹⁷⁴ 34 Annals of Cong. 2545 (1819).

national office, and, on Wirt's advice, he was initially inclined to interpret Mercer's bill narrowly. Only the persuasive efforts of several ACS members convinced the administration to interpret the law more broadly, appointing as the "agent or agents" mentioned in the bill men of the ACS's choosing. In 1820, the federal government sponsored their transportation to Africa, along with eighty-nine colonists officially listed as "carpenters" or "laborers" to assist in preparing a receptacle on the African coast for any slaves captured by the naval patrols. It was not until thus underwritten by a modicum of governmental support that the ACS ventured to send its first free black emigrants to Africa.¹⁷⁵

This settlement (on Sherbro Island near Sierra Leone) ended in disaster; both of the ACS's agents and most of the emigrants contracted fatal cases of malaria, and the survivors abandoned the new settlement and retreated to Sierra Leone. A second government-financed expedition ended no better, and by the time Monroe appointed Robert Stockton in 1821 as the United States' agent to acquire land on the African coast and to prepare to receive recaptured slaves, he was already the fifth man to hold the position. Stockton and ACS representative Eli Ayres succeeded in "purchasing" land along the Mesurado River from native Africans – albeit literally at gunpoint – and thus the first foothold of what would become the colony of Liberia was planted.

While the Society's operations in Africa foundered, the Society also faced challenges at home. For one, free black communities continued to voice their displeasure with the colonization movement at public meetings and conventions. But as before, the ACS appeared more concerned with obtaining the support of the government than that of the people it proposed to transport to Liberia. (After all, even the small number of

¹⁷⁵ Staudenraus, *African Colonization Movement*, 55-58.

volunteer emigrants stretched the Society's budget.) Reports returning from Africa of the high mortality and miserable condition of early emigrants no doubt contributed both to African American opposition and to political foot-dragging, but the ACS minimized these concerns: "Would it have been wise in the pilgrims to New England, or in the daring band who first landed at Jamestown, to have abandoned their project, because of sickness and for fear of death?"¹⁷⁶

Meanwhile, the ACS's political fortunes were in danger. The difficulties and expense of the early expeditions did not inspire confidence, and trends in American politics further darkened the organization's prospects of obtaining federal support. The Missouri Crisis may not have impeded Mercer's 1819 Slave Trade Act¹⁷⁷, but it presaged a new era of increasing sectional conflict over the issue of slavery. For cautious Upper South critics of slavery who sought a method of ameliorating the institution, the idea of "diffusion" emerged as a powerful rival to colonization. By spreading the black slave population over a larger territory, politicians of the South's border states such as Virginia's John Tyler argued, the danger of insurrection would be reduced, and with it the need for repressive oversight of slaves. Diffusion even held out the possibility that these Upper South states might reduce their own slave populations sufficiently to permit regional abolition. Besides increasing tensions between Southern diffusionists and Northerners (who could hardly see how expanding slavery constituted a measure for

¹⁷⁶ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 7, no. 5 (July, 1831), 159.

¹⁷⁷ Indeed, Douglas Egerton argues that "the Missouri question worked to [Mercer's] advantage." Southern congressmen who favored the admission of Missouri as a slave state but who wished to signal that they were no immoderate defenders of slavery "could soothe their troubled consciences by supporting Mercer's bill." Douglas R. Egerton, *Charles Fenton Mercer and the Trial of National Conservatism* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1989), 168.

removing it), this idea threatened the ACS's claims to represent the only method by which slavery could be gradually removed.¹⁷⁸

During the 1820s, the young ACS frequently and openly espoused a desire that colonization would create a safe means for gradual emancipation of the nation's slaves. Of course, the Colonization Society did not explicitly urge its scheme as an abolitionist measure, as had Jefferson and earlier proponents of the plan, but the Society frequently suggested that the end of slavery would be the eventual result:

[I]t is difficult to imagine, how . . . any high-minded American could regret that [colonization's] success should produce a general disposition to [promote] a voluntary consent to send to Africa, for our sakes, not less than theirs, our whole servile population. If this shall be never done, we may do much; the hope and expectation that it will be done, we certainly cherish. Such an expectation we indulge, because we think of its necessity—of the light of the age—of the noble spirit of our countrymen—of our ability—and of the religion of Christ.¹⁷⁹

This sort of language – taken here from an 1825 editorial in the ACS's nationally distributed *African Repository* – made no secret of the organization's desire for eventual complete abolition, but placed this goal in the distant future. Through such rhetoric, the Society hoped to unite antislavery Northerners and Southerners who considered slavery an "evil" and desired its safe and gradual removal. (If there was a contradiction in colonizationist slaveowners' enjoying the fruits of slavery while decrying the institution as a "necessary evil," the glacial pace of colonization did not force them to confront it.) The ACS frequently contended "there are now in the Southern States of our Union, hundreds, and even thousands of proprietors, who would gladly give liberty to their

¹⁷⁸ Lacy K. Ford, *Deliver us from Evil: The Slavery Question in the Old South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 73-76.

¹⁷⁹ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 1, no. 6 (August, 1825), 163.

slaves, but are deterred by the apprehension of doing injury to their country.”¹⁸⁰ Such statements could reassure both Northerners seeking an ultimate end to slavery and perhaps Southerners in no particular hurry to emancipate their own slaves. (If the ACS had such a long queue of eager manumitters, there was no immediate pressure on any individual to divest himself of his slaveholdings.) But “diffusion” presented a challenge to this delicate balance of national unity, by exposing the sectional divisions papered over by the “necessary evil” rhetoric of slavery. The debate over Missouri’s admission to the Union made it a little more difficult for Northerners to accept ACS depictions of Southern slaveowners eager to remove slavery at the earliest possible opportunity. Even if many in Maryland and Virginia were genuine in their desire to see slavery removed from their states, support for diffusion demonstrated that they did not seek to remove it from the nation. And provocations such as the Tallmadge amendment (which would have made gradual emancipation the price of admission for Missouri’s entry into the union) warned Southerners that the North might not permit them to decide the fate of slavery in their own states at their own pace.

These trends threatened the Society’s ability to maintain its national audience. Already in 1826, its secretary Ralph Randolph Gurley was complaining that “the African repository . . . is now, through the timidity of our Board, as I shall take the liberty to call it, placed under a censorship.”¹⁸¹ Gurley specified the article which had caused the uproar; in it, he had written that “there were admitted at its adoption, into our Federal

¹⁸⁰ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 1, no. 5 (July, 1825), 145. The quoted statement was made by Daniel Dana, a Massachusetts minister, and originally published privately in New England. But in republishing Dana’s speech, the ACS endorsed it, editorializing about the quoted passage that its “opinions . . . are, we believe, entirely just.” Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ralph Randolph Gurley to Leonard Bacon, January 21, 1826, Bacon Family Papers, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University.

Constitution, certain clauses, which, if intended to be permanent in their effects, are exceptionable, whether tried by the law of nature, or of God”¹⁸² – a clear reference to slavery, and one which his superiors apparently felt went too far. Though Gurley felt muzzled in 1826, the censorship he faced was apparently neither severe nor enduring, as equally overt condemnations of slavery would continue to appear in the *African Repository* for years to come. However, the episode is revealing of the Society’s struggles to maintain a rhetorical balance; the ACS’s critiques of slavery had to be sufficiently moderate to avoid antagonizing Southern supporters. Growing antislavery sentiment in the North and increasing Southern sensitivity on the subject of its “peculiar institution” made it progressively more difficult throughout the antebellum period for the ACS to strike this balance. (This no doubt contributed to the Society’s increasing rhetorical conservatism on the subject of slavery, as discussed below.)

Supporters familiar with the delicate political climate of the mid-1820s advised the ACS to be cautious in appealing for governmental support. In 1824, Charles Fenton Mercer doubted that colonizationists “have so far conciliated public opinion as to render it safe to make an appeal to the government.”¹⁸³ But the Society continued to appeal publicly for federal appropriations, and enlisted state legislatures to join in the call. State legislative resolutions in favor of colonization had been passed by Virginia in 1816, Maryland in 1818, and Tennessee in 1818, but a series of resolutions from free states in the 1820s raised Southern hackles. In 1824, Ohio’s General Assembly recommended “a system of foreign colonization, with correspondent measures . . . be adopted that would in

¹⁸² *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 1, no. 9 (November, 1825), 258.

¹⁸³ American Colonization Society, *The Seventh Annual Report of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour of the United States, with an Appendix* (Washington: Davis and Force, 1824), 11.

due time effect the entire emancipation of the slaves in our country.”¹⁸⁴ The same year, Connecticut’s legislature also advised colonization as an emancipationist measure, and the following year New Jersey’s legislature endorsed Ohio’s resolution.¹⁸⁵ These resolutions included assurances that colonization could be carried out “without any violation of the national compact, or infringement of the rights of individuals,”¹⁸⁶ but several states in the Deep South expressed their objection to the Ohio resolution, including Georgia, South Carolina, Mississippi, and Louisiana. New York Senator Rufus King’s 1825 proposal that the proceeds of public land sales constitute a fund “to aid the emancipation of . . . slaves, within any of the United States, and to aid the removal of . . . slaves, and the removal of . . . free persons of color, . . . without the limits of the United States of America”¹⁸⁷ also met with fierce Southern opposition. (It probably did not help matters that King was a vocal proponent of abolishing the constitution’s three-fifths clause.)

At least in the Deep South, the ACS had come to be seen as a dangerous abolitionist organization, and the idea of a government-funded plan of colonization was viewed with deep suspicion. The Georgia legislature introduced an 1827 protest against the constitutionality of federal support for colonization by “reprobating the cold-blooded selfishness, or unthinking zeal, which actuates many of our fellow-citizens in other states, to an interference with our local concerns and domestic relations, totally unwarranted

¹⁸⁴ Herman V. Ames, ed., *State Documents on Federal Relations: The States and the United States, Number V: Slavery and the Constitution, 1789-1845* (Philadelphia: Department of History of the University of Pennsylvania, 1904), 203.

¹⁸⁵ American Colonization Society, *The Ninth Annual Report of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour of the United States, with an Appendix* (Washington: Way & Gideon, 1826), 62.

¹⁸⁶ This language is included verbatim in both the Ohio and New Jersey resolutions. *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ *U.S. Senate Journal*. 18th Cong., 2nd sess., 18 February 1825.

either by humanity or constitutional right.”¹⁸⁸ This response was disappointing but probably not surprising to most colonizationists. After all, the Lower South had never yet provided much support to the ACS, accounting on average for only 2.9% of its annual contributions between 1826 and 1830. More worrisome, detailed attacks on the ACS began appearing in the press of the Upper South. One anonymous author wrote a series of critiques of colonization in the *Richmond Enquirer* between 1825 and 1826 under the pseudonym “Caius Gracchus,” in which he contended that for slaveowners, any federally sponsored colonization scheme posed a “threat . . . by the agency of the Federal Government, to be despoiled of that very property which the Constitution of the country was intended to secure.”¹⁸⁹ This Southern resistance movement to the ACS questioned the constitutionality of federal funding for colonization schemes, and thus helped to undermine the Society’s ambitions for Washington sponsorship.

The ACS had come into existence focused on acquiring federal sponsorship, but two setbacks in 1828 and 1830 would put this goal still further out of reach. First came a devastating report from the Senate’s Committee on Foreign Relations, to which the various state memorials concerning colonization had been referred. The report, prepared by Virginia’s Littleton Tazewell, primarily consisted of a constitutional argument that the federal government could not legally support the Colonization Society, and concluded that the ACS “professes to draw distinctions . . . between the different classes of our population; to establish colonies; to erect governments; nay, to found new empires, independent of the United States,” and that “the example of such an association cannot be

¹⁸⁸ Ames, ed., *State Documents*, 212.

¹⁸⁹ *Controversy between Caius Gracchus and Opimius, in Reference to the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour of the United States, first published in the Richmond Enquirer* (Georgetown: James C. Dunn, 1827), 81. Lacy Ford identifies Virginia Delegate John White Nash as Caius. Ford, *Deliver Us from Evil*, 308.

productive of any benefit.”¹⁹⁰ Colonizationists busied themselves writing responses and refuting Tazewell’s claims, but the damage was done; the Senate had officially expressed the opinion that federally sponsored colonization was unconstitutional. Even worse, two years later the new administration of Andrew Jackson discovered that during the preceding Monroe and Quincy Adams administrations, the liberal interpretation of Mercer’s 1819 Slave Trade Act had authorized the federal government to spend \$254,710 in support of the ACS, ostensibly to assist in settling only 252 recaptured slaves in Liberia. Jackson’s Secretary of the Navy complained,

The practice has been to furnish these persons with provisions for a period of time, after being landed in Africa, varying from six months to one year; to provide them with houses, arms, and ammunition; to pay for the erection of fortifications; for the building of vessels for their use; and, in short, to render all the aids required for the founding and support of a colonial establishment.¹⁹¹

Henceforth, however, the government would fund only these individuals’ removal to Africa and at most, “some allowance . . . for their maintenance after being landed, until they could find employment by which it might be earned.”¹⁹² When ACS Agent Elliott Cresson visited Jackson to appeal this decision, the President “treat[ed] him roughly,” using “language . . . almost abusive,” accusing John Quincy Adams of “having squandered the public money” and claiming of Liberia that “there were not 300 colonists at the place[, as] almost all who went out there, died of Pestilence.”¹⁹³

Thus the Colonization Society entered the new decade of the 1830s having not only been officially rebuked in the Senate for constitutional overreaching, but having also

¹⁹⁰ S. Doc. No. 56-231, part 6, at 45, Reprint, (1828; repr., 1901).

¹⁹¹ 7 Reg. Deb. xix (1830).

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ John Quincy Adams Diary, vol. 13, p. 113. Massachusetts Historical Society. Jackson had been listed among the Colonization Society’s Vice Presidents in its first five annual reports, but there is no evidence to suggest that he was heavily involved with the Society, and his name had slipped off the rolls in the early 1820s.

lost the only source of federal funding which it had succeeded in accessing. Jackson was also responsible for killing the Society's next best hope for federal support. In 1833, prominent colonizationist Henry Clay introduced a bill which would distribute the proceeds of federal land sales among the states,

according to their respective federal representative population . . . , to be applied by the Legislatures of the said States to such objects of education, internal improvement, colonization of free persons of color, or reimbursement of any existing debt contracted for internal improvements, as the said Legislatures may severally designate and authorize.¹⁹⁴

This bill united colonization with other components of Clay's "American system" and the leading causes of the nascent Whig party, but it did not guarantee any funding for colonization, leaving the ultimate decision in the hands of state governments. This discretion perhaps contributed to the bill's success, which passed through Congress despite some Southern opposition, only to be subjected to one of Jackson's famous "pocket vetoes." Again, the ACS had fallen short in its attempts to secure federal funding.

1831-1837: Crisis Years

If the ACS entered the 1830s still reeling from its inability to obtain congressional support, still further crises awaited the organization. Throughout the Society's existence it had faced (and largely ignored) public criticisms from Northern free black communities, and the 1820s had seen denunciations of colonization published in the Southern press. The 1830s would prove an even more difficult period for the Colonization Society, as it faced new rhetorical and organizational challenges. However, one event at the beginning of the decade opened new opportunities, as well.

¹⁹⁴ Distribution Bill of 1833, S. 6, 24th Cong. (1833). As will be discussed in Chapter 5, the bill's specific reference to colonization was amended out in the House, although the usage of funds for colonization would still have been authorized.

If Nat Turner's 1831 slave rebellion in Virginia was a boon to anyone, it was to the colonization movement. The tragedy appeared to expose slavery as unsustainable, and some panicked Southerners turned to colonization as a method of preventing future violence. Southern free blacks who faced violent reprisals and repression in the aftermath of the rebellion also applied for Liberian emigration in unprecedented numbers. "All totaled, over 1,300 black southerners went to Liberia between late 1831 and 1833,"¹⁹⁵ nearly as many emigrants as the ACS had removed from the entire U.S. in the previous decade. The Virginia legislature openly debated the possibility of a statewide plan of emancipation and colonization (but in 1833 ended by appropriating only a relatively disappointing \$90,000 over five years to fund colonizing the state's free black population). The affair also prompted Maryland's legislature to increase its own colonization appropriation from an annual \$1,000 to \$200,000 over twenty years. But colonization's increased profile in the Upper South also drew increased resistance. In 1832, William & Mary professor Thomas Roderick Dew published a review of the previous year's debate in the Virginia General Assembly, in which he set forth a new critique of the colonization movement. Like previous Southern critics, Dew suggested that federal sponsorship for colonization was unconstitutional, but the bulk of his critique of the ACS was devoted to a painstaking account of the cost of colonization.

Dew was not the first to accuse the Colonization Society of impracticality, but the charge had new sting, given the organization's lack of success in obtaining federal support. It had been clear all along, after all, that colonization on a large scale would prove extremely expensive; even the ACS's own estimates of the cost of transporting the annual increase of the nation's African American populations put the expense over a

¹⁹⁵ Burin, *Peculiar Solution*, 19.

million dollars. But it was hoped that this might be absorbed among the millions of the federal budget:

Is a nation like this to be embarrassed by an annual appropriation of little more than a million dollars to the cause of humanity?—a nation that can extinguish in a year twelve millions of national debt, and at the same time prosecute with vigour its majestic plans of defence and of internal improvement?—a nation, one of whose States can hazard six millions of dollars on the project of opening a single canal?¹⁹⁶

But with federal aid not forthcoming, by the late 1830s supporters were forced to defend the feasibility of large-scale colonization funded solely through private donations:

[I]f all the white people in the United States would give only twenty cents each, it would transport and settle, in like manner, fifty thousand persons, nearly the annual increase of the colored population. . . . It may be objected that there are people . . . who are too poor to contribute any thing. I readily admit the fact; but I hope they have more wealthy neighbors who will be willing and happy to make up the deficiency.¹⁹⁷

This simply made for a less convincing argument; even if the ACS had enjoyed unanimous national support, the prospects of collecting donations on such a scale were dim. Without prospects for federal support, it was difficult for the ACS to refute Dew's charge that their scheme was impossibly expensive.

Even more problematic, Dew also presented an ideological defense of slavery as a perpetual institution: Slavery was to be credited for "the perfect spirit of equality so prevalent among the whites of all the slaveholding states. . . . Color alone is . . . the badge of distinction, the true mark of aristocracy, and all who are white are equal in spite of the variety of occupation."¹⁹⁸ The ACS had always positioned itself as an emancipationist organization which would facilitate the gradual removal of the evil of slavery. Dew's

¹⁹⁶ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 6, no. 10 (December, 1830), 296.

¹⁹⁷ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 15, no. 2 (February, 1839), 47.

¹⁹⁸ Reprinted in *The Pro-Slavery Argument, as Maintained by the Distinguished Writers of the Southern States: Containing the Several Essays, on the Subject, of Chancellor Harper, Governor Hammond, Dr. Simms, and Professor Dew* (1832; repr., Charleston: Walker, Richards & Co., 1852), 462.

essay signaled a new era of proslavery thought, in which the peculiar institution was increasingly defended not as a necessary evil – even an evil which would be necessary forever – but as a positive good. For Dew, slavery formed the foundation of Southern equality and democracy, and the Virginia legislature’s consideration of emancipationist schemes represented a threat to the South’s way of life. Dew had no interest in gradually reducing the United States’ slaveholdings through colonization because he thought such a reduction would prove an economic and social disaster. This argument undermined the traditional moral argument for colonization as a method of removing the evil of slavery. Complicating matters somewhat, Dew was also a diffusionist, ultimately considering Virginia “too far North for slave labor,”¹⁹⁹ and suggesting that the slaves of the Upper South would gradually be transferred to the Lower South. But this, too, presented problems for the ACS. Colonization had been presented in the Upper South as a method of safely and gradually removing slavery. But if Virginian slaveowners were convinced by Dew that slavery was not morally wrong, they would be more likely to “diffuse” their slaves through sale southward than to engage in the Colonization Society’s expensive charitable project.

The ACS’s response, penned by Virginian colonizationist Jesse Burton Harrison, contended that far from placing whites upon an equal level, “*no property gives rise to greater inequalities than slave property.*”²⁰⁰ But Harrison was cautious in his critique of slavery. He introduced his remarks by saying that the ACS’s appeal was “founded but little on *the miseries of the blacks*. We direct ourselves almost exclusively to the injuries

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 484.

²⁰⁰ Jesse Burton Harrison, *Review of the Slave Question, Extracted From the American Quarterly Review, Dec. 1832; Based on the Speech of Th. Marshall, of Fauquier: Showing that Slavery is the Essential Hindrance to the Prosperity of the Slave-Holding States; with Particular Reference to Virginia, Though applicable to other States where Slavery Exists, by a Virginian* (Richmond: T.W. White, 1833), 13.

slavery inflicts on the whites.” Harrison portrayed these injuries as financial rather than moral; although he openly referred to slavery as an “evil,” he also “[b]elieve[d] that there is not the slightest moral turpitude in holding slaves under existing circumstances in the south.”²⁰¹ He also confined his argument that slavery was an economic handicap to the Upper South, while slavery might continue to flourish in the Lower South, with its “extremely rich soil . . . [cultivation of] products . . . which, from their scarcity in the world . . . are sure of a market at high prices, . . . [and] climate so nearly tropical . . . as to make the exposure and toil insupportable to free (say *white*) laborers.”²⁰² Dew’s and Harrison’s articles both appeared shortly before the Virginia legislature met in 1833 to decide whether to fund a colonization venture, and although Dew’s essay would garner the attention of later proslavery writers and historians, it was Harrison’s argument which won the day; as has been mentioned, the Virginia legislature did appropriate \$90,000 to this purpose.²⁰³ But Harrison’s cautious treatment of the subject of slavery signaled the beginnings of a rhetorical shift in ACS literature.

The ACS did not quickly or publicly renounce the hope of promoting safe, gradual emancipation, and it continued to suggest openly that its moral influence on slaveowners might produce eventual abolition. But even its loyal supporters could not imagine how slavery would be easily dislodged in the Lower South, leaving one Kentucky colonizationist to suggest that colonizationists concentrate their efforts on removing slavery in the Upper South:

²⁰¹ Ibid., 9.

²⁰² Ibid., 13.

²⁰³ That Dew’s essay has received so much more historiographical attention than Harrison’s reply is largely due to the fact that Dew’s arguments set a precedent for a new “positive good” proslavery ideology, while Harrison’s response mostly repeated familiar colonizationist claims.

[I]f South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana seem at present impracticable, their position will be greatly altered, and their high tone much abated when they stand as five slave holding states, to twenty-one non-slaveholding States and with the whole coloured population concentrated upon them.²⁰⁴

But for the most part, colonizationists refrained from such threats, preferring vague promises that “[b]y uniting on a common ground, and for a common object of humanity to the people of colour, the wise and good of every State of the Union, the Society is producing *that state of public sentiment*, from which alone can result the peaceful abolition of slavery.”²⁰⁵

The Society did increasingly shift its argument against slavery from a depiction of the institution as a moral evil to a portrait of slaveholding as an economic and social curse. In 1827, Jesse Burton Harrison had taken

it for granted . . . that every individual slave-holder in the United States acknowledges the injustice and violence of the right he assumes over his slaves, and feels it his duty, before God, and to his country, to renounce that right whenever he can do it with safety to the community and to the real benefits of the slaves.²⁰⁶

But six years later, Harrison’s response to Dew focused on the economic rather than the moral hazards of slavery. Colonizationists continued to refer to slavery as an “evil,” but increasingly this represented an economic or social assessment, rather than a moral judgment. In the aftermath of the Missouri crisis, the Nat Turner rebellion, and the rise of the immediate abolition movement, Southerners were sensitive to anything that threatened to overturn the balance of their society, and the ACS responded with increased caution in its condemnations of slavery.

²⁰⁴ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 12, no. 10 (October, 1836), 321.

²⁰⁵ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 10, no. 3 (May, 1834), 68.

²⁰⁶ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 3, no. 7 (September, 1827), 200-201.

Meanwhile, trouble was also brewing in the North. The ACS had dismissed condemnations from the free black community for years, but in the early 1830s, a new white immediate abolitionist movement emerged as a direct rival to colonization, led by fiery, principled writers like William Lloyd Garrison. As will be discussed in more depth in Chapter 4, the white abolitionist movement was in many ways simply an extension of arguments that had been previously developed by free black communities. But the ACS's perennially overstretched finances meant that the organization's primary demand had always been for white supporters to make financial contributions, rather than for free blacks to volunteer for emigration. This lack of demand for emigrants, combined with colonizationist racism and paternalism allowed the ACS to dismiss black opposition as misguided and temporary; white supporters of the scheme thought they understood free blacks' best interests better than the free blacks themselves.

But the new white abolitionist movement was not so easy to ignore, and threatened to peel white Northern philanthropists from the colonizationist ranks. These were supporters the ACS could ill afford to lose (and the Society could not as easily condescend to former white supporters as merely misinformed). In 1831, Garrison's *The Liberator* began publication in Boston, containing frequent denunciations of the ACS, and by May of 1832, Garrison had gathered his arguments into a book, *Thoughts on African Colonization*. The American Colonization Society, he averred, "increases the value of slaves, and adds strength and security to the system of slavery," and "prevents the education of [free blacks] . . . by constantly asserting that they must always be a degraded people in this country."²⁰⁷ Garrison based his criticisms on excerpts from the ACS's own publications, and had no compunctions about quoting out of context as he

²⁰⁷ Garrison, *Thoughts*, part 1, pp. 74, 147.

portrayed colonizationists as proslavery, and exaggerated the ACS's support for exclusionary legislation.

Garrison's influence should not be exaggerated. *The Liberator's* circulation never exceeded 2,500, and the American Anti-Slavery Society, which he co-founded, managed in the 1850s a budget of six or seven thousand dollars, compared to the ACS's annual collections, which by the Civil War averaged over a hundred thousand.²⁰⁸ It was perhaps because the ACS doubted Garrison's power that it delayed six months before publishing a formal response to *Thoughts on African Colonization*. In November, 1832, the *African Repository* published a brief retort (seven pages long, where Hamilton's response to Dew's proslavery attack a few months later would total thirty-four pages). The ACS (accurately) accused Garrison of selectively quoting out of context, and argued that if the Society was not directly abolitionist, colonizationism still promoted emancipation: "[I]n instances too numerous to mention, it has produced the voluntary manumission of slaves; . . . and . . . throughout the whole Southern country, it is awakening thought and inquiry concerning the best practicable modes of relieving and improving the whole coloured population."²⁰⁹ The ACS also ridiculed the radicalism of Garrison's immediate abolitionist position:

Mr. Garrison comes forward as a reformer— . . . finds fault with our wisest and best men, the clergy, the churches, the charitable, the pious; and all because we do not say, that an evil system, which has grown with our growth, and strengthened with our strength; which was introduced before we had existence; which is interwoven with the whole framework of society; which has been fortified by

²⁰⁸ For *Liberator* subscription estimates, see Rodger Streitmatter, *Voices of Revolution: The Dissident Press in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 25. For AASS budget data, see Merton L. Dillon, *The Abolitionists: The Growth of a Dissenting Minority* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1974), 213.

²⁰⁹ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 8, no. 9 (November, 1832), 274.

time, and prejudice, and habit and law, can be, and ought to be entirely, and instantaneously demolished.²¹⁰

These arguments formed the cornerstone of the colonizationist response to the abolitionist movement; throughout the antebellum era, the ACS contrasted its own gradual but effectual plan of encouraging manumission with the abolitionists' radical agenda. While the Colonization Society worked quietly to promote the spirit of emancipation, they argued, the abolitionists' harsh language only hardened slaveowners' hearts: "They have been addressed in terms of opprobrious crimination, rarely softened by the language of respect. This has made them inaccessible . . . , and has . . . put off emancipation for at least half a century beyond the period when it might have been effected."²¹¹

The ACS's response to Garrison pointed out the irony that the Society was also attacked by proslavery Southerners: "It seems somewhat strange, that the advocates of perpetual slavery (and we believe they are few) at the South, should be making war upon an Institution, which, according to Mr. Garrison, is contributing essentially to the stability and permanency of their favorite system."²¹² The increasing criticism from both abolitionist and proslavery forces in the early 1830s certainly presented a threat to the ACS, but also an opportunity; colonizationists frequently attempted to play one group against the other, responding to abolitionist critiques by pointing out proslavery opposition, and vice versa. The ACS portrayed itself as the rational alternative to the radical advocates of both proslavery and antislavery positions. In an 1835 speech, ACS

²¹⁰ Ibid., 275.

²¹¹ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 15, no. 15 (September, 1839), 243.

²¹² *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 8, no. 9 (November, 1832), 274.

Secretary Ralph Randolph Gurley described both the immediate abolition argument and the “positive good” theory of slavery, but concluded:

Both doctrines [were] . . . contrary to truth, humanity and right reason. . . . But there was a third doctrine, the true one . . . , that alone which met the necessities of the case—one which . . . must commend itself to the judgments and hearts of the American people—which declaring slavery wrong in its origin, declared also that its existence could be rightly tolerated by those who have power over it, no longer than during the time absolutely necessary to find and apply a remedy—a remedy which should not produce, or clearly and alarmingly threaten evils worse than the disease.²¹³

The ACS attempted to repel the abolitionists’ attack by emphasizing the radicalism of immediate emancipation, but also by emphasizing the (more gradual and therefore safer) emancipationist tendencies of their own program.

If the ACS was initially dismissive of Garrison’s attack, the abolitionist threat quickly grew teeth over the course of the 1830s, as numerous prominent donors and organizers defected from the colonizationist camp, including Elizur Wright, Jr., Amos A. Phelps, Theodore Weld, James G. Birney, Lewis and Arthur Tappan, and Gerrit Smith. (The fact that so many Northern colonizationists were willing to embrace the still radical idea of immediate abolition demonstrates the strength of their antislavery convictions, and suggests that they may have supported colonization for similar reasons.) The loss of the wealthy Smith must have especially stung the ACS, as it had been for years actively promoting his plan, by which subscribers contributed one thousand dollars annually for ten years. Smith’s growing dissatisfaction with the ACS had been evident for some time. At the Society’s annual meeting in 1834, he chastised his fellow colonizationists for “look[ing] too much on [free blacks] as a ‘nuisance’; . . . we have been patient even with that most offensive view of our Society which degrades it from its elevated and sacred

²¹³ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 12, no. 2 (February, 1836), 58.

objects into a mere ‘drain’ for the escape of that ‘nuisance.’”²¹⁴ Smith ardently defended African Americans’ rights to remain within the United States if they so chose, and was an emphatic critic of slavery. He had attempted for a time to balance his support for both abolition and colonization, but two years later, he submitted his resignation to the ACS, lamenting that “the Society is now, and has been for some time, far more interested in the question of slavery, than in the work of Colonization—in the demolition of the Anti-Slavery Society, than in the building up of its Colony.”²¹⁵ (Ever the gentleman, Smith included with his letter of resignation a check for the three thousand dollars outstanding on his plan of subscription.)

Smith’s defection demonstrated the increasing internal divisions within the ACS during this period. Pressed by the ACS to specify how the Society had offended him, Smith specified two speeches published in the *African Repository*. Here, in the ACS’s own pages, Harrison Otis had argued that “every effort intended to propagate a general sentiment favorable to the immediate abolition of slavery, is of forbidding aspect and ruinous tendency,” and John Tyler had claimed that the Southern states “have a right to call for measures of coercion on the part of our sister States. . . – nothing short of penal enactments will do.”²¹⁶ But if Smith took offense at these Southern colonizationists’ statements, the reverse was also possible. In a speech less than a month after Smith had written his letter of resignation, Henry Clay cited him by name, attacking him for daring

²¹⁴ American Colonization Society, *Seventeenth Annual Report of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour of the United States*, Reprint, *The Annual Reports of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour of the United States, Volumes 11-20, 1828-1836* (1834; repr., New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), ix.

²¹⁵ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 12, no. 1 (January, 1836), 36.

²¹⁶ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 11, no. 10 (October, 1835), 312-313, 311. Smith identifies these two speeches as responsible for his defection in *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 12, no. 5 (May, 1836), 138.

to discuss immediate abolition openly (it is unclear whether Clay knew of Smith's defection):

I admit that the right of free political discussion should know no restraint; . . . but it is free discussion in relation to *ourselves* and to *our own affairs*. A citizen of New York has the most perfect right to consider the constitution of his own State, and all her laws. . . But has he the right to go beyond the limits of his own State?—to go into the Southern States and assail their constitutions? . . . What is this pretension to the free discussion of what does not concern us?²¹⁷

As these debates attest, the Colonization Society faced significant internal discord during this period, which drove many antislavery Northerners from ACS ranks.

However, it is important to note that the conflict between Gerrit Smith and John Tyler or Henry Clay was not over colonizationism itself. These men did not disagree about how colonization should be practiced, or about its effects. In the same speech in which he decried Smith's rhetoric, Henry Clay also repeated the argument that abolitionism "instead of benefiting the slave, [has] add[ed] new rigours and penalties, and . . . aggravate[d] the melancholy of his bondage. . . Even those who were the friends of a safe, a practical, and a gradual abolition of slavery, have been driven from their purpose."²¹⁸ In other words, Smith and Clay agreed that colonization tended to promote emancipation; they disagreed only over the rights of abolitionists to describe slavery as immoral publicly, and to discuss its immediate abolition openly. Certainly the rise of the abolition movement strained the ACS, but the society's internal divisions should not be overemphasized. Colonizationists responded to abolitionists not by transforming their rhetoric, but by emphasizing an idea they had long promoted, that the ACS encouraged

²¹⁷ American Colonization Society, *Nineteenth Annual Report of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour of the United States*, Reprint, *The Annual Reports of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour of the United States, Volumes 11-20, 1828-1836* (1835; repr., New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), 10.

²¹⁸ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 12, no. 1 (January, 1836), 11.

emancipation (indeed, they argued, more effectively than the abolitionist movement). As one North Carolina colonizationist advised Northern abolitionists: “[I]f you would let the American Colonization Society prosecute its plans without interruption . . . , you may yet be instrumental in extending gradual and universal emancipation from the north to the south, until it reaches from Maryland to New Orleans.”²¹⁹ The debate within the ACS was not over gradual emancipation – supporters from across the country agreed that colonization fostered this goal – but over how to address the abolitionist movement. ACS members from the South (however much they supported gradual emancipation in theory) were offended and threatened by abolitionists’ vivid depictions of slavery’s cruelties, which might encourage slave insurrections, or lead to the imposition of involuntary manumission by federal fiat. Northern colonizationists were more likely to take a conciliatory tone when addressing abolitionists, casting them as well-meaning but misguided.

But the growing proslavery and abolitionist opposition were not the only challenges that the ACS faced in the early 1830s. The unexpected expenses of colonial administration and the increased demand for colonization in the aftermath of the Nat Turner uprising had strained the Society’s finances, and by 1834, it found itself saddled with over forty-five thousand dollars in debt, and no expectation of being able to repay this amount in a timely manner. In order to meet this crisis, the Society promised “to lessen the expenses of the Society, and to refrain from sending out emigrants in any considerable number, until the debt should be paid, [and] the affairs of the Colony be brought into a state of improved order.”²²⁰ The ACS also attempted to funnel this debt

²¹⁹ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 10, no. 7 (September, 1834), 213.

²²⁰ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 11, no. 2 (February, 1835), 53.

into a newly created bond issue, to whose investors the Society promised to pay an annual six percent interest. Much of the ACS's attention in subsequent years would be devoted to reporting the progress of bond subscriptions, and the current status of the Society's debt. But by 1839 (with the nation mired in a severe financial downturn), the ACS declared the failure of this strategy: "The experiment has shown, that when the proper business of Colonization is suspended, the receipts of the Society at once fall off."²²¹ The Society warned its creditors to expect only fifty cents for every dollar they were owed, and even so, it was not until 1846 that the Society could "announce the pleasing fact, that the AMERICAN COLONIZATION SOCIETY IS OUT OF DEBT!"²²² (Given that it had taken twelve years for the Society to pay off its outstanding obligations, the emphasis was understandable.)

The American Colonization Society faced in the 1830s both ideological and financial crises. And together these contributed to a still further crisis: the separation of state auxiliaries from the national organization. The Maryland State Colonization Society led the way in 1833, separating its finances from the ACS, and establishing its own separate colony on Cape Palmas, along the West African coast 250 miles from the ACS's settlement in Monrovia. Both the ideological and financial crises contributed to this defection; as Penelope Campbell has argued, the leaders of the MSCS were motivated to separate both by a sense of discord within the ACS and by a belief that the national Society had been mismanaged. The next year, the New York and Pennsylvania

²²¹ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 16, no. 4 (February 15, 1840), 55.

²²² *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 22, no. 2 (February, 1845), 36. Even this announcement included the caveat that the Society had refused to pay \$775.27 due to creditors who declined to accept payment of only half what they were owed: "[T]he committee have not felt themselves authorized to make a distinction in their favor by paying them on any other terms than have been acted upon in settling with other creditors in like circumstances." *Ibid.*

auxiliaries began autonomous colonization operations, though these societies continued to contribute a portion of their funds to the ACS, and in 1838, Mississippi and Louisiana established their own separate colony, as well. The ACS continued to maintain close relationships with all of these state colonization organizations, and tried to persuade them to rejoin the fold:

If in regard to this cause uniform opinions and united efforts throughout the country are desirable; if identity of interests, a common government and harmonious laws are important to the settlements now springing up and hereafter to arise on the coast of Africa; and, if the combined energies and exertions of the friends of the Colonization system are necessary to give it complete efficacy, surely its considerate supporters will not hasten to dissolve those ties of union that have so long held together in generous and undivided efforts so large and respectable a portion of the American people.²²³

The separation of state auxiliaries threatened to aggravate the Society's financial predicament, but worse, it threatened to undermine the ideological unity of the colonization cause.

The sectional dissension between state auxiliaries was also reflected in the ACS's own management. At the Society's 1833 annual meeting, its antislavery Secretary Ralph Randolph Gurley engineered something of a coup, as he quietly proposed replacing several Southerners on the Society's Board of Managers with Northern men.

Staudenraus argues that "[u]nquestionably, the delegates approved Gurley's list of nominations in a routine manner, and only afterwards discovered" what they had done.²²⁴

In private correspondence, Gurley complained that the excluded Southern managers attempted to "alarm the feelings of the southern members of Congress, & make them believe that the radical principles & essential policy, of the Institution were to be changed" – a charge he disputed, though he emphasized that the Society "ought . . . not

²²³ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 12, no. 4 (April, 1836), 134-135.

²²⁴ Staudenraus, *African Colonization Movement*, 208.

fear to exert its *legitimate moral influence* on slavery” (implying that the ousted Southern leadership had prevented the Society from doing so).²²⁵ Several days of contentious meetings followed, and in the end, the proposed changes to the Board were reversed. However, the episode presaged a shift in the Society’s management, and, from 1833, slave states’ representation on the Board (which had previously outnumbered Northern membership) rapidly declined (see figure 2). Even the Society’s largely honorary body of Vice Presidents saw a similar (if much less dramatic) shift in favor of the North during this period (see figure 3).

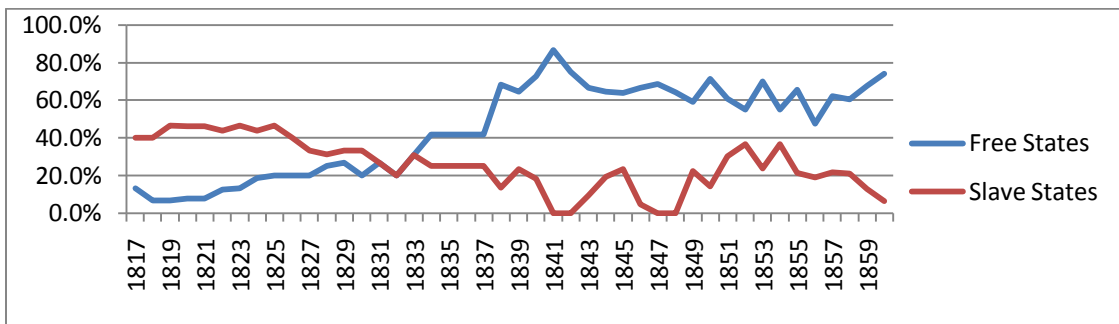


Figure 2 - Board of Managers representation

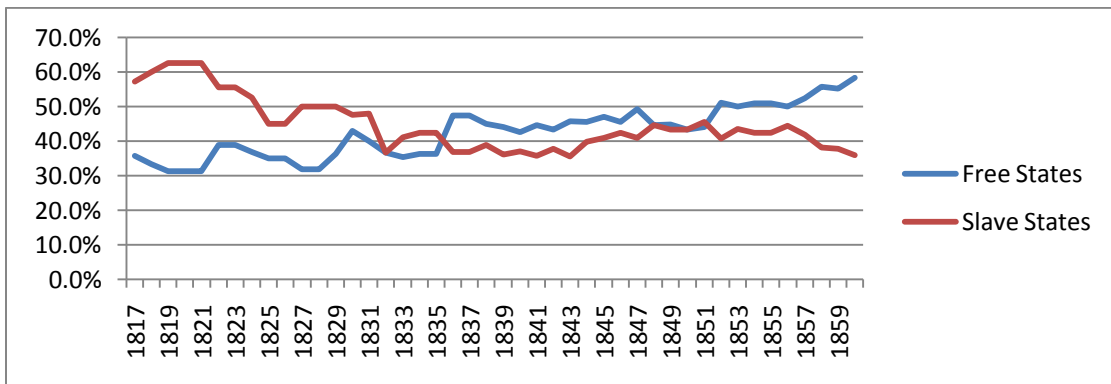


Figure 3 - Vice Presidential representation

²²⁵ Ralph Randolph Gurley to Leonard Bacon, April 30, 1833, Bacon Family Papers, Armistad Research Center, Tulane University.

During the 1830s, then, the American Colonization Society found itself facing deep debt, the withdrawal of federal support, increasing criticism from both proslavery Southerners and abolitionist Northerners, and the defections of important supporters and even entire auxiliary organizations. Despite the fact that the Society was coming under increasing scrutiny in both Northern and Southern sections of the country, we should not be surprised to find that the Society increasingly slanted its representation to the North. After all, the ACS responded very differently to the proslavery and abolitionist attacks. Supporters of colonization tried to convince abolitionists that they in fact shared the same ends: “[A] prominent object of this Institution is to afford the means for a safe, gradual, and *voluntary* abolition of slavery.”²²⁶ Colonizationists also attempted to reassure the South that they had no designs to remove slavery by force: “[A]bsurd and false is the objection, that this Society seeks indirectly to disturb the rights of property, and to interfere with the well-established relation subsisting between master and slave.”²²⁷ But colonization remained irreducibly emancipationist, and in the end, the scheme had nothing to offer to those who thought slavery a “positive good”: “If . . . opposition [to colonization] were the offspring of that calculating and selfish policy, which would coldly defend abstract slavery, *upon principle*, to attempt to meet it by argument would be an idle expenditure of words and of time.”²²⁸ As the ACS continued to proclaim its gradual emancipationist intentions throughout the 1830s, it could more easily respond to the abolitionist attack, which threatened to undermine the appeal of the ACS’s

²²⁶ American Colonization Society, *Sixteenth Annual Report of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour of the United States*, Reprint, *The Annual Reports of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour of the United States, Volumes 11-20, 1828-1836* (1833; repr., New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), xvi. The quotation is from a speech by Robert Finley.

²²⁷ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 7, no. 8 (October, 1831), 228.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*

emancipationist platform in the North. The Society could make no similar appeal to Southerners who maintained the righteousness of perpetual slavery, or who doubted the constitutionality of federal support; the evil of slavery and the necessity of government sponsorship were too deeply ingrained in the colonization platform. The Society responded to the crises of the 1830s by shifting its management to include more Northerners, in order to improve its antislavery credentials (and perhaps with the intention of bringing more frugal Yankee eyes to bear on its increasingly strained balance sheet). However, the Society's woes would only multiply by the end of the 1830s, as the Panic of 1837 devastated its collections. In 1838, the Society's receipts were barely a third of what they had totaled two years earlier. More drastic action was called for.

1838-1847: Reorganization and Cutbacks

The Panic of 1837 could not have come at a worse time for the ACS. The Society had taken on heavy debts even during the heady financial times earlier in the decade, and the defection of Maryland, New York, and Pennsylvania – all states from which large donations had been received in the past – further damaged the Society's financial outlook. The ACS appealed to the apostate auxiliary societies in March 1837 with a proposed constitution for a Liberian republic which would subsume the separate colonies “under one Government, to be styled the Government of Liberia.”²²⁹ When Maryland rejected this plan, the ACS leadership tried again with an April 1838 proposal to reform the organization as a “Society . . . composed of State Societies,” which would be managed by delegates from these auxiliaries. Delegates would be apportioned based on auxiliaries' donations to the central society and the size of their separate colonies in

²²⁹ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 8, no. 3 (March, 1837), 75.

Liberia.²³⁰ Once again, the Maryland State Colonization Society, with its relatively generous state legislative appropriation, rejected this arrangement, but the other auxiliaries agreed, and the ACS was reformed as a federation of state auxiliaries (although the New York and Pennsylvania societies also continued autonomous operations outside the ACS's purview). This arrangement contributed to further increasing the divide between Northern and Southern representation on the Society's board of managers. The new formula favored states which maintained substantial separate settlements in Liberia, and states from which the greatest contributions were collected. With Maryland still abstaining, New York and Pennsylvania represented the only sizeable separate settlements under ACS jurisdiction, and between 1838 and 1840, donations from free states were nearly double those from slave states. Between 1835 and 1837, the Society's board of managers had remained stable with five Northern members and three Southern representatives. Under the new formula, in 1838, the Society retained its three Southern managers, but Northern states now accounted for fifteen members of the board. Until the Civil War, the Society's management would continue to be dominated by Northerners.

But if the leadership of the Society saw a dramatic shift in this period, its rhetoric remained mostly consistent, and it continued to draw donations from across the country. Despite the spike in Northern contributions between 1838 and 1840, over the entire decade from 1838 to 1847, Southern donations were less than those from free states only by a relatively modest thirty percent, and averaged slightly more than their own pre-Panic peak. The ACS attempted to withdraw from the ideological fray of the 1830s, opening the first volume of the *African Repository* in 1841 with the pledge that "[w]e shall feel

²³⁰ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 14, no. 10 (October, 1838), 238.

grateful to those friends who may discover articles or sentiments in the Repository to which they take exceptions, if they will point them out, and their communications shall be attended to.”²³¹ Attacking abolitionists head on had only encouraged further defections; henceforth, the Society would attempt to avoid direct conflict with opponents and focus on describing the benefits of the scheme. The Society’s publications continued to portray it as a moderately emancipationist organization which would promote and facilitate manumission of Southern slaves. In fact, the ACS had even more reason to emphasize this aspect of the colonizationist scheme, as continued opposition among communities of free African Americans had reduced free black emigration almost to nothing. After the flurry of volunteers in the aftermath of the Nat Turner insurrection subsided, the Society would remove only 218 free blacks between 1834 and 1847, accounting for less than twelve percent of total emigration. (Between 1820 and 1833, by contrast, over half of the emigrants had been free.)²³² As Northern whites came to dominate the ACS’s Board of Managers, Northern blacks almost disappeared from its emigrant rolls, accounting for only fifty-six Liberian colonists between 1834 and 1847.²³³

This dramatic shift in emigration may have been caused in part by a lack of willing Northern volunteers, but it also reflected a rational strategy for the application of the ACS’s limited resources. As the heavily indebted organization sought to cut back on expenditures, it logically focused its efforts on removing emancipated slaves.

Transporting these individuals to Liberia would shore up the support of manumitting

²³¹ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 17, no. 1 (January 1, 1841), 2. In this editorial, the ACS (falsely) claimed to have “heretofore excluded all articles denouncing the Abolitionists, or discussing their principles, as well as those relating to slavery in the South. We shall continue to adhere to this rule.” *Ibid.* In the guise of maintaining previous precedents, the ACS was actually announcing a shift in its rhetorical course, and in subsequent months and years, direct criticisms of abolitionists and slavery did appear with less frequency in the *African Repository*’s pages.

²³² Burin, *Peculiar Solution*, 170.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 26.

Southerners, and would also reassure Northerners that the Society functioned to promote emancipation. Emancipated slaves were also often accorded higher priority because state laws commonly required them to leave the borders of the state after gaining their freedom. The common practice of testamentary manumission in the South meant that the ACS was often presented with emancipated slaves at risk of reverting to slavery if not removed within a certain period of time. The ACS frequently pleaded the urgency of such cases in order to raise funds, and noted the effectiveness of these appeals, blaming a fundraising lull in 1846 on fact that “[t]here has been no large family of slaves begging for the privilege of a passage to Liberia, who must soon be sold into perpetual slavery if not sent away.”²³⁴ By focusing on removing manumitted slaves, the cash-strapped ACS attempted to present a compelling argument to supporters across the nation.

The ACS also sought to economize in ways other than reducing the number of emigrants transported to Liberia. The Society’s managers attempted to rein in colonial expenses, blaming the organization’s financial woes on improper management of the colonial government. The ACS’s American leadership did not always see eye-to-eye with the (white) governors it appointed to oversee colonial operations. These governors, faced with the difficulties of administering the struggling colony, and at the remove of a communications delay as long as several months, frequently exceeded the ACS’s expected budget for colonial expenditures. In 1840, the ACS imposed new requirements on the colonial government to account rigorously for these expenses, admonishing the current governor that, “Could the American Colonization Society have received such reports during the last ten years, it would not now have been in debt one dollar.”²³⁵ At

²³⁴ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 22, no. 6 (June, 1846), 251.

²³⁵ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 16, no. 4 (February 15, 1840), 58.

the same time, it ceased providing a salary for the colonial physician, instructing him to charge for his services. This measure would not only save money, but would promote self-reliance among Liberian colonists: “To perpetuate a spirit of dependence among the people in Liberia, by encouraging them to look for support to the Society, would not be kindness but cruelty, and a gross abuse of the funds entrusted to us.”²³⁶ The following year, the ACS instructed the governor to reduce the size of the unprofitable colonial store (which sold provisions to Liberian colonists), and to restrict its activities to large wholesale orders. Again, this was defended not simply as a cost-cutting measure, but as a method of promoting habits of independence in Liberia. “When goods have been sold from the colonial store, it has of course lessened the sales of the colored merchant: this has sometimes been the cause of complaint, and always regarded as the infringement of his rights.”²³⁷ In the eyes of the ACS’s American managers, Liberian colonists had grown overly dependent upon government support, and colonial governors’ profligacy threatened to bankrupt the Society.

