



2013

Whiteness in Africa: Americo-Liberians and the Transformative Geographies of Race

Robert P. Murray

University of Kentucky, robert.murray@uky.edu

[Right click to open a feedback form in a new tab to let us know how this document benefits you.](#)

Recommended Citation

Murray, Robert P., "Whiteness in Africa: Americo-Liberians and the Transformative Geographies of Race" (2013). *Theses and Dissertations--History*. 23.
https://uknowledge.uky.edu/history_etds/23

This Doctoral Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the History at UKnowledge. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations--History by an authorized administrator of UKnowledge. For more information, please contact UKnowledge@lsv.uky.edu.

STUDENT AGREEMENT:

I represent that my thesis or dissertation and abstract are my original work. Proper attribution has been given to all outside sources. I understand that I am solely responsible for obtaining any needed copyright permissions. I have obtained and attached hereto needed written permission statements(s) from the owner(s) of each third-party copyrighted matter to be included in my work, allowing electronic distribution (if such use is not permitted by the fair use doctrine).

I hereby grant to The University of Kentucky and its agents the non-exclusive license to archive and make accessible my work in whole or in part in all forms of media, now or hereafter known. I agree that the document mentioned above may be made available immediately for worldwide access unless a preapproved embargo applies.

I retain all other ownership rights to the copyright of my work. I also retain the right to use in future works (such as articles or books) all or part of my work. I understand that I am free to register the copyright to my work.

REVIEW, APPROVAL AND ACCEPTANCE

The document mentioned above has been reviewed and accepted by the student's advisor, on behalf of the advisory committee, and by the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS), on behalf of the program; we verify that this is the final, approved version of the student's dissertation including all changes required by the advisory committee. The undersigned agree to abide by the statements above.

Robert P. Murray, Student

Dr. Joanne Pope Melish, Major Professor

Dr. David Hamilton, Director of Graduate Studies

WHITENESS IN AFRICA: AMERICO-LIBERIANS AND THE TRANSFORMATIVE
GEOGRAPHIES OF RACE

DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy in the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Kentucky

By
Robert Paul Murray

Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Dr. Joanne Pope Melish, Professor of History

Lexington, Kentucky

Copyright © Robert Paul Murray 2013

ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

WHITENESS IN AFRICA: AMERICO-LIBERIANS AND THE TRANSFORMATIVE GEOGRAPHIES OF RACE

This dissertation examines the constructed racial identities of African American settlers in colonial Liberia as they traversed the Atlantic between the United States and West Africa during the first half of the nineteenth century. In one of the great testaments that race is a social construction, the West African neighbors and inhabitants of Liberia, who conceived of themselves as “black,” recognized the significant cultural differences between themselves and these newly-arrived Americans and racially categorized the newcomers as “white.” This project examines the ramifications for these African American settlers of becoming simultaneously white and black through their Atlantic mobility. This is not to suggest that those African Americans who relocated to Liberia somehow desired to be white or hoped to “pass” as white after their arrival in Africa. Instead, the Americo-Liberians utilized their African whiteness to lay claim to an exotic, foreign identity that also escaped associations of primitivism.

This project makes several significant contributions to scholarship on the colonization movement, whiteness, and Atlantic world. Importantly for scholarship on Liberia, it reestablishes the colony as but one evolving point within the Atlantic world instead of its usual interpretative place as the *end* of a transatlantic journey. Whether as disgruntled former settlers, or paid spokesmen for the American Colonization Society (ACS), or visitors returning to childhood abodes, or emancipators looking to free families from the chains of slavery, or students seeking medical degrees, Liberian settlers returned to the United States and they were remarkably uninterested in returning to their formerly downtrodden place in American society. This project examines the “tools” provided to Americo-Liberians by their African residence to negotiate a new relationship with the white inhabitants of the United States. These were not just metaphorical arguments shouted across the Atlantic Ocean and focusing on the experiences of Americo-Liberians in the United States highlights that these “negotiations” had practical applications for the

lives of settlers in both the United States and Africa. The African whiteness of the settlers would function as a bargaining chip when they approached that rhetorical bargaining table.

KEYWORDS: Black Atlantic, colonization, Liberia, African Americans and colonization, mobility studies

Robert Paul Murray
Student's Signature

12/7/2013
Date

For Amy

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I arrived at the University of Kentucky in the fall of 2008 prepared to write the definitive history of conservative antislavery reformers in the upper South and explore the region's historical memory of slavery and emancipation. Needless to say, this isn't that project. As a bit of scholarly drifter, I have many debts to colleagues who helped me as my interests evolved. First and foremost, Joanne Pope Melish guided this dissertation from the beginning and remained committed to project even as it changed from my initial plan to "bring her book South" into the current study of African Americans in Liberia. Although we never seemed to be in Lexington at the same time between academic leaves and fellowships, she still found a way to shepherd this project to completion. It is only fitting that after completion it turns out we will be "neighbors" of sorts in New England. Erik Lars Myrup, Ronald P. Formisano, and Tracy Campbell, in addition to contributing to this project as dissertation committee members, have long been supportive of my work in the history department and I thank them for those years of encouragement. Erik has proven to be an especially collegial and generous scholar, both in his excellent suggestions for teaching and providing much-needed breaks during my office hours this semester. Richard Schein provided spirited feedback during the defense and greatly assisted this historian in understanding the geographer's methodology.

The history department provided financial support for this project in the form of a Dorothy Leathers fellowship. Armed with their generous support, I was able to conduct a long research trip between Washington, D.C. and Dartmouth. I am especially indebted to the staff of the Library of Congress and Friends Historical Library at Swarthmore College. The whole research expedition could have been endangered by a broken pipe

and subsequent flood at the FHL had not the staff pulled my material from the waters and allowed me to continue my work.

I am privileged to work within the same field as some truly remarkable and generous scholars. I am especially indebted to Beverly Tomek who, in addition to finding a space for my scholarship within her edited collection of essays on colonization, continues to generously support my work. Within the department of history, my thinking and social skills have been mutually reinforced by wonderful conversations with colleagues who have always had the good sense to know when was the appropriate time to theorize and when was the appropriate time to enjoy a beer and watch basketball. In the marathon of graduate school, Andrew Adler, Amanda Higgins, Patrick and Jenny Lewis, Anthony and Stephanie Miller, Stephen Pickering, and James Savage have made the time fly with only occasional disruptions to my workflow. As my carpool companion for a year in which I was intensively writing, Patrick Lewis deserves special mention as someone who unexpectedly found himself editing chapters and conceptualizing ideas about colonization and the Black Atlantic. My favorite part of book acknowledgments is the canned summation many authors utilize in which after naming those individuals who have been most helpful, they then conclude with a promise that all errors within the work are the author's responsibility alone (as though there was another option!). I personally take the opposite approach: any errors in this dissertation are probably the fault of Patrick Lewis and I recommend that all complaints be forwarded on to him. In all seriousness, Patrick and my other incredibly dedicated colleagues at the Kentucky Historical Society represent all that is good in this profession.

Finally, my greatest debt is to my wife, Amy, who has lived with these Liberians far longer than any mere mortal could withstand. She has been a constant reminder that

there is more to life than the constant clicking of a keyboard even as she has been my most studious, supportive, and correct companion/critic. I have learned to type with a cat in the lap and she has learned to accept that the cat she brought into our home simply likes me more (now we have two cats). It has been a wonderful journey from Virginia to Kentucky to New England (even if I had to drive nearly 14 hours in a moving truck with two cats in the passenger seat) and I look forward to our next adventure together. At least for now, this chapter is closed. To her I dedicate this work.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments.....	iii
Chapter One: Introduction.....	1
Chapter Two: “To Be Called a Free Colored Man in the States is Synonymous with What We Here Term Slavery”: Transformative Mobilities and Liberian Travels through the United States.....	47
Chapter Three: “All Those Things Desirable for a Map to Show”: Space, Cartography, and Control in Colonial Liberia.....	108
Chapter Four: “Nearly All Have Natives as Helps in their Families, and This is as it Should Be”: The “Civilizing” Mission of Unfree Labor.....	166
Chapter Five: “They Would Dearly Learn What It Was to Fight White Men”: Whitening through Violence in Liberia.....	219
Chapter Six: “It Became Apparent that Colonization had Two Sets of Friends.... The Explosion Came at Last”: Colonization Cacophony, Free Black Rejection, and Settler Agency.....	274
Chapter Seven: Afterword.....	330
Bibliography.....	334
Vita.....	345

About the only person excited to see the four black ships disappear over the eastern horizon was Nathaniel Hawthorne. Of course, his interest in the sailing of this little squadron was more financial and literary in nature than martial. Before Matthew C. Perry demonstrated the nonpareil example of gunboat diplomacy by sailing into Tokyo's harbor in 1853, he honed his aggressive style of military intervention along western shore of Africa in 1843 and 1844 in command of the Africa squadron. Although the United States had been nominally engaged in suppressing the Atlantic slave trade for decades, the launching of Perry's squadron reflected the political realities of the Webster-Ashburton Treaty ratified the year before. Although better known for resolving border disputes along the United States' northeastern border with Canada, the eighth article of the treaty between Great Britain and the United States reaffirmed their mutual commitment to suppressing the slave trade and ordered each nation to dispatch a naval force to Africa's western coast to intercept slavers. Per the treaty, the United States was required to provide "vessels, of suitable numbers and descriptions, to carry in all not less than eighty guns." While it technically fulfilled the treaty's obligations, it is not a ringing endorsement of the U. S. government's commitment to enforcing the eighth article that the four vessels it funneled into this new Africa Squadron could mount eighty-four guns. Even more problematic than the commitment to the bare minimum of armament was the sheer scale of the operation. Based in the southern Cape Verde islands, four hundred miles west of the coast, the Africa Squadron's nominal area of operations spanned from Madeira and the Canary Islands to the Bight of Biafra

(modern-day Nigeria), an area comprising well over three thousand miles of coastline. The four vessels were doomed to be largely ineffective in stemming the slave trade.¹

Hawthorne cared little for the supposed benefits of America's military intervention in the Atlantic slave trade, but he did see possible financial gain to be had in a book deal. Hawthorne's classmate from Bowdoin College and lifelong friend and eventual biographer, Horatio Bridge, had been assigned purser of the *U.S.S. Saratoga*, Perry's flagship. Hawthorne suggested that his friend keep a journal of his African adventures and they would subsequently publish the account as a book with Hawthorne serving as editor. Hawthorne hoped to capitalize on the burgeoning market for travel books, and dark, benighted Africa, which Hawthorne claimed had few visitors "unless driven by stern necessity" in his preface, would hopefully prove lucratively appealing. Hawthorne was especially interested in Bridge's journal as his tour of duty would place him near the settlements of African Americans established by the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Color (ACS). Hawthorne entreated Bridge to not forget to include copious detail on his experiences in this colony of Liberia, believing that "if, in any portion of the book, the author may hope to engage the attention of the public, it will probably be in those pages which treat of Liberia." The resulting work, *Journal of an African Cruiser*, bore so heavily the editorial hand of Hawthorne that its cover actually recorded the name of its editor instead of its author.²

Those "pages which treat of Liberia" were, indeed, a significant portion of the work—sixteen of its twenty-two chapters dealt with some aspect of Liberia—especially for a book nominally about an entire tour of duty along the African coast. Bridge filled his journal with accounts of raiding and burning several African settlements, the result of Perry's determination

¹ Webster-Ashburton Treaty, The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy, www.avalon.yale.edu. For the vessels and duties of the Africa Squadron, see Donald L. Canney, *Africa Squadron: The U.S. Navy and the Slave Trade, 1842-1861* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2006).

² Horatio Bridge, *Journal of an African Cruiser*, ed. Nathaniel Hawthorne (New York and London: Wiley and Putnam, 1845), v-vi; Patrick Brancaccio, "The Black Man's Paradise: Hawthorne's Editing of the *Journal of an African Cruiser*," *New England Quarterly* 53, no. 1 (March 1980): 23-41.

to punish someone—really anyone—after an American trading vessel’s crew had been murdered and the ship’s contents plundered. He recorded his opinions of the economic prospects of the African colony and also of the African Americans and Africans who inhabited it. He dined with John Brown Russwurm, the former editor of *Freedom’s Journal*, who had earned the scorn of most free people of color when he reversed course and endorsed colonization from the pages of his newspaper where before there had only been scorn. Russwurm had emigrated to the colonial capital of Liberia, Monrovia, in 1830 to serve as editor of its newspaper, the *Liberia Herald*. But at the moment that Bridge found himself sitting at Russwurm’s table, the former editor was serving as agent and governor of the independent colony established by the Maryland State Colonization Society (MSCS) at Cape Palmas, nearly three hundred miles southeast of Monrovia. Bridge described Russwurm as a “man of distinguished ability and of collegiate education,” an affirmation of Russwurm’s great talent if not exactly effusive praise for a fellow graduate of Bowdoin College who had even joined the same literary society as Bridge and Hawthorne.³

Apparently, the main topic of dinner-time conversation revolved around the governor’s recent expedition seventy miles into the interior. This was not an insignificant distance as the vast majority of the Liberian settlements hugged the African shoreline. Russwurm impressed his dinner guests with tales of encountering a powerful “tribe” in the “Bush,” and although he could not secure an escort for further exploration from the mighty “king” of this group, the African leader was impressed enough by Russwurm and his entourage to dispatch his son to the coast “to see the *black-white* people and their improvements.” The “black-white people,” it turned out, were none other than the African American settlers of the Liberian colonies. In one of the great testaments to race as a construction of time and place, those West African neighbors and

³ Bridge, 37; Winston James, *The Struggle of John Brown Russwurm: The Life and Writings of a Pan-Africanist Pioneer, 1799-1851* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 17-18.

inhabitants of Liberia, who conceived of themselves as “black,” recognized the significant cultural differences between themselves and these newly-arrived Americans. To African eyes and ears, the Liberian settlers prayed to a Christian God, spoke English, wore western-style clothing, constructed western-style dwellings along grid-pattern streets, and, in short, behaved in the manner they associated with the European and Euro-American tradesmen and sailors who had been travelling down the western coast of Africa for centuries. And so as Liberian settler and ex-slave Diana James succinctly wrote to her former mistress in 1843 about the customs of the Africans, “they call us all white man.” Instead of operating as binaries as they often are presented, the whiteness and blackness of these African American settlers operated together simultaneously. In their African enclave, the African American settlers were the “black-white people.”⁴

Even more surprising, although he was a supporter of the plan to remove free people of color from the United States due to the hardened racial lines in the United States, Bridge paradoxically recognized that something different was afoot in the Liberian settlements he visited and that perhaps the “race” of the African American settlers was perhaps not so inherent. For Bridge and most other supporters of colonization, the “colored people of America, or any other part of the world, may be regarded as borrowed from Africa, and inheriting a natural adaptation to her soil and climate.”⁵ In other words, people of African descent, regardless of their

⁴ Bridge, 37; Diana Skipwith James to Sally Cocke, 6 March 1843, in *Slaves No More: Letters from Liberia, 1833-1869*, ed. Bell I. Wiley (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1980), 57.

⁵ David Kazanjian’s *The Colonizing Trick: National Culture and Imperial Citizenship in Early America* ably highlights the significance of colonizationist rhetoric for the conflation of United States citizenship with whiteness and demonstrates the potential of colonization as a means by which to view transatlantic cultures. Acknowledging that colonization operates at the intersection of citizenship, slavery, freedom, and race, Kazanjian uses the antebellum colonization movement to advance his argument that transatlanticism not only refers to modes of exchange, but also of white colonial dominance over non-whites. Kazanjian highlights the rise of white-led colonization during the 1820s as a historical moment of clarification by which the “colonizing trick,” a term he borrowed from David Walker’s *Appeal*, fosters hierarchical societies that divide labor by race. Borrowing from whiteness studies, Kazanjian connects colonization to nation-building along a shared white formulation. The significance of colonization is its conflation of African-Americans and Africans based upon skin color. By assuming that black skin fostered a national affinity and signified the true “home” of African-Americans, colonizationists not

temporal or physical distance from Africa, held a “natural” affinity and place in that land of their ancestors. It was a central tenet of colonization rhetoric that this relocation to western Africa actually constituted a “homecoming” for these settlers; for the readers of Bridge’s journal, they were informed that Liberia “may indeed be called the black man’s paradise.” But after these repeated affirmations of unchanging and unalterable racialized—and masculine gendered—blackness which would forever be the boulder to African Americans’ Sisyphus, a blackness “borrowed” from Africa, Bridge then paradoxically notes that “blackness” was not perhaps a mutually shared identity between the African American settlers and their African neighbors. Indeed, Bridge was so struck by the prejudices held by many of the Africans against the settlers and vice-versa he actually employed the racialized terminology of “race-mixing” as understood within the American context and then returned to the terminology he had learned during his conversation with Russwurm.⁶

Many of the natives look with contempt on the colonists, and do not hesitate to tell them that they are merely liberated slaves. On the other hand, the colonists will never recognize the natives otherwise than as heathen. Amalgamation is scarcely more difficult between the white and colored races in America, than it is in Africa, between the “black-white” colonist and unadulterated native.⁷

This project will examine the ramifications for these African American settlers, the Americo-Liberians, of becoming white and black through their Atlantic mobility. This is not to suggest that those African Americans who relocated to Liberia somehow desired to be white or

only equated race with a specific nation, but removed blacks from the possibility of American citizenship in favor of their “natural” African citizenship. Yet, paradoxically many colonizationists were aware, like Bridge, of the racial mutability of the Liberian settlers in Africa. The intriguing omission from Kazanjian’s work is the African whiteness of the Americo-Liberian settlers as reinforcing “white” colonial dominance over non-whites. On the one hand, African Liberians conceived of the settlers’ colony as an extension of white dominance; conversely, neither the settlers nor their Euro-American patrons conceived of themselves as whites. The complexity of the Liberian example underscores the problem of binaries, even more fluid designations between “whites and non-whites” and the disruption of mobile subjects in the creation of race. If societies and place make race, then mobile subjects entering and leaving such societal designations inherently shape the process of racialization and make it unstable. See David Kazanjian, *The Colonizing Trick: National Culture and Imperial Citizenship in Early America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

⁶ Bridge, 156, 164.

⁷ Bridge, 107.

even conceived of themselves or self-identified as white or hoped to “pass” as white after their arrival in Africa. In other words, this is not a story of black people wishing they were white. But it is a story of a society hoping to replicate the same privileges for itself in Africa that exclusion from whiteness had prevented its denizens from enjoying in the United States. Instead of simply crossing over some black/white divide, these settlers employed their morphing racial identity and the fascination with their African whiteness found in the United States (and fueled by accounts like Bridge’s) as a useful tool to mold themselves into exotic others while simultaneously escaping associations with primitivism. Existence in Liberia transformed its African American inhabitants from the perceived bottom rung of American society into exotic foreigners, but Americo-Liberians retained the mantle of “civilization.” As the harbingers of Christianity and western culture in “benighted” Africa, Liberian settlers laid claim to a cultured and elevated identity to which many Euro-Americans found themselves awkwardly acquiescing. In this manner, Liberians returning to the United States secured previously inaccessible privileges and honors in education, their means of travel, and recognition from white Americans. Of course, numerous influences—class, gender, available social networks, to name but a few—shaped and molded both the settlers’ evolving racialized identities and their ability to demand and secure the sorts of lived experiences abroad that they believed their place in Africa had secured.

A critical first step is reestablishing Liberia as a significant and evolving point within the Atlantic world instead of its usual interpretative place as the *end* of a transatlantic journey. This is not to suggest that scholars have ignored life in the colony of Liberia. Tom W. Shick, Claude A. Clegg, Marie Tyler-McGraw, James Campbell, and others have performed yeoman work to establish relationships between the colonists and African Liberians, the post-migration experiences of the settlers, the settler/colonizationist and black/white relationships forged in establishment and peopling of the Liberian colonies, and the ways in which thinking about

Africa reflected Diasporans' thoughts on America.⁸ But these scholars have mainly focused on the lived experiences *within* the colony. The oceanic journey of these settlers is largely perceived

⁸ Researching before the 1980 coup and overthrow of Americo-Liberian rule made research in Liberian problematic (a prolonged set of civil wars lasting from 1989 to 2003 would make research in Liberia practically impossible), Tom W. Shick's *Behold the Promised Land: A History of Afro-American Settler Society in Nineteenth-Century Liberia* focuses on the trial and tribulations of the settlers while deemphasizing their oppression of the indigenous populations by pointing out the similarities with other colonial enterprises like Argentina, Australia, and South Africa. Despite dedicating an entire chapter to "Africans and Settlers," the Africans of Shick's narrative typically only emerge from the shadows during their periodic uprisings against the Americo-Liberians or at points when they come within the sphere of settler influence. Shick maintains a tight focus on the African-Americans—even the white ACS authorities fade to the background—and the Africans subsequently suffer from this tunnel vision. Thus, the overarching tone of the work is defensive of settler attitudes toward the natives. The political alliances between interior settlements and locals, for example, "fragile and temporary as they often were—provided an initial atmosphere of political tolerance, which made more enduring relations between settlers and Africans possible." Stress is placed on the difficulties of settler life and the dire economic straits of the colony rather than the fact the settler system of "apprenticing" Africans basically equated to a form of slavery. Unfortunately for Shick, the timing of his publication rendered his language seemingly obsolete and hopelessly unrealistic. Researching in the time of President Tolbert and continued Americo-Liberian rule, Shick published his account with the optimistic premise that the African-American settlers hoped to erect a "Promised Land" in West Africa and "the settlers and their descendants retained a symbolic faith in the ideals of their predecessors, the original pioneer immigrants. For better or worse, their strongly ideological legacy has remained alive in Liberia to the present time." In the same year that those words rolled off the press, Samuel Doe's 1980 coup and murder of Tolbert ended nearly two centuries of Americo-Liberian rule and undermined Shick's claim for "enduring relations" between the Americo-Liberians and African Liberians. Shick likewise employs comparative colonial model to argue that those other "successful" colonies all shared Liberia's early problems of disease, local unrest, and inadequate supplies. The difference between impoverished Liberia and thriving Australia was the maintenance of a steady stream of settlers to the island while the number of African-American immigrants to Liberia became a trickle after the American Civil War. Writing at a historical moment of pan-African reevaluation, Shick reinterpreted the Liberian settlers from their old positions of "race traitors" to heroic early African American nationalists. He also sounded the retreat from understanding colonization purely from the perspective of white observers. Previous (white) scholars had overwhelmingly utilized the official reports and addresses of the white societies propagating the colonizationist message. Even when they did look at the experiences of the settlers or native Africans, these scholars largely accepted the arguments of the white leadership without acknowledging their extremely biased lens or delving into the plethora of sources available for African-American or African viewpoints. Shick, focused on the social relations amongst Americo-Liberians and organizing his narrative around several principle settler families, Shick's work reorients the story of colonization away from the white leadership of the colonization societies to the lived experience in the Liberian colony and state. Although the result is somewhat awkward in that it is never particularly clear how representative the spot-lighted families were in relation to the overarching settler experience, Shick did signal the transition to histories studying the experiences of African-Americans and not just the white leadership of the ACS. Claude A. Clegg's study of North Carolina colonizationists and settlers almost entirely focuses solely on the Liberian context. Clegg maintains the historical focus on the African-American settlers and he is far more critical of their actions and dedicates more pages to the Africans than previous scholars. Central to Clegg's thesis is the double edged sword of liberty—hence the origins of his title, *The Price of Liberty*—whereby slaves were promised emancipation only upon the condition of emigration. The result of this bargain was an intimate knowledge of the diseases and dangers of West Africa, the ruggedness of an underfunded colonial enterprise, and the hostility and complex relationships with the local population. The complexity of Clegg's argument, and the subtle elegance of his title, stems from claim that the African inhabitants also paid the price for the settlers' liberty as they found themselves beyond the pale of political power and forced to serve as the workers in the Americo-Liberians forced labor system euphemistically referred to as "apprenticeship." Combing a wide range of American manuscripts collections for settler accounts, Clegg balances the desires of the settlers and their hopes for their new African home against the realities of what such expansion meant for the Dei, Vai, Gola, Grebo, Kpell, Kru, and Bassa ethnic groups occupying the territory upon which those hopes would have to built. Following in Clegg's path, Marie Tyler-McGraw utilizes a similar state case-study methodology for different purposes in *An African Republic: Black and*

as the culmination of their transatlantic peregrinations instead of just the beginning. While some scholars have utilized the numerous collections of letters from Liberian settlers to examine the complicated ideas held by Americo-Liberian settlers regarding Africa and whether it or the United States constituted “home” for them, very few historians have examined their literal visits to the United States beyond reporting their desires to do so, as recorded in the letters from the colony.⁹ Certainly Liberia was an impoverished location with a high mortality rate that would

White Virginians in the Making of Liberia. Although blacks and whites had shared the narrative in previous accounts of colonization, scholarly emphasis had been placed on either the white administrators or black colonists. Tyler-McGraw’s account shifts between the two in order to demonstrate the peculiar biracial nature of the organization. This is not to suggest that believes that white colonizationists were somehow egalitarians, but rather to note that both whites and African-Americans jointly contributed to the colonization project. For white Virginians, colonization offered a sort of safety valve that allowed them to balance slavery with a post-Revolution emphasis on liberty. For some whites, particularly women—and a real strength of Tyler-McGraw’s study is the skill by which she underscores the significance of both white and black women to the colonization movement—colonization offered a roadmap to emancipation. For others, especially in the wake of Nat Turner’s revolt, colonization provided the means by which slavery could be strengthened through the removal of free blacks. In addition to the promise of freedom, Liberia offered African-Americans the opportunity to create a model state that could serve as a constant reminder that they were not a depraved race. A considerable strength of this book is Tyler-McGraw’s refusal to present simplistic categories of colonization support. The reader is left with little choice but to acknowledge the significant diversity of black and white opinions regarding colonization. Like Clegg, Tyler-McGraw contextualizes without defending settler actions toward native Africans. One of the more significant contributions of *An African Republic* is Tyler-McGraw’s distinction that nationality did not bar natives from political power, but rather the gateway to political recognition was cultural assimilation. The African-American colonists attempted to erect an American-style republic, but these dreams were ultimately dashed by the settlers’ cultural intransigence. Citizenship and acceptance were based upon the adoption of Americo-Liberian culture, while the colonists refused to acknowledge anything of consequence in the local cultures. James Campbell’s *Middle Passages: African American Journeys to Africa, 1787-2005*, while examining a broad range of African American experiences with Africa beyond the Liberian context, does dedicate an early chapter to the colonization movement, its early black roots with Paul Cuffe and subsequent white appropriation, and life in colonial Liberia. Campbell’s primary contribution is to reclaim Africa as a site for thinking and negotiating African Americans’ relationship with the United States. See Tom W. Shick, *Behold the Promised Land: A History of Afro-American Settler Society in Nineteenth-Century Liberia* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980, 99, 142-143; Claude A. Clegg III, *The Price of Liberty: African Americans and the Making of Liberia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004; Marie Tyler-McGraw, *An African Republic: Black and White Virginians in the Making of Liberia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); James Campbell, *Middle Passages: African American Journeys to Africa, 1787-2005* (New York: Penguin Press, 2006).

⁹ This is not merely a problem of differing research questions, but is also rooted in the organizational structure of the ACS archival records. In distinguishing incoming correspondence for the society between letters from Liberia and domestic correspondence, the archival organization makes for relatively straightforward research for locating letters from Liberian settlers in Africa. For settlers traveling through the United States and corresponding with colonization society officials, however, the settlers’ letters are folded generically into domestic correspondence, essentially rendering invisible their otherwise distinctive quality. Archivaly, they become literally a needle in a box of needles. David Kazanjian has examined settlers’ letters, specifically focusing on the Louisiana slaves freed by John McDonough, to argue that these settlers conceived of the United States as their “home,” and rejected any broader transnational, African, or Diasporic identity. Kazanjian does mention desires to return to the United States expressed in Americo-Liberian discourse, but wedded to the epistolary record from the colony, he actually does not investigate instances in which settlers actually did return “home.” One of the few works to actually examine an Americo-Liberian travelling through the United States is Winston James’s biography of John Brown Russwurm: *The*

make it a permanent resting place for many previously mobile Atlantic subjects, but for those who survived the acclimating fever, the wars, and the poverty, it was not necessarily the end and they could do more than just write about returning home to the United States; they actually did it. Whether as disgruntled former settlers, or paid spokesmen for the ACS, or visitors returning to childhood abodes, or emancipators looking to free family from the chains of slavery, or students seeking medical degrees, Liberian settlers returned to the United States, and they were remarkably uninterested in returning to their formerly downtrodden place in American society. In his history of African American journeys to Africa, Campbell asserted that Africa was paradoxically a site for people of African descent to negotiate and conceptualize their relationship to the United States; Africa, in short, provided a two-way mirror through which with but a change in lighting viewers could see both Africa and America in the reflection. This project probes one of these sites of negotiation, colonial and early republic Liberia, to examine the “tools” provided to Americo-Liberians by their African residence to negotiate a new relationship with the white inhabitants of the United States. These were not just metaphorical arguments shouted across the Atlantic Ocean. Focusing on the experiences of Americo-Liberians in the United States highlights that these “negotiations” had practical applications for the lives of settlers in both the United States and Africa. What did life in Africa do for these settlers when they approached the rhetorical bargaining table? The African whiteness of the settlers would function as a major bargaining chip.

Struggles of John Brown Russwurm: The Life and Writings of a Pan-Africanist Pioneer, 1799-1851. James provides both commentary and primary-source documents from Russwurm’s 1848 visit to the United States. . Kazanjian’s broad-stroked dismissal that settlers only perceived of the United States as “home” receives at least a solitary challenger from James, who was particularly struck by the “extent to which Russwurm had become attached to his new African home, his corresponding bemused detachment from the United States, and his eagerness to return [sic] his ‘free home’ in Liberia.” See David Kazanjian, “The Speculative Freedom of Colonial Liberia,” *American Quarterly* 63, no. 4 (2011): 881-882; 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), 238-242.

If the African whiteness of the African American settlers in Liberia had been confined to the temporality of the West African colony, then this racial construction would have had very little significance for the Atlantic world. But the Atlantic system was mobile and complex, a grand exchange for information crisscrossing the ocean, and, of course, word returned from Liberia to the United States and the supporters of colonization and the members of the ACS. An umbrella organization, the ACS was an evolving tapestry of state auxiliary societies that cobbled together disparate supporters of slavery, conservative antislavery advocates who worried about economic modernization, evangelicals concerned with missionary efforts in Africa, and supporters of black uplift who believed that it could only be achieved through separation and the establishment of an independent African American republic among the nations of the world.¹⁰ The sinew that connected these discordant constituents was a shared assumption that the unchecked growth of the number of free people of color within the United States would spell unmitigated disaster for the nation in the presence of increased racial violence. Whether in the form of free peoples' involvement in slave insurrections or clampdowns by uncompromising whites who would never grant equality or freedom to African Americans, the violence predicted by ACS prophets foreshadowed an uncompromising race war with distinct and hardened battle lines. In positioning the ACS as an organization with members who both supported and opposed slavery, I turn away from the vexing question of whether the ACS was "inherently" a pro-slavery or anti-slavery society. An organization that diffuse, decentralized, and constantly evolving looked in far more directions than Janus and defies such simplistic declarations regarding its stance on slavery, especially since its primary concern was not support or opposition to slavery

¹⁰ Beverly Tomek's history of colonization in Pennsylvania offers several useful case studies that illuminate the multitudinous personalities who were drawn at various points in their lives to the colonization schemes. See Beverly Tomek, *Colonization and Its Discontents: Emancipation, Emigration, and Antislavery in Antebellum Pennsylvania* (New York: New York University Press, 2010).

but the great question of freedom.¹¹ Clegg gets to the heart of the ACS agenda when he argues that colonization transcended slavery “since blackness itself, burdened with all of the degrading, brutalized, guilt-ridden meanings that bondage and history had encumbered it with, was the problem.”¹² The driving question for many colonizationists was not slavery *per se*, but rather whether free blacks could coexist with white Americans. Such an issue fostered deep divisions within the organization as members arrived at vastly different answers to that question. Some perceived of blackness as inherently degraded, violent, and valueless, a needless threat to slavery and white society which colonization could remedy; others argued that degraded blackness was an artificial product of white society, and only through separation from whites who would never allow for peaceful coexistence could African Americans find uplift; still others perceived of Liberia as a case-study in black capacity and believed that African American uplift in the United States could only begin with evidence of a republican, sophisticated, and “civilized” republic of African Americans. Regardless of their respective paths to colonization (and there were many more), all of the rank and file members of the ACS considered the possibilities of free black existence within the United States and concluded that separation offered the greatest benefits.

¹¹ Within the antislavery camp, Eric Burin and Beverly Tomek have led the charge. For Burin, not only was the ACS an inherently antislavery organization, but it also led a prolonged and direct assault on the institution: “Like pebbles in the water, ACS manumissions rippled outward, destabilizing slavery in their wake.” Tomek at least quantifies her study with an all-important “at least in Pennsylvania” when she makes her case for the antislavery credentials of colonizationists. On the other end of the spectrum, many scholars have echoed the framework set down by Floyd Miller in his *The Search for a Black Nationality* who defined his terminology thusly, “‘Colonization’ and ‘emigration’ are used interchangeably throughout this work, in conformity with common practices in black history. However, most students of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century black migratory activities use ‘colonization’ to refer to those movements which are largely white-inspired—such as the American Colonization Society’s efforts to found and maintain an African colony. There is a tendency to use ‘emigration’ to describe black-initiated movements, although ‘colonization’ has also been applied in these cases.” Leslie M. Alexander follows Miller’s formula, but her lines of demarcation between “white colonization” and “black emigration” are far more strict and unbending than Miller’s. Colonization also loses any possible connection to black uplift for Alexander who defines the movement as “an idea championed by White racists who did not want to interact with free Blacks on an equal basis and plotted to forcibly remove Blacks from the United States before they gained American citizenship and posed a real threat to Southern slavery.” See Eric Burin, *Slavery and the Peculiar Solution: A History of the American Colonization Society* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), 5; Tomek, 1; Floyd J. Miller, *The Search for a Black Nationality: Black Emigration and Colonization, 1787-1863* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975), vii, 54; Leslie M. Alexander, *African or American?: Black Identity and Political Activism in New York City, 1784-1861* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 68-69.

¹² Clegg, 33.

For an institution committed to the literal whitening of America, it must have come as a bit of surprise to its members that the ACS was also apparently whitening Africa.

That rank and file membership—really anyone willing to read the publications of the ACS—discovered this racial warping almost immediately. Indeed, Liberia’s racial constructions required editorializing in one of the first published histories of the colony, an account written by Jehudi Ashmun and published in 1826. Ashmun had served as the second official agent and governor of the fledgling colony after his arrival there in 1822, taking over from Elijah Johnson, an African American settler originally from New York who had been serving as governor after the departure of the first ACS agent. Ashmun arrived in time to assist with preparing the infant settlement on Cape Mesurado—it had yet to acquire the name “Monrovia”—to withstand a combined assault from neighboring Africans in November 1822. Ashmun’s account of this early martial glory along with other reminiscences of the first two years of the colony’s existence was published as a pamphlet and serialized in the *African Repository and Colonial Journal*, the official organ of the ACS. Anyone interested in colonization then would have had relatively easy access to Ashmun’s history, and the tale certainly would have made for fascinating reading, as Ashmun fashioned a supposedly authentic dialog of the African war council that led to a concerted assault on Monrovia by the African inhabitants, primarily the Vai, Dei, and Mamban ethnic groups, living nearby. A majority of the African leaders challenged the more-pacific minority who saw the American settlers as “countrymen,” a loaded term denoting native Africans. According to the majority of the African leaders, however, “the Americans were strangers who had forgot their attachment to the land of their fathers; for if not, why had they not renounced their connexion with white men altogether, and placed themselves under the protection of the kings of the country?” It was that refusal to place themselves under African “kings” and their continuation of western cultural practices, racially coded as “white man’s

fash,” which led West Africans to identify all practitioners of this “fash” as white. Although the council of war’s proceedings were filtered through the medium of Ashmun and his white editors, this sentiment that the newly-arrived African American settlers were not “countrymen” due to their continued connection to the cultural practices and governance of the United States reflected the same assumptions that led these Africans to classify the settlers as “whites.” In his response to these African threats, Ashmun not only demonstrated a surprising understanding of African racial coding but also reinforced it. Employing a neutral African as messenger, Ashmun warned the leaders of the force prepared to wipe his tiny colony off of the map that “if they proceeded to bring war upon the Americans...they would dearly learn what it was to fight white men.” At that moment, Jehudi Ashmun was the only Euro-American manning the fortifications on Cape Mesurado.¹³

For his assuredly confused readers, Ashmun provided an explanatory footnote to clarify that “white” denoted “A phrase by which civilized people of all colours and nations are distinguished in the dialect of the coast.” Thus, with the wave a seemingly magic wand, the newly arrived free people of color instantly became “civilized people” and “white” to boot. These were, in fact, the same people whom many colonizationists railed against as the albatross hanging around America’s neck. Charles F. Mercer’s address before the first meeting of the ACS on January 1, 1818, reprinted in its annual report for all to see, painted the United States as a dystopian hellscape formerly occupied by enterprising whites that had given way to growing numbers of free people of color.

The habitations of our fathers have sunk into ruins; the fields
which they tilled have become a wilderness. Such is the table land
between the valleys of our great rivers. Those newly grown and

¹³ Jehudi Ashmun, *History of the American Colony in Liberia, from December 1821 to 1823* (Washington, D.C.: Way & Gideon, 1826), 23-25; Jehudi Ashmun, “A Memoir of the Exertions and Sufferings of the American Colonists,” *The African Repository and Colonial Journal* 2, no. 6 (August 1826), 175-176.

almost impenetrable thickets which have succeeded a wretched civilization, shelter and conceal a banditti, consisting of this degraded, idle, and vicious population, who sally forth from their coverts, beneath obscurity of night, and plunder the rich proprietors of the valleys. They infest the suburbs of the towns and cities, where they become the depositories of stolen goods, and, schooled by necessity, elude the vigilance of our defective police.¹⁴

Of course, the ideology propounded in this first meeting of colonizationists assumed that these same degraded black “banditti” would also become the vehicle of African uplift and “civilization” by establishing “colonies, composed of blacks already instructed in the arts of civilized life.” There is a duality here that has always perplexed and intrigued scholars of Liberia. How could such an uncivilized and violent class in America form the civilizing backbone of a rejuvenated and Christian Africa? Tyler-McGraw found this transformation more indicative of “alchemy”; a spatially-based metamorphosis that underscores the geographical orientation of colonizationist thinking. Clegg referred to it as “a tortured logic geared more toward effecting their ends than to proving the intellectual cogency of their position.” Clegg, investigating the language of arch-colonizationist Henry Clay, concludes that “He was perhaps proceeding from the premise that Africa was so low on the scale of human achievement” that even America’s dregs could elevate it. Of course, the rhetoric of men like Clay more than amply demonstrate that they *did* conceive of Africa as that degraded, thus removing the need for a historian’s conjecture.¹⁵ This hierarchical place-based order of “civilization” was propounded by Rev. Robert J. Breckinridge before the 1851 Convention of the Kentucky Colonization Society when he described slavery as a “type of training” through which African Americans had come to know the “manners, the habits, the wants, and the attainments, of a civilization—low as

¹⁴ *The First Annual Report of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Color, of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: D. Rapine, 1818), 15.

¹⁵ *The First Annual Report of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Color, of the United States*, 40; Marie Tyler-McGraw, *An African Republic: Black & White Virginians in the Making of Liberia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 24; Claude A. Clegg III, *The Price of Liberty: African Americans and the Making of Liberia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 30;

compared with ours, respectable as compared with the average of the human race, and exalted as compared with the bulk of their own.”¹⁶ For supporters of colonization, the supposed benefit for the respective “civilization” of both African American settlers and Africans was a keystone argument providing a proverbial “win-win” situation for all parties involved. African Americans would find uplift in Africa, transforming immediately from “banditti” to great Christian evangelicals spreading the true religion and western culture to benighted Africa; Africans would receive the benefits of Christianity and living in a “civilized” manner; white Americans would retain their dominant place in American society without the threat of racial conflict. This was a complex socio-spatial argument whereby merely inhabiting the space of Liberia was transformative and “civilizing” for all parties and the racial morphing of the Americo-Liberians played a critical role in how white colonizationists perceived their respective “civilization” across the Atlantic.¹⁷

What is needed to understand how these degraded base metals were turned into Americo-Liberian gold is a more complex notion of “whiteness,” divorced from phenotype and the presence of people of European descent, to understand this sudden burst of “civilization” for those who entered the space of Liberia. The ACS, after all, was an organization nominally founded on the principle of uncompromising conflict among fixed and intractable races. Yet,

¹⁶ Robert J. Breckinridge, *The Black Race: Some Reflections on its Position and Destiny, as Connected with Our American Disposition. A Discourse Deleivered Before the Kentucky Colonization Society, at Frankfort, on the 6th Day of February, 1851* (Frankfort: A. G. Hodges, 1851), 17.

¹⁷ Joanne Pope Melish has suggested that this train of colonizationist thinking bears a superficial resemblance to a nineteenth-century reincarnation of “environmental racism,” a belief in the environment’s capacity for mutating racial distinctions. Melish rightfully rejects colonization as an environmentalist argument, noting that most colonizationist arguments focused on Africa as the “natural” place for African Americans; the environment does not reshape their race, but rather provides the “natural” setting to nurture the essence of the African American settlers. Rather than adopting an environmental perspective, I argue that colonization was a spatial argument in which great significance was placed on spatial boundaries of the Americo-Liberian settlements as transformative, not because they were in Africa, but because they attempted to recreate the United States in Africa. The whiteness of the settlers was a critical element in arguing for this space as a civilizing influence unto itself, and the settlers would prove rather adept at utilizing this spatial reasoning to argue for their respective elevation above degraded blackness. See Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and “Race” in New England, 1780-1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 195-197.

colonizationists proved remarkably adept at holding the same contradictory understanding of race as a societal construction that Bridge employed in his journal; they simultaneously could see only unending and unchanging racial conflict within the United States even as they pondered the evolution of race in Liberia and what it meant for the “black” settlers across the Atlantic Ocean. That human quality to hold and support contradictory ideas, an affirmation of Walt Whitman’s self-contained multitudes from “Song of Myself” (“I am large, I contain multitudes”), provided stability to an otherwise destabilized idea.¹⁸ Evolving blackness and whiteness could operate simultaneously without disrupting assumptions of inherent racial difference because the colonizationists compartmentalized each idea, often expressing both sentiments in the same letters and published works. This was the central paradox at the heart of many colonizationists’ thinking: a surprising understanding of race as a product of a given society and a simultaneous rejection that such change was possible within American society.

As a scholarly field, the study of whiteness flourished in the mid 1990s and early 2000s after the publication of two particularly influential works: Alexander Saxton’s *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic*, which argued that the Jacksonian expansion of white male suffrage was built upon a foundation of racial exclusivity, and David Roediger’s *The Wages of Whiteness*, which argued that the same racial privileges that congealed in Jacksonian democracy pasted over class fissures among white laborers and provided them with a supplemental wage. These works paved the way for a creative explosion in scholarship dedicated to studying the production and preservation of whiteness. At the height of this scholarly wave, whiteness studies were most useful in delineating the means by which “race” is and has been constructed throughout history,

¹⁸ Ariela J. Gross discusses this “twoness” of race in *What Blood Won’t Tell*. She is particularly struck that the paradoxical components of race—the idea that race is an easily definable “clear-cut identity” and also an “ever-shifting category”—combine to form the “common sense of race.” Indeed, the series of contradictions that undergirded racial identity trials, the notion that race was something inherent and supposedly obviously coupled with an understanding that it could also be something concealed and altered, led to the growing importance of science and performance as ways of fixing this identity and “proving” racial identity. See Ariela J. Gross, *What Blood Won’t Tell: A History of Race on Trial in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 16-72.

and in reminding scholars to include “white” in their discussions of “race.” In focusing on the progression of how certain groups—the Irish, eastern and southern Europeans—became “white,” these scholars underscored the futility of erecting binaries when thinking of race. The power of the argument lay in the contention that whiteness, the definition of which was nominally contingent upon context, placed a dominant claim over class, gender, or political affiliation, such that being white provided a unifying bond over all other divergent identities. Yet, whiteness studies in their explosive growth largely failed to sharpen their new analytical tool. A decade after the publication of *The Wages of Whiteness*, Peter Kolchin noted the tendency of whiteness scholarship to operate in dualities in which whiteness was both a contextual product of time and place and yet somehow pervasive, real, and unchanging after its formation. If initially determined to extricate studies of race from binaries, its users rapidly fell into “white/non-white” binaries themselves. In claiming for whiteness expansive powers to shape racial hierarchies in the United States (and a preponderance of whiteness studies have focused on the United States), scholars risked forfeiting their focus on the constructed nature of race for a “ubiquitous and unchanging transhistorical force.”¹⁹ Reifying race and universalizing whiteness, however, remain the sticky wickets of the field.

Scholars have sought to rectify these problems by relocating whiteness studies beyond the confines of the United States and reestablish it as a global product of European colonialism. Such an approach also reminds us that the contours, definitions, performances, and behaviors associated with “whiteness” are not universal, but rather products of certain places and times.²⁰

¹⁹ Alexander Saxton, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic: Class Politics and Mass Culture in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Verso, 1990); David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso, 1991); Peter Kolchin, “Whiteness Studies: The New History of Race in America,” *Journal of American History* 89, no. 1 (2002): 159.

²⁰ Such is the solution put forward by the authors of the essays in a collection edited by Leigh Boucher, Jane Carey, and Katherine Ellinghaus. The editors and authors argue that the United States is not the most important area for the study of whiteness, but rather the colonial spaces of European empires. Additionally, the essays remind readers that whiteness is a particular product of a time and place, not a universal phenomenon, and that scholars have been too

Paradoxically, in their efforts to disprove the “realness” of whiteness and race, scholars rush to Europe, Euro-Americans, or people of European descent. Some whiteness studies have examined the means by which the cultural identity of the Irish caught up with their legal status as whites in the United States. Others have examined the means by which the American legal system has attempted to implement foolproof systems to unambiguously identify race and prevent “passing” from black to white.²¹ But the overarching assumption is that the legal definitions, the performances, the sciences involved in identifying these “whitenesses” have revolved around people of European descent. This leaves us with the great “problem” of our “black-white” Americo-Liberian settlers. If race is truly a product of time and place and divorced from the material body, then why only look towards Europeans or their descendants when discussing whiteness? In other words, whiteness does not have to serve as another excuse to simply refocus scholarship on whites (as is a commonly voiced concern), but it can be utilized to analyze a vast array of social constructions. In the context of Liberia, whiteness was produced by the settlers’ Christianity, English language, living in a frame house constructed along a grid-pattern street, and their efforts to dominate the local African population by serving as both colonial masters and cultural exemplars. The same set of circumstances did not produce the same racial identity in the United States at the same time, but colonizationists within the United States were not only aware of the racial adaptations in Liberia, they also used the African whiteness of their settlers as a propaganda tool.

One of these, a tract entitled *A Concise History of the Commencement, Progress and Present Condition of the American Colonies in Liberia*, was published by Samuel Wilkeson during his term as General Agent of the ACS in 1839. According to Wilkeson: “The Liberian is

theoretically sloppy in their conflation of whiteness as an empirical category, a term used by their subjects, as compared to a category of analysis. See Leigh Boucher, Jane Carey, and Katherine Ellinghaus, eds., *Re-Orienting Whiteness* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

²¹ Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Gross, *What Blood Won't Tell*.

certainly a great man, and what is more, by the natives he is considered a white man, though many degrees from that stand—for to be thought acquainted with the white man’s fashions, and to be treated as one, are considered as marks of great distinction among the Bassa and other nations.”²² Another author concerned about the religious duty of Christians to evangelize Africa utilized settler whiteness to dispute the claims that debased Africans were not only disinclined to adopt Christianity, but also incapable of receiving and understanding the Holy Word. “The Africans already look upon the white man as their superior, and hence desire to imitate him. The very ability to read and write gives dignity and importance to a colored man among them, and they express their admiration by calling him a white man. It would follow, of course, that they embrace every opportunity to place their children in the schools.”²³

Clearly, these colonizationist leaders were dismissive of these Africans’ conflation of the performative aspects of western culture with whiteness; the African Americans were “many degrees” from becoming white in Wilkeson’s eyes. Although there were a few rare exceptions of white colonizationists embracing these African notions, one being Moses Sheppard who holds an integral place in the following pages, one should not assume that an *awareness* of the Americo-Liberians’ whiteness in Africa equated to an *acceptance* of that identity. These colonizationists were aware of this racial warping and utilized it in their propaganda as evidence of the elevation of African Americans after their removal to Liberia. These white colonizationists assumed that the whiteness of the Liberian settlers reflected their neighboring Africans’ concession that these relative newcomers to the continent represented an advanced cultural vanguard clearly superior to their own and worthy of emulation.

²² Samuel Wilkeson, *A Concise History of the Commencement, Progress and Present Condition of the American Colonies in Liberia* (Washington, D.C.: The Madisonian, 1839), 45.

²³ “The Claims of Africa on the Christian World to send her the Gospel,” *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 23, no. 11 (November 1847): 333.

In reality, most of the Liberian Africans were not necessarily overly impressed with their newly-acquired Americo-Liberian governors, as attested by the near constant conflicts and violence between settlers and Africans. Although some of the African Liberians sought acculturation and adopted western cultural practices, many Africans desiring educational opportunities and acquaintance with what they termed “white man’s fash” were seeking economic opportunity. The ACS land claims constituted much of the former “pepper coast,” named for the melegueta pepper found there.²⁴ The West African coastal dwellers there had engaged in the commercial networks of the Atlantic for centuries before the arrival of the first ACS ships. While disrupting the balance of power in the region’s commercial enterprises, the creation of Liberia also signaled the establishment of missionary-run schools for African children which offered access to literacy, command of English, and entrée into western cultural practices, all desired commodities in negotiations for these coastal middlemen. The arrival of the colonists likewise provided economic opportunities for laborers. There were many reasons why Africans sought the educational and economic opportunities of the Americo-Liberian settlements that did not reflect an assumption of the supposed superiority of these white settlers. Simply put, these Africans perceived of themselves as “black” and understood that the African American settlers perceived the world and behaved as Europeans or Euro-Americans; for African eyes, the settlers “performed” as whites and, thus, simply were.

The African American settlers in turn used their African whiteness as part of a broader effort to lay claim to a new identity, exotic and foreign, without the accompanying associations of primitivism. This was not about suddenly “passing” and becoming white or laying claim to a white identity, but rather utilizing their elevated status in Africa—celebrated by both themselves and white colonizationists—to establish a hybrid identity, somewhere between white and black.

²⁴ Another name for the pepper, the “grains of paradise,” yielded the alternative name of region, the “Grain Coast.”

If the whole point of Liberia, according to its white colonizationist propagandists, was to transform American savagery into African civilization, then these returning settlers proved remarkably adept at holding the colonization societies accountable to their own rhetoric. The very prophets of unending racial conflict found themselves opening their homes, their wallets, their social networks, their resources, and their schools to the former “banditti” of this “degraded, idle, and vicious population” upon their return to the United States. That they did so was a result of these Liberian settlers’ desires to travel about the United States and their unwillingness to return to their previous social positions. Or, as Andrew Hall wrote to a MSCS official in 1847, “I find it is true what you told me in your office that I would not be willing to come back to America to be called a negro.”²⁵ The tantalizing unanswered question in Hall’s letter is under what identity he *would* be willing to come back to the United States if “negro” was unacceptable.

Too often, Liberia has been interpreted as the end of the Atlantic journey. This dissertation asks about the American travels and experiences of Liberian settlers as they returned to the United States to visit old friends, stump in favor of colonization, and seek educational opportunities. Here, the celebrated whiteness of the settlers came home to roost for colonizationists, who found themselves acquiescing to Liberian demands for different treatment based upon their elevated “civilization” in Africa. Once Euro-American colonizationists had celebrated the whiteness of their African American settlers, they could not easily return to interacting with Americo-Liberians as they would with other African Americans. And Hall’s request broadly and ably sums the majority of these Liberians’ demands: if they had no desire to be “white,” they also almost universally despised the descriptor “negro” with all of its concomitant associations of degraded labor.

²⁵ Andrew Hall to Maryland State Colonization Society, 24 January 1847, MSCS.

In turning our analytical gaze to the cross-Atlantic peregrinations of Americo-Liberians, however, we must also examine this Atlantic world, what many scholars have dubbed the “Black Atlantic,” in detail. In reexamining Liberia as a node of the broader Atlantic world instead of the end of the journey, this dissertation suggests new avenues to integrate studies of whiteness with “Black Atlantic” scholarship. Building upon the foundation laid by the likes of C. L. R. James, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Eric Williams, Paul Gilroy in his transformative work, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, sought to untether “black” from its usual conflation with “Africa” and push it into the watery mobile world of the Atlantic Ocean. Like his predecessors, Gilroy assumed that slavery was foundational to the establishment of “modernity” and presented slaves, freed people, and descendants of slaves as central actors in the creation of a modern consciousness. Gilroy’s “Black Atlantic” is fluid and adaptable. The horrors of the slave trade produced a mobile population that eschewed national divisions by finding resonance and commonality in the shared experience of New World slavery. Breaking free from the limitations of the nation-state, scholarship on this Atlantic world of motion exploded, significantly expanding our understanding of Atlantic slave societies and the connections among the displaced members of the African Diaspora with one another and their conceptualizations of “home” on either side of the Atlantic. The significance of this call to interpret the Atlantic “as one single, complex unit of analysis” cannot be understated.²⁶

Fissures have developed in the Black Atlantic model, however, many resulting from scholars of Africa or the non-Anglophone Black Atlantic privileged by Gilroy.²⁷ Most critically, for a scholarship dedicated to hybridity, fluidity, and mobility, why must this be an inherent and unchanging “black” Atlantic? The editors of a recent collection of influential Atlantic

²⁶ Gilroy, 15.

²⁷ For a strong overview of the criticisms of Gilroy’s Black Atlantic model, see Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, “Beyond the African Diaspora: Beyond the Black Atlantic” *African Affairs* 104, no. 414 (2005): 35-68. Also, Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, “African Diasporas: Toward a Global History” *African Studies Review* 53, no. 1 (2010): 1-19.

scholarship designed to probe the “origins of the Black Atlantic” asserted that the unifying feature of the articles was that they “all seek, in one way or another, to comprehend how the enslaved and formerly enslaved imagined, reformulated, and transformed the political and legal contexts in which they lived.”²⁸ That scholars now take seriously the contributions of the enslaved and formerly enslaved in shaping Atlantic societies is a groundbreaking evolution in the field, but can “black” be deterministically defined as slaves, the manumitted, and their descendants?

And questions have even arisen within the Anglophone Black Diaspora about the utility and commonality of that Diasporic identity built upon a shared history of terror and enslavement for former slaves and non-elites. Utilizing the letters from the former slaves of John Hartwell Cocke who relocated to Liberia, Ben Schiller has argued that for ex-slaves rather than Gilroy’s admittedly elite cast of characters, their identities were intimately connected to their American homelands rather than as constituent members of a Black or African Diaspora. For Schiller, the former slaves of the Black Diaspora found the connections forged in their enslaved pasts more important and real than the “rarefied discourses” highlighted by Black Atlantic scholars like Gilroy, James Sidbury, or Molefi Asante. “Relations forged within the slaveholding republic of America—relationships to place and space and between individuals and social networks—lie far closer to the heart of this matter than does the imagined terrain of Africa.”²⁹ David Kazanjian makes a similar case, likewise utilizing letters from Liberia, but focusing on the former slaves of

²⁸ Laurent DuBois and Julius S. Scott, “Introduction” in *Origins of the Black Atlantic* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 2.

²⁹ Ben Schiller, “US Slavery’s Diaspora: Black Atlantic History at the Crossroads of ‘Race’, Enslavement, and Colonisation” *Slavery & Abolition* 32, no. 2 (June 2011): 208-209.

John McDonough, to argue that “references to Africa as a homeland by emancipated black settlers in colonial and early national Liberia are exceedingly rare.”³⁰

It is unsurprising that Schiller and Kazanjian turned their analytical gaze toward Liberia. Along with its Anglo cousin, Sierra Leone, Liberia embodies the constitutive elements of the Black Atlantic—a space for mobile members of the African Diaspora crossing the Atlantic to establish a “new home”—and it holds a particularly significant, if not always acknowledged, place, in Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic*. Whether embracing or rejecting, running to or running away, most of the intellectual elites spotlighted by Gilroy as indices of the Black Atlantic—Frederick Douglass, Martin Delany, Edward Wilmot Blyden, and Alexander Crummell—dedicated significant time, ink, and energy to thinking about Liberia as a space, a nation-state, an idea, or a lived experience. In the Atlantic networks of mobility, Liberia was an important hub, even if scholars must remember the dangers of conflating one particular juncture of an Anglophone African American Atlantic identity with *the* Black Atlantic or *the* Black Diaspora.

Yet, in refocusing our scholarly lens on this important Liberian node of the Black Atlantic, “Black” suddenly becomes a more diffuse and nebulous concept than recent Black Atlantic scholarship suggests and one necessitating a renewed examination. Perhaps most curiously, whiteness studies and Black Atlantic scholarship have rarely intersected. This is especially peculiar given their nearly simultaneous meteoric rises within the academic community and the shared challenges raised to each discourse as their practitioners have floundered to delineate the contours of the “Black Diaspora,” “Black Atlantic,” and “whiteness.” These have been two different discourses passing in the night; the complete dearth of scholarly attention to any intersections of these two prolific topics of academic study intrinsically suggests

³⁰ David Kazanjian, “The Speculative Freedom of Colonial Liberia,” *American Quarterly* 63, no. 4 (2011): 882. I disagree with Kazanjian’s argument that discussions of an “African homeland” in ex-slave epistles are largely absent is untrue. See Chapter 3.

the allure of formulaic binaries even in fields of study whose practitioners are the most vocal in eschewing them. Where the Black Atlantic goes, whiteness can only impede, interrupt, or challenge; the two seemingly never walk hand in hand. But if we are to take seriously the whiteness of the African American settlers in Liberia, whiteness can no longer merely stand in for white supremacy, and the “black” qualifier of the “Black Atlantic” must be questioned and probed and can no longer refer simply to an assumed cohesiveness founded on enslaved pasts or presents.