As the ACS sought to reduce expenditures after the financial embarrassments of the late 1830s, it cut back on emigration and attempted to rein in colonial spending. But it also faced the rhetorical challenge of explaining to its supporters why such measures were necessary. After all, the Society had long proclaimed that colonization could be accomplished cheaply, and as Liberia’s founder and administrator, it had no one else to blame for escalating costs.²³⁸ As the Society confronted unprecedented financial hurdles

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 61.

²³⁷ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 17, no. 3 (February 1, 1841), 38.

²³⁸ And these costs certainly were escalating, even by the ACS’s own estimates. (Or at least, the ACS was forced to acknowledge its inability to perform colonization as cheaply as it had at first promised.) In the Society’s early years, it often estimated \$20 as the cost of transporting each Liberian emigrant, but by 1845, the *African Repository* reported that a recent expedition had cost \$58 per emigrant, which did “not include

following the Panic of 1837, it emphasized the difficulties attending colonization.

Samuel Wilkeson, who became president of the Board of Managers in the aftermath of the 1837 crisis, tried to manage expectations:

[O]ur patrons have expected too much; they have looked too soon for the fruits of their labor. Many of them are unacquainted with the character of the people who compose the great body of the emigrants. The degrading influences of slavery cannot be eradicated by the mere act of removal to Africa. Habits of industry, economy, and enterprise cannot be expected from persons who have never directed their own labor nor provided for their own wants.²³⁹

In short, colonization's progress was slow because African Americans could only gradually be converted from their degraded American state into industrious democratic citizens. Of course, the ACS had always claimed that removal would allow African Americans to develop to their fullest potential. Indeed, this idea, which Marie Tyler-McGraw calls the "alchemy of colonization" was in many ways central to colonizationism: "The free black population of the United States, 'base' and 'degraded' by a hostile American environment, might be transformed into an exemplary citizenry by the work of creating an African republic."²⁴⁰ Colonizationists had always claimed that African Americans were brutalized in the United States and would find regeneration in Africa, but it was only after the Society encountered severe financial problems in the late 1830s that it began to emphasize the difficulties involved in this promised transformation. All of the stipulated benefits of the colonization scheme would emerge over time, but the

house rent, medicine, medical attendance, nursing when sick, and other small expenses to be paid in the colony." *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 21, no. 2 (February 1845), 36.

²³⁹ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 16 (1840), iii. Though Wilkeson admitted that converting impoverished and supposedly debauched African Americans into upstanding citizens was a difficult process, he contended that freedom in the United States only proved destructive. "[I]t is found that the freed slave makes a more orderly and industrious citizen, than the free colored man from our Northern cities." *Ibid.*

²⁴⁰ Tyler-McGraw, *African Republic*, 24.

ACS counseled patience; only gradually could a population of “degraded” American blacks be transformed into a prosperous democratic nation.

As the Colonization Society encountered unprecedented financial challenges in the late 1830s and 1840s, and the dream of federal support seemed more distant than ever, colonizationists also began discussing other potential funding sources. The Society looked to the emigrants themselves to provide the necessary funds. Even without federal money, the ACS promised, “the time is coming when the colored people will seek Africa at the same rate that the whites seek America—and will, as the whites do, pay their own passage.”²⁴¹ Such arguments began appearing with increasing frequency in the 1840s and 1850s, despite the continued almost unanimous rejection of colonization in free African American communities. And the ACS took some hesitant steps towards demanding payment from free emigrants, advertising in 1841 for a company of one hundred free blacks to emigrate together. Enrollees would pay fees ranging from \$30 to \$50, and the Colonization Society would provide free passage and a small salary for a minister, school teachers, and physician.²⁴² (One hundred applicants were not forthcoming.) White colonizationists came to embrace the concept of self-paying emigration not because free blacks showed any signs of adopting such measures (as previously mentioned, free black emigration actually dropped precipitously during this period), but through a desperate need to identify some potential source for funding. (These arguments were addressed to potential white supporters, not potential black emigrants.) White colonizationists did not attend very closely to free black opposition to the scheme, dismissing these objections as springing from ignorance or abolitionist

²⁴¹ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 20, no. 9 (September, 1844), 262.

²⁴² *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 17, no. 7 (April 1, 1841), 99-100.

misinformation, and arguing that the benefits of colonization could not help but become obvious to American blacks over time. That the ACS would endorse self-paying emigration despite the sustained and nearly unanimous opposition of free blacks demonstrates just how little attention white colonizationists paid to African American opinion. As will be discussed in Chapter 4, many free blacks argued that this disinterest demonstrated the insincerity of the ACS's pledge to colonize only voluntary emigrants, but there is little evidence that colonizationists planned any coercive measures. More likely, white colonizationists viewed African American opposition through a racist lens, and believed black intransigence was a symptom of shallow superstition rather than deep reflection. Colonizationists' transfer of hopes from federal funding to self-paying emigration also concealed an unstated conservative shift. After all, even if free blacks could be expected to support the cost of their own removal from the United States, the same could hardly be said of slaves. The ACS continued to criticize slavery, and never publicly acknowledged that it had abandoned its emancipationist agenda, but without federal funding, it appeared ever more unlikely that the Society would be able to finance significant emancipation and removal projects.

Louisiana planter John McDonogh helped ease this dilemma by publicly revealing in 1842 a plan for emancipating seventy-nine of his slaves (who had been enrolled for the past seventeen years in an elaborate plan of gradual emancipation). In some ways, McDonogh was an imperfect spokesperson for colonization. His emancipationist sentiments were limited, and he in fact openly admitted that

since making the agreement with [his slaves], they have gained for me, in addition to having performed more, and better labor than slaves ordinarily perform, in the usual time of laboring, a sum of money, (including the sum they appear to have paid me, in the purchase of their time,) which will enable me to go to Virginia, or

Carolina, and purchase a gang of people, of nearly double the number, of those I have sent away.²⁴³

In this light, McDonogh's actions were not entirely altruistic, and he seemed in no particular hurry to end his personal attachment to slavery. McDonogh's plan also did not directly support the costs of colonization (although he contributed liberally to the Colonization Society). Still, McDonogh's example demonstrated that colonization was doing what it had always promised – influencing slaveholders to emancipate their slaves and send them to Liberia – and the ACS widely publicized the venture.

Colonizationists also proposed yet another potential source of funding. In the late 1830s and 1840s, panegyrics to the commercial advantages of Liberian trade began appearing in ACS texts. The Society promised American merchants “that a million or two dollars spent by them in colonizing and civilizing Africa would, in thirty years, return to them, as a body, by means of commerce to that country, more than five-fold their advances.”²⁴⁴ And the Colonization Society engaged in its own commercial ventures, charging colonial governors with collecting trade goods to be shipped as return cargo on emigrant vessels. However, the irregularity and unpredictability of these transports motivated the Society to abandon its previous practice of hiring ships for each expedition, and suggested the propriety of “the Society's owning a vessel to run regularly between this country and the Colony. We might then calculate with great certainty both as to the time of the arrival and the departure of our expeditions.”²⁴⁵ These hopes were at least partially realized with the 1845 incorporation of the Chesapeake and Liberia Trading Company, which constructed a vessel for regular passages between Monrovia

²⁴³ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 19, no. 2 (February, 1843), 54-55.

²⁴⁴ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 15, no. 2 (February, 1839), 47.

²⁴⁵ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 17, no. 23 (December 1, 1841), 360.

and Baltimore. However, the large numbers of African American investors that white colonizationists hoped to attract with this plan never materialized, the profits from colonial trade were disappointing, and the Trading Company faced further setbacks when new 1847 maritime regulations sharply limited the number of emigrants that its ship could carry. The Company sold this vessel in 1851 and purchased a larger ship, but this new bark wrecked on its maiden voyage, and the Company subsequently dissolved.²⁴⁶

The ACS's argument for commercial investment in Liberia was pitched not only to supporters and American merchants, but also to the U.S. government. Though previous arguments for federal support had failed to convince Congress, perhaps the anticipated commercial benefit to the United States from Liberian development would prove more appealing.

Every nation . . . has a . . . peculiar interest in raising up such other nations as are most likely, from their habits and origin, to give to their national patron a preference in their trade, and their demand for the various articles of consumption. Such is the interest Great Britain has had, and still has, in these United States. . . Every nation with which we have intercourse has a similar interest; but the mere peculiarity of our Anglo-American habits, affording to her commerce a preference as it does, renders her interests in our prosperity far greater than that of any other nation. We see the same preference given in French colonies for articles of French manufacture,—the same in Spanish,—the same in Dutch. Experience shows us that the augmentation of wealth, procured to any country by its colonies, does not consist in the revenue she extorts from those colonists, but in the additional custom for her wares and products which the new nation gives the old.²⁴⁷

This was an argument for colonization in a broader sense – not just for removal of an undesirable population, but in order to establish a trading empire of American colonies. Colonizationists suggested that the United States' national interest in this trade should motivate governmental sponsorship for the colonization scheme. However, Congress

²⁴⁶ For the ACS's reaction to the 1847 maritime regulations, see *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 23, no. 5 (May, 1847), 156-158. For an account of the wreck of the Chesapeake and Liberia Trading Company's second vessel, see *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 29, no. 1 (January, 1853), 16-17.

²⁴⁷ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 16, no. 8 (April 15, 1840), 123.

appeared no more moved by this argument than by previous appeals, and the ACS continued to rely heavily on private donations.

But the ACS's new focus on Liberia's commercial opportunities was not motivated solely by the Society's desperate search for revenue. Increasing European colonization in Africa also encouraged this shift. In the late 1830s, the Colonization Society began to warn that if the United States failed to promote its national interest by expanding its Liberian foothold in Africa, it might find itself entirely frozen out of this expanding market. In earlier years, the ACS had portrayed the neighboring British colony of Sierra Leone as an ally in the battle against the coastal slave trade, and in the enterprise of bringing civilization to Africa. The ACS had even contrasted the British government's greater commitment to Sierra Leone and to West African naval patrols with the U.S. government's negligence. But in the late 1830s, Society publications increasingly portrayed Britain as a competitor, and even as a dangerous one. In 1839, the *African Repository* warned that "the British Government have made colonization a pretext, if not the means of prosecuting, even to a monopoly, the great trade of Middle Africa."²⁴⁸ If the US government or ACS members did not support Liberia's maintenance and expansion, American interests were at risk of losing out to the British.

Great Britain was in fact aggressively exploring and patrolling the West African coast during this period. In 1839, prominent British abolitionist and former MP Thomas Fowell Buxton published a report urging the Crown to expand its colonies and trading outposts in West Africa as a measure to combat the continued illegal slave trade on the coast. The ACS discounted Buxton's benevolent motivations, contending that Great Britain's true intentions were to

²⁴⁸ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 15, no. 5 (March, 1839), 82.

add Africa as a Colony to her vast empire; she will secure, at no distant day, one hundred millions of new consumers for the products of her manufactories, and give employment to more of her shipping than is now required in her trade with the whole American continent. Notwithstanding the assurance of Mr. Buxton, that the African trade is to be free, we are satisfied that this trade must inevitably become a monopoly in the hands of the British, and that the American trade with Africa, will be limited to that derived through the American colonies, and to a barter on the coast with British merchants, who will be stationed at every important point.²⁴⁹

British expansionism in the early 1840s caught the ACS in a vulnerable state.

The Society's financial difficulties had limited its own attempts to purchase land along the African coast, and the ACS had no claim to extensive tracts of territory between Monrovia and the Maryland State Colonization Society's settlement at Cape Palmas. An 1841 Crown-financed expedition up the Niger river attempted to establish trading relations with the African interior; such activity threatened literally to encircle Liberia, as the Niger bent from its delta to Liberia's east along a westerly course which would permit connections with British trading posts on the Gambia River and in the hinterland of Sierra Leone, on Liberia's western border. ACS officials were given even more reason for concern later that year when Liberia's governor sent word concerning American merchant Theodore Canot. Canot, who maintained a factory at Bassa Cove, midway between Monrovia and Cape Palmas, "ha[d] received a letter from the . . . Governor of Sierra Leone, . . . and has hoisted *the British flag* at his door. I suspect negotiations are in progress to . . . make [Bassa Cove] the head-quarters of English trade on the coast."²⁵⁰ English expansion into this region threatened to "effect an absolute dismemberment of the American settlements," and the ACS desperately appealed to supporters: "The grasping policy of the British in Africa can only be counteracted, by our immediately

²⁴⁹ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 16, no. 17 (September 1, 1840), 259.

²⁵⁰ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 17, no. 6 (March 15, 1841), 92.

purchasing those portions of Liberia which lie between the settlements of our Colony. This cannot be done without *funds*.”²⁵¹ The British might claim to be motivated by a desire to squash the slave trade, the ACS argued, but in fact they sought to prevent Liberian expansion and to monopolize trade along the Liberian coast. Moreover, even the slaves captured by the British navy were deposited in Sierra Leone, where a portion entered the colonial army – “to all intents and purposes the bond-slaves of the British Government” – and others were recruited for labor in the British West Indies: “Who believes that they can be induced to come to the West Indies, unless deception or force is employed? But suppose they do—in what will their condition differ in the least from the veriest slaves, except in name?”²⁵² The ACS portrayed the expansion of the British empire in geopolitical terms; in colonizationists’ eyes, the Crown was attempting to consolidate its mercantile control of global trade. Liberia and Sierra Leone had previously been considered partners in a civilizing mission to Africa. But as colonizationists’ focus shifted during the 1830s to Liberia’s commercial opportunities, the neighboring entrepot of Sierra Leone, and its British patrons, could only appear as competitors for West African trade.

Conflict between Britain and Liberia continued to escalate through the mid-1840s. A series of squabbles between British traders and Liberian tariff-collectors led British minister to America Henry S. Fox in 1843 to inquire of the U.S. State Department

what degree of official patronage and protection, if any, the United States Government extend to the colony of Liberia, how far, if at all, the United States Government recognize the colony of Liberia, as a national establishment; and consequently, how far, if at all, the United States Government hold themselves responsible towards foreign countries for the acts of the authorities of Liberia.

²⁵¹ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 17, no. 7 (April 1, 1841), 101.

²⁵² *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 17, no. 16 (August 15, 1841), 244, 247.

Secretary of State Abel Upshur responded that although “[t]o the United States [Liberia] is an object of peculiar interest,” “[i]t was not . . . established under the authority of our Government, nor has it been recognized as subject to our laws and jurisdiction.”²⁵³ Two years later, the British navy intervened in a dispute between British traders and the Liberian government. The Navy seized a privately owned Liberian schooner in apparent retaliation for the Liberian government’s earlier confiscation of goods from a Sierra Leonean merchant who refused to pay Liberian harbor dues. (The Navy claimed that the vessel had been seized on suspicion of engaging in slaving; a British court in Sierra Leone subsequently dismissed these charges.)

The ACS concluded from the episode that “it is clear that the only remedy for the evils of the present controversies with the British, is to . . . obtain from England and other countries a full recognition of all [Liberia’s] rights and privileges as a free and independent sovereignty.”²⁵⁴ In order to accomplish this, the ACS’s Board of Directors concluded that “the time has arrived when it is expedient for the people of the commonwealth of Liberia to take into their own hands the whole work of self-government, including the management of all their foreign relations, and that this Society should cease to exercise any part of the same.”²⁵⁵ The Society would relinquish its broad oversight powers over the Liberian government (including appointment of the Liberian governor, and veto powers over Liberian legislation), and the colony would hereafter operate as a self-governing democracy.

²⁵³ Quoted in American Society of International Law, *Supplement to the American Journal of International Law*, vol. 4 (New York: Baker, Voorhis & Company, 1910), 211-212, 213.

²⁵⁴ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 22, no. 2 (February, 1846), 56-57.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 67.

Most historians have portrayed Liberian independence as a fulfillment of Liberian desires, and it was true that Liberia's legislature first raised the subject with a vaguely worded resolution in January 1845 that "the present crisis imperatively demands that we at once betake ourselves to that position where we may urge those claims which, while they would strictly accord with principles of a just demand, would also appeal to the sympathy of the world."²⁵⁶ But the Colonization Society's eagerness to interpret this vague language as a declaration of independence is revealing. In the legislature's enigmatic proclamation, the ACS perceived evidence that "[i]n the opinion of the majority of the *citizens of Liberia*, [the] time has now come [to place in the hands of the citizens of Liberia, the entire responsibility of their own government]."²⁵⁷ Whether the impetus for Liberian independence originated in the ACS or in Liberia's (semi-)democratic government, the Colonization Society eagerly grasped the opportunity to divest itself of the responsibilities of colonial governance, and helped to articulate the argument for Liberian independence. (Given the Society's pre-independence veto powers, the ultimate decision to permit or allow Liberian sovereignty rested at the ACS's offices in Washington.) After all, if Liberia's independence would help to alleviate tensions with Britain, this measure could also serve to ease tensions on the Society's finances. Over the previous decade, the Society had engaged in a long series of cost-cutting measures, and Liberian independence removed all the expenses of colonial maintenance from the Society's balance sheet. Henceforth, the ACS would operate solely as an emigration society sponsoring the transportation of African Americans to the independent republic of Liberia.

²⁵⁶ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 22, no. 2 (February, 1846), 59.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 58.

The ACS presented Liberian independence as the culmination of the promise of the colonization scheme. After all, the Society had always appealed to African American emigrants with the assurance that Liberia would permit them to exercise the privilege of democratic self-rule. However, the timing of independence reveals that colonizationists' motivations in granting Liberian sovereignty were less pure and more complicated than the Society would have liked to admit. For nearly three decades after the founding of the supposedly democratic colony of Liberia, the ACS retained control over colonial policies. While proclaiming black Liberians' capabilities to govern themselves, the Society filled Liberia's executive office with a series of white managers. During much of the ACS's early history, colonizationists' paternalist attitudes belied their rhetoric affirming African Americans' civilization and ability. When this pattern changed in the 1830s – as colonizationists increasingly shifted financial and administrative responsibilities to Liberian colonists – it was motivated more by dire fiscal necessity than by a reconsideration of African Americans' capabilities. In the context of the 1830s and 1840s, as the ACS desperately cut its expenditures (justifying each cut as a way of promoting habits of self-reliance), Liberian independence appears not as the consummation of colonization's mission of African American uplift, but rather as the culmination of a long process of reducing the Society's financial responsibilities. Only when the ACS was threatened by insolvency and Liberia by an ontological challenge from a foreign power did the Society fulfill its promise to permit emigrants to govern themselves. This illuminates the limits of colonizationists' imagination. For all their rhetoric of Liberia as a prosperous, civilized, Christian republic, American supporters of

colonization found it difficult to trust Americo-Liberians with all the responsibilities of self-government, and relinquished control only when compelled by circumstances.

1848-1860: Independence and Caution

This drastic change in the ACS's relationship with Liberia signaled no similarly radical shift in the Society's rhetoric. After all, the structure of the Liberian government had no bearing on the fundamental benefits supposed to be realized from colonization, and the ACS continued to contend that the scheme would present emigrants with enlarged opportunities, civilize native Africans, and remove a problematic population from the United States. And the decade prior to the Civil War proved a golden one for the ACS. Federal aid still did not materialize, despite colonizationist creativity in imagining novel measures of support. In 1851, Congress declined to fund a proposed line of steamships to carry Africa-bound mail and emigrants, and in 1853, a heartbreaking tied vote in the Senate blocked a \$125,000 appropriation for exploration of the West African coast.²⁵⁸ (Millard Fillmore's ascension to the Presidency after Zachary Taylor's death had left the Vice Presidency open, and the Senate without a tie-breaking vote.) However, if federal sponsorship remained inaccessible, the 1850s saw the renewal of the Maryland legislature's funding of the Maryland State Colonization Society, and more modest colonization appropriations were passed in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Indiana, Virginia, Connecticut, and Kentucky. After the Panic of 1837, and a long decade of financial cutbacks and embarrassments, the Society experienced rising donations and a flurry of emigrant volunteers, both free and manumitted. In fact, between 1848 and 1860, the ACS transported 5,888 African Americans to Liberia – more than the Society had

²⁵⁸ For the steam ship proposal, see *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 26, no. 9 (September, 1850), 265-276. For the exploration appropriation, see *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 29, no. 4 (April, 1853), 112-123.

successfully removed in its previous three decades of existence.²⁵⁹ And for the first time since before the Panic of 1837, these emigrants included not just emancipated slaves, but substantial numbers of free blacks, including “649 black northerners . . . , two and a half times as many as had gone during the previous thirty years combined.”²⁶⁰ For the first time since its formation, the ACS’s finances were regularly in the black, and the society faced demand for transportation from a wide range of African American applicants.

Liberian independence might partially account for the increased interest in colonization among free blacks, but other trends contributed to this shift. Free blacks faced increasing violence and oppression in the South, and were threatened in the North by the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law and the 1857 Dred Scott decision. These issues were too controversial for the ACS to comment on without alienating some portion of its support base, but the *African Repository* did contain several references to the trend of several western states’ attempts to prevent free black immigration (through requirements of a proof of freedom or a posted bond to guarantee good behavior). The ACS refrained from directly commenting on this trend, but reprinted editorials from other sources. A typical essay, originating in the *Puritan Recorder*, mentioned exclusionary laws in Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Iowa, and concluded, “the tendency of all this is, to concentrate the whole mass of the free blacks throughout the country, into a few of the free States, that have too much benevolence to do the same,” and recommended colonization as a solution to this quandary.²⁶¹ That the ACS declined to comment directly on these laws is indicative of the sensitivity of the issues of black citizenship. The Society did not want to appear to support discriminatory legislation, but the increasing trend of such legislation

²⁵⁹ Burin, *Peculiar Solution*, 170.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 30.

²⁶¹ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 27, no. 7 (July, 1851), 209.

formed a powerful argument for colonization; if African Americans faced increasing hostility within the United States, removal to Liberia would be both practical and humanitarian.²⁶² However, the ACS was careful never openly to celebrate such exclusionary laws; doing so would have left the Society vulnerable to the abolitionist charge that it had no consideration for the welfare of African Americans, and sought only to cruelly expel them from the United States. When these laws were discussed at all, it was only as evidence that white Americans would never accept black citizenship. African Americans would find it far easier to attain the full rights of citizenship in Liberia than in the United States.

But it was not only in discussions of exclusionary laws that the Society proved rhetorically cautious in the 1850s. Although there was no dramatic shift in colonizationist rhetoric, the Society's publications continued the trend of the 1840s of avoiding direct confrontation with abolitionist or proslavery arguments. In 1851, the Society pledged to "render [the *African Repository*] interesting to our friends, and not offensive to those who may be opposed to the cause."²⁶³ And indeed, the decade before the Civil War saw a new level of caution in the ACS's publications. The Society never

²⁶² Of course, if the ACS wished to distance itself from these discriminatory laws, it did not help when they explicitly endorsed colonization. Indiana's 1851 constitution levied fines between ten and five hundred dollars against any residents who employed African American immigrants, and set aside these fines as a fund "appropriated for the colonization of such negroes and mulattoes, and their descendants, as may be in the State at the adoption of this Constitution, and may be willing to emigrate." Quoted in *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 27, no. 10 (October, 1851), 316. This put the ACS in an awkward position. It could hardly openly embrace Indiana's new constitution without coming under fire for encouraging prejudice, but neither could it completely disavow the colonizationist provision. The Society contented itself with remarking only that "[i]t was thought very cruel in Illinois a short time ago, to adopt a policy to prevent any more free colored people from coming into the State. But this action of Indiana goes far ahead of that, and looks to their ultimate and entire removal from the State." *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 27, no. 3 (March, 1851), 75. In a footnote, the Society published without comment the speech of an Indianan politician who argued that his state's policy of exclusion was less cruel than the partial enfranchisement granted to African Americans in other states: "Why not tell them the plain and naked truth, that the rights of citizenship will never be extended to them here, and if they conclude to remain, let them understand clearly the full extent of their disabilities." *Ibid.*, 76.

²⁶³ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 27, no. 12 (December, 1851), 353.

officially renounced the position that colonization promoted emancipation, but this argument almost disappeared from the pages of the *Repository* as the ACS retreated from all discussion of slavery. In the past, the Society had openly referred to slavery as a moral and economic wrong, but by the 1850s, it avoided even mild criticism of slaveowners. The ACS even went so far as to praise slavery in the abstract. One famous romantic portrayal of a master's lament at a beloved slave's death – “not the haughty planter . . . talking of his dead slave, as of his dead horse; but the kind hearted gentleman lamenting the loss, and eulogizing the virtues of his good old *friend*” – was reprinted twice in the *African Repository*, once in 1849 and again in 1856.²⁶⁴ This was a far cry from the Society which had declared slavery an “invetera[te] . . . evil”²⁶⁵ in 1825, but the cultural landscape surrounding slavery had shifted in the intervening decades. Early in the Society's history, its descriptions of slavery as a “necessary evil” had held wide appeal across the country, but by the 1850s, Southerners were increasingly likely to take offense at such language.

The ACS responded to the increased contentiousness of the slavery issue by withdrawing from the fray, and emphasizing rather the missionary aspects of the scheme. It was in the 1850s that cracks began appearing in the national organization's united front, as the ACS published both the Alabama Colonization Society's argument that “the presence of the free colored man in the midst of a slave population, is a great evil . . . an evil which every consideration of self-interest prompts us to remove” and the New York Colonization Society's assertion that “SLAVERY IS A CRIME; the black man has been

²⁶⁴ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 25, no. 10 (October, 1849), 299. *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 32, no. 10 (October, 1856), 312.

²⁶⁵ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 1, no. 9 (November, 1825), 258.

treated unjustly, and the country and Christians are bound to put him right.”²⁶⁶ But both Alabamians and New Yorkers could agree that the “lost and degraded . . . native Africans” would benefit from exposure to African American emigrants, who would, “by precept and example, teach them the arts of civilized life, reclaim them from barbarism, and carry among them the blessings of christianity and civilization.”²⁶⁷ As the ACS retreated from the slavery debate in the United States, it increasingly emphasized the colonization scheme’s missionary aspects, and provided greater detail of Liberian news, even when this news was uneventful. (Booming trade and emigration no doubt helped the Society improve its communication with Liberia and thus provide more frequent reports.)

The ACS’s increasingly sympathetic attitude towards slaveowners did not dissuade Northern supporters, whose donations to the ACS spiked at the beginning of the 1850s. Between 1849 and 1856, mean Northern contributions more than doubled their average over the previous fifteen years. (Southern contributions rose less precipitously, increasing 52% over the same period.) A number of factors no doubt contributed to this trend. (For one, the North’s commercial economy had been hard hit by the Crisis of 1837, and had only fully recovered by the mid-1840s.) It is possible that as colonizationists retreated from combat with abolitionists (and abolitionists ran out of original critiques), Northern philanthropists increasingly saw the scheme as a charitable mission to benighted Africa, unrelated to the political issue of slavery in the United States. However, as will be more fully discussed in Chapter 4, Northern auxiliaries

²⁶⁶ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 28, no. 5 (May, 1852), 143. *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 26, no. 7 (July, 1850), 197.

²⁶⁷ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 26, no. 7 (July, 1850), 197. *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 28, no. 5 (May, 1852), 144.

continued to urge colonization as an emancipationist measure even into the 1850s. It is more likely that growing Northern support was motivated by increasing antislavery sentiment in the region. The immense popularity of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (published in 1852) was largely responsible for popularizing antislavery arguments, and concluded on a colonizationist note. George Harris, one of the African American heroes of Stowe's tale, describes in the final chapters the "desire and yearning of [his] soul . . . for an African *nationality*," and embarks for Liberia. Stowe was at best an ambivalent colonizationist; Harris also contends that the colonization "scheme may have been used, in unjustifiable ways, as a means of retarding [slaves'] emancipation."²⁶⁸ But Stowe could imagine no role in the United States for the surviving black characters in her story; the famous Topsy also becomes an African missionary. The Colonization Society was no doubt buoyed by rising antislavery sentiment in the North during the 1850s – by which time, as historian Michael Holt has demonstrated, "[t]he vast majority of white Northerners abhorred black slavery and wished it could be done away with."²⁶⁹ This did not, however, imply widespread sympathy for abolitionism, which appeared to many Northern citizens dangerously fanatical; the popular political response in the North was to choke off slavery by preventing its extension, while also containing African Americans in the South.²⁷⁰ As the North's politics and culture increasingly focused on the issue of the "peculiar institution," the Colonization Society's moderately antislavery

²⁶⁸ Stowe, Harriet Beecher, *Uncle Tom's Cabin; or Life Among the Lowly*, Reprint, (1852; repr., New York: R.F. Fenno & Company, 1899), 459, 460.

²⁶⁹ Michael Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850s* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1978), 259.

²⁷⁰ Though only "a minority [of white Northerners] sincerely viewed black slavery as such an intolerable moral evil that it could not be allowed to . . . perpetuate itself," many more "abhorred slavery as an economic system inimical to the free labor system of the North." *Ibid.*, p. 50. Excluding African Americans from the territories, however, was as important as excluding slavery: "Determined to preserve unsettled territory for whites only, many Northerners . . . opposed slavery extension explicitly to keep blacks, free and slave, out of that territory." *Ibid.*, p. 52.

message no doubt appealed to many Northerners who sought a method to remove both slavery and African Americans from the country.

However, the increases in Northern donations during this time should not be exaggerated. Though more cash was collected from free states than slave states throughout the antebellum period (see figure 1), if these figures are corrected to reflect the South's smaller white population, they demonstrate that the South in fact contributed more per white resident throughout this period, and drastically reduce the significance of the increased Northern donations in the early 1850s (see figure 4). In part, rising donations in both North and South during the 1850s simply reflected population growth. Expressed as a per (white) capita figure, Northern contributions in the 1850s only slightly exceeded those from the previous decade.

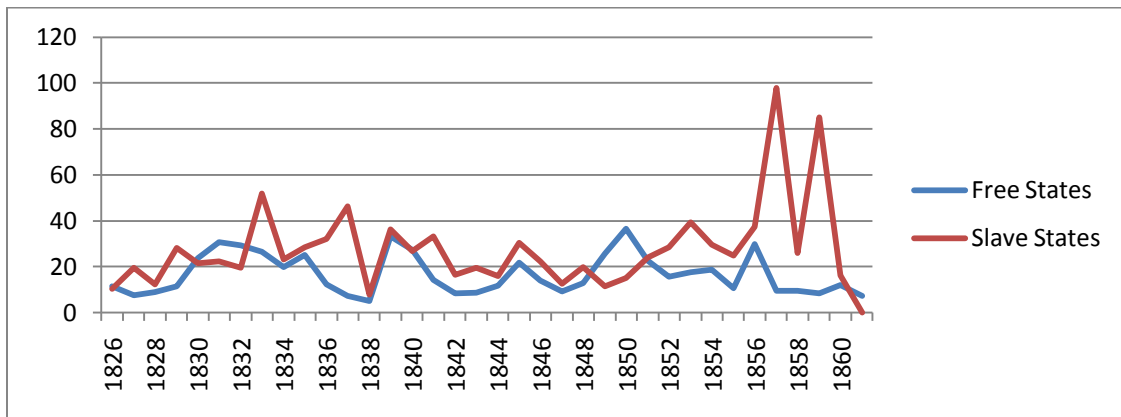


Figure 4 - Per white resident contributions (\$ per 10,000 white population)

There still remains, of course, a pair of spikes in Southern donations in 1857 and 1859 (see figures 1 and 4). But these increases do not reflect a broad expansion of the ACS's appeal in the South. In fact, almost the entirety of these increases can be linked to a pair of huge testamentary donations from wealthy Lower South benefactors: Mississippi's David Hunt, whose will provided the ACS with \$45,000, and Louisiana's

John McDonogh, who left \$83,000 for the Society.²⁷¹ Of course, too much should not be made of the actions of two individuals (especially two men as eccentric as Hunt and McDonogh), and the timing of their large donations was dependent on nothing more than the happenstance of their nearly coincidental deaths; but there is some evidence that the ACS was attempting to amplify its appeal in the Lower South during the 1850s. Not only did the Society's new timidity about slavery decrease the likelihood of offending Lower South planters, but it had enrolled steadily increasing numbers of Lower South supporters on its board of Vice Presidents since the early 1830s (see figure 5). Although the overall percentage of Southern representation among the ACS's Vice Presidents had declined over this period (see figure 3), the Society had slowly shifted the balance of Vice Presidents to include more representatives from the Lower South. By the time of Hunt's and McDonogh's deaths, the ACS listed as many Vice Presidents from the Lower South as it did from the Upper South states.

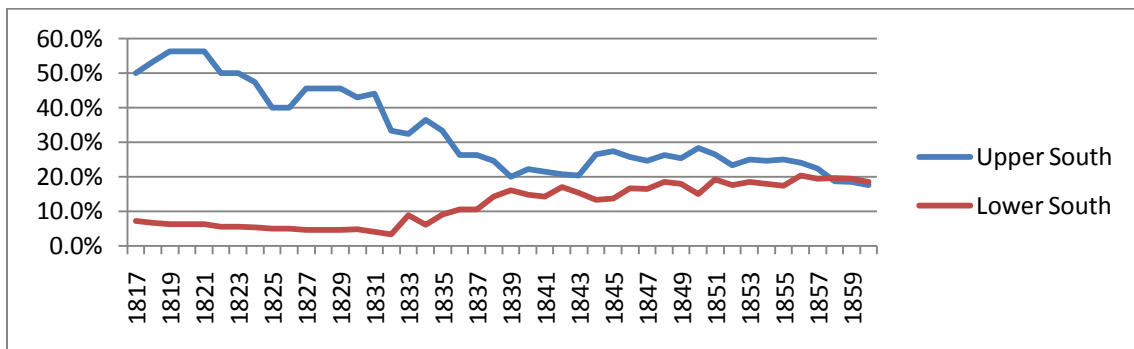


Figure 5 – Slave State Vice Presidential representation

Paradoxically, the ACS entered the 1850s operationally strengthened but rhetorically weakened. Financial support from across the country increased (though it also demonstrated increased volatility), but the decade also found the Society struggling to present a united argument which would appeal across the nation. Northerners hoped to

²⁷¹ Staudenraus, *African Colonization Movement*, 243.

wield colonization as a tool to dismantle slavery, and Southerners were increasingly sensitive about any such “abolitionist” agendas. However, even the rising sectional discord provided the ACS with new opportunities. Colonizationists had long portrayed their scheme as a safe middle ground between the fanatic extremes of perpetual slavery and immediate abolitionism. As the debate over slavery came to dominate national politics and disunion became a frighteningly real possibility, the ACS could still claim broad support across the nation. Colonization might yet prove the solution to this moment of national crisis, as it would unite the interests of moderates from around the country, and potentially even remove the irritant of sectional recriminations:

The presence and condition of the colored race in our country will ever prove, so long as they remain in our midst, a source of ungovernable and angry excitement, both in the church and in the state; and as this colonization contemplates, with the consent of both master and slave, their removal to Africa, their fatherland, to facilitate this transfer must have a most salutary effect in quieting the agitation between the great Northern and Southern parties on this subject.²⁷²

By 1859, ACS President John Latrobe knew to tread carefully around the delicate subject of slavery, arguing that “[t]he slave—protected, provided with food, shelter and raiment, treated in the vast majority of cases kindly, affectionately often—is without care as regards his physical wants, and with constitutional good humor passes happily, in the main, through life.”²⁷³ But he could safely contend that the “free [black] . . . made to feel in a thousand ways his social and political inferiority, either frets away existence in

²⁷² *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 31, no. 6 (June, 1855), 175. Of course, to suggest that colonization would ultimately remove the United States’ slave population and thus resolve the impending national crisis regarding slavery – something the ACS had openly argued in the past – required acknowledgement of colonization’s gradual emancipationist goal. By the 1850s, the Society was unwilling to avow openly this aim. In the same way that the ACS had referenced exclusionary laws in the Western states only indirectly through reprinting other periodicals’ discussions, so too did it distance itself from the argument for gradual emancipation in the 1850s. The argument for complete colonization of the United States’ slave population still appeared in the pages of the *African Repository*, but only in citations from other sources – here the Methodist paper *The Christian Advocate and Journal*.

²⁷³ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 35, no. 8 (August, 1859), 227.

aspirations, which, here, can never be realized, or, yielding hopelessly to circumstances, falls with benumbed faculties into a condition that is little better than the slave's.”²⁷⁴

Though the ACS had largely abandoned its earlier goal of ending slavery in the United States, colonizationists across the nation were still united in their distrust of free African Americans, and the conviction that blacks could never be incorporated into the citizenry of the United States. Latrobe remarked on the “increasing public prejudice” against free African Americans; in the grand colonizationist tradition, he did not endorse this prejudice, but presented it as an unfortunate but inevitable result of the increasing American population: “The two races are coming, day by day, into closer contact.”²⁷⁵

Only in Africa could the black race find refuge – “where climate, genial and salubrious to the descendants of the soil, protects them, as with a wall of fire, against the encroachments of the white man.”²⁷⁶ Despite all that had changed in the national discourse of slavery and in the ACS's own rhetoric, the Society held true to the central idea of racialized geography which it had presented since its origin. The United States would forever and unchangeably be a white man's country, in which African Americans could find no permanent place. Only in Africa would they find their “natural” home. The ACS's continued fundraising and organizing success across the United States up to the brink of the Civil War demonstrates that this idea continued to appeal to many white Americans, whatever their opinions of slavery.

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 227-228.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 229.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 232.

Chapter 3

Colonization in the South

The Upper South

As previous chapters have demonstrated, the American Colonization Society was a national organization with a national audience. During the antebellum era, the ACS distributed copies of its annual reports, monthly magazine, and various pamphlets everywhere between Maine and Mississippi. The ACS's leadership was certainly aware of this broad audience, and cautiously worded its public proclamations in order to avoid giving offense to potential supporters anywhere in the country. However, the American Colonization Society held no monopoly on colonizationist speech or publications; individual supporters across the country gave speeches and sometimes even published arguments independently from the national organization. Numerous state and local auxiliaries published their own reports, pamphlets, and periodicals. Unlike the ACS, these organizations and individuals usually appealed to a regional audience. If, as some historians have intimated, colonization was supported by different sectional audiences for different reasons, one might expect these regional colonizationist publications to differ substantially from those distributed nationally by the ACS.

After all, state auxiliaries not only published separately from the ACS, but in several cases actively divorced their own operations from the control of the parent society, and founded their own separate colonies in Liberia. Among these rogue organizations, the Maryland State Colonization Society was the most prominent and by

far the most lasting, supported not only by private donations, but also by a relatively generous appropriation from the state legislature. In 1833, the MSCS founded a separate colony at Cape Palmas (on the African coast 250 miles from the ACS's own settlement at Monrovia). The MSCS administered "Maryland in Liberia" as a separate colony, with its own finances and government, until 1857, when (in the aftermath of a disastrous war with the local Grebo tribe) it was annexed as a part of the larger Liberian nation. As an entirely separate organization during this period, with only informal ties to the national Society, the MSCS was not beholden to the ACS's policies or rhetoric, and was free to espouse alternative views of colonization's tactics or goals. Indeed, the MSCS did portray the national Society as straight-jacketed by the necessity of appealing to a national audience, arguing in 1834 (shortly after separating its operations from the ACS) that

[a]n objection . . . urged against the American Colonization Society, has been, that, acting for the slaveholding, as well as non-slaveholding states, and being composed of persons from both sections of the country, it had to steer a middle course, which made it an object of suspicion to both, and so deprived it of that influence, which the philanthropy of its principles, and the great objects to be accomplished by it, entitled it to possess. Northern gentlemen alleged, that its tendency was to perpetuate slavery, because it would not undertake a crusade against the institution in the south, but confined its operations expressly to the free blacks, and those made free for the purposes of emigration, leaving the existing rights of property in slaves as it found them. The southern gentlemen declared on the other hand, that northern influence predominated in the councils of the society; that its tendency was to favor emancipation and remotely act upon slavery, and confounding the Abolitionists with the Colonizationists, they declaimed against the society as an institution, that was to deprive them of their right in a species of property which the laws of the land had guaranteed to them. Unfortunately, both sides found, in the speeches and writings of members and friends of the society, though not, it is believed, in its official acts; sentences, which, sometimes fairly, sometimes unfairly quoted, they converted into texts, for their respective opinions.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁷ Maryland State Colonization Society, *The Third Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Maryland State Colonization Society, to the Members and the Public* (Baltimore: John D. Toy, 1835), 35.

In private correspondence, MSCS President John Latrobe suggested that the ACS was riven not only by the mutual suspicion of pro- and anti-slavery members, but by severe ideological differences: “The north looked to Colonization as the means of *extirpating* slavery— The South as the means of *perpetuating* it, because the removal of the *free* blacks alone, which the South contended for, by making slaves more valuable, necessarily tended to perpetuate the institution of slavery.”²⁷⁸

The MSCS also lodged several other complaints against the ACS, arguing that the national Society had mismanaged its funds, and that it had failed to restrict alcohol sufficiently in its colony. Supporters were dismayed to hear from Maryland emigrants tales of corruption, drunkenness, and irreligiosity in Liberia. Negative reports from the Liberian colony plagued the ACS throughout its existence; any accounts that contradicted the ACS’s depiction of Liberia as a healthy Christian meritocracy hurt colonizationists’ reputation with prospective emigrants and with donors. As the distance between ACS portrayals of Liberia as a prosperous Christian republic and actual conditions in the country became increasingly obvious (and the total spent by the society continued to climb without commensurate accomplishments), Maryland colonizationists began to suspect that the lack of progress must be due to corruption and inefficiency in the parent society. This demonstrates a way in which colonizationist propaganda could backfire. After hearing so often that the scheme would lead to an African utopia, and could be financed for relatively little, Maryland colonizationists began to question the ACS administration when these promises failed to materialize. (Those less committed to the

This publication included republished selections from the MSCS’s 1834 report, from which this quotation is drawn.

²⁷⁸ Quoted in Richard L. Hall, *On Africa’s Shore: A History of Maryland in Liberia, 1834-1857* (Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, 2003), 26-27.

colonizationist cause – including most of the free blacks who were the supposed beneficiaries of the movement – were likely to question the idea of colonization itself, rather than its execution.)

But Maryland colonizationists justified their decision to separate their operations from those of the national organization primarily as a response to the perceived divisions within the ACS. The MSCS contended that separate state action would be more efficient than the ACS's attempt to unify colonizationists throughout the United States. By removing authority from the overarching national organization and vesting it in the hands of each state, the "Maryland plan" would calm sectional divisions:

If this system is carried out in all the States, the subject of slavery will cease to be the exciting one, between the North and the South, that it now is; jealousies that now run high will subside; dread of interference with what the law makes property, and custom sanctions as such, will no longer exist, and the gloomiest cloud that threatens to overshadow the political horizon of the Union, will be utterly dispersed.²⁷⁹

Southerners disposed to suspect a national organization of interfering in their local affairs would look favorably upon a more local society made up entirely of their neighbors. The ACS had long claimed that its scheme could unite Northern and Southern interests, and heal the growing sectional rift on the subject of slavery. But the MSCS argued that any national organization would face regional chariness; sectional organizations could accomplish the colonization agenda without arousing local suspicions.

If MSCS president Latrobe suspected some Southern colonizationists of attempting to preserve the "peculiar institution," he did not position the newly independent Maryland society to appeal to such a proslavery audience. The MSCS distinguished its own agenda from that of the ACS not by defending slavery, but by

²⁷⁹ Maryland State Colonization Society, *The Fourth Annual Report of the Maryland State Colonization Society, to the Members and the Public* (Baltimore: John D. Toy, 1836), 19.

promising to remove it from the state of Maryland. The MSCS's board of managers explicitly stated that "they look[ed] forward to the extirpation of slavery as the ultimate end of their labours."²⁸⁰ ACS publications and authors often hinted that colonization would (gradually and safely) permit the eventual end of American slavery, but the national organization of the American Colonization Society itself never endorsed this as an official goal of the scheme. Defecting from the ACS allowed Maryland colonizationists to diverge from the national organization's party line, and this divergence bent towards an emancipationist agenda. Freed from ACS oversight, the MSCS unfurled not a proslavery banner but an antislavery one; Maryland colonizationists explicitly sought not to reinforce slavery in the state, but rather gradually to remove it.

But what is most striking about the agenda of the independent MSCS is not how far the organization diverged from its parent society, but rather how closely Maryland rhetoric and tactics hewed to the national model. Though the MSCS was unique in its goal of the complete emancipation of Maryland's slaves, it reiterated the usual colonizationist promise that "this result will be brought about by the consent of those interested in this species of property" (i.e. slaveholders).²⁸¹ Like their compatriots in other states, Maryland colonizationists argued that the scheme would benefit both native Africans – "propagating the lights of civilization and the gospel, throughout all Africa"²⁸² – and the African American emigrants themselves – "restoring the descendants of Africa to the only land where they can be really free."²⁸³ Like the ACS, the MSCS contended that African Americans could never be accepted into white society: "[T]here [has never]

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ Ibid., 18.

²⁸² Maryland State Colonization Society, *Address of the Maryland State Colonization Society, to the People of Maryland; with the Constitution of the Society, and an Appendix* (Baltimore: Lucas & Deaver, 1831), 11.

²⁸³ *Maryland Colonization Journal* 1, no. 13 (June 15, 1842), 197.

been an instance where two races that could not amalgamate by inter-marriage, lived as free men in harmony, in the same land, with equal social and political rights.”²⁸⁴ The MSCS’s goal of eventually ending slavery in Maryland proved but a slight variation on the ACS’s themes.

Of course, as a border state with a slave population in 1830 barely exceeding 100,000, Maryland hardly had the most entrenched slave system in the South. Certainly, Maryland was anomalous not only for its embrace of emancipation through colonization but also for its unique racial demography. As Barbara Fields has pointed out, antebellum Maryland contained an unusually large free black population; besides Delaware, “[n]o other slave state approached Maryland in either the absolute or the relative size of its free black population.”²⁸⁵ However, although free African Americans represented a relatively high proportion of Maryland’s population, they were heavily outnumbered by the state’s white population. Fields suggests that this contributed to the view that “free blacks did not occupy a unique or legitimate place within Maryland society, but instead formed an anomalous adjunct to the slave population.”²⁸⁶ Certainly this may have contributed to Maryland’s relative enthusiasm for the colonization scheme, as the MSCS promised to remove the state’s problematic population of free blacks. However, the MSCS’s official declaration that it sought to end slavery in the state put the organization’s emphasis on removing emancipated slaves, not free blacks. And Maryland’s position as a border state with a fairly small slave population also made its conversion into a free state appear

²⁸⁴ *Maryland Colonization Journal* 1, no. 2 (July 15, 1841), 37.

²⁸⁵ Barbara Jeanne Fields, *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground: Maryland during the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 2.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

possible (and indeed desirable). As the state's "Young Men's Colonization Society" argued,

From her peculiar situation among the states of the union, the people of Maryland had many opportunities of contrasting the happiness and prosperity of the slaveholding and non-slaveholding states; and . . . if a practicable scheme could be devised which . . . would remove from among them the free people of colour, . . . the manumissions for removal would be frequent, and the number of slaves would rapidly diminish.²⁸⁷

Maryland's status as a border state also allowed the MSCS to appeal to Northern audiences. Even before commencing its separate colony at Cape Palmas, the MSCS had sent out letters to several Northern colonizationist auxiliaries to inform them of its intention to separate from the national organization, and to appeal for funds. "A slaveholding state has, . . . now, for the first time, openly avowed its determination to free itself from slavery," MSCS president John Latrobe asked in a letter to the secretary of the Connecticut Colonization Society. "Will the North aid it?"²⁸⁸ Though the Maryland colonization society limited its colonization activities to the transportation of free blacks and manumitted slaves from within the state's borders, it placed no similar restriction on its fundraising efforts. MSCS agents competed with the ACS on fund-raising tours through free states, and the state society's publications directly appealed to an antislavery Northern audience: "If it is the interest of Maryland, that she should one day become a

²⁸⁷ Quoted in Maryland State Colonization Society, *Fourth Annual Report*, 22.

²⁸⁸ John H.B. Latrobe to Leonard Bacon, July 29th, 1833, Bacon Family Papers, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University. The MSCS received divergent responses to these appeals. George W. Blagden, of the Massachusetts Colonization Society, promised, "The direct aspect which your Soc. presents to slavery will, if I mistake not, insure you the sympathies of all New England; particularly of that . . . portion of it which is not already pledged to Anti-Slavery and is still not wholly satisfied with the indirect inferences of the Am. Col. Soc." G.W. Blagden to John H.B. Latrobe, Boston, October 5, 1833, Maryland State Colonization Society Papers, Maryland Historical Society. The Pennsylvania State Colonization Society's James Bayard, on the other hand, condemned the MSCS's defection from the ACS: "We are, as a Society auxiliary to the Am. Col. Soc. . . . pledged to contribute our funds & our efforts for its support, and although we wish well to your undertaking and shall be glad to see its success, we cannot at this time join in any act which will interfere with the operation of the Parent Society." James Bayard to John H.B. Latrobe, Philadelphia, October 22, 1833, Maryland State Colonization Society Papers, Maryland Historical Society.

non-slaveholding state, are not those states who have reached that enviable condition before her, deeply concerned in seeing her one of them, and will they not aid her State Society, that this noble object may be accomplished[?]"²⁸⁹ The MSCS's emancipationist rhetoric, then, not only represented the interests of Maryland colonizationists, but was also cannily positioned to appeal to Northern audiences. The MSCS (accurately) understood that many Northern colonizationists supported the scheme in the belief that it would erode slavery in the border states, and perhaps in the entire South. By explicitly endorsing exactly this goal, the Maryland State Colonization Society hoped to pull Northern donations from the ACS, and into its own coffers.

Despite (or perhaps due to) having the strongest independent colonization movement of any slave state, Maryland might be considered something of an anomaly in the Southern colonization movement. Certainly no other state succeeded in founding an enduring Liberian colony separately from the ACS (and no other state legislature provided so generous an appropriation). The MSCS was unique in its explicitly antislavery agenda, and in its appeal beyond the state's borders. However, if the MSCS's size and ambition set it apart from other regional colonizationist organizations in the Upper South, its rhetoric and ideology were less exceptional. The Kentucky Colonization Society similarly espoused the view that "slavery contribute[s no]thing towards the permanent resources of a state. It is an ulcer eating its way into the very heart of the state,"²⁹⁰ and expressed the hope that colonization might eventually convert the Bluegrass State into free territory. The Virginia state auxiliary argued that

²⁸⁹ Maryland State Colonization Society, *Address of the Board of Managers of the Maryland State Colonization Society* (Baltimore[?]: 1834), 8.