I argue that the Americo-Liberians utilized their African whiteness to argue for an exotic, but civilized, identity; a sort of nineteenth-century incarnation of the cosmopolitan “Atlantic creoles” of Ira Berlin’s “Charter generation” of slavery. If Atlantic creoles were characterized by their mixed ancestry, command of languages, Atlantic mobility, and utility in in cross-cultural negotiations in the Atlantic world, then the Americo-Liberians were denoted by their racial morphology, “civilized” society surrounded by barbarism, and usefulness in the great evangelical work of controlling and transforming heathen Africans into Christian converts who adopted western cultural practices. In so constructing the settlers, colonizationists were forced, even as they continued to argue that Africa was the “natural” geographic locale for people of African descent, to acknowledge that blackness in the United States differed from blackness in Africa. The Americo-Liberian settlers constituted the tip of “civilization’s” spear in Africa for these white colonizationists and were different from their “heathen” African neighbors, much like the equally mobile creoles of Berlin’s study.³¹ Most importantly, Americo-Liberians intentionally deployed this argument of their respective elevation and civilizing mission in Africa to secure advantages for themselves abroad and in the United States. Many secured relaxed travel arrangements, found patrons to help free their families from bondage, and secured previously

³¹ Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998), 17-92.

unattainable educational accomplishments. The first African American doctors to graduate from an American medical institution were Liberian settlers; they traveled across the United States, both slave states and free, giving lectures on their African experiences and colonization to diverse audiences. Others were trained for skilled labor in the colonies or found pathways to literacy to serve the colony or the missionaries stationed there.

Many of these individuals found their fluid identity a valuable commodity in these travels. Many of them also interpreted their journeys to Africa as transformative. Crossing the Atlantic Ocean had allowed them to at least claim—if not permanently take hold of—a kind of whiteness, an argument that they represented as the apogee of their respective society that supported peculiar claims to dominance. While the Liberian settlers sought an elevated status above their formerly degraded station, their ability to do so depended heavily upon their class and social connections within the United States. Gender further shaped these complicated and fluid dynamics. Colonization rhetoric, centered on a colonizing mission to “tame” African “savagery,” was heavily skewed toward idealized masculine tropes of dominance. In his discussion of the colonization movement’s gendered rhetoric, Bruce Dorsey has argued that colonizationists—white and black—presented a masculine framework that emphasized politics and open forums, and thus limited the roles available to women when compared to abolitionist groups. Furthermore, as conservative colonization societies sought settlers to travel long distances and lecture to mixed-sex groups of potential settlers, they specifically targeted male settlers as the only suitable candidates to perform these tasks. Women were likewise excluded from opportunities for educational pursuits, particularly in the field of medicine, which provided

another principal means by which Liberian settlers returned to the United States with the support and patronage of colonizationists.³²

Whiteness in Africa was a useful tool to bring to the negotiating table, but the process remained a negotiation. Certain settlers proved remarkably adept at navigating this terrain to secure unparalleled privilege and status for people of color in the United States; others encountered insurmountable obstacles. Moses Sheppard, a Baltimore merchant deeply involved with colonization, maintained extensive correspondences with numerous Americo-Liberian settlers and voiced appreciation for the African definitions of whiteness. In writing to one of his many associates in Liberia, Sheppard informed the man, “I have expected you to be one of the respectable settlers and I have no doubt of my expectation being fully accomplished, you will then be a white man, for freedom and independence make a white man, not color.”³³ But while “freedom” created whiteness, gender and class placed obvious constraints on its exercise by women, the poor, and those without the personal connections of an influential patron like Moses Sheppard.

This project proceeds broadly and thematically. Chapter two establishes the trajectories of several Liberian settlers’ travels in the United States, how they fared, what they wanted to accomplish, and what they actually attained. It traces how the settlers’ whiteness became entangled with arguments regarding their relative “civilization” and the power that it provided to certain well-positioned settlers to make claims for an elevated status during their stays abroad. They had no desire to “be” white, but most joined with settler Hall in expressing their desire to not be “called a negro.” Instead, they sought a liminal and nebulous position between those two antipodes and employed their African whiteness in conjunction with their American blackness to

³² Bruce Dorsey, *Reforming Men and Women: Gender in the Antebellum City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 136-164.

³³ Moses Sheppard to William Polk, 14 March 1836, Moses Sheppard Papers, Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA. Hereafter cited as MSP.

accomplish this goal. As a liminal and ill-defined identity, however, African whiteness produced great variations among settlers regarding the success of fully securing their desired status. In these American mobilities, and the very act of motion was critical to this overall process, these Americo-Liberian settlers often found themselves posing problems for the ACS because of their presence in the United States, especially among the supporters of slavery who constituted a portion of the ACS membership. Any blows for the anti-slavery cause landed by colonization were less the result of the actions of white colonizationists and their rhetoric than by the demands of Americo-Liberians to travel freely, receive educations, and lodge in the United States (although abolitionists overwhelmingly rejected colonization as an antislavery cause, much to the chagrin of many Liberian settlers).

Of course, the same ships that returned Liberian settlers to their American roots could—and did—bring native Africans across the Atlantic for their own travels. The resulting exchange between the two societies not only shaped racial consciousness in the United States, but also within the Liberian colonies themselves. Differing definitions of whiteness were at work in these Atlantic societies and the constant exchange between the two reshaped each one's perceptions of race. While the focus of this chapter is on the watery networks linking the United States and Liberia, this should not be interpreted as denying the broader network of connections in which this node of the Atlantic world was situated. The harbors of Liberia were filled with vessels from a multitude of nations; in addition to the treaties and negotiations with numerous African groups to expand Liberia's territory, the settlers also were sandwiched between French colonial incursions to their east and Britain's colony of Sierra Leone to the northwest; there were British recruiters trying to secure workers for their Caribbean colonies; there were rumors that Brazil planned to establish its own African colony to relocate its own slave population; the nautical Krumen, an Liberian ethnic group famed for their seamanship, further complicate this complex

image by their near-constant presence aboard every ship sailing under nearly every imaginable flag along the western coast of Africa.³⁴ Although the subject of this chapter is the critical and constant interchange between colony and metropole, it is important to note that this is but one channel of a vast array of Atlantic intercourse and mobility.

Chapters two through four examine the practices by which the Americo-Liberians established their African whiteness. These constituted a perceived command and control of the space, the use of multifaceted violence against Africans, and the employment of degraded African labor. Chapter three examines the geographic and spatial logic that undergirded colonization. At its heart, colonization is an argument about space. By occupying the “civilizing” space of Liberia, degraded American blackness was transformed into exotic, and “civilized,” whiteness. One of the keys to this transformation was to project Liberia as a tiny United States, despite the environment’s and Africans’ best efforts to defy this transplantation, in which Americo-Liberians served as masters of their own “civilized” space. Critical to the perception of “civilized” white settlers and degraded black Africans was the requirement that “heathen” Africans be separate and beyond the limits of “civilization,” so as to not taint the area with their barbarity, while simultaneously projecting control over the black bodies of the African inhabitants. If a critical element of whiteness is to exert control over non-whites, and a constant

³⁴ The Krumen are a subgroup of the Grebo who are related to, although distinct from, the Kru ethnic group of the Liberian interior. Unfortunately, there is potential for great confusion as the Krumen are often referenced as the “Kru.” Additional spellings of their name include “Kroo” or, more rarely, “Kroumen.” Regardless of spelling or use of name, however, any reference to Africans serving as sailors or stevedores almost certainly refers to this nautical people. The Kru were accomplished sailors whose terrestrial territory ranged from Sierra Leone to Liberia and whose pelagic realm extended across the entirety of the Atlantic Ocean. Although the Kru found themselves spread throughout the Atlantic, they always retained the possibility of returning “home” on the next vessel leaving port; such possibilities made them a unique immigrant enclave in Atlantic communities. Indicative of this mobility, by the late nineteenth century the Kru constituted a fairly significant immigrant population in Liverpool even as their possible avenues to return to West Africa and transient status helped retain a strong ethnic identity in the face of assimilationist forces. See Diane Frost, “Ethnic Identity, Transience and Settlement: The Kru in Liverpool since the Late Nineteenth Century,” *Immigrants & Minorities* 12, no. 3 (1993). For a broader history of the Kru during the period of Liberian settlement, see George E. Brooks, Jr., *The Kru Mariner in the Nineteenth Century: An Historical Compendium* (Newark, DE: Liberian Studies Association, 1972).

propagandist refrain of colonizationists was the “influence” the settlers held over Africans as evidenced by their African whiteness, then the Americo-Liberian settlers had to project themselves as separate and different from Africans while also asserting control over them. Relocation to Africa made the settlers foreign and exotic, but their control over barbarians and a “civilized” enclave in that heathen land ensured their own “civilization.” Cartography and maps of Liberia proved useful tools in this complex dance of establishing separation and togetherness, distance and control, simultaneously.

If geography separated African from Americo-Liberian, then the expansive use of coerced, unfree, or debased African labor in the colonies “returned” them to the “civilized space.” Chapter four focuses on Liberia’s labor regime. Like the discourse on space, the rhetoric surrounding the Liberian labor system attempted to project Africans as separate from the settlers, but under their control. In this case, the literal command of black bodies undergirded the whiteness of the Americo-Liberians. Slavery was made unconstitutional and illegal from the first days of the colony, but as in other places of the nineteenth-century Atlantic, there were many degrees of freedom and unfreedom in Liberia. Although chattel slavery was unavailable, there were a large number of labor options available to those settlers in the best position to capitalize on them. The African system of pawnship, whereby debts were paid by the labor of a surrogate, usually a child, evolved in the Liberian context into a system of indentures. This resulted in a large number of Liberian households utilizing African youths as domestic servants. Additionally, illegally enslaved Africans liberated by the understrength Africa squadron, called “recaptives” or “Congoes,” were deposited in Liberia regardless of their points of origins; many of these “Congoes” found themselves indentured to Liberian settlers under terms of service more familiar to American audiences. There was also the simple option of hiring African laborers for particular tasks and paying them substantially reduced wages. If the spatial arguments separated Africans

from the “civilized” space of Americo-Liberian settlements, and violence ensured Americo-Liberian dominance, then this labor regime was the integrative means by which those Africans were introduced to “civilizing” areas and controlled. Of course, many of these West Africans pre-dated the Americo-Liberians in their occupation of the land which constituted Liberia and they had never actually left, but the separation of Americo-Liberians and Liberians had to be established discursively because of the obvious and overwhelming presence of Africans there. Labor provided a tool to explain how Africans had been brought “back” into a place many had never actually left and how laboring in a “civilized” western manner would bestow “civilization” upon the laborers.

The labor of Africans within the colony was a system ripe for exploitation, despite its legal distinctions from slavery, and it helps explain Americo-Liberian Hall’s aversion to being labeled a “negro.” The living quarters of these African laborers, often located behind the homes of their masters in a physical arrangement obviously reminiscent of New World plantations, were labeled “negro quarters” by the Americo-Liberians. “Negro” held associations with degraded and debased labor, and the Americo-Liberians in full possession of their African whiteness reserved it for their African laborers. Occupying a higher station in their African society, the Liberian settlers employed their command of debased, black, African labor to lay claim to a different Atlantic identity. While not rejecting their American blackness, they attempted to project their African whiteness across the Atlantic. In employing both identities simultaneously, the Americo-Liberians created a liminal identity, a foreign and exotic strangerhood, that retained the respective “civilization” of the West broadly and the United States more specifically.

In addition to thinking about the spatial control over Liberia and the labor of its inhabitants, the Liberian settlers also projected their power and control over African barbarity through the threat of force and violence. Chapter five explores the multifaceted violence which

rocked the colony, characterizing day-to-day life in intimate settings as well as larger conflicts. Liberia was an expansionist space looking to continually expand its influence and territorial acquisitions along the coast and into the interior of the continent. Such a scenario presented numerous instances of aggression and violence, and the settlers quickly utilized their oft-violent interactions with Africans to establish their cultural separation from Africans and celebrated their victories as evidence of their power and control. If Liberia was perceived geographically as a besieged “civilized” space, then the near-constant military conflicts between it and its African neighbors established another tool which separated settler from African while also projecting settler control over African barbarity. In addition, such violent excursions to expand “civilization” provided martial glory to the settlers and their cause. Americo-Liberians celebrated their military organizations and were very proud of their ranks, such distinctions having been denied them in the United States. The projected and assumed threat of being swallowed by barbaric neighbors papered over the many societal divisions which threatened to break Liberian society apart: freeborn settlers often quarreled with their formerly enslaved neighbors, northerners and southerners were dismissive of each other’s respective homes, some settlers arrived in Africa with economic advantages not shared by others. The violence likewise reinforced colonization’s masculine projection as settlers heroically defended their outpost of “civilization” against aggressive heathenism. On a more intimate scale, the intentional effort to degrade the lowest class of laborers within the colony, much like it did in the United States, greatly elevated the day-to-day and intimate violence within the colony aside from the grand wars of expansion. Even as the violence between Americo-Liberians and Africans became a source of criticism for those opposed to colonization and evidence that the settlers were not so much exercising “influence” over Africans as violently repressing them, this martial and

masculine glory was one means by which settlers laid claim to equality with whites on the other side of the Atlantic.

Although these arguments regarding space, labor, and violence have been separated thematically into three distinct chapters, there are obviously significant areas of overlap between them. The very idea that the settlers were establishing a relocated United States ideologically placed the Americo-Liberians in societal positions that their exclusion from whiteness had prevented them from occupying in the United States. Adopting the top tier of colonial society, however, vacated the lowest laboring class. This imagined United States in Africa left Africans to occupy the lowest levels of degraded and unfree labor performed by African Americans in the United States. And much like the situation in the United States, the employment of debased and marginalized labor placed beyond the pale of citizenship in Liberia evoked both fears of uprising and violent outbursts from those protective of their respective privileges. Space, violence, and labor were interrelated and connected, and readers will find elements of each practice in each of these chapters.

Turning its lens away from the space of Liberia, chapter five reexamines the overwhelming rejection of colonization by free people of color in the United States, the evolution of the colonization societies, and the agency of the settlers in enacting these changes. For scholars, the trajectory of free black rejection of colonization follows a fairly standard narrative from early hopeful flirtations with Paul Cuffe and his idea for black-led migrations to the resounding rejection of the white-led ACS. This chapter certainly does not challenge the unpopularity of colonization with free African Americans. It does, however, add nuance to this narrative. The figure of the successful Liberian settler, traveling through the United States with lighter restrictions than other African Americans and lecturing on the possibilities of life in Africa, posed a substantial obstacle to those who desired to fight for African American rights in

the United States. Conversely, the blanket denunciation of African American settlers in Liberia and their accomplishments would have likewise undermined the agenda for black uplift in the United States. The result was a meandering course in which colonization's critics often celebrated the colony while denouncing colonization, portraying the settlers as unfortunate, but resilient, dupes of the white racists in charge of the ACS. The independence of Liberia made this a problematic line of attack, and many critics altered their rhetoric; once the settlers' independence made the "unfortunate dupes" argument untenable, they switched to a denunciation of the Americo-Liberians as simply white surrogates attempting to carve up Africa for western imperialism. Therein lay the difference between the few who elected to depart for Liberia and the vast majority who remained. For the majority of African Americans, the spatial argument of the colonizationists, the idea that they were debased, immoral, and deprived in the United States but could be civilization's vanguard in Africa, was laughable and offensive. Those few who saw possibility in Liberia emphasized the performative possibilities of the colony, the ability to draw up their own maps, command their soldiers in battle, and travel through the United States with an African servant to symbolize their rank.

Chapter five also examines the settlers' roles in changing the colonization societies. One of the aspects that makes the ACS difficult to classify as an antislavery or pro-slavery organization, or one dedicated to black uplift or indifferent to the settlers' plights in Africa, or any of several possible characterizations, was the evolving nature of the organization. While other scholars have commented upon changes within the ACS, such as the great anti-slavery/pro-slavery schism within the organization brought to the forefront during the 1833 national convention, most have placed the onus of these changes on the white leadership.³⁵ This dissertation adopts a different approach and examines the ways in which the actions of the

³⁵ Eric Burin, for example, utilized the attempted coup of the anti-slavery faction in 1833 to support his broader argument that the ACS was an antislavery organization. See Burin, 23-24.

African American settlers forced the hands of colonizationists and led them to adopt changes. Instead of the fools tricked by whites as they were portrayed by colonization's critics, the Liberian settlers were intimately aware that colonization was a multifaceted movement, and they sought to create changes which recognized and supported black uplift. For many settlers, there was no difference between abolition and colonization and they vocalized their frustrations with their critics' focus on the ACS administration. They worked with colonizationists committed to black uplift and social mobility and attempted to drive out those who did not favor such reforms; they changed the nature of the colonizationists' colonial governance. This is why so many Americo-Liberians were critical of the charges brought against the movement broadly by African Americans and white abolitionists. Many settlers cultivated contacts with those colonizationists committed to advancing the Americo-Liberians' cause. One need only examine the paltry correspondence from Liberia dispatched to Henry Clay, a leader of the colonization movement who served as president of the ACS from 1836 until 1849, as compared to the great number of Liberian letters to Moses Sheppard, who only served briefly as a manager of the MSCS but retained a lifelong interest in Liberia, to see that the settlers sought out allies most aligned with their interests. For the Americo-Liberians, it was more important to recognize that certain colonization leaders would work towards the goal of black uplift and secure *their* support, than to denounce the movement as a whole because it included supporters of slavery or black subjugation.

The focus of this study is on the experiences and beliefs of the African American settlers and Africans in the colony of Liberia and its earliest years as a republic after independence in 1847. Readers will notice that while the approach is to examine Liberia and Liberians broadly, I often focus my analytical gaze upon the independent colony of Maryland in Liberia, established by the MSCS in 1834. The MSCS desired to direct colonization into a more antislavery direction

and did not believe it could accomplish this goal within the confines of the ACS, a telling argument regarding the respective antislavery chops of that latter organization, and thus established the model for independent state action (what they termed the “Maryland Plan”). Nominally, the ACS collected funds, support, and settlers through its state auxiliaries before dispatching official expeditions; the Marylanders retained control over their state donations to establish and support Maryland in Liberia, but they also retained an affiliation with the ACS. The effort would spark additional rebellions; soon after the Marylanders bolted, the Pennsylvania Young Men’s Colonization society would join with compatriots in New York City to establish their own settlement founded on the pacifist beliefs of its Quaker benefactors. This diffuse collection of Liberian “colonies,” a more accurate term than simply referring to Liberia as a single “colony,” were brought together under the 1839 constitution of the “Commonwealth of Liberia,” with the exception of Maryland in Liberia which remained independent until 1857.³⁶ The result was a dramatic decentralization of the ACS and its African colonies. The African geography found itself, in addition to its own Maryland, with a Kentucky, Virginia, Louisiana, and Mississippi.

Scholars examining the colonization movement have always faced the problem of scale: the sheer enormity of the scale of operations upon which the colonization societies operated. The records of the ACS housed in the Library of Congress contain 190,000 items, to say nothing of the hundreds of other caches of documents deposited across the country.³⁷ Because of its decentralized, state-oriented approach, many scholars have examined the colonization movement

³⁶ Today, the former Maryland in Liberia is Maryland County, the southeastern-most county of Liberia neighboring Côte d'Ivoire.

³⁷ A series of civil wars in Liberia raging between 1989 and 2003 dramatically damaged the infrastructure of the country and makes conducting research in Liberia difficult. As of 2009, the staff of the National archives estimates that 60% to 75% of their collection was lost to looting or destroyed during the war. Those documents that were saved by relocating them to the J. J. Roberts house do constitute over 1000 boxes of materials, but there is no catalog or system of organization. See Myles Osborne, “A Note on the Liberian Archives,” *History in Africa* 36 (2009): 461-463.

through state studies and we have excellent monographs examining the movement in Pennsylvania, Maryland, North Carolina, Mississippi, and Virginia.³⁸ Such an approach is a clever way to mine the mountain of colonizationist materials without becoming overwhelmed, although I do believe that there is a tendency to associate the actions of particular regional or states societies with the movement as a whole; the MSCS certainly conceived of themselves as an antislavery organization, but they also believed that they could not operate in the ACS with such an agenda.³⁹ My research focuses less on the peculiarities of particular organizations within

³⁸ Beverly C. Tomek has joined with Eric Burin in studying colonization in Pennsylvania. Richard L. Hall and Penelope Campbell have examined Maryland. Clegg's work focuses on North Carolina; Alan Huffman has published a history of Mississippi in Africa; Tyler-McGraw focuses on Virginia. In addition to the previously cited works by these scholars, see Richard L. Hall, *On Africa's Shore: A History of Maryland in Liberia, 1834-1857* (Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, 2003); Penelope Campbell, *Maryland in Africa: The Maryland State Colonization Society, 1831-1857* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971); Alan Huffman, *Mississippi in Africa: The Saga of the Slaves of Prospect Hill Plantation and Their Legacy in Liberia Today* (New York: Gotham Books, 2004). There is an unpublished dissertation on the colonization movement in Kentucky, see Charles Raymond Bennett, "All Things to All People: The American Colonization Society in Kentucky, 1829-1860" (ph.d. diss, University of Kentucky, 1980).

³⁹ Of course, broader histories of the ACS have likewise argued that it was an antislavery society without focusing on the particular antislavery credentials of its constituent elements. Published in 1919, Early Lee Fox's unimaginatively titled *The American Colonization Society, 1817-1840* offered the first scholarly examination of the ACS. Fox based his interpretation of the ACS upon an uncritical reading of official sources published by the society. Unsurprisingly, he is remarkably sympathetic to the organization's cause and parrots many of the arguments put forward by the white leadership as his own definitive conclusions. For example, Fox discusses the unhealthy environment of Liberia with an oft-repeated nineteenth-century argument that the Liberian experiment was less deadly than the Plymouth or Virginia colonies. In fact, the high death toll actually represented an amazing organizational feat for the white leadership who rectified the situation "notwithstanding the fact that the African colonists as a class were imprudent on observing even the essentials of personal hygiene." Obviously, the voices of the settlers are completely absent from Fox's account. Parroting nineteenth-century ACS talking points, however, leads Fox to devote significant attention to native Africans. Much like the Americo-Liberian settlers and colonizationist leaders, Fox is uninterested in providing Africans with a voice or agency in his account, but one of the successes he highlights for the colony in Liberia is its role as an outpost operating against vessels illegally engaged in the transatlantic slave trade. In displaying native Africans as the beneficiaries of ACS activity, Fox is obviously buttressing his antislavery and benevolent claims for the organization. Fox's account established the ideological framework that historians would use for decades to examine the colonization movement: the centrality of determining whether the organization was intentionally supportive or opposed to slavery. Claiming to "set forth unequivocally its [the ACS] aims and purposes," a dubious task considering the broad umbrella of the society, Fox argues that the society did not pursue a pro-slavery agenda. Rather, the organization was an inherently moderate conglomeration of slavery's opponents, and Fox chides their detractors by claiming that "those who hesitate to admit the purity of their designs" should examine the society's records. Those records provide "conclusive evidence that those leaders who actually directed the affairs of the organization, where they deviated at all from the design of the Society, as expressed in its constitution, deviated consistently on the side of emancipation." Forty years after Early, but writing very much in his vein, P. J. Staudenraus published the first modern history of the ACS, *The African Colonization Movement, 1816-1865*, in 1961. Noting Hermann von Holst's conclusion that colonization represented "a farcial [sic] interlude in the terrible tragedy" and a hypocritical plot by the "slavocracy" to preserve slavery, Staudenraus countered that while the conclusions of Holst "exemplified" the contemporary state of scholarship, "colonizationists, like most Americans of the early nineteenth century, were troubled by slavery and wished to end

the colonization movement than on the broad process of race-making within Liberia and the ways this affected Americo-Liberians and their colonizationist sponsors in the United States. I do not find Maryland in Liberia a particularly interesting place because of the MSCS or any peculiarity of this settlement as compared to others, although it is important to remember these colonial differences, but rather because many of the central figures of this work, those individuals who most capitalized on the advantages derived from the African whiteness they negotiated with whites in the United States, settled there.

As my project centers on the creation of race in Liberia and its effects there and in the United States, it should be noted that this is not a chronological history of the colonization societies or the Americo-Liberian settlements in the traditional sense. The chapters are thematic in design and thus not chronological. In focusing on the establishment of Atlantic networks, this book examines personal connections rather than institutions. It is foundational, however, to explain that the ACS was formed in December 1816 by a group of prominent white men in Washington, D.C., who styled themselves philanthropists following the path established by Paul Cuffe, a free man of color and sea captain who believed that black emigration to Africa offered economic benefits and believed that the slave trade could be stymied by African American settlements along the coast of Africa. If the early black-led emigration efforts had found cautious acceptance among the nation's burgeoning free black population, the white-led ACS, filled and

it.” Staudenraus’s *The African Colonization Movement, 1816-1865* builds upon Fox’s foundation by noting that the anti-slavery moderates of the ACS operated within a broader national framework of reformism. Although the narrative format of *The African Colonization Movement* leaves little space for overarching arguments, Staudenraus repeatedly hints that colonizationists not only were not Quixotic idealists, but also offered the last hope for a moderate and bloodless end for slavery. In his closing words, Staudenraus lays all of his cards on the table and explicitly underscores what the failure of African colonization truly meant for world history. “With it perished dreams of an African empire, an all-white America, and a gradual and peaceful obliteration of slavery, having repudiated removal, Americans would grope for other solutions—Supreme Court formulas, local accommodation, military coercion, masked terrorism, intermarriage, or, in some instances, Negro acceptance of second-class citizenship—trying to solve the riddle African colonizationists failed to unravel.” For Staudenraus, the Lost Cause of the Civil War was clearly the demise of a supposedly benevolent plan for the removal of America’s free people of color.

captained as it was by many slaveholders, seemed a plan designed solely to prop up American slavery by removing its most ardent opponents to distant shores. Arriving off the African coast in 1820, the first ACS settlers found the island selected for their initial settlement to be an unhealthy place without easy access to good water. The first expedition found itself with a high death toll and unexpectedly marooned in the neighboring British colony of Sierra Leone while new territory was purchased. From the very beginning, Liberia seemed to be a place only fit for death and the ACS had an uphill battle to convince African Americans that they were not working for slavery's benefit by shipping away free people of color to their deaths in a promised Elysium. And although there were many colonizationists who struggled mightily to dispel that image and advanced colonization as an antislavery agenda or one dedicated to black uplift, there were just as many members of the ACS who utilized the movement to support slavery⁴⁰ and advocate the removal of an inherently depraved population, and there was little to counter to the

⁴⁰ The plan of colonizationist John McDonogh is indicative of the ways in which colonization could support slavery. Originally from Baltimore, McDonogh established extensive landholdings in Louisiana, primarily surrounding New Orleans; a neighborhood in Algiers and Gretna, directly across the river from New Orleans, still bears his name. He is also well known among today's school children in Baltimore and New Orleans, his will having given most of his fortune to those two cities to establish public schools, many of which still bear his name today. During his lifetime, however, he was more known for his intricate plan of manumission, a plan which the *African Repository* called a "great experiment." For the ACS mouthpiece, McDonogh was "a practical man, looking to vast results, and very capable from his intimate and thorough knowledge of the system of slavery, and the character and habits of our colored population, to device and elucidate plans for reconciling the interests of the two races at the south, and connecting the liberty and improvement of the descendants of Africa in the United States, with the civilization and advancement of their far more ignorant and degraded African brethren." McDonogh's grand plan was of manumission was a contract of sorts with those slaves who desired freedom. McDonogh proposed establishing the slave's value and dividing that by six, for each day of the slave's labor (Sunday being reserved for the slave). Laboring on Sunday for his or her own profit, an enslaved person could then "purchase another day for their own labors. In this manner, the slave could eventually buy the entire week, upon which they would be manumitted and colonization to Liberia. McDonogh estimated that the plan should take the slave no more than twelve years to accomplish. Under this rubric, nearly eighty slaves purchased their freedom and were relocated to Liberia. While McDonogh expressed that this plan, if broadly adopted, would eradicate slavery, there is practically no means by which to examine this plan as anything but a great buttress for the slave owner. Not only did the owner receive the value of the slave in money (not to mention his or her labor), thus providing the capacity to purchase a replacement for the recently manumitted, but the gradual process guaranteed the owner a decade's worth of the slave's most productive years (presuming that the desire to seek manumission was requested by young adults). Additionally, the carrot of freedom would have been a powerful motivator to ensure good behavior from the enslaved individual. In short, McDonogh created a system in a slave owner would be monetarily compensated the value of the slave by the slave while continuing to reap the benefits of their labor in their youth, would provide a valuable insurance of that slave's behavior, and guaranteed that the master would not be required to care for the slave in their older, less productive years by relocating them to Africa. Such was the great "antislavery" plan of McDonogh. See "Letter from John McDonogh, Esq.," *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 19, no. 11 (November 1843): 344-348.

obvious fact that they did possess a deathtrap of a colony.⁴¹ In short, this study focuses on those African Americans who did find themselves in the colony and the creation of race there, rather than a broad overview of the colonization movement, its organizations, or those who resisted them.

This is also not strictly a history of the African Liberians who lived, worked, traded, and otherwise engaged with the Americo-Liberians. Although I do take seriously the racial categorizations of these West Africans and place them at the center of this argument where they rightfully belong, a history of the Africans in Liberia is a different book. Indeed, even the use of the word “African” is a bit misleading as it is more a creation of the African diaspora in the western hemisphere than of Africa itself. The arrival of the African American settlers to the region reinforced an understanding that those groups who had inhabited the area before the settlers shared certain cultural traits which they identified as “black”; the other common identity to signify these native Africans was “countrymen.” The whiteness of the Americo-Liberians was established in opposition to this “countryman” identity, but a conceptualization of a shared “otherness” differentiated from the western white settlers filling the ACS colonies did not necessarily create a uniformed African identity.⁴² There were more than a dozen ethnic groups in the territory soon to be named “Liberia,” speaking in languages from five different family groups. The largest groups were the Kpelle, Bassa, Gio, Kru, Grebo, Mandingo, Gola, Kissi, Dei,

⁴¹ Tom W. Shick and Antonio McDaniel [Tukufu Zuberi] have both conducted statistical research into Liberia’s mortality rate and found it to be staggering. See Shick, *Behold the Promised Land* and Antonio McDaniel, *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot: The Mortality Cost of Colonizing Liberia in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

⁴² James Sidbury has argued that the concept of a unified African identity was a product of forced relocation and slavery rather than the continent itself, where individuals would have retained their ethnic identities. For Sidbury, people became “African” through their enslavement in the western hemisphere rather than simply being born in the continent. Leslie M. Alexander has written on the political and social discourse within the United States among African Americans whether to emphasize their “African” or “American” identity in the early nineteenth century. The transition away from the once population “African” is largely attributed to the colonization movement’s argument that Africa was the “natural” home for all people of African descent. See James Sidbury, *Becoming African in America: Race and Nation in the Early Black Atlantic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Leslie M. Alexander, *African or American?: Black Identity and Political Activism in New York City, 1784-1861* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008).

Loma, and Vai. Each possessing their own characteristics, cultures, languages, and motivations, these different groups at various times found the Americo-Liberians useful allies, bitter enemies, indifferent trading partners, useful educators, annoying interlopers, and beneficial mediators in their conflicts with each other and with the settlers. Unfortunately, the majority of the settlers and visitors to Liberia were not especially interested in learning the cultural differences between the Kpelle and Bassa, and their accounts reflect their generalizations. With few exceptions, which were often the result of missionaries, the accounts written by settlers and visitors of their interactions with Africans usually refer to these people as “natives” or “heathens.” As identifying individuals or ethnic identities is often impossible, I am unfortunately left with the equally generic “African” to denote these men and women. Also problematic is the widespread use of sobriquets and nicknames for Africans utilized by western travelers. Occasionally, the purported actual name of the individual is recorded along with their nickname; in this manner we know that “King Freeman,” the ruler of the African village attached to Russwurm’s colony, was actually named “Pah Nemah.” I have elected to employ quotation marks around the nicknames whenever possible in the text to denote that these are artificial creations. Partly, this decision is to maintain aesthetic cohesion in the narrative as I do not have the “real” names of many of my subjects. Primarily, however, the decision is based on the fact that even the “real” names like “Pah Nemah” are preserved through the writings of American mediators, a white missionary in his case, and there is obvious concern for their accuracy. Since I can offer no guarantees of accuracy, I have elected to employ the nicknames to diminish confusion even as I emphasize their constructed natures. Similarly, I often employ the term “Americo-Liberian” to denote the African American settlers and their children regardless of time frame, whereas this term is usually reserved to denote the generations proceeding from the first African American settlers. I

simply employ it as a shorthand to differentiate those Liberians of American descent from African Liberians.

Finally, any scholar writing about the creation of race is left to ponder the implications of enclosing “white,” “black,” or “race” in quotation marks to emphasize their constructed nature or leaving them out to emphasize the lived experience of these individuals. To understand that blackness was a creation of a particular society at a particular time does not mean that to be defined as “black” lacked real-world effects. Examining whiteness in two different, though intimately connected, societal contexts crisscrossing the Atlantic Ocean makes answering this question doubly difficult. While I take seriously the African definitions of whiteness in Liberia, such an evaluation does not mean I consider these racial categorizations any more “real” than I do their American cousins. The leadership of the ACS was perceived as “white” at the time, but there are intellectual fallacies in not problematizing that identity in a work which argues that African Americans also became “white” at the same time in a different place. Concluding every mention of “black” or “white” with the addendum “as perceived by members of that society at this time and place,” however, proved unworkable in a narrative devoted to examining those ideas. I occasionally employ “Euro-American” and “African American” to add variety to the narrative and underscore that these are creations of particular societies, but I find it an inelegant solution that could be possibly construed to assert some sort of non-existent racial purity. All of this being stated, the emphasis of this project is to examine the consequences of the bending of racialized identities in the lives of these people and I have elected to eschew quotation marks, aside from instances in which I want to underscore the artificial construction of these identities or replicate the language of my subjects.

Race proved a fluid and adaptable form of identity in the Atlantic world; even this area which scholars have dubbed the “Black Atlantic” did not prove so inherently and unchangingly

“black,” and that fluidity mattered to its mobile inhabitants. The experiences of Martin Delany, one of the bellwethers of the Black Atlantic, underscore the point. Delany did visit the independent Republic of Liberia in 1859 after many years of denouncing colonization, Liberia, and the Americo-Liberians themselves. Having embraced black-led emigration during the 1850s, Delany had been instrumental in establishing a National Emigration Convention to be held in Cleveland, Ohio in 1854. The call for delegates to that convention, penned by Delany, explicitly removed Liberia and Africa from the list of possible locations for his envisioned black republic. “Entire *equality*, of *unrestricted* rights,” Delany and his colleagues argued, could only come through occupying “an acknowledged *necessary* part of the *ruling element* of the society in which we live,” but that society certainly could never be Liberia, the child of white racists who filled it with unknowing dupes of their schemes.⁴³

Four years after rejecting Africa at the Cleveland convention, Delany supported the establishment of an African American colony in the Niger Valley region of Africa, and he sought funding for a scientific expedition from the National Emigration Convention in 1858 to undertake a “Topological, Geological and Geographical Examination” of the valley “for the purposes of science and for general information.” Unfortunately for Delany, the Board of the convention had not evolved along with him and was uninterested in a settlement along the Niger; it emphasized in his instructions that any scientific information gleaned from this expedition should be “without any reference” to a potential colony “with the Board being entirely opposed to any Emigration there as such.” Even more unfortunate, Delany had hoped to secure financial backing from the convention, and when that failed to materialize, Delany sought assistance from abolitionist colleagues like William Lloyd Garrison and Henry Ward Beecher. When money

⁴³ Delany had provided the introduction to William Nesbit’s scathing 1855 critique of Liberia, *Four Months in Liberia or, African Colonization Exposed*. In his introduction, Delany thanked Nesbit for exposing “the true state of things in that miserable hovel of emancipated and superannuated slaves, and deceived colored freemen, controlled by the intrigues of a conclave of upstart colored hirelings of the slave power in the United States.” See William Nesbit, *Four Months in Liberia, or African Colonization Exposed* (Pittsburgh: J. T. Shryock, 1855), 5.

likewise failed to flow from that quarter, Delany and his expedition partner Robert Campbell found themselves awkwardly accepting support from colonizationists, who provided the company with free passage on one of their vessels bound for Liberia on the condition that the exploring party stop briefly in Liberia and fairly report on the condition there.⁴⁴

In his official report of the expedition, Delany did his best to defuse his admittedly awkward arrival in Liberia, given his previously published remarks that its citizens were the puppets of white racists. The irony that Martin Delany of all people found himself in need of Liberian assistance was not lost on the good citizens of that republic. A committee of Monrovia's more prominent denizens dispatched a message of welcome as he traveled toward their city from his landing point at the northwestern town of Robertsport. "The undersigned citizens of the city of Monrovia, having long heard of you and your efforts in the United States to elevate our down-trodden race, though those efforts were not unfrequently directed against Liberia, are glad to welcome you, in behalf of the community, to these shores." In reply, Delany attempted a dubious sleight-of-hand reply, stating, "You are mistaken, gentlemen, in supposing that I have ever spoken directly 'against Liberia,' as wherever I have been I have always acknowledged a unity of interests in our race wherever located." Delany recorded no more references to his late troubles with Liberia and filled the remainder of his report with general praise of the country's inhabitants, buildings, government, and prospects.

This African voyage obviously influenced Delany's celebrated novel *Blake: or, the Huts of America*, published in serialized form between 1859 and 1862. Although he had apparently started writing the work earlier, sometime in 1853 in response to Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the book's descriptions of slave trading on the African coast and its mobile

⁴⁴ Martin R. Delany, *Official Report of the Niger Valley Exploring Party* (New York: Thomas Hamilton, 1861), 12; Campbell, 57-98; Call for a National Emigration Convention of Colored Men to Be Held in Cleveland, Ohio, on the 24th, 25th and 26th of August, 1854," in *Martin R. Delany: A Documentary Reader*, edited by Robert S. Levine (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 240.

Atlantic protagonist, a thinly veiled surrogate for the author, who organizes African Diasporic communities for a grand multinational slave revolt, demonstrate traits and knowledge gleaned by Delany during his own African voyage. Scholar Ifeoma Nwankwo notes that Delany's notion of "blackness" in this novel rests upon a shared political commitment and identification with the black community rather than phenotype or culture. In *Blake*, light-skinned Cuban quadroons serve as black double-agents by posing as whites. These rebels "of the fairest complexion among the quadroons were classed as white," but behind the white mask they remained united with their black brethren.⁴⁵ In framing blackness as choice for those of the "African race" who were "classed as white," Delany directly referenced the sorts of racial metamorphoses available in this amorphous Atlantic society by noting that many individuals of mixed ancestry had passed into the ranks of white society.⁴⁶ Thus, "some of the proudest American statesmen in either House of the Capital, receive their poetic vigor of imagination from the current of Negro blood flowing in their veins."⁴⁷ There is a veneer of permanence to this "choice," which fails to acknowledge the realities of this mobile society. Instead of permanence, "whiteness" and "blackness" merged in this world of degrees rather than of kinds, as Liberians transitioned from American blacks to African whites and then on to American "not negroes." A static "Black" Atlantic fails to capture this slippery racial world in a manner that the inhabitants of that world—even supposed progenitors like Delany—understood.

⁴⁵ Ifeoma Kiddoe Nwankwo, *Black Cosmopolitanism: Racial Consciousness and Transnational Identity in the Nineteenth-Century Americas* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 9-15, 56-74; Martin Delany, *Blake or The Huts of America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), 110-117, 237-238, 245-248.

⁴⁶ I concur with Ariela J. Gross's argument that "mixed race," although possessing historical precedent, suggests an inherent reality to race which I do not support. Although the term has significant historical uses, many of which are spotlighted in this work, I agree with Gross that the term should not be used uncritically. I have followed her suggestion and utilize "mixed ancestry" whenever appropriate to convey the sentiments of the individuals of this study without inadvertently ascribing to their theories of inherent racial identity and "blood." I only use "mixed race" in the text when it is necessary to reinforce the viewpoints of historical actors who believed in the "realness" of blood. See Gross, ix-x.

⁴⁷ Delany, *Blake*, 116.

It is unsurprising that Delany would conceive of “blackness” as a choice considering that he had spent years railing against, and then, after his arrival there, genuflecting to Liberia and its evolving racial distinctions. No less contrived than colonizationists’ “tortured logic” that brought African “civilization” from American “barbarity” through motion, the logical problem suffered by Delany was also brought on by binaries. During his keynote address at the 1854 National Emigration Convention, Delany asserted that “we are not identical with the Anglo-Saxon or any other race of the Caucasion.” Following this, he named the attributes of the “colored races” and forecast their future place in the world. Yet, in spite of his claims for inherent racial traits, he then concluded that “the great issue...upon which must be disputed the world’s destiny, will be a question of black and white; and every individuals will be called upon for his identity with one or the other.”⁴⁸ If the traits are inherent, then why would individuals be called upon to choose their own identity? Delany was clearly uncomfortable with the shades of gray where the Atlantic system and its inhabitants existed in between the great poles of white and black, and sought to draw clearer lines. Much like the quadroons of Cuba in *Blake*, all would cast their lot with either black or white and be done with the confusing space in between. For Delany, a decisive and final choice had to be made. For the Americo-Liberian subjects of this study whose existence vacillated between these two extremes, there were always more choices to be made and paths to be taken that, much like the Atlantic world, did not have such irremediable ends.

⁴⁸ Martin Delany, “Political Destiny of the Colored Race on the American Continent,” in *Proceedings of the National Emigration Convention of Colored People* (Pittsburgh: A. A. Anderson, 1854), 39-41.

Chapter 2

“To Be Called a Free Colored Man in the States is Synonymous with What We Here Term Slavery”: Transformative Mobilities and Liberian Travels through the United States

Although the racial hierarchy within the Liberian colonies was contested, unstable, and changing, most Liberian settlers did conceive of their trek across the Atlantic Ocean as a transformative move. Americo-Liberians sought recognition of their new status as the tip of civilization’s spear in Africa. They laid claim to, even if they did not completely secure, the identities of “American” and “white,” and many settlers also desired to return to the United States, if only to visit friends and family left behind. Martin Delany eloquently voiced the emotions Africa evoked in travelers and settlers when he visited Liberia during his exploratory expedition to the Niger Valley. After comparing his initial emotional response to seeing the African coast to a form of intoxication, Delany noted that this embryonic sentiment soon progressed into “a feeling of regret that you left your native country for a strange one; an almost frantic desire to see friends and nativity; a despondency and loss of the hope of ever seeing those you love at home again.” And Delany experienced such highs and lows while only a temporary visitor to Africa who—despite his claims in the expedition’s report—never intended to permanently relocate to that continent.⁴⁹ Some Americo-Liberians had been forced to leave behind spouses, children, and other family members in bondage, either due to slaveholders unwilling to emancipate loved ones or intransigence on the part of free African Americans, and they sought reunion with loved ones. Others simply desired to visit former acquaintances and see the sights of their earlier years. For some, returning to the United States as Liberian settlers provided opportunities for educational and occupational uplift unavailable to them if they had remained in America. Separated by thousands of miles and with mail services relying upon the

⁴⁹ Delany, *Official Report of the Niger River Exploring Party*, 27, 71.

erratic and unreliable merchant, naval, and immigrant ships calling at Liberian settlements every few months, such desires were only natural if beyond the financial means of many settlers.

The vast majority of settlers emigrated from slave states, and other obstacles beyond pecuniary setbacks plagued their minds as they thought of returning home. In letters sent back to former masters, colonization society officials, patrons, and sponsors, the Liberians sought information on how local whites would react to their returns. Diana Skipwith and her father, Peyton Skipwith, were two immigrants immediately disillusioned with Liberia who hoped to return on the first ship back to the United States. Foiled in this endeavor, they at least sought to visit their old Virginia plantation in order to reunite with family and friends. Writing to her former mistress, Sally Cocke, five years after her arrival in Africa in 1834, Skipwith sought updates on local conditions. "There was some things that we wish to know, that conserning of the Laws of the Cuntry. We hear from People that they are verry strick and I wrote you conserning of it but never get any letter. I do not know what he will do about it. I expect that he will write to [you] conserning of the mater his self." Twenty years later, John Cocke, Sally's father, still found his former slaves dispatching letters seeking advice. "I would wish to come over to America," wrote Robert Sterdivant in 1857, "where you are if you think it adviseable, to see all the people but not until I hear your advice on the subject." Meanwhile, Nancy McDonogh told her former master simply, "I would be happy to come and see you but I am afraid I would be interrupted by the white people. But if they would not you will be kind enough to let me no so I can come."⁵⁰

Clearly, these concerns reflected a practical recognition of the impediments they might face upon their return to their former homesteads. Laws constricted African American mobility and impeded travel. Liberian settlers occupied a mobile black Atlantic world that, in the wake of

⁵⁰ Diana Skipwith to Sally Cocke, 7 November 1839, in Wiley, 49; Robert Leander Sterdivant to John H. Cocke, 13 August 1857, in Wiley, 83; Nancy Smith McDonogh to John McDonogh, 3 July 1848, in Wiley, 150.

the successful Haitian Revolution, had been interpreted as an inherently radical Black Atlantic by both fearful whites and hopeful blacks. Abolitionists, pro-slavery advocates, blacks, whites—most Americans, in fact—assumed that migratory black subjects traversing Atlantic pathways adopted and spread abolitionist ideology. Such logic undergirded Martin Delany’s novel *Blake*, in which an escaped slave lays the foundation for a multinational slave rebellion through his Atlantic travels. On the other end of the spectrum, South Carolina’s 1822 “Negro Seamen Act,” legislation passed in the wake of Denmark Vesey’s Conspiracy, empowered sheriffs to incarcerate any “free negroes or persons of color” employed on ships from northern states or foreign ports for the duration of the vessel’s time in port; eventually, southern legislatures in North Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Louisiana, and Texas followed South Carolina’s lead in adopting similar laws. Although inimical in their aims, both Delany’s *Blake* and the southern black seamen laws derive from identical assumptions that radical antislavery activism traversed the Atlantic in the form of mobile black bodies and that the inherent danger to the slave regime resulted from this mobility.⁵¹

Both Delany and white legislators posited their beliefs on the racial alchemy of Atlantic mobility. For Delany, blackness was defined as a political and social commitment to the black community; hence, *Blake*’s light-skinned Cubans of mixed ancestry not only participate in the black uprising that is the novel’s culmination, but they also serve as *agent provocateurs* by passing into white society.⁵² Initially, South Carolina’s 1822 Seaman’s Act had exempted “free American Indians, free Moors, and Lascars or other colored subjects of countries beyond the Cape of Good Hope,” apparently in a nod to maintaining commercial ties to the Indian Ocean. By 1825, however, the South Carolinians were forced to respond to black legal ingenuity as the

⁵¹ Edlie L. Wong, *Neither Fugitive nor Free: Atlantic Slavery, Freedom Suits, and the Legal Culture of Travel* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 183-262; Nwankwo, 9-15, 56-74; *An Act for the Better Regulation and government of Free Negroes and Persons of Color; And for Other Purposes, South Caroline Statute No. 2277, in The Statutes At Large of South Carolina*, ed. J. McCord (Columbia, S.C.: A. S. Johnston, printer, 1840), 7:461-462.

⁵² Nwankwo, 57-60; Delany, *Blake or The Huts of America*, 247-248.

legislature complained that people of African descent from the northern free states and other Atlantic nations had evaded the Seaman's Act by carrying papers identifying themselves as "free American Indians, free Moors, or Lascars"; in particular, the law singled out "mulattoes or mestizos" as the principal perpetrators of this identity fraud.⁵³ Just as Delany's fictitious racially-ambiguous Cubans infiltrated white ranks as part of a black revolution, equally ambiguous sailors adjusted their racialized identities to escape imprisonment upon arrival in Charleston. Both accounts assume a racial metamorphosis capable of visually fooling the whites while also concealing an inherent revolutionary blackness.

The free movement of Liberians complicates both these assumptions of black Atlantic radicality and what makes this an inherently "black" Atlantic. In the eyes of the African neighbors of the Americo-Liberian settlements hugging the coast, the newcomers more resembled the European or white American traders who frequented their shores and they racially categorized the African-American settlers as white. Many Liberians used this racial categorization as yet another example of their African neighbors' lack of "civilization." Peering beyond the pale of Liberia's "civilized" areas of Americo-Liberian habitation, the editor of the *Liberia Herald* denounced those Africans "around us and almost within our doors, those who with perfect impunity foster their prejudices...they look with suspicion upon the colony, and a word from a 'white man' (a generic term for all classes, colors and conditions enveloped in clothing)." Settler George R. McGill, progenitor of one Liberia's most prominent families, informed the white leaders of the MSCS that the Greboes living at the future site of Maryland in

⁵³ *An Act for the Better Regulation and government of Free Negroes and Persons of Color; And for Other Purposes, South Carolina Statute No. 2277, in The Statutes At Large of South Carolina*, ed. J. McCord (Columbia, S.C.: A. S. Johnston, printer, 1840), 7:461-462; *AN Act the More Effectually to Prohibit Free Negroes and Persons of Colour from Entering this State; And for Other Purposes, South Carolina Statute 2319 in The Statutes At Large of South Carolina*, ed. J. McCord (Columbia, S.C.: A. S. Johnston, printer, 1840), 7:463-466; *An Act to Amend "An Act the More Effectually to Prohibit Free Negroes and Persons of Color from Entering into this State; and for Other Purposes, South Carolina Statute 2361 in The Statutes At Large of South Carolina*, ed. J. McCord (Columbia, S.C.: A. S. Johnston, printer, 1840), 7:466-467.

Liberia “express a strong wish to become white men, (i.e. Read & Write).” Thus, whiteness was a shifting cultural category reflecting one’s association with the culture, education, literacy, dress, language, and Christianity of the United States or Europe.

Clearly, their African whiteness and malleable subjectivity within the Atlantic context reinforced white concerns regarding mobile Atlantic subjects. And yet, in their concession of the United States to whites, Liberian settlers also embodied the aspiration for many of an idealized all-white American society. Most southern states required free people of color to register a white guardian’s affirmation of their character. As the ACS provided its settlers with documentation to affirm their identity during their travels in the States, the society functioned in the role of surrogate guardian for all settlers. Also, as inhabitants of a colony of a private society, the Americo-Liberians raised questions about the definition of “foreign negroes.” Although the law applied to any individual of African descent not from the slaveholding South, including northern African Americans, the liminal space of colonial Liberia—not quite Africa, not quite America, not quite its own nation—posed serious problems for interpreting their place in southern laws. This liminality, combined with the respectability engineered by their residence in Liberia, their usually well-placed patrons in the colonization society, and their own refusal to return to their previously degraded positions within American, led to a confusing legal dynamic. Little wonder that their letters are filled with repeated requests for legal updates from the United States.

Beyond legal obstructions, African-American travelers were also largely at the mercy of white-owned means of transportation. Whites owned and operated the steam boats, railroads, coaches, and even the vessels that carried the settlers away from Liberia. Geographer Tim Cresswell highlights the constraints of mobility for most subjects by emphasizing an examination of what he terms the “prosthetic subject.” These are individuals incapable of initiating and controlling their own movements. For Cresswell, the prosthetic subject is constrained by the

availability of modes of transportation. But for the Americo-Liberians, the difficulties arose not only from a lack of options and pecuniary constraints, but also from white supremacy and degraded conditions of their accommodations. Unlike their white counterparts, the Americo-Liberian traveler did not have easy access to legal redress in case of trouble. Of course, Liberian settlers were not the only ones suffering from degraded conditions, and such concerns were staple complaints of the entire black community. The second issue of the *Freedom's Journal* spotlighted the case of Betsey Madison, a former slave from New Orleans who managed to purchase her freedom and that of friend. Her liberty, however, was tragically cut short after enduring a lingering illness in New York City widely attributed to the “inhuman treatment” afforded her on the ship. Russwurm and his fellow editor Samuel Cornish admitted that while free people of color were widely targeted, they had few options for redress; the editorial simply called upon unspecified “Polished Republicans” to recognize the blight to national honor that such repeated injustices inflicted. It was not a clarion call that inspired confidence that wrongs would be righted. But Americo-Liberians were not simply free blacks in America. Their removal to Liberia under the auspices of a private society meant that while they were not foreign nationals, they had removed themselves from the racialized landscape of America. In essence, they had conceded the United States to whites. Conversely, their return, especially for those few who had found success and elevated their social status in Africa, signaled the capacity of African Americans for improvement, much to the detriment of the race-based arguments undergirding American slavery. The threat of physical violence or kidnapping and a return to bondage were also very real possibilities.⁵⁴

Some whites were sensitive to these problems. Moses Sheppard, a leading Quaker businessman in Baltimore and leader of the MSCS, confided to settler William Polk, then

⁵⁴ Tim Cresswell, *On the Move: Mobility in the Modern Western World* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 198-199; “Inhumanity,” *Freedom's Journal*, March 23, 1827, p. 3

residing in the capital of Maryland's colony, the difficulties that Ephraim Titler encountered in his attempted return to Monrovia. Titler originally relocated to Liberia in 1834, but the devout cooper soon sought a religious education back in the United States. Trained and ordained under the auspices of the Presbyterian Church, Titler crossed through Baltimore on his way to Norfolk, Virginia and the awaiting ACS ship. Apparently, the former New Yorker and northern free man no longer possessed papers identifying his legal status. This caused immediate difficulties in the slave state of Maryland when the boat captain refused to transport Titler without proof of his freedom. Titler called upon Sheppard to affirm his identity, but the captain still refused to bring the Liberian to Norfolk in fear of the hefty fines potentially awaiting him in Virginia. Finally, Sheppard persuaded the captain to take Titler to Norfolk and directly place him on the ACS ship, thus bypassing landfall and not actually "touching" Virginia. Sheppard provided the details of this escapade to settler William Polk "for your information and that of your friends, if any of you should come to this Country you must acquaint yourselves with the laws of the slave states....Coloured persons have many obstacles [*sic*] to encounter in traveling here." Obviously, Sheppard wanted Polk and his companions to take heed of the restrictions placed upon their mobility in the United States, but it is also intriguing that Titler would forego the step of carrying proof of his identity. Did he assume that relocation to Liberia had removed him from the legal constraints placed on people of color? Or did his northern birth and Liberian experience lead him to underestimate the trepidation of the post-Nat Turner South regarding black mobility?⁵⁵

The case surrounding Sion (occasionally spelled "Zion") Harris's 1841 trip to the United States is also illustrative of the problems facing Americo-Liberians travelling in the United States. Harris was a leading figure in Liberia. Born in East Tennessee in 1811, Harris's legal status at the time of his birth is murky. Although free by 1830 when he joined his wife Martha in

⁵⁵ Moses Sheppard to William Polk, 10 May 1837, Moses Sheppard Papers, Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA.

departing for Liberia aboard the aptly-named *Liberia*, the ACS records do not indicate Harris's legal status at birth. Ezekiel Birdseye, however, a leading abolitionist from eastern Tennessee, suggested in a letter to Gerrit Smith that Harris had been born a slave. Harris achieved fame in 1840 while employed as a carpenter at the Heddington mission station in the African interior. At daybreak on March 7, a large force of Botswains, Mambo, Veys, and Deys numbering several hundred warriors attacked the mission. The Heddington defenders amounted to Harris, his wife who served as a teacher at the mission, Bennet Demery, George S. Brown, the white missionary in charge of the station, and Zoda and Nicky, two African boys who attended the mission school. This little band defended the mission until reinforcements arrived, and they found fame after missionary Brown returned to the United States and published an account of Heddington's defense (this affair is further detailed in Chapter 5). Although Brown had heroically portrayed himself as one of the defenders, Harris grumbled in a private letter that Brown had shut himself into his second-story bedroom and did not participate in the fight except to discharge four muskets on Harris's command. Regardless of whether Brown inflated his own role in the affair, Harris became a celebrity of sorts for the missionary and colonization establishment and he hoped to capitalize on his fame.⁵⁶

In the same letter in which he detailed his account of the Heddington attack, Harris also expressed a desire to visit the United States. "I desire to go to America," he wrote to an ACS official, "to see my frinds who are in East Tenasee, Knox County, and I would like your advice about it whether it would be safe or right....If you think it difficult to go to tenessee I would like to visit America anyhow, somewhere or other." Harris's father-in-law, George Erskine, although born a slave, had been taken under the wing of Dr. Isaac Anderson, President of Maryville

⁵⁶ Sion Harris to Samuel Wilkeson, 16 April 1840, in *Slaves No More*, 220-223; Ezekial Birdseye to Gerrit Smith, 11 October 1841, in Durwood Dunn, ed., *An Abolitionist in the Appalachian South: Ezekial Birdseye on Slavery, Capitalism, and Separate Statehood in East Tennessee, 1841-1846* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997), 185-187.

College in Tennessee, and trained as a Presbyterian missionary. Erskine was personally acquainted with many of the Presbyterian leaders involved in colonization, including the ACS's long-serving general secretary, Ralph Gurley, whom Harris hoped to meet. While Harris did not leave behind any immediate family in America,⁵⁷ the Erskines had, in fact, left behind several family members in Tennessee. Erskine passed away soon after his arrival in Liberia and while on his deathbed had coaxed a promise from his son-in-law to return to the States and retrieve these relations. Clearly, Harris had a ready network of black and white acquaintances.

The opportunity to return to the United States came in the summer of 1841 and after initially travelling to Washington, D.C., the headquarters of the ACS, Harris travelled on to east Tennessee in the company of an ACS agent; the Society clearly hoped to capitalize on Harris's fame in order to secure more emigrants.⁵⁸ By all accounts, the trip was personally successful for Harris and beneficial to the ACS. Harris traveled through Virginia and Tennessee, stopping along the way to encourage his African American audiences to immigrate to Liberia. He persuaded thirteen members of his extended family to return with him to Liberia. While in Maryville, Tennessee, Harris reunited with Anderson, his father-in-law's old tutor, and addressed a camp meeting at the local Presbyterian church to a crowd reported to be over one thousand strong. He dined with white benefactors and slept as an honored guest in their homes, traveled with white companions, and spoke to mixed crowds about his African experiences and defense of the mission station. Before his return to Liberia in July 1842, Harris had traveled expansively across the upper South and as far north as Massachusetts. But there were also ample reminders of why Harris had left the United States in the first place and why he swore that nothing could induce him to stay. While Harris visited one relative, a free man, near Knoxville, several white

⁵⁷ At least, Harris claimed in his letter that he left no immediate family in the United States. In his letter to Gerrit Smith, Ezekial Birdseye claimed that Harris was visiting a brother in eastern Tennessee. This may reflect subterfuge on the part of Harris to emphasize his lack of connections to the United States, and thus reaffirm his commitment to returning to Liberia. More likely, Birdseye was unaware that Harris was visiting his wife's relatives.

⁵⁸ "Agents," *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 18, no. 16 (August 15, 1841): 250.

men entered the home searching for an escaped slave. Harris reported to Birdseye that the slave catchers treated him and his relative “with much harshness,” even tearing up the floorboards and ransacking the house in hopes of catching the escapee. In another brush with the slave society of East Tennessee, Harris was obliged to arrange the purchase of one enslaved brother-in-law. Harris’s unencumbered peregrinations, public lectures, and repeated tales of African American accomplishments in Africa also riled the area’s supporters of slavery. On the Sunday night following Harris’s public lecture at the church, Birdseye observed a group of patrollers parading an African American by the church’s door, disrupting a meeting held to discuss the importance of Christian missionaries in Africa. The poor man’s crime was to appear in the neighborhood without a pass, a charge that surprised Birdseye as that particular law was irregularly enforced in the Tennessee mountains. The timing of the patrol’s sudden determination to curtail African-American mobility, the choice of their route past the same church that provided Harris its pulpit at the exact moment that its congregation debated the necessity of “civilizing” Africa, seem more than coincidental. Birdseye deduced as much and relayed to his fellow reformer Gerrit Smith that “I thought it not improbable that the attentions shown Harris might have offended them.”⁵⁹

While reminders of African-American subjugation surrounded Harris even as he enjoyed the hospitality and companionship of white hosts, others also worried for the Americo-Liberian’s safety. George S. Brown, the same missionary whose mission had been defended by Harris the year before, had returned to New York City earlier in order to drum up support for the missionary field in Africa. Whether due to miscommunication, lost letters, or the energetic itinerary, Harris lost contact with Brown and the minister had grown worried over the Liberian settler’s fate by November. He soon placed an advertisement in several newspapers seeking

⁵⁹ Sion Harris to Samuel Wilkeson, 16 April 1840, in *Slaves No More*, 220-223; “Depature of the Mariposa,” *The African Repository and Colonial Journal* 18, no. 10 (August 1842): 262; “Massachusetts Colonization Society,” *The African Repository and Colonial Journal* 18, no. 11 (September 1842): 298; Ezekial Birdseye to Gerrit Smith, 11 October 1841, in *An Abolitionist in the Appalachian South*, 187-188.

information on the whereabouts of Harris, and the *Maryland Colonization Journal* soon echoed the call. The editors of the journal feared that he had been kidnapped and returned to slavery, although they admitted upon reflection that Harris had once been a quarter of a defensive force against hundreds of attackers and let readers know that “we should fear little for him in a fair field with some dozen kidnapers.” Still, some “scoundrel” may have robbed Harris of his identity papers and he was far too important a colonist to lose to the anonymity of slavery.⁶⁰ For colonists, many of whom had found their path to freedom only by leaving the country, a return visit could lead to reminders of their subjugated past or to a disastrous return to chains.

For other returning settlers, their confrontation with their enslaved past was far more direct. Alexander Hance, a free man of color from southern Maryland, had been persuaded by the MSCS’s traveling agent to emigrate. He left Baltimore in December of 1834 aboard the ship *Bourne* with 58 other settlers, including his wife and two sons aged one and two. Unfortunately, the family was not complete as the Hances could only afford to purchase the two young boys, and thus were forced to abandon their three daughters who remained the property of James Sommerville of Prince George’s County, Maryland.⁶¹ The separation weighed heavily on Hance. Three months after his arrival at the creatively-named “Maryland in Liberia” colony of the MSCS, Hance was writing the organization’s agent begging him to purchase and send the missing daughters on to Africa. Hance promised to repay the Board of Managers for the expense and swore that “if it is ten or twelve years to com I Will go Back again to them.” A subsequent

⁶⁰ “Information Wanted,” *Maryland Colonization Journal* 1, no. 7 (December 1841): 102.

⁶¹ The records of the MSCS list the Hances as freeborn residents of Calvert County, Maryland at the time of their departure. The subsequent dealings between Hance and the owner of his daughters, Sommerville, suggest that this was unlikely. In a letter detailing the cost to purchase his three daughters, Hance noted that Sommerville had agreed to a combined purchase price of one thousand dollars “including a note of mine which he holds (on the purchase of my children now in Africa) amounting to one hundred and six dollars with interest for three years.” Thus, it seems probable that Julia Hance was either not freeborn or these were Alexander Hance’s children from a previous liaison. It is also possible that Hance was not freeborn either. Their classification as “freeborn” in the settler records probably reflected either an error—or indifference—on the part of the scribe who either mistook a currently free person of color for someone born free, assumed that the legal status of the patriarch applied to the entire family, or was tricked by the Hances in an intentional effort on the part of the Hance family to obscure their enslaved past. Alexander Hance to the Maryland State Colonization Society, 11 September, 1837, MSCS.

letter in August from Hance asked the agent to send his love to his friends “both white and colerd” and closed with another plea to free his children. Luckily, his daughters did not have to wait for ten years.⁶²

Hance achieved both success and respect in the Maryland colony’s capital of Harper, and was elected selectman soon after his arrival. By the following year, he was a member of the governor’s council. In the summer of 1837, he felt himself capable of returning to the United States and completing his family. He arrived in Baltimore that fall and presented himself at the September 4 meeting to the Board of Managers of the MSCS, who directed that he be provided with letters of introduction and appropriate paperwork to prevent disruption to his travels. Within days, Hance had arranged a purchase price of one thousand dollars for his three daughters, ages fourteen, twelve, and nine or ten. The MSCS leadership, which had watched the number of emigrants steadily decline with each departing ship from Baltimore, realized that they had an opportunity in Hance’s sudden arrival. The Board authorized Hance to begin lecturing on Liberia to his old African American neighbors as an official spokesman for the colonization society. The Board of Managers soon authorized their traveling agent to compensate Hance a salary of no more than \$500, surely a motivating factor in Hance’s efforts considering it amounted to half of the purchase price for his daughters. And Hance ably repaid the Board’s investment by securing commitments from nearly seventy people who were willing to emigrate that year. When the reunited Hance family left for Liberia aboard the *Niobe* on November 27, they enjoyed the company of 79 other passengers, making it the largest expedition the MSCS had ever dispatched

⁶² Alexander Hance to William McKenney, 14 March 1835, MSCS; Alexander Hance to William McKenney, 30 August 1835, MSCS.

to Harper.⁶³ The large numbers of emigrants from southern Maryland and Hance's home county attest to his influence.

Equally indicative of Hance's influence over this expedition was the result of their poorly timed arrival in January of 1838. Maryland in Liberia needed the agricultural produce of both its own settlers and its African neighbors, overwhelmingly members of the Grebo ethnic group, to achieve sufficiency. At the time of Hance's departure, the harvest of 1836 was disappointing, but not disastrous. Unfortunately, while Hance was in the United States, the following year's harvest was much worse and famine struck the Cape Palmas coast. Conditions were so poor that the Greboes, who were normally subject to differing village loyalties in addition to the two broad oppositional coalitions, the Kudemowe and Nyomowe, actually did unite to set prices for the principal foodstuffs of the area. Thus, the largest expedition ever dispatched by the MSCS landed in the midst of famine and strained tensions with the rarely-united Greboes. The new emigrants attributed their misfortune to Hance whom they believed had intentionally misled them. Hance's descriptions of the colony had been integral in their decision to leave the United States for Africa, and the new arrivals directed their displeasure at the man. In a defensive letter to the leaders of the MSCS, Hance noted that although he had rescued his daughters from slavery, he regretted his trip to the United States. Not only were the settlers attempting to excommunicate him from the Methodist Church for deception, Hance speculated that they "would deprive me of my existence were it in their power."⁶⁴

Nine years after Hance's American sojourn, Charles Scotland made the same return to the United States for exactly the same purpose: to liberate a child from bondage. But whereas Hance had found the assistance of the colonizationists useful in securing his family's freedom and only

⁶³ Richard Hall, 446-447; Alexander Hance to the Maryland State Colonization Society, 11 September, 1837, MSCS; Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Managers of the Maryland State Colonization Society, 29 September 1837, MSCS.

⁶⁴ Richard Hall, 53-55, 169-171; Alexander Hance to John H. B. Latrobe, 7 April 1838, MSCS.

later incurred the wrath of his fellow settlers, Scotland stumbled much earlier in his efforts to free his child. Scotland had come to the United States at the request of the MSCS who had learned that settler testimonials like Harris's and Hance's were more persuasive than the proselytizing of their white agents. Although Scotland had not achieved quite the same political success as Hance, he was a well-respected figure throughout the Liberian colonies who had initially settled in Caldwell, a settlement of the ACS, in 1832. Wearing second-hand clothing donated to the settlers by American benefactors, the venerable 63-year-old settler boarded the Baltimore-bound *Kent* which had just deposited thirteen settlers in Africa. After visiting his old home in Martinsburg, Virginia (now West Virginia), Scotland crossed the border to Frederick, Maryland and the comfortable home of David Hughes from which he was to conduct interviews with local African American leaders. During his travels he collected promises of emigration from his old neighbors, almost all of whom were related to Scotland in some fashion. Regrettably, the aged Scotland had exposed himself to damp weather while riding to Frederick and developed chills and a fever his first night there; Hughes, however, was not prepared to have the only Americo-Liberian in the area die before speaking to the area's people of color and sent for his own physician to attend Scotland. The settler recovered and conducted his speaking tour across the state of Maryland throughout the summer, ranging as far west as Hagerstown and also explaining the benefits of emigration to the eastern shore's African American population. In the meantime, white colonizationists donated funds for the benefit of purchasing his enslaved son, and by September Scotland traveled to Virginia to buy his son's freedom and return to Liberia.⁶⁵

Unfortunately, Scotland had grossly miscalculated his son's desire to leave the United States. To Scotland's "utter astonishment," Medley, his son, planned to remain in Virginia with

⁶⁵ Samuel F. McGill to Moses Sheppard, 20 January 1846, Moses Sheppard Papers; John B. Russwurm to John H. B. Latrobe, 24 January 1846, MSCS; David Hughes to James Hall, 30 May 1846, MSCS; Moses Sheppard to James Hall, 13 July 1846, MSP; James Higgins to James Hall, 25 August 1846, MSCS.

his free wife and children. Such intentions caught the father off guard, especially in light of Virginia's ill-enforced laws requiring the removal of free people of color. But Scotland either did not know or care for the reality of Virginia's enforcement of the law; his son and family were coming with him to Africa. Scotland's convictions led him to request that the colonization society forward on the payment for Medley. If Medley would not emigrate willingly, Scotland assured the Board—while apologizing profusely for the intransience of his son—then he would purchase his son and then as his legal owner forcibly remove the young man to Liberia utilizing the full force of Virginia's slave code to his advantage. And so a Liberian planned to liberate his son from slavery by becoming his owner and continuing the cycle of bondage. In a further unexpected reversal of roles, Scotland requested the assistance and presence of the colonization society's white agent in Virginia to fully press his legal claims and convince Medley to remove to Africa without trouble. Completing the sale, Scotland deposited Medley at the home of another white colonizationist, J. W. Reynolds, in order to gather his family and belongings before departing for Africa; Scotland, meanwhile, continued on to Baltimore to make arrangements for their brief stay and to ensure their passage on the *Liberia Packet*. Perhaps unaware of the circumstances by which the Scotland family found itself in his home, Reynolds reported that Medley and his wife were in "fine spirits and anxious to go with their Father to africa." Perhaps the Scotlands had had a miraculous reconciliation after the father threatened to turn slave master or they concealed their true sentiments from their white host. More likely, Reynolds replicated the logic of colonization by conflating African Americans with Africans and assumed that such "returns" to Africa concomitantly brought happiness to the emigrants. Few colonizationists thought a forced governmental removal to Liberia likely or practical, and thus relied heavily on the assumption that once the colony was established and economically viable, African American settlers would pour into western Africa of their own accord; within this

ideological framework, there were no alternatives to “anxious” settlers in “fine spirits.”

Regardless, the elder Scotland did not provide any time for his prodigal son to change his mind or escape. On November 18, Reynolds placed the young Scotland family—Medley, his wife Elizabeth, and their young son John—on the train for Baltimore. By the first of December, they sailed out of Baltimore harbor into the Chesapeake Bay heading east.⁶⁶

Americo-Liberians returning to the United States confronted their enslaved past, the skeptical gaze of African Americans, and provoked white supporters of slavery by their mere presence; they were justifiably concerned about the social, cultural, and legal repercussions of their mobility. But many of them also interpreted their journeys to Africa as transformative. Crossing the Atlantic Ocean had allowed them to at least claim—if not permanently take hold—some of elements of whiteness, they had built a republic upon a foundation largely constructed of ex-slaves, and they represented the vanguard of civilization in “benighted” Africa. While the Americo-Liberians sought an elevated status above their formerly degraded station, their ability to do so depended heavily upon their gender, class, and social connections within the United States. The peregrinations of Samuel Ford McGill are illustrative of the racial, social, educational, and cultural possibilities available to those few wealthy and well-placed emigrants able to capitalize on their relocation to Africa.

Scion of one of the first and most prominent African-American families in Liberia, McGill had been born in Baltimore in 1815 and emigrated to Africa when his father George R. McGill, a free man of color and preacher, relocated his entire family to Monrovia in 1827. Following the establishment of the separate Maryland colony, George McGill was also one of

⁶⁶ Charles Scotland to James Hall, 21 September 1846, MSCS; Charles Scotland to James Hall, 1 October 1846, MSCS; Charles Scotland to James Hall, 15 October 1846, MSCS; J. W. Reynolds to James Hall, 17 November 1846, MSCS.

the first immigrants to Maryland in Liberia.⁶⁷ At the age of twenty-one, the younger McGill sought a profession befitting his African social status; Maryland in Liberia's first governor, James Hall, was a medical doctor originally from New England, and McGill found his desires drifting towards that profession. However, writing in October 1835 from Monrovia following the destruction of the American settlement at Bassa Cove by the neighboring Bassas under "King Joe Harris," McGill was not particularly in a donnish mood. Addressing Moses Sheppard, McGill regaled his correspondent with the response of the Monrovia settlers to the destruction of the American settlement, namely the destruction of the African town deemed most responsible. McGill joined in the fight and proudly informed his Quaker correspondent that although he could not provide an exact reckoning of the number of African casualties, "there is a certainty of six of them being killed, and I doubt not but many more." The Liberian settler was especially proud that after the assault and destruction of the Bassa town that his fellow soldiers, following in the tradition of American volunteer and militia companies, had voted him from the ranks and into the officer corps as Third Lieutenant. It was only after detailing his martial exploits that McGill added to the conclusion of the letter his desire for a medical education and requested the support of Sheppard and the Maryland colonizationists.⁶⁸ McGill's letter arrived at a fortuitous time in Baltimore as the colonization society's agent, colonial physician, and governor in Africa, Hall, had no intention of becoming a permanent resident of that continent and was dispatching a consistent stream of letters to the MSCS both begging that he be replaced and requesting that the society train several colonists to administer to the medical needs of the

⁶⁷ Penelope Campbell, 64-74, 119; Richard Hall, 117-118, 130-133.

⁶⁸ "The Colony and Colonization," *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 11, no. 11 (November 1835): 321-324; Samuel F. McGill to Moses Sheppard, 9 October 1835, MSP.

colony. McGill's plans to become a doctor were well timed, but not without complications.⁶⁹ It was left to Sheppard to explain to McGill the requirements of his American education.

You were I suppose too young when you left the United States to have recollection of the distinction between the whites and blacks it is therefore necessary to apprise you that it will preclude you from associating with the whites, and place you in the degraded class of the blacks. You must not expect to hear the term Mr. McGill from a white man. In the College you must appear as a servant; there is not a medical school in the U. States into which you could be admitted in any other character.⁷⁰

McGill accepted this rather gloomy prediction and made his way to Baltimore to enter that city's Washington Medical College in the fall of 1836 under the patronage of the Young Men's Colonization Society of Maryland. In a telling bit of advice reinforcing the constraints on Black Atlantic mobility, Sheppard concluded his letter with the notation, "you must not arrive at any port south of Norfolk, the Laws would subject you to imprisonment."⁷¹ McGill began attending lectures at the medical college in November. The experiment ended predictably. By December, his fellow students had organized, met, and presented a series of resolutions to both their faculty and the colonizationists. Claiming to respond to rampaging rumors that the college had "permitted the introduction of a Negro Boy," the students denounced these reports as slanderous against their faculty members who never would have intended that the "Students of fair complexion should mingle with those of dark skin." The students explained that the "Boy"

⁶⁹ In requesting a medical education, McGill was following the footsteps of other Liberian settlers who recognized the great want of medical professionals in the sickly colony. Although McGill would eventually take the rather bold step of securing an official diploma from an American university, the ACS already had trained several settlers for medical duties in the colony without the accompanying certification. Still others joined in with McGill and requested further training. See, for example, Joshua Chase's letter of 1836 in which he wrote to the Board of Managers of the ACS: "After due consideration and reflection, believing also that it is the wish of the board to facilitate the moral intellectual and scientific improvement of the man of color, I am led to request the following favours, if consistent, to their wishes to permit me with their aid to return to the United States and enjoy the benefits to be determined from or two courses of lectures, in any medical school." See Joshua Chase to Board of Managers of the ACS, [unknown month] 26 1836, Records of the American Colonization Society, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Hereafter cited as ACS. For a similar request, see Jacob W. Prout to Ralph Gurley, 12 March 1835, ACS.

⁷⁰ Moses Sheppard to Samuel F. McGill, 12 January 1836, MSCS. A copy of this letter is also available in the Moses Sheppard Papers.

⁷¹ Ibid.

had been allowed into the college for the purpose of instruction only if he acted in the dual capacity as servant, but they “conceive[d] that this Boy has gone far beyond the limited space granted him, and has encroached as far upon the privilege enjoyed by the students, as to wound their feelings, disgust them by his actions.”⁷² Thus concluded what surely was a tumultuous semester at Washington Medical College. Perhaps the outcome was inevitable, but one wonders if significant problems emerged from the fact that Sheppard had technically informed McGill that he would only have to “appear as a servant,” whereas his fellow students seemed to expect the arrival of a personal valet.

Maryland’s colonizationists scrambled for a solution. They attempted to meekly regain the favor of the faculty and students of the Washington Medical College, noting that it “was never the wish of the Board of Managers that Sam. F. McGill should be esteemed an equal; or as claiming privileges at all comparable with the Students but that in the capacity of a Servant, he might, thru the mere magnanimity of both the Professors and Students be gratuitously instructed in the Science of Medicine.” Clearly, the colonization society was not interested in securing a thorough education for McGill, hoping instead that he might catch snippets of lectures based solely on the generosity of the white professionals. Equally clear was the fact that McGill, a freeborn man sensitive about his social station and in full possession of his African whiteness, was not interested in performing the role of a servant.

It is suggestive that McGill only requested assistance from Sheppard in securing a medical education *after* detailing his performance in war against native Africans. Indeed, the request for aid practically appears as an addendum to the letter. The body of the letter is dedicated to establishing McGill as a heroic defender of “civilization” in Africa; a figure portrayed in stark contrast to “heathen” Africans. Such a letter signaled McGill’s elevation in

⁷² Students to the Faculty of the Washington Medical College, 12 December 1836, MSCS.

Africa over “barbaric” blackness, and it should have been obvious to Sheppard and his colonizationist allies that the proud newly-elected third lieutenant of Americo-Liberian soldiers would have been very uninterested in behaving as a servant.

Since McGill refused to be treated as a degraded African American servant, the white students refused to acquiesce to his return to the university on the grounds that their professional careers would be jeopardized due to the “sentiments” of southerners who would never trust a white doctor trained alongside an African American. Fortunately, alongside the activities of the Board, Hall had corresponded with a medical acquaintance of his from New England, Dr. Edward E. Phelps, who served on the faculty of the medical college at the University of Vermont. Equally lucky, just as the Washington Medical College students erected a racial wall around their institution, a letter arrived from Phelps inviting McGill to become a private medical student at his home in Windsor, Vermont, a small village located along the border with New Hampshire. Although McGill would be a personal student lodging in his home, Phelps assured the MSCS that he would learn the curriculum of the University of Vermont.⁷³

And so McGill trekked to New England with a letter from the MSCS’s Home Agent reminding him that he “must not forget that you are an African in America; and in that station, whatever may be your sense of equality with your fellow man, remember, it will be dangerous to show it.” The necessity of such a reminder strongly suggests that McGill had demanded an equal footing among Baltimore’s medical students and also explains the response of the medical students who had their feelings “wounded” by such demands. The Marylanders hoped New England would “be a more congenial clime, at least...one more friendly to the coloured people in some respects.” And it seems that the spectacle of a Liberian seeking a medical degree roused at

⁷³ Committee of the Maryland State Colonization Society to R. E. Harrison, 17 December 1836, MSCS; H. McCulloch, et. al. to the Faculty of the Washington Medical College, undated, MSCS; Edward E. Phelps to Ira A. Easter, 9 January, 1837, MSCS.

least the curiosity of Windsor's citizenry. Reports of the hubbub led to grumbling on the part of Sheppard. Referencing Alexander Pope's "Essay on Man" in which a group of superior beings "show'd a Newton as we show an ape," Sheppard sardonically grumbled that "a white ape would have attracted as much attention in the good town of Windsor as a coloured Liberian aspiring to science."⁷⁴

Soon after McGill's arrival in Vermont, Phelps resigned his position at the university and recommended that his protégé attend medical lectures at Dartmouth in nearby Hanover, New Hampshire. By the time McGill reached Dartmouth, his transformation into fully exotic, yet somehow "civilized," "other" was complete. A professor there, hoping to avoid a situation similar to that which engulfed the Washington Medical College, introduced McGill to the student body as a native African because "foreigners of any color are respected." McGill concocted an explanation for his fluency in English and, as he phrased it in his report to the MSCS, "the deception carried the point." In a reversal of the normative "passing" as a means of crossing the color line from black to white, McGill was actually attempting to pass as an African. Such a formulation transformed McGill from a "mulatto" free man of color seeking to climb the social ladder to an exotic English-speaking African. As such, even if he did not find equality among his fellow students, McGill still found acceptance as a curiosity. Surveying his newly-duped white classmates, McGill breathed a sigh of relief when he determined that he was "not the most ignorant one of the whole, and in a year from this I hope to be attached to the Senior class." In fact, after pondering his predicament for a week, McGill slyly—but without explanation—confided to his MSCS benefactors that his African ruse might prove beneficial in the future.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Ira A. Easter to Samuel F. McGill, 11 January 1837, MSCS; Moses Sheppard to Thomas Edmonds 31 January 1837, Moses Sheppard Papers; Moses Sheppard to Samuel F. McGill, 29 May 1837, Moses Sheppard Papers.

⁷⁵ Samuel F. McGill to Ira A. Easter, August 11, 1837, MSCS; Samuel F. McGill to Moses Sheppard, 18 August 1837, Moses Sheppard Papers; Samuel F. McGill to Moses Sheppard, 29 August 1837, Moses Sheppard Papers.

While McGill took this transformation one step further than most—being told he was an African and then being requested to pass as one— this exoticization of the mobile subject, however, was a weapon of choice for Americo-Liberian settlers travelling abroad. In relocating to Africa and conceding North America, the settlers had nominally acquiesced to racist white demands for black removal and interference in American society. Simultaneously, residence in Africa had transformed them into exotic foreigners, “white apes” according to Sheppard, but the colonizationist rhetoric centering Liberians at the forefront of the African civilizing mission also allowed them to shed the tincture of primitivism. In this manner, Hance, Harris, McGill, and others could travel, reside in the homes of whites who would shun other African Americans, and open doors to opportunities previously unavailable to them. Sheppard could grumble about Windsor’s citizenry making a spectacle out of a Liberian medical student, but it was that engine of wonderment that paved, if not McGill’s equality, then at least his acceptance amongst Windsor’s white population and through the doors of Dartmouth’s medical college. For his part, McGill disliked the implications but recognized that Liberia and Liberians inhabited a space between white assumptions of Anglo-American civilization and black African barbarity. He wrote to Sheppard, “I have received many invitations, all of which I always made it a point to decline. . . . I cannot say that my failure to accept them arose from my aversion to society; yet the idea that it was merely a momentary act of condescension, on their part, as well as a desire to see and converse a half savage character, made it rather a pain than a pleasure to be exposed to their solicitations.” Obviously, “savage” was a word imbued with significant meaning for Americo-Liberians who conceived of their “civilized” African home as being surrounded by “savage” Africans. Clearly, McGill bristled at being conceived of as even half a savage, but he too found

the utility of becoming an exotic “civilized” (or not entirely savage) African in finding acceptance among his fellow students and New Englanders.⁷⁶

Relocation to Liberia had provided McGill with opportunities overwhelmingly unimaginable for African Americans. Only a few years earlier, the first African American to receive a medical degree from a university, James McCune Smith, had attempted and failed to find similar acceptance among northern medical schools. He lacked the exoticism of an Americo-Liberian, however, and failed to gain admittance to an American institution. After being denied admittance to Columbia and Geneva, New York’s medical institute, he was forced to attain his credentials abroad at the University of Glasgow, earning his Bachelor of Arts degree in 1835 and his medical degree in 1837. McGill, utilizing the transatlantic connections afforded by the colonization societies, was able to secure admittance to an American institution—although admittedly with several false starts—at the same historical moment that Smith found those doors closed. While David Jones Peck is credited as being the first African-American to receive his degree from an American institution, he did not earn his M.D. from Chicago’s Rush Medical College until 1847, nearly a decade after McGill. On October 22, 1838, McGill along with the rest of his cohort completed his oral examinations to the satisfaction of the faculty and defended his thesis, thus becoming the first African American doctor to receive a medical degree from an American university. In order to sail out in the fall expedition,⁷⁷ he departed Dartmouth and the United States so quickly that he had not yet received his diploma, but James Hall sailed for Maryland in Liberia a few weeks after McGill carrying the document that the Liberian

⁷⁶ Samuel F. McGill to Moses Sheppard, 15 June 1837, Moses Sheppard Papers; Samuel F. McGill to Ira Easter, 16 April 1839, MSCS.

⁷⁷ The colonization societies usually hoped to send out two expeditions in a year, one in the spring and one in the fall. Chronically short of funds, however, the societies could rarely maintain this quixotic scheduling, and by 1838 there was discussion among the MSCS leadership of only sending out a solitary expedition each year. Thus, the concerns of leaders anxious about McGill’s commitment to returning to Africa combined with practical concerns regarding when the next expedition for Africa could be mounted. Indeed, there would be no spring 1839 expedition from Baltimore. McGill left for Liberia aboard the *Oberon* on November 22, 1838. The next expedition for Harper left Baltimore aboard the *Boxer* on December 12, 1839. See Richard L. Hall, 433-516.

coveted. Clearly, one element of New England life had greatly affected McGill: the weather. Unsurprising for a young man who had spent much of childhood and adolescence living near the equator, McGill's letters are filled with complaints about New England winters and wonderment that snow remained on the ground in April. And when it came time to write a medical thesis to complete his degree, McGill selected a subject close to his heart: "Direct Physical Effects of Cold"⁷⁸

Beyond finding his muse in Vermont and New Hampshire's snows, McGill busily established his transatlantic network. He corresponded, visited, and associated with prominent whites and counted some of Maryland's leading figures, including John H. B. Latrobe, architect Benjamin Latrobe's son, and Moses Sheppard as his patrons and friends. But McGill found liberty without equality empty, and confrontations like the one he endured at Washington Medical College angered him. After his return to Africa, McGill communicated with a white colonizationist seeking his advice on how to best persuade African Americans to emigrate. Describing the obstacles facing people of color in the United States, McGill recalled his travels across the country. "I have visited the States as a free Liberian under circumstances the most favorable, and even then felt that to be called a free colored man in the States is synonymous with what we here term slavery.—it is a kind of freedom which the unwearying kindness and courtesies of our best and most undoubted colonization friends can hardly render agreeable—we never breath freely again until the goodly bark conveys us once more to the shores of our but happy home."⁷⁹

McGill chaffed under the category "free colored man," and his studies in the United States subtly altered his style of writing. In letters to his white friends and benefactors, he

⁷⁸ John Stauffer, ed. *The Works of James McCune Smith* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), Xx-xi; Records of the Faculty of Medicine in Dartmouth College, 1819-1838, Dartmouth College Archives, Rauner Special Collections Library, Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire; Moses Sheppard to SF McGill, 30 November, 1838, MSP.

⁷⁹ Samuel F. McGill to H. B. Goodwin, 15 March, 1845, MSCS.

increasingly categorized those African Americans living in the United States as “your colored population,” renouncing any connection between himself and those he believed unwilling to or incapable of grasping true freedom.⁸⁰ As his graduation neared, McGill wrote to the MSCS to seek their advice regarding the timing of his return to Liberia. “My anxiety to see friends & home and above all my anxiety to leave the U.S. strongly urge my departure; on the other hand justice to myself and fellow Colonists render a longer stay necessary.” The problem was that McGill believed himself deficient in “clinical knowledge,” and a stay in Baltimore working among that city’s African-American population would provide valuable experience.⁸¹

A few white leaders of the colonization society feared that McGill would desire to stay in the United States after his medical training and become a “King among beggars.”⁸² Such concern was greatly misplaced. McGill was uninterested in becoming a Baltimore king, especially if his rule only extended over that city’s people of color. Despite the fact that he was both born and raised in Baltimore, McGill displaced his identity away from his African American roots. To quote the new doctor fully,

A short stay in Balt. would enable me to obtain this, and even though some lives might be sacrificed, it would not make much difference providing I use every exertion to save—To hurry the departure of some of your Colored population out of this world would not be so great a crime....⁸³

McGill seemingly lacked any recognition that he was once a member of Baltimore’s African American population; relocation to Liberia allowed him to shed that particular identity.

⁸⁰ As he traveled more extensively throughout the United States as a Liberian, McGill grew increasingly dismissive of African Americans. “We are looking with strongly excited intrest for the next changes that are to take place in the affairs of your Coloured population. Porrh creatures like drowning men they grasp at straws. They seem devoid of elevated feelings, their spirits are hardened to oppression, nothing but force can ever expel them from their present servile station in the U. States.” Samuel F. McGill to Moses Sheppard, 10 July 1842, MSP.

⁸¹ Moses Sheppard to George R. McGill, 12 January 1836, MSCS; Moses Sheppard to Samuel F. McGill, 12 January 1836, MSCS; Campbell, 119-121; Samuel F. McGill to Ira A. Easter, 16 October 1838, MSCS.

⁸² The MSCS leadership was particularly worried in light of Lewis Wells, an antebellum black doctor in Baltimore who had secured training by promising to emigrate, but instead remained in the United States. Moses Sheppard to Samuel F. McGill, 12 January 1836, MSCS. Also a copy of this letter in the Moses Sheppard Papers

⁸³ Samuel F. McGill to Ira A. Easter, 16 October 1838, MSCS.

But if the death of “some” of the African American population “would not be so great crime,” some people were then presumably salvageable, but who? A member of one of Liberia’s most prosperous families, Russwurm’s brother-in-law, born free, educated, and an accepted member of Maryland’s white colonization elite, McGill predictably found salvation possible for those African Americans most like himself, but only if they elected to seek liberty in Africa. Not surprising, given that the population of African American students at Dartmouth numbered two, McGill became acquainted with fellow black student Thomas Paul. The educated New Englander quickly caught the Americo-Liberian’s eye as someone “who possesses qualifications sufficient to render him a conspicuous character if placed in a situation where an opening existed for promotion.” Unfortunately, McGill noted that Paul was an abolitionist in the mold of Garrison and seemed uninterested in emigration. But McGill still held hope as Paul was “sensible of oppression and I hope it may drive him to seek refuge in Africa. He would in my opinion prove an ornament to our Colony, and no persuasions of mine shall be spared in inducing his removal from this ‘cradle of liberty.’” And so McGill condemned part of the African-American population to ignoble death by his inexperienced hands while simultaneously pressuring those he deemed worthy to undertake the transformative migration to Liberia.⁸⁴

In fact, McGill generally loathed abolitionists because he—like his white colonizationist companions—attributed to their influence the widespread rejection of Liberia by educated and affluent African Americans like Paul. Tellingly, the freeborn Americo-Liberian believed that most abolitionists focused on slavery rather than equality, and lacked what he termed “true Thompsonian spirit,—which I believe holds amalgamation as one of its principal doctrines.” Although British abolitionist George Thompson was a fervent opponent of the ACS, McGill preferred Thompson’s reformist vision that extended beyond abolition to include social

⁸⁴ Samuel F. McGill to Ira A. Easter, 29 January 1838, MSCS.

equality.⁸⁵ As a freeborn man of color, McGill had never felt the degradation of slavery, and his disdain for abolitionists “with perhaps a few exceptions” stemmed from his demand for social and political equality. As he explained his views to one correspondent, for McGill the abolition of slavery was only a necessary progression on the correct path for people of color to attain equality “unless from mental or pecuniary deficiencies he be ~~obliged~~ constrained to forgoe them.” Of course, conceding that equality could be forfeited by a lack of mental faculties or class reveals that McGill was not so much an advocate of equality as rather an outspoken advocate that he and those people of color like him—learned, financially comfortable, male, and “gentlemanly”—be treated as white men. In an argument foreshadowing W.E.B. Du Bois’s “Talented Tenth,” McGill sought to open the doors of privilege and education to leading intellectuals. The end of slavery was only the first step in this program, and for those white New Englanders unfortunate enough to engage McGill in a debate on abolition, the Liberian settler always took great delight in observing his foe’s nausea at the “blessing” it would be to follow abolitionism’s logic to its natural Thompsonian conclusion; one of these late-night debates among students ended abruptly when McGill made “a rather serious” proposal to his opponent for his sister’s hand in marriage.⁸⁶

Unsurprisingly, when McGill finally did ask for a woman’s hand in marriage who was not the sister of some unsuspecting white abolitionist, he proposed to twenty-year-old Lydia Nickolson, a freeborn resident of Baltimore and of mixed- ancestry—someone exactly like

⁸⁵ For George Thompson’s opposition to colonization, see *Speeches Delivered at the Anti-Colonization Meeting in Exeter Hall, London, July 13, 1833* (Boston: Garrison and Knapp, 1833); *Discussion on American Slavery, Between George Thompson, Esq....and Rev. Robert J. Breckinridge...Holden in Rev. Dr. Wardlaw’s Chapel, Glasgow, Scotland* (Boston: Isaac Knapp, 1836). For another man of mixed ancestry’s perception of Thompson and abolitionists’ opinions on mixed-race unions, see William G. Allen, *The American Prejudice Against Color* (London: W. and F. G. Cash, 1853).

⁸⁶ Samuel F. McGill to Henry Goodwin [Goodwyn], 15 March 1845, MSCS; Samuel F. McGill to Ira A. Easter, 29 January 1838, MSCS.

McGill.⁸⁷ The engagement was broken off twice before Nickolson finally agreed to marry the love-struck McGill and the nuptials required the intercession of both his father and Baltimore friends. It seems that the major point of contention was McGill's determination to return to Africa; Nickolson apparently was not as enamored of the idea of leaving the United States as she was of McGill. If McGill embodied the litany of possibilities that Liberia presented to those able to grasp them, then his young bride tragically epitomized what emigration to Africa meant for many other African American settlers. Soon after her arrival in Liberia, Nickolson contracted an illness that defied the best efforts of her husband/doctor and died on July 12, 1843, seven months after first setting foot in Africa.⁸⁸ McGill was crushed and confided to Latrobe that because of his wife's death his "best and most determined principles...have been tested I must confess." However, McGill decided that moving his young bride to Liberia ultimately was the only alternative. "I yet could not have acted otherwise. I could not or rather would not have resided in the United States nor could I have left one of my race there for whom affection was entertained. I would have sacrificed much very much to have averted danger, but my liberty would have been a sacrifice entirely too great."⁸⁹ Such sentiments echoed those he expressed five years earlier in his efforts to coax his fellow Dartmouth student Thomas Paul to Liberia.

These peregrinations of an Americo-Liberian medical student expose the results of Liberia's developing racial hierarchy and the importance of class there. McGill did not conceive

⁸⁷ In a letter to a Quaker friend and correspondent, Moses Sheppard confided that Nickolson broke off the engagement twice before agreeing to marry McGill. While Sheppard was happy for McGill, he seemed rather unimpressed with the new bride. "I met her for the first time at Dr. Halls where I had the pleasure of taking tea with her and Dr. McGill, there is nothing in her appearance or manner more than common, I have seen hundred of yellow girls quite as fascinating, but suppose love laughs at reason as well as at locksmiths." Moses Sheppard to Benjamin F. Taylor, 14 and 15 December 1842, MSP.

⁸⁸ Two years after Lydia's death, McGill married again. Once again he refused the possibility of an American who preferred the United States as his second wife, the seventeen-year-old orphan of early settler Francis Devany, was an African-born Liberian. After the death of his second wife, McGill married a freeborn Virginian who had relocated to Cincinnati, Ohio at a young age and removed to Liberia as a missionary. In every marriage partner, McGill sought freeborn women who had attained some level of education. See Samuel F. McGill to Moses Sheppard, 14 January 1845, MSP; Samuel F. McGill to Moses Sheppard, 15 June 1848, MSP.

⁸⁹ Samuel F. McGill to John H. B. Latrobe, 13 January 1844, MSCS; Richard Hall, 223.

of himself as white as he sought to rescue those “of my race” from American subjugation. Yet, if he did not claim a “white” identity, he obviously also did not lay claim to an American blackness. Not only did he find the idea of being referred to a free man of color more akin to slavery, McGill even struggled to interact with American blacks. He distanced himself from those Americans of African descent who voluntarily—as he saw it—remained under the heel of white oppression. The black janitor of the Washington Medical College in Baltimore, a Mr. Golden, was seemingly repulsed by McGill’s haughty attitude. After conversing with Golden, Sheppard reported to McGill the janitor’s summation of the Americo-Liberian as a “proud nigger.” Although claiming to have shown Golden respect, McGill also belittled the janitor’s own claims to medical knowledge based upon his experiences in the position, a servant of the college, that McGill had originally intended to occupy in his own quest for a medical education.

I have even received lectures from him on the ‘cirkilashun,’ the larger portion of which I knew to be erroneous. He might have led to suppose me a proud nigger, it was necessary he should have such an opinion of me, otherwise I should have been a more than nominal subgenitor. His being Dr. Golden did not elicit from me the degree of Reverence which was generally paid him, by those who had partaken of his nostrums, consequently he might have supposed me emulous to acquire superior medical information to what he possessed.⁹⁰

In attempting to describe this racialized vacillation, one scholar has credited McGill with advancing a “radical and new African American identity” that presented a pan-African ideology twenty-five years before Alexander Crummell, Edward W. Blyden, and Martin Delany proposed their versions of it, even going so far as to suggest that McGill was an instrumental figure in the development of these figures’ own ideas.⁹¹ But McGill’s writing and thinking does not exhibit the same commitment to pan-African ideas as those of the later authors. Rather, McGill really did not care for Africans or his fellow settlers. Emigration had opened doors to McGill that would have been completely unavailable to him had his father elected to remain in Baltimore.

⁹⁰ Samuel F. McGill to Sheppard, 15 June 1837, MSP; Moses Sheppard to Samuel F. McGill, 29 May 1837, MSP.

⁹¹ Richard Hall, 218-220.

Possessing numerous advantages, the McGill family exemplified the possibilities of Liberia. But McGill scoffed at the ex-slaves and uneducated settlers who constituted the majority of Liberia's population. A common practice among missionary teachers to combine classrooms of native and settler children especially earned his scorn as he believed that the children of settlers were just as likely to become "savage" as the Africans were likely to become Christian.

After the death of his brother-in-law, Governor Russwurm, McGill took over the reins of colonial government, soon alienating himself from his fellow settlers. In a letter to the MSCS, McGill noted that, while the colony had increased its size in the numbers of settlers, "I really cannot discover any material increase in intelligence respectability or self dependence." Minimally, McGill recognized that the deficiencies he perceived in his fellow colonists were not a result of their inherent debasement, but rather pointed an accusatory finger at the racialized organization of the United States, the institution of slavery, *and* the colonization society's inability to educate its settlers. "These same people are now snatched suddenly from the plantations and uninstructed and unimproved are expected by the simple passage across five thousand miles of ocean to be fit to fulfill the functions and duties of free and enlightened citizens."⁹² McGill simply failed to recognize that the "simple passage of five thousand miles" *had* been transformative; not only had that passage transformed American blackness into African whiteness, but that initial act of relocation had also enabled the "mulatto" son of a Baltimore lay Methodist minister to secure a medical degree from Dartmouth College and count many prominent whites within his circle of friends. It was his status in Africa which had provided McGill with the tools and connections necessary to secure the requisite education to "fulfill the functions and duties of free and enlightened citizens." The class-conscious McGill foresaw an African Republic of educated men like himself with little initial room for ex-slaves and

⁹² Samuel F. McGill to Moses Sheppard, 18 May 1839, MSP; Richard Hall, 324-325.

uneducated settlers. As far as his thoughts on Africans, McGill's emotions ranged from disdain to bemusement at their lack of "civilization" to outright loathing.⁹³ In 1840, while employed as the colony's physician in Harper, McGill wrote to MSCS officials expressing the settlers' concerns regarding what they considered preferential treatment of Africans on the part of missionary teachers. Many settlers were upset at the number of native African children who were receiving educations at the hands of the limited number of teachers, and McGill notified his superiors that "I am inclined to the opinions of the residents of the Southern States in relation to their blacks they had better remain in a happy state of ignorance."⁹⁴ Not only is this a remarkable sentiment for a man of color who disliked abolitionists for their lack of dedication to racial equality and amalgamation, but it likewise does not sound like the progenitor of pan-Africanism.

Instead of some early form of pan-Africanism or radical African American identity, McGill is better understood within the context of his and his fellow Liberians' African whiteness. With the arrival of the African-American settlers and their attempts to recreate the United States in Africa and create a position of authority as civilized whites in charge, the settlers and Africans shaped and challenged one another's molding of the landscape's racial organization. Like many other settlers who found uplift and transformation through Liberian emigration, McGill expressed amazement that most ex-slaves refused to accept freedom based upon the promise of emigration. "Twere I the slave," McGill informed a white American friend who coincidentally was also a slaveholder, "there is nothing that I would not give...in return for freedom." Of course, McGill conceded that he had never been a slave and had given up understanding the mentality of chattel property as something unattainable and an "unnecessary" digression. Conversely, McGill easily imagined himself in the role of slaveholder and did not see

⁹³ Even Richard Hall who makes the argument that McGill is a pan-African forefather admits that although he found portraying one useful in the United States, McGill did not like Africans. Hall wrote of McGill after his return to Liberia after his medical studies: "Though Africa was his adopted home, whose people he loathed, Ford McGill was inspired by a vision of a future civilized black republic." See Richard Hall, 197.

⁹⁴ Samuel F. McGill to John H. B. Latrobe 8 June 1840. MSCS.

such a position as beyond his imaginative powers. “Even were I myself a slave-holder, all my earthly means vested in slaves it is indeed questionable whether I could not once bid them go free, and there suddenly reduce myself to beggary.” The obstinacy of slaves unwilling to relocate to the hardships of an impoverished colony surrounded by unfriendly Africans and a guaranteed encounter with the “African fever” eluded McGill, but he could easily picture himself as a slaveholder to better understand their opposition to abolition. Even if most Americo-Liberians were more aware of the transformative properties of their journey across the Atlantic Ocean than McGill, all understood that returning to the United States with their privileged African positions would require a negotiation with their American hosts. But having tasted the privileges of racialized power, Americo-Liberians ranging from those like McGill who were most able to bring their privileged position to the United States to Alexander Hance and Charles Scotland who directly confronted black deprivation in their efforts to free their children from bondage were very uninterested in returning to their previous positions in the racial hierarchy of their former home. They mobilized their exotic and civilized identity to accomplish these goals. Settler William Polk understood the racialized implications of his new position in Africa when he passed word along to his former friends and neighbors that “I would not exchange homes with them on no condition unless they could make me as the white man.” It is significant to note that Polk is not requesting to “become” a white man, but rather to be treated *as* white. These are not individuals concealing their identity, but rather seeking to use their privileged African position to springboard their demands for a similar treatment in the United States. For Polk and settlers like him, there would be no going home except with the privileges of whiteness, and the African whiteness of these settlers provided a tool by which they could make their demands.⁹⁵

⁹⁵ Samuel F. McGill to Henry Goodwin [Goodwyn], 15 March 1845, MSCS; William Polk to Capt. Hooper, 29 November 1835, MSCS.

George McGill, Samuel's father, voiced this understanding completely when he wrote to the Board of Managers of the MSCS while his son attended Dartmouth. Expressing the same bewilderment as his son that most African Americans declined the colonizationists' invitations to emigrate, McGill informed the board that "you can tell them [African Americans] that here I can toe point with their masters the unighted states & English Comodors Captains agents are only my Eaquals when they come here and as such they treat me, as proof when the purtomac friget was here I slep on board one night in the cabin with Capt Nicolson of Baltimore I supd Brakfasted & dined with him in his cabbin, such is the case of a collrd gentleman in Liberia, when he came on shore I treated him accordingly." The elder McGill clearly understood that within the geographical confines of Liberia he could not only make claims of equality with white naval officers, but actually had the power to create that equality. In Africa, he was a colonial administrator, founder of a trading firm, school teacher, vice-agent, and respected settler with many prominent white friends in the United States, and a white—with contested meanings—in Africa. Horatio Bridge agreed with McGill. In relaying his Liberian experiences, Bridge noted, "The white man, who visits Liberia, be he of what rank he may, and however imbued with the prejudice of hue, associates with the colonists on terms of equality. This would be impossible (speaking not of individuals, but of general intercourse between the two races) in the United States." As individuals, Americo-Liberians were not content to leave those "terms of equality" in West Africa when they visited the United States, but bringing their privileged African status across the Atlantic would require laying claim to the mantle of "civilization." In this negotiation, their African whiteness proved a critical tool for Liberian settlers.⁹⁶

Although their whiteness was confined to the western coast of Africa, Americo-Liberians, especially those with the stature of the McGill family, could travel in the United States

⁹⁶ George R. McGill to Board of Managers of the Maryland State Colonization Society, 13 May 1837. MSCS; Bridge, 163-164.

with an idiosyncratic whiteness through their associates and friends who would ensure their treatment as a sort of “honorary” white in small social settings. Sheppard, the same individual who had reminded Samuel McGill that he should never expect the words “Mr. McGill” from a white man, had written to McGill’s father the same day that he penned that rather pessimistic forecast to his son. Acknowledging that he had prepared the younger McGill for the worst, Sheppard, aware of Liberia’s racial constructions, confided to the elder McGill that his son would “be regarded as a white man by a very numerous and respectable circle, but the habits and usages of Society, alas prejudices, will prevent him being treated as such in our public and common intercourse.” Throughout McGill’s travels in the United States, Sheppard and the white colonizationist leaders continually worked to ensure McGill received preferential treatment as a white man in every instance they could influence; most of these clandestine mechanics occurred without the knowledge of the socially conscious McGill. Edward E. Phelps, McGill’s mentor, could see no possibility for the Liberian settler to reside in his house “for the reason, that I could not at all times ask him to my table, without making a great deal of talk, or in other words, I dare not, in this case, brave public opinion, altho I cannot, in principle defend the position.” Although he lacked the backbone to stand up to public scrutiny of boarding an African American within his household, Phelps did promise to train the Americo-Liberian for medicine, even at the cost of losing all of his other students. Indeed, Phelps thought this outcome likely and determined that he would have to pass along his other private students to other doctors as they would not take an African American “as a chum,” a concern that coupled with the experiences in Baltimore underscore why McGill was introduced as an exotic English-speaking African to the medical students at Dartmouth. But even as McGill encountered obstacles, his path to New England was plowed with deep furrows of whiteness by his Maryland patrons, Sheppard in particular. As a Liberian settler, McGill lacked the official state documentation proving his freedom and the

captain of the vessel originally employed to take the Americo-Liberian to New England refused to take him as a passenger out of fear of violating Maryland's laws regarding the transportation of undocumented people of color. The colonization leaders created documents confirming McGill's identity as an Americo-Liberian and slyly wrote to the owners of the ship that McGill was a cabin passenger and should be treated without distinction to his race. As McGill sailed for Boston he unknowingly raced letters speeding towards New England colonizationists and acquaintances of the MSCS leadership requesting that they meet McGill. And when Lydia Nickolson initially rejected McGill's proposal for marriage, his white benefactor suggested that the mixed-race Nickolsons were notorious for the delight they held in "fooling" whites and that McGill was just another white fool to Lydia.⁹⁷

Clearly, McGill represented the apogee of Liberian society and was not representative of Americo-Liberians as whole. But this freeborn scion of a prominent family of colonial administrators and merchants does highlight the imagined possibilities of emigration. Although it required the skill, luck, and socio-economic characteristics of a McGill to fully acquire the desired results, and considering that the man became America's first African American medical school graduate it should be noted that his accomplishments were remarkable, none of the Americo-Liberians who visited the United States were interested in returning to their pre-emigration conditions. It must also be noted that gendered factors also prominently shaped McGill's racialized identity; a female settler certainly would not have found similar patrons in order to secure a medical education. Still, less well-placed settlers made their demands; Andrew Hall confirmed in a letter that "I would not be willing to come back to america to be called a negro," while William Polk conditioned any future return to the United States on being

⁹⁷ Moses Sheppard to George R. McGill, 12 January 1836, MSCS; Moses Sheppard to Matthews & Hopkins, 18 January 1837, MSP; Edward E. Phelps to James Hall, 5 October 1836, MSP; Moses Sheppard to George W. Light, 28 January 1837, MSP; Moses Sheppard to Thomas Edmonds, 31 January 1837, MSP; Unknown [probably Moses Sheppard] to Samuel F. McGill, 29 June 1841, MSP.

transformed into a “white man.” These Americo-Liberian travels sought a liminal alternative between antipodal blackness and whiteness. Although they eschewed claiming a white identity in the United States, they did utilize the tool of their African whiteness—exotic foreignness without the tincture of primitivism—to reject a return to the societal ranking of American blackness.

The experiences of Dempsey R. Fletcher, a student of McGill’s in Africa and the second Liberian settler to receive a degree from Dartmouth’s medical school, highlights the constraints and possibilities of this transatlantic mobility. For a class-conscious man incapable of seeing the world through the eyes of the enslaved, McGill selected a fascinating student. Fletcher had been born a slave in Perquimans County, North Carolina, along the eastern coast, and had emigrated at the age of five with twelve other kinsmen per the requirements of the will of their master who had disappeared at sea. Fletcher and McGill shared one trait: they had both immigrated to Liberia as children. But the similarities largely ended there. Not only was Fletcher not of mixed ancestry—at least not to the degree that he was classified as a “mulatto”—but his family developed notoriety in the Caldwell settlement of Liberia. His relative Driver Fletcher was sentenced to nine-months’ imprisonment in 1838 for grand larceny, a feat he followed up three years later by receiving a year-long sentence for stabbing.⁹⁸ While McGill enjoyed the fruits of a well-placed family, Fletcher was orphaned soon after arriving in Liberia. He could write phonetically, however, an impressive talent given his background and a commodity within a colony of ex-slaves, and he was employed by a trader. James Hall, the MSCS agent in Africa, saw potential in the youth and hired him to work for the society in Maryland in Liberia.⁹⁹ When McGill returned to Africa, he took on Fletcher as a student.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Clegg, 67-68, 213.

⁹⁹ Richard Hall, 257-258.

¹⁰⁰ Richard L. Hall argues that Fletcher and McGill’s personalities clashed and this partly led to Fletcher’s threats that he would quit his position unless he received a formal medical education in the United States. Although McGill would later write disparagingly of Fletcher in later years, saying in 1850 that “Fletcher is careless, and inefficient,” these characterizations do not appear in McGill’s correspondence when Fletcher was a student of his. Although not

The MSCS had hoped that McGill would provide the foundation upon which to erect an African medical school, and taking on Fletcher as a student certainly supported that mission. But McGill only vocalized a more restrictive vision of Fletcher's employment as an assistant in the apothecary. "I have taken a student of medicine under me, but cannot yet form any idea of his capacity—yet I entertain hope that he soon be sufficiently qualified to assist me as an apothecary." Fletcher evidently undertook his studies with the understanding from McGill and Governor Russwurm that he would study two and half years in Africa and one and half years in the United States, and then he too would acquire a medical degree like McGill. Unfortunately, Fletcher, the former slave from North Carolina, did not have the same contacts within the colonization society as the better situated McGill, and he languished at his post in Africa for five years. After repeated letters, Fletcher finally found a patron of sorts in James Hall, who, while he did actively not intercede on behalf of Fletcher as others had done for McGill, at least nominally brought up the prospect before the Board of Governors of the MSCS, who voted in March 1845 to fund Fletcher's medical education in the states. After so many years of effort, Fletcher was understandably ecstatic and gushed to MSCS President Latrobe, in a letter that contained a revealing mistake, "I never supposed that I had any friends so far distant that would interest ~~them~~ himself thus far for my prosperity and success."¹⁰¹ Fletcher was to follow McGill's exact footsteps and begin studies in Vermont under Phelps before moving on to the lectures at Dartmouth. Unfortunately, the letters and records for Fletcher do not indicate whether he was also forced to "pass" as an African as McGill had when he was first introduced at Dartmouth.

flushed with praise, McGill did request that Sheppard aid Fletcher in his American travels. "During his stay with me," McGill wrote of Fletcher, "he has been diligent and attentive, and has so far progressed that he has attended to the entire medical duties of the colony, during periods of my absence." While it is certainly conceivable that McGill was condescending toward Fletcher as reflective of his general *joie de vivre*, in this instance it seems that Hall is reading McGill's later thoughts backward in time to the earliest days of their partnership. See Richard L. Hall, 257-258, 280-281, 582-583; Samuel F. McGill to Moses Sheppard, 12 November, 1844, MSP.

¹⁰¹ SF McGill to Moses Sheppard, 27 October, 1839, MSP; Dempsey Fletcher to John H. B. Latrobe, 1 September, 1844, MSCS; Moses Sheppard to B. F. Taylor, website, March-September 1850; Minutes of the Board of Managers of the MSCS, 20 March, 1845, MSCS; Dempsey Fletcher to James Hall, 14 January, 1844, MSCS.

The Faculty Records for the College of Medicine parenthetically note Fletcher as an “African,” but there is no indication whether this reflected deception, his residence in Africa, or a racist conflation of an “African” with a person of African descent. Such wording does, however, resonate with the experiences of McGill and Liberia’s transformative capability to exoticize an ex-slave into a remarkable peregrine without accompanying assumptions of inherent primitiveness.¹⁰²

While book collections, surgical instruments, and financial assistance flowed to New England while McGill was in residence through Sheppard’s patronage, Fletcher was largely on his own. Whereas McGill was noted by colonizationists and white faculty members alike for his intellect and gentility, Fletcher was construed as an intellectually inferior man.¹⁰³ These white advisers’ discussions of Fletcher usually pointed to his deficiency as a student as the heart of his problematic academic career, but the correspondence regarding Fletcher is also more racially tinged than the letters about McGill. While the Washington Medical College students only saw a “negro boy,” the colonizationists rarely referenced McGill as a “mulatto” or “negro,” and usually only as a means of introduction before racial categorizations evaporated from the text. Conversely, Fletcher, who Sheppard described as “perfectly black with a negro face but possessing mind,” was often racialized. Indeed, the most extended correspondence between Sheppard and Fletcher while he was in New England stemmed from Sheppard’s curiosity regarding the racial hierarchy in that location. This inquiry was probably spawned by Fletcher’s report of his arrival at Dartmouth, in which he noted that “the general treatment I received from the class was better than I expected; yet reason forbid my using that degree of intimacy with the same freedom which I could have had I not been a negro.” Upon receiving this news of

¹⁰² See Records of the Faculty of Medicine in Dartmouth College, 1845-1862, August 4, 1846 Faculty meeting minutes.

¹⁰³ Edward E. Phelps to James Hall, 28 January, 1846, MSCS.