²⁹⁰ Robert J. Breckinridge, *An Address Delivered before the Colonization Society of Kentucky, at Frankfort, on the 6th day of January, 1831* (Frankfort, KY: A.G. Hodges, 1831), 23.

it is most apparent, both from the benevolence of the object[,] its principles[,] and from the history of its operation [sic], that [the colonization movement] must tend to increase and multiply the cases of voluntary manumission and so to aid the cause of Liberty and Humanity in the most safe and desirable manner.²⁹¹

In Delaware, colonizationists argued that the “march of public opinion must banish slavery; and we must at no distant period either cease to be freemen ourselves or give freedom to the slaves.”²⁹² (However, “if it [was] impossible to retain this growing population in bondage, it [was] equally impossible to manumit and retain them.”²⁹³ Only African colonization could permit the safe and gradual emancipation.) Although the MSCS stood alone in officially espousing complete emancipation as a goal, colonizationists across the Upper South embraced the scheme as a method of gradually bringing slavery to an end (at least during the 1820s and 1830s). Lacy Ford has argued that during this early period, “Slaveholders looking toward gradual emancipation, a type of slaveholder not uncommon in the upper South, saw colonization as an essential mechanism for bringing their ultimate plans to fruition.”²⁹⁴ Upper South colonizationists supported the scheme not *despite* its emancipationist tendencies, but *because* of them. For example, in 1831 Virginian sympathizer Mary Lee Custis reported that a friend had been moved to donate \$100 to the ACS after reading a specific article in the *African Repository*. The article in question had argued that colonizationism “is plainly working more effectually for the diminution and final removal of [slavery], our greatest moral and

²⁹¹ Fourth Annual Meeting of the Virginia Colonization Society, Capitol, January 1825, Virginia Colonization Society Records, reel 1, 776, Virginia Historical Society.

²⁹² Wilmington Union Colonization Society, *Proceedings of the Wilmington Union Colonization Society at their sixth anniversary meeting* (Wilmington, DE: Wilmington Union Colonization Society, 1829), 6.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, 7.

²⁹⁴ Ford, *Deliver Us from Evil*, 302.

political evil, than every and all other causes that have been, or can be, made to operate.”²⁹⁵

Nor was the idea of gradual emancipation through colonization urged only by fringe elements. In late 1831 and early 1832, the Virginia House of Delegates openly (and famously) debated both the colonization of free blacks and “the expediency of adopting measures for the gradual removal [and colonization] of the slave population of the Commonwealth.”²⁹⁶ Some representatives, such as Samuel Moore, argued that, much as Virginia’s free African American population “was . . . a nuisance, which the interests of the people required to be removed . . . , there was another, and a greater nuisance,—slavery itself. . . [I]f it were possible to devise any plan for the ultimate extinction of slavery, he would rejoice at it.”²⁹⁷ In the end, Virginia’s legislature provided only a small appropriation for the colonization of free blacks, and endorsed the vague promise that “further action for the removal of the slaves should await a more definite developement [sic] of public opinion.”²⁹⁸ (The undemocratic apportionment of Virginia’s legislature, which skewed representation towards the slaveholding eastern districts of the state, probably played some role in preventing more radical action.²⁹⁹)

This 1831-1832 debate in Virginia’s House of Delegates demonstrated the strength within the state (and across the Upper South) of the idea that colonization would promote the desirable end of gradual emancipation. However, it also represented something of a high water mark for antislavery colonizationism in the region. Although

²⁹⁵ Mary Lee Custis wrote that a Mr. Kidder’s “donation was the result of reading [this] piece in the African Repository.” Mary Lee Custis to Mary Lee, Arlington, October 6, 1831, Mary Lee Custis Papers, Virginia Historical Society. The quoted article is found in *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 7, no. 7 (September, 1831), 201.

²⁹⁶ *Richmond Enquirer*, December 17, 1831, 3.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁸ *Richmond Enquirer*, January 17, 1832, 3.

²⁹⁹ Ford, *Deliver Us from Evil*, 363-364.

the Virginia debate reflected longstanding divisions over slavery, it was also partially motivated by the panic caused by the previous summer's Nat Turner slave rebellion, which had led to the deaths of fifty-five white Virginians (and an equivalent number of slaves and free blacks convicted of taking part in the rebellion). As I discussed in Chapter 2, this tragedy produced a flurry of colonizationist activity across the country, as free blacks fled whites' reprisals, and many white Southerners turned to colonization as a method of reducing the risk of such violence.

But if the Nat Turner affair had driven many white Southerners to embrace colonizationism, or even to question slavery, these passions faded over time along with the fear of a slave revolution. And proslavery Virginians, shocked at how close the state had come to reconsidering the "peculiar institution," rallied in the aftermath of the debate. William & Mary professor Thomas Roderick Dew published a lengthy and influential rebuttal to the colonizationist arguments which had been advanced in the debate. Dew ridiculed the idea that colonization could ever accomplish the removal of Virginia's slave population. Colonizationists, he argued, were "recommend[ing] to the State of Virginia to give up a species of property which constitutes nearly one-third of the wealth of the whole state . . . , and with the remaining two-thirds to encounter the additional enormous expense of transportation and colonization on the coast of Africa."³⁰⁰ Dew estimated that the annual costs of removing the yearly increase in Virginia's African American population (both slave and free) "will swell beyond \$2,400,000—an expense sufficient to destroy the entire value of the whole property of Virginia."³⁰¹ Colonizationists might dispute Dew's math (he assumed compensated

³⁰⁰ *Pro-Slavery Argument*, 357.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 412.

rather than voluntary emancipation, and employed a high estimate of the cost of transportation and colonization), but it was impossible to deny the thrust of his argument; complete colonization would indeed be an expensive prospect. Dew's polemic against the feasibility of emancipation through colonization was influential among proslavery Southern critics of the scheme. Six years later, South Carolina state chancellor William Harper quickly dismissed the plan: "After President Dew, it is unnecessary to say a single word on the practicability of colonizing our slaves."³⁰² On the verge of the Civil War, Virginian agronomist Edmund Ruffin condemned the colonizationist experiment in similar terms, as an expensive boondoggle. Criticizing the ACS for not providing a more rigorous accounting of its receipts and expenditures, Ruffin summarized available data, and found "astounding the amount of price that the people and the government of the United States have already paid, and still are continuing to pay, for the gigantic humbug . . . of the former colony and present republic of Liberia."³⁰³

Although the crux of Dew's argument against colonization was the scheme's impracticability, he also warned that any plan of colonization and emancipation would "infringe . . . directly the rights of property."³⁰⁴ Colonization had long been suspected in the South of abolitionist tendencies. Between 1825 and 1826, the *Richmond Enquirer* published a series of anonymous editorials accusing the ACS of seeking to end slavery. This goal, the author argued, was both unattainable and dangerous:

No matter how slow, how gradual, or how insidious may be your movements to the attainment of such an object, be assured you can never be successful. In your efforts you may be able to cherish in the country a feeling intimately connected with that sectional jealousy which has already began [sic] to rear its Gorgon front

³⁰² Ibid., 88.

³⁰³ Edmund Ruffin, "Liberia and the Colonization Society, Part 4," *De Bow's Review: Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial Progress and Resources* 27, no. 5 (November, 1859), 592.

³⁰⁴ *Pro-Slavery Argument*, 381.

in the federal councils. You may be able to excite in the bosoms of the southern slaves, a spirit of discontent and insubordination, which, while it will endanger the happiness of the fairest portion of the Union, will only serve to draw closer the bonds of slavery; and to realize a great and signal example of the folly of seeking after unattainable perfection.³⁰⁵

Of course, these accusations were substantively accurate; colonizationism *had* been urged in the South as in the North, as a plan gradually to remove slavery. But while the plan appealed to white citizens of the Upper South who hoped to end slavery in the region gradually and safely, it also faced harsh critics who scrutinized the ACS's financial accounting, and who questioned the practicability and desirability of any grand schemes of emancipation and colonization.

The 1830s also saw the American Anti-Slavery Society's campaign to mail abolitionist pamphlets throughout the South, which in the slave states were widely viewed as incendiary and subversive. It was partially in response to such Northern meddling that the Southern states developed what William Freehling calls "loyalty politics," which required every all the region's politicians to demonstrate their fidelity to Southern principles, and which increasingly focused around "one slavery proposition[:] Southerners must decide the institution's fate."³⁰⁶ In this political climate, colonization was increasingly identified with the hated abolitionist movement, and suspected of promoting outsider meddling with the South's institutions. By the 1850s, "[s]afe colonization of blacks in Africa became so politically unsafe as to provoke cries of disloyalty."³⁰⁷ As everything related to slavery came under increased scrutiny in the

³⁰⁵ *Controversy between Caius Gracchus and Opimius, in Reference to the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour of the United States, first published in the Richmond Enquirer* (Georgetown: James C. Dunn, 1827), 15.

³⁰⁶ William W. Freehling, *The Road to Disunion, Volume 1: Secessionists at Bay, 1776-1854* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 302. For broader discussion of "loyalty politics," see *Ibid.*, 290-307.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 422.

South, it became increasingly difficult for the ACS, which as a national organization contained many non-Southerners, to pass the loyalty test.

Southern colonizationists responded to criticisms, and to the increasingly tense political climate surrounding slavery, largely by scaling back their ambitions for the colonization scheme. Like the national ACS, Southern auxiliaries retreated during the 1830s and 1840s from an explicitly emancipationist agenda and distanced themselves from the goal of complete African American colonization.³⁰⁸ The MSCS protested that critics who accused colonization of impracticability missed the point: “It is emphatically a *colonization scheme*. . . Those upon whom such plans are to operate must be made to perceive that it is their *interest* to settle there.” State funds and private donations were only necessary to guide the fledgling Liberian colony through the early stages of its development. “Then others will go of their own accord.”³⁰⁹ Southern colonizationists also increasingly downplayed any emancipationist intentions. By 1847, even the MSCS, which had earlier made no secret of its desire to make Maryland into a free state, was declaring neutrality on the subject of slavery: “In [its] Board of Managers, who meet and deliberate upon every important act, are to be found the supporters of the ultra slave-holding interest, and the advocate for, at *least, prospective* emancipation. But these peculiar principles of either party have nothing to do with their action as officers of this

³⁰⁸ Indeed, the ACS’s increasing conservatism over the antebellum era was prompted by its Southern members. It was at the instigation of the Virginia Colonization Society’s Philip Slaughter that the ACS resolved in 1852 that “the publication of schemes of emancipation, and arguments in their favor, in the *African Repository*, and other official documents of this Society, is a departure from our fundamental law, and should be excluded from such documents.” *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 28, no. 4 (April, 1852), 100.

³⁰⁹ Maryland State Colonization Society, *Addresses Delivered at the Sixth Anniversary Meeting of the Maryland State Colonization society, held at Annapolis, February 2, 1838* (Baltimore: John D. Toy, 1838), 26.

Society.”³¹⁰ In 1827, the Virginia Colonization Society had asked, if colonization “should ultimately lead to [the] gradual emancipation and removal [of the slaves] . . . , what patriot or philanthropist would not rejoice at the result?”³¹¹ But by 1838, U.S. Congressman Henry A. Wise, speaking at the VCS’s annual meeting, was urging the South to defend slavery vigilantly from Northern intrusion.

The south must stand as *one man*—firmly, fixed, united, presenting an undivided front . . . ; and though a *minority*, yet a minority *united* in solid and solemn purpose, can and will deter any majority which may ever threaten to attack their peace, their property, their constitutional rights, and their lives!

Wise gave colonization a rather tepid endorsement, describing himself as “even now somewhat *skittish*” about the cause, though the defection of antislavery Northerners such as Gerrit Smith had “almost, if not altogether, allayed [his] fears.”³¹² The following year, the Virginia state auxiliary fell into inactivity, and would not be revived until 1849, with the conservative pledge to “watch with sleepless vigilance [the] operations [of the ACS], and give warning of its first departure from its original aim [to colonize exclusively free blacks], as a breach of faith and a signal of our withdrawal from all co-operation with it.”³¹³ Though colonization had been embraced in the 1820s and ‘30s as a potential method of removing slavery from the Upper South, by the 1840s and ‘50s, colonizationists in the region were protesting that they had no abolitionist agenda, and that the scheme would in no way serve to undermine the institution of slavery. (Although Upper South colonizationists often argued that free blacks contributed to slaves’

³¹⁰ *Maryland Colonization Journal* 3, no. 21 (March, 1847), 322.

³¹¹ Annual Meeting of the Richmond and Manchester Society, Auxiliary to ACS, held Hall of Delegates, 17 December, 1827, Report of the Managers, Virginia Colonization Society Records, reel 1, 761, Virginia Historical Society.

³¹² Virginia Colonization Society, *Seventh Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Colonization Society of Virginia* (Richmond: Southern Churchman, 1838), 24.

³¹³ Virginia Colonization Society, *First Annual Report, Since Its Re-Organization, of the Colonization Society of Virginia, with the Proceedings of the Annual Meeting, Held in the Hall of the House of Delegates, on Thursday Evening, February 13th, 1851* (Richmond: MacFarlane & Fergusson, 1851), 11.

misbehavior – the “tendency to idleness and sullen insubordination observable in our slaves, is caused by their . . . association with free negroes”³¹⁴ – they stopped short of claiming that slavery was a positive good, or that colonization would preserve it in perpetuity.)

An 1855 pamphlet published in Richmond (probably by the Virginia Colonization Society) gives a sense of the embattled nature of the colonization cause in the Upper South by the late antebellum period. The publication, entitled *Objections to the Scheme of African Colonization, Briefly Reviewed*, responded to a wide variety of common criticisms of the movement, from the charge that it was “a scheme which has Abolition affinities and tendencies” and that it “tends . . . to encourage negro emancipation” to the allegation that the ACS was “taking off the best of our free blacks and leaving us the more worthless.”³¹⁵ The pamphlet also addressed the objections that colonization was “a costly scheme,” which was “not capable of accomplishing the results to be desired,” and that “negroes are naturally an inferior race, and therefore incapable of self-government and national independence.”³¹⁶ The VCS denied any intention to abolish slavery, arguing that the scheme in fact reduced the risk of slave rebellion: “[I]f [colonization] tends in any measure to increase voluntary manumission and to establish any drain . . . upon our slave population, may it not in this way, as it certainly does in the separation from us of the free blacks, fulfill the beneficial ends of a safety-valve to our slavery system?”³¹⁷ As to questions of the feasibility of colonization, or African Americans’ suitability as

³¹⁴ Virginia Colonization Society, *Documents of the Colonization Society of Virginia* (Richmond: MacFarlane & Fergusson, 1853), 4.

³¹⁵ Virginia Colonization Society [?], *Objections to the Scheme of African Colonization, Briefly Reviewed* (Richmond: Macfarlane & Fergusson, 1855), 6, 8.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 17, 14, 11.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

colonists, the VCS counseled patience, arguing that the Liberian experiment should be given a full trial, and that African Americans would come to recognize the benefits of colonization and finance their own removal.

Though colonization societies in the Upper South denied more strenuously than the national ACS the charge of abolitionist sympathies, colonizationist rhetoric in the region was broadly in line with that of the national society. Like the ACS, regional colonizationist organizations in the Upper South proclaimed that the benevolent scheme would carry Christianity and civilization to Africa, allow African Americans to enjoy the benefits of full citizenship, and remove a problematic and “degraded” population of free blacks from the United States. Even the Maryland State Colonization Society, which very publicly separated its own operations from those of the ACS, did not advocate views radically different from those of the national organization (and diverged from the parent society mainly in that the MSCS explicitly sought to end slavery in the state). Upper South colonizationists’ slow retreat from emancipationist goals and increasing insistence that African Americans would fund their own colonization were also aligned with rhetorical trends in ACS literature over the antebellum era (although Southern auxiliaries were even more vigilant than the national organization in excluding any discussion of emancipation).

But though Upper South colonization rhetoric was not distinctive, the scheme did have some particular features in the region. For one, as I have already discussed, the plan was implicated in political debates over the future of slavery in the border states. Residents of Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, and Kentucky who hoped to end slavery in their states embraced colonization as a method of doing so, while opponents disputed the

practicability and desirability of ending slavery in the region. Colonizationism was so prominent in these debates partially because of its high visibility in the Upper South. Not only did the region produce a consistent and significant stream of financial donations to the ACS (between 1826 and 1860, the national society drew, on average, more than a quarter of its annual donation revenues from the region, not including the MSCS's separate fundraising), but it also provided the majority of Liberian emigrants. Of the more than ten thousand African American settlers who embarked for Liberia prior to the Civil War, approximately 65 percent hailed from the Upper South states, including 4,351 emancipated slaves and 2,457 free blacks.³¹⁸ The Upper South also claimed a long tradition of prominent colonizationist thought, tracing back to Thomas Jefferson's famous endorsement of the scheme in the late 18th century.

Supporters from the Upper South states recognized their region's connection with the colonization scheme. Norfolk lawyer William Maxwell, for example, described colonization as "the child of Virginia . . . sprung forth . . . from the head, and from the heart, of our virgin Commonwealth; and I loved the beautiful daughter not only for her own, but for her mother's sake."³¹⁹ Since so many Liberian colonists had roots in Southern states, the colony bore the South's cultural imprint. Western visitors to the country remarked on Liberian society's Southern aspects; Navy chaplain Charles W. Thomas published an account of his experience in Liberia, where he found a society dominated by "those who came originally from Maryland, Virginia, and Georgia," in

³¹⁸ Burin, *Peculiar Solution*, 169-173.

³¹⁹ Virginia Colonization Society, *Sixth Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Colonization Society of Virginia, Second Edition* (Richmond: Southern Churchman, 1837), 21.

which the “*Virginians* are said to be the leaders of the aristocracy.”³²⁰ Michael O’Brien has described Liberia as both “ironically, the most conspicuous outpost of Southern culture in the nineteenth century” and “fundamentally, a reproach to the South.”³²¹ Antebellum Southern culture was recreated in Liberia, but lacking that defining feature of Southern society: slavery. (If Liberia was an outpost of Southern culture, it was one created by people who had occupied the lowest rung of Southern society.) Nevertheless, Upper South colonizationists recognized and celebrated the connections between Liberian settlements and their own region. “Maryland in Liberia” was intended, at least in part, to be literally that – an extension of Maryland society onto the West African coast. William Maxwell, who described colonization as the brainchild of Virginia, was disappointed that his own state had not yet undertaken such a step: “[B]y establishing a new and separate colony of our own, we shall naturally feel a new and particular interest in its welfare.” But with or without a separate colony of Virginian emigrants in Africa, white Virginians felt a particular interest in the wellbeing of Virginian expatriates in Liberia: “[W]e follow them with our eyes, and our hearts, to that distant shore; and we sympathize with them in all their fortunes and their fates.”³²²

The large number of Liberian emigrants departing from the Upper South also meant that much of the business of colonization was conducted in the border slave states. The high visibility of departing emigrants ensured that white residents of the Upper South were constantly reminded of the colonization scheme. Transports for Liberia departed

³²⁰ Charles W. Thomas, *Adventures and Observations on the West Coast of Africa and Its Islands: Historical and Descriptive Sketches of Madeira, Canary, Biafra and Cape Verd Islands; Their Climates, Inhabitants and Productions, Accounts of Places, Peoples, Customs, Trades, Missionary Operations, Etc., On that part of the African Coast lying between Tangier, Morocco and Benguela* (New York: Derby & Jackson, 1860), 156.

³²¹ Michael O’Brien, *Conjectures of Order: Intellectual Life and the American South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 182, 185.

³²² Virginia Colonization Society, *Sixth Annual Report*, 22.

regularly from Baltimore and Norfolk, and emigrants from everywhere in the Upper South (and beyond) made their way across the region on the way to these ports. Though colonizationists in the Upper South did not diverge substantially in their rhetoric or ideology from supporters elsewhere in the country, they were confronted in a more direct manner by the practical difficulties and logistical details of the colonization process. It was primarily in the Upper South where the colonization movement faced the challenge of translating rhetoric into reality – transforming reluctant African Americans into settlers, slaves into citizens, and money into transportation and equipment. This process was beset with many logistical difficulties.

First of all, the colonization scheme required colonists. There were two sources of potential colonists in the Upper South: free black populations and emancipated slaves. Many supporters of colonization in the region were slaveholders who emancipated their slaves for transportation to Liberia. In some cases, slaveowners took advantage of the colonization scheme to reward particularly deserving slaves, as Rebecca Hunter manumitted her slave Richard and his family “because of the honesty and fidelity with which he has served as my slave.”³²³ But most colonizationist manumitters were at least cautious critics of the slave system. Virginia native Nancy Hall, for example, described herself as “[f]rom a child . . . opposed to slavery.” When after her father’s death she inherited a family of slaves, she quickly emancipated them for colonization in Liberia. Later in life, Hall considered herself lucky to have had the opportunity to leave Virginia for the free state of Ohio: “I have suffered much . . . for being born and brought up in a slave state, and I feel grateful for my deliverance from many of the evils I formerly

³²³ Rebecca Hunter to William McLain, Charlestown, Virginia, April 24, 1855, item 47695, Records of the American Colonization Society, Library of Congress.

suffered.”³²⁴ Virginian sisters Ann and Rebecca Vaumister similarly inherited slaves from their father’s estate, and “being in principal opposed to slavery,” sought to send them to Liberia, “provided the Colonization Society will procure a passage and the means for transporting them to the Society’s Colony.”³²⁵ Such bequests represented a mixed blessing for the ACS. Upper South manumitters provided Liberia with a large number of colonists, but frequently pled poverty when it came to providing for the transatlantic transportation of their manumitted slaves. After all, as the Virginia Colonization Society’s William Maxwell pointed out, emancipations themselves represented often substantial financial sacrifice: “[M]anumitted slaves . . . would have brought money in the market, if their masters had not nobly preferred giving them their freedom for nothing; for nothing at least but the generous and godlike pleasure of liberating them in this way.”³²⁶ Manumitters often imagined their responsibilities toward the ACS to end with the offering up of their slaves for Liberian colonization. Although Upper South manumitters provided the Colonization Society with a large proportion of the emigrants it sent to Liberia, they also frequently relied on the ACS to arrange and underwrite these manumittedes’ transportation to Africa. Emancipated slaves also often had social or family ties to slaves retained by different owners, who were unwilling to manumit them. Virginian John Matthews’s plan to emancipate a young female slave and her four children was thwarted by the fact that “her *husband* is a *slave*. He is owned by another

³²⁴ Nancy Johns Turner Hall, “The Imaginationist, or Recollections of an Old Lady, a Native of One of the Southern States, now a Resident of the State of Ohio in the Year 1844,” Virginia Historical Society Manuscript Collection.

³²⁵ John Hopewell to [?], Moorefield, Virginia, July 30, 1830, Item 1138, Records of the American Colonization Society, Library of Congress.

³²⁶ Virginia Colonization Society, *Sixth Annual Report*, 21.

man. I am not able to pay the *price* which the man asks for him.”³²⁷ An emigrant’s family member might even be held by a master ideologically opposed to colonization, as one prospective colonist discovered of his brother’s owner: “[He] has promised to let him go free, but wants him to go any where but to Liberia.”³²⁸ Emancipation and colonization was rarely as easy in practice as represented in ACS rhetoric.

Even travel to the port of embarkation involved logistical difficulties.

Manumitted and free emigrants usually traveled in small family groups toward Upper South ports. If unaccompanied by any white persons, manumittedees required some form of documentation to satisfy any slave patrols they might meet along the way. Since space aboard Liberia-bound vessels was severely limited, emigrants might also have property to dispose of before leaving American shores. Val Seviery had provided his emancipated slaves with a “waggon [sic] & horses, which they must sell before they embark. I am fearful they will get but little for them, unless assisted by some persons friendly to the cause of Colonization . . . – provided such assistance involves me in no further expenses than I have already incurred.”³²⁹ Alternatively, emigrants might wish to purchase supplies before departing for Liberia. If they arrived in port before their ship did, emigrants required lodging while they awaited departure. If they arrived too late, colonizationists might arrange temporary employment in the port city until the next vessel departed for Liberia – usually months later. If the ship was delayed – a frequent

³²⁷ John Matthews to Ralph Randolph Gurley, Shepardstown, Virginia, May 10, 1830, item 3904, Records of the American Colonization Society, Library of Congress.

³²⁸ J. Mason Smith to William McLain, Atlanta, Georgia, May 16, 1855, item 47845, Records of the American Colonization Society, Library of Congress.

³²⁹ Val Seviery to Levi Mackery, Greenville [?], April, 1842, item 20880, Records of the American Colonization Society, Library of Congress.

occurrence in antebellum sailing schedules – emigrants might have to spend an extended period of time in port awaiting its arrival.

Sometimes large groups of emigrants traveled together under direction of an ACS agent; this relieved some of the logistical difficulties of gathering colonists for embarkation, but also introduced new complexities. In 1842, for example, ACS agent Levi Walker, taking a company of seventy emigrants from Tennessee to Norfolk, reported that several “will have horses, waggons [sic], &c. to sell,” and was concerned over how to maximize the proceeds of such a bulk sale. After all, only about half of his company had “means,” and the others were “depending very much on the sale of these to get to Lib[eria].”³³⁰ Such large groups of emigrants traveling across the Upper South could hardly fail to attract notice. (Several contingents included over one hundred colonists.³³¹) Shortly after Levi Walker’s company passed through Abingdon, Virginia, a local colonizationist wrote to the ACS to caution that “probably it would be best to let any caravan which might soon pass through this place, go on quietly without any very publick [sic] notice.”³³² Proslavery Southerners feared the effect upon those remaining in slavery of these large traveling companies of emancipated slaves:

[I]t is spreading a dangerous influence among the negroes of this country, for the slaves of whole plantations to acquire their freedom, take leave of the country, and make their departure with great pomp and parade, proclaiming liberty for themselves and their posterity; . . . it renders those who are left behind, dissatisfied, refractory, and rebellious; and . . . it may, probably will, if not checked in time, lead to insubordination and insurrection.³³³

³³⁰ Levi T. Walker to Ralph Randolph Gurley, Abingdon, Virginia, April 11, 1842, item 20910, Records of the American Colonization Society, Library of Congress.

³³¹ Burin, *Peculiar Solution*, 109.

³³² Taylor to Ralph Randolph Gurley, Abingdon, Virginia, April 15, 1842, item 20916, Records of the American Colonization Society, Library of Congress.

³³³ Quoted in Burin, *Peculiar Solution*, 109.

In the Upper South, the public face of the colonization enterprise was represented not only by meetings and agents, but also by colonists themselves, slowly making their way towards Liberia. The spectacle of manumittedes traveling across the Upper South might be perceived as a threat, or it could be interpreted as a vision of an inchoate democratic citizenry carrying Southern traditions to a new African republic. The colonizationist *Baltimore Sun*, for example, described one caravan of emancipated slaves in Virginia as “cheerful in the view of the enjoyment of freedom in the Liberian republic, while there seemed to be, as was natural, a regret to part, perhaps forever, from the scenes of their childhood, with all their loved associations.”³³⁴

Of course, if Upper South manumitters provided Liberia with many of its emigrants, African Americans also exerted control over their own colonization. Manumitters might wish to settle their slaves in Liberia, but could not enforce colonization over the slaves’ wishes. In many cases, slaves were presented with severely limited options. In 1842, for example, ten slaves from Murfreesboro, North Carolina, emancipated after their owner’s death, were reported to be “anxious to go” to Liberia. But this was probably largely motivated by the fact that the will directed the estate’s executors to sell any slaves who were unwilling to settle in Africa.³³⁵ In other cases, emancipators allowed their former slaves more choice; another executor overseeing a testamentary emancipation reported that the manumitted slaves had chosen to settle in Ohio rather than in Liberia.³³⁶ Manumitters considered how to impose their will upon the people who would, by the very act of manumission, no longer be their slaves. One

³³⁴ “Liberia Emigrants,” *Baltimore Sun*, November 1, 1854, 1.

³³⁵ James Wells to Ralph Randolph Gurley, Portsmouth, Virginia, April 27, 1842, item 20998, Records of the American Colonization Society, Library of Congress.

³³⁶ D. Meade to Ralph Randolph Gurley, Bentheme [?], April 8, 1830, item 3806, Records of the American Colonization Society, Library of Congress.

Kentucky slaveowner worried that once he emancipated his slaves, “Perhaps when they find they are free they may refuse to go, & my object is to get them to Liberia.”³³⁷

Though emancipated slaves had limited control over their eventual destiny, many resisted an uncertain future in malarial Liberia, and in at least some cases, slaves chose continued servitude over Liberian colonization.

Free blacks also faced severely restricted choices in the antebellum South, and often turned to colonization only as a way to escape oppression and violence in their native communities. But free African Americans had more control over their lives than did slaves, and more strenuously opposed the colonization movement. Social repression prevented free blacks in the Upper South from organizing, like their Northern brethren, into a formal convention movement to protest the colonization scheme. But Southern free blacks’ resistance to Liberian colonization was obvious from the paucity of willing emigrants. This worried white colonizationists in the region. After all, they had long advocated the plan as a method of “ridding us of a population for the most part idle and useless, and too often vicious and mischievous.”³³⁸ Free blacks were viewed in the Upper South as a problematic and dangerous population, and recruiting free black emigrants made for good public relations for the colonization movement. Supporters expected the scheme to remove free African Americans from their own locality, as did one contributor who complained to the Maryland State Colonization Society that his

³³⁷ Rick Noiff, Sr. to Ralph Randolph Gurley, Russellville, Kentucky, July 30, 1830, item 1147, Records of the American Colonization Society, Library of Congress.

³³⁸ Robert Goodloe Harper, *A Letter from Gen. Harper of Maryland, to Elias B. Caldwell, Esq., Secretary of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour, in the United States, with their own Consent* (Baltimore: R.J. Matchett, 1818), 6.

county “has in it, a large number of Free blacks, [and] has never had one of them sent to Liberia.”³³⁹

Upper South colonizationists attempted to appeal directly to free African Americans with targeted publications which encouraged them to “[g]o where you can become men—*freemen*—MEN, in the largest sense of the word.”³⁴⁰ Testimony from previous emigrants who had returned temporarily to the U.S. (often to attempt to purchase family members) could also help to recruit free black colonists, but this tactic could also backfire: ACS agent Samuel Williams reported that one such speaker “rendered valuable service to the Society in inducing emigrants to go – but I think it likely more funds could have been collected without him. The fact of a color’d man’s making a speech excited a good deal of prejudice in some places.”³⁴¹

Upper South colonizationists noted free African American resistance to the scheme, lamenting “the prejudices of the free colored population . . . , their indisposition to believe that those who advise their removal are actuated by friendly feelings . . . —their unwillingness to give credit to the statements made to them . . . of the real condition of their brethren in Africa.”³⁴² But if most free blacks were inclined to discredit the glowing depiction of Liberia in ACS propaganda, they were more receptive to the reports of emigrants they knew personally. Colonizationists sought to exploit these relationships. For example, R.W. Bailey, an ACS agent in Virginia, eagerly anticipated communication from one recent emigrant: “If he gives a good report of the country, others will follow

³³⁹ James B. Dipon, Frederick, Maryland, January 4, 1833, reel 1, 2, Maryland State Colonization Society Papers, Maryland Historical Society.

³⁴⁰ James Hall, *An Address to the Free People of Color of the State of Maryland* (Baltimore: [J.D. Toy?], 1858), 4.

³⁴¹ Samuel Williams to Ralph Randolph Gurley, Louisville, Kentucky, May 9, 1842, item 21149, Records of the American Colonization Society, Library of Congress.

³⁴² Maryland State Colonization Society, *Report of the Board of Managers of the Maryland State Colonization Society, 1st January, 1858* (Baltimore: John D. Toy, 1858), 10.

from this section.”³⁴³ Liberian emigrants did not vanish without a trace from the American landscape, but maintained trans-Atlantic communications networks, and social and familial connections. Liberian colonists returned to the United States to purchase or persuade family members, and to praise or condemn the colonization scheme. The large number of emigrants from the Upper South not only meant that outbound colonists were a frequent spectacle, but also that letters or individuals returning from Liberia provided many residents of the Upper South with first-hand accounts of the African colony.

Colonization’s relationship with slavery in the Upper South was a conflicted one. On the one hand, critics feared that the scheme would encourage slave rebellion, and the plan would thus undermine the “peculiar institution.” Many colonizationists in the region were cautious critics of slavery, seeking personally to divest themselves of slaveholdings or politically to drain their states slowly of slaves. But in a strange way, even manumissions reinforced slaveowners’ powers. After all, emancipation was totally at the master’s discretion. Slaveowners could impose Liberian colonization as the cost of freedom, and thus enforce their will upon their former slaves even after emancipation. Slaveowners had complete control over who to emancipate, and the time and nature of the manumission. Even in Liberia, former slaves remained largely dependent on their former masters for material support, and to maintain family relationships in the United States. Masters thus remained in a position of paternalist control over their former slaves even after emancipation – and, in cases of testamentary emancipations which provided for continued support, even from beyond the grave. Liberian colonization provided slaveowners with more options, not fewer. The ACS and its regional auxiliaries never pressed colonization on Upper South slaveholders as a moral duty, but rather as an act of

³⁴³ Quoted in Burin, *Peculiar Solution*, 72.

charity. For slaveholders in the region with misgivings about slavery's ethics or its efficiency as an economic system, embracing colonization (to whatever extent they desired) allowed them to assuage their doubts while minimizing sacrifices. But though colonization thus allowed Southerners to retain some of the privileges of slave ownership even as they emancipated their slaves, manumitters were, by definition, attracted to the scheme's emancipationist agenda. The ACS appealed to uneasy masters who sought to modulate or end their own ties with the institution of slavery.

But in the Upper South, colonization was never merely an abstract representation of ideology about slavery. Rather, it was an actual practice, highly visible in groups of African Americans making their way towards the coast or waiting in ports for a departing vessel, in slaveowners' wills and plans, in disillusioned or enthusiastic emigrants who had permanently or temporarily left Liberia, in letters bearing news of the colony, and in second- or third-hand reports from emigrants. Some Upper South residents viewed colonization as folly, and some as charity, but the visibility of the scheme on the region's landscape made it impossible to ignore.

The Lower South

The subject of colonization activity in the Lower South states (including the Southern Atlantic coast of South Carolina and Georgia and the cotton belt of Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana) presents a challenge to the historian. Though local colonization auxiliaries did exist in these states, few records of these organizations survive; on the whole, there are far fewer archival documents relating to colonization in this region as compared to other sections of the country. Consequently, the colonization movement in the Lower South has received relatively little historiographical attention,

and many historians have suggested that the ACS found vanishingly little support in the region. Indeed, colonizationists faced deeply entrenched opposition in this section of the country, and the ACS struggled to find purchase in the vehemently pro-slavery Lower South. One reason that few colonizationist publications from the region survive is that relatively few saw publication in the first place. Local colonizationist auxiliaries tended to be small, and often faded from existence after a few years. Many newspapers in Lower South states published exclusively critical accounts of the colonizationist movement, or eschewed coverage altogether. State governments in the region openly opposed colonization, and politicians portrayed the ACS as part of a Northern conspiracy to abolish slavery. Responding to a pro-colonization resolution passed by Ohio's legislature in 1824, Georgia governor George Troup warned that "very soon . . . , the United States Government, discarding the mask, will openly lend itself to a combination of fanatics for the destruction of everything valuable in the Southern country," while South Carolina's legislature rebuked Ohio for designing to interfere with slavery – "a system, descended to [South Carolinians] from their ancestors, and now inseparably connected with their social and political existence."³⁴⁴

Fear of colonization even played an often overlooked role in provoking South Carolina's nullification crisis of 1832, during which the state claimed the right to "nullify" supposedly unconstitutional federal legislation. The specific acts protested by the state were tariffs, but nullification leader John Calhoun admitted that he

consider[ed] the Tariff, but as the occasion, rather than the real cause of the present unhappy state of things. . . Southern States . . . must in the end be forced to rebel, or submit to have their permanent interests sacrificed, their domestick

³⁴⁴ Ames, ed., *State Documents*, 16.

institutions subverted by Colonization and other schemes, and themselves & children reduced to wretchedness.³⁴⁵

Similarly, a Charleston newspaper editorial from 1830 compared colonization proposals to the federal tariff, and warned that federal colonization bills were intended “to create discontent, excite insubordination, render our property worthless . . .,” and thus to “diminish . . . the political weight of the south, by depriving us of the right of representation on account of our slaves.”³⁴⁶ At least in South Carolina, opposition to colonization was so strong that it helped to spark a disputation of federal authority, while many politicians across the Lower South proclaimed their opposition to the scheme.

However, these problems were not entirely restricted to the Lower South region. Newspapers from around the country published critical accounts of colonizationism, and it was not uncommon for auxiliary societies in other sections of the country to sputter out of existence after only a few years of active organizing. Although colonization generated particularly strong opposition from Lower South politicians, political protest of the scheme was by no means limited to this region. Nor was political opposition to colonization unanimous in the Lower South. Georgia governor George Troup may have endeared himself to some constituents by attacking colonization, but his description of the ACS as a Northern conspiracy also attracted public criticism for being “intended less to *inform*, than to mislead your fellow-citizens.”³⁴⁷ William Crawford, the Georgia

³⁴⁵ John C. Calhoun to Virgil Maxcy, September 11, 1830, Galloway-Maxcy-Markoe Papers, vol. 35, Library of Congress. Historian William Freehling argues that South Carolina’s response to colonizationist petitions “is of considerable importance in understanding not only the Nullification Crisis of 1832 but also the ensuing era of sectional controversy.” William W. Freehling, *Prelude to Civil War: The Nullification Controversy in South Carolina, 1816-1836* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 124.

³⁴⁶ *Charleston Mercury*, April 28 1830, quoted in *Pensacola Gazette and Florida Advertiser*, May 15, 1830.

³⁴⁷ *Augusta (Ga.) Chronicle*, August 12 1825.

politician who achieved the most national prominence during the era (and Troup's mentor), served as a vice president of the ACS from its formation until his death in 1834.

The financial data also indicate that the ACS found significant support in this section of the country. Between 1826 and 1860, the ACS received over \$260,000 in donations from Lower South states, accounting for a substantial but not overwhelming average of 14.5% of the Society's annual collections. Expressed as a per capita figure, the Lower South actually contributed more to the colonization cause per free white citizen than any other region. However, these figures are distorted by the inclusion of two very large bequests to the Colonization Society by the wealthy planters John McDonogh of Louisiana and David Hunt of Mississippi. Between 1857 and 1859, Hunt contributed at least \$45,000 to the Society, while McDonogh's estate donated nearly \$75,000. The donations of these two men made up nearly half of the funds the ACS received from all Lower South states over the entire antebellum period; obviously, with these contributions excluded, figures for Lower South contributions decline significantly.³⁴⁸ However, it is perhaps unfair to exclude these gifts (after all, other regions' totals also include large individual donations), and even leaving aside McDonogh's and Hunt's gifts, per capita figures for the Lower South are comparable to the Upper South, and to other sections of the country.

Lower South slaveowners also contributed to the colonization cause by manumitting slaves for transplantation to Liberia. Between 1820 and 1860, 1,677 emancipated slaves emigrated from the Lower South to Liberia, and an additional 709 free blacks from the region took their place among Liberia's colonists. In the Upper

³⁴⁸ Specifically, McDonogh's and Hunt's contributions between 1857 and 1859 accounted for 44.5% of all fundraising across the entire Lower South between 1826 and 1860. All these figures are based on ACS Database.

South, each colonizationist manumitter emancipated an average of 9.96 slaves, while Lower South manumitters averaged 14.09 slaves per emancipator.³⁴⁹ However, as a proportion of total slave population, emancipation for colonization was simply more common in the Upper South. Based on 1850 populations (at the height of colonizationist manumission), approximately one manumittee departed the Upper South for every 320 slaves in the region, while only one emigrant for every 1,027 Lower South slaves made the same journey.³⁵⁰

From these figures, a portrait of colonizationism in the Lower South begins to emerge. The ACS's presence was less visible in the region than in Virginia or Maryland. Fewer emigrants traveled to port to meet fewer Liberian-bound vessels, and local publications advocating the colonization scheme were rarer. The relative sparseness of colonizationists in the Lower South presented its own logistical hurdles, as Augustus Longstreet discovered in 1854, when he sought to colonize Louisa, one of his Augusta, Georgia slaves. ACS officials communicated that the Society could not "tell when an opportunity will be presented, as we cannot, at present, make any calculations about sending a vessel from Savannah this year."³⁵¹ In order to emigrate, Louisa would need to make the hundred-mile journey from Augusta to the port of Savannah, but Liberia-bound vessels touched only irregularly at this and other Lower South ports. In this case,

³⁴⁹ Burin, *Peculiar Solution*, 171, 172.

³⁵⁰ Based on *The Seventh Census of the United States: 1850* (Washington: Robert Armstrong, 1853). On the other hand, colonization was more frequent among the Lower South's comparatively small free black populations. One in forty-six free blacks from the Lower South embarked for Liberia, compared with one in seventy-six for the Upper South. This probably reflects greater social repression faced by free blacks in the Lower South.

³⁵¹ J.W. Lugenbeel to Robert Campbell, Washington DC, May 8, 1854, box 1, folder 5, Rhind-Gardner Papers, Mss. 3576, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, Louisiana State University. At the time of this attempted emancipation, Longstreet (a Georgia native) was serving as the president of the University of Mississippi, and had left Louisa's case in the hands of Robert Campbell and other Georgia colonizationists.

Longstreet's intention seems to have been thwarted by the logistical difficulties involved, as Louisa did not appear on the emigrant rosters in subsequent years. Despite such limitations on colonization activity in the Lower South, the ACS was by no means unknown in the region, and what its supporters lacked in numbers, they made up for in material resources, making large donations and emancipating many slaves for Liberian colonization.

In many ways, Lower South colonizationists were exemplified by wealthy emancipators and supporters like John McDonogh. McDonogh, who owned a large plantation near New Orleans, and was known in his time as one of the wealthiest individuals in the nation, was the single largest antebellum contributor to the ACS. In 1842, McDonogh emancipated eighty slaves to be transported to Liberia, and his will dictated the emancipation and colonization of another forty-one slaves upon his death in 1850, and a portion of his property to be invested on behalf of the American Colonization Society. To be sure, these contributions – both of funding and of colonists – were unusually large. Yet, as we have seen, large emancipation/colonization projects were relatively common in the Lower South, and McDonogh was by no means the only large contributor to the cause. Also, given the paucity of colonizationist publications in the region, many residents of the Lower South probably encountered the scheme through the example of men like McDonogh.

McDonogh commenced his colonizationist project in 1825, but did not publicly announce his plan until 1842, when he deemed a large number of his slaves prepared for African colonization. Despite his earlier reluctance to discuss his plans publicly, after 1842 McDonogh proved a powerful and vocal advocate for the colonizationist cause. He

described his personal scheme of emancipation in a series of editorials for the *New Orleans Commercial Bulletin*, which were reprinted and distributed throughout the Lower South. McDonogh hoped to influence other slaveowners to follow in his path:

When they find from my experience, that they can send their whole gangs to Africa, every fifteen years, without the cost of a dollar to themselves, what master will refuse to do so much good, when it will cost him nothing in the doing it, and afford him at the same time such high gratification, in knowing that he has contributed to the making many human beings happy.³⁵²

McDonogh promised that by following his plan, slaveowners would earn sufficient profits to replace their colonized slaves with new purchases.

McDonogh's plan of emancipation essentially encouraged slaves to purchase themselves in installments. He prescribed a five-and-a-half day workday for his slaves, who were required to labor on his plantation Monday through Friday, and Saturday mornings. (A deeply religious man, McDonogh prohibited his slaves from working on the Sabbath.) McDonogh considered any work his slaves performed on Saturday afternoons as remunerated rather than required labor, and kept an account of how much he "owed" each of his slaves in payment for this labor. When this account equaled a certain proportion of a slave's value, McDonogh considered that slave to have "purchased" Saturday morning for himself. Thereafter, any labor performed at any time on Saturday contributed to McDonogh's notional account for each slave, which was then

³⁵² John McDonogh, *Letter of John McDonogh on African Colonization; Addressed to the Editors of the New Orleans Commercial Bulletin* (New Orleans: Tropic Office, 1842), 3. McDonogh was not the first to advocate such a plan, and he was probably heavily influenced by Henry Schoolcraft's 1825 *Travels in the Central Portions of the Mississippi Valley*, in which Schoolcraft proposed an essentially identical scheme. Schoolcraft, however, was not a colonizationist, and suggested that this method of gradual emancipation would prepare slaves for American citizenship: "He will enter society with habits of industry and temperance, which are calculated to render him a valuable citizen; and we will venture to assert, that any slave, who is not possessed of sufficient mental energy and firmness to submit to this preparatory discipline, cannot be qualified for, and is scarcely entitled to, the enjoyment of civil liberty." Henry R. Schoolcraft, *Travels in the Central Portions of the Mississippi Valley: Comprising Observations of its Mineral Geography, Internal Resources, and Aboriginal Population* (New York: Collins and Hannay, 1825), 233-234.

applied to the purchase of Friday, and so on until the slave had “bought” the entirety of his time from McDonogh. This, he calculated, would take up to fifteen years. According to McDonogh, the plan operated by encouraging supererogatory effort in his slaves; as he explained it to them, “you . . . will have gained and placed in [your master’s] hands, previous to the going out free, a sum of money arising from your extra labor, fully sufficient to enable him to purchase an equal number of people with yourselves . . . , to take your place in the work of his farm.”³⁵³ That is, McDonogh argued, the promise of emancipation would elicit longer labor hours from slaves sufficient that (in addition to normal profits) the slaveowner would earn the price of a replacement work force.

McDonogh was in his own time something of an iconoclast, and if any other planters adopted his plan of emancipation by installment, none publicly carried it to fruition. However, his plan did share several characteristics with common practices for colonizationist manumitters across the South. McDonogh justified his delay in emancipating his slaves not only by demanding that the slaves pay for their own replacements, but also by arguing that only an appropriate religious education would prepare slaves for Liberian independence; his plan, he claimed, had its “basis . . . [in] RELIGION—a desire to awaken in their bosoms the love of the Divinity.”³⁵⁴ As Eric Burin has demonstrated, most colonizationist emancipators similarly emancipated their slaves only after “subjecting . . . [them] to unspecified amounts of religious

³⁵³ McDonogh, *Letter*, 10-11.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 15. McDonogh’s sincere religiosity shaped his emancipation agenda. His practice of allowing his slaves to labor for themselves on Saturday afternoons predated his colonization scheme, and was born out of a desire to prevent any Sabbath-breaking by slaves tempted to labor on Sunday. Beginning in 1822, McDonogh permitted his slaves to direct their own pursuits on Saturday afternoons, paying a regular wage to any who chose to devote this time to plantation labor. Three years later, this scheme had evolved into the plan of installment emancipation. See William Allan, *The Life and Work of John McDonogh* (Baltimore: Isaac Friedenwald, 1886), 42-43.

indoctrination, educational instruction, and occupational training.”³⁵⁵ Like other emancipators, McDonogh was the final arbiter of his slaves’ readiness for colonization; indeed, he delayed their emancipation for two years after they had completed their contracts and thus, according to his own calculations, recompensed him for the value he would lose by manumission. And if McDonogh was somewhat eccentric, so were other emancipators. After all, only a small minority of slaveowners engaged in colonization projects. Nor was McDonogh’s reasoning atypical of colonizationist emancipators. Like other “ambivalent participants”³⁵⁶ in slavery, McDonogh demonstrated no eagerness to forego the benefits of the “peculiar institution”; his plan was designed to avoid any financial sacrifice on his own part. However, the plan was rooted in McDonogh’s doubts about the justice and safety of perpetual slavery; not only would emancipation and colonization “mak[e] many human beings happy,” but McDonogh also enjoyed the “satisfaction . . . in knowing that he was surrounded by friends, on whose faithfulness and fidelity he and his family could rely, under every possible contingency.”³⁵⁷ This language implied that slaves held in perpetuity were not friends to their masters, and might prove unreliable, or even rebellious.

McDonogh’s doubts about perpetual slavery may have also been shaped by his relatively egalitarian attitude about race. One of his closest and most affectionate friendships was with the free black planter Andrew Durnford (the mixed-race son of a British merchant and a free black woman). Although Durnford was McDonogh’s junior by twenty years, and to a certain extent financially dependent on the older man, their correspondence reveals an affectionate relationship. Durnford did not defer to

³⁵⁵ Burin, *Peculiar Solution*, 41.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 40.

³⁵⁷ McDonogh, *Letter*, 3.

McDonogh, and indeed, frankly advised him against publicizing his colonization ventures: “[I]f you will have my opinion I must not withhold it. Therefore, write no more on the Subject. It is a question that a man will not be forced into except he has a natural disposition to benevolence.”³⁵⁸ This unusually egalitarian interracial friendship may have contributed to McDonogh’s colonizationist sympathies, as he grew to doubt the morality and sustainability of perpetual bondage. (Other Lower South emancipators expressed even franker critiques of slavery, such as Mississippi’s Silas Hamilton, who wished to “wipe from my character the foulest stain with which it was ever tarnished and pluck from my bleeding conscience the most pungent sting.”³⁵⁹)

McDonogh’s reasoning was both radical and conservative. In many ways, his philosophy was based in the paternalist ideology increasingly used to defend Southern slavery during the antebellum period. Historians have traditionally defined paternalism as “liken[ing] the plantation . . . to an extended family, in which masters governed their slaves with firmness and benevolence, much as they claimed to manage their own wives and children.”³⁶⁰ McDonogh’s plantation, he intimated, better conformed to the paternalist ideal than those of his neighbors; not only did he provide parental guidance and affection to his slaves, but like children, these slaves would achieve maturity and leave the home. Indeed, McDonogh warned any potential imitators that his scheme required the “most unlimited confidence and esteem . . . mutually [to] exist, as well on the side of the master as of the servant.”³⁶¹ Of course, if other Southern slaveholders could comprehend, and perhaps even commend, McDonogh’s paternalist attitude, few

³⁵⁸ Quoted in David O. Whitten, *Andrew Durnford: A Black Sugar Planter in the Antebellum South* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1995), 58.

³⁵⁹ Quoted in Fox, *American Colonization Society*, 193.

³⁶⁰ Ford, *Deliver Us from Evil*, 8.

³⁶¹ McDonogh, *Letter*, 6.

followed his logic to its colonizationist conclusion. For most slaveowners, paternalism functioned to justify perpetual slavery, not to demand dismantling it. And not all Deep South planters shared McDonogh's paternalist attitudes. McDonogh regarded himself as isolated in a hostile social environment, and "felt deeply the stain on our state as a Christian people when I was unable to give . . . the name of one, single individual in it, who does anything" for the religious education of slaves.³⁶² The paternalist ideology may have had more traction in the Upper than in the Lower South (although historian Adam Rothman argues that "the evident commercialism of slavery [in the Deep South] made [infusing the master-slave relationship with ethical content] a more difficult and more crucial task.")³⁶³ Emancipators in both the Upper and Lower South faced protests from neighbors, but resistance to emancipatory schemes was strongest in the Lower South. McDonogh himself delayed his slaves' departure for Liberia for two years after all had fulfilled their accounts, excusing the postponement by saying that "as the Abolitionists . . . had occasioned much excitement in our State, not only among the owners of slaves, but among the slaves themselves, I did not consider it safe, or myself at liberty," to emancipate.³⁶⁴ Though he placed the blame on abolitionists, McDonogh's immediate fear was of antagonizing local slaveowners, or being perceived as encouraging insurrection among local slaves.