Fletcher's reception, Sheppard wanted to know more. "You are now in a location where it is avowed that colour is disregarded and among a people who are advocates of equality, you are therefore in a situation to impart the information I wish to obtain. Your colour being unmixed gives you an advantage in this respect that Dr. McGill did not possess." Determined to quantify equality, Sheppard asked Fletcher to assign his treatment a number between one hundred and zero, one hundred meaning that every New Englander treated him with dignity and zero signifying that no one treated him in this manner. Fletcher placed the number at twenty-five, noting that more cordiality was extended to him while engaged in individual interactions than in group settings, and thus he tended to avoid group engagements in which "I supposed my absence would be preferable."¹⁰⁴

Suggestive of Fletcher's state of mind, he wrote colonization officials that his plan of withdrawing from groups was so that if forced into an altercation, he could justify his actions on the grounds of self-defense. Years later after his return to Africa, Fletcher wrote to Sheppard, tellingly calling him one of his "transatlantic friends," to note the value of his American education. While such sojourns to the United States or England were necessary to acquire this knowledge, Fletcher admitted "that there was not a day while I was in the United States that my mind was free from suspicion or from embarrassment. If I was eulogized for my acquirements, I thought [it] to be flattery & unsound, if spoke contemptedly of—I thought I deserved it and had no right to be in America."¹⁰⁵ Needless to say, he found northern prejudice to only differ in degree rather than in kind. Like McGill before him, Fletcher found himself engaged in debates with white abolitionists regarding the merits of colonization. Yet, class and birth separated the two Liberians. McGill rarely mentioned poor people, except to deny their existence in New

¹⁰⁴ Moses Sheppard to B.F. Taylor, website, 23 March, 1850; Dempsey R. Fletcher to Moses Sheppard, 11 November 1845, MSP; Moses Sheppard to Dempsey R. Fletcher, 10 January, 1846, MSP;.

¹⁰⁵ Dempsey R. Fletcher to Moses Sheppard, 16 September, 1850, MSP.

England as evidence of his need to operate upon Baltimore's impoverished African American population. In breaking down the twenty-five percent of the northerners who engaged with him on some platform of equality, Fletcher noted that two-thirds of them were the most prominent men in the area. These individuals were probably of the same group as Dr. Phelps and Dartmouth physician Dr. Mussey in whom McGill found comfort and whose power and privilege were secure enough to allow for the intrusion of a Liberian settler in their lives without loss of respect, so long as he did not sit at the dinner table. The remaining one-third of Fletcher's comrades, however, were "the least cultivated in literature," a class absent from McGill's circle of friends.¹⁰⁶ Even as he struggled to find the same acceptance among the upper classes as McGill, Fletcher exhibited far more dexterity at coexisting with the lower orders.

Several Maryland colonizationists had opposed sending their colonists to New England for fear of abolitionists influencing their colonists to remain in the United States. While McGill eventually escaped most of their suspicions, although not to the point of providing the resources for his clinical work in Baltimore, Fletcher was not so lucky. By October 1846, less than a year after Fletcher's arrival in Vermont, Phelps was convinced that the Liberian had fallen in with "bad company." The ill-defined term had previously suggested abolitionists, but Phelps's primary complaint about Fletcher social circle centered on expenditures rather than any indication from Fletcher that he no longer desired to return to Liberia. Fletcher's friends apparently encouraged him to spend freely on "ice creams and beers and oysters" (hopefully not in the same sitting). The menu does not suggest refined company and reinforces the notion that Fletcher found a place among the lower classes that McGill neither desired nor found comfortable. Perhaps these were the middle-class abolitionists the Marylanders so feared tempting Fletcher with the perks of an American residence. More likely, Fletcher's friends were

¹⁰⁶ Dempsey R. Fletcher to Moses Sheppard, 24 February, 1846, MSP; Dempsey R. Fletcher to Unknown [Probably James Hall], 25 September, 1845, MSCS.

lower-class whites who were unperturbed in sharing a beer with a former slave. Class-conscious Phelps who had expressed such concern about how society would view an African American dining at his table could only assume that those who would share their table were “bad company.”¹⁰⁷

Just as McGill left Dartmouth early, so too did Fletcher request an earlier examination so as to make the fall colonization society expedition.¹⁰⁸ Ironically, Fletcher graduated as part of the Class of 1847, exactly the same year that Peck graduated from Rush Medical College. To make his ship, Fletcher requested and received a private examination before the end of the semester on October 29, 1846, and he arrived in Liberia a newly minted doctor aboard the *Liberia Packet* on January 23, 1847.¹⁰⁹ Clearly, Fletcher did not find quite the same acceptance among white elites as McGill had enjoyed through his connections. Phelps chaffed at Fletcher’s culinary excursions, seemingly forgetting that McGill, upon whom Phelps lavished praise, had requested similar “spending money” while he was in residence in Windsor. Perhaps Fletcher was not McGill’s equal in intellect and manners, but there is something suggestive in the way the same whites who had favored and patronized McGill’s endeavors so dismissed the “perfectly black” former slave. Nor did Fletcher’s writing exhibit the same elasticity in his racial identity as McGill’s; African Americans never appear as “your coloured population.” Lacking such a circle of upper-class intimates as McGill possessed, it is unsurprising that the lowly-born Fletcher would be

¹⁰⁷ Edward E. Phelps to James Hall, 21 October, 1846, MSCS.

¹⁰⁸ Originally, the colonization societies utilized a fairly standard model of dispatching two expeditions to Liberia each year, in the spring and fall respectively. This system, however, soon fell victim to the chronic financial shortcomings of the societies. The MSCS expeditions that McGill and Fletcher relied upon, for example, became more sporadic after 1838 until the start of the annual trips of the *Liberia Packet* in 1846. See Richard Hall, 433-516.

¹⁰⁹ See Records of the Faculty of Medicine in Dartmouth College, 1845-1862. 29 October, 1846 Faculty meeting minutes. Also 17-18 November, 1846 Faculty Minutes; Richard L. Hall, 280-281; Samuel F. McGill to Ira Easter, 6 May, 1837, MSCS; Richard L. Hall, 489.

comfortable among the least-cultured denizens of his neighborhood and could enjoy beer and ice cream with this class in a manner utterly foreign to McGill.¹¹⁰

And yet, for all of the constraints placed upon Fletcher, he still acquired the same medical degree as McGill. Clearly, the “mulatto,” McGill, received favorable treatment based upon racist assumptions that the “more white” the subject the greater the capacity for culture and civilization. Robert Breckinridge, a leading colonizationist, made this point in his article “Hints on Colonization and Abolition; with reference to the black race,” published in 1833, the year before the establishment of Maryland in Liberia. “This whole class of mulattoes is to be considered and treated as distinct from the blacks. They consider themselves so; the blacks consider them so, and all who have opportunity of comparing the two cannot doubt that the former are the more active, intelligent, and enterprising of the two. They look upwards, not downwards. They are constantly seeking, and acquiring too, the privileges of the whites.”¹¹¹ Regardless of the dubious veracity of Breckinridge’s claims that all mixed-race individuals conceived themselves as “distinct from the blacks,” such racial constructions were common among antebellum whites. Within this framework, then, perhaps it is not as startling that Fletcher found impediments where McGill did not, but rather that he was supported to the degree that he was. The African whiteness of Liberians only roughly made the journey across the Atlantic to the United States. The resounding course of Liberians traveling through the United States was to demand for some rudimentary forms of equality, especially in terms of their mobility. If they could not bring their whiteness along for the trip, they attempted at least to occupy a liminal space in which they bore greater respect from the white Americans they encountered on their journey. The result was not a unified or uniform response as race, class, gender, and personal and

¹¹⁰ See Records of the Faculty of Medicine in Dartmouth College, 1845-1862. 29 October, 1846 Faculty meeting minutes. Also 17-18 November, 1846 Faculty Minutes; Richard L. Hall, 280-281; Samuel F. McGill to Ira Easter, 6 May, 1837, MSCS.

¹¹¹ Robert Breckinridge, “Hints on Colonization and Abolition; with reference to the black race,” *The Biblical Repertory and Theological Review* 5, no. 3 (July 1833): 282-283.

kinship networks all shaped Americans' responses to the products of Liberia's engine of respectability.

A few years after Fletcher's return to Liberia, Sheppard sat down to explain his foray in African American medical patronage to a fellow Quaker residing in a slave state. After detailing the extent of his involvement in McGill's case, Sheppard admitted that Fletcher had not received the same diligence and attention. But Sheppard claimed that it was not racist assumptions or class that deterred him from taking the same interest in Fletcher, but rather that it was simply unnecessary. Having established the path to respectability and a liminal space between whiteness and blackness, Sheppard simply noted that "the way was opened" for Fletcher. Indeed, although on a smaller scale, Fletcher too received the benefits of Sheppard's patronage. Before returning to Liberia, he met with Sheppard in Baltimore. Sheppard apparently hoped to establish the new doctor's transatlantic network and invited Dr. W. W. Handy, a member of the faculty of the Washington Medical College who had attempted to find a place for McGill there, to join him and Fletcher for tea. As he did for McGill, although again with less frequency, Sheppard maintained his correspondence with Fletcher after the Liberian's return to Africa. Writing to Fletcher in the wake of the political debates on the Compromise of 1850 and the growing sectional animosity within the United States, Sheppard attempted to describe the raging battle in the states to the former slave. In a perfect summation of the alchemic possibilities of Liberia, Sheppard grew frustrated with his efforts to describe the contemporaneous state of affairs and concisely concluded his letter with one final note: "I congratulate you on your not being a nigger here."¹¹²

Both McGill and Fletcher attained a singular accomplishment: a medical degree from an American university. In being the first black medical students to receive official degrees, both were intimately aware that they represented the apogee of African American uplift and many

¹¹² Moses Sheppard to Benjamin Franklin Taylor, March-September 1850, MSP; Moses Sheppard to W. W. Handy, 16 November 1846, MSP; Moses Sheppard to Dempsey R. Fletcher, 20 June 1850, MSP.

eyes were fixed in their direction to ascertain their capabilities. Even following in McGill's wake, a solicitous Fletcher had written the MSCS, "you are aware of my anxiety to obtain what is supposed by many to be denied coloured people not from physical but mental disorganization, together with the ebony hue."¹¹³ Most pro-colonization ideologies projected spatial-racialist assumptions that "civilization" and ability were predicated upon geography and location. Liberia was the ultimate civilizing mission, capable of civilizing both African Americans and Africans by their mere presence within its borders. The issue for colonizationists turned on whether those societal dregs of the United States—the free blacks—were inherently inferior or only environmentally so. For those advocates who attributed the problem to the social hierarchy of the United States, free blacks' interaction with white culture would prove to be a blessing for Africa. White colonizationists who performed this intellectual acrobatic maneuver conceived of slavery as providing an "apprenticeship" of sorts in white American society. Even if African-Americans lagged behind whites in civilization, so this logic proceeded, they far excelled native Africans in cultural achievement. Hence, Robert Breckinridge's 1851 address before the Kentucky Colonization Society in which he classified slavery as a "type of training" for African Americans in the cultural practices of Euro-Americans.¹¹⁴ The problem the ACS soon discovered was that the operations of full-fledged colony in Africa necessitated more skill than apprenticeships in slavery could provide. Colonial administration required literate and skilled administrators, school teachers, mechanics, and, as highlighted in this chapter, physicians.¹¹⁵ Utilizing the colonizationist argument that life in Liberia bestowed respectability and "civilization," the settlers sought financial support in returning to the United States to acquire trades and skills

¹¹³ Dempsey R. Fletcher to John H. B. Latrobe, 27 January, 1846, MSCS.

¹¹⁴ Breckinridge, *The Black Race*, 17.

¹¹⁵ The reasons for training settlers as colonial physicians, according to the ACS's official organ, was "that it will ultimately diminish the expenses of the Board; that it will impress the free people of color with the truth, that they are to be encouraged in Liberia in the liberal professions; and that it is the wish of the Board, that they should share *there* [emphasis mine], in all honourable pursuits, and rise to the highest distinction." See "Medical Education of Young Men of Color for Liberia," *African Repository and Colonial Journal*, 8, no. 9 (November 1832): 285-286.

previously beyond their reach. Although the colonizationists publicly proclaimed settler Anthony Wood's 1844 visit to the United States as a trip solely "to induce some of his old friends and associates to join him in Africa," the formerly enslaved blacksmith actually sought "mechanical instruction" in addition to his lecture circuit—apparently in the form of gun smithing, a tool Samuel McGill considered imperative to the survival of a colony surrounded by "savages." Lott Cary envisioned a lecture trip to Virginia combined with a business venture to sell Liberian coffee in Richmond and to purchase a vessel to make the annual runs between Liberia and the United States.¹¹⁶ Regardless of their purposes in traveling through the United States, Liberian settlers sought an elevated "not quite white, but also not black" status within the American racial binary based upon the respectability afforded them by the civilizing mission of Liberia. Major Bolon (occasionally spelled "Bolin"), a Baltimore shipwright, sought such a promotion in a dramatic fashion. Employed by the MSCS to build two schooners in Liberia for the purposes of coastal trade, Bolon requested that upon completing the vessels he be allowed to command one ship on a transatlantic voyage back to Baltimore. Despite his grandiose plan, Bolon recognized that perhaps certain white citizens of Baltimore would not look favorably upon a black captain entering their port. Incredibly, his solution to this logistical problem was to suggest that he take on a white mate. Perhaps he planned for this white sailor to adopt the visage of captain upon their arrival in port, but Bolon never disclosed why he thought that Baltimore's whites who would not allow an all-black crew to enter their port would embrace with open arms a vessel that contained a white subordinate to a black captain. Tellingly, Bolon did not offer any other possibility aside from his captaining the ship, and equally suggestive is the fact that the MSCS leadership left that particular letter unanswered (although interestingly both the *Maryland*

¹¹⁶ "Major Anthony Wood," *Maryland Colonization Journal* New Series 2, no. 11 (May 1844), 162-163; Samuel F. McGill to Moses Sheppard, 13 February 1844, MSP; Moses Sheppard to Samuel F. McGill, 12 November 1844, MSP; Ralph R. Gurley, *Life of Jehudi Ashmun, Late Colonial Agent in Liberia. With an Appendix, Containing Extracts from his Journal and Other Writings; With a Brief Sketch of the Life of the Rev. Lott Cary* (Washington, D.C.: James C. Dunn: 1835), 153; Untitled article, *Connecticut Mirror*, 24 January 1829, p. 3.

Colonization Journal and the *African Repository and Colonial Journal* did reprint the letter). And so too did Americo-Liberians chafe at segregated railroads and resent the classification system. A settler traveling through Richmond displayed both confusion and indignation when a railroad clerk demanded to know his height to fill out the pass that would allow the traveler onto the train.¹¹⁷ All of which was previously noted in Andrew Hall's succinct statement to a colonization official: "I find it is true what you told me in your office that I would not be willing to come back to America to be called a negro." The tantalizing unanswered question in Hall's letter is under what identity he *would* be willing to come back to the United States if "negro" was unacceptable."¹¹⁸ Intriguingly, Hall places the origins of his statement with a colonization official, specifically referencing a particular conversation held in the man's (all of the MSCS leadership were males) office. Was this promise of the ability to shed a "negro" identity standard fare for the MSCS sales pitch to prospective emigrants? And this promise was not predicated on *never* returning to the United States, but never returning "to be called a negro." Of course, the question then is under what racialized terms would Hall be willing to return to the United States? The resounding answer of Liberians traveling through the United States was a demand for some rudimentary forms of equality. If the history of race in America for Africans and their descendants had previously witnessed its evolution from status to inherently degradation, then relocating to Liberia and claiming African whiteness in the form of "civilization" was a means for the settlers to reverse course.

Such peregrinations to the United States, however, were not limited to Americo-Liberians as the American settler colonies in Africa likewise provided a conduit to funnel Africans to the United States. Not only did many Africans find employment on the European and American

¹¹⁷ This anecdote led Moses Sheppard to sarcastically comment to his Liberian correspondent that "next time you come they'll weigh you." Moses Sheppard to Samuel F. McGill, 17 November 1845, MSP.

¹¹⁸ Major Bolin [Bolon] to James Hall, 21 January 1846, MSCS; Andrew Hall to Unknown, 24 January 1847, MSCS

sailing vessels plying the African trade, a few Africans also found themselves exploring American cities. Africans had initially bestowed whiteness on the African-American settlers in Liberia to denote their cultural similarities with other white Europeans and Americans sailing down the African coast, but the Americo-Liberians attempted to imbue whiteness with the privileges it entailed in the United States. Spaces of flow such as the transatlantic corridor funneling settlers, merchants, and sailors from the United States to Africa were not one-way avenues, and just as a Sion Harris or Samuel McGill could return to the United States, so could Africans board those same ships. If the insertion of African Americans into western Africa disrupted the existing racialized organization of that space, the mobility of Africans exploring the United States could equally expose these travelers to the racialized organization of America; an exposure that greatly challenged the racial dominance of the Americo-Liberians.

Not all visiting Africans went necessarily by choice. On February 14, 1834 the MSCS and the three leaders of the nearby Grebo towns formally ratified the deed of sale establishing the future Maryland in Liberia. These three “kings,” Pah Nemah (“King Freeman”), Weah Bolio (“King Will”), and Baphro (“King Joe Holland”) were the principle rulers on Cape Palmas. The agent of the MSCS, James Hall, lacked both the manpower and military strength to repulse a potential assault, and so he negotiated the next best thing: a son from each ruler. Hall confided to the MSCS that “This measure cost me much trouble & coaxing—I wrung them one by one.” Hall informed the fathers that he would dispatch the boys to the United States where they would be taught to read and write, a desirable skill for Africans who increasingly dealt with coastal traders. In private, Hall confided that while he hoped that the children *would* receive an education and “civilization” in the states, his primary concern was to ensure the possession of hostages that would make their fathers think twice before launching an assault against the nascent colony. Although “Freeman’s” son took ill in Monrovia before making the Atlantic crossing, “John

Cavally” and “Charles Grahway”¹¹⁹ found themselves in the original Maryland by April. The MSCS immediately concocted a strategy to circulate the young Africans among various churches in hopes of drumming up support for colonization, and then envisioned a broader trip in which the two youths would stravage across the northeastern United States in the company of two minister brothers, John and the aforementioned Robert Breckinridge, and raise funds for the society in New York, Philadelphia, Boston, and New Haven.¹²⁰ The trip was not a financial success; few northerners contributed and the travelling companions ran into difficulty while in Boston from William Lloyd Garrison, who lambasted the trip from the pages of *The Liberator*. Ironically, despite their ideological differences, both Garrison and the Breckinridges could agree that the “African princes” offered little incentive for evangelicals to open their purses. Garrison only briefly mentioned their presence in his account of the colonizationist mission to Boston. While Garrison privately called the two Grebo youths “those young humbugs,”¹²¹ Robert Breckinridge confided in a letter to Sheppard that the boys, “while of no use to us, are ruining, as fast as may be.” Of course, perhaps the colonizationists expected a bit too much from two youths who had never been to the United States and could not speak English. And putting them under the watchful eyes of the Breckinridge brothers, two conservative Presbyterian clergymen, certainly did not make for a cordial travelling expedition.

¹¹⁹ These last names stemming from the principle towns of which their respective fathers were headmen. They were also respectively known as “John Baphro” (son of Baphro or “King Joe Holland” and “Charles Bolio” (son of Weah Bolio or “King Will”)

¹²⁰ James Hall to John H. B. Latrobe, 23 February 1834, MSCS; Hall, *On Afric’s Shore*, 42-46; Minutes of the Board of Manager of the Maryland State Colonization Society, 26 April, 1834, MSCS;

¹²¹ Garrison referred to the Africans as “humbugs” in a private letter to George W. Benson detailing his altercations with the colonizationist delegation. He does not explicitly state whether he thought the Africans were frauds or whether their manipulation by the MSCS was the fraud, but his word selection has confused at least one editor. In the first volume of his *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, Walter M. Merrill erroneously makes this conclusion about the fund-raising trip: “Less important were the two native African princes, if one may judge by Garrison’s report of their Boston meeting in *The Liberator* for August 2; indeed, they were evidently imposters.” While certain liberties were taken with their monarchial titles, the two youths were definitely Africans. See Walter R. Merrill, *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison: I Will Be Heard!* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971), 1: 384-387, 396-398.

Robert Breckinridge was a slave-owner originally from Kentucky who was attracted to colonization through its dual promise of “civilizing” Africa through Christianity—thus, appealing to his Protestantism—and also finally creating an all-white American republic—thus, appealing to his affinity for whiteness. For myriad of reasons from his racist perspective, Breckinridge found the Africans unsettling and their continued residence in the United States a possible disaster without white patronage. He recommended in his report to Sheppard: “These two african boys ought to be separated, or they will never learn our language; they ought to be put under the sole care of white men; they ought to be taught how to work, as well as how to read, & write; and they ought to be placed if possible, in the country. Excuse this freedom; but if we are not wise, we shall raise up the very worst & most powerful enemies in these boys.”¹²²

In this assuredly unpleasant manner, the two Africans traveled through the United States’ largest urban areas. While these journeys were under the watchful eye of two stern ministers, the two youths had at least one unsupervised evening in an American city that summer. At the completion of the fund-raising travels for the MSCS, the two boys were boarded together in Baltimore at the home of James Ward, an African-American minister, despite Breckinridge’s unsolicited advice. After some sort of undisclosed dispute with the reverend, “Charles” and “John” absconded one evening and spent at least one night on the streets of Baltimore before locating the home of an MSCS board member. Their American sojourn ended abruptly when “Charles” died suddenly of an “effusion upon the lungs.” The funeral for “Charles” was held at the house of the MSCS’s home agent on November 19; a newspaper advertisement in the *Baltimore Patriot & Mercantile Advertiser* invited the entirety of the city’s African-American population to attend. The surviving child was quickly dispatched on the next ship for Africa on December 14, 1834, to notify the deceased boy’s parents that the society had treated them fairly

¹²² Robert Breckinridge to Moses Sheppard, 7 August 1834, MSP.

and spared no expense to ensure their well-being. But they were not the only Africans to make this journey.¹²³

As other Africans repeated this journey, an expanding knowledge of the Atlantic world and the societal structure of the United States also led to African challenges of the colony's racial structures. While the Americo-Liberians would remain generically "white" to most Africans, whiteness remained a malleable cultural construct to those Africans. As the settlers hoped to utilize their colonial powers and tools of whiteness to keep Africans in a subordinate position within the colony, expanding access to that colonial space and "white man's fash" provided Africans with their own tools to challenge settler dominance. Education proved a critical battleground here as the establishment of schools for African children became an ubiquitous demand of African leaders engaging in treaty negotiations with the Liberian leadership. Clearly, Africans believed these opportunities to understand western cultural practices and gain fluency and literacy in English offered these coastal traders advantages in their mercantile negotiations. But the knowledge gained in these schools also proved useful in challenging settler dominance. By 1838, colonist Nathan Lee was writing back to the United States to complain about African children attending the missionary's schools: "it is Sur much as ever we can do to pass without being terribly abused it is the cry of the Natives Moss Specials these young lads calling us Slaves." Lee's solution was to remove African children from the schools in favor of the settlers' children in order to ensure that every Americo-Liberian child received the education denied him or her in the United States. Not only did limited classroom space and qualified teachers leave many settler children without teachers, but education in "white mans fash" elevated these African youths within their own societies. Given the flexibility of their definitions of whiteness, it is unsurprising that Lee encountered difficulties from school children, who once armed with a

¹²³ "Memorandums"; journal, page 58, Moses Sheppard Papers; "Died," *Baltimore Patriot & Mercantile Advertiser*, 19 November 1834, p. 2.

working knowledge of English literacy and American customs, would have considered themselves the equals—if not the betters, given that their history was unspoiled by the shackles of slavery—of their settler neighbors.¹²⁴

The capital of Maryland in Liberia, Harper, was established on the outskirts of Gbenelu, the village of “King Freeman.” Obviously, the early years of colonial establishment in Liberia sparked friction between the settlers and Africans. This strained cross-cultural exchange eventually led “King Freeman” to dispatch his main interpreter, Simleh Ballah,¹²⁵ on a trip to the United States to see for himself the country and determine the veracity of the claims that James Hall had been making. In addition to fact finding in Baltimore, Ballah was also instructed to deliver an address to the Board of Managers of the MSCS to notify them that “Freeman” appreciated the influx of trade goods and capital into Cape Palmas. Ballah left for Baltimore in early 1836 and addressed the Board in June; in return, he received a list of the laws that the Board desired to be enforced in their colony. Armed with these instructions, Ballah returned to Cape Palmas in July aboard the *Financier*, but not before a tour of Baltimore that included an obligatory journey to the top of that city’s Washington Monument. Perhaps most impressively, Ballah found lavish quarters during his time in Baltimore at the residence of Latrobe, who acted as his tour guide.¹²⁶ “Freeman” was reportedly pleased with the results of his own little exploratory expedition. Utilizing a white missionary as his “hand,” he dispatched a letter to the Board upon Ballah’s return thanking them for their kind treatment of his “eyes” while in the United States. He was pleased with the MSCS’s rules for governance and promised to implement them amongst his people. “Freeman” also reported that Ballah talked about the United States,

¹²⁴ Nathan Lee to John H. B. Latrobe, 5 July 1838, MSCS; Samuel F. McGill to John H. B. Latrobe 8 June 1840. MSCS.

¹²⁵ Ballah is an intriguing character. Although occasionally called “Bill Williams” in correspondence, Ballah is one of the rare African figures who was largely called by his name. Since he was often referenced by name, I have elected to follow suit, although he is certainly more of an exception than a rule.

¹²⁶ “Selim Ballah,” *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 13, no. 3 (March 1837):101-103.

and “Freeman” determined that it must be a “fine” country. What seemingly struck “Freeman” most forcibly was the economic power of the United States. Although the letter was written less than a week after Ballah’s return from Baltimore, “Freeman” reported that “Soon Bello go for Merica first time long way bush & tell all man say he must make fine road & bring plenty trade for Cape Palmas.” Here, “Freeman” distorts the difference between the MSCS colony and the United States, as he is actually referring to a settler expedition that Ballah was escorting into the interior of Africa to secure trade routes. For “Freeman,” “Merica” was both in the western hemisphere and the tiny colonial outpost just beyond the pale of his village.¹²⁷

Intriguingly, not only did Ballah return with a greater understanding of the commercial power of the United States after observing the energy of Baltimore’s harbor, but he also carried with him a greater understanding of the degraded position that the African American settlers in Liberia held in the United States. “Freeman” reported that “Me hear say you hab plenty slave in you country,” and he promptly extended an invitation for all slaves in the United States to enjoy freedom on Cape Palmas. It is possible that the white missionary whose hand guided this letter ascribed a pro-colonization spin to “Freeman’s” message without the Grebo leader’s knowledge, but the sentiment is not out of character. Ballah only observed Baltimore and may have had a poor understanding of the vastness of slave south, and “Freeman” may have not understood the sheer numbers of ex-slaves to whom he was extending a blanket invitation to settle. The settlement of Maryland in Liberia proceeded more smoothly relative to its sister colony in Monrovia—in which a helpful naval officer had aided “King Peter’s” decision to sell the land by placing a gun next to his temple—because of “King Freeman’s” desire to transform Cape Palmas into a bustling entrepôt. He hoped that the establishment of Harper would provide the necessary

¹²⁷ The missionary J. Leighton Wilson who transcribed the letter for “Freeman” explained to the Board that the Greboes referred to the United States as “big Merica.” The unspoken corollary to this formula would be that the colony clinging to the shores of Africa must be some sort of small America. J. Leighton Wilson and “King Freeman” [Pah Nemah] to the Board of Managers of the MSCS, 5 September 1836, MSCS.

stimulus to make Cape Palmas a regular stop for American and European traders. Even if he did not know the true number of American slaves or ever expressed a desire for them to come to his home in order to enjoy Freedom, “Freeman’s” notation that Ballah had observed American society and noted the presence of slavery is a remarkable side effect of a nominally diplomatic mission. These sorts of African mobilities fostered African challenges to the settlers’ demands that whiteness bestow similar privileges as it did in the United States, and helped Africans challenge Americo-Liberian power.¹²⁸

Even before Ballah returned from Baltimore, an expanded understanding of European and American customs based upon travel and experience within those countries undergirded African resistance to Liberian colonial authority. Immediately following Ballah’s dispatch to the United States, Hall grew increasingly frustrated with the large numbers of thefts occurring in his colony. Determined to put a stop to the abuses, Hall held a meeting with local African leaders, pronouncing a new policy in which the settlers would indiscriminately confiscate any African property of equal value to that of the stolen goods. Hall’s plan was to force the African community to police its own or be subject to confiscation. The response of “Freeman” and the leaders caught Hall by surprise. “But that what I had proposed was new to them, that they could not learn by their people who had visited the white mans country that any laws of that nature were ever made. That as we were one people & under one flag, I had no right to make one class more than another suffer for all the thefts.” Noting the justice system established by the colonists, the Greboes demanded that a similar system be enacted for themselves. The Greboes considered Maryland in Liberia to be analogous to any “white man’s country”—an argument that also indicates the expansive travels of these seafarers—and that the laws in one must apply to the

¹²⁸ J. Leighton Wilson to John H. B. Latrobe, 25 June 1836, MSCS; Minutes of the Board of Managers of the MSCS, 23 June 1836 and 8 July 1836, MSCS; Pah Newmah [King Freeman] to the Board of Managers of the MSCS, 5 September 1836, MSCS; Richard Hall, 52-53.

other. In lieu of Hall's abusive system of justice, the Greboes conceded that they would police their own, but demanded a place within the colonial judiciary. Thus, Hall gave ground to African legal theory and found himself awkwardly explaining to a Board of Governors in the United States why he had just appointed six Grebo Constables and six Grebo Justices of the Peace to oversee the legal proceedings of Gbenelu. Clearly, an understanding of the "white man's fash" enabled these African negotiators to parry a law that would have led to their victimization and secure a greater role in the colony's judiciary proceedings.¹²⁹

These racialized dynamics of power came to the forefront in 1836 when Ballah returned to Liberia and Hall stepped down as governor and was replaced by John Brown Russwurm. The son of a white, Virginia-born, Jamaican merchant and ambiguously described "Creole" woman, Russwurm was the product of a most remarkable upbringing. Although born in Jamaica in 1799, Russwurm attended boarding school in Canada before relocating to Maine after his father's marriage to the widow Susan Blanchard. For her part, the new Mrs. Russwurm, who already had three children of her own, demanded that John Brown be raised as part of the family. Russwurm graduated from Bowdoin College as one of the first African-American college graduates in the United States and moved to New York where he co-edited *Freedom's Journal*, the first black-operated newspaper in the United States. By the time he replaced Hall as the first African-American appointed governor of a Liberian colony—another accolade to add to a resume already filled with other "firsts"—Russwurm had lived in Monrovia for nearly seven years and had served as colonial secretary and editor of the *Liberia Herald*. Unfortunately, he inherited his predecessor's problem with theft, and Russwurm found himself on the verge of war with the Greboes less than three months after stepping onto the wharf at Harper. In an effort to avoid conflict, Russwurm and the leadership of nearby Gbenelu met, but "King Freeman" refused to

¹²⁹ James Hall to John H. B. Latrobe, 1 May 1836, MSCS. Also printed in Richard Hall, 107-108.

address Russwurm directly, preferring to talk only to an accompanying white missionary unassociated with the colonial administration; needless to say for a man of Russwurm's stature and background, such dismissal was not taken lightly.¹³⁰

The primary problem for the new colonial administrator was the MSCS's store, an agency outpost established to provide settlers with needed goods, which had been raided repeatedly by neighboring Greboes. Colonists had arrested a prominent Grebo leader, a relative of "King Freeman," for these offenses. The spark was applied to this powder keg when another Grebo was subsequently brought before Justice of the Peace Anthony Wood for an unrelated "petty theft." In light of the perceived problem with African thieves, Wood was in no mood for leniency and immediately sentenced the African to be flogged, fined, and incarcerated. Reacting to the imprisonment of a prominent leader and the arbitrary justice doled out to their kinsmen, the Greboes formed an armed mob, sprung the captives from the colony's jail, and closed Maryland Avenue, the main thoroughfare of Maryland in Liberia, which ran through the middle of Gbenelu, effectively cutting the colony and colonists in half by isolating Harper from the outlying agricultural village of Latrobe. The Americo-Liberians found themselves divided in two on either side of "King Freeman's" principal town surrounded by a large force of very angry Greboes.

In this bleak moment, Russwurm arranged for a meeting between himself and "King Freeman" in hopes of reversing the colony's course towards war. Unfortunately, "Freeman" refused to acquiesce to Russwurm's demands to meet and only addressed the white missionary who had come to observe the proceedings. Fuming, Russwurm suspected that he knew the source of his dismissal: the arrival of Ballah from Baltimore. Just a few months after Ballah's return, which provided the Greboes with information about the state of race relations in the United

¹³⁰ 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), 5-25; Richard Hall, 136-150.

States, a man of African descent assumed control of Harper's government at a time of heightened tension between colonists and Africans. Believing that "Freeman" and his fellow Greboes dismissed the settlers and himself "from the knowledge which some of his people had acquired from having visited the U. States of the bondage of the people of color," he "commenced by calling on Simlah Balla & others who had known me in Messuardo, to testify that I came not to reside among them because I was a poor fellow or wanted chop."¹³¹ As he attributed Ballah's report as the source of the Greboes' sudden lack of respect for the American settlers, Russwurm wanted to impress upon his audience, using Ballah's testimony, that he was not an impoverished settler fleeing slavery, but rather the representative of the "great men" in America.¹³²

In his history of Maryland in Liberia, Richard Hall believes Russwurm was mistaken in his belief that his mixed-race ancestry disrupted the negotiations between himself and "Freeman" as Russwurm was white in Africa.¹³³ While Hall is nominally correct in that Africans continued to consider the Americo-Liberian settlers as whites even after they received intelligence of the reasons for these newcomers' arrival in Africa, such a construction constrains and reifies whiteness into its pre-packaged American form. For Hall, Russwurm is white and thus "Freeman" could not conceive of him as a refugee person of color fleeing racial oppression in the United States. But this static whiteness lacks the cultural flexibility of the African definition in which whiteness encompassed the cultural and educational norms of Euro-Americans and western Europeans. Nathan Lee was no less a "white man" in Africa because the African school children taunted him by calling him a "slave." What is also significant about this episode is that it highlights how the Americo-Liberians hoped that their society would function. The Grebo revolt was initiated when an African was brought before a settler Justice of the Peace and

¹³¹ Chop was a colloquialism for food. Russwurm is essentially stating that he was not a poor black hoping to eke out an existence in Liberia.

¹³² John B. Russwurm to John H. B. Latrobe, 12 February, 1837, MSCS.

¹³³ Richard Hall, 149.

summarily sentenced to a corporal and fiscal punishment without a means to challenge the ruling. While such a society remained the dream for most Americo-Liberians, the settlers usually lacked the force to make such a vision, by which their “civilization” became the accepted and dominant norm, into a reality.

Occasionally, these African visits to the States were more reflective of the diverse Atlantic economic system rather than intentional diplomatic endeavors. Thus, six Africans, Kru sailors led by village headman, “Prince Will,” found themselves in Baltimore in the summer of 1829 after their efforts to find employment aboard a Mexican ship had been thwarted by a storm that sank their canoe. Picked up by an American ship, the Africans found themselves on an unintended journey to the United States. Fortunately for them, in the eyes of their American hosts the Kru held a vaunted and practically unparalleled status among African ethnicities. Coastal dwellers, the Kru had a long association with the sea, and ships plying the Atlantic had counted Kru among their ranks for generations before the arrival of the first ACS ship. The entire Liberian coast lacks a natural harbor and thus every trade good, immigrant, and visitor had to be rowed ashore by a Kru stevedore. Considering the mortality rate in Liberia, perhaps it is more apt to call the Kru the “Charons” of Liberia. In his history of Liberia, Clegg notes that because of their long association with European and American merchants, their close proximity to the American colonies in Liberia, and the fact that the entire colonial population and its wares passed through their hands, the Kru functioned both as literal and cultural “middlemen” for the colony. Many visitors found their Kru boatmen, usually only wearing a cloth about their waist and ritually tattooed and scarred, unsettling, but it is a testament to the hybridity of these “middlemen” that they carried credentialed letters of introduction for themselves signed by other European and American captains attesting to a particular individual’s talent in unloading and loading a vessel. The colonizationists favored the useful Kru, not only for their nautical skill, but

also because the Kru were often the most fervent allies of the American settlements as the establishment of the Liberian colonies ensured steady work for these talented sailors. Thus, when the shipwrecked Kru arrived in Baltimore, the ACS immediately arranged a meeting with “Prince Will” and his brother “Walker” in Washington, D.C. before their return to Africa. While the ACS crowed that such a visit was designed to provide them with greater knowledge of the African coast and its navigation, and there were few people more qualified to perform this task than the Kru boatmen, certainly “Prince Will” and “Walker” also gleaned useful information on America from these travels.¹³⁴

What then to make of these migrating Liberians in the Atlantic context? The Americo-Liberian experience highlights how whiteness rarely functioned as an analytical panacea for all race relations as it became entangled in national (“American”) and cultural (“civilization”) identities. Of course, only at the fringe of American society, this tiny colonial outpost in western Africa, was it even possible for these settlers to *claim* these identities that were routinely denied them in the United States. And such a transformative migration should remind scholars that while the social relations that create race are contextually confined to certain times and places, mobility inherently disrupts this process by catapulting individuals and peoples into new locations. The concerns of Americo-Liberians in how they would be received in the United States and the conditions upon which they would return underscore their unwillingness to return to America “to be called a negro.” Transformed into exotic—but civilized—foreigners, the Liberian settlers were uninterested in returning to their previously segregated and degraded positions in American society. Being able to “toe point” with whites in Africa, they sought an ameliorated liminal position between white and black in America. Having founded their argument for the removal of America’s free black population upon spatial assumptions that their

¹³⁴Clegg, 77; “Kroomen,” *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 5 (July 1829): 156-157.

“civilization” would increase abroad, the prominent white leadership of the colonization societies found themselves awkwardly supporting these Liberian visits to American soil to accomplish tasks often beyond the reach of African Americans. Liberians travelled with white society officials, resided in their homes, and counted them among friends who would “treat them as white” within intimate circles. At the same historical moment that James McCune Smith failed to secure a position within an American medical school, Samuel F. McGill achieved that aim through the patronage of colonizationists. Yet, McGill’s relative success at attaining the privileges of whiteness, when juxtaposed against Dempsey Fletcher’s later journey, likewise underscores that while Liberians believed that their journey across the Atlantic was transformative and desired a condition in the United States reflective of that transformation, these alchemic mobilities were in turn shaped by time, place, gender, class, and social standing. While the Americo-Liberians’ African whiteness was born from movement, it could only roughly survive the return to America with money and status in its pockets.

Liberian settlers returning to the United States posed problems for pro-slavery advocates. Even as they nominally acquiesced to racist white demands to concede North America territory to Anglo-Americans, the Americo-Liberians’ presence and acceptance by white colonization officials who argued for spatially—specific racial categorizations undermined the ideological foundation of American slavery—that people of African descent were inherently inferior to those of European descent. Little wonder that Sion Harris’s lecture circuit, Samuel McGill’s medical education, or Alexander Hance’s efforts to liberate his family sparked grumbling from whites. As wards of the colonization societies, the Liberians usually had prominent backers. East Tennesseans displaced their angst at Harris by targeting their African American population and enforcing oft-neglected laws; Baltimore’s medical students did not physically remove McGill from their lectures but rather petitioned the Maryland colonizationists.

Of course, even as mobile Americo-Liberians disrupted the United States, mobile African Liberians disrupted the racial order in Liberia. The same ships that moved settlers could also move Africans, and several found themselves investigating the large United States that they considered analogous to their smaller version. In this manner, Africans procured information that challenged the American settlers' claims to authoritative power and subjugation over them. This broad base of knowledge gleaned from travels through the Atlantic world provided legal theories to challenge settler hegemony and also raised questions for settlers respecting the nature of their power in Liberia. Ultimately, these questions hinged on the multifaceted and evolving interpretations of "white man's fash" and where in the Atlantic it could travel.

Sion Harris understood this. Writing to the colonization society in early 1848, several years after his initial return to his native Tennessee, Harris was in the midst of arranging a second tour of the United States with colonization officials. He was hopeful for the possibilities of securing more emigrants for the newly-minted republic of Liberia, which had declared independence the year before. "I am able to do much more than I did when I was there before," he informed his ACS correspondent, "I am more experienced about Africa more convinced that this is the collard man's home." Harris was certain that he could turn aside all of the criticisms thrown against colonization and Liberia. But it was not grand expansionist visions for an independent nation-state that steeled his conviction that he could triumph in any debate with colonization's opponents; instead, it was the performance of "white man's fash," the actions that had led to the creation of his African whiteness and those actions that would have the greatest resonance in America, which would serve as his rhetorical trump card. "Sinate & the Representatives met yesterday we have 2 houses now & the oath was ministered to the President & a salute of 24 guns[.] if But slow we are climing[.] how is it possible that a collard man can say he is free in America when these things that I see & enjoy and pertake he cannot talk about[.]

that is the reason they are so easy whipped in conversation.” A show of political élan with a splash of martial adornment: the things in which Harris could observe and participate defined him as “free.”¹³⁵ Americo-Liberians and their allies mobilized Liberia’s space, violence, and labor to project their exotic and foreign, yet civilized, identity and their possession of “white man’s fash” to create what Harris experienced. The following chapters explain how they accomplished these goals.

¹³⁵ John B. Russwurm to Samuel Wilkeson, 4 January 1840, ACS; Sion [Zion] Harris to William McLain, 5 January 1848, ACS.

For all of his faults, no one ever accused Henry Clay of thinking small. The architect of the “American System” had been intimately connected with the ACS from its inception, attending its inaugural meeting in Washington, D.C. on December 21, 1816. He would serve as its president, a position that primarily functioned as the face of the organization while the various secretaries and managers performed as the escapement, from 1836 until 1849. The great nationalist legislator was attracted to the heuristic possibilities of the organization and its repeated efforts to highlight the great ill of the developing antebellum society that if left unchecked would grow into an American chimera capable of ripping the fledgling nation apart: free people of color. Since its inception, the ACS waged an ongoing propaganda war against both pro-slavery advocates who saw the society as a mechanism of abolitionism and abolitionists who interpreted the society as a great engine designed to preserve slavery. For the most part, the nineteenth-century observers and subsequent scholars of colonization have focused on the relative anti-slavery chops of the movement.

Yet, freedom, specifically black freedom, and not slavery was always the core issue of the organization, a nominally unsurprising revelation given the official name of the group was actually *The Society for the Colonization of the Free People of Color of America* [emphasis mine]. A slaveholder himself, Clay was not uninterested in slavery, but he saw in Liberia a panacea for the more troubling problem of degraded free blackness. Liberia offered a place of transformation and the start of a surrogate American empire in Africa.

Liberia would provide the means and space to transform that blackness, “burdened with all of the degrading, brutalized, guilt-ridden meanings,” into respectability, civilization, and—

although unstated by Clay—African whiteness. Speaking to colonization societies in the late 1820s, only a few years after the establishment of Monrovia, Clay painted an image of a new Africa for his audience. From the Liberian launching pad, a “confederation of Republican States...like our own” spouting from the seed of colonists “reared in the bosom of this Republic.” The impetus for this African United States would be the example of the colonists themselves who would “open forests, build towns, erect temples of public worship, and practically exhibit to the native sons of Africa the beautiful moral spectacle and the superior advantages of our religious and social systems.” So alike would Africa be to the United States, that the Niger River would easily be mistaken for the Mississippi, at least in terms of its river traffic crowded with steamships. Tiny Liberia, serving as the model to which all Africans would naturally gravitate, would single-handedly create a “civilized and regenerated Africa, its cultivated fields, its coasts studded with numerous cities, adorned with towering temples, dedicated to the pure religion of his redeeming Son, its far-famed Niger, and other great rivers, lined with flourishing villages.” With such opportunities in Africa, Clay wondered aloud for his listeners how African Americans could *not* want to emigrate. And Clay pinpointed one of Liberia’s mechanisms for attaining respectability: the subjugation and control of blacks (for it seems that nothing so quickly delineates whiteness than the effort to control blackness). “Here they [African Americans] are in the lowest state of social gradation—aliens—political—moral—social aliens, strangers, though natives. There, they would be in the midst of their friends and their kindred, at home, though born in a foreign land, and elevated above the natives of the country, as much as they are degraded here below the other classes of the community.” Although the neighboring Africans had revolted against the Liberian incursion into their territory initially, once these wayward simpletons had “become better acquainted” with the settlers and acquired a desire for their arts and culture, the colony would acquire a “salutary influence” over its African

dependents. Within the United States, free people of color constituted the most “vicious” class, but “transplanted in a foreign land, they will carry back to their native soil the rich fruits of religion, civilization, law and liberty.”¹³⁶

Some scholars have pointed to this transformation as an absurdity within colonization thought. The supposed paradox rests in the assumption that the lowest of the United States could immediately become the exalted of Africa. The colonizationists’ argument, however, rested upon a socio-spatial argument regarding the relative “civilization” of Africans. Robert Breckinridge and others considered slavery a great training course in the “civilization” of whites. Once African Americans “returned” to heathen Africa, they would be recognized for their elevated “civilization.” Within this new framework, the degraded American black would influence, control, and elevate the degraded African black, and in turn acquire his or her own respectability. This circular argument was spotlighted in the sixth issue of the ACS’s official organ, *The African Repository and Colonial Journal*, penned by the wonderfully-named Peachy Grattan. Commenting upon a speech by Samuel Bacon, an early advocate of colonization, Grattan notes that “by civilizing Africa, the degradation of Africans in other countries may be forever and completely removed; and by elevating the character of these exiles, the civilization of their native continent may be easily effected.”¹³⁷ The uplift of Africans required the “return” of her descendants to control them; the uplift of Africa’s descendants was predicated upon their “return” to Africa. Thus, Liberia is transformed into a civilizing space in which the mere habitation therein is transformative.

The logic of this argument is not so much tortured as it is reflective of a transitive moment in American racial thinking. Historian Bruce Dain has argued that it is impossible to

¹³⁶ Henry Clay, “Speech of the Hon. Henry Clay, before the American colonization society, in the Hall of the House of Representatives, January 20, 1827,” (Washington, D.C.: The Columbian, 1827).

¹³⁷ Robert J. Breckinridge, *The Black Race*, 17; Peachy Grattan, “The Rev. Leonard Bacon’s Plea for Africa, and an Address in Behalf of the Colonization Society, by Peachy Grattan, Esq.,” *The African Repository and Colonial Journal* 1, no. 6 (August 1825): 174.

draw a neat interpretive line between the eighteenth-century environmentalist and nineteenth-century biological understandings of race. Biology was informed by earlier environmental theories. For Dain, colonizationists projected a “rhetoric of conservative environmentalism.” But what truly fascinates Dain about colonizationists is their arguments for the benefits of black relocation for both Africans and people of African descent. Engaged in a rhetorical battle with their black and white critics and needing to argue for expansive benefits to humanity to justify the plan, “sincere colonizationists [whoever they might be] became the first major American figures explicitly and unequivocally to see blacks as in effect fully equal and undegenerate, in Africa and as Negroes—that is, as distinct, different, and separate, but still equal, and connected to the West and Christianity.”¹³⁸ This was the civilizing—or “whitening”—mission of Liberia: to transform its immigrant inhabitants from degraded American blacks into something different, something more, even as they, in turn, transformed the colony’s African inhabitants. And the Liberian settlers most certainly remained “connected to the West.”

At its heart, colonization was an argument about space. The settlers and Africans’ presence in Liberia—an exercise in commanding black bodies for the settlers and a towering example of “civilized” life for the Africans—transformed degraded American blackness into the respectably exotic: African whiteness. Within the logic of this transformative space, Clay and other colonizationists’ claims for a racial panacea were convoluted, but not paradoxical. More problematic for the ideologies of whites and the lived experiences of African-American settlers was the perplexing problem of “home” and what constituted “foreign” within this framework. Clay’s wording on African Americans’ “home” is confusing and required an impressive set of mental gymnastics on the part of his listeners: “Here they are in the lowest state of social gradation—aliens—political—moral—social aliens, strangers, though natives. There, they would

¹³⁸ Bruce Dain, *A Hideous Monster of the Mind: American Race Theory in the Early Republic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 81-83, 104-105.

be in the midst of their friends and their kindred, at home, though born in a foreign land.”

African Americans are both of and not of America; they are among African “friends” and “home” on that continent despite their foreign birth.

This question of “home” plagued the African Diaspora as it struggled to locate the spatial place of blackness within the Atlantic world. It somehow belonged everywhere but Africa and also solely to Africa. Echoing contemporaneous black critiques of the ACS conflation of Africans and African Americans, several historians have traced the “Americanness” of black society and combed its organization to unearth its creole origins. For Americo-Liberians who journeyed either to a “home” or “adopted home” depending upon the author, the relationship between their African lives and the land of their birth was never truly severed. The result was a Janus-faced vision of “home” that straddled both sides of the Atlantic in complicated and complex networks. David Kazanjian attempts to break free of this duality by claiming that “references to Africa as a homeland by emancipated black settlers in colonial and early national Liberia are exceedingly rare.”¹³⁹ Instead, Kazanjian claims that when Liberian settlers, or at least formerly enslaved ones as he does not directly address the interpretations of freeborn settlers, imagined their homeland their thoughts turned westward instead of to Africa in juxtaposition to white colonizationist rhetoric like Clay’s that reinforced this eastward migration of American blacks as a “return to home.” Although a measurement of language like “exceedingly rare” inherently rests upon the interpretational judgment of the reader, declaring that discussions of an “African homeland” in ex-slave epistles are largely absent is untrue.¹⁴⁰ Such ruminations range

¹³⁹ Kazanjian explicitly denotes this as a foreign thought to former slaves, but it is unclear whether he is distinguishing their interpretations of a “homeland” from those of the freeborn settlers as he never expands on the thinking of those settlers who never experienced slavery firsthand. It is also possible that Kazanjian is inelegantly lumping the entire settler population into an ex-slave categorization.

¹⁴⁰ Even within the article in which Kazanjian makes this claim, the reader will encounter ex-slaves referencing an African home. He quotes Henrietta Fuller, formerly a slave from Louisiana owned by John McDonogh, writing to her former master that “Liberia is the home for our race & as good a country as they can find, Industry &

from Abraham Blackford's estimation that "Africa is the very country for the colored man" to Caesar Chew's command to "tell the colored people that they Better com to Africa for this is the plase ous colord people." And what should we make of Paul Sansay's message that "if any of my friends enquire about me tell them I am under my own vine and fig tree none dare molest nor make me afraid?" By quoting the Old Testament prophetic Book of Micah, in which God promises the Israelites deliverances from Babylonian captivity and God's temple is rebuilt as the focal point for the gathering of nations, Sansay ties a Liberian homeland that he possesses and owns—a place under his "own vine and fig tree"—to the missionary ideal of the colony that attracted so many evangelicals to the colonization fold. A rare Catholic parishioner in Liberia, Sansay's reference to a text that combined a promise of deliverance from Babylonian slavery with a vision of a future period of peace established by a gathering of distant nations at a place of Christian religiosity seems less than coincidental. If Liberia was not a homeland, Sansay seems to suggest that this was a place of spiritual deliverance; a place in which to establish a sedentary existence, "to sit" under the vine and fig trees.¹⁴¹

This argument that Liberian freedom is "paradoxically and recursively bound to slavery" is a significant insight, but in asserting that American slavery remained entwined and a part of the lived experience of Liberian freedom, it is not necessary to entirely dismiss an African home for a continued metaphysical presence in American chains.¹⁴² What about freeborn Liberian settlers who knew racial oppression without the accompanying shackles? What about those

perseverance is only required to make a man happy & wealthy in this our Adopted country." See Kazanjian, "The Speculative Freedom of Colonial Liberia," 875.

¹⁴¹ Kazanjian, "The Speculative Freedom of Colonial Liberia," 882; Abraham Blackford to Mary C. Blackford, 14 February 1846, in Wiley, *Slaves No More*, 24-25; Sezer Chue [Caesar Chew] to Unknwon, 2 September 1835, MSCS; Paul Sansay to Unknown, 16 January 1839, MSCS; The Book of Micah, Chapter 4, 1-13, New International version.

¹⁴² Ben Schiller utilizes similar evidence not to dismiss an African homeland, but rather point that many ex-slaves in Liberia rejected an overarching Diasporic identity in favor for a shared memory of life in the United States. See Schiller, *US Slavery's Diaspora: Black Atlantic History at the Crossroads of 'Race', Enslavement, and Colonisation*, 199-212.

former slaves who could join Blackford, Chew, and Sansay and imagine “home” on both sides of the Atlantic? There is complexity here as both white and black colonizationists struggled to define “home.” And while Kazanjian correctly notes that white colonizationists were more prone to view the relocation to Africa as a racialized “return” to a homeland, the convoluted structure of Henry Clay’s address—born here, though foreign through degradation, foreign there, though elevated—reminds us that this question of a “return” also plagued white colonizationists. Liberia offered a means of elevation and respectability, often interpreted through classed and gendered assumptions of a masculine freedom built upon control of movement, space, and people within that space. Within colonizationist rhetoric, the settlers are never women, despite their obvious presence and dramatic significance for a sickly colony with a low birth rate. The Connecticut Colonization Society was typical when it stated, “every man of colour who removes from the United States to our African Colonies, removes from a land of degradation, from a land where his soul is crushed and withered by the constant sense of inferiority, to a land where he may enjoy all the attributes of manhood and all the happiness of freedom.”¹⁴³

For white colonizationists and black settlers the journey across the Atlantic and existence within the space would be transformative. This necessitated a bit of geographic imagination on the part of those who remained in the United States, and, like Clay, they pontificated on a vision of a continent they never visited. In depicting Africa and Liberia’s ripples in a visual manner—a steamboat lumbering down a Niger River bristling with villages and towns—these armchair geographers relied greatly on the reports, images, and maps produced by those who had visited the colony. For their part, the Americo-Liberian settlers mobilized geography in their efforts to establish sovereignty over the territory previously possessed by their erstwhile African neighbors. The history of cartography is interwoven with the desire to categorize and demarcate

¹⁴³ “An Address to the Public, By the Managers of the Colonization Society of Connecticut,” *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 4, No. 4 (June 1828): 121.

an “us” and “them” and subsequently either assign each group their concomitant metaphorical territory grafted onto a physical landscape or deny the territorial claims of “them.”

Numerous scholars have argued that the turn of the nineteenth century marked an epistemological transition in Europe and the west whereby the non-western “other” transitioned from being a “savage” (noble or otherwise) to becoming “primitive.”¹⁴⁴ The turn of phrase is significant. Savagery denotes a horizontal spatial relationship; a side-by-side evaluation of two things determined by a value judgment. Most importantly, savagery lacks a temporal element. In its spatial construction, savagery assumes an external factor acting upon the “savage,” whether that be economy, environment, government, religion, or ideology. The “savage” can become tamed by changing his or her thinking and adopting “civilized” patterns of life; lines can be crossed within this framework. “Primitive,” however, replaces the spatial hierarchy with a construction based upon time. Within this model of thinking, Europe has progressed beyond its neighbors in attaining civilization. Although given the same amount of time as other societies, Europeans attained a higher level of civilization, suggesting something exceptional in their character and degraded in non-Europeans. Instead of retaining the capacity to pass from savage to civilized, primitiveness suggests an inability to progress from a sort of defect. “Primitives” not only lack Europe’s “civilization,” they are literally from another time.¹⁴⁵

Intriguingly, the term “primitive” is almost completely absent from the colonization rhetoric presented in the *African Repository and Colonial Journal* and the letters pouring in from Liberia. By far, the preferred nomenclature was “savage” or “heathen.” Whether it was to announce their determination to support their isolated colony “in a distant and almost unknown

¹⁴⁴ See, for example, Hayden White, “The Forms of Wildness: Archaeology of an Idea,” in *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978): 150-182; T. Carlos Jacques, “From Savages and Barbarians to Primitives: Africa, Social Typologies, and History in Eighteenth-Century French Philosophy,” *History and Theory* 36, no. 2 (May 1997): 190-215. My thinking here is heavily indebted to Karen Piper, *Cartographic Fictions: Maps, Race, and Identity* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002).

¹⁴⁵ Jacques, 204-214.

country and amongst a savage people” or to infer that the abundance of Africa—“the soil is generally very fertile; the tropical fruits spring up spontaneously, and the abundance of wild game”—was responsible for its inhabitants’ lack of advancement, “savage” was the preferred and most often used descriptor. And “savage” was also the most common adjective utilized by the Americo-Liberian settlers to describe their erstwhile neighbors.¹⁴⁶ Needless to say, the settlers’ letters were filled with less-than-glowing opinions of the natives: “The people among whom we live are very ignorant and superstitious,” “the natives about us are a lazy & idol people,” “they are the most Savage, & blud thirsty people I ever saw.” Even John Brown Russwurm, a towering figure in African American scholarship who one recent biographer has characterized as a “Pan-Africanist Pioneer,” peppered his official reports with reminders to his employers that “we are in a land of savages.”¹⁴⁷ When settler Samuel F. McGill returned to the United States and travelled through New England, he drew upon his experience in Africa when describing his nights without a bed as reducing himself “to sleep every night as a savage.” Occasionally, the colonizationists contradicted themselves and argued that the Africans were not savage, but “want but long and uninterrupted intercourse with enlightened nations, and the introduction of the Christian religion, to place them on a level with their more wealthy northern fellow-creatures.”¹⁴⁸ Within this understanding of the colonizing mission, the continued use of “savage” makes sense. Colonizationists held African society up to a European prism and found it wanting, but assumed that their African-American mediators provided the ideal go-betweens to

¹⁴⁶ “Report to the Pennsylvania Legislature,” *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 16, no. 9 (May 1840): 137
“Colonization Society,” *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 1, no. 10 (December 1825): 302.

¹⁴⁷ Washington McDonogh to John McDonogh, 28 December 1845, in Wiley, 138; George R. McGill to Maryland State Colonization Society, 12 July 1832, MSCS; Matilda Lomax to Sally Cocke, 4 July 1848, in Wiley, 67; John B. Russwurm to John H. B. Latrobe, 26 June 1843, MSCS. Technically, Lomax’s disparaging remarks were not directed towards the natives of Liberia, but rather a group of recently arrived “Congoes,” or illegally enslaved Africans whose slave ship had been intercepted by a United States naval vessel. Whenever American ships liberated these slave voyages, the Africans were “returned” to Liberia regardless of their actual origins (which were very rarely near Liberia). The Americo-Liberians called these refugees “Congoes.”

¹⁴⁸ Samuel F. McGill to John H. B. Latrobe, 11 August 1837, MSCS; Samuel F. McGill to John H. B. Latrobe, 28 April 1838, MSCS.

coerce Africans across the line of civilization. In this way, their thinking reflected a spatial, horizontal interpretation of “civilization”; extended contact with and life under the command of the Euro-American/European surrogates, African-American settlers, would elevate and civilize the African savage. The only temporal element would be the time required to cohabit the same space for Africans to adopt settler culture; for them to start sleeping in beds. This was the civilizing mission of the colony and a foundational ideology of colonization thought: the mere existence of living within colonial Liberia would simultaneously elevate settlers and Africans. Life in Liberia would be transformative.

Of course, William Polk found Liberia’s capital of Monrovia a most disappointing settlement run by an “ill conducted government & a parcel of distasteful people.” The colony had existed for less than a decade when Polk and his fellow African American emigrants aboard the *Lafayette* arrived in February of 1833. Expecting a small colonial outpost, these settlers were less disappointed in the still rough-hewn looks of the small village than the quality of the reception they received. The *Lafayette* expedition was the inaugural effort of the MSCS. With the financial backing of the state government, the *Lafayette* left Baltimore carrying nearly 150 African Americans, primarily from Maryland’s Eastern Shore, for Africa. The ACS government in Monrovia simply could not handle such a large number of new settlers and dumped the Marylanders in the young settlement of Caldwell, where they suffered from inadequate housing, poor rations, and a high mortality rate. Adding insult to injury, many of the new arrivals complained that rather than aiding their fellow immigrants, the established settlers swindled the naïve newcomers out of their rations. It was not an auspicious start for the MSCS.¹⁴⁹

But Polk persevered. In 1834, he relocated to the new colony established at Cape Palmas by the MSCS and acquired a reputation for honesty among his fellow settlers and white

¹⁴⁹ William Polk to William McKenney, 5 February 1836, MSCS; Edward Pembleton, James Rice, Isiah Shockley, et. al., 3 February 1833, MSCS; Richard Hall, 16-27.

colonization officials. During meetings of the citizens of Africa's Maryland, Polk was often called upon to serve as secretary and he was made superintendent of the MSCS's store in its African capital of Harper. By 1835, Polk requested that a white acquaintance in the United States "tell the colored people that I would not exchange homes with them on no condition unless they could make me as the white man." The letter fell into the hands of Moses Sheppard, the prominent Quaker businessman in Baltimore and former manager of the MSCS. Noting Polk's condition that he would never return to the United States unless he enjoyed the privileges that whiteness afforded, Sheppard confided that "I have expected you to be one of the respectable settlers and I have no doubt of my expectation being fully accomplished, you will then be a white man, for freedom and independence make a white man, not colour." What Polk made of this conflation between freedom and whiteness went unrecorded, but letters continually poured into Maryland from Polk requesting his old friends and relatives to join him in Africa. Polk was no longer interested in being a "beast of burden" for the whites.¹⁵⁰

Unfortunately for Polk, few of his old Eastern Shore acquaintances followed his advice and immigrated to Liberia. By August 1836, Polk confided that while he was sorry for the condition of America's people of color, he had almost decided to cease writing them altogether as he could think of no other remedy than emigration. "If they come they come or if they stay they stay," he shrugged. Conversely, the post script of his letter betrayed any semblance of nonchalance acceptance. Writing to African Americans in Maryland via a white MSCS official, Polk declared, "if they will come out...and stay as long as I have been and then want to go back they ought to be sent out to the Southern states as Slaves." Perhaps this condemnation to the Slave South reflected a rhetorical flourish, but Polk obviously dismissed those African Americans who were unwilling to brave the same obstacles he encountered in order to "be out of

¹⁵⁰ William Polk to Captain Hooper, 29 November, 1835, MSCS; Moses Sheppard to William Polk, 14 March 1836, MSP.

the white peoples hands altogether.” Of course, Polk was not alone in these emotions; shock, betrayal, frustration, and confusion characterized many Liberian’s letters as they pondered why most African Americans were unwilling to vacate their homes and subjugation for liberty in foreign Africa.¹⁵¹

Indeed, for many settlers, the entire point of existence within Liberia was to acquire the respectability that residence there and foreignness from the United States bestowed upon the inhabitants. These individuals rested their hopes on the alchemic formula of Liberia, originating from the spatial assumptions of white colonizationists, the transformative effects of foreignness and control over African blackness, and also the racial categorizations of the Africans themselves, in order to secure an elevated status within the Atlantic world. In his letters to the United States, Polk clearly rejected any notion that he conceived of himself as a “white” man, and instead pleaded for his fellow people of color to remove themselves from the clutches of white power. And it would have been ludicrous for Polk, a former slave, to make assertions of whiteness to an American audience. In Africa, however, Polk could make claims to both whiteness *and* an American national identity utterly unavailable to him in the United States. Of course, for those African Americans, many of whom were former slaves like Polk relocating to Africa, initially white was neither a flexible categorization nor was it was one that had previously incorporated them. As vessels repeatedly arrived off the coast of Liberia carrying new settlers to a deathtrap of a colony, most newcomers, in a trend that would continue until the establishment of the independent Republic of Liberia in 1847, identified themselves not as Liberians, but rather as “Americans.” Like most settler societies, colonial Liberia was an effort to recreate its mother country, the United States, in Africa. Settlements were erected utilizing American-patterned street grids along with the names, farming techniques, churches, civic

¹⁵¹ William Polk to William McKenney, 30 August 1836, MSCS.

institutions, clothing, and culture of the United States. Often, these early teleportation efforts bordered on the absurd. William Thornton, architect of the United States Capitol, presented a plan in 1821 for the proposed town of Mesurado, the future Monrovia, that curiously combined the realities of a besieged military post with the sweeping avenues and public squares of L'Enfant's vision for Washington, D.C. Thornton foresaw a future Liberian capital with a similar grid pattern of streets, including a grand avenue similar to the Mall but renamed "Emancipation Street," and intersecting diagonal avenues all convening in an enormous circle, much as L'Enfant drafted for the American capital. But whereas L'Enfant's squares and circles were designed as public spaces, the focal point of Liberia's capital was occupied by a twelve-foot tall tower that would function as an arsenal, complete with circular defensive wall and battery; the great space between the fort and streets centered less on the idea of public gatherings and more to provide a clear field of vision for the fort's defenders to fire upon any potential attacker. Thornton very literally envisioned the capital of Monrovia as another District of Columbia, but with the ever-present potential of being overrun by aggressors. Apparently, there was some concession that this combination of enlightened city planning and bloodshed were strange bedfellows and a note scribbled at the bottom of the plan underscored that "only one half the town on this Plan, reserving the other part of the site for a more mature plan." Thornton's effort to drop the District of Columbia into western Africa, however, is indicative of this broader dream to reconstruct the United States in Africa. These chimerical visions have led historian James Sidbury to conclude that Liberia ironically provided a place where black Americans could be more fully American.¹⁵² But situated near the equator without a nominal national identity beyond the structures of a private benevolent society and with a large polyglot population of Africans, Liberia never fully functioned as a new United States as the settlers—and their white

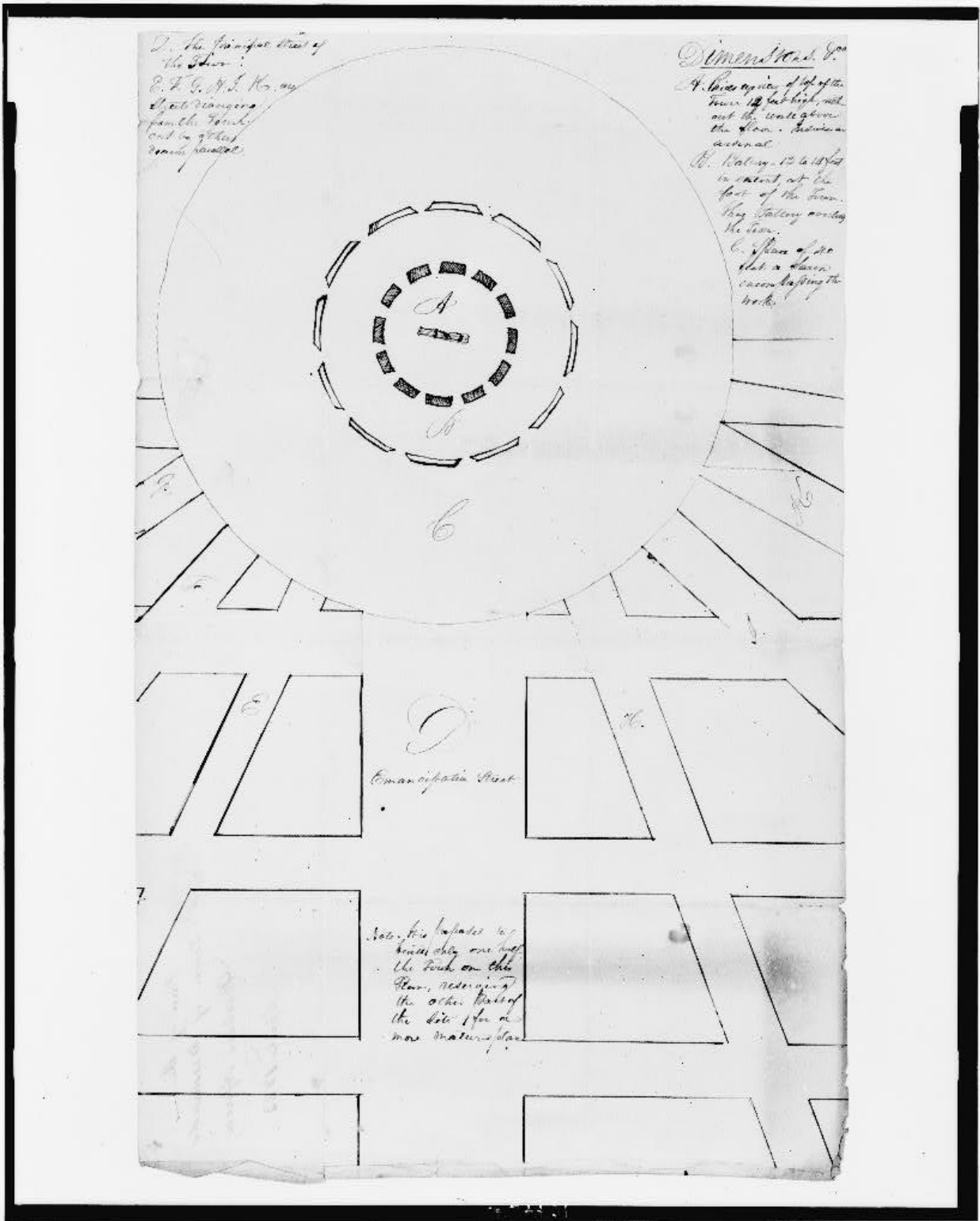
¹⁵² William Thornton, "Town plan for Mesuardo, Liberia," Library of Congress, www.loc.gov; Sidbury, 200-201.

benefactors—hoped. The transportation was incomplete, inadequate, and challenged by the locals who did not care for the expansionist trajectory of the Liberian colonies.

Of course, another primary goal of mapping colonial Liberia's territory was simply bringing it into existence. Within the borders of a place named "Liberia" were over a dozen ethnic groups, each with their tongues from four different language groups; none conceived of themselves as "Liberians." Even the name "Liberia" was an effort to overturn existing European naming practices and bring the colonial entity into being and assert control over this new creation. As European exploration moved down the western coast of Africa, European naming practices followed a pattern of exploitive commodification; literally the cartographic representations and names of African sites inextricably linked the map to economy.¹⁵³ One only needs to cycle through the list of locations—the slave coast, the gold coast, the ivory coast—to ascertain what commodities could be found in those locations. While European names had focused on exploitive commodification, the colonizationists had to appeal to a higher moral authority to secure volunteers and money for their colony (despite their own plans for extracting money from the territory). Hence, "Liberia" and its newly named geographic features—Monrovia, Clay-Ashland, Millsburg, Caldwell—shifted away from economic exploitation of resources to focus instead on boosterism and highlight the colony's connections to emancipation, freedom—for both whites and blacks—and the United States. That is not to suggest that economic exploitation was not part of the plans for colonial Liberia, but rather than exporting the raw materials of Africa Liberia would develop much as a tiny United States and export finished goods and agricultural produce on those steamships that Henry Clay envisioned.

Settlers joined with Clay in this economic vision. James C. Minor reported home in 1833

¹⁵³ This argument is presented in relation to Amerigo Vespucci in Franco Farinelli, "Why America is Called America," in *Envisioning Landscapes, Making Worlds: Geography and the Humanities*, edited by Stephen Daniels, et. a. (New York: Routledge, 2011), 3-10.



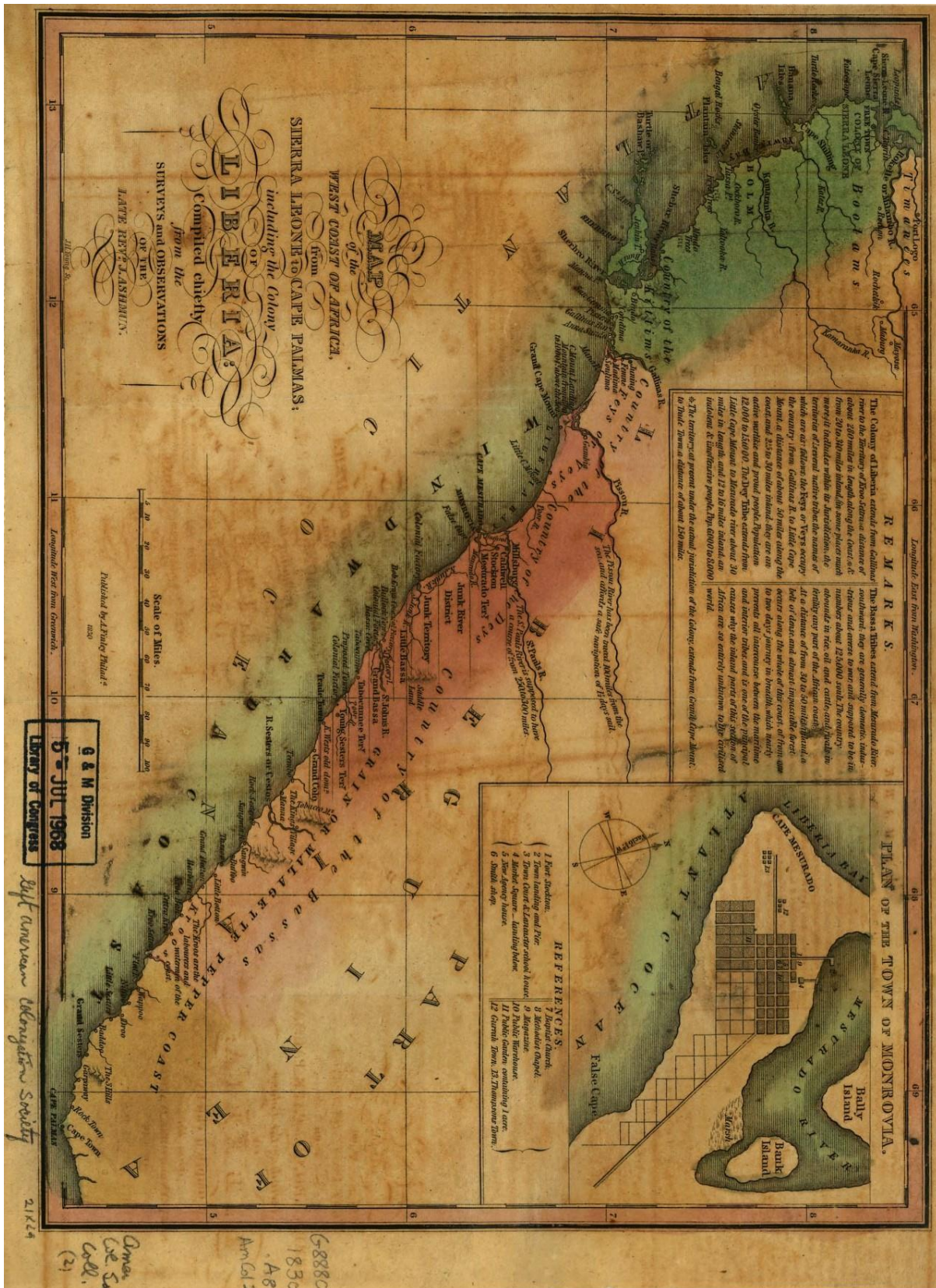
(William Thornton's Plan for Mesurado, 1821. Courtesy of the Library of Congress)

that “our infant commerce is stretching out her hands and inviting the weary wanderers of the Ocean to call. If your readers will peruse the Liberia Herald they will see for themselves the number of vessels that arrive and depart in the course of a month.” In addition to asserting Liberian sovereignty over African territories, the remarks included on an 1830 map of the colony, drawn from the measurements of governor Ashmun, likewise assert the capacities of the colony for this modernized economic exploitation, crowing that the “country abounds in rice, [palm] oil, and cattle, and rivals in fertility any part of the African coast.”¹⁵⁴ This was to be the geographic focus, farmsteads supplying goods to well-managed and thoughtfully laid-out communities through the network of rivers before being passed onto ships from the Americo-Liberian settlements along the coast. Unsurprisingly, these were the geographic features—rivers and settlements—prioritized by the ACS map.

And so the settlers and white colonizationists mustered an imaginative geography to bring their colony into existence and ascribe themselves control over their territory and the land, attempting to wrangle what they could not control on the ground into something they could manage on paper. Even as the Americo-Liberians and colonizationists depicted the American settlements as linear, orderly, neatly delineated by the lines on the map and carved out of the wilderness in the images they prepared, they likewise reinforced images of their African neighbors as disorderly savages. As sovereignty extended to possession of the land by “us,” so too did private possession of the land rely upon a Lockean notion of investing labor into the soil through agriculture.¹⁵⁵ Despite the poor quality of the coastal soils, overwhelming lack of North American draft animals with which the settlers were accustomed to farming, and repeated belittlement of the Liberian settlers by anti-colonization forces as mere trading factories, the

¹⁵⁴ Jehudi Ashmun, “Map of the West Coast of Africa from Sierra Leone to Cape Palmas, including the Colony of Liberia” (Philadelphia: A. Finley, 1830); James C. Minor to John Minor, 11 February 1833, in Wiley, 17.

¹⁵⁵ This relationship between territorial sovereignty of the state and personal possession by an individual is highlighted in Karen Piper, *Cartographic Fictions: Maps, race, and Identity* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 6-14.



(Map of the West Coast of Africa from Sierra Leone to Cape Palmas, including the Colony of Liberia, 1830. Courtesy of the Library of Congress)

colonizationists presented an obsessive focus on the agricultural merits of the colonies both to prove the land's capacity for long-term American settlement and to lay further claim to the land through civilizing improvements over the savage African agricultural techniques. Comically, as the day-to-day management of the colonization societies passed from plantation owners to ministers, missionaries, and businessmen, the men who championed Liberian agriculture knew less and less about farming. This could lead to some sheepish back peddling from these champions of the soil, such as merchant Moses Sheppard's addendum to his African correspondent: "I mentioned Prunes to you I am informed that they do not grow within the Tropics."¹⁵⁶ But even as letters written to Liberia advocated growing plum trees near the equator, letters returned across the ocean westward from Africa, written by both white and black inhabitants of Liberia, warning the American-based colonizationists that all was not well with Liberian soil.

Jehudi Ashmun included in an official report that was republished in the *African Repository and Colonial Journal* that the "richest lands of the cape, either degenerate into rocky, precipitous ledges, on the one hand, or are subject to inundations of salt or stagnant water, on the other." Ashmun's posthumous biography, compiled by Ralph Gurley, captured the frustrated agent's angst regarding agriculture when it quoted the governor's decision that agriculture in colonial Liberia "was either *that the wretched modes of tillage followed by the natives must be adopted*; or that *nothing valuable in the way of farming, could be accomplished till the country should be generally and extensively cleared of its woods, and the plough with the whole system of an improved agriculture be introduced.*"¹⁵⁷ Such was the wonderful logical legwork necessary to maintain American superiority beyond North America; although better suited to the local

¹⁵⁶ Moses Sheppard to Samuel F. McGill, 18 May 1843, MSP.

¹⁵⁷ "From Liberia," *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 14, no. 9 (September 1838): 271; Gurley, *Life of Jehudi Ashmun*, Appendix 132.

conditions and the only means to prevent starvation, the African system was “wretched” and would have to be replaced by the plough and the American “system of improved agriculture” once the entire colony was somehow miraculously cleared of jungle.

African American settlers at Cape Palmas, facing criticism of their farming practices, explained to their governor in 1844 the deceptive nature of the Atlantic soil: “its true the 1st or 2nd crop of Potatoes will produce tolerable good and after that we might as well plant them on the sane beach without manure.” New arrival Moses Jackson sent word back to Kentucky in 1846 that conditions in the colony did not appear favorable as the settlers did not engage in the cultivation of the soil. Jackson claimed that Liberians considered a 15-acre farm a large establishment and concurred with that assessment in light of the complete lack of draft animals in the colony. “Now sir,” Jackson informed his correspondent, “you may judge how a man feels who has been raised to the use of these animals in Cultivating the ground and you also judge how things are progressing here.” In light of the absence of draft animals, Jackson could not recommend that his friend Absalom Woodfork join him in Liberia until Jackson could observe more of the colony.¹⁵⁸ The ACS received these reports from the colony and prophesized to the American public in 1838 “that agriculture will open a certain and unfailing source of comfort and competency” based upon “astonishingly and almost incredibly rapid improvements” in farms along the St. Paul’s River;¹⁵⁹ in 1839, “the colonists are now prepared, with the aid of suitable beasts of burden, to commence the business of cultivating the soil”; of course, 1840 was the year that “the progress of agriculture in the Colonies, has been greater the last, than in any former

¹⁵⁸ “Latest from Liberia,” *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 2, no. 3 (May 1826): 76-77; Report of the Citizens of Maryland in Liberia, 24 October 1844, MSCS; Moses Jackson to Elliott West, 22 March 1846, Shelby Family Papers, University of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky.

¹⁵⁹ In the defense of the ACS, they were quoting from the internal propaganda machine of the colony, the *Liberia Herald*, published in Monrovia.

year.”¹⁶⁰ Such is the trend for the entire run of the *African Repository and Colonial Journal*. Each new year heralded by an old refrain that agriculture was improving and it would be better than the last. At the same moment in which settler agricultural improvements—modest, fictitious, or otherwise—were trumpeted, African agricultural practices were dismissed as “in a rude and infant state.” Not only did the child-like Africans fail to fully utilize the soil, thus justifying its occupation by American settlers, but their gendered division of labor was completely backwards; “the labours of their wretched agriculture devolve, almost entirely, on women.”¹⁶¹ A muscular and masculine colonizing effort necessitated an equally masculine agricultural foundation.

Questions of control over space, land, and agriculture were at the heart of the ACS’s enterprise from the very beginning. At a March 1, 1820 meeting onboard the *Elizabeth*, the maiden voyage of the ACS charged with establishing the colony of Liberia, the male emigrants congregated at the bow of the ship to hear the terms of land distribution read to them by the ACS agent, Samuel Bacon. A disagreement broke out among the settlers regarding the role of the white ACS agents in the future governance of the colony. Several settlers viewed the white agents of the ACS solely as aides in establishing the colony and surveying land for farming without establishing leadership over the settlers. While Bacon disapproved of this mutiny, he was even more critical of the expedition’s female contingent, whom he labeled as “full of evil speaking nothing satisfies them.” Landing at Sherbro Island, southeast of Freetown off the coast of modern-day Sierra Leone, the settlers had hoped to connect with John Kizzell, a Sherbro Island merchant and former partner of Paul Cuffe, and negotiate with local leaders for the

¹⁶⁰ “Mississippi Colonization Society,” *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 15, no. 5 (March 1839): 88; “Annual Report of the American Colonization Society,” *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 16, no. 4 (February 1840): 66.

¹⁶¹ Thomas Winterbottom, “Agriculture of Africa” *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 1, no. 4 (June 1825): 101; “Description of Bornou from Clapperton’s Narrative,” *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 2, no. 8 (October 1826): 259.

purchase of territory. Unfortunately, the negotiation, or “palaver” in the West African terminology, dragged on without success, and by April another cabal of the expedition’s men had lodged a formal complaint with Bacon upon the grounds that their “friends in the United States are looking up to use for the permanent ground work of this establishment,” and that Bacon threatened that “ground work” by not securing the land necessary for agricultural production.¹⁶² The promise of land in the form of two allotments—one in the town and one in the country for farming—was a primary recruiting tool and presumed economic foundation for the colony. This land acquisition was structured on the two-tier “lease and release” conveyance, in which the land was initially “leased” to the settler upon arriving in the colony by drawing previously surveyed and numbered lots and then “released” to the owner after surpassing a base requirement of “improvement,” usually building dwellings and cultivating the soil within a certain time frame.

The laws put in place in 1824, for example, stipulated that settlers should draw a town lot and a tellingly-named “plantation.” Just as gendered assumptions of masculine agriculture propelled the colonizing mission, the capacity of a colonist to secure a sizable homestead focused upon his family life. “Plantation” lots were nominally five acres, but a married man could draw an additional two acres in the name of his wife, and an additional acre for each child who would live within the nuclear family’s homestead; the ACS capped the allotment at a ten acre maximum per family. Although manhood undergirded the civilizing mission by literally clearing away savagery from the land, the nominal proscriptive “unit” of settlement was the family. The wording of the law makes this clear: “Every married man, besides a town lot, shall have for himself five acres of plantation land, two for his wife, and one for each child, if they are

¹⁶² Samuel Bacon, “Extracts from the Journal of the Reverend Samuel Bacon, Agent to the Colonization Society,” ACS.

with him: *Provided*, That no single family shall have, in all, more than ten acres.”¹⁶³ The man draws the lot, the children are “with him,” but the addition of two acres for the wife added considerable economic weight to the household. In order to exchange the certificate of their land for actual title deeds, within two years of receiving the land the settlers had to cultivate two acres, the town lot had to be cleared and enclosed “with a good fence,” and a “legal house” must be built for the family’s habitation. For those wondering what constituted a “legal house,” the ACS notified its settlers that African junk just would not do. A “substantial” or legal house must be of sufficient extent to accommodate the family, be made of stone, brick, or “of frame or logs, weatherboarded, and covered with tile or brick.” Of course, someone would have to build all of those steam engines for the river traffic envisioned by Clay and load those ships with goods, and the ACS granted an exemption from maintaining a “plantation” for all approved “mechanics” and tradesmen who lived in the town. The complicated, multi-tiered system generated significant paperwork, both in the need for the many forms to sufficiently document the process and also the letters of complaint from the settlers who found the process confusing and unfair in the expected

¹⁶³For the 1824 law code, see ‘Digest of the Laws Now in Force in the Colony of Liberia, August 9th 1824,’ in *Constitution, Government and Digest of the Laws of Liberia, as Confirmed and Established by the Board of Managers of the American Colonization Society, May 23, 1825* (Washington, D.C.: Way & Gideon, 1825), 11. Many settlers chafed at these restrictions on land and also this meager definition of a “plantation.” Unsurprisingly, when an African-American settler, Anthony D. Williams, finally seized the reins of colonial governance in 1836 upon the return of ACS agent Ezekiel Skinner to the United States, he expanded the allotments of farmland to 20 acres. Equally unsurprising, his reasoning for expanding the grants of farmland was to facilitate grazing and creating an indigenous population of livestock for farming. Of course, if the ACS ran out of available land in the colony with these larger allotments, “the expense and difficulty of obtaining more will not be found very great.” In other words, there was always more African land to seize and control. There was significant disconnect between the rules put forward by the colonization societies in the United States, the actions of their colonial administrators, and the expectations of the settlers. In 1836, Tolbert Major, settling in newly repopulated Bassa Cove after its destruction the previous year, reported that he expected to draw 40 acres, under the assumption that two acres for every ten allotted had to be “improved.” In other words, Major assumed he would be granted 40 acres after he had cultivated eight. He apparently secured land holdings of a decent size. In 1843 his house burned down with significant loss to himself. “Hade it not have bine for my plantations,” he reported to his former master and possible biological father, “I do no know what I would have don.” Anthony D. Williams, “Intelligence from Liberia: From the Lieutenant Governor, Anthony D. Williams” *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 14, no. 3 (March 1838): 67; Tolbert Major to Joseph Major, September 1836, and Tolbert and Austin Major to Benjamin Major, 7 August 1843, both letters can be found in Major Collection, McLean County Museum of History, Bloomington, Illinois, www.mchistory.org.

time frames to improve the terrain given the reality on the ground; both were sources of consternation for the colonial governor.¹⁶⁴

If our aforementioned settler Polk had decided to take a stroll from Maryland in Liberia's capital of Harper to his five-acre farm lot in 1839, he would have at least found the names he encountered comforting reminders of home. Setting out upon the main thoroughfare, Baltimore Street, Polk would have navigated the familiar grid pattern of many American cities. If he had looked to his right southward down Brice Street, one of four streets that bisected the peninsula, he might have caught a glimpse of the Atlantic Ocean and the small island the settlers named Auburn Island just off the peninsula that functioned as an African burying ground. Crossing over Brice, Etting, and Murray Streets dotted with frame houses similar to those found in the United States, Polk would have passed Hoffman Square on his right. The public Square housed the handsome two-story Agency House, home to the colonial government; while on his left, directly across the road from the Agency House, was a small gun emplacement pointing down the cape into the interior. Farther on his left, Polk could see the settlement's economic lifeline, its wharf and agency store, hugging the shore. Across the water, the Africans planted cassava on the

¹⁶⁴ Jehudi Ashmun to R. R. Gurley, 21 June 1826, in *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 2, no. 9 (November 1826): 263-264. Lewis Crook's 1835 land woes, for example, are indicative of the confusion and problems accompanying colonial Liberia's land distribution system. A member of the inaugural *Elizabeth* expedition, Crook had unfortunately failed in farming near Monrovia and by 1835 he tended a farm in Millsburg, several miles up the St. Paul's River from Monrovia. Unfortunately, the distance between Monrovia and Millsburg apparently precluded word of reaching him that the governor planned to sell his town lot to pay off a debt of \$33. The struggling Crook was dismayed at this loss of property, especially as he thought the Board of Managers of the ACS had ordered that no settler land be sold in the colony for the purposes of repaying debts. Only after the sale, did someone inform him that the ban on seizing land for debt restitution applied to land drawn after 1833, but Crook remained unsure of the details. He wrote to the board hoping to reclaim his lost town lot and to also chastise them for protecting land received after 1833. As a veteran of the 1822 war against the nascent colony, Crook was severely wounded manning a cannon that guarded the eastern approach of the settlement. In addition to the poor communication between Monrovia and Millsburg, a system of land distribution that intentionally separated each settler's allotment into two distinct and distant parcels, and failure to adequately convey the laws of the colony to its settlers, Crook was also displeased at the Board's treatment of the old settlers: "What so they think of the old Settlers of the Colony? Would there have been any colony established if we had not shed our blood? Can ever any people suffer we have suffered? Am I not a cripple having been shot in the year 1822...and do I now deserve a pension? Either in lands as so many others did. Look at the United States soldiers!" Needless to say, Crook provided a litany of reasons for the Board to return his town lot. Unfortunately, it was all for naught. Crook died of "decline" in 1835, the same year that he dispatched his plea to the Board. See Gurley, *Life of Jehudi Ashmun*, 130-146, Appendix 131-132; Lewis Crook to Ralph R. Gurley, 3 March 1835, ACS.

peninsula formed between the Atlantic Ocean and Hoffman River. Here, as the road left Harper, it changed its name to “Maryland Avenue” and provided the principal highway of the colony. With the barrel of the fort’s cannons directed squarely at his back, Polk would have walked east and quickly discovered the reason for the cannon’s direction. Maryland Avenue cut like a knife through the mass of native buildings forming the Grebo town of Gbenlu, whose leader was “King Freeman.” Emerging on the other side of Gbenlu, Polk would have to pass through a smaller satellite village the settlers called “Dury’s Town” before entering the more familiar-sounding agricultural village of Latrobe and the frame houses of the school supported by the Ladies’ Society for Education in Africa sitting atop a coastal hill, the Presbyterian and Methodist mission stations, the receptacles for newly arrived immigrants, and the agency farm, home to both the house of the official in charge of the society’s experimental farm and the colony’s jail. Farther to the north, along the Hoffman River, he may have just made out the rectangular-shaped Episcopal school contrasting sharply against the cluster of cylindrical structures of the Grebo hamlet named for its leader, “Joe Wah’s town.” If he had looked south, toward the ocean, wedged between the Ladies’ school and Fair Hope Presbyterian mission, Polk would have noted a fourth small Grebo settlement nestled along the beach.

Here, it would have made sense for Polk to turn left and walk northwards along Thomson Street. Continuing east along Maryland Avenue would bring him near the colony’s school for settler children and on to the hilltop mission station of the Episcopal Church, Mount Vaughn, and the more-imposing heights of Mount Tubman, which served as a fortified agency station and main defensive outpost for the settlers who farmed the eastern-most lots of the settlement. But in turning left onto Thomson Street and keeping the agency farm on his left, Polk may have exchanged words with his neighbor on the right-hand side of the street, Anthony Wood, whose strange dialect betrayed his enslaved birth in the West Indies and subsequent illegal importation

into Maryland. Proceeding along Thomson Street until it dead ended into Duncan Street, at which point he would have taken a right and returned his eastward journey, Polk would have encountered more familiar dialects from Annapolis and the Eastern Shore.¹⁶⁵ Ultimately, Polk's eyes and ears would have found the entire walk of less than a mile filled with recognizable names, dialects, frame and stone houses, and a settlement established like any other on the American frontier. The only disruptions to this idyllic American landscape would have been the clustered African huts of Gbenlu and its satellites filled with Grebo-speakers attired in the local dress that most American settlers considered nudity, demanded by the climate and weather associated with living only a few degrees north of the Equator.

At least, that is what would have happened according to the map. In 1838, colonial secretary James Revey, a member of the inaugural expedition of the ACS aboard the *Elizabeth* in 1820, sketched a territorial map of Maryland in Liberia and a more localized view of the capital Harper and its agricultural satellite village, Latrobe. The map conveys an American settlement built upon precision and scientific measurements. The importance of ships, both as economic engines and bearers of new settlers, is demonstrated by the recorded depths of the various points near Cape Palmas along with dangerous submerged rocks. A pair of anchors symbolically sketched northwest of the cape, where the bottom was reportedly "sandy," mark the prime anchorages for visiting ships and the most direct route to the settlement's wharf along the protected northern coast. Each section of Maryland Avenue as it turns from its east-west axis to a precise northeast-southwest direction is measured in rods. The settler farm lots, nearly all perfect rectangles, are numbered and labeled with their appropriate owners and acreage. In combining two maps, one of the settlement and another of the entire territory claimed by Maryland in Liberia, Revey visually demarcates certain spaces as civilized western-style private possessions

¹⁶⁵ Revey Map, MSCS; Richard Hall, 327-330.

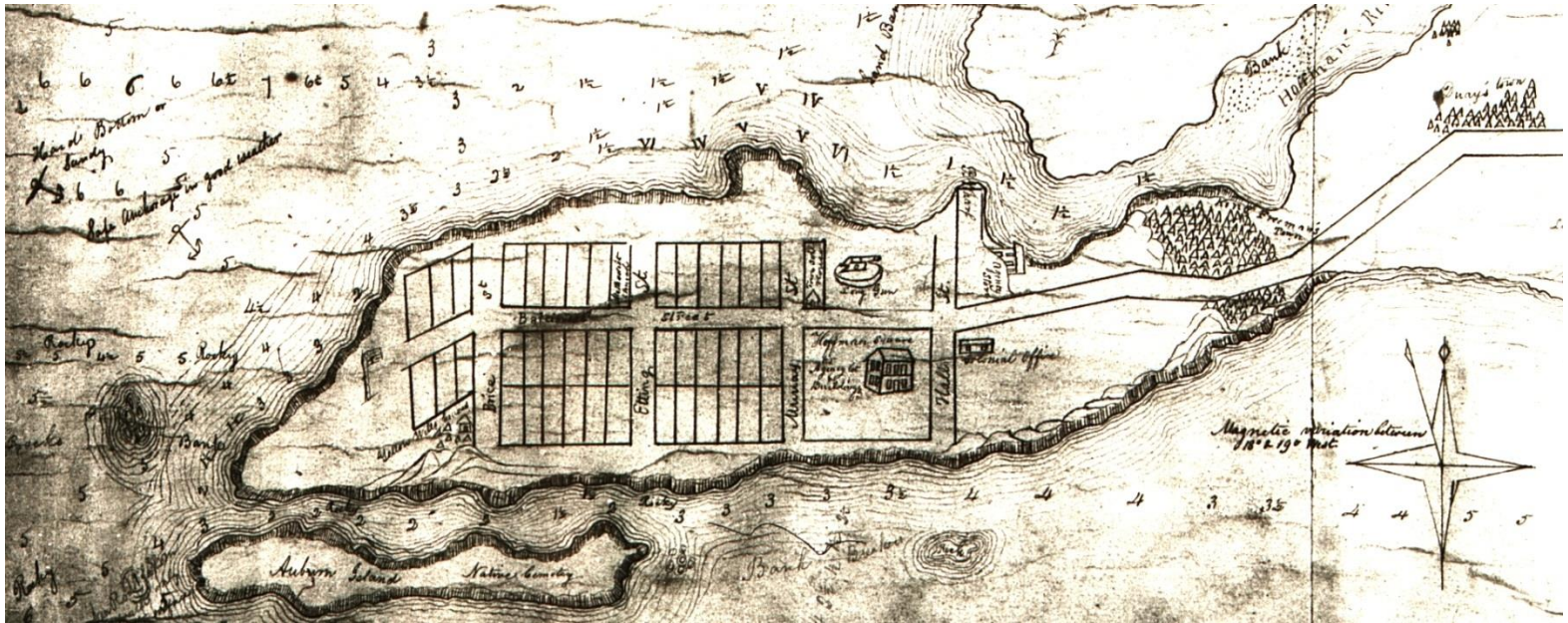
while simultaneously claiming the land outside of the neat rectangles as potential areas for settler expansion. The only impediment to settler expansion as projected by the map is Mother Nature.

The blank spaces of the page besieging the settler's rectangular plots are labeled with explanations of the end of the settlement's agricultural progress; "low land" and "sandy" to the south of the farms nearer the ocean, "salt mangrove marshes" to the north and west along the Hoffman River, "swamps" near Mount Vaughn. In contrast to American expansionism, the four African settlements are seemingly fed a by a single field planted with cassava, which Revey dismisses as a potential source of agricultural expansion due to sandy soil. There is no other notation of native spatial possessions aside from the "native cemetery" on tiny Auburn Island and the navigational hazard of the "Devil Rocks or the Natives sacred rocks."¹⁶⁶

The entire mapmaking project was intimately connected to economic exploitation and exerting control. The governor of Maryland in Liberia submitted the map along with a report noting that the impetus for creating the map with its anchors and accurate soundings of the harbor, along with dangerous submerged rocks, was the near loss of a German trade vessel off the coast. In a subsequent letter, Revey underscored that the map was designed to convey the most important elements of the colony to its American board: the spread of Christianity—"civilization"—via missionary stations and the economic potential of the colony—farms, waterways, and anchorages for ships. Without those ships purchasing the commodities funneled through Harper's wharf, the colony could not long survive. The governor also hoped that the

¹⁶⁶ After the installation of John Brown Russwurm as the first African-American governor of a Liberian colony, the settlers renamed Auburn Island in honor of Russwurm. After war with the neighboring Africans in 1857 led to the annexation of the colony into the larger Republic of Liberia as Maryland County, the cessation of Grebo burials on Russwurm Island was the final constituent element of the peace treaty signed between the Greboes and Americo-Liberians. See "Treaty of Peace between the Government of Maryland in Liberia and the Grebo People," Peace between the Government of Maryland in Liberia and the Grebo People," *Maryland Colonization Journal* 8 (new series), no. 24 (May 1857): 374-375.

leaders of the MSCS would “be able to form a pretty good idea of your territory in Africa”;
economy and territorial control visually portrayed in the same map. ¹⁶⁷

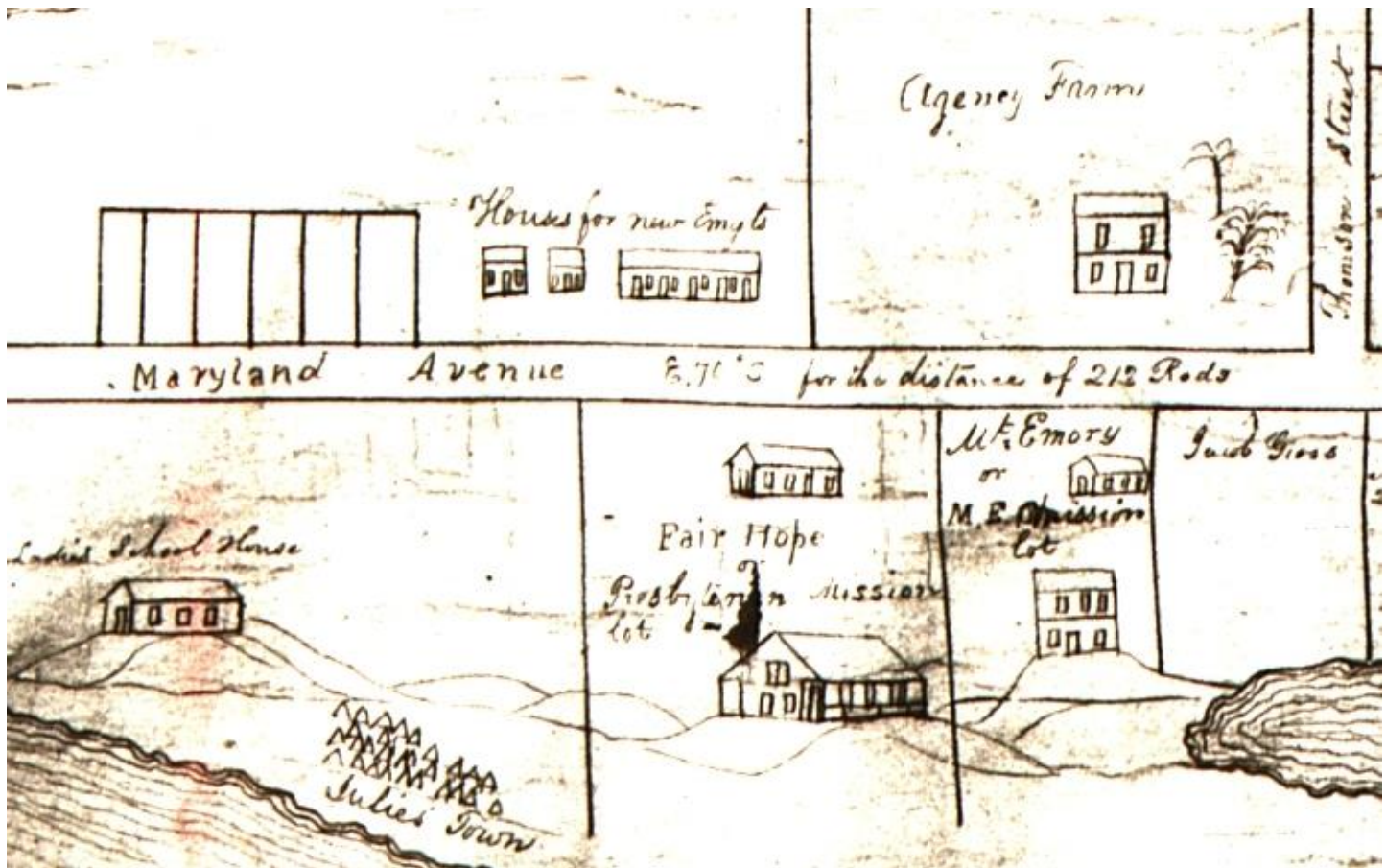


(The settlement of Harper according to Revey's Map, 1838. Courtesy of the Maryland Historical Society.)

The most striking images, however, are the architectural drawings that symbolize the most significant buildings of the colonies: the agency structures, missionary stations, schools, and military fortifications. Presumably, Revey attempted to accurately depict the aesthetics of each structure within the confines of his artistic ability. The frame two-story agency house sits directly across from the squat, rectangular, single-story agency office. While many of the schools are depicted in similar manner as the agency office, the mission stations vary from the Presbyterian Fair Hope station, complete with triangular roof and what appears to be a porch, to the neighboring boxy two-story Methodist outpost named Mount Emory. The various outbuildings of Mount Tubman, sitting dutifully on their hilltop, are encircled by a wooden

¹⁶⁷ John B. Russwurm to John H. B. Latrobe, 8 December 1839, MSCS; John Revey to John H. B. Latrobe, 20 January 1840, MSCS.

palisade to provide protection to settlers defending the outpost. There is symmetry and order to this cartographic world—“civilization” in the form of American architecture—and the necessary



(The structures along Maryland Avenue include the receptacles for newly arrived emigrants to recover from the African fever, the agency farm, the “Ladies School House,” an academy established by the Ladies’ Society for Education in Africa, and the Presbyterian and Methodist mission stations. A small Grebo satellite village of Gbenelu is visible along the beach near the Ladies School. Courtesy of the Maryland Historical Society.)

Lacking any representation of humans—savage or otherwise—Revey’s map bestows savagery in the form of chaos onto the physical arrangement of the four African settlements that resided within or near Harper. In contrast to the careful street axes and farm lots of the American town, African settlements are written off as a jumbled and disorganized conglomeration of triangles. Although the shape vaguely echoes African domestic construction, round buildings

with conical thatched roofs, there is little effort to reconstruct the same architectural flourishes depicted in the American frame buildings. A larger Grebo town simply has more triangles than a smaller one. In keeping with the settler tradition of employing only Anglicized names, each settlement was rechristened as the possession of that particular village's leader. Thus, the main African settlement within Harper, Gbenelu (which literally translates as "big town"), was renamed "King Freeman's Town" according to Revey and his fellow settlers. This mutated Grebo political organization—a hierarchical system based upon age and gender in which the nominal village leader, the *wodoba*, was literally the first among equals of the oldest and most revered men in the village—into a European monarchial system, complete with "kings," more familiar and recognizable to the settlers.¹⁶⁸ More recognizable, but for the American settlers steeped in a republican tradition denied them in the United States, not necessarily up to their standards of civilized governance. In comparing the sister projects of Sierra Leone and Liberia, one settler pointed to governance as a decisive influence upon the raw material of the colonization movement. "I am led to think col^d. Americans the best from observing that the coloured subjects of the British crown taken in general, will not compare with the Coloured American in those qualities which make up the sum total of civilization." The problem, according to this decidedly biased American observer, was that the largest population of blacks most likely to be colonized from the British empire were the former slaves of the West Indies, and they were "but imperfectly civilized" being "uncultivated, unchristianized field hands."¹⁶⁹ Foisting an Anglicized name and monarchy upon neighboring Africans certainly did not equate to respect.

In employing these symbolic images on his map, Revey was not alone but rather part of evolutionary cartography. Published nearly two decades before Revey's map, the 1830 map of

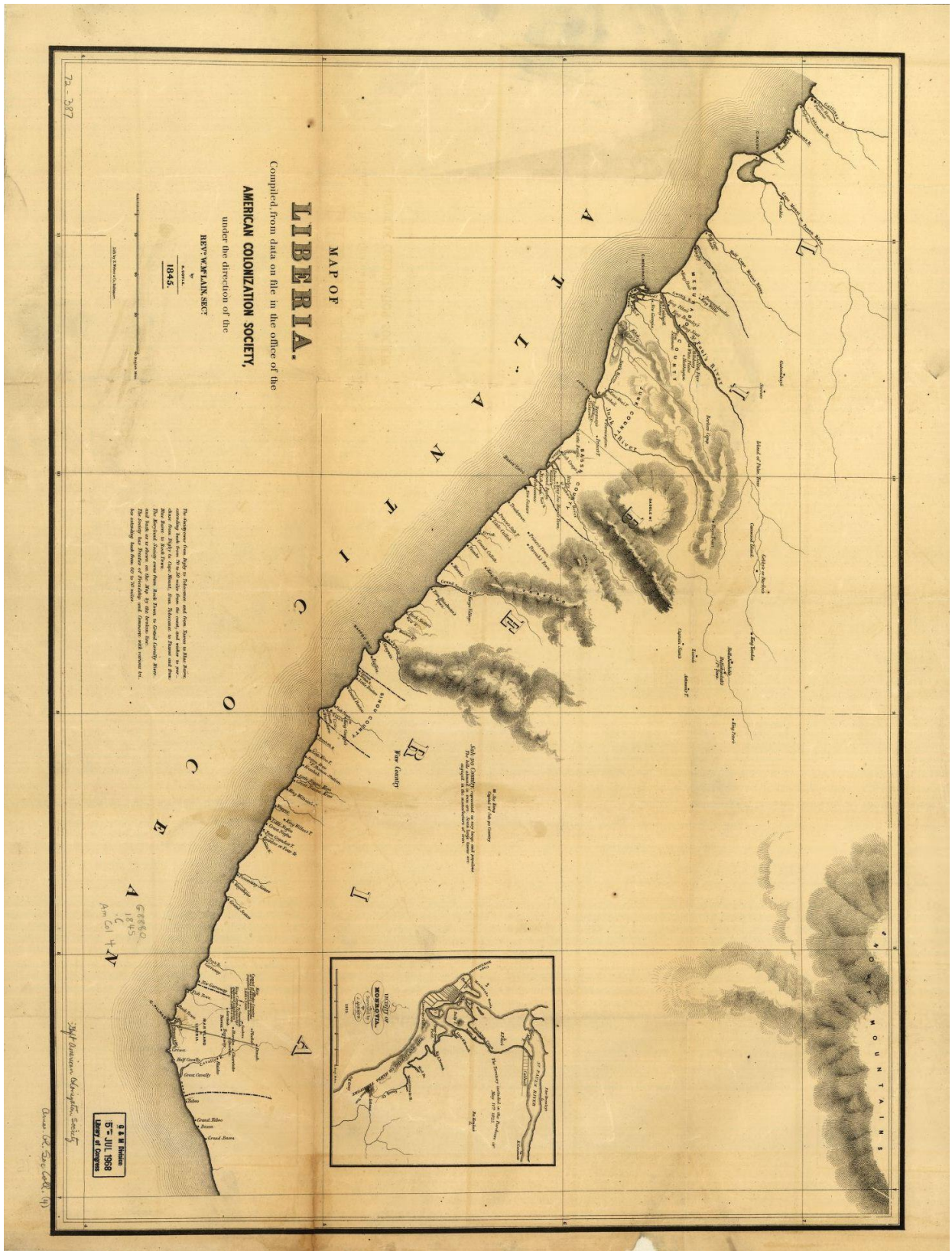
¹⁶⁸ Richard Hall, 539-540.

¹⁶⁹ Samuel F. McGill to Moses Sheppard, 25 April 1849, MSP.

Sierra Leone and Liberia compiled from the notes of Ashmun utilized squares to represent the location of Monrovia's neighboring African villages. Yet, this early published map likewise ensured differentiation and isolation of "Gurrah Town" and "Thompsons Town" by employing a cluster of squares set apart and differently organized than the neat grid pattern of Monrovia.¹⁷⁰ An official map published by the ACS in 1845, however, not only continued the tradition of ignoring African place names but also followed Revey's logic and represented those African towns nearest Monrovia in the form of small triangles. This map diminishes the scope of the African habitation represented by Revey, who at least drew many such symbols for large towns, by decreasing the number of pseudo-huts. While Revey's "King Freeman's Town" is a significant conglomeration of shelters stretching across the peninsula, the ACS map renders the size of African villages near Monrovia on a scale between one and three triangles. Hence, even the largest African settlement seems microscopic when compared to the grand grid pattern of Monrovia.¹⁷¹ In their representations of the coast, both ACS maps utilized circles or squares to mark the locations of various African towns, mission stations, slave factories, and trading camps. Neither dedicate any ink to demarcating African agricultural fields as Revey had done despite the agrarian explanatory mission of the maps. The resulting effect is to portray the Liberian coast as empty space open for settler expansion aside from the small dots and occasional triangle. Even Revey's half-hearted attempt to name the peninsula across from Cape Palmas as a Grebo agricultural site concealed more than it retained. Revey was correct in at least one regard: the soil on that peninsula probably was very sandy. The poor coastal soils of the Liberian colonies forced their rice-dependent populations into an expansive system of crop rotation, meaning overgrown fields interpreted by American settlers as wasted territory was viewed by Greboes as active rice

¹⁷⁰ Map of the West Coast of Africa from Sierra Leone to Cape Palmas, including the Colony of Liberia (Philadelphia: A. Finley, 1830). Library of Congress, www.loc.gov.

¹⁷¹ Map of Liberia (Baltimore: E. Weber & Co., 1845). Library of Congress, www.loc.gov.



(Map produced by the ACS in 1845. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.)

fields that were simply fallow.¹⁷² The Greboes at Cape Palmas grew more than cassava and they certainly thought they possessed more arable land than Revey drew for them on his map.

There are echoes to the English legal argument of *vacuum domicilium*, in which land that was not properly “subdued” by human improvement was declared vacant. Such ideas of “proper” land use had provided legal justification for the acquisition of American Indian land by the earliest European settlers in North America. In many ways, this “America in Africa” was designed to be a repeat performance, and it is unsurprising that one of the most common rhetorical devices employed by colonizationists was to refer to Monrovia as a nineteenth-century Jamestown or “City Upon the Hill.”¹⁷³ Much as similar arguments were employed to justify European incursions into Indian lands, arguing that coastal-dwelling Africans made poor use of the soil and classifying their fallow fields as perpetually unused space was a rhetorical and ideological tool for seizing control of African soil. Such metaphors also explained away Liberia’s high mortality rates as just another setback akin to Jamestown’s “starving time” before the creation of an expansive American-style republic in Africa. One year before Ashmun had to concede in his 1826 report that the richest soils of the colony were prone to erosion and contamination from saltwater, he was negotiating with African leaders for the purchase of lands bordering the St. Paul’s River, which emptied into the Atlantic Ocean just north of Monrovia. Recording in his journal the ongoing negotiations, he wrote that “if I saw those lands to be necessary to their subsistence, or indeed of any material use to them whatever, I should not ask

¹⁷² Richard Hall, 82-84.

¹⁷³ John Peacock, “Principles and Effects of Puritan Appropriation of Indian Land and Labor,” *Ethnohistory* 31, no. 1 (Winter 1984): 39-44. The eighth annual report of the ACS, for example, asked: “Who can view this Colony without interest? It promises to prove a blessed asylum for a wretched people. It is already to the African tribes, like ‘a city set upon a hill which cannot be hid.’” The tenth report made the connection between Jamestown, New England, and Liberia even more explicitly: “How was it with the two great Colonies of this country? Did they support themselves Did Jamestown go on in its early period, without assistance? No, sir...I will now come nearer home, and consider the condition of the fathers of New England. The feeble Colonists of Plymouth could never have sustained themselves without other aid than their own.” See *The Eighth Annual Report of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: J. C. Dunn, 1825), 14; *The Tenth Annual Report of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour of the United States*, 8.

them to give them up to use—but they knew as well as I that they were wholly useless to them—but would prove highly advantageous to us.”¹⁷⁴ This narrative of improper African land use reinforced the interpretation of the colony as a grand civilizing mission on the part of the African American settlers through maximized masculine agriculture. It also underscored the image of separation the colonizationists hoped to project: the Africans misused the land they possessed, the Americans purchased this wasted space and displaced uncivilized and incompetent African overlords. The narrative was one of possession and dispossession, not an intermingled society, even as it inherently acknowledged the central proximity and role of Africans in these negotiations. All three maps of colonial Liberia attempted to visually explain how the Africans could paradoxically be both a part of and separate from the Liberian colony. This was no easy task as the maps had to demarcate the society’s possessions and present a comforting space for potential African American settlers to Liberia who were distributed maps of the colony as part of the propaganda campaign to entice more settlers.¹⁷⁵ The early 1830 map especially highlights the remarkable transition of the territory from African to an Americo-Liberian possession and “savage” Africans pushed beyond the pale of Liberia’s civilized space. In this early map, “the territory at present under the actual jurisdiction of the Colony” of Liberia is shaded in red, an apt color to signify territorial possession and control over the inhabitants. The lexical element of this early map, however, in a display that the later maps eschewed, acknowledges African claims even as the chromatic message of possession simultaneously negates those claims. Within the red shades of Liberian hegemony, there are telling designations of certain areas as the “country of the Veys,” the “Country of the Deys,” and the “Country of the Bassas.” Additionally in a nod to the old European names for the region, the font and display of “Liberia” stands alongside the older commodity-based names for the region: “Part of Guinea” and “Grain or Malagette Pepper

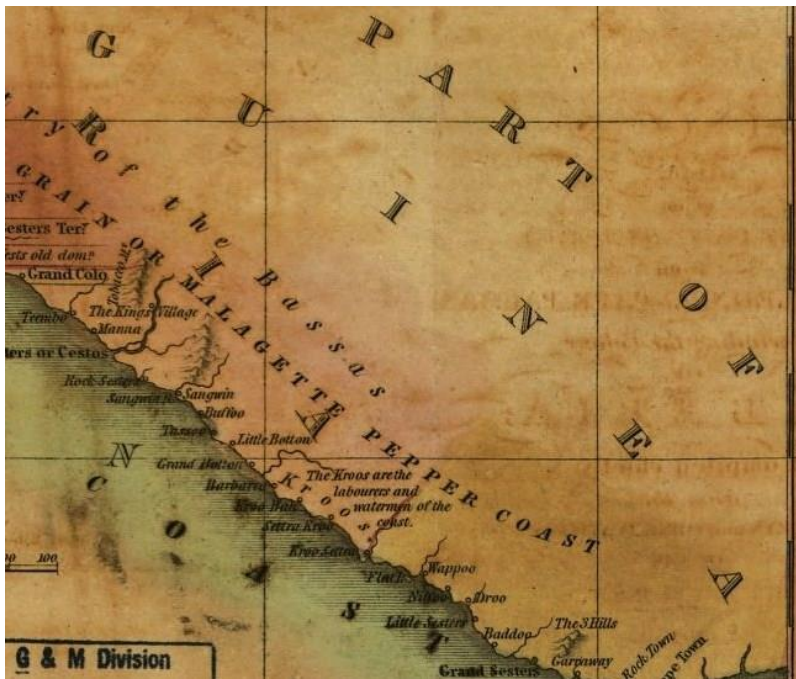
¹⁷⁴ Jehudi Ashmun, “A Journal during the Negotiations for the St. Pauls Land, May 1825,” ACS.