Other emancipators from the Lower South also testified that local anti-colonizationist sentiment hindered their plans. One South Carolina man, for example, seeking to carry out the emancipation project prescribed by his uncle's will, reported that

³⁶² John McDonogh to Rev. Charles Colcock Jones, January 26, 1835, Papers of John McDonogh, box 9, folder 11, Louisiana State Museum.

³⁶³ Adam Rothman, *Slave Country: American Expansion and the Origins of the Deep South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 207.

³⁶⁴ McDonogh, *Letter*, 13.

“[h]is neighbors . . . are hostile to the objects of the society,” that the probate court had instituted obstructive recordkeeping policies, and that he was “a little apprehensive that there may be some enemy who intercepts his letters” to the Colonization Society.³⁶⁵ Other reports from the Lower South indicate that colonizationists in this region often felt isolated and intimidated. Georgia resident Albert Cuthbert, Jr. complained that “Colonization is . . . decidedly unpopular here, chiefly because it is not understood, &, unfortunately few seem to care to be enlightened.” Cuthbert mentioned the legal battle over a local resident’s estate, in which the ACS had intervened to defend the will’s testamentary emancipation of the man’s slaves; one hostile neighbor “said that ‘the Northern Colonization Society had come to set [these] niggers free,’ & the bullet headed fool could not be made to understand that the society was not even hosted in a Northern State.”³⁶⁶ Of course, hostility towards the Colonization Society was not restricted to the Lower South, but opposition was particularly strong in these states.³⁶⁷ The ACS’s records throughout the antebellum period contain many reports from ACS agents despairing of raising funds in the region, while supporters frequently communicated with

³⁶⁵ B. Gilderhus [?] to Ralph Randolph Gurley, Charleston, April 16, 1838, item 20945, Records of the American Colonization Society, Library of Congress.

³⁶⁶ A. Cuthbert Jr. to William McLain, Eatonton, July 10, 1855, item 47434, Records of the American Colonization Society, Library of Congress. The deceased resident in question was Robert Bledsoe, but the case was atypical of colonizationist emancipations. Bledsoe had directed his emancipated slaves to be settled, not in Liberia, but rather in Indiana or Illinois. The problem arose from the fact that, by the time of Bledsoe’s death, both these states had passed legislation severely limiting the immigration of new black residents. The ACS had intervened to suggest Liberia as an alternative destination, which might preserve Bledsoe’s emancipatory aims, but Georgia’s Supreme Court ultimately ruled that, since the slaves could not be emancipated in accordance with the terms of the will, they should be distributed among Bledsoe’s heirs. See *Reports of Cases in Law and Equity, Argued and Determined in the Supreme Court of the State of Georgia, from Milledgeville Term to Decatur Term, 1855, Inclusive* (Athens: Reynolds & Bro., 1855), 127-170.

³⁶⁷ Eric Burin argues that “in the plantation districts and in the Lower South, . . . nearby whites were . . . likely to take exception to ACS liberations,” but he goes on to point out that manumitters’ experiences varied widely within each state. Burin, *Peculiar Solution*, 101. Burin suggests that emancipations were most tolerated where they were most common – in the Upper South, and especially near urban centers. I concur with this analysis, but I believe the typical experience of Upper South and Lower South colonizationists were sufficiently differentiated to justify the organization of this chapter.

the Society only on the condition of anonymity, in order to protect themselves from public scorn.³⁶⁸ Nor was regional opposition restricted to passive abstention from colonizationist activity; anti-colonizationists in the Lower South worked actively to oppose the scheme. A South Carolina colonizationist reported that “the Society is little known among us, otherwise than by the ignorant or malignant misrepresentations of enemies,” while the formation of one auxiliary colonization society in Mississippi was thwarted when “[s]ome evil disposed person made such representations as . . . rendered it necessary to suspend any effort of the kind until public opinion should be rectified.”³⁶⁹

One class of opponents was particularly dangerous to the Colonization Society: the heirs of testamentary emancipators. By manumitting and colonizing their slaves, testamentary emancipators were depriving legatees of their inheritance. Thus, heirs (in many cases the executors of the deceased’s estate) stood to gain financially from the invalidation of emancipating wills. To be sure, in most cases heirs attempted to abide by the last wishes of their deceased relatives, often at significant personal sacrifice of time and money. However, testamentary emancipations across the South were subject to legal challenge by the wills’ beneficiaries. One North Carolina will, for example, was challenged on the grounds that the misspelled “collisination society” did not exist.³⁷⁰ The

³⁶⁸ These phenomena (poor fundraising reports and requests for anonymity) were sufficiently widespread to defy full citation, but I will provide a few examples. In 1833, James Birney did “not believe, that any thing effectual [for colonization] can be done *South* of Tennessee.” Dwight L. Dumond, ed., *Letters of James Gillespie Birney, 1831-1857* (New York: Appleton-Century Co., Inc., 1938), 97. In 1837, ACS Secretary R.R. Gurley “could not obtain a hearing in South Carolina.” P.R. Fendall to Ralph Randolph Gurley, Washington, May 2, 1837, item 13262, Records of the American Colonization Society, Library of Congress. In 1842, William Hamilton reported from Alabama that “no funds can be raised here. Some of our most influential citizens are strongly prejudiced against your Society:—we dare not broach the subject in public.” William Hamilton to William McLain, Mobile, Alabama, May 15, 1842, item 21116, Records of the American Colonization Society, Library of Congress. For two examples of anonymous letters from the Lower South (South Carolina and Mississippi), see *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 23, no. 1 (January, 1847), 13.

³⁶⁹ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 5, no. 6 (August, 1829), 180, 182.

³⁷⁰ Clegg, *Price of Liberty*, 191.

most famous Lower South attempt of a relative to break a colonizationist will occurred in 1836, near Port Gibson, Mississippi. Wealthy planter Isaac Ross had died, and provided in his will for the colonization of most of his slaves in Liberia. However, Ross's grandson and the executor of his estate, Isaac Ross Wade, used every legal and extralegal tool at his disposal to maintain control of the slaves. (When a lengthy legal appeals process ended in defeat for Wade and the county sheriff was ordered to take possession of the slaves, Wade wielded his political influence to have the sheriff himself arrested.) Not until 1849, twelve years after Ross's death (and after the slaves registered their discontent by burning down the plantation's mansion), did the last of Ross's servants finally make their way to Liberia. However, the legal battle was expensive for the ACS, and greatly depleted the value of their share of Ross's estate, demonstrating the high cost of an unsympathetic executor.³⁷¹

These stories demonstrate that the Colonization Society frequently found itself under attack in the Lower South. The content of these attacks can be gleaned from the proclamations of hostile (usually Democratic) politicians and newspapers in the region. For example, Jefferson Davis, still a Mississippi senator two years away from assuming the Presidency of the Confederacy, questioned blacks' capacity to sustain civilization in Liberia: "Is it kindness, is it charity, is it sound policy, to transfer a useful and happy body of laborers from the protection of our laws, and the benefit of our civilization, that they may possess a liberty which they cannot enjoy, . . . and finally when left to themselves lapse into the barbarism of their ancestors?" For Davis, slavery was the "normal condition" of African Americans, and any attempt to change this condition was

³⁷¹ For a general description of the events surrounding the Ross estate, see Alan Huffman, *Mississippi in Africa* (New York: Gotham Books, 2004). On the arrest of the county sheriff, see *Ibid.*, 69. On the arson at Ross's plantation, see *Ibid.*, 77-82.

foolhardy.³⁷² This was an attack on colonizationism's racial logic. The ACS contended that, freed from the oppression of American society, African Americans would flourish in Liberia, creating a modern Christian civilization. For Davis, and for many other sincere believers in black inferiority, this argument was difficult to swallow.

However, the most common Southern criticism of the Colonization Society was not the scheme's racial impracticability, but rather its supposed abolitionist tendencies.

One 1858 editorial from Mississippi declared the ACS

an offshoot of Abolitionism; . . . it owes its origin to the same fruitful parent which has filled the halls of Congress with pestilent agitators; Northern pulpits with blasphemous traitors to God and their country . . . ; and which seems destined sooner or later to surrender the Union of the States to the demon of destruction.³⁷³

These sentiments were not unique to the Lower South; as we have seen, similar criticisms were advanced in the Upper South by anti-colonizationists such as Thomas Dew. But the testimony of colonizationists from the Lower South indicates that these opinions were more widespread, and more intense, in the region.

This is exemplified, as well, by the legal restrictions placed upon colonizationist manumission in Lower South states. Most slave states required emancipated slaves to vacate the state (these measures were intended to prevent the growth of free black populations, and were compatible with the goals of the Colonization Society), but the most restrictive manumission policies were mostly confined to the Lower South. South Carolina and Mississippi outlawed all testamentary emancipations in the early 1840s, and Georgia followed suit in 1859. These policies targeted the Colonization Society, which relied upon testamentary emancipations, and were designed to thwart even postmortem

³⁷² "Address of the Hon. Jefferson Davis before the Democratic State Convention in the City of Jackson, July 5, 1859," *The Weekly [Jackson] Mississippian* July 5, 1859.

³⁷³ [Jackson] *Mississippian and State Gazette*, May 26, 1858.

emancipators who provided for the removal of their slaves. (Loopholes persisted, as would-be testamentary emancipators could instead will their slaves to a sympathetic friend, and trust him to carry out their intentions.) Between 1857 and 1860, Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas, Alabama, and Maryland all prohibited emancipations altogether, with Mississippi's law specifically prohibiting "any evasion or indirection so to provide that the colonization society, or any donee or grantee, can accomplish the act" of emancipation.³⁷⁴ With the exception of Maryland, this legal trend of extreme restrictions on even foreign emancipations was limited to the Lower South, which demonstrates the extent of anti-colonizationist feeling in the region.

However, as we have seen, despite all these hindrances, the Lower South did in fact provide the Colonization Society with both considerable financial support and significant numbers of colonists. Though many in the region denounced colonization, clearly the ACS continued to appeal to at least some local residents. But how was that appeal couched in the Lower South? Unfortunately, the paucity of surviving colonizationist publications in the region makes answering this question difficult, and makes it nearly impossible to analyze the evolution of colonizationist propaganda in the Lower South over time. However, enough sources exist to paint at least a partial picture of colonizationist rhetoric in this section of the country.

Given the intense suspicion with which many in the Lower South viewed the ACS, one might expect the Society to have adopted a particularly conservative stance in

³⁷⁴ *Revised Code of the Statute Laws of the State of Mississippi, Published by Authority of the Legislature* (Jackson: E. Barksdale, 1857), 236. For a general description of evolving Southern legislation on emancipation, see Henry W. Farnam, *Chapters in the History of Social Legislation in the United States to 1860*, ed. Clive Day (Union, NJ: Lawbook Exchange, Ltd., 2000), 197-200.

the region. And some sources bear this out. For example, in 1831 Louisianian colonizationist John Ker asked,

will [voluntary emancipation, as encouraged by the Colonization Society] not . . . benefit other slave holders, . . . by removing some examples of loose and injuriously indulgent discipline, the effect of mistaken feelings of Humanity? Will it not have the effect also, of enhancing the value of those who may be left? Will not the hands of slavery be strengthened as to those who shall remain, except from the only ground of hope to the slave, the voluntary act of the master? . . . It is manifest to every slave holder that many evils arise from the existence of the free colored people among the slaves: and it would be unnecessary to expatiate upon this point.³⁷⁵

One might expect this argument – that colonization would strengthen slavery, and increase the value of slaves remaining in bondage – to recur frequently in Lower South colonizationist publications. After all, slavery was deeply entrenched in states like Mississippi and South Carolina, and the ACS quickly found itself under suspicion of meddling with the “peculiar institution.” Lower South colonizationists were careful to dispute this charge. In 1822, only six years after the foundation of the ACS, one Georgia auxiliary was already distancing itself from the national organization, promising to “proceed with the parent society, no longer than their proceedings are prudent and justifiable.”³⁷⁶ Indeed, the rhetoric of national ACS publications sometimes proved unpopular in the Lower South. For example a Natchez, Mississippi paper reprinted a New York speech by ACS agent William Winans, commenting that the speech “contains some views and denunciations of slavery equally as bitter as those of any abolitionist in

³⁷⁵ Quoted in Charles Sackett Snyder, *Slavery in Mississippi* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1965), 211. It is worth noting that this sort of proslavery argument was advanced only to counter the idea that colonization was antislavery in its effects.

³⁷⁶ Putnam Auxiliary Society for Colonizing the Free Persons of Color of the United States, *Third Annual Report of the Putnam Auxiliary Society for Colonizing the Free Persons of Color of the United States, with an Appendix* (Milledgeville: James Camak, 1822), 30.

the land, and places the colonization society in a very different light from what we have always regarded it.”³⁷⁷

However, if the ACS’s mildly anti-slavery rhetoric created enemies in the Lower South, the organization did not respond by substantially changing that rhetoric. The year after William Winans’s reprinted speech had created a minor scandal in Mississippi, Winans himself arrived in the state to present the colonizationist argument publicly. The Colonization Society, he contended, allowed that

if ever it shall become expedient, in the judgment of those properly concerned in the matter, to change the *Institutions of the South*, it may be done without leaving in society the elements of interminable discord and conflict. That the time will come, when such will be the case, is believed, it is presumed, by every sober minded man, who has turned his attention to the operation of causes bearing upon the subject.³⁷⁸

If this was code, it was not a very subtle one. Winans was arguing, in the heart of the Lower South’s black belt, that slavery would someday come to an end, and that colonization would pave the way for a peaceful abolition. Nor was this an isolated case. ACS agent James Birney penned a circular specifically for distribution in the Lower South, which proudly proclaimed, “all that is wanting in my . . . judgment, to disburden [the border states] of slavery in a reasonable time, is means to defray the cost of a comfortable conveyance to a safe and pleasant home, of all slaves who may be offered by their owners for removal.”³⁷⁹ A pro-colonization Mississippi paper provided an approving introduction for a reprinted Kentucky speech which argued, “The indomitable energy and superior skill and industry of the whites, with a dense and overflowing

³⁷⁷ *Mississippi Free Trader and Natchez Gazette*, June 4, 1846.

³⁷⁸ *Semi-Weekly Natchez Courier*, June 11, 1847.

³⁷⁹ *Natchez Courier and Adams, Jefferson and Franklin Advertiser*, July 19, 1833. Birney’s territory as an agent of the Colonization Society covered the states of Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Arkansas, and it was to this region that this circular was addressed.

population, will ultimately deprive the slave of his employment, and render him valueless as property.”³⁸⁰ Similarly, a Georgia paper approvingly reprinted a Virginia editorial which described slaveowners as “weighed down and impoverished by the nature of negro slavery,” and slave territories as “blighted and held back in the glorious race of improvement and power, by the same cause, that impels us to pray for [slavery’s] final extinction and enlist our sympathies in behalf of colonization schemes.”³⁸¹

Colonizationists in the border states frequently proclaimed the superiority of free to black labor, but apparently this idea had resonance even in the Deep South. And even where one would least expect it, the colonization movement proclaimed an agenda of gradual emancipation.³⁸²

In this sense, colonizationism in the Lower South differed less than might be expected from the national movement. The scheme was defended there in much the same terms as in the rest of the country – as a cautiously emancipatory enterprise which would bring civilization to Africa and rid the United States of an anomalous population of non-citizens. And despite intense opposition, the ACS remained active in the antebellum Lower South – collecting donations, defending testamentary emancipations in court, arranging for the transportation of Liberian emigrants, etc. The most significant difference between the colonization movements of the Upper and Lower South was not diverging ideologies or motives, but rather the disparity between the social and cultural contexts of the two regions. In the Upper South, colonization was prevalent, visible, and,

³⁸⁰ *Semi-Weekly Natchez Courier*, May 21, 1847.

³⁸¹ *Macon [Georgia] Telegraph*, January 14, 1828.

³⁸² Although sufficient data do not exist to track change over time in Lower South colonizationist rhetoric confidently, it is worth mentioning that several of the emancipationist quotations in this paragraph originate in the late 1840s – at a time when Upper South colonizationists were retreating from these kinds of antislavery arguments. This may be due to the fact that attacks on the Colonization Society in the Upper South were a relatively new phenomenon, while Lower South colonizationists had already spent years facing down local hostility.

perhaps because of this, largely tolerated. In the Lower South, the colonization movement maintained a lower profile, its supporters scattered and outnumbered by proslavery opponents. Yet, despite these hurdles, the ACS remained active in the region, and though its local supporters were geographically and socially isolated, they thought and wrote much the same as did other colonizationists across the nation.

Southern African Americans

African American experiences and opinions of colonization are in many ways more difficult to access than those of white Southerners. In the North, free blacks expressed their antipathy to the ACS in organized protest meetings, but restrictions on public gatherings of African Americans in the South prevented any similar movement from becoming widespread there. As such, African American resistance to colonization must usually be reconstructed from less direct sources. For example, anti-colonizationist newspapers frequently reported stories such as the 1853 case of “a number of family servants amounting to forty, [who] were called together by the master and mistress, and their freedom tendered to them on the condition that they would emigrate to Liberia. The slaves . . . unanimously refused the offer.”³⁸³ It is easy to dismiss such reports as anti-colonization propaganda, but at least some cases of slaves’ declining Liberian emancipation are documented.³⁸⁴

To decline an offer of freedom was no small decision, but slaves had frequently heard something of Liberia through their own information networks, and viewed it as a pestilential wasteland – and given the colony’s high mortality rate, slaves may have been better informed about conditions in the colony than white colonizationists. As African

³⁸³ *Greenville* [South Carolina] *Mountaineer*, May 19, 1853.

³⁸⁴ See, for example, Burin, *Peculiar Solution*, 60.

American social and familial networks in the South included both enslaved and free individuals, both groups largely shared similar negative opinions of the colonization movement. Southern blacks viewed ACS propaganda about Liberia with suspicion, and went to great lengths even to verify the reports of friends:

Even when their friends wrote to them favourably of the country, inviting them to emigrate, [Maryland free blacks] believed that there was a restraint upon the writers, and that the agent prevented any letters from reaching America, which did not speak in terms of praise of Africa. The ingenuity of the people of colour in the State, however, devised a very simple test of the reliance which might be placed on the letters of their friends. Before they emigrated, they took a small slip of calico, and divided it into two parts; the one was taken by the emigrant, and the other remained with his friend. By sending back these little tokens, assurance was given that the statements in the letters were true, and that he wrote without restraint.³⁸⁵

Southern white colonizationists decried “the belief, almost universal among [African Americans], that [colonization] originates in the sordid motives of fear and interest, and that it is designed to make the bondage of those now in slavery more hopeless and perpetual.”³⁸⁶ Southern blacks thus questioned not only the ACS’s veracity, but also its motives, portraying the supposedly charitable organization as a proslavery front. Some hints of the roots of this antagonism may be found in the Maryland State Colonization Society’s complaint that African Americans’ “indisposition to believe that those who advise their removal are actuated by friendly feelings towards them” was connected with “the tenacity with which in spite of all their experience . . . , they still cling to the hope, that they may at length be allowed more toleration, and may be placed in a position of

³⁸⁵ Alexander, *History of Colonization*, 416. See also Maryland State Colonization Society, *The Fourth Annual Report of the Maryland State Colonization Society, to the Members and the Public* (Baltimore: John D. Toy, 1836), 6.

³⁸⁶ R.S. Finley to J.H.B. Latrobe, Baltimore, August 8, 1832, reel 1, Maryland State Colonization Society Papers, Maryland Historical Society.

greater comfort in this country than has heretofore been the case.”³⁸⁷ In other words, free blacks in the South rejected a central tenet of colonizationist thought – that American prejudice was permanent and immovable. To accept Liberian colonization would be to accept, and thus to acquiesce in, the irremediable injustice of American society. (This argument was more fully elaborated by the black protest movement in Northern states, as I shall discuss in the next chapter.)

Of course, a minority of free blacks and slaves in the South did accept Liberian colonization. For free blacks, Liberia might represent a chance to escape social persecution, the financial opportunities of African trade, or the prospect of full citizenship. For Louis Sheridan, a wealthy black North Carolina businessman, all of these factors appear to have played a role. Sheridan’s initial decision to depart from the United States stemmed from his humiliation at being disfranchised by a new state constitution. He determined to depart for Liberia, where he hoped to receive greater commercial, social, and political freedoms, taking with him a large quantity of building supplies for the Liberian market. (Disappointed in the colony, he succumbed to disease six years later.) Of course, Sheridan was atypical in his wealth, but his story demonstrates the appeals that attracted some free black Southerners to Liberia.³⁸⁸ A rare Southern convention of free blacks in Baltimore demonstrated the conflicts of opinion within the community. Delegates from across the state gathered in 1852 to consider the inducements offered by the ACS; the resulting meeting was deeply divided between delegates inclined toward emigration and a disruptive audience which vocally opposed the proceedings of the meeting. One delegate, after proclaiming “that the colored man

³⁸⁷ Maryland State Colonization Society, *Report of the Board of Managers of the Maryland State Colonization Society, 1st January, 1858* (Baltimore: John D. Toy, 1858), 10.

³⁸⁸ Clegg, *Price of Liberty*, 153-158.

could never rise to eminence except in Africa—in the land of their forefathers,”³⁸⁹ felt sufficiently threatened by the crowd’s response that he proposed to “leave under the protection of the police, and send in the morning his resignation.”³⁹⁰ One of the delegates (most of whom favored emigration) may have spoken for the hostile crowd when he proposed, as an alternative to colonization, that the convention should “raise a fund to fee a lawyer . . . to go to Annapolis next winter to endeavor to obtain a change of legislation in reference to the colored race.”³⁹¹ But most delegates had given up hope of bettering their condition in the United States, as demonstrated by the platform passed by the convention:

[W]hile we appreciate . . . the sincerity of the motives and the activity of the zeal of those who . . . have honestly struggled to place us on a footing of social and political equality with the white population of the country, yet we cannot conceal from ourselves the fact that no advancement has been made toward a result to us so desirable.³⁹²

Even the relatively few free blacks in Maryland who embraced emigration did so reluctantly, as the only possible way to escape the prejudices of their white neighbors.

Emancipated slaves were typically granted less freedom of choice than free black emigrants. For most, Liberia represented their only chance at freedom, as state laws required the removal of emancipated slaves from the state’s borders, and colonizationist emancipators rarely provided for any alternative. Yet traveling to Liberia also required giving up established relationships, cultural familiarity, and potentially even one’s life.

Even if the only alternative were slavery, this was not an easy decision. Slaves

³⁸⁹ “A Typical Colonization Convention,” *The Journal of Negro History* 1, no. 3 (June, 1916), 325. The title given to the reprinted accounts of this meeting in *The Journal of Negro History* is inaccurate, given that this convention was atypical in several ways. First, it was unusual in having taken place in a slave state. Second, it was far more contentious than most Northern black conventions, which habitually passed anti-colonization resolutions without much debate (as will be discussed in Chapter 4).

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 326.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 328.

³⁹² *Ibid.*, 335.

sometimes attempted to postpone their decision point, or their date of embarkation, to preserve the possibility of emancipation while avoiding immediate departure. For example, several of Elijah Seavey's slaves reported that they were "married and connected in such a way, they are unwilling as yet to go."³⁹³ These slaves presented a real, convincing reason for their remaining in the United States, but also – "unwilling as yet" – kept open the possibility of future emancipation.

Of course, although many African Americans looked upon emigration as requiring the abandonment of social connections, Liberian colonists frequently continued to correspond with American friends and family members back in the United States. Many emancipated slaves also communicated with their former masters. Manumitters and manumittees often exchanged affectionate letters many years or even decades after colonization. But emigrants' expression in such missives was limited. Though many probably felt Liberia fell short of the flourishing democracy and tropical paradise promised by colonizationist publications, emancipated slaves formulaically expressed gratitude to the former owners for permitting them to settle there. After all, these transatlantic ties not only were bonds of affection but could also provide crucial resources for colonists attempting to sustain themselves on a foreign shore, with often inadequate support from the ACS.

An 1858 letter from Mary Scott is a typical example. Scott had been emancipated two years earlier, along with 67 other slaves, after the death of her owner, Virginia planter James Hunter Terrell. She wrote to Terrell's nephew and executor James Hunter Minor; her letter, in its entirety, read as follows:

³⁹³ Elijah M. Seavey to Rev. D. Showater, Washington, Mo., June 16, 1855, item 48061, Records of the American Colonization Society, Library of Congress.

Master James Docter Minor, Dear Sir. i Drop you these few lines and i hope that thay may finde you and family well as it leaves me at present and i enjoy good he[l]th at this tim and My Respects to all enquiring frendes and to Mrs Ma[r]ly and Children if you pleas to send mee one Barrel of Bacon and one Barel of flooor one Barrel of fish a keg of Buter a Barrel of Suggar and if you Be pleas to send me a Bonet And a Counter Pin Please to send me a Blue Barage Dress and some Lawn and geigem and a Roll of Bleach Cotton and 3 Pair of Shoes and Stocking if you Please and a Ball of figerd White Ribbon and if you Pleas Sir to Direct our letters and things to Carys Burg if you Pleas Sir. No More to say But Remaine your humle servant.³⁹⁴

For Scott, an ongoing connection with her master's family primarily represented access to provisions and consumer goods which were difficult to acquire in Liberia. However, these requests could only be introduced after the pleasantries of stating her own happy condition, and affectionate inquiry into Minor's family. It is emblematic that Scott addressed Minor as "Master," and described herself as his "humble servant," for she was playing out a paternalist script familiar from her previous life as a slave. Eugene Genovese famously argued that slaves were able to turn the ideology of paternalism "to their own limited advantage" by embracing a reciprocal understanding of the slave system. Masters' "acts of kindness and material support" were seen not as gifts but rather as compensation – "payment, as it were, for services loyally rendered."³⁹⁵ By inquiring after the well-being of her former master's family, Mary Scott laid claim to being part of it. Expressing affection, deference and loyalty, Scott fulfilled her end of the traditional paternalist bargain, and she hoped that Minor would come through on his side with direction and support.

While white colonizationists in both the Upper and Lower South tended to view the scheme as a philanthropic project of gradual emancipation, Christian mission, and

³⁹⁴ Mary Scott to James H. Minor, Careysburg, Liberia, January 21, 1858, Letters from former slaves of Terrell settled in Liberia, 1857-1866, University of Virginia Special Collections.

³⁹⁵ Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 146.

racial renewal, most African Americans in the region were critical of the ACS, portraying it as a selfish plan of segregation, prejudice, and slavery. As I shall demonstrate in the next chapter, these white and black attitudes toward colonization were in each case remarkably similar north of the Mason-Dixon Line.

Chapter 4

Colonization in the North

Regional Colonization Argument(s)

The American Colonization Society's origin myth, frequently repeated in the Society's publications, situated the organization's roots in New Jersey, as the brainchild of Princeton pastor Robert Finley.³⁹⁶ Although this story was widely circulated in the ACS's national publications, it had particular political import in the North, and could be, for New Jersey colonizationists, a point of pride. In 1824, at the founding meeting of the New Jersey state auxiliary colonization society, United States Navy Captain Robert Field Stockton, himself a Princeton native, gave credit to "the Rev. Mr. Finley of this State . . . [for] mak[ing] known the present scheme" of the ACS. Given the Society's supposed Northern roots, it was only natural that the "first and great object of [the authors of the Institution] was a gradual Abolition of Slavery."³⁹⁷

As the foregoing chapters have demonstrated, this emancipationist argument in favor of colonization was by no means confined to the free states of the antebellum North. But it was in the North that the antislavery effects of colonization were most

³⁹⁶ Though ACS publications frequently described Finley as the father of the organization, and his precedence in the movement was generally unassailed by antebellum supporters from across the country, historian Douglas Egerton has more recently brought this narrative into question, suggesting that credit for the Society's founding should instead be assigned to Virginia politician Charles Fenton Mercer. See Egerton, "Its Origin." Regardless of whether it was Finley or Mercer who first floated the idea of a national colonization society, the Society's supposed Northern origin was a point of pride for colonizationists in the free states, and especially in Finley's home state of New Jersey.

³⁹⁷ *Proceedings of a Meeting Held at Princeton, New Jersey, July 14, 1824, to Form a Society in the State of New Jersey, to Cooperate with the American Colonization Society* (Princeton, NJ: D.A. Borrenstein, 1824), 5.

stridently and consistently advocated. In Worcester, Massachusetts, for example, an auxiliary colonization society asserted, “The existence of slavery in the United States has been, with every friend to his country, a constant theme of regret,”³⁹⁸ and presented colonization as the cure to this national disease:

The only remedy for the evil, has been applied by the Society. . . The friends of the Society expected that voluntary emancipation would follow in the train of colonization. It [is] believed that many masters would follow the natural dictates of justice and humanity, and manumit their slaves, when it could be done with safety to themselves, and without danger to the public [as the ACS made possible].³⁹⁹

But such arguments were by no means confined to New England. These sentiments extended west to Ohio, where the state colonization society contended that the ACS’s plan was “the only one, which could unite [North and South], in any efforts for the removal, or even the mitigation, of the greatest evil, and heaviest curse, which afflicts our land”: slavery.⁴⁰⁰ “That Slavery is an evil no one can deny. All must desire to cure the disease.”⁴⁰¹ And colonizationists in the mid-Atlantic states also proclaimed similar arguments. For example, the Pennsylvania Colonization Society published a resolution in 1829 stating that

the views and purposes of the American Colonization Society . . . , its influence in the southern States, by which a number of those who were born to slavery have been emancipated, and the assurances the Society has received that a much greater number now in bondage will be made free when means are afforded to transport them to the colony, entitle the society to the confidence and support of the friends of the abolition of slavery.⁴⁰²

³⁹⁸ *Report Made at an Adjourned Meeting of the Friends of the American Colonization society, in Worcester County, Held in Worcester, Dec. 8, 1830, by a Committee Appointed for that Purpose, with the Proceedings of the Meeting, &c* (Worcester: S.H. Colton and Co., 1831), 11.

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁴⁰⁰ Ohio State Colonization Society, *A Brief Exposition of the Views of the Society for the Colonization of Free Persons of Colour, in Africa; Published under the Direction of the board of Managers of the Ohio State Colonization Society, Addressed to the Citizens of Ohio* (Columbus: David Smith, 1827), 3.

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴⁰² *Reports of the Board of Managers of the Pennsylvania Colonization Society, with an Introduction and Appendix.* (London: John Miller, 1831), 12.

In fact, despite the social, economic, and cultural differences between the free states, there was little regional variation in the arguments advocated by colonizationists across the antebellum North. (Exceptions to this rule will be addressed as appropriate throughout this chapter.)

Of course, it is hardly surprising to find such emancipationist sentiments motivating colonizationism across the North, given that these same arguments were offered in national ACS publications, and even by Southern auxiliary organizations from Virginia to Mississippi. What does distinguish the rhetoric of Northern colonization societies is the prominence granted to the scheme's emancipationist tendencies. The Pennsylvania Colonization Society pamphlet quoted above did not just mention slavery as one of the many problems that colonization might solve; slavery was positioned as colonizationism's primary target from the publication's very first sentence: "Slavery, and its inconsistency with the dictates of Christianity, have long been freely acknowledged and deeply lamented by the people of the United States,—and its removal, the great problem which has occupied the attention of her best and wisest men."⁴⁰³ The Vermont State Colonization Society also took on abolition as its primary goal, pledging "never [to] rest till every slave that treads American soil shall be emancipated."⁴⁰⁴ This was typical of the propaganda published by Northern colonization auxiliaries, in which the desire to end slavery was presented as the animating impetus behind the scheme. This is not to say, of course, that other motivations had no place in Northern discussion of colonization, but the antislavery impulse was presented from the first as the scheme's primary motivation. Epistolary evidence also supports the conclusion that many of the ACS's

⁴⁰³ Ibid., iii.

⁴⁰⁴ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 5, no. 11 (January, 1830), 351.

Northern supporters espoused the cause because of its emancipationist goals. A typical New York supporter accompanied his ten dollar donation to the Society with a note declaring, “I believe the method adopted by the Colonization Society is the best calculated to free our Country of the evil” of slavery.⁴⁰⁵

As early as 1819, colonization was already being promoted in Connecticut as a method “ultimately to produce an entire emancipation of the slaves in America.”⁴⁰⁶ A year before the ACS would send its first colonists to Africa, and three years before the establishment of the Society’s first permanent colony at Monrovia, the Connecticut auxiliary was already anticipating the complete abolition of American slavery, and introducing the scheme to potential supporters as a design to remove the stain of slavery from the nation. At this early date, many were as yet unaware of the Colonization Society, and the founders of Connecticut’s society urged on its audience the moral imperative to hasten emancipation.

[T]hough *we*, in Connecticut, in consequence of the religious principles and wise precautions of our virtuous ancestors, are free from the complicated evils incident to a slave population, and consequently from the crime of trafficking in human flesh and blood . . . , though *we* hear but at a distance, the lash of the task-master’s whip; the groans and shrieks of the miserable captive; or the clanking of his chains . . . – [a]re we not inhabitants of the same nation—citizens of the same Republic—and in a national point of view, if no other, partakers of the guilt and disgrace?—Nay, more: Are not the helpless and suffering captives, “bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh?” Does not the voice of humanity and affection, therefore, as well as the dictates of our holy religion, and the wounded honour of our nation, call upon us in tones deep and potent as thunder, to interpose our utmost exertions in behalf of “suffering humanity?”⁴⁰⁷

⁴⁰⁵ Adonijah Bidwell to Richard Smith, Hillsdale, New York, July 10, 1828, item 1701, Records of the American Colonization Society, Library of Congress.

⁴⁰⁶ Hartford Auxiliary Colonization Society, *Constitution of the Hartford Auxiliary Colonization Society; A List of Officers Chosen at the Organization of the Society; Together with an Address to the Public* (Hartford: Lincoln & Stony, 1819), 9.

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

At this early date, the supporters of the Connecticut auxiliary assumed that they would meet their strongest resistance not from any who would question their plan's abolitionist tendencies, but simply from their New England neighbors' reluctance to sacrifice for the benefit of distant slaves. The guilt for American slavery, the Hartford Auxiliary Colonization Society argued, was national, and the crime one against humanity. Connecticut would have to do its part to help bring an end to the institution. By the end of the antebellum era, nearly every American would be aware of the colonization movement (even if many were opposed or indifferent to it), and Northern colonizationist publications would concern themselves primarily with disabusing readers of their preconceived understandings of the scheme. But in the late eighteen-teens and early '20s, the ACS and its nascent auxiliary societies in the North were publicizing their scheme to an uninitiated audience, and introduced the ACS by proclaiming its goal of eventual abolition. The founders of Connecticut's auxiliary did not anticipate ideological challenges. Rather, they appealed to the beneficence of potential donors, and attempted to reassure them of the plan's practicability. (Though there was not yet an ACS-sponsored settlement in Africa, the Hartford Auxiliary Colonization Society lauded the success of Britain's Sierra Leone colony.)

Of course, though Northern colonizationists proclaimed emancipation as one of their plan's primary advantages, they also anticipated other benefits to be gained from the scheme. For example, in one of the most popular Northern colonizationist pamphlets (it was reprinted in at least thirteen editions), Pennsylvania supporter Mathew Carey listed five distinct blessings to be gained from the ACS's efforts:

[t]o rescue the free coloured people from the . . . degradation . . . to which they are exposed in the United States . . . , [t]o place them in a country where they may

enjoy the benefits of free government . . . , [t]o advert the dangers of a dreadful collision at a future day of the two castes . . . , [t]o spread civilization . . . and true religion throughout the vast continent of Africa . . . , [a]nd . . . to afford slave owners . . . an asylum, to which they may send their manumitted slaves.⁴⁰⁸

This was a typical list of the boons to be expected from colonization; similar inventories could be found in colonizationist propaganda across the country. Like many of his compatriots in the movement, Carey's reasons for supporting the ACS combined charitable and self-interested motives. Liberia represented a refuge for oppressed African Americans, and a Christian mission to pagan Africa. But Carey also expected to realize from the scheme benefits for himself and other white Americans. Removing blacks from the United States would avert "[t]he dangers arising from the great increase of a caste in the nation, who are by custom cut off from all chance of amalgamation with their fellow beings of a different colour."⁴⁰⁹ Like many colonizationists, Carey thought African Americans constituted an inherently foreign population, whose continued residence in the United States could only endanger the country. Colonizationist publications frequently included threatening projections of impending population growth in the nation's African American population, and Carey's pamphlet was no exception; a table calculated that by 1880, the United States would contain over ten million free and enslaved blacks.⁴¹⁰ Carey did not expound on the significance of this figure, but he surely expected it to shock his Northern readers, and to motivate them to support the Colonization Society.

However, though Carey presented black population growth as a threat to the nation, he also made clear that this population would have a greater impact on the South

⁴⁰⁸ Carey, *Letters*, 6-7. Though Carey placed emancipation last on his list of benefits, he emphasized that "[t]he last item has recently assumed a greatly increased importance," in light of Southern laws restricting emancipation, and made clear that he sought the eventual entire abolition of American slavery. *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 15. Carey overestimated black population growth significantly; his projection for the United States' African American population in 1880 exceeded the eventual census data for that year by nearly sixty percent.

than on his white, Northern audience. The ACS, he wrote, “has been violently opposed . . . where it might have rationally been supposed to meet with the most favour, in South Carolina.” To support this statement, he quoted census figures for the state demonstrating “that while the slaves very nearly trebled their numbers [between 1790 and 1830], the whites did not quite double theirs,” and suggested that growing black population “may, and in all probability will, produce repetitions of the horrible scenes which took place at Southampton, at which humanity shudders.”⁴¹¹ Subsequent tables charted black population growth in Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, and Georgia, with no mention made of the Northern free states. Of course, this might seem a logical consequence of the fact that the South contained the vast majority of the nation’s African American population, but it is worth noting that Carey did not represent the nation’s growing black population as an immediate threat to his white, Northern audience. He denounced the vague “evil to be dreaded from the existence among us of a class of people, who, although free, and therefore righteously entitled to all the advantages and privileges of freemen, were nevertheless . . . debarred from them by the inexorable force of public prejudice,”⁴¹² and hinted that two races attempting to occupy the same nation would inevitably be drawn into conflict. But his calculations made clear that if African American populations were damaging or dangerous, white Southerners would suffer sooner and more greatly than his Northern readers. In fact, Carey represented slavery itself as an albatross around the neck of the slave states. Wary of arousing Southern opposition to the ACS, he was cautious in how he approached the subject; the section of the pamphlet labeled “Disadvantages to the Whites resulting from Slavery” contained

⁴¹¹ Ibid., 14.

⁴¹² Ibid., 6.

none of Carey's own words, but rather a series of quotations from Southern colonizationists, all of which suggested that the Southern economy was hindered by the inefficiency of slave labor.⁴¹³ Slavery, Carey argued, was not only immoral and unjust to its black victims, but also damaging to its white perpetrators.

As a whole, then, Carey's appeal on behalf of the Colonization Society did not promise direct benefits for potential white Northern supporters, despite the many other groups who would gain by the scheme. Native Africans would learn Christianity and civilization from Liberian colonists. Free African Americans would find refuge from American prejudice. Southern slaves and slaveowners, yoked together by tradition and necessity, would both emerge from slavery's shadow into the light of a more perfect economy and democracy (though former slaves would have to remove to Liberia to experience these blessings). Notably missing from this list of beneficiaries was the very audience to which Carey appealed for support. Of course, the pamphlet suggested that a biracial society was untenable in the long term, and made vague threats about "the awful consequences likely to ensue, sooner or later, from the admixture of two heterogeneous castes in the country."⁴¹⁴ However, although Carey lived in Philadelphia, home to one of the largest black communities in the North, he made no reference to the African American population of his own city or state, and did not explicitly promise his Northern readers that the ACS would remove black populations from their vicinity.

Such a focus on Southern, rather than Northern, black populations was typical of colonizationist propaganda throughout the Mid-Atlantic States and New England. References to the dangers of free black populations in the North were not utterly

⁴¹³ Ibid., 27.

⁴¹⁴ Ibid., 5.

unknown; an early New Jersey Colonization Society publication, for example, complained

that the black population of New-Jersey is more than twenty thousand. What a mass of ignorance, misery and depravity, is here mingled with every portion of our population, and threatening the whole with a moral and political pestilence. My answer then to the State of New-Jersey is, that this enormous mass of revolting wretchedness and deadly pollution will, it is believed, be ultimately taken out of her territory, if the plan of the Colonization Society be adopted.⁴¹⁵

It is significant that this argument appeared in New Jersey, a state with a significant African American population (including, in 1830, two-thirds of the slaves remaining in the “free states”). Although colonizationist rhetoric from Pennsylvania to Maine generally demonstrated little regional variation, publications in the mid-Atlantic states were more likely to contain foreboding accounts of growing free black populations. For example, one New York pamphleteer threatened that if African American numbers were not reduced by colonization “and the blacks are liberated and left to form a part of our community . . . their natural desire will be to have themselves represented by their own color, and claim to have seats in our legislature.” This possibility the author considered not only ludicrous but also dangerous: “[I]t is by no means certain, but that the aspiring political demagogue of party, to gratify his own ambitions, may be found to advocate their claims . . . , regardless of its unhappy tendencies.”⁴¹⁶ The more fearful tone with

⁴¹⁵ *Proceedings of a Meeting Held at Princeton, New Jersey, July 14, 1824* . . . , 15.

⁴¹⁶ *Remarks Upon a Plan for the Total Abolition of Slavery in the United States, by a Citizen of New-York* (New York: S. Hoyt & Co., 1833), 15. Despite the author’s fear of a politicized black citizenry, he thought the South would suffer the most from growing black populations: “From reasonable calculation it appears that the colored population so much more rapidly increases than the white that the present generation may witness it becoming a very questionable fact whether this may be considered a nation of white or a colored people as regards the southern States.” Ibid. It is also worth mentioning that although the author endorsed the Colonization Society, the Society did not endorse him, or the plan he outlined for the federal government to purchase and emancipate all the nation’s slaves. It does appear that colonizationist arguments presented outside of the purview of organized societies were more likely to focus on the scheme’s benefits for the North’s white citizens. For example, an 1836 colonizationist memorial from Pennsylvania, with no official affiliation to the ACS or any of its auxiliaries, defended the scheme entirely on the merits of its advantages for whites. “We leave the benefits which the blacks themselves are to

which free black populations were discussed in mid-Atlantic publications than in New England's no doubt reflected that these populations were more substantial in the former region.

However, even in the mid-Atlantic states, these arguments were the exception rather than the rule, and the emphasis of most colonization auxiliaries remained squarely on the scheme's utility for ending Southern slavery. (And if some Northern colonizationists departed from the party line by focusing solely on the removal of free blacks, others diverged in the opposite direction, by suggesting that African American populations would be permanent fixtures in the nation's racial landscape.⁴¹⁷) Nor were

receive entirely out of consideration, and present the subject to your view, exclusively in the light of politic expediency." *Petition of citizens of Dauphin County, Pennsylvania, for an annual appropriation to remove to Africa all free negroes and manumitted slaves, &c.* (Washington, DC: 1836), 1. Perhaps organized colonization societies were more careful to avoid appearing selfishly motivated, and suppressed these arguments. However, this does not explain why the ACS's Northern auxiliaries (who dominated colonizationist rhetoric and activity in the region) chose to rely so heavily on the antislavery argument. In any case, if some Northerners (like those of Dauphin County, Pennsylvania) supported the scheme out of a desire to be rid of local free black populations, they had chosen a poor tool for the job, as the vast majority of Liberian emigrants originated in the Southern states.

⁴¹⁷ An 1848 pamphlet printed in both Philadelphia and New York, for example, argued, "If 'the aristocracy of the skin' were laid aside, and the Coloured population of America were invested with the full rights of citizenship, and every civil prize, every useful employment, and every honourable station were thrown open to their exertions, there can be little doubt . . . that the mixture of colours, in the same population, would soon be found *perfectly harmless*." Wilson Armistead, *Calumny Refuted, by Facts from Liberia; with Extracts from the Inaugural Address of the Coloured President Roberts; an Eloquent Speech of Hilary Teage, a Coloured Senator; and Extracts from a Discourse by H.H. Garnett, a Fugitive Slave, on the Past and Present Condition, and Destiny of the Coloured Race* (London: Charles Gilpin, 1848), 3-4. According to this argument, the primary benefit of Liberia was its demonstration of African American abilities, which would counteract the prejudices of American whites. Other Northern colonizationists shared such sentiments. At an 1833 meeting of the Massachusetts Colonization Society, Alexander Hill Everett contended, "The pecuniary means at the disposal of the Association . . . probably never will be, sufficient to pay the expenses of the transportation to Africa, of a tenth part of the annual increase of the colored people. It is quite clear, therefore, that there could be no prospect of ever making any approach, in this way, to a removal of the whole mass. And, Sir, [i]f this could be effected, why should we desire it? Is there not ample room and verge enough in our vast territory for the whole population of all colors, classes, and descriptions?" Massachusetts Colonization Society, *Proceedings at the Annual Meeting of the Massachusetts Colonization Society, Held in Park Street Church, Feb. 7, 1833, together with the Speeches delivered on that occasion by Hon. Messrs. Everett, Ladd, and Cushing, and Rev. Messrs. Stow and Blagden, also the Letters of His Excellency Governor Lincoln, and the Hon. Samuel Lathrop, Communicated to the Meeting* (Boston: Peirce and Parker, 1833), 12. However, these arguments, that colonization would allow African Americans to gain recognition as American citizens, were as exceptional as those which stated that the scheme was primarily oriented toward the removal of the North's free blacks.

the goals of removing local free black populations and national slave populations necessarily mutually exclusive. Colonizationists in West Chester, Pennsylvania complained:

From our local situation, we experience the evil of a free coloured population, in its fullest extent. . . We are principally influenced [to support Colonization] by two considerations, independent of the hope of more immediate local advantages: – First, that we shall aid in suppressing the slave trade, and introducing civilization into Africa. Second, that we shall open a door for gradual emancipation, and the eventual extirpation of slavery at home, without prejudice to the rest of the community.⁴¹⁸

Colonization could thus appeal to motives of both self-interest and charity of Northern supporters.

But even when combined with charitable motives, such open acknowledgments of “the hope of more immediate local advantages” were rare, especially after the mid-1830s. More common were sympathetic descriptions of free blacks’ predicament. “What motive has the black man to be industrious?” the Connecticut Colonization Society asked in one of their publications.

Would you set before him the importance of a good character? But of how much value is character to him who stands now, and must always stand in the lowest order of society? It is this degradation of the condition of our free coloured population which ensures their degradation of character, and their degradation of character reacts to make their condition still more degraded.⁴¹⁹

Any conception of colonization as a charity to free African Americans relied on such logic; the poverty and supposed immorality of free blacks was portrayed as regrettable but unavoidable in the United States. Such superficially sympathetic descriptions of the plight of free blacks were far more frequent in the Northern colonizationist publications

As I have argued, most Northern publications of the ACS and its auxiliaries inclined toward neither view, and instead described the plan primarily as a method gradually to extinguish slavery.

⁴¹⁸ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 3, no. 10 (December, 1827), 310.

⁴¹⁹ Connecticut Colonization Society, *Address to the Public by the Managers of the Colonization Society of Connecticut, with an Appendix* (New-Haven: Treadway and Adam, 1828), 6.

than were hostile characterizations of the free states' African American population. But it was more common still for Northern auxiliaries to avoid the subject altogether, and to present the enterprise primarily as a means to emancipate Southern slaves, to spread Christianity in Africa, and to cut off the Atlantic slave trade. Colonizationist propaganda did dramatize the threat of a burgeoning African American population, but this was portrayed as a national rather than a regional problem, and one from which the free states of the North remained shielded.

Of course, given that during the antebellum period ninety-five percent of the country's black people lived south of the Mason-Dixon Line,⁴²⁰ it might seem logical that Northern colonizationists would focus their attention on the South, rather than the North's comparatively small African American population. But the infrequency of Northern colonizationist promises to remove the region's free black populations suggests that few joined the Colonization Society out of a desire to be rid of free blacks in their own localities. Of course, the ACS made appeals to free blacks across the country to consider Liberian emigration. But if the rhetoric of Northern auxiliary colonization societies is any indication, the ACS's primary appeal in the free states was its promise to remove slavery, not local African Americans.

In fact, Joanne Melish has suggested that in New England, "support for colonization . . . seems to have been inversely related to the actual proportion of free people of color in each state's population"⁴²¹ (that is, that the ACS found its strongest support in the whitest states). However, the ACS's financial records do not bear out this thesis. Taking per capita contributions as the benchmark, the biggest Northern donor

⁴²⁰ James M. McPherson, *Drawn with the Sword: Reflections on the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 15.

⁴²¹ Melish, *Disowning Slavery*, 194.

states included New Jersey, which gave during the antebellum period an average of approximately \$27 a year per 10,000 white population; Vermont, with average donations of \$32 per 10,000 white citizens; Rhode Island with \$36 per 10,000 whites; and Massachusetts, with \$37. These states ran the gamut of free black population density – from New Jersey, almost five percent of whose free population in 1850 was African American, to Vermont, where blacks made up less than a quarter of a percent of the state’s population. (Two and a half percent of Rhode Island’s population was comprised of free blacks, and a slightly less than one percent of Massachusetts’.) The Northern state that gave the most generously to the ACS, by far, was Connecticut, which averaged approximately \$70 in donations each year per 10,000 white citizens; this figure (nearly double that of any other Northern state) is not explained by its free black population, which comprised just over two percent of the state’s population. Such scattered data cannot support definitive analysis, but if there was any correlation at all between a state’s financial support for colonization and the size of its free black population, it seems to have been a positive one, not negative as Melish suggested. (The four Northern states which were in 1850 more than two percent black contributed an average of \$36 to the Colonization Society per 10,000 white population, while the comparable average of the other Northern states’ annual donations was \$12.)⁴²² However, there are simply too many outliers to state definitively that white Northerners who lived alongside free black populations were more likely to support colonization.

What can be said about the lack of definitive correlation between the size of a state’s African American population and its financial support for colonization is that

⁴²² Donation figures are based on ACS Database. Population figures are drawn from *Seventh Census of the United States: 1850* (Washington: Robert Armstrong, 1853).

Northern whites did not seem to be motivated to join the Colonization Society simply because they felt menaced by free black populations in their own state. Of course, some individuals may have hoped that the ACS would remove the “degraded” free blacks from their own localities, but as a whole, regional support for colonization seemed to have little to do the size of a state’s free black population. And the ACS had an active presence in all regions, receiving significant donations in nearly every Northern state from Pennsylvania to Maine and Ohio.⁴²³ This suggests that the Society’s supporters were motivated by something other than fear of their black neighbors. As I have argued,

⁴²³ Most of the funds raised by the ACS and its auxiliaries in the antebellum North were collected by travelling agents who combed the region delivering speeches, distributing literature, and taking collections. Colonization societies developed their fundraising structure over time, and increasingly relied on travelling agents especially in the urbanizing North, where a single individual proselytizing for the cause could reach a wide audience. Indeed, if by the 1840s and ‘50s – the height of antebellum ACS activity – the Society’s correspondence from the Upper South paints a picture of a region crowded with departing emigrants (as discussed in the previous chapter), the same evidence portrays the Northern states of the Atlantic seaboard as crowded with agents. This trend was exacerbated by the practice of both the ACS and its local auxiliaries making separate fund-raising tours. One agent of the New York Colonization Society complained about having to compete with other fund-raising efforts in his state: “When invited to this post, I was told that this State was to be my field to cultivate. . . I inquired in relation to affairs at Albany and was told that Rev. Mr. Dodge had just been there as an agent of the [ACS] and had taken about \$200. . . At Saratoga Springs I received a call from Capt. Barker from ‘down east’ who had come with authority from Washington to collect money. . . He has gone on west where I expect to see him again. At Newburg I called to spend the Sabbath hoping I might get some money for the cause, but I was informed that Rev. John K. Davis an agent of the American Society had just been there and collected from all the liberal friends. . . It was then inexpedient for me to ask more. Since I have come to the city I learn that there is a Mr. Robertson who holds a commission to collect money in this state for the [ACS]. Having found so many in so short a space, I am afraid that there is no room for me to work to advantage.” Chauncey Eddy to Ralph Randolph Gurley, New York, August 8, 1843, item 23036, Records of the American Colonization Society, Library of Congress. Things were no better in Connecticut, where another agent complained that the same John Davis mentioned in the previous letter “had been upon my parish rounds. When I got to Mystic I could do nothing because he had lately been there. So I went on to Stonington and he had lately been there. So I went to New London & complaining to Mayor Williams about it, he told me Mr. Davis had been lately at Sag Harbour.” Samuel Cornelius to Ralph Randolph Gurley, Hartford, September 5, 1843, item 23036, Records of the American Colonization Society, Library of Congress. The ACS’s Northern agents had to compete not only with each other, and the agents of the ACS’s Northern auxiliaries, but also with agents from the Maryland State Colonization Society, who appealed to a Northern audience by pointing out their own state’s willingness to embrace emancipation. After the Society’s 1838 reorganization, these competing agents caused not only logistical headaches, but also management questions, as each state’s representation on the Society’s board partially depended on fundraising success. Residents of the North’s populous cities and towns frequently heard colonization’s virtues extolled by the agents of various societies, and had no shortage of opportunities to contribute to the cause.

Northern colonizationist rhetoric, which made far more frequent claims to success in emancipating Southern slaves than to removing Northern blacks, supports this argument.

Besides its emancipationist tendencies, two other arguments in favor of colonization deserve special attention in the North. First, there was the scheme's missionary agenda. This was a particularly popular argument in New England, where colonization was urged as a method to bring Christianity to benighted Africa. Colonizationists argued that Western Africa "can only be entered prudently by colored men, and that these colonies are the most certain method of subduing it to Christ." Fundamental to the colonizationist sense of racial geography was the belief that "God has surrounded Africa with a climate pestilential to the white races, as a barrier to keep them out of it, that it might be reserved for the negro race."⁴²⁴ Christian missionaries were necessary to redeem pagan Africa, and African Americans represented the only population on the globe with the necessary combination of racial and cultural traits for the task. Of course, this argument was not unique to the antebellum North; the ACS's national publications publicized similar logic. But this argument was advanced more frequently, and seemed to have more purchase, in the antebellum North. The North was home of the most fervent supporters of missionary societies (for example, between 1830 and 1839, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions received nearly sixty percent of its donations from New England, and an additional twenty-four percent from New York⁴²⁵). In addition, Northern colonizationists cited the region's cold climate

⁴²⁴ Massachusetts Colonization Society, *Fourteenth Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Massachusetts Colonization Society, Presented at their Annual Meeting, May 28, 1855* (Boston: T.R. Marvin, 1855), 29.

⁴²⁵ Charles A. Maxfield, "The 'Reflex Influence' of Missions: The Domestic Operations of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, 1810-1850" (PhD diss., Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, 1995, 118n100).

as evidence that African Americans were ill-suited for residence there: “No one . . . who watches the negro, anywhere upon our temperate zone, in the dead of winter, can help a surmise, that the God of nature has another destination in store for the development of his constitutional energies.”⁴²⁶ These factors no doubt contributed to the Northern popularity of colonization’s missionary attraction. For at least a few individuals, in fact, this was the scheme’s primary appeal. One Maine supporter explained his 1831 contribution to the Society by stating that the ACS would “send into Africa the language of England, the freedom of America, and the Protestant religion; and wherever these are, what blessings may we not expect to follow?”⁴²⁷ A New York newspaper friendly to the cause advised in 1826 that although the ACS’s “means are totally inadequate to the end” of removing African American populations, the Society still deserved public support for its influence on “the Christianizing of Pagan Africa. Here is an object worthy of our utmost exertions and our highest regards.”⁴²⁸ However, though such arguments appeared with particular regularity in the North, in most cases colonization’s missionary benefits were discussed as just one of the scheme’s many advantages, and usually considered subsidiary to the greater cause of emancipation.

The second argument in favor of colonization that may have held particular sway in the North was the discussion of the colony’s commercial advantages. Colonizationists promised that “should the plan of Colonizing Africa from the United States succeed . . . it will probably be instrumental to open, in future time, a commerce between the two

⁴²⁶ McGill, *Hand of God*, 10-11.

⁴²⁷ Thomas C. Upham to Ralph Randolph Gurley, Brunswick, Maine, August 25, 1831, item 5430, Records of the American Colonization Society, Library of Congress.

⁴²⁸ *New-York Spectator*, Aug. 8, 1826.

countries incalculably advantageous to both.”⁴²⁹ Of course, the American benefits of any such trade would flow disproportionately to the commercial North. The New Jersey Colonization Society, for example, expected colonization to boost the local economy:

In supplying the colonists in Liberia with the necessary articles for their use, as well as for exchange with the natives for the products of their country, it had been found that various articles of the manufacture of New-Jersey could be beneficially furnished by the society, and that the extension of the colonies and their commerce with the natives would create a considerable market for articles manufactured in New-Jersey ; the interest of the manufacturer, combining with his benevolence, presented an additional inducement to contribute to the enterprise.⁴³⁰

It is difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of such arguments. Northern merchants and ship captains did engage in commerce with Liberia, as they did with every other part of the Atlantic world, but there is little evidence that they considered charitable contributions to the ACS a good investment in their own economic future. Although the colonization scheme’s missionary and commercial advantages were prevalent in Northern accounts, neither of these claims could compare to the frequency with which the plan was defended for its emancipationist tendencies.

If there was a regional exception to this rule of emancipationist rhetoric, it was to be found in Western states like Ohio, where colonization was sometimes presented as a way to minimize or counteract African American immigration into the region. To be sure, colonization was frequently celebrated in the West, as elsewhere across the country, for its emancipationist tendencies. Frank Blair, Jr., for example, opened a colonizationist speech in Cincinnati by stating,

⁴²⁹ Daniel Dana, *A Discourse Addressed to the New Hampshire Auxiliary Colonization Society at their First Annual Meeting, Concord, New Hampshire, June 2, 1825* (Concord: Shephard & Bannister, 1825), 20-21.

⁴³⁰ *Historical Notes on Slavery and Colonization: with Particular Reference to the Efforts which have been Made in Favor of African Colonization in New-Jersey* (Elizabeth-Town, NJ: E. Sanderson, 1842), 30.

Every nation that has embraced Slavery has perished under the intolerable burden—perished either by violence or the poison with which it taints and corrupts society. Already the virus has penetrated, and is spreading through the veins of this nation; and unless speedy relief is found, we shall be fatally infected.⁴³¹

(Of course, Blair presented colonization as the only solution to this disease.) But slavery was not the only burden that Ohio supporters hoped the ACS might remove; they also discussed, more frequently and more openly than their compatriots on the Atlantic seaboard, the scheme's ability to remove the African American population of their own state. In fact, the very constitution of the Ohio State Colonization Society deviated from the usual format for ACS auxiliaries; an addendum to the usual boilerplate about the society's purpose stated that "this Society will contribute its funds and efforts . . . [to] aiding free colored persons of Ohio to emigrate to Africa and by contributing funds not thus appropriated to the [ACS] treasury."⁴³² Unlike most Northern auxiliaries, whose funds were mainly employed in the transportation of emancipated slaves, the OSCS planned to dedicate its resources primarily to the removal of the free blacks of its own state. Colonizationist propaganda in Ohio derided emancipated slaves – "miserable beings, with all the ignorance and degraded habits of thinking and acting which pertain to slavery, . . . [who have] *flooded* upon us in Ohio and Indiana, in yearly accumulating multitudes, to live among us without any of either the qualifications or privileges of citizens or freemen."⁴³³ Of course, the fear of African American immigrants was a longstanding theme in antebellum Ohio politics, and the state had instituted its famously

⁴³¹ Blair, Frank P, Jr., *Colonization and Commerce: An Address Before the Young Men's Mercantile Library Association of Cincinnati, Ohio, November 29, 1859, by Frank P. Blair, Jun. of Missouri*. Cincinnati: 1859.

⁴³² Quoted in Henry Noble Sherwood, "Movement in Ohio to Deport the Negro," *Quarterly Publication of the Historical and Philosophical Society of Ohio* 7, nos. 2 & 3 (June and September, 1919): 56.

⁴³³ *A Brief Exposition of the Views of the Society for the Colonization of Free Persons of Colour, in Africa; Published under the Direction of the Board of Managers of the Ohio State Colonization Society, Addressed to the Citizens of Ohio* (Columbus: David Smith, 1827), 7.

restrictive Black Laws with “one specific objective: to make life for African Americans in Ohio so intolerable that these men and women would not use the free state as a refuge from the oppression of slavery.”⁴³⁴ In 1849, David Christy, the ACS’s appointed agent for Ohio, declared that these laws, “though designed, originally, to operate as a check upon colored immigration, have wholly failed of their object,”⁴³⁵ and presented statistics indicating that between 1800 and 1840, “Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois, have *doubled fifty-five times* on their original numbers” of free black residents.⁴³⁶ Although Christy was critical of slavery, and argued that colonization would help to end its practice in the United States, the emphasis of his appeal lay in his promise to remove free blacks from Ohio, not on the scheme’s emancipationist effects.

While colonizationists in other Northern states often politely suggested that their plan was compatible with that of abolitionists (as will be discussed below), a group of Marion, Ohio citizens who endorsed the ACS vigorously opposed the abolitionist movement: “[T]he propagation of Abolition principles [is] dangerous to the Union of this Republic—calculated to excite animosity between the northern and southern states, and to produce insurrection among the slaves. . . [E]very abolitionist is either willfully or ignorantly an enemy to his country, and . . . those who maliciously persist in urging these dangerous schemes, ought to be held up to public odium and contempt.”⁴³⁷ Other Western states joined in this conception of colonization as primarily a method to remove

⁴³⁴ Stephen Middleton, *The Black Laws: Race and the Legal Process in Early Ohio* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005), 3.

⁴³⁵ David Christy, *A Lecture on African Colonization: Including a Brief Outline of the Slave Trade, Emancipation, Relation of the Republic of Liberia to England, &c., Delivered in the Hall of the House of Representatives of the State of Ohio* (Columbus: J.H. Riley & Co., 1853), 26. Christy delivered this lecture in 1849; the most restrictive of the Black Laws would be abolished later that year. Middleton, *Black Laws*, 153.

⁴³⁶ Christy, *Lecture*, 25.

⁴³⁷ [Columbus] *Ohio Statesman*, February 21, 1840.

free black populations, rather than (or in addition to) a way to enable the end of slavery. In Indiana, the state colonization society complained that by requiring emancipated slaves to leave their native states, the South “drive[s] out the free people of color from the slave States into the free States, or to some foreign land.”⁴³⁸ (Clearly, they preferred the latter option.) In Iowa, whose “black codes” (excluding African Americans from public welfare and public schools, prohibiting black legal testimony against whites, and requiring all black residents to register and post bond) were typical of the region⁴³⁹, lawmakers attempted to entice black residents to emigrate by granting them “certificate[s] entitling [them] to a free passage, from the United States to the coast of Africa.”⁴⁴⁰ (The measure passed the state legislature, but was vetoed by the governor.) On the antebellum northwest’s free frontier, white residents hoped to define the region’s “empty” spaces as uniformly white. Colonization was often seen in the region as the carrot companion to the stick of the “black codes,” and public support for the scheme was oriented more toward the removal of local free blacks than of the nation’s slaves. However, even in the West, where the ACS was often embraced as a method to expel African Americans from the region, traditional antislavery accounts of the movement also proliferated. An 1827 Ohio circular in favor of the ACS, for example, opened with a critique of slavery – “every where admitted to be a great evil” – and concluded that the

scheme which has been adopted, of founding a separate and independent community of free people of color in a distant land . . . will . . . remove the fears of dangers (whether real or imaginary) of the emancipation of slaves in our own

⁴³⁸ Indiana Colonization Society, *Report* (Indianapolis: 1846), 10.

⁴³⁹ Robert R. Dykstra, “Iowans and the Politics of Race in America, 1857-1880,” in *Iowa History Reader*, ed. Marvin Bergman (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1996), 131. Dykstra goes so far as to suggest that “Iowa was the most racist free state in the antebellum Union.” Ibid.

⁴⁴⁰ George W. McCleary to Henry C. Davis, Iowa City, February 7, 1855, item 46727, Records of the American Colonization Society, Library of Congress.

country. . . It is lessening the evil. And should its progress be in the ratio of an *accumulating power*, may it not eventually eradicate the evil wholly?⁴⁴¹

Such an emancipationist argument could have appeared in any state of the antebellum North.

From its outset, the ACS received a fairly friendly reception in the Northern press, which faithfully reported upcoming meetings and excerpted the Society's reports. But the organization did arouse some opposition in the region. For one, communities of the scheme's supposed beneficiaries, free blacks, made clear their distaste for the Society in published memorials and large public gatherings, beginning with a large protest rally in Philadelphia a few short months after the ACS's foundation.⁴⁴² Free African Americans charged that the Colonization Society encouraged their expulsion from the land of their birth, and questioned the organization's claims that emancipation would follow in colonization's wake. (The significance of African American opposition to colonization will be discussed in greater depth below.) However, the black protest movement was little reported in the North's white press, and for the first fifteen years of the Society's existence, the arguments that free black communities presented against the scheme were not widely circulated outside those communities.⁴⁴³ Early opposition to colonization in

⁴⁴¹ [Chillicothe] *Scioto Gazette*, June 14, 1827. Thomas Matijasic's study of Protestant support for colonization in antebellum Ohio similarly found that Ohio colonizationists offered the same arguments as their peers across the Northern states: "[T]he movement provided them with a way to combat the evils of slavery and the degradation of free blacks without the risk of offending traditional prejudices. . . [T]he Liberian project was seen as part of a larger movement to spread Christianity to 'unenlightened' portions of the world." Thomas D. Matijasic, "The African Colonization Movement and Ohio's Protestant Community," *Phylon* 46, no. 1 (1st Quarter, 1985): 16.

⁴⁴² Staudenraus, *African Colonization Movement*, 32-33.

⁴⁴³ In 1816, as the fledgling ACS prepared its first memorial requesting congressional sponsorship, Washington DC's *National Intelligencer* did publish a "Counter Memorial . . . in behalf of the free people of colour" of the city. The article opened with a fairly accurate summary of free black complaints with the Colonization Society ("Your memorialists . . . would rather die than quit their native country; . . . they never will consent to go to Africa, or any other country; but . . . will cling to this their native soil whilst they have breath, and be buried where their fathers are buried"), but was revealed in the end to be a satirical fabrication, advancing a "remedy [for white American prejudice] at once natural, easy and efficacious—

the North's mainstream newspapers usually took the form of questioning the practicability of the scheme. In 1823, for example, New York's *National Advocate* summarized the Society's early difficulties in establishing a permanent colony in Liberia, and concluded that "this scheme of African colonization is to be a source of trouble and expense, without any good or permanent results; and as such we consider it prudent to abandon the scheme altogether."⁴⁴⁴ This was not ideological opposition; rather, the critique was that the Colonization Society was over-ambitious, and could never hope to afford the removal of significant numbers of African Americans.

Northern colonizationists took such critiques seriously, and responded to them at length. In an 1829 speech, Massachusetts pastor Baxter Dickinson admitted that the "transportation of more than two millions of souls to a remote country is indeed an object of formidable aspect. . . . But that the number can be gradually diminished, till utterly extinguished, may be made to appear . . . from a simple arithmetical calculation."⁴⁴⁵ Dickinson produced figures indicating that drawing off the annual increase in the nation's African American population would eventually enable the complete colonization of all the nation's blacks. He also reiterated the imagined perils that made colonization imperative: "[I]f nothing is done to arrest their increase, we shall have in twenty years four millions of slaves; in forty years eight millions; in sixty years sixteen millions, and a million of free blacks . . . – enough for a powerful empire! And how can they be

your memorialists mean the remedy of *amalgamation*." [Washington, DC] *Daily National Intelligencer*, December 30, 1816. Thus, the concerns of African American critics of colonization were mocked, and their motivations for wanting to remain in their native country brought into question.

⁴⁴⁴ [New York] *National Advocate*, July 25, 1823.

⁴⁴⁵ Baxter Dickinson, *Sermon, Delivered at Springfield, Mass., July 4th, 1829, Before the Auxiliary Colonization Society of Hampden County, by Baxter Dickinson, Pastor of the First Church in Longmeadow* (Springfield: S. Bowles, 1829), 11.

governed?”⁴⁴⁶ Free blacks were an afterthought in this account; the real problem lay with Southern slave populations, which Dickinson hoped could be removed from the country in their entirety, thus ending the twin dangers the US faced in slavery and its growing black population. When the practicability of the colonization plan was brought into question early in the ACS’s history, Northern colonizationists did not respond by reducing their ambitions. Rather, they reasserted the merits of their scheme (including the eradication of American slavery), and proclaimed that even the immense task of colonizing the United States’ entire African American population could be accomplished in gradual stages. The idea that colonization would enable the removal of slavery from the nation (and of the slaves themselves) remained central in the rhetoric of the plan’s supporters.

Responding to the Abolitionist Challenge

If the ACS hoped to position itself as the path out of slavery, and the nation’s primary organization dedicated to dismantling the institution, this dream was ended fifteen years after the Society’s founding by none other than former supporter William Lloyd Garrison. By the beginning of the 1830s, Garrison had turned against the scheme. From its foundation in 1831, his organ *The Liberator* published frequent criticisms of the Colonization Society, and the following year, his book *Thoughts on African Colonization* appeared, presenting a thoroughgoing critique of the colonization movement. Garrison described the ACS as a

CONSPIRACY AGAINST HUMAN RIGHTS . . . , proclaiming the absurdity, that our free blacks are natives of Africa; . . . propagating the libel, that they cannot be elevated and improved in this country; . . . exciting the prejudices of the [white]

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid., 18.

people against them; . . . apologising for the crime of slavery; . . . [and] conceding the right of the planters to hold their slaves.⁴⁴⁷

With Garrison at its head, the movement for the immediate abolition of slavery would gain many converts from the Colonization Society from across the North during the antebellum period. Prominent defectors included Garrison himself (a Massachusetts native), New Yorkers Arthur Tappan, Lewis Tappan, and Gerrit Smith, and Ohioan migrants James Birney and Elizur Wright. (Birney was a former Southern slaveholder, and Wright had previously resided in Connecticut and Massachusetts.) Though the withdrawal of these men, and countless other less famous allies, no doubt harmed the Colonization Society, it also revealed the emancipationist agenda that had motivated them to join its ranks in the first place. These former supporters had joined the Colonization Society in the eighteen-teens and '20s, believing that it presented the only national plan to end Southern slavery, and began defecting in the 1830s, after Garrison's formation of the American Anti-Slavery Society – a more explicitly antislavery option than the ACS, which refrained from condemning slaveowners for fear of offending potential Southern subscribers.

Abolitionists presented a number of critiques of the colonization movement. Garrison wrote that the Colonization Society was “agreeable to slaveholders, because it is striving to remove a class of persons who they fear may stir up their slaves to rebellion.”⁴⁴⁸ Though the ACS professed to seek the end of slavery, Garrison charged, the organization concealed a proslavery agenda. The Society officially restricted its operations to colonizing free blacks, and Garrison argued that it specifically targeted free blacks from the slave states, in order that slaves themselves might be held in more secure

⁴⁴⁷ *The Liberator* 1, no. 17 (April 23, 1831), 1.

⁴⁴⁸ Garrison, *Thoughts*, part 1, p. 21.

bondage. This argument distorted the ACS's agenda; although more than three-quarters of the free African Americans colonized by the Society during the antebellum period did in fact originate from Southern states, the majority of emigrants were emancipated slaves – a point Northern colonizationists never tired of making in their responses to abolitionist attacks. If abolitionists cast doubt on the Society's emancipationist agenda in the South, they also attacked its pretensions of charity to free blacks. As reformed colonizationist Elizur Wright put it, "There pervades the whole community, a strong prejudice against the colored race. . . The Society, not only acknowledges the existence of such a prejudice, but it pronounces it unconquerable. . . Therefore the Colonization Society . . . *humors its own wicked prejudice.*"⁴⁴⁹ This critique was closer to the mark. Colonizationists did in fact portray white Americans' prejudice against blacks as an insurmountable fact; they argued that it was more feasible to remove African American populations four thousand miles across the Atlantic Ocean than it was to remove white Americans' bigotry toward them. Although colonizationist organizations were generally careful to avoid condoning anti-black prejudice, especially in the North, abolitionists contended that the ACS's protests of powerlessness in the face of this prejudice was akin to a tacit endorsement. (As I will discuss below, both of these abolitionist critiques of colonization had been advanced by the movement's black opponents for years before they were adopted by white abolitionists like Garrison.)

The influence of the abolitionist movement should not be exaggerated. As historian Merton Dillon has argued, "Few aspiring businessmen and few clergymen in the national denominations . . . could support abolition. No politician whose election

⁴⁴⁹ Elizur Wright, Jr., *The Sin of Slavery, and Its Remedy; Containing Some Reflections on the Moral Influence of African Colonization* (New York: W. Osborn and Co., 1833), 23.

depended on more than a small, homogeneous constituency dared advocate such a program or even allow it to be advanced within his district.”⁴⁵⁰ Even those in the North who were inclined toward emancipation (as were most colonizationists) did not necessarily align themselves with either the colonization or abolition causes. “A good many Northerners who recognized slavery as an evil, even as a sin, nevertheless considered it a problem so remote from their own lives that it did not require active interference.”⁴⁵¹ Immediate abolitionists remained a radical minority in the North throughout the antebellum era. Louis Ruchames estimates the membership of the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1838 at 250,000⁴⁵² – only two and a half percent of the total population of the free states. In national elections, the openly abolitionist Liberty Party received only 2.3% of the nation’s popular vote at its peak (in the 1844 presidential election, with former colonizationist James Birney heading the ballot) – and less than nine percent of the vote in its stronghold of New England.⁴⁵³ Even the Free Soil Party’s much more muted attack on slavery failed to attract enough votes to become a viable national or even a stable regional party. Only after the outrages of the 1850s (the Fugitive Slave Act, the Kansas-Nebraska Act, the Dred Scott decision, etc.), and a further tempering of rhetoric would a successful antislavery political party emerge in the North: the Republicans, whose “free labor” ideology valued the North’s “society of opportunity where work was honored” over the South’s “stagnant, hierarchical society where labor

⁴⁵⁰ Dillon, *Abolitionists*, 26-27.

⁴⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 84.

⁴⁵² Louis Ruchames, *The Abolitionists: A Collection of Their Writings* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1963), 20.

⁴⁵³ Reinhard O. Johnson, *The Liberty Party, 1840-1848: Antislavery Third-Party Politics in the United States* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009), 45-46.

was debased.”⁴⁵⁴ And this ideology was more aligned with the ACS’s moderate critique of slavery than with the agenda of organizations advocating the immediate abolition of slavery. Despite the much greater historiographical attention devoted to abolitionists than to colonizationists, the evidence indicates that the ACS had at least as much support as the Anti-Slavery Society in the antebellum North, if not in fact significantly more.

However, the abolitionists had two organizational advantages over the Colonization Society. First, their strategies of public critique and political action did not require them to incur any significant expenses. The American Anti-Slavery Society utilized a fundraising structure similar to that of the ACS and other contemporary benevolent societies. But unlike the ACS, the abolitionist society could direct the vast majority of its funds toward publicizing its ideology. In 1835, for example, the AASS raised an impressive thirty thousand dollars for a campaign “to flood every town and hamlet, North and South, with mailings of abolitionist literature”—over a million items in total.⁴⁵⁵ The Colonization Society’s donations that year slightly exceeded this figure (totaling over thirty-six thousand dollars⁴⁵⁶), but it could only dream of matching the AASS’s public relations budget. After all, the ACS was pledged to support its African colony, and to assist emigrants to find their way there. Colonization was expensive, and the perennially cash-strapped ACS could never afford major publicity expenditures (unless the publicity might pay for itself by recruiting new donors). Although the ACS’s receipts typically exceeded those of the AASS (and usually by a wider margin than in 1835), the abolitionist organization was able to produce a larger volume of argument and

⁴⁵⁴ William E. Gienapp, *The Origins of the Republican Party, 1852-1856* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 356.

⁴⁵⁵ Stewart, *Holy Warriors*, 70.

⁴⁵⁶ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 42, no. 7 (July, 1866), 223.

propaganda. With most of its budget devoted to the practical requirements of Liberian colonization, the ACS struggled to compete with the flood of abolitionist writings. The abolitionists were thus able to produce a volume of supporting literature disproportionate to the number of their members. As Garrison put it, “the genius of the abolition movement is to have *no plan*.”⁴⁵⁷ The colonization movement, on the other hand, was perennially hamstrung by the practical requirements of its own ambitious plan.

The second advantage of abolitionists in their contest with colonizationists was that they were not attempting to appeal to a national constituency, and could afford to be as harsh as they wanted in their criticism of slaveholders; indeed, that was the point. This is not to say that abolitionists made no attempt to appeal to Southern slaveholders. But fundamental to the abolitionist movement was the idea that owning slaves was an inherent sin, which only complete and immediate renunciation could rectify. Garrison and his American Anti-Slavery Society pulled no punches in their attack on slavery. As he put in *The Liberator*'s famous inaugural editorial, “I will be as harsh as truth, and as uncompromising as justice. . . I do not wish to think, or to speak, or to write, with moderation.” The immense crime of slavery demanded immediate and uncompromising opposition. “Tell a man whose house is on fire to give a moderate alarm.”⁴⁵⁸ Though the ACS had consistently proclaimed an emancipatory agenda from its foundation through the 1830s, it sought an audience among slaveholding Southerners. Even if the Society's Southern supporters were inclined toward gradual emancipation (and as the previous chapter suggests, most of them were), extreme rhetoric like Garrison's could easily drive them from its ranks. And of course, the ACS was concerned with appealing not only to

⁴⁵⁷ Quoted in Stewart, *Holy Warriors*, 56.

⁴⁵⁸ *The Liberator* 1, no. 1 (January 1, 1831), 1.

the minority of Southerners who actively participated in the organization, but also the larger audience of potential supporters in the region. The result was a striking contrast between abolitionist and colonizationist rhetoric. The abolitionists' more strident language appealed to Northerners with the strongest antislavery convictions – exactly the dedicated people most likely to commit to significant organizational efforts or donate substantial sums to the cause. Indeed, the ACS saw more defection in its top ranks of leadership and donors than among rank and file members.

Where Garrison proclaimed that “every American citizen, who detains a human being in involuntary bondage as his property, is, according to Scripture . . . a man-stealer,”⁴⁵⁹ colonizationists presented a more measured critique. Massachusetts supporter William Peabody, for example, admitted that “[t]here are not many who will say that the relation of master [to] slave is defensible in itself,” but hastened to add that “nothing can be more unjust than to censure [slaveowners] for receiving this sad inheritance from their fathers.”⁴⁶⁰ Though Peabody addressed a New England audience, he may have chosen his words carefully to avoid any potential offense to slaveowners; as he recognized, any plan of emancipation through colonization relied on their support. The differing constituencies of the Colonization and Anti-Slavery Societies only partially explain their divergent rhetoric, however. After all, Peabody was a Massachusetts native, speaking to a Massachusetts audience, whose speech was published by a regional Massachusetts auxiliary society. He had little reason to suspect that his appeal would reach an audience

⁴⁵⁹ Quoted in Ruchames, *Abolitionists*, 80.

⁴⁶⁰ William B.O. Peabody, *An Address, Delivered at Springfield, before the Hampden Colonization Society, July 4, 1828* (Springfield: S. Bowles, 1828), 8-9.

beyond the state.⁴⁶¹ Of course, with the antebellum era's explosion of print and transportation technologies, there could be no guarantee that language intended for one audience would not be reproduced for another. But even when Northern colonizationists addressed a Northern audience, and could be reasonably sure that no slaveowners were present to take offense, they were moderate in their criticisms of slavery.

Garrison's strategy for attacking the Colonization Society was to repeat the pronouncements of its own supporters, often out of context or edited for maximal impact. To choose just one among many possible examples, his *Thoughts on African Colonization* quoted a writer in one of the ACS's own publications as saying, "I may be permitted to declare that I would be a slaveholder to-day without scruple,"⁴⁶² but did not include the same author's argument that perpetual slavery was unjustified, or his statement, two sentences later, that "the most detestable of monsters in action . . . is the advocate by cool argument of slavery in the abstract."⁴⁶³ As a believer in slaveholders' immediate duty to emancipate, Garrison would have taken exception to any argument for the temporary necessity of slavery, no matter the context. However, through selective quotation, he made the movement appear to be proslavery, while omitting the antislavery statements that nearly always accompanied the quotations that he chose to excerpt and reprint. From the beginning of the 1830s through the Civil War, the abolitionist pressure

⁴⁶¹ In fact, the ACS's national organ *The African Repository* did publish excerpts of Peabody's speech, but it excised the passages that were most critical of slavery, or which hinted at the possibilities of slave revolt. For example, the version of Peabody's speech published in Springfield mentioned slaveholders "who desire the religious improvement of their slaves, [but] naturally fear to enlighten them, when it seems as if the letting in of light to such a race would reveal the secret of their physical strength, and the like the candle in the fire-damp of the mine, cause a quick and awful explosion." *Ibid.*, p. 13. The text of the speech published in the *African Repository* did not include such language, and instead focused almost exclusively on Peabody's discussion of religion and sin, leaving it largely implicit that slavery was the sin under discussion. *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 4, no. 8 (October, 1828), 225-230.

⁴⁶² Quoted in Garrison, *Thoughts*, part 1, p. 63.

⁴⁶³ *The Fourteenth Annual Report of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour of the United States, with an Appendix* (Washington: James C. Dunn, 1831), 29.

on the Colonization Society was unrelenting. Colonizationists complained that the “practice of [the] Abolitionists . . . has been upon precisely the same principle that the Atheist proves from the bible that ‘*there is no God,*’ viz: by omitting the antecedent and most important portion of the sentence—‘*The fool hath said in his heart.*’”⁴⁶⁴ But the abolitionist attack did disrupt colonizationist activity in the North, especially in New England. After all, the impact of the abolitionist movement on the ACS must be measured not only in the number of converts who rushed into the open arms of the AASS, but also in the doubts the abolitionists raised about the ACS’s pretensions to encourage emancipation. One did not need to embrace fully the abolitionist position in order to find the abolitionist critique of colonizationism compelling, and the fighting between the two major antislavery groups doubtless raised questions for many potential supporters of colonization who would otherwise have considered the ACS unproblematically antislavery.

Abolitionism did not cripple ACS fundraising in the North; contributions received from the free states averaged \$6,200 annually between 1826 – when record-keeping begins—and 1829, and then increased to \$16,600 a year in the 1830s, \$17,200 in the 1840s, and \$27,000 in the 1850s. But the abolitionist movement did pose a serious challenge to the ACS in the North; if nothing else, its vocal criticism ensured that colonization could never again appear uncontroversial. During the three decades prior to the Civil War, Northern colonization auxiliaries increasingly dedicated themselves to combating abolitionist attacks. Whereas during the eighteen-teens and ‘20s, Northern colonizationists had concerned themselves primarily with combating occasional criticisms of the scheme’s practicability, in the ‘30s they turned to address abolitionist

⁴⁶⁴ *New-York Spectator*, March 26, 1835.

critiques. As late as 1831, the Massachusetts Colonization Society was still primarily concerned with haranguing white Northerners who felt no responsibility to help end slavery. “The southern and northern sections of our country are parts of a great whole, and, like fellow-members of the same body, should feel a mutual interest in the good and evil of each other. . . . The evil [of slavery] is national, . . . requir[ing] the energies and resources of the entire nation to check it.”⁴⁶⁵ But in subsequent years, Northern colonizationist propaganda increasingly turned from critics on the right (who questioned the need to help end slavery) to those on the left (who questioned the ACS’s desire or ability to do so). During the ACS’s early years, Northern colonization societies thought their audiences might need convincing to participate in an antislavery movement. By the mid-1830s, proponents of colonization increasingly presumed their audience’s antislavery inclinations, and argued for their particular scheme as the only practical route toward ending slavery. In 1833, Massachusetts state senator Caleb Cushing thought his antislavery sentiments “to have universal currency throughout New England. . . . [A]ware of the extraordinary violence of language employed in certain quarters to impugn the motives and abstract doctrine of . . . [the ACS], I have felt bound to put on record, in the outset, a distinct declaration of [antislavery] creed . . . , at the risk of seeming to argue that, which none disputes.”⁴⁶⁶ The abolitionist challenge did not weaken the emancipationist rhetoric of Northern colonizationists; rather, they responded by reasserting the antislavery principles and emancipationist tendencies of their scheme.

⁴⁶⁵ Massachusetts Colonization Society, *American Colonization Society and the Colony at Liberia* (Boston: Peirce & Parker, 1831), 11-12.

⁴⁶⁶ Caleb Cushing, *An Oration Pronounced at Boston Before the Colonization Society of Massachusetts, on the Anniversary of American Independence, July 4, 1833* (Boston: G.W. Light & Co., 1833), 7.

Colonizationists throughout the free states felt the impact of abolitionism, but the Anti-Slavery Society drew its strongest support in New England, and it was here that the ACS faced its most significant challenge. From the 1830s on, the Society's agents frequently reported that abolitionist sentiment hindered their fundraising in the region. "I have just returned from a short tour into Worcester County," one complained after a failed 1841 fundraising drive in Massachusetts, "& find almost every town to [be] *thoroughly abolitionized*. . . [I]t is almost impossible to raise much for Colonization."⁴⁶⁷ Mid-Atlantic supporters reported fewer problems; one New Jersey colonizationist wrote that "we are not vexed here with a single abolitionist."⁴⁶⁸ Though the immediate abolitionist movement was undoubtedly larger in New England than in the mid-Atlantic states, the divergent reports of colonizationists between the two regions probably had as much to do with the regional differences in the tone of abolitionist groups as with these groups' size or popularity. New England abolitionists were particularly strident in their criticisms: "[T]he principles and operations of the American Colonization Society are anti-scriptural and anti-republican; and therefore ought to be execrated by every lover of his country, and friend of the human family."⁴⁶⁹ In the mid-Atlantic states, while abolitionists did not endorse colonization, they did not so frequently or so strenuously attack it.⁴⁷⁰ As Beverly Tomek has demonstrated, there was significant overlap in Pennsylvania between colonizationists and abolitionists:

⁴⁶⁷ Dorus Clarke to Samuel Wilkeson, Chicopee Falls, Massachusetts, April 20, 1841, item 19033, Records of the American Colonization Society, Library of Congress.

⁴⁶⁸ Ethan Osborn to Joseph Gales, Fairfield, New Jersey, August 10, 1836, item 12415, Records of the American Colonization Society, Library of Congress.

⁴⁶⁹ New England Anti-Slavery Society. *Second Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the New-England Anti-Slavery Society* (Boston: Garrison & Knapp, 1834), 8.

⁴⁷⁰ While it is true that mid-Atlantic abolitionist texts were more likely to eschew or minimize critiques of colonization than those published in New England, this fact should not be overemphasized. Mid-Atlantic abolitionists included several vocal critics of the Colonization Society. In his book-length comparison of

By 1830, . . . [a]t least 31 [Pennsylvania Abolition Society] members had either joined [the American Colonization Society or the Pennsylvania Colonization Society] or contributed money to [a] fund drive to send emigrants to the colony. Of the 100 donors listed . . . in the West Chester Colonization Society's ledger, 15 were clearly, and 8 were likely, affiliated with the abolition society.⁴⁷¹

There was also more support for cooperation between the two groups in Ohio, where one abolitionist proposed assembling a “committee, to consist of two Abolitionists and one Colonizationist; or, if thought preferable, three Abolitionists and two Colonizationists” to produce a tract demonstrating the superiority of free over slave labor.⁴⁷² However, if abolition presented its strongest challenge in New England, this does not appear to have had a significant effect on the ACS's fundraising in the region; average annual per capita contributions from the region remained steady through the 1830s and '40s, then increased by over sixty percent in the decade before the Civil War.⁴⁷³ It is probable that the Colonization Society benefited from growing antislavery sentiment in New England more than it was hurt by abolitionists' attacks.

Given that support for emancipation was nearly universal among Northern colonizationists (indeed, many had been motivated to join the organization in the hope that it would safely remove the stain of slavery from the nation), most saw the fight with the abolitionists as wasteful and unnecessary. Many argued that colonization and abolition societies should be natural allies, rather than enemies. As Cushing complained,

the colonizationism and abolitionism, for example, New Yorker William Jay refrained from arguing that the ACS had been founded to support slavery, but he ridiculed its pretensions to promote abolition: “[T]he society aim[s] at abolishing slavery, by declaring it lawful; increasing its profits, and lessening its dangers; and . . . covering with obloquy, and denouncing as fanatics, all who dissent from its assertion, that this is ‘the only possible mode’ of relieving the country from slavery.” William Jay, *An Inquiry into the Character and Tendency of the American Colonization and American Anti-Slavery Societies, Third Edition* (New York: Leavitt, Lord & Co., 1835), 107.

⁴⁷¹ Beverly Tomek, “Seeking ‘an Immutable Pledge from the Slave Holding States’: The Pennsylvania Abolition Society and Black Resettlement,” *Pennsylvania History* 75, no. 1 (2008): 46.

⁴⁷² *Proceedings of the Anti-Slavery Convention, Assembled at Philadelphia, December 4, 5, and 6, 1833* (New York: Dorr & Butterfield, 1833), 29.

⁴⁷³ Specifically, donations received from New England states averaged \$29.22 per 10,000 white citizens between 1830 and 1850, and \$49.30 per 10,000 whites between 1851 and 1860. ACS Database.

I conceive it to be a matter of unspeakable regret, that the friends of another association, professing purposes of philanthropy akin to ours, – I mean the Anti-Slavery society, – should have deemed it needful or proper to commence a deliberate and persevering warfare on the aims of the Colonization Society.⁴⁷⁴

After all, “We, who maintain the principles of the Colonization Society, ardently desire the abolition of slavery, whenever, and so soon, as it can be peaceably accomplished; and herein our anxiety falls not short of that, which actuates the members of the Anti-slavery society.”⁴⁷⁵ The differences between the abolition and colonization movements, Cushing argued, did not reflect divergent goals, but rather a tactical disagreement. He emphasized that “By the Constitution, [the Southern states] alone [have] the power to act in this matter” of legally abolishing slavery.⁴⁷⁶ Given that only the voters of the South had any constitutional power to bring slavery to a close, Cushing argued that abolitionist invective was unlikely to accomplish its goals: “To think of inducing [Southerners] to abolish the slave-system, . . . by language of menace, dictation, reproach, and general obloquy, – is mere infatuation.”⁴⁷⁷ The Colonization Society, on the other hand, was

of manifest utility in respect of enslaved blacks, because, in addition to its direct agency in conveying them to Africa when emancipated, it tends to promote and encourage the spirit of emancipation, and by . . . the discussion it elicits, the cultivated and influential individuals in the South, who engage in its cause, gradually bring to a right conclusion the minds of the slave-holders themselves, through whom alone the abolition of the system of slavery can be peacefully accomplished.⁴⁷⁸

By promoting the calm discussion and practice of emancipation, Cushing argued, the Colonization Society would do more to influence Southern slaveholders than all the

⁴⁷⁴ Cushing, *Oration*, 11-12.

⁴⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁴⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁴⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁴⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

angry ink spilled by abolitionists. If anything, the abolitionists' tactics were counterproductive:

[T]heir influence is extremely and entirely pernicious in the slave-holding States . . . , – calculated to check manumission and to defer the period of the final abolition of slavery, at the same time that they engender at the South a most unfortunate feeling of irritation, resentment, and jealousy towards the North.⁴⁷⁹

Cushing did not directly reply to the abolitionist charge that the ACS encouraged prejudices, but he did point out that such prejudices had long predated the colonization movement, and contended that the ACS would force no one to leave the country: “[T]he Colonization Society says to the free colored inhabitants of the United States: ‘We . . . offer to you a participation in the advantages now enjoyed in Liberia . . . ; – if you accept them, it is well; if you prefer to remain here, the inferior class, it is well.’”⁴⁸⁰ Cushing portrayed the Colonization Society as an entirely charitable enterprise, uninfected with any motivations of self-interest: “[T]he emigration from among us of all the colored inhabitants of the country would, in my opinion, occasion a chasm in various walks of industry, which I am at a loss to see how we should supply; – and therefore I am not prepared to admit that their removal would be for *our* interest.”⁴⁸¹

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid., 20.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid., 9. Some Northern colonizationists went even farther. Massachusetts supporter Alexander Hill Everett thought Liberia's success would eradicate American prejudice: “By establishing colonies of free and civilized blacks in Africa, and raising the general standard of civilization on that continent, it will gradually remove the prejudice against the colored race, and place them in public opinion where they ought to stand—upon a footing of perfect equality with their brethren of the great human family.” Massachusetts Colonization Society, *Proceedings at the Annual Meeting of the Massachusetts Colonization Society, Held in Park Street Church*, 13. Everett was unusually liberal in his views on African Americans, however, and thought that white prejudice, and not black residency, was the problem that African colonization could remove. “I am quite willing that the colored people should remain with us. What we really ought to desire is, that their present political situation should be improved, . . . that they should be placed . . . on an equal footing in point of civil and political rights, with all the other inhabitants of our favored country.” Ibid., 12. This was a minority position among Northern colonizationists, few of whom anticipated African Americans being incorporated into the American citizenry.

⁴⁸¹ Cushing, *Oration*, 20-21.

Cushing's arguments were typical of Northern colonizationists' response to the abolitionist attack – and for that matter, typical of the national Society's reaction. Though they expressed private frustrations with the imprecations of Garrison and his cohort (one New Jersey supporter hoped for a future in which “there will hardly remain a grease spot to shew [sic] where abolitionism sat”⁴⁸²), Colonization Society supporters in the North were publicly polite toward their antislavery brethren in the Anti-Slavery Society – much more polite, in fact, than the general public of the North, where abolitionists occasionally endured the violence of angry mobs. The ACS emphasized that the two groups sought the same end (though the colonization scheme had additional benefits to recommend it, such as its missionary outreach to Africa), and questioned only the abolitionists' tactics. In order for slavery to be peacefully abolished, Southern slaveowners had to be convinced to sacrifice their slave property. Such a persuasive task called for high rhetorical powers, and the Colonization Society, with its Southern support base and moderate language, was more suited to this goal than the abrasive Anti-Slavery Society.

In a Pennsylvania speech, William Henry Ruffner made this point through parable:

The wind and sun vied with each other to strip the cloak from the traveler. The wind raged and stormed, but the traveler the more resolutely wrapped his cloak around him. . . [T]he sun came out with its smiling face and gentle beams, and the traveler laid off his cloak for his own comfort and convenience. Abolitionism is the wind; colonization is the sun.⁴⁸³

⁴⁸² George W. Janvies to Joseph Gales, Pitts Grove, NJ, July 11, 1838, item 14246, Records of the American Colonization Society, Library of Congress.

⁴⁸³ William Henry Ruffner, *Africa's Redemption: A Discourse on African Colonization in its Missionary Aspects, and in its relation to Slavery and Abolition, Preached on Sabbath Morning, July 4th, 1852, in the Seventh Presbyterian Church, Penn Square, Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: S. Martien, 1852), 33.

The friendly advances of the Colonization Society were much more likely to succeed in convincing Southerners to emancipate their slaves than the angry rhetoric of abolitionists. The fact that Ruffner was himself a Southerner (a native of Virginia) gave him added authority in the eyes of his Philadelphia audience. “No one but a Southerner knows, or can know,” he asserted, “how general is the antipathy of the Southern people to the institution” of slavery. “The South, if let alone, would spew out slavery in less than a generation. . . [Its white residents] know well that they are the chief sufferers in the matter; and they would gladly deliver themselves.”⁴⁸⁴ Such was the image of the Southerner depicted by colonization societies to a Northern audience – a role Ruffner was happy to play for his Philadelphia listeners.

Northern colonizationists represented slaveowners as generally eager to emancipate. Even when no Southern representative, like Ruffner, was available, the Colonization Society could make some claim to expertise, with its extensive contacts in every region of the country. According to the Connecticut state auxiliary society’s typical formulation, Southerners were practically queuing up to manumit their slaves:

Gentlemen of the highest respectability from the South, assure us, that there is among the owners of slaves a very extensive and increasing desire to emancipate them. Their patriotism, their humanity, nay their self-interest, prompt to this; but it is not expedient, it is not safe to do it, without being able to remove them. If permitted to remain they sink into vice and indolence and ruin; and contaminate the slave population; and thus render their future emancipation the more difficult and hopeless. Very many of their masters are ready to make them freemen, if they can go where they can live and act as industrious, virtuous freemen ought to do.⁴⁸⁵

This was a frequent theme in the Northern colonizationist press. Slaveowners were restricted from giving up their slave property only by anticipation of the dangers that

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid., 42.

⁴⁸⁵ *Third Annual report of the Colonization Society of Connecticut* (New Haven: Baldwin and Threadway, 1830), 11.

emancipated slaves posed to the community in which they lived, and to themselves. Massachusetts supporter Alexander Hill Everett went so far as to suggest that “[t]he idea . . . which first suggested the establishment” of the ACS had been to assist the “many persons among the proprietors of slaves in the Southern States, who are desirous . . . to give them their liberty.”⁴⁸⁶ By providing slaveowners the opportunity to discharge their slave property safely, the ACS would benefit both the former slaves (freed to enjoy democratic freedom in Liberia) and the former masters (freed from the responsibilities of slaveholding). After all, Northern colonizationists argued, slavery hindered the Southern economy, and slaveowners would profit from the substitution of free for slave labor:

We see, among the States of the Union, some, which nature has most bounteously favored, comparatively impoverished by the system of slave labor, . . . unblest by the signs of universal competency, happiness, and welfare, the commodious habitations, the thrifty and well ordered farms, the flourishing manufactories, the ships, the churches, the schools, which are the result and the honor of free labor in the Eastern and Middle States.⁴⁸⁷

Complete emancipation would follow fairly easily in the wake of colonization, in this view, as the self-interest of Southern slaveowners happily aligned with their moral duty to emancipate. The Young Men’s Colonization Society of Pennsylvania assured its supporters that “*Ten thousand slaves would this moment be released from thralldom, if they could be transported from this country.*”⁴⁸⁸ But colonization not only made it possible for slaveowners already inclined toward emancipation to manumit their slaves; it would also help to spread their example and promote the spirit of emancipation across the South.

⁴⁸⁶ Massachusetts Colonization Society, *Proceedings at the Annual Meeting of the Massachusetts Colonization Society, Held in Park Street Church*, 9.

⁴⁸⁷ Cushing, *Oration*, 6.

⁴⁸⁸ J.R. Tyson, *A Discourse Before the Young Men’s Colonization Society of Pennsylvania, Delivered October 24, 1834, in St. Paul’s Church, Philadelphia, by J.R. Tyson, with a Notice of the Proceedings of the Society, and of their First Expedition of Coloured Emigrants to Found a Colony at Bassa Cove* (Philadelphia: William S. Martien, 1834), 31.

The slave-holder who nobly resigns that property which was legally his own, has new feelings and sensibilities. He no longer retains an interest in the continuance of slavery as a system. His sentiments are opposed to it. They become as expansive as is the extent of his influence. Some adopt his reasoning, and imitate his example. These become the centre of other circles, which grow wider and more numerous, till at length they diffuse themselves into a dense and undistinguished mass. In proportion as the work of *private* emancipation advances, the cause of *public* abolition is hastened.⁴⁸⁹

This was the mechanism by which colonization was supposed to end American slavery.

As long as the funds for transportation could be raised, Southern slaveowners would supply the Society with manumitted emigrants; the greater number the Society could afford to send, the more manumission would be promoted.⁴⁹⁰

Northern colonization auxiliaries did not only discuss emancipating slaveowners in the abstract, however; they also frequently published specific accounts of slaves waiting to claim their freedom in Liberia. In 1844, for example, the Massachusetts Colonization Society reported that

Mr. Joseph H. Wilson, of Wilsonville, Shelby Co., Ky., offers to emancipate twenty-seven slaves for emigration to Liberia. . . Mr. Wilson might sell them for TWELVE THOUSAND DOLLARS; but he proposes to give them their freedom, and 1,000 or 1,200 dollars besides, to commence business with in Liberia; so that his donation will amount, in all, to \$13,000 or more.

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid., 32.

⁴⁹⁰ Colonizationist Leonard Bacon offered another mechanism by which the scheme would defeat slavery, besides the vague promotion of the spirit of emancipation. “[W]henver the civilized and enterprising population of Africa shall send forth their productions to compete in every market, with the sugar, and cotton, and coffee, of the west-Indies and Southern America, the planters will be compelled, by the spirit of improvement which always springs from competition, to substitute the cheaper process for the more expensive, to adopt the labour of freemen instead of the labour of slaves, in a word, to convert their slaves into freemen. . . The conclusion from the principle which I have attempted to illustrate and apply is, let Africa be civilized and every African throughout the world will be made a freeman, not by some sudden convulsion, demolishing the fabric of society, but by the tendencies of nature and the arrangements of Providence, slowly yet surely accomplishing the happiness of man.” Leonard Bacon, *A Plea for Africa: Delivered in New-Haven, July 4th, 1825, by Leonard Bacon, Pastor of the First Church in New-Haven* (New Haven: T.G. Woodward and Co., 1825), 17. The profitability of the Southern crops grown by slave labor, in this view, was possible only as a result of the region’s monopoly on those products. Cotton could not be grown in the free-labor North, but it could be grown in Liberia, whose products would undercut slave-grown American cotton.