¹⁷⁵ Tyler-McGraw, 72-73.

Coast.”¹⁷⁶ The publishers hoped that the map would convey that “the Colony of Liberia extends from Gallinas River to the Territory of Kroo Settra: a distance of about 280 miles in length.” Awkwardly, an asterisked notation admitted the territory under “actual jurisdiction” of the colony only extended 150 miles, itself a very generous summation of the actual extent under the supervision of the tiny American settlements. The remarks assert that the “territories of several native tribes” are included within the “jurisdiction” of Liberia. The whole cartographic execution of the 1830 map is remarkable evidence for the significance of map-making in the practice of colonization. The shading of the map, running roughshod over African territorial claims and European names, makes a powerful argument for the appropriation of the territory by the ACS, even more powerful than if they had ignored those counter-claims. This is all the more remarkable given the map’s textual concession that the “actual jurisdiction” of the colonial government was not as great as that portrayed. Perhaps the greatest testament to the power of this map’s negation of the Afro-European challenges to ACS hegemony over the territory is the complete absence of any reference to the “pepper coast” or “Country of the Bassas” on later maps.

These later maps, both Revey’s map and the 1845 ACS map for example, leave little question as to the name of the territory presented; for Revey, the larger territorial map is emblazoned with an unquestionable “Maryland in Liberia,” while the ACS map projects “Liberia” in an equally impressive font. These later renditions leave no space for combative

¹⁷⁶ The Malegueta pepper, a common export of the region, was also called the “grains of paradise.” Hence, the Liberian shore was often referenced as either the “pepper coast” or the “grain coast.”



(Lower right section of 1830 map, depicting the final letters of “Liberia” interspersed with “Part of Guinea” and “Grain or Malagette Pepper Coast. Courtesy of the Library of Congress)

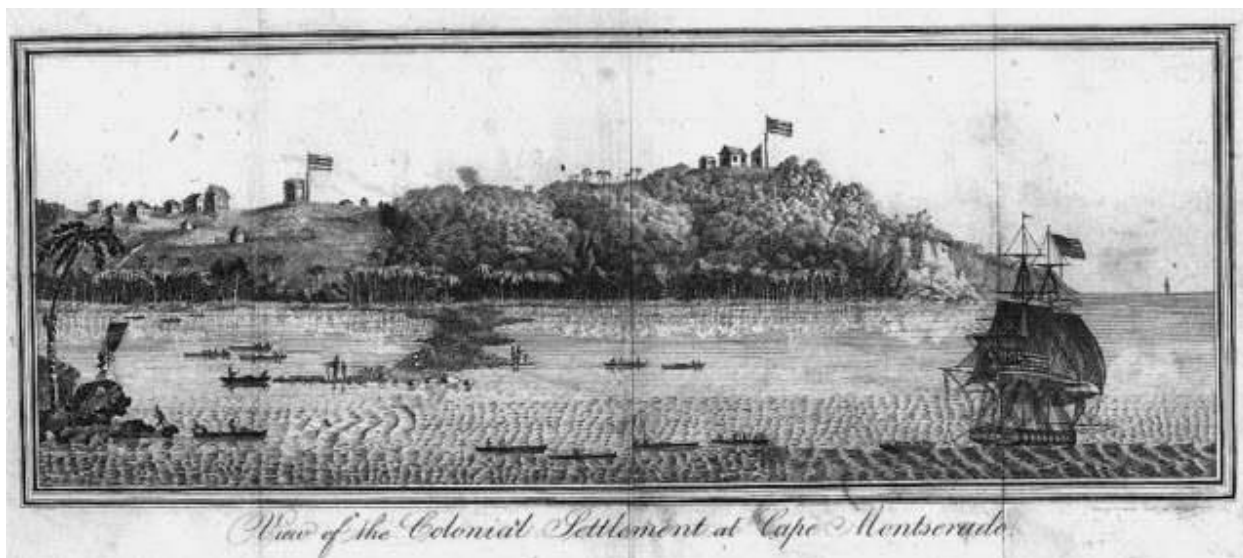
African claims to sovereignty and territorial possession. The ACS map has literally wiped the African ethnicities from its map, leaving behind only the names of settlements and substituting the old African “countries” with the new American imports for spatial organization and governance: Mesurado County, Junk County, and Bassa County. Behind the façade of scientific calculation of geographic metes and bounds lay the intentions of the mapmakers; in this case, the ACS desired to include all of “such boundaries & the various settlements...as would be an advantage. We ought to have a good map...one showing all the land owned, & the settlements, & all those things desirable for a map to show.”¹⁷⁷ Presumably, anything undesirable or proving disadvantageous would be excised to reinforce the importance of settlements and land possessed. The map of Maryland in Liberia follows this trend in focusing on land ownership and downplaying ambiguity, even noting that the territory of the Half Cavally town was exempted from the original land purchase. But even this concession is tightly regulated, marked, and surrounded by the American settlement.

¹⁷⁷ William McLain to James Hall, 14 July 1845, MSCS.

The net effect of these cartographic representations is to constrict Africans into isolated settlements residing within the territorial confines of the American colonies—under the civilizing control of the Americo-Liberian settlers—but not really a part of the colonial hierarchy. They lack agricultural fields and habitations beyond their chartered towns; they belong there and the rest of the territory belongs to the settlers. Even the images produced of the Liberian colonies reinforce this “part of, but separate” spatial construction. An image entitled “View of Colonial Settlement at Cape Montserado,” published in early issues of the *African Repository and Colonial Journal*, hoped to depict Monrovia for its American audience.¹⁷⁸ Carved from the surrounding forests along the cape, the frame houses of the village stand out against the open sky. Not content with one flag, the colony flies two colonial flags of the ACS, heavily inspired by the flag of the United States. In the foreground, an American vessel is anchored and the water is plied by African vessels, presumably the Kru stevedores who handled and ferried every good and passenger to and from Liberian wharves.¹⁷⁹ Yet, one looks in vain for other inhabitants of the colony. The actual settlement is devoid of any human habitation; the Africans perform the menial labor for seemingly omnipresent overlords, but they are outside the immediate confines of the civilized settlement carved from the African wilderness. They labor, but reside somewhere outside the civilized line, somewhere beyond the tidy frame structures arranged neatly in rows in their own separate settlements and cluster of triangles. The African villages next to Monrovia so prominently noted on the ACS maps have disappeared in this image. But, of course, Africans never actually disappeared from the American settlements,

¹⁷⁸ “View of Colonial Settlement at Cape Montserado” *African Repository and Colonial Journal*, volume 3.

¹⁷⁹ ACS images of colonial Liberia were often framed from the perspective of the Atlantic Ocean and usually incorporated a ship, both visually reinforcing the connection of the colony to Atlantic commerce and also the origins of Liberia as an American product; i.e. it is seen from the American side across the water. The Republic of Liberia replicated this ocean and ship motif, but reversed the perspective and presented the ship as seen from the African shore.



(“View of Colonial Settlement at Cape Montserado. *African Repository and Colonial Journal* volume 3.)

and the expansive intermingling of the inhabitants recommends the artificialness of specifying certain spaces as “African” within an “American” world.

Foregrounding Africans against a colonial backdrop was a common motif. A lithograph of the Bassa Cove settlement, a venture of the Young Men’s Colonization Society of Pennsylvania that replaced the destroyed Port Cresson in 1835 (see chapter 5), followed the pattern of the Monrovia image. Supposedly based upon the sketches of colonial physician Robert McDowall, the image eventually graced the membership certificates of the Pennsylvania Colonization Society. Once again, Africans are placed in front of the colonial backdrop to set the scene, although this time they appear in leisure rather than performing the work of the colony. The frame houses of the American settlement starkly contrast to the thick jungle, obscuring a few possible African structures in their foliage, and highlighting the progress of American civilization to carve itself from the African jungle. There are figures closer to the American buildings than the free foregrounded Africans, but they are distant and indeterminate.

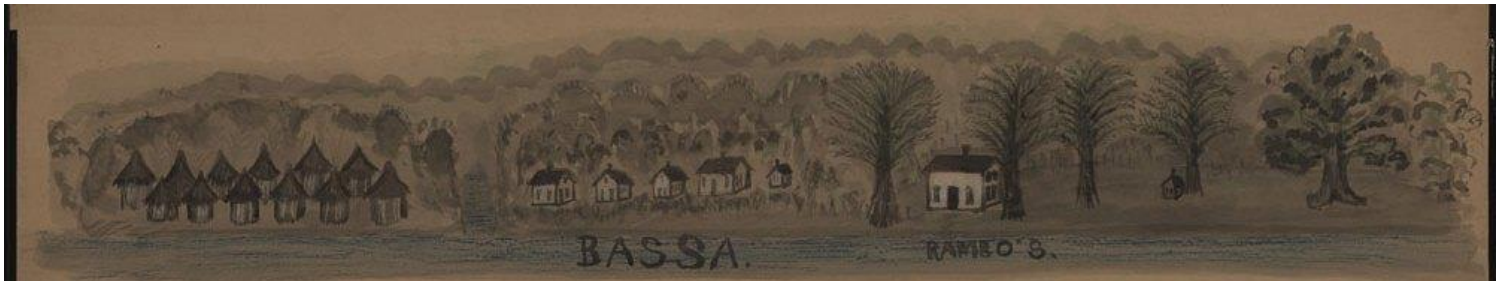
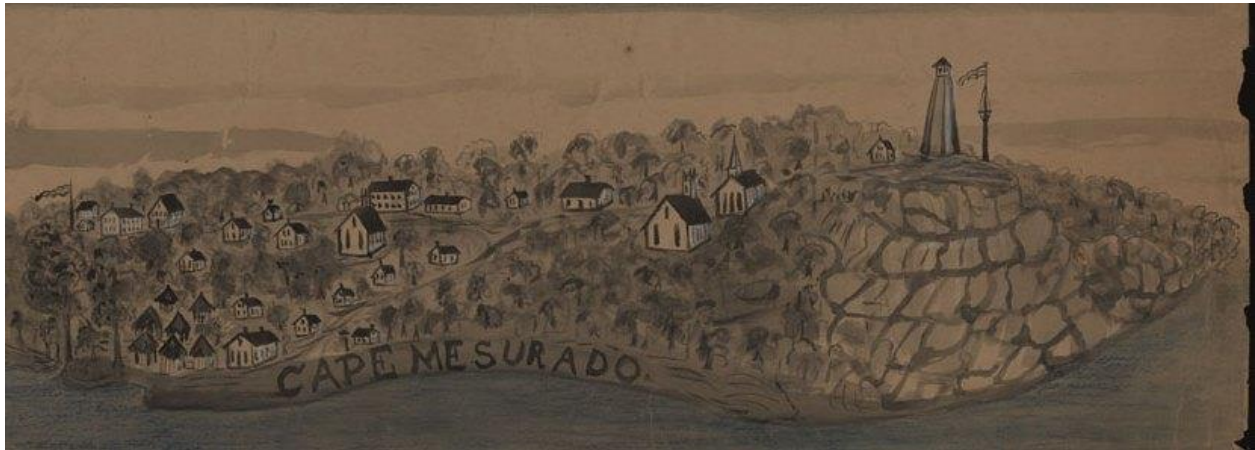


("A View of Bassa Cove." Courtesy of the Library of Congress.)

Livestock, a rarity in colonial Liberia, walk along the shore, indicating the introduction of superior American agricultural practices. In this image of Bassa Cove, the Africans are literally exiled from the enlightened embrace of the American settlement by a fence that surrounds the American structures, one of the required improvements in colonial Liberia. Much like the unoccupied Monrovia, the interior of the palisaded settlement is devoid of inhabitants, the exterior is the place for the African.¹⁸⁰

Two sketches of Monrovia and Bassa Cove, undated and unsigned but with buildings suggesting that they date to the 1850s, include the conical roofs of African dwellings along the shore of Cape Mesurado and Bassa Cove. Presumably, in the image of Monrovia these are the dwellings of the Kru sailors as they lived close to the town landing. At Bassa Cove, the Africans are neighbors to the American settlement, but their close proximity in the 1850s is absent from

¹⁸⁰ "A View of Bassa Cove," Library of Congress, www.loc.gov.



(Two sketches of Monrovia and Bassa Cove. Although undated and unsigned, the buildings in the sketches suggest that these were drawn during the 1850s. Courtesy of the University of Virginia.)

the lithograph from the 1830s.¹⁸¹ For many settlers, this constant contact with Africans was a liability for the colony. Writing soon after arriving in the Maryland colony in July 1838, at the same historical moment that Revey was confining chaotic Africanness to the triangles on his map, settler Stephen Smith reported problems with the colony. “But as for my part I am not pleased with the arangment of the cooney [sic] one the reason is this that wee are al among the natives and thear is a nof [enough] of them heare to tend every foot of land that is heare and tha heave as much rite to the land as wee heave and as tha become inlightened theare woold require

¹⁸¹ Images of Cape Mesuardo and Bassa in University of Virginia Special Collections.

more room and where is it to come from.”¹⁸² Sampson Caesar was also startled by the omnipresence of Africans in Monrovia, although he found them a useful, though disconcerting presence. “The natives are numerous in this place and they do the most of the work for the people in this place they will Steal every Chance.” And Revey’s own map of Maryland in Liberia inadvertently disputes the proposed separation between Africans and Americans. At the margins of the map, beyond the range of settler explorations, Revey still managed to include rough points of importance. Well to north of the American settlements, “King Cavas Dominions” were reported to have populations between three and four thousand. Such information could only come from interviews with Africans who had traveled to the interior. Even more explicit, Revey was forced to estimate the course of the river near the seaside village called “Fishtown” by the Americans. He dutifully transcribed above the meandering stream “Course of the Fishtown River as described by the natives.”¹⁸³

Even as the American settlers grumbled about the Africans within their settlements and cartographically attempted to remove them to the periphery, settlers and Africans often found themselves adopting each others’ cultural practices. Liberia was a creolized space, bringing westerners and Africans into close contact within a new environmental and spatial context for both parties. In many ways, settler insistence on proper western attire or daily life structured around western institutions—Christian churches in particular—reflected an understanding that for all of their best efforts, Liberia simply would not function like an American state plopped down in West Africa. While Revey dutifully noted the frame structures of the settlers on his map, the construction requirements of the new colony were such that African building designs, which were faster and easier to build as they better utilized local resources, were employed. Thus,

¹⁸² Stephen Smith to Zachariah Tippet, 5 July 1838, MSCS. The word “cooney” seems to be slip of Smith’s pen. Elsewhere in the letter, he spells the word “coloney.” It seems that in the case of the quoted passage, he simply forgot to make the “l.”

¹⁸³ Sampson Caesar to David Haselden, 7 February 1834, UVA website; Revey Map.

Tolbert Majors and his fellow settlers found themselves being placed in a “thatch house” after arriving in the American settlement at Bassa Cove. Even the first settlers of Revey’s Maryland in Liberia lived in native African dwellings as they established the colony. They could sweat in their western clothing poorly adapted to life near the Equator and demand that their public buildings be differentiated from local buildings through the use of frame designs, but they had to eat. For all of their dismissal of African agricultural practices and repeated requests for livestock to plow fields,¹⁸⁴ the local foodstuffs of rice and cassava and the poor soil required the settlers to adapt their farming techniques to local customs. Many of the more successful settler farmers utilized African workforces, and much of the labor in the colony—both in the society and in the homes of the settlers—was performed by Africans (see chapter 4).¹⁸⁵ Even as colonists adjusted their worldview to simultaneously recognize and deny their new reality in Africa, so too did numerous Africans adapt and adopt the culture of their newly arrived neighbors, friends, enemies, sexual partners, and employers.

¹⁸⁴ Lamenting the lack of draft animals and proper plows were ubiquitous complaints in settler letters and reports back home. Despite the colonizationists’ best efforts, North American oxen, mules, and horses proved to have short life spans in Equatorial Africa. A few examples drive home the point. From Kentucky, Liberia, Moses Jackson wrote back to his native Kentucky in 1846: “15 acres is considered a large farm and so it is for one man tend the way that they tend it with the how they use neither horses mules nor oxen and they say that these animals cannot stand it perform labour in this Climate this is the majority yet their some think that if they are properly managed they might be profitably employed here which of these opinions is Correct I cannot say but one thing I can say and that is that there is none of animals in use here & but two horses in Colony that I can here of. Now sir you may judge how a man feels who has been raised to the use of these animals in Cultivating the ground and you may also judge how things are progressing here.” Maryland in Liberia Governor John B. Russwurm inadvertently reported in 1839 the breadth of Liberia’s creole culture observable in the Agency Farm’s [an agricultural station established by the society as a model farm and place for agricultural experimentation] garden: “It is almost repetition to say, that no much ought to be expected in farming till the colonists have some kind of working teams, and no sensible man can doubt but their introduction would have a beneficial effect. . . . At present, on the Agency, we have plenty of water melons, cantelopes, oca, tomatoes, eggplants, peas, beans, peanuts, corn, and other garden vegetables growing besides potatoes cassadas and plantains.” Writing in 1836, George Crawford thought he knew the source of Liberia’s woes: “As it respects the colony it is not as flourishing as I could wish. I am not prepared to say from what cause tho I think chiefly owing to want of horses to plough.” See Moses Jackson to Elliott West, 22 March 1846, Shelby Family Papers, University of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky.; John B. Russwurm to John H. B. Latrobe, 8 December 1839, MSCS; George Crawford to John M. McCalla, 25 September 1836, in Wiley, 252.

¹⁸⁵ Tolbert Major to Benjamin Major, 17 October 1840, The Major Collection of Letters from Liberia, McLean County Museum of History, Bloomington, Illinois in www.mchistory.org/ (accessed 25 October 2012); James Hall to John H. B. Latrobe, 23 February 1834, MSCS; William E. Allen, “Liberia and the Atlantic World in the Nineteenth Century: Convergence and Effects,” *History in Africa* 37 (2010): 7-11, 24-40.

Just as many Africans equated whiteness with education and culture, the ability to become a “Merica man” and alter nationality exhibited a similar commitment to elasticity; practicing “white man’s fash,” also had the power to alter nationality. Liberia was an important hub in the Atlantic world and its inhabitants found themselves connected to this Atlantic geography and its representations. And, occasionally, engaging in these expansive networks was not entirely optional. The example of “Yellow Will,”¹⁸⁶ another of Polk’s neighbors in Harper, is illustrative. “Will” lived at the southern end of Brice Street, on top of the bluffs looking across the narrow channel to the island where the Grebo buried their dead. We know the location of “Will’s” dwellings because Revey decided to include them on his map.



(Close-up image of Revey’s 1838 map of Harper, highlighting his notation “Yellow Wills houses.” Courtesy of the Maryland Historical Society.)

“Will,” whom the colonial governor described as an

“ordinary head man,” followed in the footsteps of his people by taking to the sea aboard the litany of European and American vessels trading along the coast of Africa. “Will” apparently

¹⁸⁶ “Yellow Will” of Cape Palmas can easily be confused with “Yellow Will,” the Bassa leader who resided near Edina. Not only did both men share the same Anglicized name, but they were also staunch supporters of the American occupation. Both names are suggestive of phenotypical classifications reflecting mixed ancestry. Bishop Levi Scott, upon meeting the Cape Palmas “Yellow Will” in 1854, described him as “a large yellow man.” See Levi Scott, “Remarks of Bishop Scott, at the Anniversary of the Missionary Society of the M.E. Church, at Cincinnati,” *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 30, no. 6 (June 1854): 181-182.

found both employment and trouble in the British colonial outpost of Fernando Po, located near Sierra Leone.¹⁸⁷ Although the expansive use of diminutive sobriquets of Africans by Europeans and westerners makes positive impossible difficult, it seems likely that the same “Yellow Will” who would earn the Americo-Liberians’ trust in the 1830s as they established Maryland in Liberia near his home of Half Cavally found himself in a British colonial courtroom in September 1827 for receiving stolen goods, along with his fellow “kroomen” “Peter,” “Ben Kroo,” “Jack Freeman,” and “John Freeman.”¹⁸⁸

Events occurring in the following year suggest why “Yellow Will” was back home at Cape Palmas when the American settlers arrived there in 1834. “Will” had found employment aboard the *HMS Eden*, a British sloop of war, patrolling the western coast of Africa looking for vessels engaged in the Atlantic slave trade. In November 1828, the *HMS Cornelia* and *Eden* captured the slave ship *Neirseé* (also called the *Estafette*) along with 280 slaves onboard. The French captain and sailors were put below and a skeleton crew, consisting of “Yellow Will” and eight other Kru sailors and native Sierra Leoneans, six British sailors, and the liberated wife of one of “Will’s” companions, were put in place to sail the vessel to Sierra Leone. Unfortunately, the French sailors escaped on Christmas Eve and wrestled control of the vessel back from their British captors; “Yellow Will” was stabbed twice—in the thigh and hand—in the melee. The slave ship sailors reversed course and sailed their vessel and recaptured cargo of slaves, which now included shackled free Africans and British sailors, to the island of Guadeloupe in the Caribbean. Secretively, they landed the slaves and captured African sailors in the middle of the night on January 23, 1829. The entire party was marched three miles inland to a sugar plantation,

¹⁸⁷ James Hall provided a brief biography of “Yellow Will” in his May 1, 1836 report to the MSCS. In it, he noted that “Yellow Will” “had formerly been a head-workman, among the natives employed by the English at Fernad[o] Po.” This information, coupled with the timing of events and the behavior of Fernando Po’s “Yellow Will,” suggest that he and the Cape Palmas “Yellow Will” are one and the same. See James Hall to MSCS, 1 May 1836, MSCS. Also printed in Winston James, 119-120, 287.

¹⁸⁸ James Holman, *Travels in Madeira, Sierra Leone, Teneriffe, St. Jago, Cape Coast, Fernando Po, Princes Island, etc. etc.*, 2nd ed. (London: George Routledge, 1840): 68.

excepting the British sailors. The French slave traders, apparently squeamish about continuing to hold their European captives, put the sailors in an open boat and kicked them off into the sea. Fortunately, they reached the neighboring island of Dominica, the small British possession between Guadeloupe and Martinique, and sounded the alarm regarding the fate of the *Neirseé* and her human cargo. Soon letters of inquiry were dispatched from the British governor to his French counterpart on Guadeloupe.¹⁸⁹

The free Africans on Guadeloupe fared worse in their accommodations. Probably fearful of their influence on the enslaved Africans, the French slave ship captain and his island confederate separated the ten free Africans from the rest and secured them in a loft above the boiling house of the sugar plantation. Unfortunately, “Sarah,” the recaptured wife of the Sierra Leonean “Thomas George,” was kept with the other enslaved Africans, suggesting that they more greatly feared the men as potential fomenters of revolt. From this plantation, the slave cargo was sold off in small groups to the island’s sugar magnates. The free Africans were likewise exposed to sale in their isolated loft, but they were cultural middlemen, well-travelled products of the Atlantic, and far better equipped to challenge the terms of their sale than the others. Minimally, all could speak English to some degree, and several were apparently entirely fluent. At least two could likewise read English; another, “James Patterson,” could write.¹⁹⁰ Four claimed to be Christians. Thus armed with these cultural weapons, they proceeded to play the only card at their disposal in this most disproportionately balanced relationship of power: they

¹⁸⁹ *State Papers, Relating to Slaves in the Colonies; Slave Trade. Session: 5 February-23 July 1830*, vol. 33 (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 1830), 117-139.

¹⁹⁰ A native African of Sierra Leone, “James Patterson” had apparently received a thorough colonial education, probably in a missionary school. He not only claimed to be a Christian, but also could read and write in English fluently. Robert Jameson, the colonial judge of Dominica, who recorded the depositions of the Africans regarding the *Neirseé* affair singled out “Patterson” as possessing remarkable command of English. In the official state papers, the other signatures of the other Africans includes the ubiquitous “the mark of” to denote that they could not sign their English names. “James Patterson” was apparently the only one who could write his own signature. See Robert Jameson, “Deposition of Negroes, in Case of the “*Neirseé*” or “*Estafette*,” *State Papers, Relating to Slaves in the Colonies*, 123-125.

shouted and screamed at every potential buyer that they were actually free, Englishmen, and “Subjects of the King of England.” To a certain degree, the tactic worked. Although the captain punched, bludgeoned, and threatened to “kill them like sheep if they spoke English” —and apparently severely kicked “George” after he attempted to intercede and prevent the sale of his wife—the free Africans remained the only unsold prisoners after a week of slave buying. Potential purchasers were not necessarily thrilled about this challenge to their authority. One man examining the lot disliked “Will’s” repeated protests that he was an Englishman, and delivered the kick instead of the captain, asserting his power to buy them anyway if he so desired. Yet, the prospective buyer decided that the English-speaking slaves were more trouble than they were worth and passed on purchasing.¹⁹¹

Eventually, the free Africans could no longer delay and were apparently purchased by an English planter—or someone claiming to be English—who based his right to purchase these Subjects of the English King on his own claims to that nationality. The Sierra Leoneans were skilled artisans, carpenters and a mason, and they were put to work on the plantation plying their trades. Unfortunately for “Yellow Will” and his Kru compatriots, nautical skills were not in high demand on the sugar plantation and they found themselves working in the boiling house, carrying water and fuel for the fires and fillings hogsheads with sugar. With such skills and backgrounds, however, they remained dangerous enslaved property and the plantation owner ensured that the formerly free Africans were separated from the remainder of his enslaved property each night and slept in their own isolated quarters. Three weeks passed in this manner for the newly enslaved “Yellow Will” and his companions.

But the British were not only sending letters to the French governor. To his credit, the British governor of Dominica named the *Eden* Africans as “free British subjects,” thus

¹⁹¹ Ibid, 117-139.

reinforcing and giving credence to their claims for an English nationality. Although internally the British government seemed to separate the Sierra Leone Africans from the Kru sailors—the royal judge responsible for taking the depositions of the Africans made sure to provide quotation marks around the title “Englishmen” for the Kru deponents, a formality he ignored for the Sierra Leoneans—so long as the Kru and Sierra Leoneans remained confined to the same room, the Kru would continue to reap the benefits of being lumped in with the “free British subjects.” The fact that the British governor not only dispatched letters to Guadeloupe but soon had another British warship trolling the waters near Guadeloupe looking for the slave ship also probably aided the Africans. On February 13, two men arrived at the plantation to speak with the master. They apparently originated from the “big Town,” probably Pointe-a-Pitre or possibly Saint Francois, a smaller town located on the eastern end of the island near their disembarkation point. It seems that word reached the plantation owner that the British were making inquiries or perhaps the imminent arrival of a British warship in the area added to the tension, but for whatever reason the planter decided that his English-speaking slaves were liabilities. The nine Africans were brought to the beach to be placed in a sloop, but on their way an unnamed female slave from the island who spoke English informed the Kru that they were just being relocated to another French island to be further buried under the anonymity of slavery. Who this female slave was or how she came to deliver the message to the Kru but not to the Sierra Leoneans went unrecorded, but when the sloop arrived “Yellow Will” and his fellow countrymen decided that they preferred the devil they knew to the one they did not and fled back to the quarters on the plantation. The Sierra Leoneans risked the sloop and were brought out into the channel between Guadeloupe and Dominica before being put into an open boat and cast off into the Caribbean like their British counterparts. With three oars, three loaves of bread, a bit of salted fish, and a single flask of water they were directed south towards Dominica. Obviously unfamiliar with this part of the world, the Africans

requested the location of a harbor; the French responded that “they must find one as they could.” In the meantime, the plantation owner was apparently displeased to find three of his problematic Africans had returned to him. He called upon one of the two unnamed visitors from the “big Town,” apparently an English-speaker, and informed the Africans that “they could not be sold, but might be quite sure they were only going back to the English.” The following night, the same process that had led to the release of the Sierra Leoneans was repeated for “Yellow Will” and his countrymen; fortuitously, both boats of Africans successfully navigated the channel to Dominica.¹⁹²

Here was the mobile nineteenth-century black Atlantic at work: free Sierra Leonean and Kru Africans preventing their illegal sale into slavery on a French island through their cultural weapons and claims of Englishness acquired from work and education in the British colony, erroneously warned of impending duplicity by a supposedly “French” slave who spoke English, and cast about on a circuitous journey that brought them from the coast of Africa to Guadeloupe, Dominica, and then back to Africa. It would be a stretch to assume that the tactics adopted by the free Africans to combat their sale into slavery inherently constituted a previously adopted and well-reasoned construction of identity—desperate times call for desperate measures—but there is something suggestive both in the tactic and its relative success. West African understanding that race and nationality were permeable membranes based upon cultural practices reinforces the theory that when “James Patterson,” who adopted a completely Anglicized name without a belittling nickname, spoke and wrote English fluently, professed to be a Christian and was permitted to visit a nearby church while enslaved on Guadeloupe, truly believed himself an Englishman when he denounced his imminent sale to potential buyers. Even as westerners like the Guadeloupe planters were beginning to conceive of race as biologically innate in the mid

¹⁹² Ibid, 117-139.

nineteenth century, these West African middlemen scared them. Clearly, their ability to forestall sale and secure freedom had more to do than just simply speaking English as evidenced by the English-speaking slave woman who warned “Yellow Will” and his company of possible subterfuge. The claims of these free Africans to their English identity, as subjects of an expanding British empire, were stronger than those of the English-speaking slaves of Guadeloupe. Minimally, the episode explains “Yellow Will’s” familiarity with the language and customs (and judicial system) of the British, his willingness to adopt an English identity when it best suited his interests, and also perhaps why he no longer found working for the British African squadron an appealing occupation and returned home to Cape Palmas in time for the inaugural expedition of the Maryland State Colonization Society to splash ashore there on February 13, 1834.¹⁹³

With such a background, “Yellow Will” was recruited by MSCS agent James Hall to serve as an interpreter between the Americans and the Greboes situated at Cape Palmas. He fulfilled this duty faithfully and earned the respect of the colonists as an impartial and dedicated interpreter. He certainly cut an imposing figure; when Horatio Bridge observed a formal meeting between the settlers and Africans during his time at Cape Palmas, he recorded that the official interpreter was “dressed in a crimson mantle of silk damask, poncho-shaped, and trimmed with broad gold lace.”¹⁹⁴ “Will’s” integrity must have been impressive as Maryland’s governor repeatedly probed “Will” to no avail to disclose the secret discussions and plans of his people during the early negotiations between the settlers and the Africans living at Cape Palmas. After another round of interrogations examining “Will” for the clandestine intentions of the Greboes, “Will” informed the governor tellingly that “I am this countryman, not an American, I work for you to get money not to betray my own people. When I join the Americans I shall leave my own

¹⁹³ Richard Hall, 42-46.

¹⁹⁴ Bridge, 63.

people. I can't have a heart for both sides." In describing himself, "Will" employed the common African descriptor "countryman," an identity reflecting both their residence in Liberia and the Americans' newcomer status. Within a year, "Yellow Will" fulfilled his pledge and relocated to Harper, living at the western tip of the Cape.¹⁹⁵

Given the value of an earlier English identity that had prevented his permanent sale into slavery, it is not shocking that "Yellow Will" found an American identity equally useful. Also, in highlighting his ability to become an American through adopting the culture and customs of the settlers, "Will" likewise underscored the significance of space in cultural identity. It was not enough to wear a coat and speak English to become an American, "Will" literally had to relocate and place himself within an American space: the settlement of Harper. This was the inverse formulation of the map's basic assumption of Liberian territorial sovereignty; whereas the colonizationists and settlers viewed the entire space as Liberian aside from isolated African settlements, "Will" conceived of the space as inherently African and an American identity could only be attained through relocating to one of the isolated American settlements. It was not enough to simply leave one of the African towns for the countryside.

Crossing what he perceived to be a permeable line, "Yellow Will" literally crossed into the settlement of Harper and settled in a frame house. Apparently, "Will's" property included a number of other dwellings or buildings as Revey actually drew a cluster of houses on his map along the edge of Brice Street and inked the words "Yellow Wills houses" next to them. Soon, those houses were graced with a set of American chairs from Oliver Holmes, Jr., the former vice-agent for the MSCS in Africa, replacing the "country chairs" (African products) in the home and symbolically representing the change from African to American. "Will's" two sons attended Thomas Savage's school attached to the Episcopal mission station at Mount Vaughan; in

¹⁹⁵ James Hall to John H. B. Latrobe, 1 May 1836, MSCS.

addition to being a missionary, Savage was also a trained doctor and “Will” had hopes that at least one of his sons may also become a doctor. “I feel myself an American,” he supposedly wrote in 1837, “and am determined at all times to be on their side and adopt their fashion.” To emphasize his conversion, he signed his letter “With Much esteem I am yr. obt. Srvt William Hall or Yellow Will of Cape Town.” “Will/Hall” likewise expressed a desire to see the United States, probably on different terms than those under which he saw Guadeloupe. Of course, the words of “Yellow Will” may be, in fact, those of any number of possible amanuenses. Upon receiving the chairs from Holmes, “Will” supposedly ended his thank-you note with “hoping that God may bless you for your goodness to me in this thing.” It is the only reference to the Christian God among his writings, and other colonial correspondence does not mention “Yellow Will” as a Christian convert. The phrase may have been inserted by the writer to convey “Will’s” thankfulness in terms that would resonate with American ears or perhaps it suggests the missionary’s influence on one of “Will’s” educated sons, who would have made natural choices as scribes for “Will.” There are, however, other indications of a West African author or at least someone familiar with the creolized Liberian English—the use of “book” to denote a letter, for example—to argue that these pro-American sentiments and hopes for assimilation originated from “Yellow Will.” A visitor in 1854 recorded “Yellow Will” as expressing these sentiments: “Merica man been here twenty years, and yet...we are two people. We want one school for both. I want bring our people...half round, by and by bring em whole round. Not do this all at once.”¹⁹⁶ Of course, in forging this American identity, “Will” received positive reinforcement from the United States. Unsurprisingly given his large coterie of African correspondents, Moses Sheppard wrote to “Will” reemphasizing his adoption of a new nationality after interviewing

¹⁹⁶ Levi Scott, 181-182. A brief biographical account, also primarily indebted to MSCS sources, that includes this quote is Jane Jackson Martin, “The Dual Legacy: Government Authority and Mission Influence among the Glebo of Eastern Liberia, 1834-1910” (PhD diss., Boston University, 1968), 98-100.

settler Samuel F. McGill, who was visiting the United States. “I hear good palaver for you, Dr McGill speak me you like Merica man, White man peak [Sheppard envelopes all English speakers, including the settlers, as “white man”]. Yellow Will big Merica man.”¹⁹⁷ The point here is not to claim that nationality or whiteness were flexible categories that individuals could select at will; the complete abandonment of home to live with strangers certainly highlights the severe measures required to accomplish the transformation, and “Will’s” exceptional addition to the Revey map suggests that he was singular in his willingness to adopt “White man’s fash” and “white man peak.” Yet, “Will’s” addition to the map underscores the ongoing tension between space, nation, and race occurring in colonial Liberia. Although “Will’s” frame houses appear on the map, his Anglicized name “William Hall” does not.

Africans like “Yellow Will” conceived of themselves as crossing identifying boundaries based upon performing “white man’s fash”; indeed, the argument that inhabiting the colonial space of Liberia would eventually produce an entire continent of “Yellow Wills/James Halls” was a foundational argument for colonizationists. From the earliest days of the colonization idea, when the white leaders of the newly formed ACS borrowed from the colonization schemes of Paul Cuffe, the colonial space was set aside as a miraculous engine of civilization. Even before Liberia was birthed on the maps, the idea of the colony was to bestow an alchemic transformation on both degraded African Americans and savage Africans who would simultaneously benefit from residence in the colony. This civilizing paradox was evident even in the first official report of the ACS, published in 1818 four years before the establishment of Monrovia. Through colonization “the slaves themselves and their posterity shall be converted into a free civilized and great nation.” Uncivilized blacks would become a great civilized nation

¹⁹⁷ Revey Map; Yellow Will to John H. B. Latrobe, 8 June 1837, MSCS; Yellow Will to John H. B. Latrobe, 21 January 1840, MSCS; Yellow Will to Oliver Holmes, Jr., 22 May 1839, MSCS; Moses Sheppard to Yellow Will, 13 December, 1842, MSP.

in Africa. Yet, the ACS seemingly contradicted itself in the same report when it crowed that “colonies, composed of blacks already instructed in the arts of civilized life, and the truths of the gospel” would expand into the interior and incorporate Africans into their civilizing commerce. African Americans needed to leave the United States to acquire civilization—whiteness—but had seemingly been instructed in civilization by their birth and residence in that white space. This harkens back to mental gymnastics of Henry Clay which began this chapter.¹⁹⁸ The critical element for white colonizationist thinking was to emphasize free black degradation within the United States due to the obstinate refusal of whites to accept unburdened black freedom and the power to seize the civilizing mantle of whiteness once beyond the shores of America. This key word, “degraded,” mustered to describe the condition of free people of color in the United States, is ubiquitous within white colonizationist discourse—and also elite black discourse in the United States—before Liberian independence.¹⁹⁹

By emphasizing degradation, colonizationists historicized their arguments by highlighting ancient African attainments in Christianity— pervasive references to Ethiopia with

¹⁹⁸ *First Annual Report of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Color, of the United States*, 37, 40.

¹⁹⁹ John C. Young pointed it out as an obvious fact to the Kentucky Colonization Society in 1832: “It is a well known fact, that in all parts of our land, the free negroes are the most degraded portion of our population.” Nathaniel Bouton informed his New Hampshire audience in 1825 that the “problem” of free people of color, “the most ignorant, degraded and vicious class in the community” resembled a disease and was a result of the ignorance and degradation of slaves who, if set free, “ignorant and degraded as they are, they could not take of themselves, but would spread over and infect every portion of the country.” H. L. Ellsworth continued this theme of former slaves spreading their degradation like a disease in 1842 before a meeting of white colonizationists in Washington, D.C.: “Should emancipation become general without colonization; were thousands and hundreds of thousands of slaves set free, scattered over our land, filling the outskirts of our villages, degraded and degrading others, marked by God as a distinct race with no adequate human motives for elevation, they would be a prey upon the community.” New Yorkers in 1823 cheered on the Greeks in their struggle against Ottoman rule, but pondered “Will we approve in them [the Greeks] what we would approve in a degraded population of our own nation?” They added a further shuddering thought: “We too, like the Turks, are oppressing a hapless race.” Kentucky emancipationist Cassius Marcellus Clay informed his readers of the *True American* that “It is worse even than slavery to have a degraded, disfranchised class of freeman in any country.” *The Fourth Annual Report of the Kentucky Colonization Society, with an Address, by Rev. John C. Young* (Frankfort, KY: Albert G. Hodges, 1833), 19; Nathaniel Bouton, *Christian Patriotism: An Address Delivered at Concord, July the Fourth, 1825* (Concord, NH: Shepard & Bannister, 1825), 14-17; *Proceedings of the Convention of the Friends of African Colonization, Held in the Capital at Washington, May 4, 1842* (Washington, D.C. [?]: 1842 [?]), 58; *First Report of the New-York Colonization Society* (New York: J. Seymour, 1823), 19; Cassius M. Clay, “What is to Become of the Slaves in the United States?” *Lexington True American*, August 12, 1845.

a sprinkling of references to the mythical kingdom of Prester John—and the arts of civilization, here Egypt was a favorite archetype, to argue that black capacity could return and be realized beyond the boundaries of the United States.²⁰⁰ Having received “training” in whiteness coded as “civilization,” African American settlers could both fully achieve and expand their newly-found civilization in Africa while simultaneously civilizing the neighboring Africans. Space and geography resided at the heart of the colonizationists’ arguments. Colonial Liberia could be the ultimate civilizing space—capable of civilizing both settler and colonized—because it offered a remarkable educational experience for the African American settlers: a lesson in the control and management of black subjects, the ultimate attainment of respectability for nineteenth-century white Americans.

The tiered system of governance initially established by the ACS, a black colonial structure capped by a white governor, reinforced this idea of managing blackness as the central goal of Liberia; management first in the form of managing the settlers and instructing them, and then turning the settlers loose to control Africans. The first report of the ACS utilized this language of management in the form of the white governor’s beneficial influence. “The race [free blacks] possesses a fund of good dispositions, and is capable in a proper situation and under proper management, of becoming a virtuous and happy people. To place them in such a situation, to give them the benefit of such management, is the object of your noble enterprize.”²⁰¹ Much as Robert Breckinridge argued that slavery provided the “training” in arts and civilization for African Americans, so too did residence in Liberia provide the training to control its African

²⁰⁰ Wilson Moses argues that Afrocentrism—the argument that Africa is central to the identity of African Americans and all members of the black Diaspora—was not an inherently black phenomenon and points to the arguments of white colonizationists who utilized these Afrocentric arguments to justify their plans to remove African Americans to their “natural” environment. Moses demarcates several strains of Afrocentric thinking that were central to the colonization movement, including a “redemptionist” argument that African Americans were the best vehicles to redeem benighted Africa (this was also a critical idea for the Back-to-Africa Movement). See Wilson Moses, *Afrotopia: The Roots of African American Popular History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

²⁰¹ *First Annual Report of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Color of the United States*, 33, 37.

subjects. Here, it is important to remember that the settlers were issued, in the language of the ACS, a “plantation,” complete with its nineteenth-century connotations of coerced labor. The white colonizationists delighted in publishing reports “that the chief and people of one of the native tribes in the neighborhood of the Colony, have sought the protection and placed themselves under the authority of the Colonial government. The intelligence that their offers of submission were accepted, was received by them, says the Colonial Agent, with shouts of joy.”²⁰² Just as the single word “degraded” undergirded the foundational spatial argument of colonization, the settlers’ “influence”²⁰³ over neighboring Africans, signified the Africans’ desire to adopt American cultural practices, or “white man’s fash,” learned from the guiding hand of the American settlers and their missionary allies.²⁰⁴ After this initial tutorial in management, the settlers would be in a position to control their black subjects in a similarly civilized manner.

Thus, the managers of the ACS crowed at their annual convention in 1829: “By this gentleman

²⁰² *The Fourteenth Annual Report of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Color of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: James C. Dunn, 1831), 6.

²⁰³ “Influence” was the word of choice for white and black colonizationists, whether it was a string of reports from the colonial governors—white and black—or colonization boosterism at home. The “influence” of the colony was proclaimed by Governor Joseph Mechlin in his report for 1831: “Our influence over the neighboring tribes is rapidly extending, and I trust we shall be the means of diffusing civilization and Christianity over this unhappy land.” This was also a theme struck upon by the future first president of the Republic of Liberia, Joseph J. Roberts, when he served as governor of the Commonwealth of Liberia in 1843: “It becomes my duty to invite your attention to the providential favors which our colony has experienced during the past year... in the extension of the influence of the colony, over the minds of the heathen tribes around us.” Meanwhile, at home the Board of Managers of the ACS reassured its supporters in 1827 that “The influence of the Colony with the natives, is great and increasing, and resulting as it does, principally, from the integrity and kindness manifested towards them by the Colonial Government in all its transactions, may be expected to be permanent.” See *The Fifteenth Annual Report of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Color of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: J. C. Dunn, 1832), 4; Joseph J. Roberts, “Governor Roberts’ Message,” *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 19, no. 6 (June 1843): 176; *Tenth Annual Report of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Color of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Way & Gideon, 1827), 46.

²⁰⁴ The colonization movement found its ranks filled with evangelical Christians who conceived of the colonial endeavor as one great missionary outpost. The northern ranks of the colonization movement, in fact, were principally filled with evangelicals afire with the flames of the Second Great Awakening, and one of the principal fundraising drives of the ACS was the annual Fourth of July collection taken up in the cause of colonization by sympathetic ministers. Daniel Mayes spoke for these supporters of colonization before the Kentucky Colonization Society in 1831. “Every colonist transported may be, literally and strictly, considered a missionary. He bears with him the rudiments of civilization and Christianity, and although not engaged in the ministry, yet his presence, contributing to the growth, prosperity, and welfare of the colony, extends its influence into the interior, further and further, and opens a more easy communication, for... we send to the African, missionaries of his own race.” See Daniel Mayes, “Address” in *The Proceedings of the Colonization Society of Kentucky with the Address of the Hon. Daniel Mayes, at the Annual Meeting, at Frankfort, December 1st, 1831* (Frankfort: Commentator, n.d.), 23.

[Agent Jehudi Ashmun] the Colonists are represented not only as contented and enterprising, but as making rapid progress in the most important public and private improvements, and exerting a salutary and extensive influence over the native tribes. ‘These tribes,’ he remarks, ‘have begun to perceive that is civilization and religion, which give superiority to man over his fellow man.’”²⁰⁵

The settlers, seeking their own opportunities in the colony and products of the same western religious and cultural assumptions regarding their “superiority” over savages, did not need any white assistance in projecting a veneer of control over their African neighbors. Despite the success of the Bassas in eradicating the American colony at Bassa Cove in 1835, settler Samson Caesar was unconcerned. “I can only say,” he wrote to a Virginia correspondent soon after the retaliatory American assault on “King Joe Harris’s” town, “that we are in no danger of the natives if we manage Right as for own part I feal no fear at all of the natives.” Four years later, Russwurm reported to the MSCS that Maryland in Liberia had started to affect the neighboring Greboes. The “Cape Palmas People” appeared to be more “industrious” as thefts had decreased, although Russwurm cautioned that such alterations may have actually been the result of unusually plentiful crop harvests. Still, “we cannot but indulge the hope, that they are falling in imperceptibly with civilized habits; as there are many symptoms which would indicate such a state....I am of the opinion that king Freeman, Yellow Will, and a few others of the leading men, have found honesty is the best policy in their dealings with us, and if matters depended solely on them, we should be troubled but little with palavers of any kind.”²⁰⁶ Three years later with the

²⁰⁵ *The Twelfth Annual Report of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: James C. Dunn, 1829), 8.

²⁰⁶ John B. Russwurm to John H. B. Latrobe, 8 December 1839, MSCS; This letter is also reproduced by Winston James, but James unfortunately relies solely on transcriptions from the *African Repository and Colonial Journal* (in this case, the June 1840 issue). The uncritical reliance on the *African Repository* and pro-colonization accounts is a weakness of James’s edited collection of Russwurm’s writings. To their credit, the ACS editors in the States were skillful and usually honest transcriptionists when publishing accounts from Liberia. But as producers of a work of propaganda, they were equally talented editors who elected to omit certain sections that challenged their narrative. In attempting to salvage Russwurm from the dustbin of history, James overcompensates in uncritical praise for Russwurm as “the first modern” Pan-Africanist whose “aspirations and practices were directly connected to the anticolonial movement on the continent in the twentieth century” despite being a critical cog in that same colonial

arrival of the *USS Vandalia* as part of the African Squadron, Russwurm grumbled that the American naval officers had “been meddling with *our* [emphasis mine] natives.” These lessons in management would largely come to fruition in the form of guiding the labor of Africans. The white colonizationists bellowed about agriculture as the foundation of the colony, but they often omitted describing precisely whose hands would wield the hoe. Ashmun, who as governor from 1824 until 1828 was largely responsible for securing and expanding the American foothold at Cape Mesurado, followed in this path when he wrote a small tract entitled *The Liberia Farmer* in 1825 to aid new settlers in establishing their “plantations,” a title he dutifully maintained throughout the tract. Denouncing those who would depend solely on trade for subsistence, Ashmun asked “are you so lost to all sense of shame, as to be willing to depend on a half naked

apparatus. For James, Russwurm “more than any other leading figure of his time—and certainly before Blyden and Crummell—he sought unity between those from abroad and their continental brothers and sisters, despite their acknowledged cultural differences.” The *African Repository* report reinforces this notion, but Russwurm’s actual report continued after his glowing estimation of King Freeman and Yellow Will. “I would not have you believe that this feeling is a general one—far from it—as the majority deem nothing more meritorious than to steal from colonists, and their endeavor to [illegible] them out of even their own coat if possible. It is the hardest thing imaginable to get at the truth of any story, as lying is practiced from their cradle up, and if detected, considered no disgrace. Unless thieves are caught in the act, or with some of the chattels, it is difficult even to bring them to justice, as woe would be the lot of the unlucky wright who should reveal their names to me. No matter what his rank, he would be mulcted in a heavy fine.” Also excised from the publication was Russwurm’s report on the “War on our borders.” He wrote: “I consider it my duty to inform you, that war has been raging for some months in the Kraboh country, between the Saurekahs and our foes the Barroways. So near are the contending parties that we frequently hear the firing of guns, whenever an engagement takes place: but country wars are merely scarecrows, as the natives think great execution has been done, if 2 or 3 happen to fall. The sum total of loss in their several engagements, is 6 or 7 Saurekahs and 11 or 12 Barroways. I have driven quite a profitable trade in supplying the former with our refuse fire-arms in exchange for rice, and conferred a favor also, as the latter were interdicted from trading in the colony. The result of our troubles with the Barroways alias Barrckahs, has been highly beneficial to our agricultural interest. We have been taught by it, to depend on our own resources. Formerly all the beach people, would in times of scarcity depend on those in the bush, like the Barroways, for supplies of cassadas & rice; and this knowledge begat in them so much pride and insolence, that none pitied them, when not allowed to trade with us, but all took advantage of their situation by charging 100, and even 200 pct.” It is easy to see the editorial hand of the colonizationists at work here; there are copy editing marks on the report in the MSCS collection to denote which sections to excise. But the omitted lines do not paint such a glowing picture of Russwurm as a pan-Africanist anti-colonial pioneer, but rather a colonial administrator willing to turn gun dealer to remove a particularly troublesome neighbor. This is not to suggest that Russwurm lacked for early pan-Africanist thoughts or consistently dismissed Africans, but he was not so consistent and singular in his praise for the continent as James argues. For a man who “sought unity between those from abroad and their continental brothers and sisters,” Russwurm gladly excised Africans from the body politic of his colony. In 1842, while engaged with a dispute between the Presbyterian missionaries of the Fair Hope station and the Greboes of Gbenulu, Russwurm made sure to inform all parties of the laws of the colony. “I sent our constitution and code—laws for the natives—and the declaratory ordinance of the Board.” The Constitution was for the settlers and the code of laws for the Africans. See John B. Russwurm to James Hall, 26 September 1842, MSCS. See also Winston James, 246-249.

Savage to feed you?” Yet, for all of his suggestions regarding clearing the land, tilling, planting, and fencing, Ashmun never fully addressed who would be conducting this labor; a curious oversight given the nature of possessing a “plantation.” Peyton Skipwith answered this question in a letter to his former master in Virginia upon his arrival in Monrovia: “There is Some that have come to this place that have got rich and anumber that are Sufering. Those that are well off do hav the natives as Slavs and poor people that come from America hav no chance to make aliving for the nativs do all the work. As it respects farming there is no Chance for it unless we would get the nativs to work for us and then you must be wit them.”²⁰⁷ There are echoes from the United States here. The colonial elite—the African-American settlers—disdained working side by side with their African work force (see chapter 4 for labor in the colony). Thus, even as settlers and Africans found themselves in close confines and interspersed, the cartographies of the colony emphasized separation and isolation.

As the Americo-Liberians laid down their neat streets reminiscent of their American homeland and battled both the environment and the inhabitants of the land to reconstitute a version of the United States in Africa, their vision of this society did not include a return to the subjugated position they had previously held in North America. In the Liberian adaptation of American society, the African American settlers would occupy the societal positions previously occupied by whites. Of course, this vacated the lowest levels of society that had provided the cheap or unfree manual labor upon which the United States was built. Conveniently for the Americans, however, there was a large pool of “uncivilized” and degraded workers nearby. On the other side of the Atlantic, they found whiteness and became Americans in charge of their tiny United States. Most Americo-Liberians relished this new relation of power; in many regards

²⁰⁷ John B. Russwurm to James Hall, 26 September 1842, MSCS; Samon Caesar to Henry F. Westfall, 3 August 1835, *Liberian Letters*, Electronic Text Center, University of Virginia Library, www.etext.lib.virginia.edu/subjects/liberia/index.html; Jehudi Ashmun, *The Liberia Farmer*, in Ralph R. Gurley, *Life of Jehudi Ashmun* (Washington, D.C.: James C. Dunn, 1835), 64-79; Peyton Skipwith to John H. Cocke, 10 February 1834, in Wiley, 36-37.

inverting the old American social structure with themselves at the pinnacle provided them with their own “wages of whiteness.” Obviously, this bode ill for the African inhabitants of these colonies, some of whom challenged this interpretive rendering of the colony by their presence while others attempted to blend into this civilized space. But as “Yellow Will” discovered, even those who could enter into the American space and adopt “white man’s fash” in an effort to cross these boundaries, the map could arrest their motion and fix their identity. He could live in a frame house, but he could never truly become “William Hall.”

Chapter 4

“Nearly All Have Natives as Helps in their Families, and This is as it Should Be”: The “Civilizing” Mission of Unfree Labor

Samuel McGill was steamed. Writing to the editors of the *New England Puritan* to defend the Liberian settlers’ religiosity, he penned, “I can now select many colonists in Liberia who have trained up more native children in their families as Christians,--now members of the Christian church, than are to be numbered as native communicants in the Presbyterian mission at Cape Palmas.” McGill specifically referred to the prevailing system in the colonies whereby Liberian families kept African “apprentices” to perform domestic and manual labor. While chattel slavery as the American settlers conceived of the system was banned by the constitutions and legal systems of the Liberian colonies, a hybrid system developed there combining American concepts of indentured servitude with African practices of pawnship, in which the labor of surrogates, usually children, were used as collateral to repay debts. Within the Liberian context, this system was further altered by the supposed payment of “civilization” it provided. African parents sought an education in “White man’s fash” for their children to secure economic and social advantages in the coastal trades; while certain settlers took the “civilizing mission” of the arrangement seriously, the system primarily funneled labor into the under-populated colony. Although these “African servants” were usually contracted for a set number of years and enjoyed certain rights and privileges under the various Liberian legal codes,²⁰⁸ it was, like its American counterpart, a system rife with opportunities for abuse. It was this system of unfree labor, lying somewhere between slavery and freedom, which McGill asserted served as a more effective

²⁰⁸ McGill’s Maryland in Liberia, for example, explicitly included the relationship between “master and servant” under its legal definition of “Domestic Relations.” Additionally, no male over the age of twenty-one and no female over the age of eighteen could “be held to serve any person as a servant, under pretence of indenture, or otherwise, unless such person shall enter into such indenture while in a state of perfect freedom.” See *Constitution and Laws of Maryland in Liberia; with an Appendix of Precedents*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore: John D. Toy, 1847), 9 32, 37, 188, 204, 211.

“civilizing” force than the Presbyterian missionary outpost named Fair Hope and under the direction of J. Leighton Wilson.²⁰⁹

Wilson had earned McGill’s ire in late 1842, to the point of publicly naming his mission station specifically as lacking the evangelical chops of the Americo-Liberians, because the long simmering disagreement between McGill’s brother-in-law, governor Russwurm, and the Managers of the MSCS, and Wilson and his evangelist directors, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) had finally reached the point of boiling. In a nod to the ever-present violence or threat of violence to the colony (see chapter 5), the ordinances that governed Maryland’s corner of Liberia dictated that all males between the ages of sixteen and sixty residing within the colony be enrolled in the general militia and drill accordingly when called upon by the governor.²¹⁰ Although the missionaries were exempted from this requirement, those employed by the mission stations in more secular work—laborers and teachers—were not, an unacceptable provision for ABCFM missionary Wilson. The issue came to a head in 1838 when the colonial administration fined one of Wilson’s teachers for dereliction of military duty for his absence from the drill field. The resulting squabble between colonization leaders in both Marylands straddling the Atlantic who refused to concede the manpower from their militia and the ABCFM missionaries who classified all in their employ as engaged in the Lord’s work eventually led to a special ABCFM committee chaired by Chancellor Walworth to declare in 1842, “that it is expedient, if not absolutely necessary to the successful operations of the mission,

²⁰⁹ “To the Editors of the N. E. Puritan,” *New England Puritan*, October 1, 1842, reprinted in “Report of Chancellor Wolworth, Chairman of a Committee of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, to Whom was Referred the Community of the Secretary Relative to the Cape Palmas Mission,” *Maryland Colonization Journal*, 260-263.