The MCS hoped to raise a fund of \$1,350 from Northern donors to finance the transportation of these slaves – “about one tenth as much as Mr. Wilson offers to give.” Such appeals served a dual purpose. They reinforced the image of Southern slaveholders as eager to divest themselves of their slave property, while their specificity also helped to encourage donations. “Here are at least EIGHTY SLAVES waiting for FIFTY DOLLARS each, to secure their freedom,” the MCS proclaimed, and then invoked the Biblical maxim, “[W]hatsoever ye should that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.”⁴⁹¹ An antislavery Northerner contributing to such a fundraising drive could reassure himself that his donation enabled a practical, tangible good (in the emancipation of specific slaves), while also imagining that Southerners like Joseph Wilson would shoulder the bulk of the sacrifice required by the colonization plan.

These appeals were apparently effective in raising donations. In fact, the appeal on behalf of Joseph Wilson’s slaves had been cannily planned by the secretary of the Massachusetts Colonization Society, who had written to his counterpart in the national organization earlier that year with the following request: “Tell me what slaves there are to be emancipated, besides that minister’s in Virginia. I want some, to make an appeal for. [T]he fact that we emancipated 164 last year, and did it fairly and openly, and can tell who they are and where they are, ‘takes hold of people’s minds.’”⁴⁹² The ACS grew to rely on its Northern friends for such cases. In 1850, its secretary, William McLain,

⁴⁹¹ Massachusetts Colonization Society, *Third Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Massachusetts Colonization Society, Presented May 29, 1844, Second Edition* (Boston: T.R. Marvin, 1844), 11.

⁴⁹² Joseph Tracy to William McLain, Boston, July 2, 1844, item 24232, Records of the American Colonization Society, Library of Congress. The Virginian minister referred to by Tracy was C.I. Gibson, whose appeal for assistance colonizing his ten slaves had been published in the *African Repository* (with identifying details removed so that Gibson could avoid antagonizing his Virginian neighbors). For the original letter, see C.I. Gibson to Ralph Randolph Gurley, Petersburg, Virginia, January 26, 1844, item 23661, Records of the American Colonization Society, Library of Congress. For the ACS’s appeal for funds, see *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 20, no. 5 (April, 1844), 125-126.

wrote to Gerard Hallock, the editor of the pro-colonization New York paper *The Journal of Commerce*, requesting assistance in transporting thirty Virginia slaves emancipated by Timothy Rogers. Virginia state law required that emancipated slaves be removed from the state, but the Society was in its usually precarious financial state, and McLain hesitated to commit to funding their removal. “We have sent this year already 393 emigrants,” he wrote to Hallock, “and we are no upwards of \$26,000 in debt. Dare we say that we will take them?”⁴⁹³ *The Journal of Commerce* printed a special appeal for the Rogers slaves, pointing out, “in such cases, that little or nothing was contributed by Abolitionists, Free Soilers, and other special friends of the slave, but that almost, if not quite, all the money came from . . . moderate, rational, consistent opponents of slavery” (i.e. colonizationists).⁴⁹⁴ The appeal was successful, and the funds raised to colonize the emancipated slaves. Even when no specific cases of emancipation were at issue, Northern auxiliaries created separate funds specifically to benefit emancipated slaves; this allowed donors to target their contributions specifically for emancipationist causes. In 1841, for example, an Illinois auxiliary colonization society was able to raise \$145 for the ACS’s general fund, and an additional \$150 “for the express purpose of colonizing emancipated slaves.”⁴⁹⁵ Auxiliaries took these distinctions seriously. Upon receiving a donation of one thousand dollars for the colonization of emancipated slaves in 1852, the Massachusetts Colonization Society transferred most of the funds to the ACS to finance

⁴⁹³ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 26, no. 6 (June, 1850), 162.

⁴⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹⁵ *The Colonization Herald and General Register* 1, no. 6 (June, 1839), 277.

the transportation of specific emancipated individuals, but specified that the remainder would “be retained till it can be used for the purpose for which it was given.”⁴⁹⁶

The Trend Toward Conservatism: Rhetorical Retreat in the 1850s

Northern colonizationists even went so far as to help purchase slaves from their owners for the purposes of colonization in Liberia. This was not a common practice; as Eric Burin has pointed out, colonizationist payments to slaveowners both opened colonization societies to the “[a]bolitionist . . . charge that [they] were comfortable regarding African-Americans as chattel, as things that could be bought and sold,” and “undermined the idea that southerners were eager partners in the colonization program.”⁴⁹⁷ Perhaps for these reasons, such cases were more common in the mid-Atlantic states, and almost unknown in New England. At the same time that the Pennsylvania and New York colonization auxiliaries were engaged in buying slaves, the Massachusetts Colonization Society refused to “authorize any person to solicit funds for the purchase of his own freedom, or that of others,” as such projects were not covered by the MCS constitution.⁴⁹⁸ But the complications of emancipated slaves’ social and familial networks sometimes presented opportunities too tempting to be ignored. The enslaved Corpsen family of Virginia, for example, included seven individuals (a married couple and five children), who had at least four different masters. Two of these masters collaborated to emancipate the four Corpsen family members they owned, and contributed funds to redeem an additional two of the family’s children. This left one child, fifteen-year-old Jerry, remaining in slavery. Although Jerry’s owner agreed to sell

⁴⁹⁶ “Massachusetts Colonization Society minutes August 5, 1852.” Massachusetts Colonization Society Records, Massachusetts Historical Society.

⁴⁹⁷ Burin, *Peculiar Solution*, 92.

⁴⁹⁸ Massachusetts Colonization Society, *Fourteenth Annual Report*, 7.

him at a discounted price of four hundred dollars, and the other Corpsens managed to raise a quarter of this ransom in Virginia, three hundred dollars were still required to redeem Jerry, and to enable the entire family to sail for Liberia. Inspired, no doubt, by the great sacrifices already undertaken by the Southern slaveowners involved (even Jerry's owner claimed to sell at a loss), and despite the ideological liabilities involved, the Pennsylvania Colonization Society helped to publicize the case and to raise the price of Jerry's freedom.⁴⁹⁹

Such efforts were also publicized in friendly but unaffiliated publications like the *Journal of Commerce*. In 1850, the *Journal* published an appeal for eight members of an enslaved Kentucky family, seven of whom had been emancipated for the purpose of colonization. The owner of the remaining slave (valued at one thousand dollars), agreed to sell him for the discounted price of \$650, of which the slave had raised \$350. "Only three hundred dollars is required here," the *Journal* proclaimed, "to secure the emancipation and removal to Liberia, of an interesting family of eight persons, now in bondage, and worth, as property, \$3000."⁵⁰⁰ By placing the appeal in an unaffiliated paper rather than one of its own publications, the ACS avoided direct involvement in compensated emancipation (and reached a wider audience of potential supporters). But colonization societies went to no great lengths to conceal their involvement in such cases. The funds for the Kentucky family were to be forwarded to the ACS's secretary; in another case, donations were collected by the secretary of the New York Colonization Society.⁵⁰¹

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid., 90-91.

⁵⁰⁰ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 26, no. 11 (November, 1850), 329.

⁵⁰¹ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 26, no. 10 (October, 1850), 306.

In 1851, the NYCS celebrated yet another successful fundraising effort to help purchase a slave for Liberian emigration by drawing distinctions between his case and that of a Poughkeepsie man who had escaped from slavery before falling victim to the recent Fugitive Slave Law, and whose redemption from captivity (and return to Poughkeepsie) by abolitionists had been widely reported in the Northern press:

We are happy to see announced the safe arrival of Bolding, for whose redemption, after his return to slavery, two thousand dollars was promptly and liberally contributed. We rejoice, too, at the completion of the sum of six hundred dollars required to emancipate Anthony Sherman, of Savannah. . . In the former case, the owner exacted the full value of the slave. In the latter, a widow with limited ‘means sacrifices full one-third of her little all, by offering freedom to her slave for one third of his market value!’ . . . How different their destinies and those of their families! The one, taking up his residence at the North, in the midst of social embarrassments, has not only a prospect of encountering all their evils himself, but of leaving the same as an inheritance to his family. The other, looking forth to Africa and its bright star, the Republic of Liberia, beholds not only personal liberty, but an open and unobstructed path to the highest social, civil, and political privileges, with the noblest motives of benevolence and humanity, as well as self-interest, to call forth every dormant energy, and leaves these, too, as a heritage for his descendants! Who that is not under heavy prejudice, can doubt as to the relative value of freedom to these two men in their different spheres of influence? The influence of the one will be as a light within a prison-house; the influence of the other as the light of day.⁵⁰²

Obviously, the NYCS discussed the two cases in part to contrast the fate of African Americans in the United States with a typically utopian vision of Liberian democracy. But the comparison also subtly mocked the abolitionists, who had proven willing to pay to purchase a slave, and who, the NYCS implied, had not gotten as good a bargain.⁵⁰³

⁵⁰² *New-York Colonization Journal* 1, no. 12 (November, 1851), 2. A.J. Williams-Meyers identifies Bolding’s purchasers as “the Dutchess County Anti-Slavery Society and other leading citizens.” A.J. Williams-Meyers, “The Underground Railroad in the Hudson River Valley: A Succinct Historical Composite,” *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History* 27, no. 1 (2003): 64.

⁵⁰³ Appealing for funds for specific emigrations opened the Colonization Society to the possibility of fraud. In 1852, for example, a charismatic free black man collected two thousand dollars from New York donors, supposedly to enable his own emigration, and to underwrite an agricultural project in Liberia, but absconded with the funds. The New York Colonization Society issued a warning, stating that it had “no confidence that the money given to [the man] has been used for any other than his private purposes.” *New-York Colonization Journal* 2, no. 2 (February, 1852), 2. No doubt to avoid such cases, the ACS enacted a

It was no coincidence that such cases of slaves purchased for colonization did not occur until the 1850s. The national society's trend toward conservatism on the subject of slavery over the course of the antebellum years was also mirrored in its Northern auxiliaries. The morally questionable act of rewarding slaveowners for emancipation would probably not have been tolerated in the vehemently antislavery 1830s. But by the 1850s, as the national ACS had scaled back its own ambitions, so too did its Northern auxiliaries. After over three decades of failing to attract federal support, or to make any significant impact on African American populations, the idea of ending slavery by colonizing the nation's entire slave population appeared less and less plausible. There had always been some diversity of opinion on this subject within the ACS, and among its Northern supporters. As early as 1835, the ACS's New York City auxiliary was promoting colonization's benefits even if they did not include ending American slavery:

It was never . . . contemplated by the founders of the scheme, to colonize the whole of our free coloured population, much less to remove from this country all who are now in bondage. It will be well if means be found to insure the emancipation and removal annually of a number equal to the present annual increase of the slave population, or even of all whose freedom may be obtained upon the condition of their removal. But whether the numbers of those who emigrate be greater or less, in proportion at all events, to that number, must be the benefits derived from the Colonization System. And surely none but those who avowedly [sic] prefer that every slave that now exists, or hereafter may be born on this continent, should remain in bondage, rather than obtain freedom at the price of removing to the land of his origin. . . [N]one but such hardy objectors will insist that nothing should be essayed, because every thing cannot be accomplished; that not a single slave should be liberated, because all cannot be set free at once.⁵⁰⁴

new rule in 1855 that all individual appeals must be issued through state auxiliary societies. The Massachusetts Colonization Society warned its supporters "to regard every appeal in behalf of Colonization, which comes to them without the express sanction of the State Society, as unauthorized. We do not say that all such appeals will be dishonest . . . ; but only, that . . . they rest wholly on the private, personal responsibility of him who makes them." Massachusetts Colonization Society, *Fourteenth Annual Report*, 6.

⁵⁰⁴ Colonization Society of the City of New York, *Third Annual Report of the Colonization Society of the City of New York, with the Proceedings of the Annual Meeting, May 1835, including the Annual Report of the Board of Managers, to that Society* (New York: Wm. A. Mercein and Son, 1835), 22.

This local society expressed an interest in at least holding the size of the nation's slave population steady by removing its annual increase, and certainly said nothing to suggest that colonization would be incompatible with the abolition of slavery. But the goal of colonizing all of the nation's slaves was disclaimed, and the benefits of individual emancipations substituted. Such a limited view of colonization's ends was not unanimous (especially in the 1830s). While New York City's colonization society abnegated any desire to bring slavery to a close, the scheme was being defended in upstate Oneida County in the following terms:

[In] the uniform opinions of the Northern States . . . , the institution of Slavery is regarded as both a wrong in morals and an error in policy. . . [A]s we honestly and intelligently desire the abolition of slavery, we will . . . co-operate with [Southerners] whenever we can in any measures that tend to the present improvement and ultimate elevation of the whole African race.⁵⁰⁵

But as the decades dragged on and the ACS found itself financially unprepared even to meet the immediate demand for its services, Northern colonizationists, like their compatriots in the national movement, scaled back their expectations, and became increasingly conservative on the subject of slavery. The New York Colonization Society even went so far as to print a (tepid) endorsement of 1850's unpopular Fugitive Slave Act, stating that although it was "hated," Northern citizens were "bound to obey it."⁵⁰⁶ Like the national ACS, Northern auxiliaries increasingly turned their attention in the 1840s and '50s from emancipated slaves to free blacks. Colonizing slaves was often expensive; emancipating masters (considering manumission itself sufficient sacrifice) did not often fund the cost of transporting their manumitees to Liberia, and the divided ownership of many slave families often led colonizationists into the morally

⁵⁰⁵ Colonization Society of the County of Oneida, *To the Inhabitants of Oneida County* (Utica: 1838), 3-4.

⁵⁰⁶ *New-York Colonization Journal* 1, no. 6 (May, 1851), 2.

compromising position of either purchasing the freedom of manumitees' family members, or requiring emancipated slaves to emigrate without the accompaniment of loved ones who remained enslaved. Free blacks, on the other hand, were less likely to have family members in slavery, and could potentially finance their own emigration. By 1858, the Massachusetts Colonization Society was hoping that

the great work will be done, mainly, by the colored men who emigrate independently, on their own resources. There have been such cases already, and they will increase in number, till the work of our Society becomes comparatively small and unimportant, and finally ceases, and we take our place with that incorporated Company in England, which, more than two centuries ago, sent emigrants to New England, and whose existence is now scarcely remembered, except by antiquaries.⁵⁰⁷

Such statements were increasingly common in the 1850s. The Massachusetts Colonization Society promised that free blacks would embrace colonization in larger numbers.

Among the free, many causes are producing a rapid change of opinion. The hopes which they had been taught to entertain, of an improvement of their condition in this country, have been disappointed. In a majority of the States, the legislation is unfavorable to them, and is steadily becoming more so. . . . White laborers from Europe are . . . crowding them out of employment. Such discouragements force them to think of Liberia.⁵⁰⁸

⁵⁰⁷ Massachusetts Colonization Society, *Seventeenth Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Massachusetts Colonization Society, Presented at the Annual Meeting, May 26, 1858* (Boston: T.R. Marvin & Son, 1858), 16-17. Restricting free black colonization to those able to contribute some of their own resources would not only save money, but would also beneficially limit potential emigrants to those who were most qualified to lead the burgeoning democracy of Liberia; those “who have neither acquired the property necessary to purchase their own outfit, nor the character which may induce those who know them to furnish it, should defer their emigration till they have overcome some of these obstacles.” *Ibid.*, 16.

⁵⁰⁸ Massachusetts Colonization Society, *Eleventh Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Massachusetts Colonization Society, Presented at the Annual Meeting, May 26, 1852* (Boston: T.R. Marvin, 1852), 8. Though the MCS was usually vague about the location of these free black communities among whom colonization had come into increased favor, its annual report for 1859 opened by approvingly noting, “During the past year, twenty emigrants have gone from Massachusetts to Liberia; a larger number than in any former year.” Massachusetts Colonization Society, *Eighteenth Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Massachusetts Colonization Society, Presented at the Annual Meeting, May 25, 1859* (Boston: T.R. Marvin & Son, 1859), 6. While during previous decades colonization had been usually defended in Massachusetts for its ability to bring about gradual emancipation, the MCS was claiming at the end of the antebellum period that the scheme would remove troublesome free black populations from the state.

The New York Colonization Society told a similar story:

For years past, the prejudice of the free people of color against the very name of Colonization, closed their eyes and ears. . . . An era of greater liberality of thought has arrived, and notwithstanding an uncompromising hostility from many . . . , there has arisen a class of intelligent and independent thinkers among them, who begin fearlessly to examine the subject, and express their views. . . . [A] generation of hope deferred has unsettled the confidence once felt, that social equality would soon be attained here.⁵⁰⁹

Such statements, describing free blacks as pressed out of the country by racist legislation, job discrimination, and white resistance to change, left the ACS vulnerable to

⁵⁰⁹ *New-York Colonization Journal* 1, no. 9 (August, 1851), 2. Another symptom of increasing conservatism among Northern colonizationists during the 1840s and '50s was a turn away from the goal of increasing Liberia's population, and toward supporting improvements in the colony. If the ACS did not have sufficient funds to make a significant impact on black populations in the United States, the thinking went, perhaps it should instead focus on making Liberia as appealing as possible, and improving the lives of its citizens. In 1848, a group of Boston colonizationists founded the "Trustees of Donations for Education in Liberia," which raised funds to support the establishment of a Liberian college. "Such an institution is thought to be the more needed, as there is now no place in the whole wide world, where colored youth can pursue such a course of education without serious disadvantages. Its first students, of course, will be from the families of the emigrant population of Liberia, and few in number; but . . . if successful, it can hardly fail to attract students from the United States, and perhaps from other parts of the world. If this can be done, a state of feeling towards Liberia will be produced, which will ensure for the Republic, all that its most ardent friends have ever hoped." Joseph Tracy to Henry Clay, Boston, April 14, 1848, box 2, Trustees of Donations for Education in Liberia Records, Massachusetts Historical Society. Of course, this charity competed directly with traditional donations to the Colonization Society, as the MCS complained in 1857: "The labors and expenditures for Collegiate education in Liberia, have in some degree interfered with the collection of funds in Massachusetts for the ordinary purposes of Colonization." Massachusetts Colonization Society, *Sixteenth Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Massachusetts Colonization Society, Presented at the Annual Meeting, May 27, 1857* (Boston: T. R. Marvin & Son, 1857), 16. The privileging of measures to improve Liberia over the "ordinary purposes of Colonization" was something of a trend of the era, however. The MCS also devoted thousands of dollars during the 1850s for the education of two African American men for medical service in Liberia. Massachusetts Colonization Society, *Thirteenth Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Massachusetts Colonization Society, Presented at the Annual Meeting, May 24, 1854* (Boston: T.R. Marvin, 1854), 13. (Given the large investment the MCS had made in this schooling, its members were paranoid that the newly minted doctors might decide to eschew Liberia and settle elsewhere. In 1853, when one of the men requested that his wife join him in England during his studies there, the MCS, "of the opinion that if [she] joins her husband in England there is a strong probability that neither of them will go to Liberia," cynically recommended that the woman be shipped to Monrovia to ensure the doctor's eventual emigration. "Committee Report," box 1, Massachusetts Colonization Society Records, Massachusetts Historical Society.) As the focus of the Northern colonizationists shifted from the transportation of emigrants to the improvement of the colony, the scheme became less directed toward the emancipation of American slaves, and more toward the ends of African charity. Similar considerations urged the New York Colonization Society to abandon the support of emigration altogether shortly after the Civil War, and dedicate its resources toward the improvement of the Liberian education system. See Eli Seifman, "Education or Emigration: The Schism Within the African Colonization Movement, 1865-1875," *History of Education Quarterly* 7, no. 1 (Spring, 1967): 36-57.

the abolitionist charge that it endorsed these trends. But while the ACS in the 1850s largely abandoned its emancipationist rhetoric, Northern colonizationists never gave up the hope that the scheme would lead to the end of slavery (or at least facilitate its natural decline). “If the production of cotton in Africa, India, and Australia, and the manufacture of flax by the improved scientific method, should succeed as it is hoped,” the New York Colonization Society argued in 1851, “slave labor will be ruinous, and the masters be more ready to flee from their slaves than the slaves to flee from them.”⁵¹⁰ The same year, Simon Greenleaf, the president of the Massachusetts Colonization Society wrote to his counterpart in the national Society, perceiving an opportunity to renew the scheme’s antislavery appeal: “[A]bolitionism in New England, is brought to a dead stand . . . & has proved itself a *failure*, so far as the removal of slavery is concerned.” Greenleaf hoped that by urging the ACS’s emancipationist argument, “a *large* portion of what is now *anti-slavery* would be *absorbed in colonization*.”⁵¹¹ A speaker at the same society’s 1855 meeting declared that Liberia’s impact on slavery “is the aspect most dwelt upon, and less need be said of it”⁵¹² than of other benefits, but repeated traditional arguments: “When it is known that there is a prosperous republic working into the heart of Africa, will not humane Christian men at the South rejoice to impart the blessings of it to their bondsmen? Will not such a spectacle surely, though silently, do much to destroy the curse?”⁵¹³

⁵¹⁰ *New-York Colonization Journal* 1, no. 4 (March, 1851), 1.

⁵¹¹ Simon Greenleaf to Henry Clay, Boston, January 9th, 1851, item 37015, Records of the American Colonization Society, Library of Congress.

⁵¹² Massachusetts Colonization society, *Fourteenth Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Massachusetts Colonization Society, Presented at their Annual Meeting, May 28, 1855* (Boston: T.R. Marvin, 1855), 30.

⁵¹³ *Ibid.*, 31.

The frequency with which Northern colonizationists offered such emancipationist arguments for the scheme may have declined as the Civil War loomed, but these arguments were not entirely silenced, as they were in the ACS's national publications. Northern colonizationist publications were much less ambitious in the 1850s than they had been in the 1830s, but the general outlines of the scheme remained the same: It promised to build a Christian empire in Africa, and to serve as a moderate corrective for slavery. On the national level, the ACS's increased conservatism during the 1850s may have been intended to conciliate the increasingly defensive South. But this partial retreat from emancipationist rhetoric did not decimate colonizationist support in the North. (Per-capita donations in the mid-Atlantic states between 1850 and 1860 were down a modest four percent from previous averages, and decreased by seventeen percent in the West, but actually increased by forty-six percent in New England.⁵¹⁴) Indeed, the newly

⁵¹⁴ Based on ACS Database. The high year-to-year variability of these financial figures makes it difficult to consider a four- or even a seventeen-percent difference as highly significant, and in both the mid-Atlantic and the West, the declines in per capita donations were the result of population growth, rather than an actual decline in contributions. (Between 1830 and 1860, population in the mid-Atlantic states increased by 108%, and in the West it more than quadrupled.) Given the relative poverty of many immigrants to both regions, perhaps the increase in per-capita donations among New England's relatively stable population (which increased between 1830 and 1860 by a relatively modest 68%) is a better measure of Northern support for the ACS during the 1850s. But even if New England was the only Northern region to increase its support for the ACS in the decade before the Civil War, no other region saw significant declines in its contributions to the Society, and the evidence indicates that citizens of New England found the scheme increasingly appealing during the same period that its organized societies in the region (and across the country) were becoming newly conservative in their rhetoric. It is difficult to evaluate the reasons for the Society's increased support. It is possible that as the ACS talked less and less of slavery, and more and more of Africa, it found a new audience who considered the scheme primarily a Christian mission to Africa. "If there can be a better mode suggested for the suppression of the African slave trade, and the ultimate civilization of that vast region of earth, than the plan of colonization, we have not yet become acquainted with it." *Boston Daily Atlas*, January 24, 1853. Perhaps some New England whites were motivated to support the Society after hearing of colonists departing from their own region. "In 1854, there was an emigration from Massachusetts, of fifteen colored persons, and so well have they fared in point of health, that only two have died—one from imprudence in point of diet, and one from causes independent of climate. Twenty went from Cambridge, Mass, last fall." *The [Boston] Congregationalist*, January 28, 1859. Or maybe as the national debates over slavery reached the crisis point, Northern colonization auxiliaries found supporters who were equally critical of slavery and the abolition movement, and who still sought some way to prevent a national schism. "To those citizens of the United States who . . . will not ignore or deny the weight of the curse of domestic slavery, but yet will not countenance any violent or unconstitutional means for its abolition, — . . . to the thoughtful citizens of this class, the colonization

modest colonization movement attracted continued support from a Northern white population who supported the scheme's missionary agenda, and who sought a way to dismantle Southern slavery without sparking civil war.

African American Responses

Free blacks of the antebellum North reacted to the Colonization Society swiftly and vocally. Within a month of the formation of the ACS, the wealthy African American businessman James Forten arranged a protest rally for free blacks in Philadelphia. The following summer, Forten held another protest meeting in the city, attended by three thousand African Americans, which issued a memorial declaring,

If the plan of colonizing is intended for our benefit . . . ; we humbly and respectfully urge, that it is not asked for by us; nor will it be required by any circumstances, in our present or future condition; as long as we shall be permitted to share the protection of the excellent laws and just government which we now enjoy, in common with every individual of the community.⁵¹⁵

At this time, less than a year after the formation of the ACS (and nearly three years before the first ship of African American emigrants would set out for the fledgling colony of Liberia), the opposition of Northern free African Americans to the colonization scheme was almost certainly a larger and better-organized movement than the Colonization Society itself. Although over the course of the antebellum period a small

scheme presents itself as the only remedy for ameliorating the present state of things, and a remedy which ought to be made sufficient for the exigency." *Boston Daily Advertiser*, July 11, 1855. Most likely, people supported the colonization movement for all of these reasons; it is no coincidence that all of them could be found offered in the Northern press. Of course, none of these were entirely new reasons for supporting colonization, and it is likely that colonizationists held the same ideology during the 1850s that they always had: a belief in the natural segregation of the globe, and the impossibility of multiracial democracy.⁵¹⁵ Quoted in Garrison, *Thoughts*, part 2, p. 11. Robert Dick has remarked on the polite language of these African American responses to the ACS, especially in these early years. "Instead of making a blanket indictment of all those who promoted emigration, Negro spokesmen acknowledged that some colonizationists were well-intentioned but unenlightened individuals who thought they were doing the right thing for the Negroes. After all, some blacks had also moderately favored colonization when the Society was in its planning stages, but most of them had subsequently turned away from it." Robert C. Dick, *Black Protest: Issues and Tactics* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1974), 12. By expressing deference to white colonizationists' good intentions, African Americans not only conformed to racial behavioral expectations, but also respected the genuinely emancipationist intentions of many Colonization Society members.

number of African Americans chose to resettle in Liberia, free black communities across the United States maintained a stance of distrust and hostility for the colonization movement, and continued to offer critiques of the ACS in public meetings and the press. It is, of course, difficult to assess the representativeness of any particular expression by blacks of rejection (or endorsement) of colonizationism. Though conventions like Forten's claimed to represent the sentiments of the general African American population, they were not strictly democratic affairs.⁵¹⁶ Indeed, one of the wrongs protested by these conventions was that African Americans had been denied access to democratic processes. However, the fact that so few Northern blacks expressed any personal interest in colonization suggests that the anticolonization views expressed by black conventions and newspapers were widely shared throughout the African American community. Between 1820 and 1860, only nine hundred free blacks departed for Liberia from all free states and territories – only twenty-two percent of all free emigrants (and just over eight percent of all Liberian colonists).⁵¹⁷ Of course, colonization was not popular among free African Americans in the slave states (where total antebellum emigration was equivalent to only 1.3% of the 1850 free black population), but Northern free blacks were even less eager to abandon their native country for Africa; total antebellum emigration was equal to less than half a percent of the region's 1850 free black population.

⁵¹⁶ Describing the antebellum black convention movement, historian Howard Bell wrote, "There was no consistent pattern followed in choosing delegates to the various assemblies. In most cases the ideal was the election of local representatives to state or national conventions, but in few cases was the rule followed rigidly. Once present, a man had a good chance of being accredited as a delegate, especially if he had come from an unrepresented area." Howard Holman Bell, *A Survey of the Negro Convention Movement, 1830-1861* (New York: Arno Press, 1969), 5. It is worth noting, however, that Forten did not enforce ideological conformity on his gathering, and put the question of colonization to a vote; the results demonstrated the group's unanimous opposition. Dick, *Black Protest*, 10. Debates within other black conventions demonstrate that diverging opinions on colonization were often tolerated, though very much in the minority.

⁵¹⁷ Burin, *Peculiar Solution*, 172.

The address circulated by Forten and his compatriots in 1817 not only disclaimed any desire to emigrate to Liberia, but also connected colonization with slavery:

Diminished in numbers [by colonization of emancipated slaves], the slave population of the southern states, which by its magnitude alarms its proprietors, will be easily secured. Those among their bondmen, who feel that they should be free, by rights which all mankind have from God and from nature, and who thus may become dangerous to the quiet of their masters, will be sent to the colony; and the tame and submissive will be retained, and subjected to increased rigor.⁵¹⁸

Colonization was thus presented as an essentially proslavery measure. Slavery itself represented a denial of slaves' fundamental human rights, and the colonization of emancipated slaves would only provide the slaveholding South with a safety release valve – a way to draw off excess or recalcitrant slave populations, or to increase the security and value of slave property. In the words of an 1856 state convention of free blacks in Columbus, Ohio, the ACS was “the embodiment of the pro-slavery sentiment of the country; . . . its prime aim is the perpetuity of slavery; and . . . it should be despised and loathed by the friends of the slave, as a foul and filthy plague.”⁵¹⁹

Not only would the colonization of emancipated slaves sanction the denial of slaves' rights, these African American groups argued, but the removal of free blacks represented a potential violation of their rights as American citizens. As African Americans at an 1831 Brooklyn meeting argued,

we know of no other country in which we can justly claim or demand our rights as citizens, whether civil or political, but in these United States of America, our native soil. . . [W]e shall be active in our endeavours to convince . . . the public . . . that we are *men*, that we are *brethren*, that we are *countrymen* and *fellow-*

⁵¹⁸ Quoted in Garrison, *Thoughts*, part 2, p. 12.

⁵¹⁹ “Proceedings of the State Convention of Colored Men, Held in the City of Columbus, Ohio, Jan. 16th, 17th, & 18th, 1856,” in *Proceedings of the Black State Conventions, 1840-1865, Volume I: New York, Pennsylvania, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio*, eds. Philip S. Foner and George E. Walker (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1979), 307.

citizens, and demand an equal share of protection from our federal government with any other class of citizens in the community.⁵²⁰

Free African Americans (accurately) perceived that colonizationist rhetoric challenged their status as American citizens. To relocate – even voluntarily – to Liberia would only reinforce the colonizationist claim that African Americans were “necessarily any thing rather than loyal citizens.”⁵²¹ Free blacks responded to this colonizationist challenge by asserting the shared nationality of white and black Americans:

[T]his country is our country; its liberties and privileges were purchased by the exertions and blood of our fathers, as much as by the exertions and blood of other men; the language of the people is our language; their education our education; the free institutions they love, we love; the soil to which they are wedded, we are wedded; their hopes are our hopes; their God is our God; we were born among them; our lot is to live among them, and be of them; where they die, we will die; and where they are buried, there will we be buried also.⁵²²

Rhetoric like this presented not only a claim to American nationality, but also to American citizenship. African Americans were bound to the United States not only by allegiance to the “soil,” but also by shared American “language, education, and free institutions.” The same African American meetings and conventions which condemned colonization also protested expanding black disenfranchisement – which saw new limitations on black suffrage in nearly every state in the Union⁵²³ – and discriminatory laws such as Ohio’s Black Laws. For free blacks, colonization and such exclusionary

⁵²⁰ Quoted in Garrison, *Thoughts*, part 2, p. 24.

⁵²¹ American Colonization Society, *The Seventh Annual Report of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour of the United States, with an Appendix* (Washington: Davis and Force, 1824), 92. In full, this quotation read: “The danger is not so much that we have a million and a half of slaves, as that we have within our borders nearly two millions of men who are necessarily any thing rather than loyal citizens—nearly two millions of ignorant and miserable beings who are banded together by the very same circumstances, by which they are so widely separated in character and in interest from all the citizens of our great republic.” *Ibid.*, 91-92.

⁵²² “Convention of the Colored Inhabitants of the State of New York, August 18-20, 1840,” in Foner and Walker, *Proceedings of the Black State Conventions*, 14.

⁵²³ See Charles H. Wesley, “Negro Suffrage in the Period of Constitution-Making, 1787-1865,” *Journal of Negro History* 32, no. 2 (April, 1947): 143-168. The only states which made no attempt to limit or prohibit black suffrage before the Civil War were Vermont, Maine, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts.

policies were of a piece; both represented a fundamental denial of their claims to American citizenship, and of their desire for social and political equality.

African American conventions warned free blacks to resist the ACS's propaganda.

[A]ll kinds of chicanery and stratagem will be employed to allure the people [to Liberia]; the eternal summer, and the earth's enduring verdancy, the salubrious climate, and the independence of its inhabitants; the enjoyments and privileges of its citizens, will be pictured forth in glowing color, to deceive you.⁵²⁴

This was in fact a fair summary of colonizationist descriptions of Liberia.⁵²⁵ But free blacks were commanded to resist these temptations, largely because of their duty to continue the fight for abolition and full citizenship:

We implore you, fellow countrymen, by reason of the association that cling[s] around you; by virtue of the interests that endear your attachment to your native land; because of the holy ties of consanguinity, identification, and the obligations of brotherhood, and humanity, you owe those in bonds, as bound with them, to let none of these delusive mirrors confound and entrap you.⁵²⁶

The risk was not only that the ACS would tempt free blacks to embark for Liberia voluntarily; African Americans also worried that colonizationists were less than sincere in promising that colonization would proceed only with their consent. One 1840 pamphlet authored by two black New York Presbyterian ministers contended that “no very high expectations seem to have been entertained [by colonizationists], that [the]

⁵²⁴ “Proceedings of the State Convention of Colored People Held at Albany, New-York, on the 22d, 23d and 24th of July, 1851,” in Foner and Walker, *Proceedings of the Black State Conventions*, 67.

⁵²⁵ Although the ACS more often focused on attracting white (and governmental) support than appealing for black emigrants, colonization organizations did occasionally produce publications directly targeted to potential emigrants, which portrayed Liberia in terms very much like the ones described here. One 1832 Maryland State Colonization Society pamphlet, for example, promised that Liberians “own the soil [they] live on and are free . . . [and] have all that is meant by liberty of conscience. . . Cattle, hogs, fowls, ducks, goats, and sheep, require no care but to keep them from straying. Cotton, coffee, indigo, and sugar cane, grow wild. . . [There is] no winter.” Maryland Board of Managers for Removing the Free People of Color, *News from Africa: A Collection of Facts, relating to the Colony in Liberia, for the Information of the Free People of Colour in Maryland* (Baltimore: J.D. Toy, 1832), 16-17.

⁵²⁶ “Proceedings of the State Convention of Colored People Held at Albany, New-York, on the 22d, 23d and 24th of July, 1851,” in Foner and Walker, *Proceedings of the Black State Conventions*, 67.

enterprize . . . would commend itself strongly to that class of the community to which is purported solely to be addressed. But little reliance appears to have been placed on obtaining their *voluntary* consent.”⁵²⁷ African Americans (accurately) observed that the ACS addressed itself more to white than to black Americans. An 1832 African American meeting in New Bedford, Massachusetts declared that

the Society, to effect its purpose, the removal of the free people of color . . . , teaches the public to believe that it is patriotic and benevolent to withhold from us knowledge and the means of acquiring subsistence, and to look upon us as unnatural and illegal residents in this country; and thus by force of prejudice, if not by law, endeavor to compel us to embark for Africa, and that too, apparently, by our own free will and consent.⁵²⁸

Behind the pretense of seeking the emigrants’ consent, Northern free blacks charged, colonizationists attacked the idea of black citizenship, encouraged discriminatory legislation, and intimidated free blacks into accepting banishment from the United States. The ACS was not an isolated organization, but part of a broader conspiracy to perpetuate slavery and deprive African Americans of their rights.

The black protest movement against the ACS had two important effects. First, as several historians have noted, the anti-colonization movement promoted a sense of shared racial community. “Through . . . agitation against the racist policy of the Colonization Society, thousands of American Negroes for the first time felt a sense of communication with groups from other sections of the nation. It was inevitable that this development would lead to . . . an integrated program representing a national viewpoint.”⁵²⁹ Shared

⁵²⁷ Samuel E. Cornish and Theodore S. Wright, *The Colonization Scheme Considered, in Its Rejection By the Colored People—In Its Tendency to Uphold Caste—In Its Unfitness for Christianizing and Civilizing the Aborigines of Africa, and for Putting a Stop to the African Slave Trade: In a Letter to the Hon. Theodore Frelinghuysen and the Hon. Benjamin F. Butler* (Newark: Aaron Guest, 1840), 5.

⁵²⁸ Quoted in Garrison, *Thoughts*, part 2, p. 51.

⁵²⁹ “Introduction to the Black State Conventions,” in Foner and Walker, *Proceedings of the Black State Conventions*, xi. See also Leonard I. Sweet, *Black Images of America, 1784-1870* (New York: Norton, 1976), 40. Richard Newman concurs with this view. “The colonization debate forced the black protest

opposition to colonization not only drew African Americans together, but also influenced the construction of their identity. Leslie Alexander has argued that while Northern African Americans had previously identified as simultaneously African and American, “the colonization movement forced Black activists into a defensive posture. Fearful of forced removal, the Black community began to publicly distance itself from Africa and espoused an American identity.”⁵³⁰ Free blacks’ strident claims to the rights of American citizenship, as quoted above, were developed, in part, in response to the threat colonization posed to those rights. The ACS portrayed African Americans as inherently African, and therefore disqualified from America’s racially-defined citizenry; Northern free blacks responded by redefining their own identity, and what it meant to be “American.” Mia Bay has also argued that, “Widespread opposition to colonization gave impetus to the development and articulation of black racial thought,”⁵³¹ and that African Americans developed a racial ideology of equality in reaction to the American Colonization Society’s descriptions of the ineradicable differences between whites and blacks.

The second major effect of the black protest movement against colonization was to provide an ideological and organizational foundation for the white abolitionist movement that followed in its wake. Scholars have long remarked on the historical divide between the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century model of moderate

tradition to evolve and forced black abolitionists to think more about coordinating their tactics nationally.” Richard S. Newman, *The Transformation of American Abolitionism: Fighting Slavery in the Early Republic* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 103.

⁵³⁰ Leslie M. Alexander, *African or American?: Black Identity and Political Activism in New York City, 1784-1861* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 75.

⁵³¹ Mia Bay, *The White Image in the Black Mind: African-American Ideas about White People, 1830-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 24. Patrick Rael similarly contends that although “[b]lackness in general rejected colonization and its rationale wholesale, . . . the ACS had supplied them with a logic they could use to argue for their inclusion in the American project.” Patrick Rael, *Black Identity and Black Protest in the Antebellum North* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 275.

abolitionism, and the radical immediatism of the abolitionist generation of the 1830s. Lacking the funds to transport even the relatively few free blacks who volunteered themselves or emancipated slaves who were volunteered by their owners, the Colonization Society found it relatively easy to ignore the black protest movement, and Northern auxiliaries were no different.⁵³² But, as has been discussed above, colonizationists found it more difficult to ignore the white abolitionist movement, which converted some of the ACS's most prominent supporters, and ended the days when the organization had been portrayed as uncontroversially antislavery in the Northern press. William Lloyd Garrison emerged as the vocal head of the anti-colonization forces seeking the immediate abolition of slavery, and his name became shorthand for the movement. But Garrison's rhetoric had been based on African American sources: "As [he] himself noted, black activists helped convince him and many of his contemporaries to embrace their angry tradition of reform, eschewing the still-deferential tactics of both gradual abolitionists and colonizationists."⁵³³ White immediatists adopted a bellicose stance toward colonization only through the influence of these black activists. "Black opponents stood alone for more than a decade, as white abolitionists failed to develop an

⁵³² As the Connecticut Colonization Society explained to its supporters in 1829, it was "not any difficulty in finding emigrants, which has limited the emigration of the past year to one hundred and sixty souls. Not less than six hundred free people of color . . . were, a few months ago, seeking a passage to Liberia. The masters of more than two hundred slaves, were at the same time, seeking the same privilege. . . The difficulty is simply the want of resources. The funds of the general society were so much exhausted and embarrassed . . . that its operations . . . were necessarily curtailed." Colonization Society of the State of Connecticut, *Second Annual Report of the Managers of the Colonization Society, for the State of Connecticut; with an Appendix, May 1829* (New-Haven: Baldwin and Treadway, 1829), 6-7. When Northern colonizationists took note of black opposition at all, they readily explained it away as a temporary prejudice which time and Liberia's success would easily remove. "It is not strange that the coloured race looked at the enterprise in its infancy with suspicion," said Massachusetts supporter Baxter Dickinson that same year. "How could they do otherwise with the record of their past wrongs before them? In proportion, however, as the plan and its success have become known, has that jealousy been removed. And why should they not readily fall in with the views of the Society which seeks their benefit?" Dickinson, *Sermon*, 6-7.

⁵³³ Newman, *Transformation of American Abolitionism*, 104.

ardent anti-colonization stance until . . . 1831.”⁵³⁴ Many white abolitionists followed Garrison’s path, turning against the ACS only after being exposed to the arguments of its black opponents. White abolitionist Samuel Hanson Cox, for example, ascribed his own conversion from colonizationist to abolitionist to his discovery of black antagonism toward the scheme:

My investigations have issued in a complete conviction that, on [the] ground alone, [of] the non-consent or unanimous opposition of the colored people of this country, especially of the Northern States and preeminently of the better informed of them, the Society is morally annihilated. At all events I can advocate it no longer. More—If I had known the facts as they might have been known long ago, I never should have advocated the Society.⁵³⁵

Moreover, white abolitionists borrowed most of their arguments against the ACS from the rhetorical precedents of the black protest movement. All of the abolitionist charges that colonizationists found themselves struggling to refute in the 1830s – that colonization was proslavery, that it encouraged racial prejudices, that it was motivated primarily by self-interest rather than by benevolent reasons, etc. – had been drawn from the black opposition movement.

Though the vast majority of Northern free blacks held the ACS in contempt, this antipathy was not absolutely unanimous. Obviously, even if no one else endorsed the colonizationist agenda, at least nine hundred African Americans from the free states found the ACS’s offers sufficiently compelling to abandon their native country and embark for an uncertain future in Liberia. African American pioneer John Russwurm, the third black graduate from an American college and cofounder of the first black-run newspaper (*Freedom’s Journal*), had participated in the black opposition movement opposing the ACS. “It is a fact, worthy of notice,” he wrote in 1827, “that our bitterest

⁵³⁴ Dorsey, “A Gendered History of Colonization in the Antebellum United States,” 80.

⁵³⁵ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 10, no. 4 (June, 1834), 110.

enemies think not more contemptibly of us, than do Colonizationists generally—that nothing serves more, to keep us in our present degraded state, than the revolting pictures which are drawn by Colonization Orators on the fourth of July, and other public occasions.”⁵³⁶ But within two years, he had come to support the Society, and himself embarked for Liberia in 1829 (where he would become the editor of the colony’s leading paper and governor of “Maryland in Liberia”). Before departing, Russwurm announced his conversion in *Freedom’s Journal*. Though he recognized that he “advance[d] doctrines in opposition to the majority of [his] readers,” he put forward an argument in favor of emigration: “We consider it a mere waste of words to talk of ever enjoying citizenship in this country: it is utterly impossible in the nature of things: all therefore who pant for th[is], must cast their eyes elsewhere.”⁵³⁷ No great wave of emigrants emerged to follow Russwurm’s example, but his endorsement of colonization shocked African American readers accustomed to considering the ACS a racist organization seeking their involuntary expulsion from the United States. Russwurm’s arguments set a precedent for the logic of subsequent emigrationist movements.

If Russwurm provided an intellectual framework for an African American defense of emigration, few embraced the idea in the three decades following his own departure. However, by the early 1850s (just as Russwurm died in Liberia, possibly of malaria), the idea of emigration had found support among a vocal minority of American free blacks. As many scholars have noted, some African Americans felt sufficiently threatened by the 1850 passage of the Fugitive Slave Act to reconsider emigration as a method to find

⁵³⁶ Winston James, *The Struggles of John Brown Russwurm: The Life and Writings of a Pan-Africanist Pioneer, 1799-1851* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 185.

⁵³⁷ *Ibid.*, 201.

refuge from persecution by white Americans.⁵³⁸ A new emigration movement emerged in the following decade, with an ideological foundation provided by black nationalists like Martin Delaney, and with a practical agenda hashed out in meetings like 1851's North American Convention of Emigrationists and 1854's National Emigration Convention of Colored People. However, Delaney and his cohort carefully distinguished their "emigration" movement, defined by its black sponsorship, from the racist, white-dominated "colonization" movement.⁵³⁹ Delaney himself excoriated the ACS, saying that "it originated in a deep laid scheme of the slaveholders of the country, to *exterminate* the free colored of the American continent."⁵⁴⁰ The emigrationists' attempt to rhetorically distance themselves rhetorically from the Colonization Society might have been partially a pragmatic decision; after three decades of almost universal condemnation in the black press, the ACS had acquired an extremely negative reputation, and no black organization associated with it could hope to meet with much approbation in the African American community. But there was a genuine ideological distance between Delaney and the ACS. Where the white colonization movement clung to Africa as the "natural" location for a black colony, Delaney recommended Central America; where the ACS had delayed the emergence of democracy in Liberia, Delaney sought to build black pride through a movement led by African Americans; where the ACS thought white prejudice unavoidable, Delaney considered racial discrimination a terrible moral crime. However, there was some overlap between the (black) emigration movement and the (white)

⁵³⁸ See Alexander, *African or American?*, 140-142; Benjamin Quarles, *Black Abolitionists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), 215; and Cyril E. Griffith, *The African Dream: Martin R. Delaney and the Emergence of Pan-African Thought* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1975), 15.

⁵³⁹ Alexander, *African or American?*, 68.

⁵⁴⁰ Martin R. Delaney, *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States*, Reprint, (1852; repr., Baltimore: Black Classics Press, 1993), 169.

colonization movement. The moral connotations of white prejudice and legalized discrimination may have been significantly different for Delaney than for the ACS, but he reached a similar conclusion: African Americans could never hope to gain acceptance as American citizens. “To imagine ourselves to be included in the body politic, except by express legislation, is at war with common sense, and contrary to fact,” he wrote. “Legislation, the administration of the laws of the country, and the exercise of rights by the people, all prove to the contrary. We are politically, not of them, but aliens to the laws and political privileges of the country.”⁵⁴¹ Despite his early advocacy of Central America as the best receptacle for African American emigrants, Delaney found the idea of African racial unity increasingly appealing, and in 1859 he sailed for Liberia, seeking to establish a (separate) settlement in the region.

Other black advocates of emigration embraced the ACS even more openly. When an 1849 black convention in Ohio proposed a standard resolution testifying “[t]hat we will never submit to the system of Colonization to any part of the world . . . ; and we say once for all, to those soliciting us, that all of their appeals to us are in vain; our minds are made up to remain in the United States, and contend for our rights at all hazards”⁵⁴² (exactly the sort of anti-colonization statements that such conventions had been issuing for decades), one delegate, a Mr. Jenkins, surprised the assembly by rising to oppose the resolution. (This was sufficiently unusual that another delegate assumed that Jenkins had

⁵⁴¹ Delaney, *Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny*, 158.

⁵⁴² “Minutes and Address of the State Convention of the Colored Citizens of Ohio, Convened at Columbus, January 10th, 11th, 12th, & 13th, 1849,” in Foner and Walker, *Proceedings of the Black State Conventions*, 229.

simply misunderstood the resolution's intent.) "We can never be anything in the United States," he argued.⁵⁴³ Another delegate, J. Mercer Langston, rose to Jenkins' defense:

I for one, sir, am willing, dearly as I love my native land, (a land which will not protect me however,) to leave it, and go wherever I can be free. We have already drank too long the cup of bitterness and woe, and do gentlemen want to drink it any longer? The spirit of our people must be aroused, they must feel and act as men. . . . The prejudices . . . were strong in this country, against the colored man, and [I am] fearful that they [will] remain so. . . . [W]e must have a nationality, before we can become anybody. . . . Why sir, the very fact of our remaining in this country, is humiliating, virtually acknowledging our inferiority to the white man.⁵⁴⁴

The anti-colonization resolution passed over these objections, but advocates of emigration made their voices heard, suggesting that only through emigration would African Americans find refuge from racism. Black New Yorker Lewis Putnam had a slightly different interpretation, though he, too, advocated the colonization cause:

If the object was to resist the force of prejudice, instead of submitting to its mandates, there would be no hope for success; but in yielding to it, on the basis of a demand for aid to establish a position beyond its reach, the reflex from the success in Liberia would be sufficient to neutralize the evil under which we are struggling in this country.⁵⁴⁵

African Americans *could* find acceptance in the United States, Putnam insisted, but only after the success of Liberia proved them worthy of being treated as equals.

The majority of black Northerners opposed the ACS because they rejected its core principles; colonizationists insisted that they should give up their resistance to the unassailable forces of white prejudice, and relinquish any claims to American citizenship.

⁵⁴³ Ibid., 223.

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁵ Lewis H. Putnam, *A Review of the Cause and the Tendency of the Issues between the Two Sections of the Country, with a Plan to Consolidate the Views of the People of the United States in Favor of Emigration to Liberia, as the Initiative to the Efforts to Transform the Present System of Labor in the Southern States into a Free Agricultural Tenantry, by the Respective Legislatures, with the Support of Congress to make it a National Measure* (Albany: Weed, Parsons, & Company, 1859), 13. Putnam had no official affiliation with the ACS, and in fact the MSCS falsely complained that his separate fundraising efforts to support Liberian emigrants were fraudulent. *New York Times*, March 8, 1852.

Even most of those antebellum blacks who came to similar conclusions about the lack of options open to African Americans in the United States, like Martin Delaney, continued to oppose the white colonizationist movement; Delaney and his cohort thought the ACS one of the organizations making continued black residency in the United States untenable. Though the Colonization Society promised to end American slavery – a goal fervently desired by most African Americans – most were offended by the colonizationist portrait of white prejudice as unchangeable, and African American citizenship as impossible.

Chapter 5

Colonization in National Discourse

Though Americans had labored for generations to prevent it, the Civil War was for no one a complete surprise. Political friction between the North and South (primarily focused on slavery, but also surrounding other issues of regional interest, such as tariff policy, banking policy, and the federal assumption of state debt) had predated the Constitution. As Elizabeth Varon has pointed out, even George Washington's famous "Farewell Address," warning of the risks of partisan politics, was largely motivated by the fear that regional interest would overtake national unity.⁵⁴⁶ Politicians frequently invoked the threat of disunion throughout the antebellum era. When the Civil War finally arrived, it was after many decades of diverging popular and political representations of slavery and race, which had contributed to the growing sectional division of opinion over these matters. Across the nation, white Americans' conceptions of blackness and slave labor were shaped by newspaper accounts, politicians' speeches, novels, minstrel shows, and any number of other cultural products. A full survey of these writings and representations would require the work of a lifetime, but my purpose in this chapter is briefly to sketch the position of colonizationism within this national discourse. I want to suggest that the ACS was a vocal and vital participant in these national conversations. Having discussed in previous chapters the confrontations between the ACS and both abolitionist and proslavery polemical writers, I will primarily confine myself in this

⁵⁴⁶ Elizabeth R. Varon, *Disunion!: The Coming of the American Civil War, 1789-1859* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 33-34.

chapter to a brief survey of colonizationism's role in both literature and national politics.

I read these texts (literary, persuasive, or political) in direct conversation with each other (as in fact they often were). Abolitionists, apologists for slavery, and colonizationists frequently referenced each other's rhetoric, and presented refutations of each other's arguments. In this chapter I discuss these conversations in order to demonstrate colonizationism's important role in this discourse. These arguments are revealing often not so much for their effectiveness (abolitionists and proslavery advocates may have responded to each other, but converts from one position to the other were vanishingly rare), but for what they reveal of each group's fundamental assumptions about African American character, or American democracy.

Fiction

It may be apocryphal that Abraham Lincoln called Harriet Beecher Stowe "the little lady who started this great big war," and the description surely would have been an exaggeration. But her novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* did more to promote the national discussion of slavery than any other antebellum book. Barely a year after its 1852 publication, one million copies had already been sold⁵⁴⁷, and the book found an audience across the country. The popularity of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* spawned a multitude of imitators, as authors of various ideological persuasions attempted to duplicate its sentimental appeal. The 1850s saw the growth of an entire genre of polemical plantation novels, which ranged from abolitionist to colonizationist to proslavery. But nothing came close to matching the success of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The novel was so popular in New England that one Maine man comically suggested that "people point at me in the street as

⁵⁴⁷ Shaw, S. Bradley, "The Pliable Rhetoric of Domesticity," in *The Stowe Debate: Rhetorical Strategies in Uncle Tom's Cabin*, ed. Mason I. Lowance, Jr., Ellen E. Westbrook, and R.C. De Prospro (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), 79.

THE MAN WHO NEVER READ UNCLE TOM'S CABIN.'⁵⁴⁸ As far south as Georgia, one woman wrote in the midst of the Civil War that

alho [sic] I have read very few abolition books (*Uncle Tom's Cabin* making the most impression) nor have I read many pro slavery books—yet the idea has gradually become more and more fixed in my mind that the institution of slavery is not right—but I am reading a new [proslavery] book, *Nellie Norton* by the Rev E W Warren which I hope will convince me that it is right.⁵⁴⁹

This image is a striking one – a slave-owning woman, whose husband was fighting a war to defend the institution of slavery, turning to fiction to make up her own mind about that very institution.⁵⁵⁰ Clearly literature was an important venue through which antebellum (and bellum!) Americans explored the meanings and morality of slavery.

My discussion of fictional representations of slavery is informed by a theoretical framework adapted from Dwight McBride's concept of "discursive terrain." In his study of slave narratives, McBride writes that

discursive terrain does not simply function to create a kind of overdetermined way of telling an experience; it creates the very codes through which those who would be readers of the slave narrative understand the experience of slavery. If language enable[s] articulations, language also enables us to read, to decipher, and to interpret those articulations. As a result, it becomes very important for the slave narrator to be able to speak the codes, to speak the language that preexists the telling of his or her story. Hence the story has to conform to certain codes, certain specifications that are overdetermined by the very discursive terrain into which the slave narrator is entering or inserting himself.⁵⁵¹

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁹ Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas, *The Secret Eye: The Journal of Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas, 1848-1889*, ed. Virginia Ingraham Burr (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 238.

⁵⁵⁰ Drew Gilpin Faust has explored the ways in which Southern women during the Civil War used literature "to explore the dilemmas of a rapidly changing American social world." Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 154.

⁵⁵¹ Dwight A. McBride, *Impossible Witnesses: Truth, Abolitionism, and Slave Testimony* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 3-4. McBride's concept of "discursive terrain" owes an obvious debt to the semiotic concept of "intertextuality," as developed by theorist Julia Kristeva. Kristeva describes all texts as being in dialogue with a complex web of previously published works; meaning is constructed as much in the relationship between texts as in the relationship between text and reader. See Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 64-91.

McBride suggests that “discursive terrain” particularly constrained former slaves authoring accounts of their own experiences. The authenticity of slave narratives was often doubted, ironically especially when they expressed their experiences of slavery too well, in language considered too educated for people raised in slavery.⁵⁵² However, I contend that *all* antebellum accounts of slavery and African American experience entered a predefined discursive terrain shaped by established conventions and understandings (often shared by ideologically diverse writers and readers). To choose a simple example, the use of dialect to transcribe African American speech in published writing was a “literary convention” that “validate[d] . . . [antebellum readers’] conception[s] of authenticity.”⁵⁵³ White readers expected to see black speech rendered in dialect; its presence signaled an author’s familiarity with African Americans, and its absence might make readers doubt (consciously or unconsciously) a text’s credibility. In the discussion that follows, I will analyze several elements of the discursive terrain of slavery, and how authors of varying ideological backgrounds each incorporated “accepted truths” about race and slavery into their texts, but interpreted these truths in very different ways. For example, a proslavery writer (or reader) might understand African American dialect as evidence of black inferiority; while for an abolitionist it could demonstrate the

⁵⁵² For example, Frederick Douglass said of his eloquence in presenting his own autobiography that “my manner was such as to create a suspicion that I was not a runaway slave, but some educated free negro.” Quoted in John Blassingame, “Introduction” in *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself*, Reprint, (1845; repr., New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), xxii. Most slave narratives were prefaced with statements from white authorities testifying to their veracity. Lydia Maria Child’s introduction to Harriet Jacobs’ autobiography expected that “[i]t will naturally excite surprise that a woman reared in Slavery should be able to write so well.” Harriet A. Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself* (Boston: for the author, 1861), 7.

⁵⁵³ Levy, Andrew, “Dialect and Convention: Harriet A. Jacobs’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*,” *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 45, no. 2. (September, 1990): 206. The actual use of creolized forms of English by slaves and other African Americans has spawned its own academic literature, but I am more concerned here with its appearance in antebellum writing, which was often an inaccurate representation of actual slave dialects, and also habitually employed “eye-dialect,” or the phonetic misspelling of words to emphasize a speaker’s lack of education. See J.L. Dillard, *Black English: Its History and Usage in the United States* (New York: Random House, 1972).

degradation and lack of educational opportunities of slavery; and a colonizationist might read it as evidence of the unbridgeable gap between the white and black races.

No book contributed more to the shaping of this discursive terrain, or was more central to the national discourse of slavery, than *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The book itself, and popular antebellum stage adaptations of its story, presented millions of Americans with a portrayal of slavery as immoral and damaging to both slaves and slaveowners. Scholars have called the book “probably the most influential novel in history up to its time—and possibly of all time,”⁵⁵⁴ and it no doubt convinced many Northern white readers of slavery’s immorality. Part of Stowe’s genius was to present her readers with stereotypically droll scenes of black incompetence, but to undermine expectations, or to make the stereotype itself into a complaint against slavery. An early scene in which the slaves Sam and Andy confound the slave dealer Haley’s attempts to capture the runaway Eliza is an illustration of “Stowe’s comic appropriation of one of slavery’s most cherished stereotypes—a ‘childlike’ creature exhibiting ‘obedience,’ ‘loyalty,’ and ‘happiness.’”⁵⁵⁵ Sam and Andy speak in stereotypical “humorous” dialect – “I’se ‘quired what yer may call a habit o’ *bob*servation, Andy”⁵⁵⁶ – and they present a typical comic scene of incompetence as they attempt to capture Haley’s runaway horse, and then misunderstand his questions and advise him to take the wrong road to overtake Eliza. Externally, this might appear to be a typical comic scene demonstrating slaves’ incompetence and need for direction, but Stowe reveals that all of this is a façade put on

⁵⁵⁴ Alfred R. Ferguson, “The Abolition of Blacks in Abolitionist Fiction, 1830-1860,” *Journal of Black Studies* 5, no. 2 (December, 1974): 137.

⁵⁵⁵ James Bense, “Myths and Rhetoric of the Slavery Debate and Stowe’s Comic Vision of Slavery,” in Lowance, Westbrook, and Prosop, *The Stowe Debate*, 189.

⁵⁵⁶ Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin; or, Life among the Lowly*, Reprint, (1852; repr., New York: Bantam Books, 1981), 54.

by Sam and Andy (in concert with their mistress, Mrs. Shelby), to retard Haley's attempts to recapture Eliza: "Nothing was further from Sam's mind than to have any one of the troop [of frightened horses] taken until such season as should seem to him most befitting."⁵⁵⁷ Sam's apparent stupidity and incompetence are revealed actually to be calculated attempts to foil Haley's plans. Readers' expectations of African American behavior are satisfied, but that behavior is revealed to be intentional and clever, rather than involuntary and stupid. The character of Topsy later in the novel presents another figure of the racialized African American. Like Sam and Andy, Topsy fulfills many of readers' expectations of slaves' behavior. She is dishonest and lazy, and indulges in "every species of drollery, grimace, . . . mimicry, . . . dancing, tumbling, climbing, singing, whistling, [and] imitating every sound that hit her fancy."⁵⁵⁸ But Stowe explains Topsy's depraved behavior not racially, but rather as a result of her upbringing under slavery. She is completely ignorant of religion or morality, and when her mistress Ophelia St. Clare expresses bewilderment at how to make her behave, Topsy offers, "Law, Missis, you must whip me; my old Missis allers whipped me. I an't used to workin' unless I gets whipped."⁵⁵⁹ Topsy's degradation, then, is explained by her brutal upbringing under slavery, and thus Stowe makes Topsy's stereotypical behavior into an attack on the institution of slavery. Once introduced to a Christian education and the pure love of the dying Eva St. Clare, Topsy is redeemed. The black stereotypes of *Uncle*

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid., 52.

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid., 282.

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid., 284.

Tom's Cabin are presented not as evidence of racial inferiority, but of the degradation and dishonesty forced on slaves by their unnatural circumstances.⁵⁶⁰

Of course, as many historians and literary scholars have pointed out, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is not a fully abolitionist novel. At the end of the tale, its titular black protagonist is dead, and almost all of the surviving black characters determine to emigrate to Liberia.

⁵⁶⁰ *Uncle Tom's Cabin* also cleverly incorporated another element of the discursive terrain of slavery into its critique of the institution: the fictive "family" ties between masters and slaves. Uncle Tom himself is situated in two congenial, affectionate families before finally being consigned to the demonic Legree. When his first owner, Arthur Shelby, informs him that he is to be sold, Tom responds with a nostalgic non sequitur: "Mas'r . . . I was jist eight years old when ole Missis put you into my arms, and you wasn't a year old. 'Thar,' says she, 'Tom, that's to be *your* young Mas'r; take good care on him.'" Ibid., 62. Although Tom has the opportunity to escape his impending sale, he considers it part of his familial duty to "take good care on" his master to meekly accept his fate. Nor is this self-sacrificing affection entirely one-sided. Throughout Tom's ordeal, the Shelbys have not forgotten him, and cooperating with Tom's wife Aunt Chloe, over the next five years, they finally lay aside enough to redeem him. Though he arrives too late to save Tom, Arthur Shelby's son, George Shelby, travels hundreds of miles in an attempt to repurchase the loyal slave. Stowe's genius is not to deny the traditional portrait of affectionate "families" of owners and slaves, but to demonstrate that such relationships were susceptible to instant dissolution by death or bankruptcy. Stowe struggled with the question of how interracial familial affection would fare after emancipation; both *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and her next novel, *Dred*, end with former masters and slaves still living together indefinitely while the latter are prepared for freedom. Ibid., 498-500. Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Dred: A Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp, in Two Volumes, Vol. II* (Boston: Phillips, Sampson, and Company, 1856), 330-331. Of course, for proslavery writers, depictions of fictive slave "families" were arguments for the benevolence and necessity of the slave system. In a typical scene in Caroline Hentz's *The Planter's Northern Bride*, for example, the protagonist planter Moreland, returning to his plantation after a long absence, is surrounded by an adoring circle of his slaves, "eager to get within reach of his hand, the sound of his voice, the glance of his kind, protecting, yet commanding, eye. More like a father welcomed by his children than a king greeted by his subjects, he stood, the centre of that sable ring." Caroline Lee Hentz, *The Planter's Northern Bride* (Philadelphia: T.B. Peterson and Brothers, 1854), 331-332. Hentz explicitly denies that Moreland's relationship to his slaves is dictatorial; it is rather familial and patriarchal. Though this plantation is not Moreland's primary residence, he knows each of these slaves by name, and he is as familiar with their histories and situations as they are with his. Colonizationist novelists had particular difficulties incorporating the trope of the fictive slave family into their accounts; after all, it was difficult to explain why familial affection required removing black "relations" to another continent. Sarah Josepha Hale devises one possible solution to this problem in *Liberia*, whose white protagonist, Charles Peyton, sacrifices his promised birthday presents as a child to purchase a mistreated slave, Keziah, from a cruel master. Thereafter, Keziah's "devotion to him knew no bounds" to the extent that "she slept on the stairs, or threw herself, with no covering nor bed, on the floor in the passage leading to his room . . . so that, at the slightest noise, she was up and wide awake, to render any service that might be required." Sarah Josepha Hale, *Liberia; or, Mr. Peyton's Experiments* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1853), 31. To this point, everything seems to conform with the conventional depiction of mutually devoted master and slave. But when Peyton offers to free Keziah, she enthusiastically accepts, proclaiming, "I's born to be free, mas'r; I allers know'd it." Peyton is surprised by this desire: "Mr. Peyton could not prevent a sensation of disappointment, for he had felt convinced that Keziah loved him too well to leave him." Ibid., 55-56. Here Hale hinted that slaves' outward signs of devotion and affection for their white "families," even though genuine, might mask a deep-seated desire for freedom.

One of them, George Harris, writes a lengthy explanation of his reasons for leaving the United States:

The desire and yearning of my soul is for an African *nationality*. I want a people that shall have a tangible, separate existence of its own; and where am I to look for it? . . . On the shores of Africa I see a republic, – a republic formed of picked men, who, by energy and self-educating force, have, in many cases, individually, raised themselves above a condition of slavery. . . *Our nation* shall roll the tide of civilization and Christianity along its shores, and plant there mighty republics, that, growing with the rapidity of tropical vegetation, shall be for all coming ages.⁵⁶¹

Writing in the 1850s, after decades of public confrontations between the colonizationist and abolitionist causes, Stowe was aware of the controversy surrounding Liberia, and George addresses abolitionist concerns. Emigrating to Liberia, he argues, should not be seen as abandonment of those still enslaved; in fact, it will allow him to be a more effective advocate for those still in bondage. While he has no power to affect slavery as an individual, “let me go and form part of a nation, which shall have a voice in the counsel of nations, and then we can speak.” George argues that African Americans “*ought* to be free to meet and mingle, – to rise by our individual worth, without any consideration of caste or color. . . We ought, in particular, to be allowed *here*.” However, while he maintains his own and his fellow African Americans’ rights to remain in the United States, he conveniently “*do[es] not want it; I want a country, a nation, of my own.*”⁵⁶²

Stowe’s qualified endorsement of colonization did not fully accord with ACS policy. Although George Harris endorses emigration to Liberia, he is only able to make this decision because he has escaped from slavery, and establishes himself in Canada before sailing for Liberia. Of course, the ACS (which had been publicly critical of

⁵⁶¹ Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, 491-492.

⁵⁶² *Ibid.*, 493.

African American settlements in Canada⁵⁶³) disclaimed any intention to interfere directly with slave ownership, and did not intend Liberia to be a haven for escaped slaves.⁵⁶⁴ However, George's arguments for emigration accord with colonizationist ideology. His desire for "a nation of his own" indicates that his racial identification with Africa is stronger than his national identification with the United States, and he suggests that only through building up an African nation can he help to fight American racism and end the practice of slavery. These colonizationist strains in Stowe's novel have been criticized, both in her own time and by modern scholars. As Susan Ryan has argued, the colonizationist conclusion to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* somewhat undercuts the novel's success in forcing white readers to identify with black protagonists. "Even though the success of its overall argument depends on creating a sense of responsibility that crosses racial lines, the novel ends with a resegregation of benevolent relations and a reinscription of racial allegiance."⁵⁶⁵ However, Stowe's colonizationism should not be surprising, given the fact that her father, husband, and sister all supported the ACS. Of course, Liberia plays a relatively minor role in the novel; George's emigration occurs only in the denouement,

⁵⁶³ In 1841, for example, the *African Repository* printed a lengthy critique of the abolitionist practice of settling escaped slaves in Canada. "The history of Lower Canada shows most conclusively that the descendants of two nations, each preserving their own language, cannot peacefully live together." *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 17, no. 1 (January 1, 1841), 13.

⁵⁶⁴ This was a point made by J.W. Page in his proslavery response, *Uncle Robin, in His Cabin in Virginia, and Tom Without One in Boston*. One of the novel's sympathetic slaveowning characters responds to a rumor about runaway Kentucky slaves who first found refuge in Canada and then sailed for Liberia (a clear reference to George Harris and his family) by ridiculing the notion that such an event might actually occur: "Can you suppose anything more foreign from the intention of Southern philanthropists (who planted the colony of Liberia for the reception of coloured persons then free, and who were to become so by emancipation), than that it should recoil upon themselves, produce insecurity in their slave property, by becoming an asylum for runaway negroes? The very idea, sir, is a slander upon the republic of Liberia; a direct charge of ingratitude and breach of faith." J.W. Page, *Uncle Robin in His Cabin in Virginia and Tom Without One in Boston* (Richmond: J.W. Randolph, 1853), 97-98. Although Page discredits the idea that Liberia would welcome escaped slaves, Liberia does function in the novel as a legitimate method for slaveowners to emancipate their slaves. *Ibid.*, 217-218.

⁵⁶⁵ Susan M. Ryan, *The Grammar of Good Intentions: Race and the Antebellum Culture of Benevolence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 150.

and Stowe reportedly later said that “if she were to write *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* again, she would not send George Harris to Liberia.”⁵⁶⁶ But the novel’s colonizationist conclusion cannot be ignored.

Given the American Colonization Society’s antislavery rhetoric, Stowe’s ideological position – somewhere between full-fledged abolitionism and a complete endorsement of colonization – should not appear a paradox. After all, her implication that slavery should be immediately abolished, but that Liberia’s success might help to make this possible, was not without precedent. Almost two decades before the publication of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, her own father, Lyman Beecher, had presented a similar view at a meeting of an Ohio colonization auxiliary. Beecher began his speech by asserting, “There can be no doubt that slavery, through the world, is destined to cease.”⁵⁶⁷ Colonization and abolition societies should not be antagonists, but cooperate to accomplish this task. The ACS’s “great and primary object, is the emancipation of Africa, while she anticipated as an incidental result, the emancipation of the colored race at home.”⁵⁶⁸ Only by demonstrating African American capabilities could the prejudice of white Americans be overcome: “[S]ince prejudice is the result of condition and character, it is invincible till the causes which created it are removed.”⁵⁶⁹ Lyman Beecher’s response to abolitionism was typical of Northern colonizationists, as discussed in the previous chapter; he argued that abolitionists should have no quarrel with the Colonization Society, and that a regenerated Liberia could be a powerful tool in the

⁵⁶⁶ Quoted in Susan Marie Nuernberg, “The Rhetoric of Race,” in Lowance, Westbrook, and Prospo, *The Stowe Debate*, 262.

⁵⁶⁷ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 10, no. 9 (November, 1834), 279.

⁵⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 281.

⁵⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 282.

attempt to convince Southerners of the immorality of their “peculiar institution.”⁵⁷⁰ By the 1850s, when Stowe began to write *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, the chasm between abolitionism and colonizationism had widened, as the Colonization Society increasingly retreated from its earlier emancipationist rhetoric. But while the novel condemned slavery in stronger terms than did most contemporary colonizationists, the ACS had throughout its history promised to help remove the curse of slavery, and to promote the spirit of emancipation peacefully among slaveowners. Though the immense popularity of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* is proof of Stowe’s narrative genius, the book’s ideological combination of opposition to slavery and support for colonization was not unique; in fact, it was not far removed from mainstream colonizationism.⁵⁷¹

⁵⁷⁰ Calvin Stowe, Harriet Beecher’s future husband, presented similar arguments in another 1834 speech: “People in slave-holding communities generally regard slavery as an evil, but an evil which has grown so interwoven with the texture of society, that disruption would be a greater calamity, than slavery itself. . . . With them, accordingly, slavery is a prohibited topic; they will enter into no argument, they will hear no reason on the subject, unless in connection with some plan by which their own safety can be secured, while the rights of the slave are restored. Colonization affords such a plan, and in connection with colonization the whole subject of slavery can be introduced and discussed, without awakening fears and exciting prejudices which preclude conviction. This is the great thing necessary to produce universal emancipation.” *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 10, no. 10 (December, 1834), 301. Harriet’s sister Catharine Beecher was even harsher in her denunciation of abolitionists, who, she wrote, had unjustly slandered the ACS: “One of the first measures of Abolitionists was an attack on [the ACS], originated and sustained by some of the most pious and devoted men of the age. . . . In public, the enterprise was attacked as a plan for promoting the selfish interests and prejudices of the whites, at the expense of the coloured population; and in many cases, it was assumed that the conductors of this association were aware of this, and accessory to it. And the style in which the thing was done was at once offensive, inflammatory, and exasperating.” Catharine E. Beecher, *An Essay on Slavery and Abolitionism, with Reference to the Duty of American Females* (Philadelphia: H. Perkins, 1837), 23-25. Catharine went on to suggest that if abolitionists hoped to convert Southern slaveholders, their immoderate language was ill-suited to the task. *Ibid.*, 44-57. Harriet Beecher Stowe’s endorsement of colonization was more limited than those of any of her relatives, but the arguments she presented in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* were not greatly different from those of her father, husband, and sister. They did, however, reach a much wider audience.

⁵⁷¹ Sufficient ideological distance separated *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* from the ACS that the Society declined to endorse the book. But occasional oblique references to the novel did dot ACS literature. For example, in 1853, the *African Repository* introduced one of its typical, generic, bucolic descriptions of Liberia with the title “A glance at ‘Topsey’s’ [sic] Home,” a reference to Topsy, one of the novel’s other African American characters, who by the end of the novel had become a missionary in Africa. *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 29, no. 10 (October, 1854): 311-312. The following year, it printed a letter from Liberian colonist Edward Blyden, in which Blyden commended Stowe for her portrayal of George Harris: “Mrs. S[towe] evidently believes that colored men should aspire to a separate nationality, in order to their permanent elevation and respectability. It seems to me that a want of expansion of soul and independency of spirit is what renders so many of them contented and indifferent as sojourners in a land of strangers—

It is striking that the most famous “anti-*Tom*” novel, Mary Henderson Eastman’s *Aunt Phillis’s Cabin* (which sold 18,000 copies in the first weeks of its publication⁵⁷²), also included an ambivalent endorsement of colonization. *Aunt Phillis’s Cabin* is usually described as a proslavery rejoinder to *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Indeed, Eastman makes clear her intention to defend the South from Stowe’s misrepresentations. The book’s lengthy preface attempts to demonstrate that “the Scriptures evidently permit slavery, even to the present time,”⁵⁷³ and that, at least in the South, slaves “are necessary: though an evil, it is one that cannot be dispensed with; and here they have been retained, and will be retained, unless God should manifest his will (which never yet has been done) to the contrary.”⁵⁷⁴ Where Stowe had portrayed black incompetence as resulting from the degradations of slavery, Eastman describes comically inept slaves in need of white guidance. The most frequent comic figure in the novel is Aunt Phillis’s husband, Bacchus, humorously depicted as a lazy, alcoholic, bungling fool, who requires frequent affectionate direction from his master. This relationship is established quickly; during his first appearance in the novel, Bacchus is excited by the springtime availability of green corn, which “helps dispepsy wonderful,” and is corrected by his owner, who asserts, “It may be good for dyspepsia, . . . but it sometimes gives old people cholera morbus, when they eat it raw; so I advise you to remember last year’s experience, and roast it before you eat it.”⁵⁷⁵ Such scenes implied that maladroit slaves were reliant on their owners, without whose supervision they would be lost.

nay, as menials in a land of oppressors.” *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 30, no. 8 (August, 1854), 238.

⁵⁷² Barrie Hayne, “Yankee in the Patriarchy: T.B. Thorpe’s Reply to *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*,” *American Quarterly* 20, no. 2 (Summer, 1968): 181n2.

⁵⁷³ Mary Henderson Eastman, *Aunt Phillis’s Cabin; or, Southern Life As It Is* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo & Co., 1852), 15.

⁵⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁵⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 31.

Eastman references colonization several times in the novel, usually in order to discredit abolitionists. In several scenes in which sympathetic slaveowners contend with abolitionist arguments, the slaveowners contrast colonizationism with morally bankrupt abolitionism. In an argument with an abolitionist by the name of Kent, the Southern gentleman Chapman asks, “[W]hy don’t the Abolitionists buy our slaves, and send them to Liberia?” and expresses his own willingness, though “a poor man,” to “sell [his slaves] to any Northern man or woman at half-price for what I could get from a trader, and they may send them to Liberia.”⁵⁷⁶ Compensated emancipation and colonization is thus represented as the fair alternative to the radicalism of abolition. The same Kent who had advocated abolitionism later demonstrates his lack of moral principles by marrying a slaveowning Southern woman and becoming the sort of greedy, brutal, Yankee master typical of plantation novels.⁵⁷⁷ Kent gets his comeuppance when, upon his wife’s death, expecting to inherit her substantial estate, he is thwarted by her will, which instructs that her slaves are to be freed, and her plantation sold to cover the expense of their colonization. The novel’s protagonists remark on the wisdom of this arrangement.⁵⁷⁸ In

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid., 93-94.

⁵⁷⁷ The idea that former New Englanders made the harshest masters became a convention of slavery literature of every ideological persuasion. Of course, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin’s* Simon Legree is the most famous example of a former Yankee who becomes a brutal, degraded slaveowner, but similar figures were featured in a wide range of novels, including the proslavery *Uncle Robin in His Cabin in Virginia and Tom Without One in Boston* and the colonizationist *Frank Freeman’s Barber Shop*. Page, *Uncle Robin*, 13. Baynard Rush Hall, *Frank Freeman’s Barber Shop* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1852), 82. The convention that Northerners made the harshest masters was so pervasive that it even appeared in nonfiction works, such as Harriet Jacobs’ narrative of her years in captivity: “When northerners go to the south to reside, they prove very apt scholars. They soon imbibe the sentiments and disposition of their neighbors, and generally go beyond their teachers. Of the two, they are proverbially the hardest masters.” Jacobs, *Incidents*, 69. The figure of the cruel Yankee slaveowner was part of the discursive terrain of slavery, but susceptible to varying interpretations. Antislavery readers might take the New England origins of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin’s* brutal Simon Legree to indicate that slavery encouraged sadistic behavior, and would pervert any man, while proslavery Southern readers might deduce from the Northern birth of *Uncle Robin’s* cruel Mr. Preble that Northern whites had less natural affinity for blacks, and were actually more culpable of racial prejudice than their Southern brethren. The figure of the cruel Yankee slavemaster was thus a shared feature of the national discourse of slavery, but its meaning could be interpreted in varying ways.

⁵⁷⁸ Eastman, *Aunt Phillis’s Cabin*, p. 242.

the novel's climactic deathbed scene, the benevolent planter patriarch Mr. Weston offers to emancipate the children of his dying, loyal slave Aunt Phillis, and send them to Liberia; in the end, they are emancipated, but choose to remain on the plantation. Jim O'Loughlin has pointed out the limitations of Eastman's attempted defense of slavery: "Eastman's attempt to debate Stowe in terms set by Stowe compromised the pro-slavery position."⁵⁷⁹ *Aunt Phillis's Cabin* portrays the character of slaveowners as benevolent and kind, but if the ultimate elaboration of this benevolence is emancipation, how is this a vindication of slavery? In fact, before offering to emancipate Phillis's children, Weston remarks, "The distinction between you and me as master and slave, I consider no longer existing."⁵⁸⁰ Though the relationship between Phillis and her master is portrayed as preternaturally affectionate, this close emotional bond sublimates the master-slave relation out of which it was born. Eastman portrays slavery as a necessary evil – "a curse on the master as well as the slave"⁵⁸¹ – and the benevolence of her slaveowning characters is illustrated by their willingness to emancipate and colonize their slave property. However, she stops short of endorsing complete emancipation and colonization. Weston considers it "*impossible* to manumit [all] the slaves," and though he is willing to see slavery end in his native Virginia, "as in our climate, white labor would answer; . . . *farther* South, *only the negro* can labor, and this is an unanswerable objection to our Southern States becoming free."⁵⁸² Eastman's endorsement of

⁵⁷⁹ Jim O'Loughlin, "Articulating 'Uncle Tom's Cabin,'" *New Literary History* 31, no. 3 (Summer, 2009): 591.

⁵⁸⁰ Eastman, *Aunt Phillis's Cabin*, 259.

⁵⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 233.

⁵⁸² *Ibid.*, 234.

colonization is thus limited to the possibilities it holds out of safe emancipation; she does not present the ACS as a way either to remove or to perpetuate slavery.⁵⁸³

The plethora of plantation novels that followed the success of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* included a few with clear colonizationist perspectives.⁵⁸⁴ Sarah Josepha Hale, most famous for her role as editor of the popular magazine *Godey's Lady's Book*, had long been an ACS supporter, and had published a colonizationist novel, *Northwood, or, Life North and South* in 1827, which was quickly rereleased in 1852 in order to capitalize on the popularity of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Hale also immediately began work on a second novel, which would be published in 1853, under the title *Liberia, or, Mr. Peyton's Experiments*. Written in the era before the most vociferous abolitionist attacks on the

⁵⁸³ During the book's concluding chapter, Eastman does suggest that as the "Jews ever turn their eyes and affections toward Jerusalem, as their home; so [too] should the free colored people in America regard Liberia," and also expresses the hope that "Liberia or Africa [will] become a great nation." *Ibid.*, 271-272. Liberia is thus recommended for free blacks, if not all slaves. But nowhere does Eastman suggest that the removal and colonization of free blacks will render slaves' bondage more secure, and the function of colonization in the novel's plot is always to permit the emancipation of slaves, not the removal of free blacks. Other proslavery novels similarly deployed colonization as an emancipationist project, including *Antifanaticism* (in which loyal slaves are rewarded by being emancipated and colonized), *The Planter's Northern Bride* (in which the protagonist proves his benevolence by offering to emancipate and colonize his slaves, but finds his offer declined), and "*Uncle Tom's Cabin*" *Contrasted with Buckingham Hall* (in which a slaveowner recommends a colonization project in Cuba or the American southwest in order to make possible the abolition of slavery – but demonstrates no desire to emancipate his own slaves). Martha Haines Butt, *Antifanaticism: A Tale of the South* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo, and Co., 1853), 265. Hentz, *Planter's Northern Bride*, 109. Robert Criswell, "*Uncle Tom's Cabin*" *Contrasted with Buckingham Hall, the Planter's Home; or, A Fair View of Both Sides of the Slavery Question* (New York: D. Fanshaw, 1852), 48-49.

⁵⁸⁴ Besides those discussed in greater depth below, these included *Our Cousin Veronica* (whose antislavery English narrator marries an American slaveowner and settles on Liberian colonization as the only way safely to disengage from slavery), *Aunt Leanna* (in which a Northern family emigrates to Kentucky and contrives to emancipate and colonize as many slaves as possible), and *Adela, the Octaroon* (whose complex plot chronicles several runaway or emancipated slaves who either find happiness in Liberia or poverty and degradation in the North), as well as very thinly fictionalized works such as *Yaradee* or *Claims of the Africans*, which both present colonizationist rhetoric in the slight fictional frame of a father explaining the benefits of Liberia to his children. Mary Elizabeth Wormeley, *Our Cousin Veronica; or, Scenes and Adventures over the Blue Ridge* (New York: Bunce & Brother, 1855). Elizabeth A. Roe, *Aunt Leanna, or, Early Scenes in Kentucky* (Auburn: Miller, Orton, & Mulligan, 1855). H.L. Hosmer, *Adela, the Octaroon* (Columbus: Follett, Foster & Co. 1860). F. Freeman, *Yaradee; A Plea for Africa, in Familiar Conversations on the Subject of Slavery and Colonization* (Philadelphia: J. Whetham, 1836). Sarah Tuttle, *Claims of the Africans; or, the History of the American Colonization Society* (Boston: Massachusetts Sabbath School Union, 1832).

colonization scheme, *Northwood* is primarily an antislavery novel, and colonization plays a fairly minor role. Hale's primary purpose in this tale, in which a New England man inherits a South Carolina plantation, is to contrast Southern lassitude with New England discipline. After outsmarting both financial and romantic rivals and claiming both his rightful inheritance and the hand of his love, New Englander Sidney Romilly sets out to apply his Yankee ingenuity to the operation of the plantation. In addition to purchasing various modern labor-saving inventions, Sidney

engaged a living labor-saving instrument, an ingenious Yankee machinist and practical farmer, who was to reside with Mr. Romilly and see, experimentally, what could be done to improve and facilitate the labor on a Southern plantation; and also, for the introduction of white laborers. . . . The plans, then, that Sidney and his wife are now discussing . . . relate to these improvements, and to the number of servants they hope to be able to free by this mode of emancipation. They have resolved that every slave whose services are not needed to keep up the present income of the estate, shall be well fitted out and sent to Liberia. And thus, gradually, without disturbance to society, or danger of suffering to their servants, they hope to make them all, eventually free, and prepared to do good by and with their freedom.⁵⁸⁵

This fictional representation drew heavily from colonizationist rhetoric, in which it was argued that slaveowners would eventually come to recognize the natural superiority of free over slave labor, and financial interest alone would lead them to emancipate and colonize their slaves. *Northwood* is similar to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in that both books are primarily concerned with demonstrating slavery's damaging nature, and introduce colonization only at the end, as a convenient way to remove both slavery and former slaves from the American landscape. *Northwood* maintains almost exclusive focus on the novel's white characters; slaves appear infrequently and are only lightly characterized. Hale's emphasis is not on injustices done to slaves. Rather, the "white race . . . endures

⁵⁸⁵ Sarah Josepha Hale, *Northwood, or, Life North and South: Showing the True Character of Both*, Reprint, (1827; repr., New York: H. Long & Brother, 1852), 404.

the heaviest burden of the evils of slavery. . . Slave labor keeps Virginia poor; free labor makes Massachusetts rich.”⁵⁸⁶

This would change with *Liberia*. Drawing on Stowe’s example, Hale portrayed her African American characters with much more detail, and made them more central to her story. The book’s title was also no coincidence. Colonization had almost been an afterthought in *Northwood*, but it provided the structure for the entire plot of *Liberia*. The later novel chronicles the attempts of white protagonist Charles Peyton to free the slaves he has inherited, which find their culmination in Liberia. Where *Northwood* was a pre-Garrisonian novel whose primary purpose was to demonstrate the necessity of ending slavery, *Liberia* assumes that its readers will approve of Peyton’s emancipationist project. Its plot revolves around a series of failed emancipationist projects, each one demonstrating the superior advantages of Liberian colonization. Peyton first attempts to settle some former slaves on some property close to his own plantation, but most of them quickly devolve into indolence:

It was easy for Mr. Peyton’s freedmen to work enough to satisfy their consciences, and to procure a part of what was necessary for their subsistence, and often a great part; for it is wonderful, to those of many wants, how little will suffice to satisfy those whose only desires spring from their animal nature. And they knew they had an unfailing resource, if sickness or distress came upon them. Mr. Peyton never refused them what they really needed, both for the sake of past services, and because he did not wish to be the means of burdening others in the community with the care of his people.⁵⁸⁷

Next, Peyton attempts to settle a second family of emancipated slaves in Philadelphia. At first, the experiment seems a success, and the family is able to support itself in a fine style. Too fine, in fact, Peyton’s wife notes during a visit to their well-appointed

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid., 167. This argument is put into the mouth of Squire Romilly, Sidney’s father, but there is little doubt that this very sympathetic character was meant to express sentiments that Hale herself endorsed.

⁵⁸⁷ Hale, *Liberia*, 59.

Philadelphia home: “When they might be vindicating their right to freedom . . . , they were wasting their energies on every pursuit that could gratify their vanity, and losing sight of those means that could alone increase their true respectability.”⁵⁸⁸ This, of course, only portends disaster, and the family’s failure to prepare for adversity is made clear when the patriarch falls ill and loses his employment, before spiraling into alcoholism and dire poverty. They also experience discrimination and violence at the hands of racist Northern whites. Peyton next encounters some familiar former slaves during a trip to Canada, who had escaped from a harsh master. Predictably, he forms an unfavorable impression of this community, as well: “Canada was no pleasant abiding-place for the blacks, and . . . held far apart from all intercourse and communion with those who occupied the superior position . . . , it was as fully probable that they would deteriorate as improve by a residence in that country.”⁵⁸⁹

After bearing witness to so many failed attempts to settle former slaves in North America, Peyton finally turns his eyes to Liberia. His slaves are at first resistant to settlement, and his former manumitees even more so, but eventually consent to remove. Hale inserts lengthy quotations from ACS publications in order to demonstrate Liberia’s advantages, and the novel also includes a 58-page appendix of colonizationist propaganda. Upon arrival in Liberia, the novel’s black characters discuss the positive psychological effects of living in a homogenously black society. “You know Ben,” one remarks to another, “you never felt like a man in America.” Ben replies: “I used to try mighty hard, but I never could feel like any thing but a nigger.”⁵⁹⁰ For Hale, this is what makes Liberia superior to all other possible destinations for African Americans. In

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid., 83-84.

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid., 126.

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid., 224.

Hale's view, blacks could never hope to advance in a white society; only in their own country could they shed their racial identity and think of themselves as full "men," fit for all the responsibilities and rights that should belong to all humanity. Like *Uncle Tom's Cabin, Liberia* invites the reader to identify with its black characters. Hale hoped that her white audience's narrative satisfaction at the novel's Liberian conclusion would promote ideological support for the ACS.

The premise of the novel does require Hale to put her black characters through various trials, and to fail the test of freedom in the United States. Peyton's emancipated slaves in the South fail to labor diligently, and those of the North value social pretensions over moral or spiritual growth. Though both of these experiments in emancipation end tragically, Hale describes these moral failings in a racist, comic tone. For example, urban free blacks' pretensions to dignity are mocked through the character of Amanda Fitzwalter, who Hale describes as "a little black woman, round, plump, and consequential, with her chin thrown up in the air by the exertion of maintaining a proper dignity of deportment."⁵⁹¹ Readers are supposed to laugh at Fitzwalter's description of the African American community's over-ambitious literary society: "Lately . . . they have been debatin' on Foreign and Domestic Poetry. To-night the subject is, 'Which is the finest poet of Human Nature, Byron or Shelley?'"⁵⁹² It is Fitzwalter's race (as revealed by her racial dialect) that is supposed to imbue this description with humor; the implication is that free blacks are attempting to compete with a white civilization that is still beyond their abilities. As Susan Ryan has pointed out, Hale "exploited [both] the time-worn stereotype of the slow, shiftless rural 'black' who cannot (or will not)

⁵⁹¹ Ibid., 81-82.

⁵⁹² Ibid., 83.

‘regulate’ himself, [and] . . . the popular image of the frivolous, pleasure-seeking, irresponsible urban ‘black.’”⁵⁹³ Of course, Hale’s African American characters were not solely comic figures; the same free urban blacks who are objects of fun are transmuted later in the chapter into deeply tragic figures, mired in poverty and degradation:

[T]he figure of a woman [lay] stretched on the ground . . . ; in another corner lay what seemed a bundle of rags, breathing heavily; and a little boy, with hardly an article of clothing upon him, was crouching among the smouldering ashes in the chimney corner. . . The least distressing object in the miserable room was the dead body of a babe, whose life was as yet counted only by months and days.⁵⁹⁴

Readers of the novel needed to be able to shift quickly from comic to tragic modes; indeed, the comic stereotype of the improvident Northern black is intended to foreshadow the eventual tragedy that befalls the characters. Where Stowe had appropriated stereotypes of black ineptitude as evidence of slavery’s degrading nature, Hale presented similar scenes to demonstrate the failures of emancipation *sans* colonization. Hale also accompanied her stereotypical descriptions of African American incompetence with universalizing language. Her depiction of the Southern manumitees’ failure to labor diligently, for example, is followed by the maxim, “Few men naturally like a life of labor. It was first inflicted as a curse; and though obedience often transmutes it into a blessing, yet people generally, white as well as black, count it a happiness if they are elevated above the necessity for exertion.”⁵⁹⁵ Stereotypical black laziness was thus redefined as universal human aversion to labor, which only proper acculturation could overcome.

Liberia attempts a difficult rhetorical task. Hale cites common cultural stereotypes of African Americans, but transmutes comedy into tragedy; though stereotypical black improvidence and pretension are momentarily humorous, they contain

⁵⁹³ Ryan, “Errand into Africa: Colonization and Nation Building in Sarah J. Hale’s *Liberia*,” 568.

⁵⁹⁴ Hale, *Liberia*, 106.

⁵⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 59.

the seeds of the characters' downfall. These stereotypes usually created a sense of cultural distance between white audiences and African American representations, but Hale asks her readers to identify with these characters; their racially particularized character flaws are reformulated as faults to which all humans are prone. In this way, Hale incorporates readers' expectations of comic African American behavior, but presents the behavior as a marker of tragic degradation. Liberia is positioned as the solution to this degradation, and once settled there, Hale drops the textual markers of her African American characters' race. "One of emigration's most unusual outcomes is that the former slaves . . . lose their . . . black English dialect and begin to use grammatically perfect, standard (white, northern) English."⁵⁹⁶ Readers are expected to understand the African American characters' stereotypical behavior as a result of their American context. Once placed in the black nation of Liberia, these characters are completely redeemed from racial conventions, and are described in terms of generalized humanity. The evolution of Hale's African American characters from objects of mirth to tragic figures to heroic subjects is designed to appeal to an audience with particular racial understandings and expectations. For readers whose expectations of black behavior were shaped by the popular stereotypes of the minstrel stage, Hale's characterizations of emancipated slaves would fit with expectations of African American behavior. However, Hale attempts to reinterpret these stereotypes, not as comic demonstrations of black inferiority, but rather as tragic evidence of the damage caused by slavery and white competition. Having engaged the sympathy of her white readers with her black characters' predicament, she provides a narrative resolution through Liberian colonization. This construction could be convincing for readers who considered slavery

⁵⁹⁶ Ryan, "Errand into Africa: Colonization and Nation Building in Sarah J. Hale's Liberia," 572.

immoral, and who wished to see African Americans conform to hegemonic standards of success, but who could not imagine this occurring in the United States.

If Hale's *Liberia* was written for a Northern audience, and primarily argues for the superiority of Liberian colonization over any other form of emancipation, colonizationist novels also appeared for Southern readers. Baynard Rush Hall, author of *Frank Freeman's Barber Shop*, repeatedly identifies himself as a Southerner, and addresses a Southern audience.⁵⁹⁷ The bulk of the novel's plot is designed as an exposé of abolitionist perfidy, and a vindication of slaveowners. Benevolent protagonist Edward Leamington was born in the North, but had married a slaveowning Southern woman, and found himself entangled in the slave system. Near the beginning of the book, Leamington makes his own first slave purchase by acquiring the title to Frank Freeman, a virtuous slave unjustly suspected of participating in a violent uprising, and who can only be saved from vicious slave traders by Leamington's purchase; Freeman is suitably grateful for Leamington's financial sacrifice. Leamington's family, including Freeman, are soon forced to travel to Boston to attend to Leamington's ailing mother, where Freeman is seduced by abolitionists into deserting his master. The greedy, predatory abolitionists promise Freeman great opportunities as a free man in the North, but he quickly discovers that Boston is no more hospitable to African Americans than the South.

Frank Freeman . . . could have plead law, practiced medicine, preached sermons, taught schools, been a candidate; but there were no openings: white persons had monopolized the things: and owing to the unfortunate and perhaps wicked prejudices of the whites, they preferred whites, in all these cases. And Frank had

⁵⁹⁷ Hall directly addresses "ye noble, generous, planters of my native south-land." Hall, *Frank Freeman*, 86. In fact, Hall was born in Philadelphia, only briefly lived in Kentucky, and spent most of his peripatetic life in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and New York. *Dictionary of American Biography* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936). In *Frank Freeman*, however, Hall concealed his Northern roots, and presented himself as a Southerner.

not the bad taste to condemn in our race, what he felt was proper and natural in his own.⁵⁹⁸

In the end, Frank is reduced to a proprietor of the titular barber shop, and resigns himself to a life of poverty in the North. He is rescued by a Quaker, and a convenient bequest from his former owners, which enables him to sail for Liberia. This fulfills Frank's natural desire for "a country and a nation: he did not want to be isolated and dependent: he would not beg and cringe."⁵⁹⁹

The tone of *Frank Freeman's Barber Shop* is far removed from that of *Liberia*. Hale's scenes of comic black incompetence were comparatively brief, and foreshadowed tragic results, but Hall's novel includes lengthy scenes mocking black pretension. An entire chapter chronicles a marriage proposal between two incidental Northern free black characters, stereotypically described as "done up . . . in silks and broadcloths splendid with buckle and button, and sparkling with glass jewelry and French paste!"⁶⁰⁰ The romantic scene plays out on the top of a speeding coach, and the characters' sentimental expressions of affection are undercut by their simultaneous efforts to rein in their frightened horse; celebrating their engagement with a first kiss, their "protruded lips . . . smack . . . short and snappish, like a whip-crack,"⁶⁰¹ and set the horse off on another mad dash. The chapter concludes with their wedding, officiated by a white abolitionist minister. Once again, a romantic kiss between African Americans is turned into a comic opportunity, as the groom invites the minister to kiss the bride at the conclusion of the ceremony. Hall considers such a breach of social segregation quite hilarious, and the minister's refusal evidence of the absurdity of his racial egalitarianism.

⁵⁹⁸ Hall, *Frank Freeman*, 316.

⁵⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 315.

⁶⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 266.

⁶⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 272.

Ha! ha!—Emancipator! you are caught—fairly caught! . . . And yet the astounded doctor after all escaped this most righteous punishment; for . . . the whites, fearing they would have to follow suit, contrived to smuggle [him] out . . . ; in which they, of course, succeeded, being accustomed to smuggle out black people.⁶⁰²

Abolitionists were as much the butt of the joke here as were African Americans (and this is only one of several scenes in the novel which ridiculed the abolitionists' own racial prejudices), but Hall's extended racist comedy portrayed free blacks as especially degraded. In contrast, enslaved African American characters are presented sympathetically, especially Frank Freeman himself, whom Hall describes as "on a par with the whites generally," though his character is flawed by with the racial traits of being "ardent and impulsive . . . confiding and unsuspecting."⁶⁰³ The contrast between the novel's characterizations of loyal, happy slaves and pretentious, ignorant free blacks gives the impression that freedom has been the cause of black degradation.

Yet *Frank Freeman's Barber Shop* is not a proslavery novel. Its white protagonist Leamington only reluctantly assumes slave ownership, and his Southern uncle assures him that all the slaveowners of the region are motivated primarily by necessity: "[S]how us any fair, open, practicable system for universal emancipation, and the South will erect you a monument, and call you Pater Patriæ."⁶⁰⁴ Leamington describes the desire for freedom among African Americans as "invincible" and "natural,"⁶⁰⁵ and the novel is sympathetic to Frank's dawning realization that he cannot consent to call another man "master." Though the book was clearly intended for a

⁶⁰² Ibid., 282-283.

⁶⁰³ Ibid., 40. Hall makes a point of Freeman's pure African descent, in contrast to Stowe's mixed-race George Harris (and doomed Uncle Tom). "[W]riters of *fictions* make their heroes and heroines beautiful mulattoes; always so, if they are to come North among the free! But surely a black person is the best representative of the blacks. . . Writers of *fiction* kill off the jet black—not knowing exactly how to *work them* advantageously to the North." Ibid., 185-186.

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid., 76.

⁶⁰⁵ Ibid., 30.