²¹⁰ The “general militia” was made distinct from the “volunteer militia,” which was to consist of uniformed companies and more reflected the militia organizations of the settlers’ American homes. Also, although the ordinance named all males of the appropriate age group living within the colony, the settlers did not consider the colony’s African residents as acceptable members of this military bulwark against Africans. The few exceptions seem to have been the “civilized” Africans like “Yellow Will” who “crossed” over to American cultural practices. See *Constitution and Laws of Maryland in Liberia*, 21.

that it [the mission station] should be removed from the territory of the Maryland Colony at Cape Palmas.”²¹¹

McGill clearly had a lot on his mind during his visit to the United States during the summer and fall months of 1842. Not only was he finally successful in courting his desideratum, Lydia, but he also stumped extensively on behalf of colonization. On November 7, in a publicized meeting called specifically for him to lecture on his African experiences, he addressed a large audience at the Light Street Methodist Church in Baltimore. At the completion of McGill’s address, MSCS president John H. B. Latrobe proclaimed that there was “no better demonstration of the effects of African colonization than was furnished in the person of Dr. McGill and his father’s family.” Despite his American successes and published rebuttal in the *New England Puritan*, McGill still clearly chafed at Walworth’s report as he returned to Liberia in February 1843, but his actions upon arriving at Monrovia, the first leg of his African journey to Harper, suggest his own recent familial addition weighed most heavily on his mind. While at Monrovia, McGill “procured a native youth to live with me at Cape Palmas; he had resided with my brother at Monrovia for nearly a year, and understood the English language.” Given his new life as a married man, it seems likely that he intended the African youth to serve as a domestic servant. As the vessel sailed onward to Harper, McGill struck up a conversation with Reverend Samuel Hazlehurst of Philadelphia, a white missionary on his way to take over the Episcopal mission at Cape Palmas, regarding recent squabbles between the missionaries and civil authorities of the colony. The two men were interrupted in their conversation by the arrival of McGill’s newly-acquired African youth on the deck, whose presence perhaps reminded McGill of his published claim that settlers like himself made better evangelists than the missionary

²¹¹ “Report of Chancellor Wolworth, Chairman of a Committee of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, to Whom was Referred the Community of the Secretary Relative to the Cape Palmas Mission,” *Maryland Colonization Journal* 1, no. 17 (October 15, 1842): 257-259.

standing before him. However the conversation progressed, McGill and Hazlehurst engaged in a sort of private wager that speaks volumes to the life in Liberia.²¹²

At this moment my boy presented himself on deck, and his name was asked by the gentleman—I had not previously selected one, but at the moment conferred on him that of “Chancellor Walworth,” (he was previous to this known by his native name, which is generally dropped when they live in our colonies.) At the time of naming him, I declared my intention to place this boy under influences that would ultimately lead to his conversion, and render him a worthy member of some Christian church, and this in order to prove that a colonist, one who is known as, (and with regret acknowledges himself) an unregenerate man, might possibly become the humble means of opening the door for the conversion of the native Africa.²¹³

Like other westerners living in West Africa, McGill believed African “nakedness” was a principal impediment to the attainment of complete “civilization.” Hence, “since arriving at home, this boy has been clad” and encouraged to attend church. Apparently, as “Chancellor Walworth” “became acquainted with the native boys of Gov. Russwurm’s family, who have been for two years creditable members of the Methodist Episcopal Church,” the boy joined them during Sunday sermons. In an unsurprising narrative turn, “Chancellor Walworth” “became more serious and depressed in mind” until he underwent a full conversion experience. McGill appended a letter from the local Methodist minister affirming “Chancellor Walworth’s” conversion and regular attendance at services, and then concluded that the account proved his point that the settlers were “serviceable on this coast in evangelizing the heathen.” For the readers of the *Maryland Colonization Journal* that published McGill’s letter, the editors hoped they would recognize the account as “a plain and simple narrative...of everyday life in the

²¹² Episcopal Church, Foreign Committee, *An Historical Sketch of the African Mission of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the U.S.A.* (New York: Foreign Committee, 1884), 9, 13, 61.

²¹³ “Chancellor Walworth,” *Maryland Colonization Journal* 2, no. 3 (September 1843): 33-35. The journal account is an accurate transcription of a letter to James Hall, editor of the *Maryland Colonization Journal*, written in McGill’s script. The journal claimed that its published account was a reprint of a McGill letter dated June 26, 1843. The original note from Anthony Williams is dated June 26, but the accompanying letter only bears the date of November 23. This may reflect the date that Hall received it, but it has been chronologically filed in the MSCS letter books with letters from November 1843 instead of June.

colony.” For the colonizationists controlling the press, McGill’s account challenged the narrative that “would represent them [the settlers] as exercising a baleful influence upon the natives.”²¹⁴ For modern ears, there are startling parallels to American slavery. For starters, McGill’s word choice raises intriguing questions. He did not “negotiate,” “contract,” or “indenture” the African youth, but rather “procured” the lad. Even more jarring, given the history of enslaved Africans and the power to name them within the context of New World slavery, is McGill’s complete nonchalance at sardonically renaming his charge after his former antagonist.²¹⁵ There are eerie echoes in McGill’s account to the likes of Robert “King” Carter of the eighteenth-century informing one of his overseers, “I hope you will take care that the negroes both men & women I sent yo [sic] up always go by the names we gave them for this reason I nam’d them here & by their names we can always know what sizes they are.”²¹⁶

Little wonder that the Africans found the Liberian settlers to be closer to the foreign whiteness of Europeans and Euro-Americans than their own self-conceptualizations of blackness. In the same manner that controlling the space of Liberia produced similar results, this system of controlling the labor of black bodies nourished the conceptualizations of Liberian settlers as “civilized,” but exotic, others. Indeed, McGill and many of his fellow settlers found the whole system of coerced labor a great benefit to their African laborers, much as apologists

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Scholars have debated the extent to which Africans and African Americans controlled their own naming practices, retained their own names in addition to new ones projected onto them by slavery, and emulated the Euro-American naming system of their owners. John Thornton, for example, has challenged “the old idea that masters assigned names to slaves or that slaves imitated masters’ systems of naming.” Examining plantation records in Barbados, Jerome S. Handler and JoAnn Jacoby have likewise argued for the continuation of African naming practices for both African and creole slaves, although they argue that the lack of regular, universal system makes for an uneven argument contingent on time, place, and even individual plantation management. Examining Carolina slaves, John Inscoc concluded that while African slaves were renamed by plantation authorities, their creole descendants freely selected the names of their children. See John Thornton, “Central African Names and African-American Naming Patterns,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 50, no. 4 (October 1993): 727-742; Jerome S. Handler and JoAnn Jacoby, “Slave Names and Naming in Barbados, 1650-1830,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 53, no. 4 (October 1996): 685-728; John Inscoc, “Carolina Slave Names: An Index to Acculturation,” *The Journal of Southern History* 49, no. 4 (November 1983): 527-554.

²¹⁶ Robert Carter to Robert Jones, 10 and 14 October 1727, The Diary, Correspondence, and Papers of Robert “King” Carter of Virginia, 1702-1732, Electronic Text Center, University of Virginia Library, www.carter.lib.virginia.edu.

for slavery within the United States often extolled the institution's benefits to its victims in the form "civilization" through Christianity. Or as historian James Campbell succinctly put it when summarizing the turn towards sugar and coffee production after Liberian independence: "the Liberian countryside bore a more than passing resemblance to the Old South."²¹⁷

Of course, one should also look at the circumstances of McGill's nonchalant acquisition of a household servant: the establishment of his familial household in Africa. Although he does not explicitly designate "Chancellor Walworth" as domestic help for his new bride, the timing of his acquisition seems more than coincidental. McGill likewise credited the youths in Russwurm's household for putting "Chancellor Walworth" on the path towards Christian conversion. It was almost certainly one of these youths who actually accompanied Sarah Russwurm on at least two different visits and prolonged residences in the United States. How her American associates reacted to the unidentified "servant" (or servants if she employed two different individuals) raises startling questions regarding the role of African American women in this system of unfree labor. Indeed, one of the troubling elements of Russwurm's visits to the United States was how *little* commentary her travels with an African servant generated among her colonizationist colleagues. Given their propaganda that such relationships bestowed "civilization" and Christianity upon the "heathen," perhaps her contemporaries simply applauded the use of an African servant and thought it unworthy of notation.²¹⁸

Liberia's labor regime, then, provided settlers with additional claims to controlling black bodies and the civilizing mission. In the case of McGill's dispute with the missionaries, he even asserted that Liberians' claims to African labor *trumped* the civilizing credentials of the missionary establishment. If spatial categorizations separated African American from African

²¹⁷ James Campbell, *Middle Passages*, 71.

²¹⁸ "Our Autumnal Expedition," *Maryland Colonization Journal*, 4, no. 3 (September 1847): 33; "Sailing of the Packet, Emigrants, & c.," *Maryland Colonization Journal*, 5, no. 2 (August 1849): 17.

while likewise exerting control over African space, then the labor system of Liberia *returned* the Africans to the “civilizing” space of Liberia under the guiding influence and control of the settlers. Nominally, the labor provided the other “soft” guiding hand as opposed to the “hard” hand of violence (discussed in chapter 5). Of course, the two often worked in concert towards the same end. Within this framework of “civilizing” work, colonizationists of the evangelical slant—even bitter opponents of slavery like Gurley or Latrobe—supported the Liberian labor system as a means of spreading Christianity. Such logic not only retroactively supported the introduction of New World enslavement of “heathens,” American Indians, Africans, or otherwise, thus allowing for the necessity of terminating slavery now that it had fulfilled its divine proselytizing mission, but also endorsed African American superiority over barbaric unchristian Africans. One must remember Robert Breckinridge’s theory that slavery served as a “type of training” that had bestowed “civilization” upon African Americans.²¹⁹ Of course, such thinking was not limited to Euro-American colonization leaders, but likewise undergirded the ideology of many African Americans. This “Ethiopianism” was an affirmation of a divine mission for African Diasporans to “restore” Africa to its previous exalted position as a continent of grand, modern, and artistic civilizations (Egypt) or great Christian empires (Ethiopia). Obviously, such ideology appealed greatly to Liberian settlers along with evangelical colonizationists. This sentiment was reinforced when settlers and colonizationists alike opened their King James Bibles and read in the Psalms, “Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God.”²²⁰ The African American princes had left Egypt, wandered in the desert of American slavery, found their enlightenment in that wasteland, and were prepared to restore Ethiopia, or Africa more

²¹⁹ Breckinridge, *The Black Race: Some Reflections on its Position and Destiny*, 17

²²⁰ Psalm 68:31 (King James Version).

broadly, that “benighted land,” to the dominion of the Christian God.²²¹ This was a powerful message (and certainly not one limited to colonizationists). These sentiments were perfectly encapsulated by John Revey’s letter to Latrobe that accompanied his maps of Maryland in Liberia.

Avarice & cruelty dragged the African from his home and all its pleasures, but God bringeth good out of evil: He will not clear the guilty. And the slave trade originating in the foulest passions of the human heart, but notwithstanding been the medium through which thousands and tens of thousands of Africans have been brought to an acquaintance with civilization & the Christian Religion, who otherwise might have lived & died in superstition & ignorance, without God and without hope, like the thousands around us whom we daily behold. Now who is the man so wise as to determine that it is not the will of heaven to restore them to the land of their forefathers, to impart in however small degree the knowledge & religion they received in a Gospel land?²²²

In addition to the educational apparatus attached to colonial administrations and missionary establishments, the employment of African labor provided Liberians with opportunities to lay claim to their “civilizing” influence over their colony’s African inhabitants. Of course, McGill inadvertently acknowledged the unspoken caveat of the argument that African labor necessarily equated to this “civilizing” influence: he spoke only of young domestic servants. A perusal of complaints regarding African laborers, e.g. Samson Ceasar’s notation that “the natives are numerous in this place and they do the most of the work,” and the financial records of the colonies, reinforce the argument that African labor was critical to colonial operations. Conversely, much of *this* labor was performed by adult males, both indentured and contracted by colonial authorities, in which conversion was often a low priority. McGill’s purported conversion of “Chancellor Walworth,” however, is illustrative of the large-scale

²²¹ Wilson Jeremiah Moses has produced the classic treatises on “Ethiopianism” and black nationalism. See Wilson \ Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1820-1925* (1978; repr., New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Wilson Moses, ed., *Classical Black Nationalism: From the American Revolution to Marcus Garvey* (New York: New York University Press, 1996); Moses, *Afrotopia*.

²²² John Revey to John H. B. Latrobe, 20 January 1840, MSCS.

employment of African youths within Liberian households as domestic servants. Working within the household, these youths would most likely fall under the direction of African American women.

For Africans, these settler women were likewise categorized as “white,” although all western-style cultural performances were labeled in the masculine as “white man’s fash.” Hence settler Diana James’s report to her former mistress, “they call us all white man.” In terms of securing recognition as such in the United States, however, women simply did not have the same opportunities as men to return to the States in order to lay claim to a “civilized” exotic persona based upon their African whiteness. James’s correspondence is filled with desires to visit the United States. In 1839 she wrote, “You request of me and my Father to come over to Emerrica but i do not expect ever to come thire a gain not because i will not but becawse i cannot.” Four years later, James had seemingly made peace with her African home after great initial frustration, but she still held hopes for a return: “My mind are [perhaps a subliminal recognition of her twoness?] perfectly at ease & I wish to make Africa my home the longest day that I live. Yet I do not pretend to say that I do not want to come back and see you all.” For all of her desires, James never returned to the United States and although the colonization societies did not prevent that journey from occurring, the mechanisms of that organization did not offer the same aid which they extended to other male settlers. The colonizationists advanced their agendas through politics and public forums dominated by men. In so doing, they limited the role of women and corralled their female supporters into auxiliary societies. The rhetoric surrounding Liberia, from both its Euro-American supporters and African American settlers, focused on a masculine civilizing mission, taming both the landscape of Africa and its inhabitants. If there were many possibilities for some Liberian settlers returning to the States to find patronage as detailed in chapter two,

James's failure to ever make that journey highlights a great roadblock for others to secure a passage on that returning vessel: gender.²²³

There were opportunities for male settlers of even relatively modest means to secure colonization society patronage to fund their returns to the United States. Beyond the educational requirements necessary to run a colonial administration, the logic which supported McGill and Fletcher's American sojourns, the colonization societies' use of settler testimonials to combat colonization's overwhelming negative image among African Americans provided opportunities for Harris, Hance, Scotland, and other "respectable" settlers to travel the United States and lecture. "Respectable" obviously functioned as a loaded term reflecting a settler's relative economic success in the colony and continued support for colonization. Hance and Scotland were certainly not as well off as the McGills, but they had not succumbed to crippling poverty like many of their compatriots, and they maintained a positive outlook on colonization. Of course, educational institutions, specialized mechanical training, and traveling lecture tours to address mixed-race and mixed-sex audiences combined with the already established masculine leanings of the colonization societies and led them to seek out male settlers to perform these tasks.

For women, the capacity to continue their Atlantic peregrinations was largely economic and class-based. Sarah Russwurm was the wife of a governor; Diana James was not. There certainly would have been little doubt regarding Russwurm's African status given her accompaniment by a servant. Conversely, Moses Sheppard, charged by McGill to perform a task for his sister similar to the one that he had performed for McGill himself, believed that he had

²²³ Diana Skipwith James to Sally Cocke, 6 March 1843, in Wiley, 57; Diana Skipwith to Louisa Cocke, 20 May 1839, in Wiley, 46; Diana Skipwith James to John H. Cocke, 7 March 1843, in Wiley, 58. Bruce Dorsey has noted that colonization adopted a masculine framework, whereas abolitionism as a broad movement integrated women far more successfully. See Dorsey, 136-164.

failed McGill in his instructions to “smooth matters” in Russwurm’s travels.²²⁴ Regardless of Russwurm’s opinion of the relative merits of her American sojourns, Sheppard’s concerns reflect his own association of “whiteness” with “liberty,” a conflation mutually reinforced by his respect for the African racial classifications. Yet, as he informed William Polk, if “freedom and independence make a white man,” then gender, poverty, and personal connections placed obvious restraints on such a nominally fluid identity.

Of course, much of the impetus for African parents to send their children into settler homes was to secure a new identity for themselves. As noted before, these coastal-dwelling Africans sought literacy and an understanding of western cultural practices for their children so that they could cement their position as economic middlemen between coastal traders and African groups living in the interior. The same logic undergirded the complements of “native scholars” filing into the “native schools” of the colonies, which were usually attached to missionary stations. Hence, the final line of the deed of purchase for Maryland in Liberia, signed by “King Freeman,” “King Will,” and “King Joe Holland,” dictated “that free schools shall be established for the benefit of the Children of each village.” Harper’s “Yellow Will” may have exceeded many of his compatriots’ desires to crossover into the American camp, but his decision to send his sons to a missionary school and his hopes that one would become a doctor, and other Africans’ desire for their children to be immersed in western cultural practices, emanated from a shared understanding of the value of being cultural and literal middlemen.²²⁵ Settlers like McGill occasionally interpreted African desires for western educations as evidence of colonists’ cultural supremacy and influence over Africans. Hence, Hilary Teague of the *Liberia Herald* crowed in an 1844 editorial, “The natives are beginning to ‘like’ civilized manners and habits. *I sen you my*

²²⁴ Samuel F. McGill to Moses Sheppard, 31 March 1848, MSP.

²²⁵ For a discussion of the significance of interpreters or “talk men” for coastal trading in West Africa, Brooks, 18-25.

*piccaninie, say they. I want you for keep him, larn him white man fash, pose he no larn, flog him, O no want him go country make fool fash all same me.*²²⁶

The bound children of nearby Africans, however, did not constitute the entirety of the Liberian labor market. There was the possibility of indenturing adult Africans or even down-on-their-luck fellow settlers. Another possible source of labor was the “recaptives” or “Congoes.” These were Africans previously ensnared in the illegal Atlantic slave trade whose vessels had been captured by the United States navy, and they were universally deposited in Liberia regardless of their actual points of origin (in a nod to the western conflation of a vast coterie of peoples into generic and placeless “Africans”). The opinions of the Liberian settlers regarding these African castaways were decidedly mixed and always dependent upon their adoption of American cultural practices. Those recaptives who established New Georgia, for example, were looked upon favorably by most colonists. Having been held in Georgia for several years before being dispatched to Liberia, many of the New Georgians had adapted to American customs. Hence, the *Liberia Herald* of September 30, 1843, carried a two-column obituary of “Brother “James Young.” A part of a cargo of souls involved in a lawsuit, “Young” had languished in Georgia, “but after years of vexatious litigation the voice of liberty prevailed.” Of course, “while the suit was pending the marshal distributed them [the Africans] among planters taking recognizance that they should be forthcoming when called for”—the voice of liberty apparently has many dulcet tones—and while being saved from slavery by being enslaved in a different manner, “Young” underwent a conversion experience. Eventually freed and dispatched to Liberia to join others in establishing the recaptive settlement of New Georgia, named in honor of the state which served as the captives’ sometimes-enslaver, sometimes-savior, “Young” went on to serve as the Baptist minister of the settlement’s Providence Baptist Church. The *Liberia*

²²⁶ “Deed No. 1 from King Freeman and King Will, of Cape Palmas,” MSCS; Hilary Teage, “Native Children,” *Liberia Herald* 24, January 1844.

Herald's obituary concluded that "Young's" "preaching was plain and practical," eminently suited for his audience, and that he exhibited a "deep seriousness and earnestness" reflecting the weight with which he carried his message. "James Young" and his fellow New Georgians were the favorites of the Americo-Liberian settlers due to their broad embrace of American culture, yet "Young's" obituary was prefaced with two articles, "Heathen Customs" and "Tender Mercies of Heathenism," that belied the general attitude of the settlers towards Africans.²²⁷

Juxtaposed against the New Georgians were the recaptured Africans from the *Pons* who were deposited in Liberia in December 1845. The *Pons*, an American barque from Philadelphia, was captured by the *USS Yorktown* carrying nearly 900 slaves and almost immediately dispatched to Liberia. Having only recently been taken aboard the vessel and lacking the years of forced acculturation in the United States, the *Pons* Africans evoked a decided mixed response from the settlers. Matilda Skipwith sympathized with those who died from their limited time aboard the dreadful vessel and noted that several of survivors had "embraced the religion of our Savior and making rapid improvements in Education." Despite these positive signs, she affirmed, "Tho I must say of a truth that they are the most Savage, & blud thirsty people I ever saw or ever wishes to see." The *Liberia Herald* agreed with Skipwith's summation. Six months after their arrival, the *Herald* reported an amusing anecdote in which six of the *Pons* Africans were

²²⁷ "Died," *Liberia Herald*, September 30, 1843. It should be noted that the high standing of the New Georgians was not limited to the settlers, but was likewise embraced by colonizationists in the States as examples of the colony's civilizing influence. Thus, Connecticut's colonization society in 1830 recorded for its members a letter from non-other than John B. Russwurm, then working in Monrovia as the editor of the *Liberia Herald*, regarding the significance of New Georgia: "Provisions are brought into the Cape by the recaptured Africans, who are settled a few miles from here on lands which they call New Georgia. They amount to about 400, and are easily known from the surrounding natives by their dress and their copying as much as they can after the settlers. The great change which has taken place in their condition every way, would be enough to convince the most sceptical [sic]; it seems that transplantation has improved their nature much, for while the native who have the same chance still adhere to their old customs, these are advancing daily in the arts of civilization." A year later, the managers of the parent society noted in their official report a letter from governor Mechlin, "They have been placed on lands assigned to them, and have already constructed twenty superior country houses, thatched in a manner peculiar to themselves and far surpassing those of the natives. AS regards the old ones of this class, I consider them as the most independent men whom we have. Could you behold their neat town of New Georgia, you would be delighted...." See *Third Annual Report of the Managers of the Colonization Society of the State of Connecticut* (New Haven: Baldwin and Treadway, 1830), 17-18; "Report," *The Fourteenth Annual Report of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour of the United States*, 4-5.

“engaged in clearing away bush on a farm on Bushrod Island,” when they happened across a boa constrictor. “As if apprised of the Congo predilection for snake meat his snakeship went off at full speed for the covert of his house,” but the Congoes gave chase and successfully captured the snake along with her nest of eggs. “We need not say it was a high day for the congoes,” concluded the *Herald*, “It was indeed to him a feast of fat things.” A week and half later, the *Herald* claimed that a number of the *Pons* Africans were living in the woods and raiding the settlers’ farms at night. Needless to say, the editors attributed the barbarity of these “thieving scoundrels” to their unwillingness to live in the American settlement. “We have considerable sympathy for these people,” chided the *Herald*, “and the community in general would willingly assist in taking care of them;--but such is the disposition of some of them that they prefer, notwithstanding you may lavish upon them much care and expense,--to live a wild life in the woods...rather than live with the colonists.” Of course, befitting the narrative of the colony’s “civilizing” influence, by December 1846, after one year’s residence in the colony, those who had elected to remain within the colony’s sphere of “civilized” habitation proved themselves to be “becoming of value to their guardians—those remaining in the colony, show no disposition, now to wander off....we find no great difficulty in accustoming them to our habits.” In fact, the *Pons* Africans had become a blessing to the settlers at Grand Bassa as additional reinforcements to counter the incursions from the neighboring African settlement, Fishtown. The newspaper supposedly quoted a reliable source from Grand Bassa who claimed “our Congoes have really turned our manly; they have thrown more dread upon the Fishmen, (our former antagonists) and the surrounding tribes, than I have ever known exerted upon them before.”²²⁸

²²⁸ “From Capt. Bell to the Secretary of the Navy,” *Extracts from Letters Respecting the Capture of the Slave Ship “Pons,” on the Coast of Africa, and the Landing of the Captured Slaves in Liberia on the 16th of the Twelfth Month, 1845* (1845?), Triptych, Tri-College Digital Library, http://triptych.brynmawr.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/SC_Broad/id/2124/rec/6; Matilda Skipwith Lomax to Sally Cocke, 4 July 1848, in Wiley, 67; “The Africans by the Pons,” *Liberia Herald*, July 17, 1846; “The Africans by the ‘Pons,’” *Liberia Herald*, December 4, 1846.

Within the layers of these various evaluations of the *Pons* Africans lay many of the assumptions regarding Liberia's capacity to "civilize" Africans. There are jocular accounts of eating a living snake and its eggs, a meal certainly unbecoming to the American settlers who were more interested in the length of the snake—reported at fourteen feet—than its culinary qualities. Further, there is the juxtaposition between the "thieving scoundrels" living in the forests surrounding the settlements, and thus beyond the "civilizing" influence of the colonists, and the utility of the *Pons* Africans who remained within the confines of the settlement. There are intriguing parallels between the *Herald's* conclusion that the forests shielded those whose "disposition" led them to reject "warm and comfortable quarters" in the American settlements and Charles F. Mercer's speech before the first meeting of the ACS in 1818, in which he denounced "newly grown and almost impenetrable thickets which have succeeded a wretched civilization, shelter and conceal a banditti, consisting of this degraded, idle, and vicious population." Mercer, of course, was speaking of the degraded population of free people of color rather than Africans, but both he and the editors of the *Herald* assumed that the surrounding thickets stood against the civilized open fields of agrarian society.²²⁹

More relevant to the labor practices of the colony is the reference to the growing utility of the *Pons* Africans who remained in the American settlements under the guidance of "their guardians." Like other collections of recaptives, a number of the *Pons* Africans were apprenticed to Liberian settlers, here redefined in the newspaper account as "guardians." Given the undisclosed number who ran away and inhabited the nearby woods, it is difficult to estimate the exact number of apprentices created by the capture of the *Pons*. The *Liberia Herald* reported, "Doctor Lugenbeel, the United States agent, has put them all out with different persons, who have taken them as apprentices. Those under age will be apprenticed under the apprentice act of

²²⁹ *The First Annual Report of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Color, of the United States*, 15.

the colony, and adults will be bound for seven years.”²³⁰ There is an element of ownership of these Africans exhibited by the *Herald*’s unnamed correspondent, presumably one of the settlers who received African apprentices from the *Pons*. He refers to the group as “*Our* [emphasis mine] *Congoes*” and further notes their recent arrival to manhood. The language employed assumes both a collective ownership by the community (“*Our*”) and an individual ownership (“*guardians*”). Conversely, the recaptives are not embraced for their respective “*civilization*” in the same way as the New Georgians, but are merely useful in countering the violence of an antagonistic neighboring African settlement. More than simply preventing the aggressions of Fishtown, the recaptives projected the violent authority of their American “*guardians*” onto Fishtown’s inhabitants. The correspondent gleefully reported one altercation in which the “*Congoes* went down to Fishtown and forcibly arrested the thief, a Fishman, and after giving him a good beating, took his cloth and a cutlass—and it was pretty difficult for us to prevent them from going down to set fire to the Fishtown.”²³¹ So, the *Pons* Africans discovered their manhood in becoming an extension of American violence even as the American settlers passed themselves off as the moderating influence in control of African barbarity. An intriguing question arises over whether the female captives from the *Pons* could likewise discover their “*womanhood*” under American supervision. To accomplish that, however, female recaptives would have had to ascribe to American constructions of feminine domesticity and command their own household staffs, a difficult cultural and economic proposition necessitating marriage to a settler, a matrimonial act which settlers were infamously reluctant to do. In his testimony on the state of affairs in Liberia in the early 1830s, Thomas C. Brown could only think of two settlers married

²³⁰ As the agent of the United States government, James Lugenbeel was assigned to oversee the “*return*” of recaptives to Liberia. He was not the agent of the ACS, Joseph Roberts in 1845, who served as the governor of the colony. See “*From the Monrovia Herald of ‘December 28th, 1845,’ Extracts from Letters Respecting the Capture of the Slave Ship ‘Pons.’*”

²³¹ “*The Africans by the ‘Pons,’*” *Liberia Herald*, December 4, 1846.

to African women.²³² There were simply far more opportunities for recaptive men to exhibit violence against neighboring Africans than for recaptive women to establish an American-style household.

The *Pons* Africans perfectly demonstrate the interrelatedness between space, violence, and labor at work in Liberia. Mere inhabitation in the space led to increased civilization; one means to ensure that the savages remained in the civilizing space was to bind them in a system of coerced labor, and as an added bonus they subsequently became useful tools in the day-to-day campaigns of violence against Africans. Through these mutually reinforcing “civilizing influences,” the formerly “savage” African would find “civilization” and uplift. The arrival of the *Pons* further underscored the racial classifications of Liberia. Just below the column detailing the demise of the snake at the hands of the captives, a small announcement declared: “We have been informed that the supplies sent out for the negroes by the ‘Pons’ will be shortly distributed. We would suggest as the most equitable mode of distribution that reference be made to the court books where the number which each colonist took is registered.” Not only is it telling language to refer to this registry as a catalog of “numbers,” not names, “each colonist took,” but the use of “negroes” to distinguish the *Pons* Africans underscores the associations between racial designations and labor. The settlers generally expressed aversion to the label “negro”; Andrew Hall’s declaration that he “would not be willing to come back to America to be called a negro” reflected a broader sentiment among the settlers.²³³ When writing to the United States, Americo-Liberians almost universally used “colored” in their correspondence, again underlining that these

²³² *Examination of Mr. Thomas C. Brown, A Free Colored Citizen of S. Carolina as to the Actual State of Things in Liberia in the Years 1833 and 1834* (New York: S. W. Benedict and Co., Printers, 1834), 12.

²³³ The term “negro” has an evolving and contested history. Currently in disuse and saddled with pejoration, the term was employed by many African American activists in a positive manner (such as the United Negro College Fund). For Americo-Liberians, however, it seems that “negro” was glued to accompanying associations of debased labor and they rarely used the word. See Anita Henderson, “What’s in a Slur?” *American Speech* 78, no. 1 (2003): 55-56; Joanne Pope Melish, “The Racial Vernacular: Contesting the Black/White Binary in Nineteenth-Century Rhode Island,” in *Race, Nation, and Empire in American History*, edited by James T. Campbell, Matthew Pratt Guterl, and Robert G. Lee (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 17-39.

were not individuals who desired to be “whites” or conceived of themselves as such, but rather utilized the tools of their African whiteness to demand an altered position in the United States as respected foreigners. Although there was certainly a great deal of variation—McGill thought the term “free man of color” in the United States to be “synonymous” with slavery—“negro,” imbued with associations of enslaved or degraded labor, was almost never employed as a self-identity by settlers. The classification of the *Pons* captives as “the negroes” certainly suggests the labor-oriented lens through which the settlers viewed these Africans. Referencing the “uncivilized” *Pons* Africans as “negroes” separated these individuals from the settlers while the Americo-Liberians could lay claim to the title of “civilizers” and “masters of negroes.” Much like the New Georgians’ residence in old Georgia, the *Pons* Africans found themselves saved from slavery by becoming a different sort of unfree labor. The startling parallels to the United States in terms of the employment of this “negro” labor become all the more startling when one remembers that in the official language of the ACS, these settlers’ farm lots were technically “plantations.” These were the sorts of practices that led Africans to identify the Americo-Liberians as whites and provided the settlers with tools to demand recognition as such from Euro-Americans.

Further, complicating this labor regime, there were obviously large numbers of Africans willing to work for settlers or the colonial administration for minuscule wages. These temporary wage laborers were a constant source of disgruntlement for both Americo-Liberian laborers who found their wages undercut by this competition and observers of the colony who pondered the relative merits of the colony’s labor system. Samuel Williams, an Americo-Liberian actually writing in defense of the colony, admitted that many of these complaints were legitimate. “Many of the colonists are in want of work to make something to enable them to get the comforts of life, but the natives are employed in preference, because they can live on twenty-five cents per day,

while the colonists must have seventy-five cents. Now, this is wrong.” Alexander Cowan, a white colonizationist attached to the Kentucky state auxiliary of the ACS, visited Liberia in 1858, one year after the publication of Williams’s book, during a period of increased interest in emigration due to the United States’ growing racial tensions following the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act and recent *Dred Scott* decision. He delighted in the tidy appearance of Monrovia’s streets, ascribing their general appearance to two laws, one that dictated that settlers and Africans be required to give up four work days a year to perform public service on street cleaning and another which punished criminals charged with theft or larceny with forced labor on the town’s streets. The amount of time assigned to clean Monrovia’s thoroughfares depended upon the monetary value of the stolen goods. The value of the work of a Liberian settler (or African who met the performative requirements to be classified as “civilized”) was established at \$6 a month, meaning that if the stolen goods’ value equaled \$6 then the culprit would work for one month. Native labor, however, was valued at \$3 a month, meaning the same crime would result in double the sentence in months worked.²³⁴

Yet, even as Cowan celebrated a system explicitly built upon the assumption of degraded African labor, he concurrently noted that something was not quite right with work in the young republic. The inexpensive African labor created interesting sights for Cowan, especially given the paucity of livestock within the colony which raised their relative value considerably and led colonists to only begrudgingly risk their beasts of burden. While exploring Monrovia, he noticed that wagons, buggies, and other means of conveyance usually delegated to the work of domesticated ungulates were actually pulled by African laborers in Liberia.

²³⁴ Samuel Williams, *Four Years in Liberia. A Sketch of the Life of the Rev. Samuel Williams. With Remarks on the Missions, Manners and Customs of the Natives of Western Africa. Together with an Answer to Nesbit’s Book* (Philadelphia: King and Baird, 1857), 16-17; Alexander M. Cowan, *Liberia as I Found It, in 1858* (Frankfort, KY: A. G. Hodges, 1858), 40.

What a strange sight in a civilized land to see cattle going about the streets, and a line of human carriers doing the work of beasts of burden. Twenty-five to thirty native men in single file carry on their heads the materials for the erection of a *college* building! Each one takes what is required, be it brick, or sand, or stone window sills, and carries his load over a mile, and returns for another load. Lumber is taken to the spot to be used by several natives, as the length and weight demands. I saw, I suppose a new improvement—a new cart, with some natives holding up the tongue, others guiding the cart by the tongue, others drawing the by a rope fastened to the bolster, and other behind pushing the cart. The cart was loaded with brick brought up on the head from the wharf, and deposited in the street. There was no necessity to give the *words gee* nor haw; the natives understood their own dialect and moved according to the word of command by the head native.²³⁵

Although he expressed great admiration for the Constitution of Liberia, specifically its provision establishing “one great object” of the new Republic to “regenerate and enlighten” Africans, Cowan admitted that in watching the carts trudge up to the new college building, he “did not admire such a levelling practice as an elevating principle to raise the heathen brothers.” Despite the assurances of settlers like McGill that the employment of African labor was a sure means to Christianize and “civilize” their charges, Cowan concluded, “I am afraid the natives are employed because they can be paid in articles of barter, as cloth, tobacco, & c., that the percentage charged on them left a margin for profits, even *for poor labor*.”²³⁶

Finally, settler children were often bound to unrelated adults in Liberia. As a sickly settlement with high mortality rates, the Liberian colonies and the young republic faced staggering familial crises and poverty issues with large populations of widows, aged parents without children, and orphans. While sick lists and poor funds only modestly mitigated some of these issues, orphans were almost universally placed in the households of adult relatives. If no adult relative was available, however, the children were subsequently placed in the households of settlers. The result is a dizzying buffet of labor options fully in line with those of other

²³⁵ Cowan, 43-44.

²³⁶ Ibid.

contemporaneous Atlantic societies which offered remarkable opportunities to those with the means to capitalize upon these labor options.²³⁷ Within the Liberian colonies, settlers and colonial administrators could utilize indentured African labor, both adults and children, hire African laborers at minimal cost, work criminals on public projects, and employ American orphans placed within households.

The colonial accounts of Maryland in Liberia reveal the Liberian labor market in full force. Russwurm's meticulous line-by-line accounts alternate between wages paid to settlers and to largely unnamed African laborers. On February 3, 1838, the colonial agency paid Nathan Lee \$8.00 for "country boards," boards cut in the West African fashion, and James Martin \$5.50 for "plank," boards for American-style dwellings, and nails. Ten days later, an undisclosed number of "natives" received \$3.00 for "bringing plank from bush." With few exceptions reserved for those Africans most affiliated with the colony, the use of full settler names and unidentified "natives" was the prevalent system employed in colonial bookkeeping. For example, the Ladies School account, the records for the colonial school supported by the Baltimore-based "Ladies Society for the Promotion of Education in Africa," reveals a relationship with "Long Tom," who functioned as the building's guard, even as it likewise recorded the labor of unnamed "natives." Trusted African inhabitants of Cape Palmas were also employed as military extensions of the colonial establishment, much like the recaptives in the ACS settlements. Such was the situation in 1838 after "King Freeman" and Russwurm journeyed together up the Cavalla River, a journey in which they were fired upon by a group of native Africans determined to maintain control over the river traffic; they also lost their worldly possessions as their vessels were overturned in the ensuing melee (this incident is also further detailed in chapter 5). While both Cape Palmas

²³⁷ Seth Rockman's *Scraping By: Wage Labor, Slavery, and Survival in Early Baltimore*, for example, details the commodification of labor during the Market Revolution in early national Baltimore. The port city on the western side of the Atlantic, itself intimately linked to Liberia, likewise offered its city's employers a multiethnic range of options among free, enslaved, indentured, bound, wage, and unwaged laborers. See Seth Rockman, *Scraping By: Wage Labor, Slavery, and Survival in Early Baltimore* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).

leaders had seethed at the subsequent theft of their watery goods and the soaking of their bodies, they had been militarily unable to deal with the culprits, the Barboes of Ploroh. The accidental burning of “Freeman’s” town following this incident and antagonism between the Cape Palmas Africans and Liberian settlers prevented either side from wielding the necessary force to mount an expedition against the Barboes as their respective leaders desired. But “Yellow Will,” underlining his commitment to become an American, provided Russwurm an opportunity to bring the Barboes to the negotiating table to answer for their actions at the river. “Will” proposed kidnapping several Barbo men in hopes of forcing a ransom and securing restitution for the aforementioned indignities. Russwurm tellingly described “Yellow Will” as “my headman,” simultaneously affirming “Will’s” significant place within the American colony, the patriarchal possession of him, and the intransience of certain settlers to embrace the “Americanness” of “Will”; no official documents utilized “William Hall” in lieu of “Yellow Will.” A contract was established with “Will” and seven “resolute men”; although they only succeeded in capturing a single Barbo man, the solitary prisoner was enough to bring the Barboes to negotiations with the colony. For their services, \$29 of “sundries” was paid to these “Cape Palmas Soldiers” for capturing the “Barbo man”; “Yellow Will” received \$8 individually.²³⁸ That the “resolute men” received “sundries” underscores the prevalence of the practice noticed by Cowan one decade later of paying Africans in trade goods rather than cash.

The labor of the public farm, an agriculture experiment station owned by the colonial administration dedicated to testing new crops and growing food for the public good, proved an even more muddled situation. In addition to the aforementioned conglomeration of African and settler labor, the public farm employed a large number of unspecified “boys.” On February 3,

²³⁸ January-June 1838 Colonial Account Books, MSCS; Ladies School House Acct., July-December 1839 Colonial Account Books, MSCS; John B. Russwurm to John H. B. Latrobe, 1 November 1838, MSCS; Fortification Account, July-December 1838, Colonial Account Books, MSCS.

1838, Thomas Davenport was paid \$1.50 “for work of boys.” Davenport and his wife, Frances, were progenitors of a huge emigrant family of former slaves from Frederick County, Maryland, consisting of their eleven children and two grandchildren. Davenport would certainly have had a large number of available children and grandchildren to work the public farm and probably would have found doing so necessary to support such a large family. Yet, in May, just three months later, the manager of the public farm recorded a payment to “Ths. Davenports Sons for work on farm.” In fact, Adam and Rudolph Davenport, two of the older sons of Thomas, were listed individually by name, following the usual bookkeeping protocol for settlers by using their full names. It would seem unlikely then that the “boys” were also Davenports “sons.” In this light, it is especially intriguing that the entry recorded Thomas Davenport as receiving the payment for the work of others. And Davenport was not the only settler receiving financial compensation for the work of unidentified “boys.” Just one month after Davenport’s payment, Nathan Harmon was likewise listed as the recipient of wages for “4 day’s work of boys.” And like the Cape Palmas soldiers who kidnapped the Barbo, the colonial administration paid “sundries” to “Bottle-Beer & boys for work.” “Wills boys,” presumably the sons of “Yellow Will” who attended the missionary school, were paid “tobacco and mugs” for work.²³⁹

The terms “boys,” then, seems reserved for the bound African youths of Liberian households. The fact that Davenport and Harmon were the listed recipients of the wages for the work of their “boys” would suggest a hiring-out system akin to that employed within the context of American chattel slavery. This argument is further reinforced by the fact that many of the settlers were originally from the Upper South, a labor market in which the hiring out of enslaved labor was a common feature. This idea of bound African children working on the public farm is

²³⁹ For information on the Davenports, see William McKenney to Managers of the Colonization Fund, 9 July 1836, MSCS; also, Richard L. Hall, 454-455. “Farm Account, January-July 1838, Colonial Account Books, MSCS; Contingent Expenses, January-July 1838, Colonial Account Books, MSCS.

problematized, however, by Lugenbeel, the American agent for recaptured Africans, who visited Maryland in Liberia in November 1845. As part of his visit to Cape Palmas, Lugenbeel observed the public farm and reported, “I was very much pleased to observe several boys at work on the farm, who, I was informed, were orphans and children of poor persons, and were employed and paid for their labor by the Governor.” Unfortunately, a change in the farm’s superintendent led to a change in bookkeeping as the new overseer somehow made the nondescript “natives” even less precise by simply creating a system divided among named settlers, boys, and “laborers.” Yet, others besides orphans worked the public farm in 1845. Indeed, in his December 1845 report, Russwurm complained of the inadequacies of the colonial jail located on the public farm (and rendered on Revey’s map of the colony). For those found guilty of petty crimes within the colony, residency at the jail during the night and labor on the farm during the day were standard punishments, hence the location of the jail on the farm. By the end of 1845, however, Russwurm was souring on this system of justice. Writing to the board, he justified the construction of a new stone jail away from the farm because “our present jail system is too lenient...that confinement at night in a log house on the Farm, and labor there during the day, when they can see & converse with their relatives & friends, is looked upon as a slight punishment.”²⁴⁰ It is certainly possible that Lugenbeel coincidentally observed the farm on a day in which the labor was solely performed by orphans of American settlers; nevertheless, the overarching image of Liberian workers presents a complex workforce of African and American laborers, bound, apprenticed, imprisoned, and nominally free.

Constitutionally, all of these labor systems were made legally distinct from slavery, but the diversity of the institution and the employment of debased and dismissed African laborers made the whole labor regime susceptible to abuse. This was a central change of William Nesbit’s

²⁴⁰ James Lugenbeel to James Hall, 26 May 1846, MSCS; John B. Russwurm to John H. B. Latrobe, 30 December 1845, MSCS.

damning 1855 expose on Liberia: *Four Months in Liberia: or African Colonization Exposed*.

Nesbit, originally a freeman from Pennsylvania, arrived in Monrovia in December 1853 aboard the *Isla de Cuba*. He only required a matter of months to determine that the Liberian republic was not the Promised Land he had been led to believe, thus giving title to his book, and he returned to the United States disenchanted with the African nation's prospects for emigration. While Nesbit found much to dislike about Liberia, the relations between Americo-Liberians and Africans held a particularly distinguished place in his narrative. "Every colonist keeps native slaves, (or as they term them servants,) about him, varying number from one to fifteen, according to the circumstances of the master. These poor souls they beat unmercifully, and more than half starve them, and all the labor that is done at all, is done by these poor wretches." By noting the preferred use of "servants" over slaves, Nesbit underscored the mixture of labor systems at work in Liberia even as he rejected those distinctions from chattel slavery based upon the lived experiences of the unfree. Unsurprisingly, he also commented upon and denounced the practice of indenturing out the insolvent to fulfill their financial obligations—an extension of the practice of having thieves work on public works which Cowan so celebrated—and the expansive use of the whip.²⁴¹

Significantly, although he resided in Liberia for less than half of a year, Nesbit quickly grasped the racial dynamics at work. In one of the most evocative lines in his book, Nesbit denounced the Liberian citizens' displays of religious piety, declaring that they "make a great deal of outward show of religion, but if half that is said of them be true, the best among them are but whited sepulchers." Nesbit joined with the majority of free people of color in the United

²⁴¹ Nesbit, 15, 32. Both pauper and child apprenticeship had long histories in the American colonies and the United States before the settlers arrived in Liberia. In Ruth Wallis Herndon and John E. Murray's collection of thirteen essays, the authors examine and discuss roughly 18,000 pauper-apprenticeship contracts. The system was expansive and certainly would not have been foreign to nineteenth-century Americans even as they adapted it to their African context. See Ruth Wallis Herndon and John E. Murray, ed., *Children Bound to Labor: The Pauper Apprentice System in Early America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009).

States in assuming that the Americo-Liberian settlers were little more than black-faced whites hoping to emulate the white master-class in the United States (see Chapter 5). Not only were the settlers whitened shells professing religiosity while emptiness filled their souls, they did everything to “imitate” the planter class of the United States. Like the slaves of the United States, the “slaves” of Liberia “occupy small buildings next to their masters’ residence, known as the ‘negro quarters,’ so their imitators in Liberia....so exact have they been in carrying out the customs and feelings of their exemplars in this country [slave owners in the United States], that the slave is never allowed to eat or sleep in the master’s house, or hut, as the case may be.”²⁴²

Nesbit assumed that the use of “negro” to denote African labor was a simple mimicry of American slave owners. Yet, just as in the case of the *Pons* Africans, this assignment of identity was far more complex than settlers’ simplistic desire to become southern planters in Africa. If Nesbit understood the oddity of distinguishing “negroes” in a West African settlement of Africans and those of African descent, he missed the embedded social standing implied by the term’s relationship to labor. While the roots of this conflation of “negro” with “unfree and degraded labor” lay in the experience of New World slavery, Nesbit assumes that the use of “negro” equated to a desire to be “white” within the American context instead of utilizing whiteness as a tool to lay claim to an elevated blackness. Nesbit likewise forgets that the origins of the settlers’ whiteness stemmed from classification by Africans, and that this racial categorization originated from a host of cultural practices, although labor and the interactions with African laborers certainly was a prominent wedge dividing African’s self-identity as black and these relative new-comers to the coast.

In focusing on the “negro quarters” behind the houses and detailing the procedures by which African children found themselves bound in settler households, Nesbit primarily focused

²⁴² Nesbit, 15, 39-40.

his attention on domestic servants. He was critical of the legal safeguards against enslavement, essentially arguing that Liberia offered far more parallels to American slavery than differences. “These slaves are generally obtained by purchase from the native parents, after arriving at such size and age as to be able to labor, at prices varying from eight to fifteen dollars. After the private transaction between the master and parents, the courts, at the instance of the master, go through some mummerly which fastens the fetters upon the purchased child during his natural life.” As in the United States, however, there were runaways, and Nesbit celebrated those who would “defy the powers that would enslave them.” Unfortunately when dealing with such an economy of scale, Nesbit lamented that the abundance of such available labor meant Liberian masters simply arranged a new contract with another African parent. That being said, there was apparently some effort to stop runaways, and the McGills seemed to hold a special role for Monrovia’s citizenry. “A slave owned by James M’Gill,” whom Nesbit only identifies by the sobriquet “second president,” would apparently “harangue” other natives into staying within their households for a “dash”—although misidentified by Nesbit as a “dosh”—the ubiquitous gift through which all Liberian transactions funneled.²⁴³

Nesbit claimed that little effort was expended to locate and reclaim runaway Africans, aside from purchasing the services of McGill’s “second president,” and the occasional references to runaways in the *Liberia Herald* reinforce his claim. There are a few runaway servant advertisements listed in the *Herald*, but these were reserved for runaway settlers. Such advertisements were eerily reminiscent of similar fare in American newspapers, adjusted for the economic realities of Liberia, and assuredly underscore that this was a settlement of displaced Americans familiar with the way such things were handled in the United States.

²⁴³ Ibid, 39-41.

TWO CENTS REWARD!

Keep a good look out.--Ranaway from the subscriber on the night of the 14th, inst. Isaiah Holister, an indented apprentice, of a brown complexion aged about 15 years. Any person apprehending him and delivering him to me in Monrovia, shall receive a Reward of Two Cents, if found out of this County, and if in the County One Cent; but no further expenses whatever in either case. All persons are forwarned from harboring him. D. B. Brown²⁴⁴

SIX CENTS REWARD

Ranaway from the subscriber an apprentice named Matthew Matthias. He ran off without any sufficient cause. All persons are warned against harbouring said apprentice. The above reward will be given to any one that delivers him to me at Monrovia; but no expenses will be paid. James Cotton Monrovia, Sept. 15th, 1842²⁴⁵

These two advertisements were both placed in 1842 and reveal much of life in colonial Liberia. Both Hollister and Matthias were young orphans originally from North Carolina. The large Hollister clan arrived in Monrovia in 1833, resulting in the deaths of parents Thomas and Loretta from the acclimating fever. Matthias arrived with his father, also named Matthew, aboard the *Criterion* in 1831. While both the senior Matthew and his wife Elizabeth survived the acclimating fever, the family patriarch died in 1838 from a fall. Elizabeth remarried, but apparently there were too many mouths to feed in the new family and Matthew was apprenticed out. Despite their 1842 departures from their masters, both lads were recorded in the 1843 colonial census as present in the colony and employed as “apprentices.”²⁴⁶ “D. B. Brown” was

²⁴⁴ “Two Cents Reward!” *Liberia Herald*, 24 February, 1842, p.

²⁴⁵ “Six Cents Reward,” *Liberia Herald*, 21 September 1842, p. 3.

²⁴⁶ Like many emigrant rolls, there is some confusion with the names. There are two Isaiah Hollisters listed in the 1843 census, one 18 and the other 20 years of age, but both are listed as “apprentices.” Although the emigrant role for the *Roanoke*, the vessel that brought the Hollisters to Liberia, does not list Isaiah, it does include his surviving sister, Loretta, and Sally Ogon; the 1843 census lists the twenty-year-old Isaiah and “Loretta” (Loretta) as the grandchildren of Ogon. The ship’s list includes an age-appropriate “Josiah Hollister,” who does not appear elsewhere in the archives, suggesting the possibility of a mistaken identity. Claude A. Clegg III argues that the name “Ogon” along with Sally’s age, sixty-six at departure for Africa, suggests that she or an immediate ancestor had

almost certainly Dixon B. Brown, originally a blacksmith from Petersburg, Virginia who had emigrated to Liberia in 1829, and who eventually served as High Sheriff of the colony, filling a position formerly held by Joseph J. Roberts. James Cotton was another freeborn Virginian employed as a carpenter in the colony. Thus, two young settler children, then, found themselves indentured to two prominent skilled craftsmen upon the death of one or both parents.

It is intriguing that Hollister was noted as possessing a “brown complexion.” The inclusion of such information may simply reflect an adherence to the formula of runaway advertisements in American newspapers. It may also be that phenotypical associations were so cemented in the psyches of the African Americans that Brown assumed that Liberia’s citizenry would all understand the precise ratio of melanin necessary to produce a “brown” teenager among the multitudes of individuals of mixed-ancestry in the colony. Equally intriguing is Cotton’s assertion that Matthias “ran off without any sufficient cause,” a seeming tacit admission that there might be legitimate reasons for indentured youths to flee their masters while rejecting that such was the case with Matthias.

Even settler Samuel Williams’s bluntly-named rebuttal to Nesbit, *Four Years in Liberia. A Sketch of the Life of the Rev. Samuel Williams. With Remarks on the Missions, Manners and Customs of the Natives of Western Africa. Together with an Answer to Nesbit’s Book*, conceded just as Cotton’s advertisement had that the Liberian system was fraught with opportunities for exploitation. “Wicked persons there [Liberia] do abuse the native youths. But why does Mr. Nesbit condemn the whole country and accuse all as slave holders, because a few abuse their power?” Intriguingly, Williams distinguished between the practice of indenturing African

Yoruba roots. The 1843 census also transposes Matthias’s name as he appears as “Mathias Mathews.” See United States Government, *Tables Showing the Number of Emigrants and Recaptured Africans Sent to the Colony of Liberia by the Government of the United States* (Washington: 1845), 333, 357, 368; “Information Relative to the Operations of the United States Squadron on the West Coast of Africa, the Condition of the American Colonies there, and the Commerce of the United States Therewith,” *Public Documents Printed by Order of the Senate of the United States, Second Session of the Twenty-Eighth Congress* (Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1845), 9: 152-393; Clegg, 99.

youths, of which he approved, and the employment of cheap African labor at greatly reduced wages, which he denounced as an impediment to the advancement of Liberian settlers. Like Nesbit, Williams attributed this proclivity from “both gentlemen and ladies” for African servants as an inherited trait from the upbringing of the majority of the settlers in the American South. Williams, unsurprisingly, was a freeborn Pennsylvanian like Nesbit. In terms of hiring adult African laborers, Williams simply concluded “this is wrong.” But for Williams, the evangelizing benefits of taking African youths into Liberian households outweighed the abusive costs. Although “nearly all” of the Americo-Liberians had “natives as helps in their families,” Williams concluded that “this is as it should be,” dismissing those abusive relationships as simply indicative that “black people are no better than white people.” Williams considered Liberia to be a “candle in a thick fog,” and, like other settlers, pointed to the New Georgia settlement as indicative of their growing influence over Africans.²⁴⁷

Writing after Nesbit’s scandalous account and after several exposés of Liberia that did not paint the Americo-Liberians in a favorable light, Williams probably thought it ill-advised (or simply untruthful) to completely deny the abuse of laborers in Liberia. There were inklings of the problem, however, from the earlier days of the colony. In 1835, two decades before Nesbit and Williams’ authorial sparring, a series of newspapers reprinted a supposed summation of an interview with Beverly Wilson, a free man of color recently returned from Liberia. This published account found nothing but platitudes for the colony and reported as part of its assertions of American influence over the neighboring Africans: “A number of the natives, both men and boys (but no women) are employed by the colonists as servants or *helps*, in their families, work for wages by *the moon*, or month, which they are always careful to demand at the

²⁴⁷ Williams, *Four Years in Liberia*, 16-17, 59.

day, and are very sure to get.”²⁴⁸ While the belated assurance that the servants received their wages certainly raises eyebrows for modern readers, the authors of the piece seemingly blindly accepted this bit of good news without question. Just three years later, however, James Birney in his grand denunciation of his colonizationist roots, his 1838 *Letter on Colonization*, was pointing to the indiscriminate abuses of African laborers as part of his reasoning for rejecting colonization. Quoting Samuel Jones, an African American dispatched by an Ohio colonization society to observe Liberia, Birney reiterated, “the relation between the colonist and native is very similar to that between master and slave.” While Birney likewise noted the constitutional impediments to chattel slavery, “Yet,” he wondered, “what kind of barrier does a paper prohibition oppose to a vitiated public sentiment?” The system was primed for exploitation, and Birney understood that the civilizing rhetoric surrounding Liberian labor provided a slippery slope which allowed culprits to further abuse the system. Based upon an argument that bringing African laborers into the settlement served missionary purposes, then, Birney pondered, seemingly only advantages could be gained by bringing in as many laborers as possible.

How many plausible pretexts might be found for turning into a cotton, or coffee, or sugar plantation, some half a dozen or more of these nearly naked nomadic ladies and gentlemen, that they might be better fed and clothed than they could clothe and feed themselves—and have the additional benefit of now and then hearing the gospel preached, to the salvation of their souls! How easily might they fill their mouths with arguments that were formerly deemed good for the African slave trade, and *now* for the domestic slave trade, and for the continuance of slavery among us?²⁴⁹

Needless to say, most settlers supported this argument that work in the colony brought “civilization” to the laborer and continued to employ Africans on the farms and in their homes in varying degrees of unfreedom. The arrangement of youthful labor—both African and

²⁴⁸ “Liberia,” *Richmond Enquirer*, June 12, 1835. The article, originally published in the *Norfolk (VA) Herald*, was also republished in the *Pittsfield Sun* on June 18, 1835 and the *New Bedford (MA) Mercury* on June 19, 1835. It was likewise published in the August 1835 edition of the *African Repository*.

²⁴⁹ James G. Birney, *Letter on Colonization: Addressed to the Rev. Thornton J. Mills, Corresponding Secretary of the Kentucky Colonization Society* (New York: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1838), 37-39.