Southern audience, its fundamental ideological assumptions are not far removed from those of Hale's *Liberia*. Both novels feature benevolent slaveowners who see the "peculiar institution" as, at best, a necessary evil. Both describe free blacks as having deteriorated from the moral and economic position of slaves. And the African American protagonists of both novels feel a natural desire for their own nation. Though the two books were intended for different audiences, they demonstrate that as late as the 1850s, colonization was still being urged in the South as well as in the North as a method to help generally benevolent slaveowners extricate themselves from the system, and as a way to assist African Americans who should be rescued from slavery, but who would only degenerate in a mixed-race society. Both Hale and Hall present colonizationism's global segregation as the only possible method to end slavery safely while also ensuring the happiness of former slaves.⁶⁰⁶

Of course, colonization did not only appear in literature which endorsed the colonization scheme. Both abolitionist and proslavery novels raised the specter of

⁶⁰⁶ Hezekiah Hosmer's *Adela, the Octoroon* forms something of an exception to this rule. The novel is clearly antislavery, and, in the usual fashion for colonizationist novels, baldly contrasts the fates of African American characters who find success and happiness in Liberia with those who remain in the United States: "[T]he lowly, persecuted negro of the free States . . . has no home, no individuality, no character, no freedom here. Driven from place to place in pursuit of employment, and compelled to take up with any menial service which offers, to obtain a livelihood, how much more is his mental, or moral, or physical condition improved, by a transition from slavery to the free States of our Union?" Hosmer, *Adela*, 399. However, *Adela* herself, the refined white lady whose octoroon racial status is only revealed late in the book (by an antagonist who designs to enslave her and subject her to sexual humiliations) is apparently sufficiently racially pure to join her (white) lover in California and join the American citizenry. Of course, *Adela* conforms to the literary tradition of the "tragic octoroon," which "permits the [white] audience to identify with her, not merely on the superficial level of her color, but more profoundly in terms of the radical reversal of fortune she has suffered—both modes of identification denied . . . to the more representative, but less imaginatively available figure of the black slave." Jules Zanger, "The 'Tragic Octoroon' in Pre-Civil War Fiction," *American Quarterly* 18, no. 1 (Spring, 1966): 67. In other words, white readers were invited to identify with *Adela* as, essentially, a white woman whose black parentage was insignificant. Her character is constructed very differently from the escaped slave Eunice, described as a mulatto, and who is sufficiently light-skinned to pass for white. Eunice identifies as African American, however, and embraces the opportunity to embark for Liberia: "Life will know little pleasure, till I forsake, forever, the soil, where, at best, I can be only a slave." Hosmer, *Adela*, 131. The complications that such mixed-race characters posed for the ACS's simple segregationist ideology might explain why the "tragic octoroon" was so infrequently featured in pro-colonization literature or rhetoric.

colonization, if only to explain the reasons for its rejection. Proslavery novelists tended to conflate colonization and abolitionism. The proslavery *Ellen* lists “colonization societies” among the interests of a fanatical abolitionist character.⁶⁰⁷ In *Old Toney and His Master*, colonization is similarly identified with abolitionism:

[T]he fanatics of the North and England would send . . . four millions [of slaves] back to Africa, which is the road back to hell! For to give them their freedom *en masse* is to pronounce the doom of expatriation upon them, or to devote them all to a final and a bloody extermination, more sudden, and heartless, and complete than has been the almost extermination of the Aborigines of America! . . . Poor, degraded, despised, maltreated free negro! Kicked and cuffed hither and thither, without a kind master to defend you when wronged, without a friendly soul to sympathize with you in your woes and troubles! cheated and fleeced on all sides, with poverty, and cold, and hunger, and starvation staring you in the face . . . — whither and to whom shall you flee? Cursed by the white man, hated and despised by the slave, and pitied only by the slandered, and abused, and grossly-misrepresented slaveholder, who at last is your best and truest friend, you are destined to be driven into the wilderness and the desert, and forced back into a savage condition worse than the moral death and corpse-like state from which you are only just beginning to awake by the helping hand of the beneficent institution of slavery!⁶⁰⁸

Even abolitionist novels, which of course took a much friendlier view of emancipation, represented the colonization’s emancipationist possibilities, though the ACS’s plan was usually portrayed as insufficient. In Richard Hildreth’s 1836 novel *The Slave* (republished in 1852 as *The White Slave*), the mixed-race protagonist, himself an escaped slave and now passing for white as he searches for the family wrenched from him by sale, encounters a Southern colonizationist, Mr. Telfair. Telfair is described sympathetically, as a genuine critic of slavery, but his gradual approach is quickly contrasted with that of Mr. Mason, who seeks to emancipate his slaves as quickly as possible, and settle them in Ohio or Indiana; hearing Mason’s plan, the novel’s narrator

⁶⁰⁷ V.G. Cowdin, *Ellen: or, The Fanatic’s Daughter* (Mobile: S.H. Goetzel & Company, 1860), 7.

⁶⁰⁸ “Desmos,” *Old Toney and His Master; or, the Abolitionist and the Land-Pirate, Founded on Facts: A Tale of 1824-1827* (Nashville: Southwestern Publishing House, 1861), 249-250.

remarks, “How the nobleness of the man grew upon me as he thus detailed his plans and intentions!”⁶⁰⁹ Hildreth’s purpose in pairing the two men appears to have been to grant greater credit to the immediate emancipationist Mason than to the gradualist Telfair, but both characters are described in sympathetic terms. Abolitionist novels often portrayed colonization as an unnecessary corollary to emancipation. In the antislavery *Our World*, for example, the Rosebrooks, a benevolent planter family, develop an elaborate plan to emancipate all their slaves and settle those who wish to emigrate in Africa, but Mr. Rosebrook “hold[s] that they can do as much for us at home, work for us if properly encouraged, and be good free citizens, obedient to the laws of the State, serving the general good of a great country.”⁶¹⁰ Liberian colonization could also be portrayed as exile, or as a method for slaveowners to rid themselves forever of unwanted slaves. In *Thrice Through the Furnace*, a planter’s licentious son, Sedley, disrupts his father’s promised emancipation of the enslaved man Jasmyn, because Jasmyn and Sedley are romantic rivals for the enslaved Marian. “Sedley . . . saw that Jasmyn being free, Marian would not long tarry behind; and . . . proposed to his father, either to sell [Jasmyn] privately, contrary to his agreement . . . , or only to sell him his freedom on condition of his being immediately transported to Liberia.”⁶¹¹ But even in such critical portrayals of the colonization scheme, antislavery novels still characterized the plan as directed toward the emancipation of slaves, rather than the colonization of free blacks, and rarely depicted colonization as an unalloyed evil. Sedley’s plans to exile Jasmyn to Liberia are only

⁶⁰⁹ Richard Hildreth, *The White Slave: Another Picture of Slave Life in America* (London: George Routledge and Co., 1852), 166.

⁶¹⁰ Francis Colburn Adams, *Our World: or, the Slaveholder’s Daughter* (New York: Miller, Orton & Mulligan, 1855), 138.

⁶¹¹ Sophia Louisa Little, *Thrice Through the Furnace: A Tale of the Times of the Iron Hoof* (Pawtucket: A.W. Pearce, 1852), 67.

pernicious because they prevent his promised emancipation in the United States, and because of Sedley's villainous intentions toward Marian, not because colonization itself is portrayed as a crime.

Not every antebellum novel of slavery mentioned colonization, but the scheme was sufficiently widespread in the literature to appear ubiquitous. Writers of every ideological persuasion felt it necessary to comment, if only in passing, on the ACS's plans. And the portrayals of the colonization scheme in these various fictional accounts were surprisingly similar. Many authors found something to commend in the plan; notably, both the most popular antislavery novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and its most popular proslavery response, *Aunt Phillis's Cabin*, provided partial endorsements of the scheme. And yet, the image of colonizationism remained stable across such ideologically opposed works: it was portrayed as a method by which slaveowners could, and did, emancipate their slaves. Proslavery authors could attack the ACS for its emancipationist tendencies, or endorse its limited application for specific, deserving slaves; and antislavery authors could either reproach colonizationists for the glacial pace of the scheme, or praise the possibilities that it held out for at least some slaves' emancipation. Colonizationist novels presented the scheme as a way for virtuous slaveowners to divest themselves of their human property, or for the entire South to do so. But no matter how divergent their reactions to Liberian colonization, nearly all authors described it as an emancipationist measure. During the antebellum era, I would suggest, the colonization scheme itself became part of the discursive terrain of slavery. The ACS's plan was sufficiently well-known that almost any author contemplating the subject of slavery had also to consider Liberia, and to form some opinion of the plan of colonization, much in

the same way that nearly all fictional accounts of slavery made some mention of abolitionism. The uniformity of these literary portrayals of colonizationism, even among authors with extremely divergent ideological perspectives, also demonstrates the ACS's success in identifying its cause in the public mind with the gradual emancipation of slaves. Antebellum novels nearly always considered colonization in this light. The rare free black emigrants in these fictional accounts were usually former slaves. Certainly not all antebellum plantation novels endorsed colonization, but they typically contained some reference to its emancipationist project – even if only to deride the scheme as unnecessary or insufficient. The Colonization Society's popularity was not such as to command the allegiance of the majority of Americans, but it *was* sufficiently popular to demand some mention by anyone attempting to write a comprehensive account of American slavery.

Politics

The prevalence with which colonization appeared in fictional accounts of slavery (nearly always) contrasts strongly with the frequency with which the scheme was discussed in the halls of the nation's Congress (very rarely). Congress received many memorials and petitions in favor of colonization during the antebellum years, submitted by the ACS, its local auxiliaries, friendly individuals, and state legislatures, but these often fell victim to the House's infamous "gag-rule," which (as originally formulated in 1836) required that "all petitions, memorials, resolutions, propositions, or papers, relating in any way, or to any extent whatever, to the subject of slavery, or the abolition of slavery, shall . . . be laid upon the table, and that no further action whatever shall be had

thereon.”⁶¹² With some modifications, this regulation would be enforced until 1844, and its broad language was usually applied to colonizationist petitions, as well as to calls for the immediate abolition of slavery. The Senate’s gag rule, though less discussed in either the contemporary press or the historiographical literature, was according to one historian, “a stricter version of the gag rule than that first passed in the House, and . . . far outlasted any gag imposed in the House.”⁶¹³ Of course, official policy of gag rules notwithstanding, both houses of Congress had always been reluctant to discuss the issue of slavery.⁶¹⁴ The Colonization Society had prominent friends in both houses of congress, but by no means majority support, and attempts to invoke federal aid for the scheme were habitually referred to unfriendly committees, or tabled without discussion. Despite the ACS’s claims to have no direct influence on slavery, when colonization was discussed, it frequently became the springboard for discussions of slavery, and the occasion for vehement opposition by strongly proslavery politicians. It is not my intention in this chapter to provide a narrative account of colonization’s role in national politics. The most significant federal interventions in colonization have already been discussed in Chapter 2, and they were, in any case, few and far between. Throughout the antebellum period, the Colonization Society did receive occasional federal payments for settling in Liberia slaves captured in the illegal Atlantic slave trade – though even these were controversial, as will be discussed below. But calls in Congress for more significant federal sponsorship were routinely tabled or referred without discussion. A complete

⁶¹² Quoted in Robert P. Ludlum, “The Antislavery ‘Gag-Rule’: History and Argument,” *Journal of Negro History* 26, no. 2 (April, 1941): 207.

⁶¹³ Daniel Wirls, “‘The Only Mode of Avoiding Everlasting Debate’: The Overlooked Senate Gag Rule for Antislavery Petitions,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 27, no. 1 (Spring, 2007): 124.

⁶¹⁴ As Wirls has pointed out, “prior to the creation and application of various gags in the House and Senate, antislavery petitions (along with many others on various topics) were referred or tabled, never to be heard from again, [so] there was, in effect, nothing to gag.” *Ibid.*, 136.

account of the scheme's discussion in Congress would mostly consist of a repetitive chronicle of petitions introduced, and instantly dismissed.

Although the ACS never received the substantial federal support that it had sought from its foundation, congressional debates on the subject, on the relatively rare occasions when they were allowed to occur, are instructive. Discussions of the colonization scheme almost invariably descended into acrimonious debates over slavery. In 1832, for example, several colonizationist memorials were introduced to the House by various representatives. All were quickly disposed of in the usual fashion, by referring them to committee, without debate, which would usually have been the end of the matter. Shortly afterward, however, one memorial, which had been introduced by fervent ACS supporter and Virginia Representative Charles Fenton Mercer, was challenged by Tennessee's James K. Polk, who said that he had initially "very indistinctly heard" the subject of the memorial, but he had since been informed that "it was a memorial signed by British subjects . . . , praying for the abolition of slavery." This was unacceptable: "[F]oreigners had nothing whatever to do in respect to any measures which might be adopted in reference to this great question; their interference in it in the slightest degree was uncalled for and impertinent."⁶¹⁵ Mercer briefly defended the propriety of the petition, but agreed to withdraw it. At this point, however, another colonizationist, Rhode Island's Tristram Burges⁶¹⁶, objected, and demanded that the memorial be read. "The great question of the abolition of slavery embraced the interests of the whole world," he said. "Who was there that possessed the feelings of humanity that did not breathe a fervent aspiration that the

⁶¹⁵ 8 Reg. Deb. 2333 (1832).

⁶¹⁶ Although Burges was not a member of any colonization societies, he had stated "that Colonization was the great and perhaps only means by which our country could ever be relieved from the burden of slavery." Henry L. Bowen, *Memoir of Tristram Burges; with Selections from his Speeches and Occasional Writings* (Providence: Marshall, Brown & Company, 1835), 183.

day might come when every human being that saw the light might be free? And was it a crime to address to a man who wielded the command of slave labor a wish like this?”⁶¹⁷

Such language of course provoked an angry reaction. James Blair, of South Carolina, contended that the fault for slavery lay with

the ship owners of the North who had . . . brought the Africans to the Southern shores . . . , pocketed the money, and then went home, purchased houses, and established factories. . . [T]here had always been a disposition in [the] House to agitate the slave question. . . The next step would be to patronize the Colonization Society; and then, he supposed, the next would be to apply to its designs the surplus revenue—to appropriate their own money to purchase their own property. . . He could tell gentlemen, that when they moved that question seriously, they from the South would meet it elsewhere. It would not be disputed in that House, but in the open field, where powder and cannon would be their orators, and their arguments lead and steel.⁶¹⁸

In response, Burges described himself as incredulous “that the gentleman, whose entire fortune, standing, and consequence in the community, was built upon a pyramid of the bones and sinews and blood of enslaved Africans, should dare to bring a charge like this.”⁶¹⁹ In the end, Burges withdrew his demand that the memorial be read, and Mercer withdrew the memorial itself, but not before the affair had occasioned exactly what Congress generally sought to avoid: an impassioned debate over slavery. This debate split, as might be expected, along party and sectional lines. The four members who objected to the memorial’s reading because it contained improper content were all Jacksonian Democrats, and all from Southern states. Of the seven members who spoke in

⁶¹⁷ 8 Reg. Deb. 2338 (1832).

⁶¹⁸ Ibid., 2340.

⁶¹⁹ Ibid., 2344. This debate became even more personal when Blair attacked Burges by referring to James De Wolf, a prior Senator from the same state, who “was openly charged on the floor of the Senate, not only with having been engaged in this traffic, but with having thrown into the sea a living African in a state of disease, for fear the smallpox should spread to the rest of his cargo. . . That most horrible act had been charged home upon the Senator to his face, and he dared not deny it.” Ibid., 2347-2348. Burges responded by pointing out that De Wolf was “one of the greatest friends and abettors of the present administration” of Andrew Jackson. “Mr. [De] Wolf was an eminently good Jackson man, and [Burges] left him with the party.” Ibid., 2349. If De Wolf was morally culpable for his role in slave trading, Burges suggested, the blame lay not with Rhode Island, but with Jackson’s Democratic party, to which Blair also subscribed.

favor of colonization, none was a Democrat. Three Southern anti-Jacksonians (including Mercer) declared themselves in favor of colonization, but recommended that the memorial be withdrawn, while three representatives from Northern states and one from Tennessee spoke in favor of the memorial.⁶²⁰

This was fairly typical of debates over colonization in the federal legislature. Any discussion of the scheme tended to arouse opposition from Southern Democrats, usually from the Lower South. Often the objection was simply that the Colonization Society designed to meddle with slavery – an institution which could only be legislated upon or regulated by the states. Responding to a colonizationist petition in 1827, South Carolina Senator Robert Hayne discounted ACS promises not

to interfere with, or in any way disturb, the policy of the Southern States. . . . But, sir, facts speak stronger than professions. And what are the facts? Are not the members and agents of this Society every where (even while disclaiming all such intentions) making proclamations that the end of their scheme is universal emancipation? Have we not heard the orators . . . asking whether, when all the free People of Color are transported, we are to stop there; and answering their question, by the avowal that the great work will be but then begun? Sir, let any man examine the whole scope and tendency of the reports and speeches made to this Society . . . and he must be dull of apprehension, if he does not perceive that the spirit which lurks beneath their fair professions, is hostile to the peace and best interests of the Southern States; and not the less so, because it comes clothed in the garb of friendship. . . . Besides, sir, does not every Southern man know that, wherever the Colonization Society has invaded our country, a spirit of hostility to our institutions has immediately sprung up?⁶²¹

⁶²⁰ The men who declared the memorial's content offensive were Tennessee's James Polk, South Carolina's William Drayton and James Blair, and Virginia's John Patton. Rhode Island's Tristram Burges, Tennessee's Thomas Arnold, New York's John Dickson and Massachusetts's George Briggs all spoke in favor of the memorial, while Virginia's Charles Mercer, Kentucky's Robert Letcher, and Maryland's Benedict Semmes all endorsed colonization but asked that the memorial be withdrawn. Five other members participated in the debate, but did not express clear opinions on the memorial itself.

⁶²¹ 3 Reg. Deb. 328 (1827). The Colonization Society was accused not only of encouraging hostility to slavery among white citizens, but even among slaves. In 1837, North Carolina Democrat Robert Strange asked: "What would be [the] effects [of the Society], but to hold out to the slave population a desire to become free? He meant, according to the laws of the country in which they live. They did not generally desire freedom, in their degraded condition, and most of the slaves preferred living in that condition. But when an inducement was held out to them, it was done to make them discontented with the situation in which God had placed them." 13 Reg. Deb. 567 (1837).

Frequently the complaint was that appropriations for colonization would be unconstitutional; whether or not the colonization project threatened slavery directly, an expansion of federal powers certainly increased the risk of overreaching and interference with that sacred subject. Responding to another colonization proposal in 1832, Hayne asserted that the

Southern States would never feel secure . . . unless the powers of this Government, to levy and distribute money, were limited to the definite objects specified in the constitution; and, unless that question was settled, he, for one, would never feel secure for the rights or the property of the Southern States, exposed, as they will be, to be constantly assailed through the treasury of the United States.⁶²²

ACS supporters attempted to mollify such concerns. Responding to Hayne in 1827, Maryland colonizationist Ezekiel Chambers promised him that the Society had no “ulterior views, inimical to the Southern or slaveholding States, and hostile to the tenure by which citizens of those States held their property. . . . If such a purpose had been entertained, the Society could not have selected an agent less willing than himself to effect them.”⁶²³ Five years later, Chambers again attempted to reassure Hayne, pointing out, “The constitution and terms of the [ACS] repudiate all idea of interference between the owners of slaves and their legal rights as secured by the local laws.”⁶²⁴ This was of course the party line of the ACS, which abjured (at least when convenient) any impact whatsoever on slavery.

⁶²² 8 Reg. Deb. 643 (1832). Hayne also presented a few other arguments against the Colonization Society, accusing the leadership of Liberia of “proceeding, as all such Colonies always proceed, with a high hand, to extend their influence and power by the sword,” and critiquing ACS calculations of the enterprise’s cost: “Twenty dollars to transport a person to Africa and establish him there! Why, sir, it would cost more to carry him to the place of embarkation. . . . Gentlemen, on whose judgment and accuracy I rely, have estimated it at \$200.” 3 Reg. Deb. 290, 331 (1827). Such practical, non-ideological objections may have been sincere, but it cannot be coincidence that they were usually presented by the same apologists for slavery who also found the scheme abstractly loathsome.

⁶²³ *Ibid.*, 319.

⁶²⁴ 8 Reg. Deb. 643 (1832).

But for all their disclaimers and guarantees, colonizationists in Congress also provided evidence for Hayne and his fellow proslavery Democrats that the ACS did in fact seek to influence slavery. Chambers might have repudiated the idea that the ACS would interfere with the “legal rights” of slavery, but he admitted that

most of the [Society’s] members, looked to the period when . . . it should be practicable to emancipate slaves without the certain infliction of misery and degradation; . . . and anticipated, as one of the results of this altered condition of matters, a gradual change of opinion upon the subject of emancipation. . . If it be matter of reproach that the Society was likely to be instrumental in effecting such a change in the condition of the country as to lead intelligent men, in the full and free exercise of their uncontrolled judgment, to adopt a different course of conduct from that which they were now reluctantly compelled to pursue, he would admit the propriety of this rebuke.⁶²⁵

Supporting a parallel attempt to advance colonization in the House, Maryland

Representative Daniel Jenifer asserted that he did not

contemplate to take from any master his slave, without a fair equivalent, at any time; certainly, at this time, there is no allusion to the slave whatsoever. But, sir, if it were the intention to look beyond the free people of color, I would say, in answer to the objection founded on the rights of property, that the rights of persons are superior to the rights of property. I will conclude, Mr. Speaker, by saying that we who are cursed with a slave population, are in the situation of an individual who feels himself within the draught of an awful cataract. Shall we fold our arms, and quietly descend upon our fate? or shall we make a vigorous and noble effort to rescue ourselves from impending destruction?⁶²⁶

Such reassurances could not have been very reassuring. Chambers conceded the ACS’s emancipationist agenda, and (accurately) claimed that this goal had the support of the majority of the Society’s members. Colonization might seek to remove slavery through entirely voluntary means, but it promised to remove slavery nevertheless. Jenifer, meanwhile, renounced any impact on slavery “at this time,” but admitted that the scheme might eventually apply to slaves as well as free blacks, and questioned the inviolability of

⁶²⁵ Ibid.

⁶²⁶ 8 Reg. Deb. 1675 (1832).

property rights. He described slavery itself as an imminent threat; only the Colonization Society could prevent slave states from going over the falls without a barrel.

Colonizationists were, in short, representing the scheme in Congress in much the same terms that the ACS did in its various publications: as a method to remove the curse of slavery safely and gradually. No wonder that proslavery politicians found the scheme so objectionable; they were being asked to allow federal sponsorship of a scheme to dismantle their “peculiar institution.” Congressional sponsors of colonization who made such emancipationist arguments were nearly always Upper South Whigs, like Chambers, Jennifer, or Kentucky’s Henry Clay, who in 1832 anticipated that “as [the free] black population was moved off, the several States themselves might deem it proper to introduce a system of gradual emancipation, such as was introduced by Franklin in Pennsylvania, in 1779.”⁶²⁷ Likewise, Kentucky’s Thomas Metcalfe, in 1849 urged colonization to the “serious consideration . . . of those who apprehend danger to this Union on account of the continuance of the institution of slavery.”⁶²⁸ These men felt empowered to recommend slavery’s gradual removal because they represented slave states. Northern supporters of the ACS tended to be more circumspect, like Massachusetts Whig George Briggs, who, though “his constituents took a deep interest in the success of the colonization cause,” proclaimed that “the people of the North . . . had no idea of interfering, in the most remote degree, with that species of property which was

⁶²⁷ 8 Reg. Deb. 645 (1833).

⁶²⁸ Cong. Globe, 30th Cong, 2nd Sess. 207 (1849). Metcalfe contended that “there are men . . . who are willing to emancipate their slaves upon condition that they could be carried out of the country. . . . Thousands would be emancipated by their owners, who would ask nothing for their slaves. . . if they only had the means of transporting them to some quarter of the world where it would not be inhuman to send them.” Ibid. This was the last substantive discussion of colonization in Congress prior to the Civil War (and will be analyzed in more detail below); it is noteworthy that as late as 1849, as the ACS increasingly abandoned its emancipationist rhetoric, its supporters in Congress promoted the scheme primarily as a method to encourage voluntary emancipation.

held by their Southern brethren.”⁶²⁹ The exemplar of the emancipationist Upper South supporter of the ACS was Kentucky’s Henry Clay, a fundamental figure of both the Whig party and the American Colonization Society.

Clay was a tireless advocate of colonization, and embraced the scheme as a method to remove slavery from his native state.⁶³⁰ The ACS had Clay to thank for its closest approach to federal support; his 1833 distribution bill promised to apportion revenue from the sale of public lands among the states, which could apply the funds to colonization, among other specified purposes. The bill passed the Congress, but was subjected to one of President Jackson’s pocket vetoes.⁶³¹ The distribution bill’s provision for colonization was one of its most controversial components, and Senate opponents made two attempts to strike out this particular section of the bill, led by Georgia Democrat, and future Secretary of State, John Forsyth. Between the two votes, eighteen Senators voted to remove the language that authorized use of the funds for colonization, and twenty-four voted against amending the bill; four additional Senators switched their opinions between the two challenges, and cast votes both for and against removing the colonization language. As usual, the vote split along party and sectional lines. Of the eighteen Senators who consistently voted against colonization’s inclusion in the bill,

⁶²⁹ 8 Reg. Deb. 2343 (1832). Briggs would later become a founding member of the “Trustees of Donations for Education in Liberia,” a group of Northern colonization sympathizers who sought to improve educational opportunities in Liberia. “Massachusetts Act of Incorporation for ‘the Trustees of Donations for Education in Liberia,’” box 16, folder 1, Records of the New York State Colonization Society, Schomburg Center, New York Public Library.

⁶³⁰ David S. Heidler and Jeanne T. Heidler, *Henry Clay: The Essential American* (New York: Random House, 2010), 447-450 and passim.

⁶³¹ The legitimacy of the pocket veto was always in question, but Jackson’s use in this case was especially underhanded, given that many congressmen mistakenly believed the distribution bill to be part of the “compromise of 1833,” which ended the nullification crisis provoked by South Carolina’s refusal to abide by federal tariff regulations. The other components of this compromise (both passed the same day as the distribution bill) had been a reduced tariff and the Force Bill, which authorized military enforcement of tariffs. Some pro-tariff congressmen had supported the entire package of legislation in the belief that the distribution bill (which supported Whig plans for internal improvements) was compensation for the reduction of tariff rates. *Ibid.*, 255-256.

fifteen were Jacksonian Democrats, two were members of South Carolina's short-lived "Nullifier Party," and one (Louisiana's Josiah Johnston) was an anti-Jacksonian. Four of the opponents represented Northern states, and fourteen represented slave states (seven from the Upper South and seven from the Lower South). Of the twenty-four Senators who consistently voted to retain the bill's colonization language, only three were members of the Democratic party. Nine represented Southern states (only two from the Lower South), and fifteen came from the North (two from mid-Atlantic states, three from the West, and ten from New England). The four men who split their votes were all Northern Democrats.⁶³² Despite the fight in the Senate, the section of the bill restricting states' usage of the distributed funds was subsequently stripped out in the House.⁶³³

Henry Clay never stopped advocating colonization, but he represented a dying breed of gradual-emancipationist Whigs. By the 1850s, the party was, as many historians have noted, in deep decline, and slavery was the major issue detracting from the party's national viability. In the South, Whig moderation on the issue of slavery left the party "vulnerable to the charge that their party . . . posed a threat to the South and to the peculiar institution."⁶³⁴ Particularly in the Lower South, the party collapsed, as its supporters "were caught between the demands of the northern wing of their own party and the attacks of . . . southern militants at home."⁶³⁵ Things were not much better in the North, where Whig politicians were "under pressure from Free Soilers and Liberty Party veterans who, without a southern wing to propitiate, could press their antislavery

⁶³² 9 Reg. Deb. 230-232 (1833).

⁶³³ 9 Reg. Deb. 1904 (1833).

⁶³⁴ John Ashworth, *Slavery, Capitalism, and Politics in the Antebellum Republic, Volume 2: The Coming of the Civil War, 1850-1861* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 486.

⁶³⁵ *Ibid.*, 488.

convictions and demands much further.”⁶³⁶ Clay kept fighting, and in 1849, during a brief hiatus from national politics, demonstrated the sincerity of his antislavery principles by campaigning for a movement gradually to end slavery in Kentucky at an upcoming constitutional convention. As a corollary to this effort, Kentucky Senator Joseph Underwood tested the waters of the (Democratic-dominated) United States Senate with a petition in favor of colonization.⁶³⁷ The expected emancipationist platform of Kentucky’s state convention included a plan to colonize freed slaves; no doubt Underwood and Clay sought federal assistance in this project.⁶³⁸ But the Senate was even less friendly to colonizationist proposals than it had been sixteen years earlier, in the debate over Clay’s distribution bill. As usual, the debate devolved into a sectional fracas, with a Northern Senator (New Jersey’s William Dayton) declaring that “slavery has so ruled this Government, from the adoption of the Constitution to this time, that we have at length reached such a condition that if we now attempt to exercise the poor right of the

⁶³⁶ Ibid., 491.

⁶³⁷ In fact, the petition did not request any immediate action on the part of Congress, but only that the Committee on the Judiciary should “inquire and report whether Congress possesses the constitutional power to appropriate money for the removal of free people of color who choose to emigrate.” Cong. Globe, 30th Cong, 2nd Sess. 189 (1851). Underwood clearly believed that Congress did possess this power, and supported the petition by pointing out the “large sums of money [appropriated] for the removal of the Indians from one part of the United States to another portion” and “the removal of captured Africans from the United States to the shores of Africa.” Ibid., 190. Even if the Senate had allowed the petition to be passed to the Judiciary Committee, it would have faced serious challenges there, as one member of that committee, New Jersey’s William Dayton, pointed out. Although he personally considered the ACS “the only institution which now conciliates the kind feeling [and] the philanthropy, of both North and South,” he pointed out that he was the only Northerner on the committee, and questioned whether “any man [can] . . . doubt to what will be the action of that committee?” Ibid., 209. Dayton had a point. The four remaining members of the committee, Andrew Butler of South Carolina, John Berrien of Georgia, James Westcott of Florida, and Solomon Downs, of Louisiana, all voted against referral or discussion of the topic (while Dayton himself abstained from the vote). For the contemporary membership of the Judiciary Committee, see *Journal of the Senate of the United States of America: Being the Second Session of the Thirtieth Congress Begun and Held at the City of Washington, December 4, 1848* (Washington: Wendell and Van Benthuysen, 1849), 59.

⁶³⁸ No single plan for emancipation was ever agreed upon in Kentucky, but the leading proposal was that “all slaves in 1849 should remain slaves for life but that children of slaves born after a fixed date, as 1855, should be free, males at the age of twenty-five and females at the age of twenty, and upon acquiring freedom should be colonized in Africa at the expense of the state.” Asa Earl Martin, *The Anti-Slavery Movement in Kentucky, prior to 1850* (Louisville: The Standard Printing Company of Louisville, 1918), 146.

beggar and cry for some slight relief, we are denounced as insolent,”⁶³⁹ and a Southerner (Mississippi’s Jefferson Davis) responding with a positive defense of slavery:

Slavery brought with it commerce . . . , and what is commerce but the parent of civilization, of international exchanges, and all these mighty blessings that now bind the people of the most remote quarters of the globe together? These are some of the fruits, sir, that are to be considered before you judge the tree.⁶⁴⁰

In the end, the whole matter was “indefinitely postponed,” by a vote of twenty-seven to twenty-three. The vote revealed the increasing sectional divisions over the colonization issue. Twenty of the twenty-seven votes to quash debate came from slave-state Senators, including fifteen from the Lower South. Twenty-three of the twenty-seven votes came from Democrats. Only five Southern Senators voted to continue discussion, all from Upper South states. Even in the North, colonization’s support was increasingly sectionalized. Mid-Atlantic Senators were split, with two voting on each side of the issue. Representatives of free Western states voted eight to four in favor of continued debate, and eight New England Senators were open to discussing colonization, with only one voting to close the topic. Senators who were friendly to discussing colonization included twelve Democrats and eleven Whigs. By 1849, opposition to colonization in Southern states was nearly unanimous (twenty votes in favor of closing debate, and only five defending the propriety of the discussion), and the ACS’s support was shaky even in the North (seven votes against discussion to eighteen in favor).⁶⁴¹ Opposition in the

⁶³⁹ Cong. Globe, 30th Cong, 2nd Sess., 207-208 (1851).

⁶⁴⁰ Ibid., 210.

⁶⁴¹ Ibid. This was despite Kentucky Senator Thomas Metcalfe’s open attempts to conciliate Northern support for the bill: “Why cannot we appeal to northern people, who have so much to say about this institution . . . , with some hope of success, and ask them whether they cannot aid us in this great measure? They are anxious that there should be no slavery here. We lament that the African race was ever brought to this country; but they are here, and it now becomes us to make the best we can of our situation.” Ibid., 207. But colonization had not gained popularity in the North, and New Hampshire’s John Hale signaled the possibility of increased Northern opposition by protesting immediately after the introduction of the bill that the Senate’s unofficial gag rule had recently prevented him from introducing an antislavery petition, while

Senate turned out to be the least of Clay's problems, as none of the emancipationist candidates he supported was elected to Kentucky's constitutional convention, and the new state constitution turned out to be more protective of slavery, not less so.⁶⁴²

The ACS faced an uphill battle in all of its various attempts to induce federal support of their scheme. Colonizationist proposals in the national legislature frequently fell victim to official or unofficial proscriptions of discussing slavery, and when supporters did manage to raise the issue, they faced fierce – and increasing – resistance, primarily from proslavery Lower South representatives. Antislavery Northern representatives were not nearly as vocal in criticizing the Society, though neither were they particularly moved to rise to its defense; the most vocal proponents of colonization in the American legislature were gradual emancipationist Whigs from the Upper South. Even indirect support for the Society through payments for the resettlement of slaves

the colonizationist memorial was “a petition of precisely similar character, except that it prays Congress to take action in favor of slavery.” Ibid., 189. Much of the debate over the petition in fact centered on the issue of the gag rule, as Underwood described himself as opposed to the House's “21st rule” (the most recent incarnation of the other legislative body's gag rule, which had been overturned in 1844), and asked whether “any sensible, rational man expect[s], that you are to allay the excitement which has been progressing year after year until it is at the point almost of severing the Union . . . unless you can get men rationally to think and rationally to talk on the subject?” Ibid., 206. Underwood was making an argument that his own petition should be considered rather than subjected to the gag rule still in place in the Senate at the time. Jefferson Davis made the argument for maintaining the gag rule and quashing the petition, arguing that the end of the gag rule in the House had allowed “abolitionism [to go] . . . on step by step, steadily progressing, whilst in the Senate, where the wiser and more dignified rule has been adopted to lay the question of reception on the table without discussion, there was scarcely an allusion to the topic.” Ibid., 209. Of course, in the end, Underwood's petition did fall victim to the gag rule, though Hale, who had objected to the rule's unequal application, apparently reconsidered, voting in the end to extend discussion of the colonization measure.

⁶⁴² Martin, *Anti-Slavery Movement in Kentucky*, 146. The new state constitution prohibited the state assembly from “pass[ing] laws for the emancipation of slaves without the consent of their owners” or “to prevent immigrants to this State from bringing with them . . . slaves.” The assembly was commanded also commanded to pass laws to prevent emancipated slaves from remaining in the state. *Report of the Debates and Proceedings of the Convention for the Revision of the Constitution of the State of Kentucky, 1849* (Frankfort: A.G. Hodges & Co., 1849), 1100. The new constitution even went so far as to prohibit active ministers from serving in the assembly, apparently on the theory that they were unduly susceptible to religious calls for abolition. Ibid., 738-751.

recaptured from the illegal Atlantic slave trade could be controversial.⁶⁴³ Though colonizationists faced proslavery opposition in Congress, they continued to advocate the scheme as an emancipationist measure (though a completely voluntary one), and colonization was debated as such. In fact, congressional debates over colonization represented rare occasions where emancipation was openly discussed on the floor of the nation's legislature. Like every other legislative attempt to limit or remove slavery, it fell victim to increasing Southern intransigence on the topic. Though the ACS lacked sufficient support in Congress to receive the federal appropriations it sought – or even a detailed hearing – the scheme did have the support of a significant minority of politicians from Northern and Upper South states, even into the late antebellum period. However, the Society saw a gradual decline in its congressional champions, especially in the South. The ACS had always claimed to combine the interests of both free and slave states, but its “middle course” was increasingly difficult to maintain in an era of growing sectional factionalism.

⁶⁴³ Throughout the antebellum period, Liberia remained the standard receptacle for slaves captured by U.S. naval patrols, but ACS opponents questioned the constitutionality of any payments to support these redeemed captives in Africa. In 1850, when the Colonization Society applied for federal appropriations for the expense of seven hundred and fifty recaptured slaves recently deposited in Liberia, Tennessee Senator Hopkins Turney objected, arguing that “there was no obligation on this Government to support these Africans a single day after they were returned to the shores of Africa.” *Cong. Globe*, 31st Cong., 1st Sess. 1803 (1850). Virginia's Robert Hunter feared that if the Senate authorized funds for the support of recaptured slaves in Liberia, “we would be equally authorized to establish there a colony of our own free negroes. I see no difference between the two propositions, and I hope, therefore, that sufficient time will be given to enable us to look into this matter.” *Ibid.*, 1804. In the end, the idea of depositing recaptured slaves on the shores of Africa with no provision for their support was sufficiently off-putting that the measure passed through both the Senate and the House fairly easily, but not without significant Southern opposition. Twenty-five Senators supported the bill, and fourteen voted against it (thirteen of them from slave states). *Ibid.*, 1809. In the House, the bill received one hundred and ten votes in favor and fifty in opposition (forty-six of them from slave states). *Cong. Globe*, 31st Cong., 2nd Sess. 780-781 (1851). Though the ACS did not receive federal funds for the transportation of American blacks, appropriations for the Society to provide for recaptured slaves were rarely blocked. Proslavery Southern Democrats did everything in their power to harass or delay such legislation, however. Alabama Representative Jabez Curry moved to retitile a similar 1860 measure “An act to protect and support the Republic of Liberia in Africa, and to attach perpetually to the Government of the United States the American Colonization Society.” *Cong. Globe*, 36th Cong., 1st Sess. 2641 (1860). Debate over the proposed title alone spanned four full pages of the *Congressional Globe*, though the bill passed handily in the end.

However, if colonization's political fortunes suffered as the nation divided over the subject of slavery, the scheme was far from dead in American politics. Though the Whig party which had most strongly championed colonization disintegrated in the 1850s, the plan found new advocates in the nascent Republican party. Henry Clay, who had once been the Colonization Society's most prominent national advocate, had seen his influence decline in the years before his death, in 1852. However, Abraham Lincoln, in many ways Clay's successor, made no secret of his own endorsement of colonization, and delivered at least two addresses in favor of the scheme to the Illinois auxiliary society (of which he was a prominent member). As Eric Foner has argued, "For almost his entire career Lincoln's outlook on slavery closely paralleled that of Clay."⁶⁴⁴ The idea that a federally sponsored colonization program might help to dismantle slavery did not die with Clay, and during the Civil War, Lincoln supported several colonizationist projects, including an 1861 attempt to colonize Central America with escaped "contraband" slaves, and an 1862 settlement of American blacks in Haiti. Phillip Magness' and Sebastian Page's impressive archival research has only very recently brought to light evidence that the Lincoln administration continued to pursue a colonizationist agenda well past the Emancipation Proclamation, as the government entered into secret negotiations with both Britain and the Netherlands to discuss the possibility of settling emancipated slaves in those nations' colonial possessions in South America and the Caribbean; European powers hoped that African American emigrants would help to fill labor shortages in these colonies. That the administration would continue to devote resources and attention to the colonization scheme even during the national crisis of the Civil War is indirect evidence

⁶⁴⁴ Eric Foner, "Lincoln and Colonization," in *Our Lincoln: New Perspectives on Lincoln and His World*, ed. Eric Foner (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008), 140.

of Lincoln's dedication to the plan, and at least one confidant reported that the President continued to advocate colonization shortly before his death.⁶⁴⁵ Of course, these wartime colonizationist projects were all established in the Americas, outside the purview of the ACS, but this is further evidence of the seriousness of Lincoln's intentions; his administration planned coinciding colonization ventures in several easily accessible locations because they expected these projects to remove large numbers of emancipated slaves. Even after the Emancipation Proclamation, moderate antislavery politicians like Lincoln clung to the idea that colonization would simultaneously remove slavery and the bulk of the nation's African American population.

Conclusion

The historical significance of the colonization movement should not be judged based on the ACS's success. By any measure of what the Society had hoped to achieve, the colonization scheme was a miserable failure. By 1860, only eleven thousand emigrants had been transported to Liberia, after more than four decades of active organization – not nearly enough to have any significant impact on the United States' African American population, free or enslaved. Liberia was a small, struggling outpost of African American emigrants, without significant power either to prevent the Atlantic slave trade, or to promote Christianity on the continent. And the tragic consequences of Liberia's failure to create a national identity shared by colonists and natives would be fully revealed in the following century. Free blacks never embraced colonization in

⁶⁴⁵ For the administration's negotiations with the British government, see Phillip W. Magness and Sebastian Page, *Colonization After Emancipation: Lincoln and the Movement for Black Resettlement* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2011), 13-23, 55-62. On negotiations with the Dutch, see *Ibid.*, 73-81. On evidence of Lincoln's late endorsement of colonization, see *Ibid.*, 109-117. The man who claimed to have heard Lincoln support the scheme in 1865, General Benjamin Butler, was not always consistent in his story, but Magness and Page argue that "the common details [of his various] accounts suggest the story is built around an actual event." *Ibid.*, 114.

significant numbers, and even the minority who did advocate for emigration distanced themselves from the ACS. Far from reconciling Northern and Southern supporters in a unified national plan to deal with slavery, colonizationism faced increasing challenges on both sides of the Mason-Dixon Line.

However, if antebellum setbacks forced the ACS to scale back its ambitions, the colonization scheme remained a vital part of the national discourse concerning slavery until the Civil War. Colonization may not have received much attention in the halls of Congress, but it saw more discussion than any other plan to emancipate the country's slaves. In the rush of 1850s plantation novels that followed in the wake of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, colonization was not only represented by its own partisans, who recommended the scheme to both Northern and Southern readers, but was also discussed in a wide range of fictional accounts of slavery, by authors from every segment of the ideological spectrum. Remarkably, the ACS's image in both of these discourses (literary and political) remained stable through the tumultuous antebellum era; colonization's goals were represented in the same terms that had originally motivated the scheme – primarily, support for gradual emancipation. In fact, both antebellum authors and politicians – friendly and unfriendly to colonization – represented the scheme in more openly emancipationist terms in the 1840s and '50s than the ACS dared to do in its own publications. As previous chapters have demonstrated, the ACS maintained significant support bases in all regions of the country throughout the antebellum period. And the plan's popularity was sufficient that even those who rejected the Society felt the need to address it.

Colonization appeared in the national discourse of slavery in much the same terms that the ACS had always proclaimed for itself. The Colonization Society promised to empower and encourage Southern slaveowners to emancipate their slaves; voluntary emancipations would increase the racial homogeneity and social cohesion of the United States. African American emigrants, freed from white prejudice and competition, would also advance in civilization in the separate section of the globe – the “bounds of their habitation” – for which nature had intended them. Antebellum authors and politicians emphasized the colonization scheme’s emancipationist tendencies, and continued to portray the plan until the brink of the Civil War as one which might permit the end of slavery and the complete colonization of the country’s slaves. The Society’s ideology of racial homogeneity was sufficiently powerful that it influenced the nation’s most popular author on the subject of slavery; *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* both reflected and popularized the colonizationist vision of a segregated planet. For all her powers of imagination, Harriet Beecher Stowe, like many white Americans, could not conceive of a place for African Americans within the nation’s populace.

Conclusion

Colonizationists often appeared surprised by the intensity of antagonism their scheme aroused among abolitionists and proslavery Southerners—even haplessly so. As founding ACS member Francis Scott Key put it, “[T]he Society found itself in a very extraordinary situation.—It had scarcely been formed, when it was assailed by opponents of the most contrary character, from the North and the South.”⁶⁴⁶ Colonizationists never tired of pointing out the irony that they were abused by both abolitionist and proslavery forces, who shared nothing besides an enmity for colonization. In fact, the ACS claimed, neither group had anything to fear from the scheme, as the Society had no plans to infringe on either’s rights. One colonizationist speaker mused, “I believe it is a maxim of law . . . that you do not injure those who give an intelligent consent to your conduct: *Volenti non fit injuria*. Such is the basis of this whole enterprise. It contemplates a voluntary emancipation by the owner, and voluntary emigration on the part of the negro.”⁶⁴⁷ How could colonizationism infringe on anyone’s rights, asked the ACS, when only African Americans who consented to emigrate would embark for Liberia, and only slaves who were voluntarily emancipated by their owners would join the exodus? Colonizationists found it difficult to comprehend how their perfectly voluntary scheme could arouse such active opposition in both the North and the South.

⁶⁴⁶ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 3, no. 12 (February, 1828), 353.

⁶⁴⁷ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 20, no. 12 (December, 1844), 365. The quoted speech was delivered by Presbyterian minister John Holmes Boccock.

However, the ACS's "volenti non fit injuria" response failed to satisfy the scheme's opponents, because it did not address the Society's fundamental ideological differences with both abolitionist and proslavery groups. Colonizationism was based on an idealized image of a homogeneously white American society and electorate. Only with such a population, they thought, could the American democratic experiment flourish. Maryland colonizationist Robert Breckenridge made the case:

The class out of which we choose our rulers and teachers and associates, is the same out of which our children choose their husbands and wives; *it is the class of our equals*,—whether we be all equally free or all equally slaves—it is the class of our equals only. All civil equality which begins not in such sentiments as will tolerate personal equality, is idle and fictitious; and as to political without personal equality, it is every where impossible, but in a land of repeated and popular elections, the notion is utterly absurd.⁶⁴⁸

Democratic freedoms, Breckenridge argued, could not endure without a basis in social equality. White Americans would never accept African Americans as equals – not as associates, spouses, or voters. Therefore, in order to preserve the United States' democratic society, African Americans had to be removed. This included, in Breckenridge's eyes, enslaved blacks: "The state of slavery is ruinous to the community that tolerates it, under all possible circumstances; and is most cruel and unjust to its victims."⁶⁴⁹

This, in brief, was the colonizationist argument. The United States was destined to be a nation exclusively of white citizens, and the nation's African American population could only serve to disrupt the smooth functioning of the American economy and democracy. Slavery, also, was an inefficient economic engine, which could be profitably replaced with free white labor. No coercion would be required to convince slaveowners

⁶⁴⁸ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 9, no. 11 (January, 1834), 324.

⁶⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 326-327.

to emancipate and colonize their slaves, as their own economic self-interest would ultimately drive them to embrace the scheme. Like most other contemporary white Americans, colonizationists held and promoted racist conceptions of blacks, but the ACS emphasized that blacks, too, would benefit from racial homogeneity. Liberian colonists possessed “an independence of thought, a nobleness of feeling, and an energy of character, and a manly and business-like tact, not to be found among their race in this or any other country.”⁶⁵⁰ Thus, colonization would not only be responsible for ensuring the success of American society, but would also help to spread the model of egalitarian, racially homogenous democracy around the globe.

The abolitionist and “positive good” proslavery movement both defined themselves largely in opposition to this colonizationist ideology. Garrison’s critique, *Thoughts on African Colonization* was published the year before he helped found the first national abolitionist organization, the American Anti-Slavery Society, and Thomas Dew’s famous 1832 proslavery essay, in many ways the founding document of the defense of the institution as a “positive good,” had been written in response to the Virginia Legislature’s consideration of colonization. Abolitionists, both white and black, argued that the careful process of colonization and global segregation was not necessary to end American slavery, and that African Americans should immediately be accorded all the rights and privileges of American citizenship. Proslavery theorists, on the other hand, contended that black slavery did not undermine American democracy, but actually provided the foundation for white egalitarianism. Thomas Dew argued that Southern society was more democratic than the North because “the menial and low offices being all performed by the blacks, there is at once taken away the greatest cause of distinction

⁶⁵⁰ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 20, no. 11 (November, 1844), 342.

and separation of the ranks of society. . . And it is this spirit of equality which is both the generator and preserver of the genuine spirit of liberty.”⁶⁵¹ Abolitionists objected to the fundamental premise of the colonization enterprise: the impossibility of egalitarian, democratic, multiracial societies. Regardless of how consensual the process was, the very idea of colonization – of transmuting black residents of the United States into citizens of Liberia – struck against the rights and recognition which African Americans sought in their native country. Apologists for slavery, on the other hand, increasingly distanced themselves from the Colonization Society’s defense of the institution as a temporary, if necessary, evil, arguing instead that slavery should be perpetual. The Society’s appeals for federal funds were viewed as a direct attempt to enlist the federal government in the project of dismantling American slavery – exactly what many Southern slaveowners feared. And even if the ACS could somehow afford to remove the slaves without government sponsorship, and scrupulously obtained the consent of their owners, the experiment would only prove deleterious, as it would upset the social balance in the South that made democratic perfection possible. Colonization thus not only threatened democratic freedoms from above, through expansion of federal tyranny, but also from below, through the disruption of the social order. The ACS’s ideology was thus in fundamental conflict with those of the burgeoning antebellum ranks of abolitionists and proslavery advocates.

But the fact that the ACS faced ideological challenges in both the North and the South does not necessarily draw into question the influence of its own brand of gradual emancipation – which, as demonstrated in Chapter 5, remained prevalent in both the literary and political discourses of slavery. In fact, the ACS’s depiction of the United

⁶⁵¹ *Pro-Slavery Argument*, 461-462.

States as a racially homogenous, egalitarian, prosperous republic probably accorded with more (white) Americans' ideal of their country, than either the abolitionist vision of a biracial future, or the ideal of perpetual slavery. As historian Rogers Smith has argued, the antebellum era represented the high point for racial definitions of American civic identity. It was during the Jacksonian era, Smith writes, that the idealistic language of the revolutionary era began to give way, and "American leaders began making their beliefs in inherent, unalterable racial hierarchies more explicit."⁶⁵² The period also saw an increasing trend of African Americans' legalized exclusion from the nation's body politic, as "increasingly harsh state restrictions were imposed on all blacks, slave and free, throughout the nation."⁶⁵³ Racially restrictive state laws defined American citizenship in the same terms promoted by the ACS, and the infamous Dred Scott decision officially excluded blacks from the nation's citizenry. Of course, there was not a perfect overlap between colonizationists and supporters of racially restrictive definitions of citizenship – and in fact many ACS supporters expressed ambivalence about restrictive legislation⁶⁵⁴ – but it was probably no coincidence that Roger Taney, the author of the Dred Scott decision, supported the ACS.⁶⁵⁵

The ACS certainly did not enroll the majority of the country's white citizens among its supporters. Besides those abolitionists and slaveowners who opposed the

⁶⁵² Rogers M. Smith, *Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in U.S. History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 196.

⁶⁵³ *Ibid.*, 253.

⁶⁵⁴ In 1851, for example, the *African Repository* surveyed various state laws restricting black immigration or residency, before declaring, "How far these proceedings may be consistent with the dictates of humanity, or the principles of right government, we pretend not to determine." *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 27, no. 10 (October, 1851), 290. Of course, if restrictive state legislation was potentially morally problematic, colonization provided the solution: "[W]ere it not for the fact, that, in the order of a wise overruling Providence, an asylum has been provided to which they can resort, without fear of molestation from the encroachments of the white race, we should regard their condition and prospects as sad and gloomy indeed." *Ibid.*

⁶⁵⁵ Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 442.

Society on ideological grounds, many considered its plans too visionary for practical application, or were not sufficiently moved by the ACS's arguments to contribute personally. Of course, as with any charitable organization, failure to contribute did not necessarily represent opposition to the Society's purposes. The ACS's thousands of active supporters were certainly in the minority. But they were an influential minority, and succeeded in making the idea ubiquitous in antebellum accounts of slavery – literary, political, or polemical. And although the Society failed to achieve its practical goals, it helped to popularize an ideological agenda – promoting free labor as superior to enslaved labor, racially delineating the boundaries of American citizenship, and commending the model of American democracy abroad – that defined mainstream American beliefs in the antebellum era and for generations to come.

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