American—within settler households proved susceptible not only to physical abuse, but also to sexual indiscretions. Given Birney’s fears that the missionary zeal surrounding the Liberian regime was instrumental to the expansion of exploitative practices, it is appropriate to note that one of the great moral scandals which rocked Maryland in Liberia not only centered on the activists of a missionary outpost, but was also intimately tied to its workers. The allegations surrounding the Mount Vaughan mission station, an outpost of the Episcopal Church, which shook the colony in 1837—one year before the publication of Birney’s letter although unmentioned by him—centered on the actions of settler James Thomson, a British subject originally from British Guiana who after a residence in England and New York had set out for Liberia in 1832 aboard the *Jupiter* as a school teacher. Thomson had been picked up by James Hall when the governor touched at Monrovia before proceeding to Cape Palmas to establish the Maryland colony. Hall considered Thomson one of the “few...sterling good men” in his expedition and named him as a salaried employee of the colonization society, receiving \$300 per annum for his services as colonial secretary, store keeper, bookkeeper, and surveyor. His access to a regular salary and post as gatekeeper to the company’s stores, and thus also keeper of the settlers’ debts to the agency, did not endear Thomson to his fellow colonists, but Hall considered him an essential member of the colonial administration as a man possessing “more intelligence than any citizen of Liberia (Russwurm excepted).” Being a product of the British empire, Thomson was a lay reader for the few Episcopalians in Monrovia, and Hall described him as a man possessing great “purity of heart.” Thus, the Episcopal Board for Foreign Missions thought they had the perfect candidate to establish a school for African children when they appointed Thomson a missionary in January 1836. By December the following year, Thomson was writing to his friend Oliver Holmes, the interim agent between Hall and Russwurm, seeking an advocate in Maryland with the Board of the MSCS as “a rumor spread throughout the colony, that I had

indulged myself in carnal intercourse with females, natives and colonists, and even with the girls of the mission school.”²⁵⁰

In the spring of 1837, the head of the Episcopal mission, Thomas S. Savage, heard growing rumors surrounding his capable and well-educated assistant. Things came to a boil when an Americo-Liberian teenager, Henry Harmon, was brought before Savage for attempting to seduce an unnamed girl living with Thomson’s family.²⁵¹ Whether the “girl” was a bound African servant or orphaned American, the written accounts did not record. Harmon, whom Thomson described as that “mischief-making, lying fellow,” apparently attempted to ameliorate the charges laid against him by claiming that Thomson provided a poor role model and that a girl attached to the mission station had informed Harmon of illicit behavior by Thomson. Thomson traced down Harmon’s source to a young orphan named Martha, “that girl who together with her grandmother, imposed themselves on my hospitality,” reported the accused.²⁵² By the time Thomson found himself before the colony’s Court of Quarter Sessions later that year, the accusations had expanded to illicit intercourse between himself and a “mulatto” girl, Sally, placed under his care, attempts at similar relations with two other children, Martha and Frances, placed with his family, sexual intercourse with an African woman of Robookah, on the eastern edge of Maryland in Liberia’s territory, during a mission trip, and finally with the wife of “Jack,” the headman of the African laborers attached to the Episcopal mission.

Despite the degraded position Africans held in the minds of most of the settlers, the charges involving African women were actually more legally threatening for Thomson than those involving American girls. As a married man, Thomson faced criminal charges for the crime of adultery under colonial jurisprudence, but under the ordinances established for the

²⁵⁰ Richard Hall, 112-114, 157-168, 512; James Hall to John H. B. Latrobe, 9 February 1834, MSCS; James Hall to John H. B. Latrobe, 23 February 1834, MSCS; James Hall to John H. B. Latrobe, 24 April 1834, MSCS; James Thomson to Oliver Holmes, 28 December 1837, MSCS.

²⁵¹ Harmon was a son of the Nathan Harmon who received the wages of certain “boys” labor on the public farm.

²⁵² James Thomson to Oliver Holmes, 28 December 1837, MSCS

“temporary government” of the newly-established colony, “carnal illicit intercourse with native women shall be punished, on conviction, by fine and imprisonment”; if the convicted offender continued with sexual relations with African women, then the sentences would concomitantly increase in severity. This was an odd, paradoxical quirk of the colony’s legal code. Aside from its gendered logic that spent no time pondering the implications of settler relations with African men, it also placed an acknowledged barrier between Africans and African Americans. It is an even more perplexing as the law code originated with the white colonizationist leadership in Baltimore, the very men arguing for a natural and inherent affinity between the inhabitants of Africa and the returning “children” of that “benighted continent.”²⁵³

More than the alleged affair with “Jack’s” wife, however, the community’s uproar and court case centered on the incident at Robookah. This largely hinged on a confession from Thomson to Savage. Thomson, claiming a heavily-burdened soul, wrote that he was “conscious that I was guilty of one charge that was preferred against me...I was powerfully impressed by conscience to make a candid acknowledgment of what, was really a fact—connection with that mulatto girl who lived with me...the one I had a law-suit about.” Any particular details of that lawsuit, when it occurred and under what circumstances, Thomson omitted from his letter to Holmes. Thomson feared that the details of the Robookah incident circulating among the settlers were misleading and whipping the crowd into a mob calling for his blood. Of course, there was the problem that the charges had some veracity, although Thomson asserted, “They were erroneously impressed with the idea that, what had happened to me when I went to Robookah, which I thought they might have heard of, was an act so criminal as to deserve hanging.” According to Thomson, he had travelled to Robookah to acquire “native scholars” for the mission school, but there had been confusion between him and the town’s leaders. Thomson had

²⁵³ *Constitution and Laws of Maryland in Liberia*, 23.

been on the hunt for both African boys and girls, and the village headmen seemingly could not understand why Thomson would desire girls for his school; the “king” supposedly presumed that Thomson was there either for a wife or a slave. Thomson claimed that he had grown frustrated with the African’s intransigence or unwillingness to understand his mission and had retired to bed for the night. While Thomson dozed, an undisclosed African “female came & prostrated herself” by him. Such were the admitted crimes of Thomson.²⁵⁴

Savage decided that he could no longer employ the man in a missionary station, but he took a further step by requesting that Thomson remove himself from the colony entirely. Savage suggested a sort of self-imposed exile elsewhere in the British empire, perhaps in Thomson’s native Demerara, and after having established himself elsewhere he could then send for his wife. For all of the hardships of Africa, Thomson was remarkably uninterested in returning to South America and he refused to abandon home or wife. Feeling scorned, Savage apparently began a smear campaign against Thomson and found fertile ground amongst those settlers with grudges against the old keeper of the company store and its accounts. Equally unfortunate for Thomson was the fact that the charges associated with him were of a criminal nature, and thus he found himself before the Court of Quarterly Sessions, a three-judge panel presided over by Russwurm along with two other associate judges, Thomas Jackson and Joshua Stewart. This time Thomson pleaded not guilty to the charges, which focused on his relations with the orphan children placed at the mission station and the woman at Robookah. As these were the two self-admitted incidents in Thomson’s private confession and the fuel driving the gossip spread by Savage, the court case centered around them and ignored the other rumors circling around Thomson. Savage testified under oath, but could not produce the original written confession having dispatched it to the Episcopal missionary society headquarters in the United States; Thomson unsurprisingly

²⁵⁴ James Thomson to Oliver Holmes, 28 December 1837, MSCS

disputed the veracity of Savage's court testimony. More significantly, the documents produced by Thomson reflected that in the correspondence between Thomson and Savage, Savage had requested the written confession, stating, "I must have your confession in your hand writing written in ink and signed by yourself. The world will not know it. The Board must—God already knows it." Savage supposedly concluded his request with the promise that the confession would be "sacred." Thomson's case was further buttressed by the testimony of one of the mission's girls—probably Martha—with whom he supposedly had had inappropriate relations. Under oath, she testified that Thomson had removed her blanket while she slept and hushed her when she made a noise as his wife actually slept in the same room, but she stated before the judges that they had not engaged in sexual relations. The young woman's credibility was destroyed, however, by testimony from others who claimed that Martha had told them different accounts of Thomson's behavior. The judges sternly dismissed the girl as unreliable and concluded the day's session.

That night, Russwurm and his fellow judges, assistant agent McGill, and colonial secretary Revey, met at the agency house to consult William Blackstone's *Commentaries on the Laws of England* and Edward Livingston's penal code originally prepared for the State of Louisiana, the sum total of the colony's law library. Martha's testimony was considered suspect, and little but hearsay could be gleaned from other witnesses. More significantly, the judges decided that confessions wrought by promises of secrecy could not be given juridical credence. Privately, Russwurm informed the managers of the MSCS that he believed Thomson to be guilty of the charges, but publicly he believed the judges beholden to follow the legal code in order to prove that theirs was a society of law. The court found Thomson not guilty of the charges; the broader community was set alight by the verdict; and Russwurm sighed in a letter to his

superiors, “There are peculiar difficulties surrounding an Agent here, he has to contend against the ignorance of the people at all times.”²⁵⁵

Those people, it turned out, were not particularly impressed with the verdict of the court. Although both Thomson and Russwurm stated that certain individuals supported executing Thomson, and according to Russwurm, “the most lenient were for banishment and confiscation, while the law only required fine and imprisonment,” the male settlers of the colony actually adopted a more peaceful and legal approach: they petitioned a higher authority, the Managers of the MSCS.²⁵⁶ On August 9, 1837, a gathering of Americo-Liberian settlers at the colonial school house produced a committee of five leading citizens to conduct their own plebian court of inquiry into Thomson’s guilt and the behavior of the Court of Quarterly Session. Reconvening in December, fifty-three male heads of families signed the resolutions written by the committee of five, a “solemn protest” against the proceedings of Thomson, which they “humbly hail to you [the Managers of the MSCS] across the Atlantic.” As compared to the judges, the citizens did not believe the confessions were wrung out by promises of secrecy, and they were far more sympathetic to the testimony of the mission’s children. As male heads of households they adopted a paternal tone in addressing the managers and requested the Board think in the same terms. In addition to asking the Board to “think of our poor children,” the petitioners also deemed Frances and Martha, aged seven and fourteen, as trustworthy witnesses intimidated before the court “without friend or attorney.” In short, they concluded that “James M. Thomson had confessed that he had cohabitated with a native woman and that he was tried for that offence but he got clear.” For their part, the Board sympathized with and applauded the settlers for their

²⁵⁵ John B. Russwurm to John H. B. Latrobe, 27 December 1837, MSCS; “Extract of Letter from George R. McGill,” MSCS. The letter in full is George R. McGill to John H. B. Latrobe, 25 December 1837, MSCS.

²⁵⁶ George McGill claimed the petition to be of Savage’s rendering and even Russwurm described the committee of citizens as meeting with Savage to receive his advice on how they should proceed, but the actual documents of the petition outline a settler-initiated project.

moral stance, but they upheld the legal decision of the judges as the proper course for a “civilized” nation based upon law.²⁵⁷

The Thomson affair reveals much of life in colonial Liberia: the intimate connections of a tiny society in which few things could long remain private and the great inequalities in power which shaped day-to-day relations. The orphan girls were placed at the mission per the policies of the colony which provided a limited, though very necessary, social security net for the inhabitants of that unhealthy settlement. Unfortunately, the legal status of the girls was never fully documented in the trial and as the loss of their parents was the means by which young Holister and Matthias found themselves indentured, it would be unwise to simply assume they were free. The settler youth, Harmon, was “employed” by the mission, suggesting he received a wage. And finally, although glossed over by the court case as Thomson seems to have omitted any mention of her from his confession, there was “Jack’s” unnamed wife and the other African laborers attached to the mission station. For those who could seize it, there were advantages to be had in such a mishmash of social relations, again a situation directly at odds with the efforts to geographically separate settlers from Africans, and settlers like Thomson and McGill capitalized on their advantages to attain very different ends.

Yet, for all of the various indentured servants, orphans, and wage labor to be found in western Africa, it is important to remember that African laborers were conceived differently than their American or culturally-assimilated counterparts. For all of the debate surrounding an unknown woman at Robookah, very little ink was spilled in anger over “Jack’s” wife. As laborers attached to the settlement, “Jack” and his wife would have been recognizable figures to the Americans. The silence in relation to a possible affair within the settlement as compared to

²⁵⁷ Petition of Citizens of Maryland in Liberia, 9 August 1837, MSCS; Thomas Savage to Charles Snetter, 15 September 1837, MSCS; Petition of Citizens of Maryland in Liberia, 21 December 1837, MSCS; Board of Managers of the MSCS to Petitioners of Maryland in Liberia, 26 March 1838, MSCS.

the outrage of an admitted altercation—although an affair with differing opinions as to its exact nature—on the far reaches of the colony’s territory with an unknown woman, is telling. For all of the labor options before them, Americo-Liberians reserved the drudgery for their African workers. Africans pulled the carts through Monrovia’s streets and lived in the “negro quarters” behind the homes of the Americans.

It is equally important to remember that the cheapness of African labor was originally conceived as a selling point of the colony by those colonizationists who envisioned an idyllic agricultural settlement. Chapter four discussed the importance of African laborers to this masculine agricultural mission; little wonder then that many settlers saw the Liberian labor market as a rich exploitive field. In a widely published and reprinted letter from Eli Ayres, the colony’s first governor, to Robert Stockton, the naval officer whose “encouragement” was so critical in securing the initial land cessation, Ayres laid out the advantages of Liberia for settlers. Ayres reiterated the old chimera of the need for “legitimate commerce,” an anti-Atlantic slave trade mainstay that held that the only thing standing between western nations freeing themselves from the productions of New World slavery and African involvement in the slave trade was the establishment of a “legitimate” commodity trade with Africa. In so doing, the Atlantic economy would not be deprived of the produce of the plantation economy even as the flow of African slaves across the Atlantic was extinguished by the bustling new economic opportunities in Africa.²⁵⁸ Ayres painted a picture of Africans literally begging for employment opportunities.

Such is Africa, and such is the condition of its inhabitants. They are waiting and longing for employment. Labouring men may be employed to any extent at the lowest rates. A labourer will work for *a month* for four pounds of tobacco or for eight yards of the cheapest calico or India Muslin, or for two pair of shoes, or for two pints of gun-powder or for forty-eight gun flints. For a hat he will work two

²⁵⁸ James T. Campbell has a useful discussion of the significance of the “legitimate commerce” argument in undergirding the establishment of Sierra Leone and Paul Cuffe’s own efforts at emigration. See James Campbell, *Middle Passages*, 15-56.

months. The sale of rum is forbidden in the colony, but other articles are given for labour at much the same rate; and a native labourer may be kept for the astonishingly small sum of one fourth of a cent per day, or less than one dollar a year.²⁵⁹

Yet before this testament of purely economic qualities, Ayres was extolling the civilizing virtues of this trade. In Sierra Leone, Africans had been trained as carpenters, blacksmiths, and ship builders, and they were in the process of constructing a stone church “that would be gazed at with astonishment in the city of New York.” These skilled craftsmen were included in the same paragraph with other “young men” making progress in the attainment of Greek and Latin languages; the linkage between the laborers and the classics students was left for the reader to guess. Liberian labor was both commodity and civilizing mission, intriguing indices of the uneven market revolution and the incomplete commodification of labor. In this juncture of economic convenience and moral imperative lay the colonizationist rhetoric Birney recognized it as echoing many of the justifications for New World slavery. Through this command of “negro” labor the Americo-Liberians distinguished themselves from their African “servants,” subsequently elevating their own collective “civilization” vis-à-vis through the degraded labor of their servants, much as degraded and enslaved black labor within the United States provided a unifying and elevating whiteness to those free from the taint of slavery. Or as Moses Sheppard informed Russwurm of his two sons, they “will be white men, that is they will have no tincture of the slave.”²⁶⁰

This celebration of the civilizing mission of labor could produce strange bedfellows. Josiah Conder, the British editor, author, and abolitionist, displayed a nuanced understanding of colonizationist rhetoric and actually quoted supporters of colonization in his own approbation of

²⁵⁹ “American Colony in Africa,” *Trenton Federalist*, September 6, 1824.

²⁶⁰ Moses Sheppard to John B. Russwurm, 7 August 1837, MSP.

free labor, *Wages or the Whip*. Specifically, Conder was most fascinated with the praise for the New Georgians and used this example to extol the humanitarian effects of free labor elsewhere. He also understood that the heart of colonizationist thinking was a spatial understanding whereby occupancy in particular environments altered the inhabitants. Conder, however, turned the evidence of colonization's beneficence to Africans into an argument for abolition: "If, then, such be the actual transformation which the liberated slave exhibits on touching the shores of Africa... what is to prevent the slave from throwing off his very nature with his chains, on the western shores of the Atlantic or in the islands of the Caribbean Sea?"²⁶¹ Conder hoped that the superior "free labor" of New Georgia would prove the ability of former slaves to adapt. Conversely, while Conder demonstrated adept understanding of the changes wrought by "touching the shores" of Liberia, he failed to grasp the complexity of working in Liberia. Rather than the binary established in his title, colonial Liberia is better conceived as a place that employed both wages *and* the whip.

On the other end of the ideological spectrum, William Sleight's unambiguously entitled *Abolitionism Exposed!* employed the same colonizationist rhetoric to argue against abolitionism. Quoting from the *African Repository*, Sleight celebrated Liberia's supposed stifling influence on the African slave trade within its territorial confines. Even more beneficial, several thousand Africans, "mostly youth, who have come into the colonies"—there seems to be no suggestion that any of these Africans may actually have been the original occupants of Liberia's territory—"to learn 'Merica fash,' and make themselves 'white men,' by conforming to the habits of civilization, and becoming subject to our laws."²⁶² In focusing specifically on the African youths in the colony, Sleight was focusing on children like "Chancellor Walcott" who worked in

²⁶¹ Josiah Conder, *Wages or the Whip: An Essay on the Comparative Cost and Productiveness of Free and Slave Labour* (London: 1833), 14-16.

²⁶² William Sleight, *Abolitionism Exposed!: Proving the Principles of Abolitionism are injurious to the Slaves Themselves, Destructive to this Nation, and Contrary to the Express Commands of God* (Philadelphia: D. Schneck, 1838), 83.

Americo-Liberian households. Instead of the beneficence of free labor, Sleigh found a celebration of bound labor in his Liberian example. “Civilization” could be found through work in a “civilized” environment and at a “civilized” trade. It was undoubtedly one of these African children who found herself attached to Sarah Russwurm as she travelled about the United States.²⁶³

As both a member of the prominent McGill family and John B. Russwurm’s wife, Sarah Russwurm had ample opportunities to travel to and from the United States, unlike the majority of the cash-strapped female settlers. These trips were encouraged by her physician-brother who believed they were salubrious for her health. This was the reason for her earlier jaunt to the United States culminating in a return to Liberia aboard the autumnal expedition in 1847, the first mention of her accompaniment by an unnamed though seemingly ever-present servant. One year later, both Mr. and Mrs. Russwurm admitted they were in poor health, wracked by political pressures and the birth of four children, and they decided that a shared journey to the United States would prove beneficial to them and their son who would accompany them.²⁶⁴ Although

²⁶³ Although the manifests of the sailings simply identify this person as “servant,” the decorum of the time period would strongly dictate that Russwurm travel in the accompaniment of a female servant.

²⁶⁴ There is a bit of mystery here. The Russwurms had one daughter, Angelina, and four sons, George Stockbridge, Francis Edward, Samuel Ford, and James Hall Russwurm. In his biography of Russwurm, Winston James builds upon the work of Mary Sagarin to conclude that James Russwurm seemingly died in infancy soon after his birth in 1836. In his June 15, 1848 letter, however, McGill requests assistance from Moses Sheppard in paving the path for his sister’s residence in the northern states. As an aside, he notes, “James knows but little of the U. States.” Given the familial context and the fact that James Russwurm was born in Liberia and would have never visited the United States, it seems likely that James Russwurm did not die in infancy, but rather lived to at least 1848. Angelina had accompanied her mother to the United States in 1847, but there is no record of her presence in the 1848 journey. For whatever reason, it seems that only Samuel Ford accompanied his parents to the United States in 1848. The *Maryland Colonization Journal* announced the arrival of the *Liberia Packet* on the front page of its August issue, noting the ship carried “Gov. Russwurm and lady, child and servant.” Russwurm noted the presence of at Samuel Ford with him in North Yarmouth, Maine as they unpleasantly shared a similar bout of diarrhea. The coupling of the child with the servant may indicate that the African “help” was actually there for Samuel. However, when father and son returned to Africa that year, the servant remained with Sarah Russwurm. For James Hall Russwurm, see Samuel F. McGill to Moses Sheppard, 15 June 1848, MSP; James, 80-83, 292; Samuel F. McGill to Moses Sheppard, 15 June 1848, MSP. For Angelina Russwurm’s 1847 accompaniment of her mother, see John B. Russwurm to James Hall, 1 October 1847, MSCS; “Fifteenth Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Maryland State Colonization Society,” *Maryland Colonization Journal* 3, no. 24 (June 1847): 371. For Samuel Ford Russwurm’s presence and medical ailments in Maine, see “Arrival of the Liberia Packet,” *Maryland Colonization Journal* 4, no. 14 (August 1848): 217; John B. Russwurm to James Hall, 21 August 1848, MSCS, this letter also reprinted in James, *The Struggles of John Brown Russwurm*, 238-239.

she had visited the United States before on shorter trips, Dr. McGill recommended a more protracted residence in the United States for Sarah Russwurm in order to provide her with a fuller recovery. John Russwurm desired to see old acquaintances in Maine; his wife desired to perform the same rounds in Baltimore. They agreed to sail to the United States that August, but Sarah would return at a later date than her husband to be determined by her health. McGill wrote to Sheppard in June of that year with hopes that his old patron could plow the same furrows of respectability for his sister that had supported McGill during his time in the United States. “I have advised her to go northward where she will be more pleasantly as well as comfortably situated than in Balt. In event either or any of them go North will you have the kindness to use your influence to smooth matters for them as much as possible.”²⁶⁵

Of course with these Liberian settlers, there was more to the establishment of American networks than mere “respectability”; there was also performative whiteness befitting these harbingers of African “civilization.” When McGill planned to return to the United States for his medical education, Sheppard had confided in a letter to McGill’s father that his son would “be regarded as a white man by a very numerous and respectable circle, but the habits and usages of Society, alas prejudices, will prevent him being treated as such in our public and common intercourse.” Wherever Samuel traveled in the United States, he raced letters of introduction from his Maryland patrons to their extended network of friends and colleagues encouraging all to meet McGill and interact with him accordingly. Most intriguing is Sheppard’s use of the word “regarded.” He does not promise that his Maryland associates will treat McGill metaphorically “as” a white man, but rather that they will “regard,” to literally look upon McGill, as a white man. Clearly, McGill desired a network similar to that established for his sister during her time in the United States. Significantly for her requisite performance of “respectability,” Sarah

²⁶⁵ Samuel F. McGill to Moses Sheppard, 31 March 1848, MSP.

Russwurm would be travelling in the accompaniment of living evidence of Americo-Liberians' "influence" over Africans and her status: her personal servant. It seems that McGill was not asking Sheppard to intercede on behalf of a stranger, either. Sheppard and Sarah Russwurm, if possibly unacquainted in person, had at least corresponded for over a decade together in a seemingly constant game of one-upmanship in which African "curiosities" crossed the Atlantic in exchange for trinkets and toys for Russwurm's children.²⁶⁶

Both Sheppard and McGill clearly hoped wife would soon follow husband northward away from Baltimore. Writing in August soon after Sarah Russwurm's arrival in Baltimore, Sheppard confided to McGill his hopes that "your sister may receive the wanted benefit from her residence in the U. States." Still, Sheppard desired her to head northward as soon as possible. "Here no friendship however ardent, no kindness however sincere, could place her perfectly at ease. The attempt at social intercourse here is Embarrassing to both parties; one part of our people are restrained by pride, and the other by ignorance."²⁶⁷ For his own part, John Russwurm after staying but a few days in Baltimore planned to travel northward through Philadelphia and New York before heading on to Maine. Following his visit with family and old friends in North Yarmouth, Maine, he would stay for a week in Boston before traveling to Baltimore and returning to Africa aboard the *Liberia Packet*. He successfully accomplished this circuitous journey, even indulging in the traditional tourist's pastime of complaining about the prices of hotels; he was particularly offended by the \$19.25 bill received from Boston's grand United

²⁶⁶ Moses Sheppard to George R. McGill, 12 January 1836, MSCS. Sheppard's half of this transatlantic correspondence has been saved and fortuitously the curmudgeonly merchant made sure to acknowledge the receipt of Russwurm's packages and their contents when dispatching his own to Liberia. Moses Sheppard's letter book records several letters and packages, along with their contents, dispatched to Sarah Russwurm before her prolonged stay in Baltimore on 30 May 1823, 25 November 1837, 6 April 1838, 20 November 1838, 10 November 1841, 12 December 1842, and 6 April 1848, all in MSP.

²⁶⁷ Moses Sheppard to Samuel F. McGill, 25 August 1848, MSP.

States Hotel (“oh the Yankees!” he exclaimed to James Hall).²⁶⁸ In the same letter in which he found the United States Hotel to be over-priced, he also noted “S.E.R. [Sarah Elizabeth Russwurm] and myself both long to see Africa again.” Although he did not explicitly denote her presence in Maine, the tone strongly suggests that she accompanied him on this northern sojourn. It seems likely that she also accompanied him on his return to Baltimore, her home town, where it seems that she remained for some time after the departure of her husband aboard the *Packet*; Russwurm was back at his African post by November 1848.²⁶⁹ Where she and her servant traveled between that time and her own return to Africa in the fall of 1849 is unclear. It seems that she remained for some time in Baltimore despite her Brother and Sheppard’s wishes. In February 1849, three months after Russwurms’ return to Liberia, Sheppard reported to McGill his opinion of Sarah Russwurm’s American visit:

I fear your Sisters residence here has not been as agreeable as it ought to have been, shut out from the grade of society in which she should have associated she has been confined to that portion of the community to which she did not belong. The line of separation between the casts seems more stringent than formerly. Many, most of the quakers would have gladly entertained her but for the danger of it becoming a subject of news paper animadverseen.²⁷⁰

Intriguingly, for all his success in establishing a network of colleagues for McGill who would “regard” him as a white man, Sheppard believed that he had failed to perform the same task for Russwurm. It seems that one of Russwurm’s established contacts in Baltimore was James Hall, then serving as the home agent for the MSCS, and his wife. Before the return of Sarah Russwurm to Africa, the absence of whom her husband freely admitted had “aided greatly to ruffle my temper,” the ruffled husband thanked Hall for “your & Miss Hall’s kindness & attention to Mrs. R during her long residence in your country.” It also seems that Russwurm

²⁶⁸ John B. Russwurm to James Hall, 21 August 1848, MSCS, this letter also reprinted in James, *The Struggles of John Brown Russwurm*, 238-239.

²⁶⁹ John B. Russwurm to John H. B. Latrobe, 22 November 1848, MSCS; this letter also reprinted in James, *The Struggle of John Brown Russwurm*, 239-240.

²⁷⁰ Moses Sheppard to Samuel F. McGill, 16 February 1849, MSP.

trusted Hall to serve as the keeper of Sarah's "little money" and directed drafts through Hall for his wife's exclusive use.²⁷¹ Otherwise, there is little indication of whom Russwurm interacted with on her American holiday or even whether she remained in Baltimore.

Sheppard's thinly veiled references to McGill's association with Baltimore's African American population, a society to which he believed "she did not belong," reinforces the understanding that Americo-Liberians' African sojourn had led to an evolution of their racial identity above and different from American constructions of blackness. We unfortunately do not know Sarah's opinion of her American companions; perhaps she was content with her associations or even sought them out. She clearly defied the wishes of her brother and his patron by residing in Baltimore for some amount of time. We also do not know the travel arrangements or official function of her travelling companion simply listed as her "servant." Not only would the employment of an indentured African servant during her two residences in America have assuredly projected Sarah Russwurm's class status, but the command of a black body would have strongly resonated with American proscriptions of whiteness. Regardless of her entourage, Sheppard's belief that he and his fellow Quakers had failed Sarah when he had had such previous success with male Liberian settlers underscores that there were constraints placed on these Atlantic citizens' fluid identities. This is all the more reinforced when examining the American journeys of her husband. During his visit in Baltimore, the Board of Managers of the MSCS hosted a grand banquet in Russwurm's honor at the Exchange Hotel. Reminiscing about the dinner years later, the former colonization society president, John H. B. Latrobe, recalled, "It was ludicrous to see the astonishment of the Irish waiters...when they were called upon to render the same service to a colored man that they were in the habit of rendering to the many socially

²⁷¹ John B. Russwurm to James Hall, 18 October 1849, MSCS.

prominent citizens who were his hosts.”²⁷² Latrobe’s memory of European servers, denoted specifically as “Irish” with all its concomitant racial, social, and cultural baggage, balking at performing the tasks for “a colored man” as they would for elite whites even as that “colored man” participated in the same social performances as those elite whites highlights the complex relationship between “whiteness,” the “Black Atlantic,” and the ongoing exchange between Liberia and the United States.

Sarah Russwurm may have had the economic and social clout to travel about the United States in the accompaniment of a servant like other elite women, but her husband possessed the additional gendered boost to secure a banquet in his honor and a white wait staff. What does it mean for conceptualizations of “black” and “white,” when the same individual, Latrobe, who denoted Russwurm as “colored” could likewise scoff at the hotel staff for not interacting with Russwurm in the same manner as his hosts? And at the same time, Sarah Russwurm found herself in the company of Baltimore’s African American population to which her white patron no longer believed she belonged. If “freedom” created whiteness, then there were obvious constraints placed on women, the poor, and those without the personal connections of a Samuel McGill or John Russwurm in fully claiming that identity.

Perhaps most intriguing about Sarah Russwurm’s American travels is the absolute lack of ink spilled about her possession of a servant during those travels. Literally without the *Maryland Colonization Journal* following the journalistic protocols of the day and listing the prominent passengers aboard each departing journey of the *Liberia Packet*, there would be no documentary record that Russwurm arrived in the United States with an African servant in tow. For all of Sheppard’s hand wringing regarding his ability to conduct Russwurm in the society he presumed

²⁷² “Our Autumnal Expedition,” *Maryland Colonization Journal*, New Series 4, no. 3 (September 1847): 33; John H. B. Latrobe, *Maryland in Africa: A History of the Colony Planted by the Maryland State Colonization Society under the Auspices of the State of Maryland, U.S. at Cape Palmas on the South-West Coast of Africa, 1833-1853* (Baltimore: John Murphy & Co., 1885), 72. Latrobe’s extract regarding Russwurm’s banquet is also reprinted in James, *The Struggle of John Brown Russwurm*, 242.

most suited for her, it never appeared odd or worth mentioning the sight of this African servant. It was not one of the problems verbalized by Sheppard and there are no suggestive undertones to his letter. He simply did not believe that Russwurm's performance of an elite white woman, complete with personal servant, could overcome the known reality of her mixed-race Baltimore roots. While the expressed desire to move northward may have simply reflected a desire to remove Russwurm from a slave state, there is also the simple fact that she and her family were known in Baltimore. Samuel McGill's initial medical foray in Baltimore had failed spectacularly, but he had found success in New England, not due to any supposedly racially-enlightened principles held by the locals there, but rather because he was an unknown entity, able to pass himself first as a wonderfully exotic English-speaking African and then as an entirely different sort of exotic, but civilized, Liberian.

In another regard, the absence of detail regarding the African servant is in keeping with other Americo-Liberian writings. Simply, any detailed mention of indentured African servants or African laborers within the settlers' correspondence is practically non-existent. On the other hand, generalized remarks on the use of such labor within the colony and early republic are common. Whether in scandalous vilifications of the colony as in the case of Nesbit or *apologias* in her defense as in the example of Williams, all accounts provide broad generalizations with few explicit details. Detailed descriptions of the acquisition and naming of "Chancellor Walworth" are rare and only exist thanks to the prickly personality of a scorned McGill. What we are usually left with are in the model of David Bacon's remembrances of his years as colonial physician in Monrovia, in which he described the cluster of buildings surrounding the government house as, "a storehouse, on the street—behind that a small building, for the servants, and, a little further back the kitchen, then nearly rebuilt,—the whole being arranged on the Southern plan—of a dwelling-house distinct, with the domestic arrangements under separate roofs." This was the sole

mention of the “negro quarters” behind the main house which so enraged Nesbit. Conversely, the various settler youths who were placed in his household serving as attendants and apothecary assistants were biographically described; Peter, for example, was originally from New Orleans and had been a “pet slave” of his owner whose will dictated the teenager’s passage to Liberia upon death.²⁷³

Such broad formulations served a purpose for the Americo-Liberians. By generalizing all Africans, aside from those most prominently attached to the Americans, into such non-descriptive blanket categories as “natives,” “laborers,” or “negroes,” while likewise ensuring to consistently identify by name American settlers, the Americo-Liberians distinguished themselves from their African neighbors while simultaneously asserting control over their labor. If Liberian space was geographically interpreted as transformative and civilizing and violence provided the “hard” approach to heathen subjugation, then work offered the “soft” civilizing hand by “bringing” Africans into the civilizing space willingly. Here, the rhetoric of African youths “coming” to the colonies is significant. Establishing African barbarity *outside* the civilizing colonial space, regardless of the actual reality on the ground or recognizing those groups who lived along the coast before the Americans’ arrival, allows for argument that the Africans were seeking “civilization” by going to the Liberian settlements, i.e. they were acquiescing control to the Americo-Liberians. Regardless of the reality on the ground, and it was assuredly more complex than that simple construction, such fabrications provided the ideological underpinning for arguments supporting the labor system of Liberia as a “civilizing” influence. Focusing on African children within the settler households, and largely under the domestic influence of settler women, further propelled this civilizing narrative. Obviously, those accounts which sought to disrupt and challenge this Liberian propaganda almost universally eschewed focusing on African

²⁷³ David Francis Bacon, *Wanderings on the Seas and Shores of Africa* (New York: Joseph H. Harrison, 1843), 1: 104-106.

children and instead directed attention to the lived experience of adult African laborers within the colony (men pulling carts like beasts of burden) or the peculiar reinterpretation of the American South with its “negro quarters” behind the master’s house.

There is also the question of elite Liberian women travelling abroad with their servants. Obviously given the economic constraints of such mobility, the ability to do so would have been limited solely to economic and political elites. But there were such women. Joseph J. Roberts’s wife and daughters travelled abroad, to both the United States and Europe. His widow, in fact, relocated to London after Roberts’s death. What did Russwurm’s servant think of the United States? If she did travel with the family northward, did she perceive the same differences in the political and social contexts between Baltimore and Maine which so caught the attention of Sheppard and McGill? Or were her duties so regimented that it made little difference where on the globe she stood? It would be unwise to completely dismiss this African Liberian as simply filled with wonderment at such American delights.

When one of these African visitors to the United States, Simleh Ballah, travelled to Baltimore, albeit under much better circumstances as the emissary of a needed ally, he had lived in Latrobe’s household and climbed to the top of Baltimore’s Washington Monument to observe the busy harbor below. He was obviously impressed, but he was also an apparently astute observer who either engaged thoroughly with his Baltimore hosts in questions about the city, or understood English far better than he let on. After his return to Africa, while defending one of the numerous incidents of provocation between settler and African at Cape Palmas, Ballah claimed that the Board of Managers held their colony to too strict a standard. While there were certainly scrapes and confrontations in Liberia, such was the natural order of things: “those occasional revolutions are inseparable from any state of society & [he] asks if the people in

Baltimore did not pull down each others houses just before he went to America.”²⁷⁴ Clearly, the commercial might of the Chesapeake did not stupefy Ballah into believing that the United States was only a land of milk and honey, and he also conceived that there were parallels between the two societies no matter the distance. It seems likely that Russwurm’s servant could easily have developed her own understanding of the Atlantic world after such a long residence in the United States. Indeed, if she ascribed to the practices of other West Africans like Ballah, then she would have already conceived of herself as having lived in a “little” United States and was simply visiting the larger version.

Another traveler in this Atlantic world sailing at roughly the same historical moment as Russwurm’s servant was Horatio Bridge, the American naval officer who published his *Journal of an African Cruiser* under Nathaniel Hawthorne’s guiding hand. Bridge predicted that “large plantations” in Africa could never compete “with those of Brazil and the West Indies” in the production of staple commodities. According to Bridge, “free labor in Africa will not soon be so cheap as that of slaves.”²⁷⁵ Bridge may have been right in asserting that Liberian plantations could never compete with their New World cousins, but he was duped by a false binary if he believed the farms he observed while on shore leave were maintained solely by “free labor.” Perhaps the workers were not legally chattel, but they were also most certainly not entirely “free” either. And regardless of their respective abilities to compete with the sugar production of a Barbados or coffee plantations in Brazil, Americo-Liberian settlers considered the acquisition of unfree laborers a stepping stone to acquiring their own economic freedom. Before he “returned to my labor among the heathen,” missionary and Americo-Liberian Washington McDonogh spent several months assisting his brother in clearing and planting his farm. Of course, it was

²⁷⁴ J. Leighton Wilston to John H. B. Latrobe, 6 June 1837, MSCS; John H. B. Latrobe to King Freeman, May 1837, MSCS; Selim Ballah,” *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 13, no. 3 (March 1837):101-103.

²⁷⁵ Bridge, 45.

probably helpful that his brother possessed “about 24 or 25 bound boys; some of them were taken from on board of a slaver by an American man-of-war.” This was undoubtedly the *Pons*, but it is important to note that only “some” of the “bound boys” originated from the slave ship.²⁷⁶ That this windfall of labor could be justified as an exercise in “civilizing” the heathen provided an added bonus. Tellingly, despite apparently having a flock of sorts conveniently attached to his brother’s farm, missionary McDonogh sought to go out beyond the American settlements to “labor among the heathen”; the presumption being that once the children found themselves bound to a Liberian household, then Christianity and its accompanying “civilization” was imminent. Space and labor worked hand-in-hand to transform the Americo-Liberians into exotic foreigners, while simultaneously making them vanguards of civilized Christianity. That economic and social gain in Liberia came on the backs of degraded labor only disturbed those who dismissed the “civilizing” possibilities of that labor, the “legitimate commerce” argument writ small. But for the day-to-day lives of Liberian’s inhabitants, the labor options were simply that: economic opportunities. It is perhaps best to conclude with a quote from settler Peyton Skipwith, who directly attributed his rising fortunes to his indentured servants and the windfall of the overloaded *Pons*. He wrote his former master, ironically a well-suited correspondent for understanding the economic possibilities of unfree labor:

I am very sorry that I did not turn my attention to farming when I first arrived to this Country, but It was Entirely out of my power as I was alone in a Manner & had no male kind to render me assistance. Now I Am very well Situated and has several apprentices with me Exclusive of some of the Barque Pons cargo of Congoes.²⁷⁷

For Skipwith, there was nothing civilizing or elevating about laboring on his farm. He simply needed male field hands to make his farm thrive. That he had the capacity and luck to acquire a

²⁷⁶ Washington W. McDonogh to John McDonogh, 7 October 1846, in Wiley, 141.

²⁷⁷ Peyton Skipwith to John H. Cocke, 25 June 1846, in Wiley, 63-64.

multitude of laborers in various forms and stages of unfreedom to fulfill his agrarian demands and that his use of these laborers would be sanctioned by many individuals otherwise opposed to slavery was the benefit of being an Americo-Liberian, the great exotic, and newly-made foreign, “civilizer” of a heathen continent.

Chapter 5

“They Would Dearly Learn What It Was to Fight White Men”: Whitening through Violence in Liberia

For all of the assurances on the part of the white leadership of the ACS that colonization was practical, it easily devolved into a muddled affair. Such was the case when over one hundred former slaves of Virginian Aylett Hawes, liberated by his will upon condition of resettlement to Liberia, found themselves auspiciously sailing from Norfolk on October 24, 1834; the day was auspicious as it fell on the anniversary of William Penn’s arrival in his newly established New World colony in 1682. While the date probably bore little significance to the Virginians, it resonated with their patrons, the Young Men’s Colonization Society of Pennsylvania (YMCSP), who relished the symbolism of establishing a new colony in West Africa on the same day that Penn had come ashore in North America. A “Mrs. Sigourney” composed a two-stanza hymn for the occasion, the first stanza celebrating the arrival of Penn and his “law of love” and the second echoing this motif by announcing “A ship its sail is spreading, For that far tropic clime.” Partnering with the New York City Colonization Society, the YMCSP hoped to establish an independent colony just south of the mouth of the St. John River at a small inlet called Bassa Cove, or “Yorksylvaniana” as one apparently-amused New York colonizationist named the effort. The partner institutions were anxious to demonstrate their antislavery agenda by sending out expeditions consisting entirely of emancipated slaves and had received word of another band of potential emigrants in Savannah, Georgia. Following in the wake of the Marylanders’ separation from the parent Society, these northern societies were members of a broader separatist movement of more-northern state auxiliaries who were frustrated by the ACS’s financial woes, mismanagement, and reluctance to take a firm stance in opposition to slavery. Although they retained their status as ACS auxiliaries, these societies increasingly retained control over their

own funds and established their own independent colonies. The Bassa Cove settlement, named for the Liberian ethnic group who inhabited the area, was a short distance south of the ACS outpost of Edina, itself named in honor of the citizens of Edinburgh, Scotland, who had donated £100 to the ACS in 1833. And so black Virginians set out to establish a new settlement under the governance of Pennsylvanians and New Yorkers who soon hoped to fill it with Georgians across the cove from an ACS settlement named in honor of a Scottish city.²⁷⁸

If any of the new settlers had possessed or examined the convenient 1830 map of the Liberian coast based upon Jehudi Ashmun's observations they would have discovered that their new neighbors, the Bassas, "are generally domestic, industrious and averse to war." The settlers probably would have found that description comforting as, per the large Quaker presence among the Pennsylvania colonization ranks, the new colony at Bassa Cove was to be founded on a principle of "total abstinence from trade in ardent spirits and arts of war." If any northern benefactors had pushed into the hands of the literate settlers a curious book entitled *Claims of the Africans: or History of the American Colonization Society*, published two years earlier by the Massachusetts Sabbath Union, they would have been reassured that their soon-to-be closest neighbor, "King Joe Harris," was "a good natured old man" who urged the settlement of missionaries among his people and begged "like a child" for the erection of schools. The early days of the Bassa Cove settlement seemed to justify the tactics of the auxiliary societies in establishing the separate colony. "Joe Harris" dispatched his son to be educated for three years in the United States. Over the course of three days in May, the Pennsylvanians and New Yorkers

²⁷⁸ J. R. Tyson, *A Discourse before the Young Men's Colonization Society of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, 1834); "Colonization Meeting," *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 11, no. 1 (January 1835): 17; "Intelligence," *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 9, no. 2 (April 1833): 58; Colonization Society of the City of New York, *Proceedings of the Colonization Society of the City of New York, at their Third Annual Meeting* (New York: William A. Mercein & Son, 1835), 4-10, 25.

met in New York City to discuss the bright prospects of their settlement. “Joe Harris’s” son was patronizingly introduced at this meeting as a budding scholar in search of whiteness.²⁷⁹

Mr. Cresson then placed before the audience a young negroe of pleasing countenance, whom he introduced as the son of king Joe Harris, once himself a slave trader; but now a friend of the Society; and reposing such entire confidence in it, that he had committed his son to our care, to remain three years in this country for his education. Master Harris had come here to “learn book,” and go back a white man—not in colour, but he trusted, in what surpassed all outward change, in having his sins washed away. (The lad smiled, as if he comprehended this accoun [sic] of him.)²⁸⁰

Less than one month later, “King Joe Harris” wiped Bassa Cove from the map, attacking the settlement on the night of June 10, 1835 and killing eighteen settlers, forcing a hellish flight on the part of the survivors into the surrounding woods. During the morning following the attack, Richard Davis, an ancient Liberian settler at the age of fifty-five and one of the recently manumitted slaves of Hawes—his former coach driver, in fact—scoured the woods in search of Lucretia Brant, his thirty-six-year-old unmarried daughter who was listed on the emigrant roll as a “spinster.” Davis “found her out in the woods sitting on the ground looking as pal [sic] as death from great loss of blood from the many dangerous wounds she had recd. that night.” Davis tried to move the woman by himself, but she suffered too greatly from his solitary efforts. He left her and sought additional aid in carrying his daughter from harm’s way. Somehow finding Edward Hankinson, a Quaker and the agent for Bassa Cove, in the confusion, Davis begged for assistance in securing the aid of the ubiquitous Kru to carry his daughter to safety; everything in Liberia, trade good or human, passed through the hands of the Krumen. Hankinson himself had apparently escaped the devastation with the aid of one of these coastal dwellers. Davis “went immediately to Mr. Hankinson as [sic] ask him for something to pay the Kroomen to bring my

²⁷⁹ Tyson, 59.; anonymous, *Claims of the African: or The History of the American Colonization Society* (Boston: Massachusetts Sabbath School Union, 1832), 245

²⁸⁰ “Colonization Meeting in New York,” *African Repository and Colonial Journal*, 11, no. 7 (July 1835): 206.

child out of the woods. He very inhumanely sent me off without any thing say he had nothing for me notwithstanding my great distress his heart was iron-cased against my small request.” Lucy Brant died in the forest.²⁸¹

Most of the survivors fled to neighboring Edina. That small isolated outpost soon found itself engulfed in the conflict with “Harris.” Unprepared to engage in a prolonged war and isolated from Monrovia, over fifty miles distant to the north, the citizens of Edina begged for aid from the colony and the ACS leaders in the states. In July, one correspondent inquired of “the board of managers whither they intend to forsake us all together Located in Edina.” Despite the precarious situation, there were advantages to warfare. “We stand at present in battle array wishing to obtain our ground the land which have been assigned to us we find is of no use on the east of this River purchased by Governor Mechlin. We have at all times been refused authority by the natives...from whom the land was bought.” The war provided the perfect opportunity to forcibly occupy the territory south of the St. Johns River to which the citizens of Edina clearly believed they were entitled. Of course, such a conflict would require some serious firepower, hence the citizens formally petitioned the ACS for a dozen pieces of artillery and one hundred muskets.²⁸²

Even as they called for help, however, the Americo-Liberians were not content to remain in their isolated settlement, but rather moved up the river and attacked “Joe Harris’s” forces near his town, losing one man as they inflicted an estimated twenty casualties on the enemy. W. L. Weaver, Edina’s superintendent, informed the Board of Managers how a colony in such desperate need of artillery and provisions was able to successfully go on the attack: “Bob Gray and King Yellow Will have proved themselves our devout friends in the War, they have taken

²⁸¹ Richard Davis to H. J. Woodbury, October 1835, ACS.

²⁸² Hanson Leiper to the Board of Managers of the ACS, 10 July 1835, ACS; W. L. Weaver et. al. to Ralph R. Gurley, 10 July 1835, ACS.

almost the whole of it on themselves had several Battles with King Joe Harris and succeeded in repulsing him each time.” “Bob Gray,” whom one settler described in 1834 “as almost one of our citizens,” and “Yellow Will”²⁸³ were supporters of the American settlements who probably saw the war as an opportunity to curry favor with the Americans and simultaneously remove a rival—“Joe Harris”—from the south side of the river. While “Bob Gray” actively intervened in the war on the Americans’ behalf, “Yellow Will” simply refused to aid “Harris,” an act of defiance for which “Harris” burned his village. Although Bassa Cove was under the leadership of the Pennsylvania and New York societies, once Edina became engaged in the war, the colonial authorities at Monrovia brought the entire colonial apparatus onto a war footing. Americo-Liberian volunteers along with their Recaptive African allies from New Georgia marshaled in Monrovia. On July 14, the colonial council declared war against “Harris” even as it held out the olive branch in the form of peace commissioners charged with the task of interviewing “Harris” in order to “demand...an explanation of his late conduct...demand reparation for his aggressions on the persons and property of Americans...demand security...for the future peace and safety of the Colony generally, and its citizens individually.” The “peace” commissioners would be carrying a sizable stick with them in the form of over one hundred volunteer soldiers who would immediately go to war with “Harris” if the commissioners did not feel their demands adequately met. The colonial agent, Ezekiel Skinner, was not to be outdone by the citizens of Edina in requesting military supplies from his superiors; in addition to requesting field artillery pieces in case the settlers needed to “penetrate King Joes territories,” quite the affirmation of this masculine mission, Skinner also asked the ACS for fifty rifles to form an elite rifle company. Ever the propagandists, the ACS officials in the States spun the war as evidence of the beneficial effects of colonization, as this simultaneous preparation for both

²⁸³ Not to be confused with “Yellow Will” of the Maryland colony at Cape Palmas.

war and peace “indicate a state of political advancement among” the settlers that was only made possible by their transformation into the civilizers of Africa.²⁸⁴

The peace commissioners had little time to ply their trade as soon after arriving in the territory, a general engagement between “Harris” and the colonists led to the defeat of the African leader and the burning of his town. Facing such odds, “Harris” made peace with the settlers and “Bob Gray,” whom he only considered an auxiliary to the Americans, promising not to interfere with their efforts to resettle Bassa Cove or trade along the St. Johns River and to return the goods pillaged from the destroyed settlement. The ACS agent “dashed” “Bob Gray,” “Young Bob”—presumably “Bob Gray’s” son—and “Yellow Will” a smattering of trade goods, muskets, gunpowder, umbrellas, cloth, and snuff boxes to reinforce their connection to the American settlers, and by October 31 Skinner was walking among the unburied bodies of the Bassa Cove settlers with plans to reestablish the colony.²⁸⁵

There was significant confusion regarding the cause of the assault, especially in light of the colonizationists’ previous convictions that “Joe Harris” had embraced his American neighbors. In their July petition, the citizens of Edina ascribed “Harris’s” motives to land disputes; by October, colonizationists in the United States were convinced that “Harris” was only a cog in the machinations of slave traders who had been forced to abandon their factory near Bassa Cove upon the arrival of the Americans. But most Americo-Liberians were positive that they understood the root cause of the betrayal: the principles of the settlement, namely pacifism. On July 1, Hilary Teague informed his correspondent that the “unfortunate circumstances” of the destruction of the settlement and loss of lives was due “entirely to the principles on which the

²⁸⁴ W. L. Weaver to Ralph R. Gurley, 12 July 1836, ACS; “Letter from a Colonist,” *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 10, no. 8 (October 1834): 244-245; Ezekiel Skinner to Elliott Cresson, 31 October 1835, ACS; “Latest from Liberia,” *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 11, no. 11 (November 1835): 337-339; Ezekiel Skinner to Ralph R. Gurley, 24 August 1835, ACS; “Proceedings of the American Colonization Society, at the Nineteenth Meeting,” *African Repository and Colonial Journal*, 12, no. 1 (January 1836): 23-25.

²⁸⁵ Ezekiel Skinner to Elliott Cresson, 31 October 1835, ACS

settlement was founded. I anticipated it and ventured to remark the same to Mr. Hankinson.

He...imputed them to a want of faith.” The cause was the inherent savagery of the surrounding Africans who were only kept in check by force and the military strength of the colony. The June *Liberia Herald*, reporting immediately after receiving word of the attack, spoke for many of the settlers in explaining the situation in the colony.²⁸⁶

What was the immediate cause of the attack we have not been able to learn, but we have no hesitancy in believing that the smallest show of military preparation would have prevented the attack . But the principle on which the Colony was founded, is one, that forbids every thing like military preparation; consequently, they fell an easy prey to the villainous savages. With all deference, to the opinion of men, in almost every thing our superiors in wisdom, we beg leave, on this subject to differ, and we think our intercourse with the natives and consequent knowledge of their disposition, and habits, entitle us this privilege. We, as much as any one on earth, abhor, and deprecate the effusion of human blood; but we are conscious the way to prevent it, is not to be unprepared to resist the natives, but rather the most certain method to provoke it. Such is the dastardly, unprincipled disposition of these half cannibals, that nothing but a knowledge of superiority, in point of physical force, on the part of foreigners, will keep them to the terms of any compact made with them. A colony established without the means of defending itself, becomes at once, from the force of their cupidity, a temptation to robbery and murder; but let them see an exhibition of military equipment, the slightest preparation of defence, and their dastardly souls like a humble spaniel will succumb into most willing obedience.²⁸⁷

If properly managed with requisite shows of military might, the Africans would become pliable subservient neighbors, and the Americo-Liberians were the most qualified administrators of this “superiority, in point of physical force” due to their residence near and familiarity with Africans. In a letter labeled “private,” settler Jacob W. Prout—soon to be a signer of Liberia’s Declaration of Independence in 1847—affirmed to the ACS, “I do not hesitate to say that the means of defence of the Settlement of Port Cresson will hereafter keep them in (the natives) in [sic] fear, as I well know that in order to keep them under subjection they must allways see some

²⁸⁶ “Relief of the Sufferers at Bassa Cove,” *African Repository and Colonial Journal*. 11, no. 12 (December 1835): 371; Hilary Teague to Unknown [probably Ralph R. Gurley], 1 July 1835, ACS.

²⁸⁷ “Latest from Liberia,” *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 11, no. 11 (November 1835): 338.

thing like a prepared state.” There are eerie echoes here of white southerners’ arguments that they were most qualified to “handle” the South’s African American population because of similar claims to familiarity with savage blackness. Undoubtedly, arch-racist Samuel Cartwright did not know he echoed the *Liberia Herald* when he wrote nearly a decade later on southern slaves that “no spaniel is more attached to his master or is truer to him, than is Canaan when properly managed.”²⁸⁸ Control could not only just be wrought from the map and bound labor, it also had to be created from cannon and sword, elegantly normalizing violence that ensured the smooth order of the society.

As variegated, shifting, and contested whiteness on the American mainland developed in opposition to black degradation and red backwardness, elevated settler blackness—or African whiteness—emerged in opposition to black African savagery. And much as whiteness papered over many cultural, ethnic, economic, and social rifts within the elbowing ranks of European immigrants in nineteenth-century America, so too did “civilization” congeal fissures within settler society. Fractures developed among settlers depending upon their origins as free-state and slave-state emigrants eyed one another suspiciously; freeborn settlers—who often emigrated with greater capital both in terms of money and educational resources that they could transform into government positions with regular salaries—often found themselves at odds with former slaves. Even racial differences amongst the supposedly homogenous “black” settlers, especially amongst the multitudinous mixed-race categorizations, cleaved society. And, of course, such identifying factors did not operate in a vacuum, but rather built upon one another in dizzying constellations of power within the colonial setting. Freeborn settlers were more likely to be of mixed ancestry, who were more likely to have rudimentary education, and thus were more likely to secure employment with a regular salary, thus providing both civil and economic authority over their

²⁸⁸ Jacob W. Prout to Ralph R. Gurley, 8 January 1836, ACS; Samuel A. Cartwright, *Essays* (Vidalia, LA, 1843), 40.

less-equipped neighbors. Controlling black savagery through the influence of “civilization,” which usually took the form of the musket, provided the glue to cement these disparate elements of society together. More specifically, with such an emphasis on violence, the colony enveloped itself in a masculine mission to tame savagery, effectively distinguishing settler from savage.

As detailed in chapter four, this idea of controlling black labor was foundational to the idea of Liberia. Jehudi Ashmun noted in his final report of 1825, four years after the initial purchase of Cape Mesurado, that every colonist could “obtain the comforts of life” because “Every family, and nearly every single adult person in the Colony, has the means of employing from one to four native labourers.” The widespread availability of cheap and unfree labor provided a societal floor that elevated all settlers. Perversely, this was exactly the same theory of social bliss through inequality that undergirded George Fitzhugh’s pro-slavery arguments before the American Civil War. Slavery was an unmitigated good for Fitzhugh because it removed economic competition amongst society’s necessary lowest strata, and, contrary to free market capitalism, enveloped these laborers within the protective embrace of paternalism while simultaneously elevating the entirety of white society above them. Hence, slavery “is a form, and the very best form, of socialism.” Paternal masters saw to the needs of the enslaved, thus sparing the lowest orders of society from cruel competition with their social peers: “The slaves are all well fed, well clad, have plenty of fuel, and are happy....A state of dependence is the only condition in which reciprocal affection can exist among human beings.” Much as slavery provided contentment to the enslaved, African labor would find “civilization” through working for the colonists. White and black colonizationists found strange bedfellows in Fitzhugh²⁸⁹ and Cartwright.

²⁸⁹ Fitzhugh actually did address colonization and Liberia in a few of his published works. Although he found Liberia to be a better run society than Haiti, he did not see colonization as a viable alternative to the benefits of slavery. He based this criticism on the limitations of space: “No habitable part of Africa is unsettled, and the free

Such a large class of laborers, occupying the lowest strata of society because of their supposed lack of “civilization,” obviously echoed the mixed free and enslaved organization of labor in the United States. And just as whites in the United States grumbled about the supposed attributes of enslaved and free African American workers, utilized violence to maintain their system of privilege, and legally constrained the mobility of African Americans, so too did the Americo-Liberians strictly enclose citizenship around the normalcy of American “civilization,” engage in armed struggles against neighboring Africans, and denigrate the laborers who provided the economic backbone of the colony.

While the Africans were willing to see whiteness as an advantageous cultural identity, they were not supportive of this imported American construction of its concomitant relations of power. In some ways, the Americo-Liberians and Africans were not wholly dissimilar in their interpretations of whiteness. Clearly, whiteness was a privileged and highly prized commodity for the Africans who did view it as an economic position that could greatly strengthen their power in the expansive coastal trade. In light of these Africans’ history as middlemen between trading vessels and those living in the continental interior, literacy and fluency in English and knowledge of the culture of these merchants provided a strong economic incentive to learn the ways of the “white man.” But they were unwilling to concede to the American-style of whiteness conceived by the Americo-Liberian settlers in which they were degraded cheap labor cast out beyond the pale of citizenship in Liberia because of their lack of civilization.

The efforts on the part of the Americo-Liberians to enforce this relation of power led to conflicts with the Africans. These conflicts were often violent and the wars and struggles between the settlers and neighboring African groups are a near constant of Liberian history. Of course, even if the settlers and Africans avoided wars like the one that engulfed Bassa Cove,

blacks who go there in numbers must make room for themselves, sword in hand, as the whites did in America.” See George Fitzhugh, *Sociology for the South, or, The Failure of Free Society* (Richmond, VA: A. Morris, 1854), 277.

violence—or the threat of violence—was an ubiquitous presence in the colonies. The violence of Liberia was not limited to grand conflicts, but shaped the day-to-day interactions of Americo-Liberian and African Liberian. This chapter will examine the contours of this “landscape of violence” by highlighting the range of violent actions, ranging from large-scale wars of conquest to intimate episodes among individuals. Both settlers and Africans, elbowing for space and power in western Africa, navigated a complex and evolving landscape.

Of course, there were peaceful alternatives to the sword, and one of the striking and understudied responses to this encroaching colonial power was the means by which these savvy traders negotiated the laws of Liberian society to gain advantage. The ongoing negotiations between Maryland in Liberia and “Freeman” over thefts were prime examples of this exchange. As noted in chapter two, before Governor Hall stepped down in favor of Russwurm, he had attempted to prevent thefts he attributed to Africans by threatening the indiscriminate confiscation of African goods of equal value to any good claimed by a colonist to have been stolen. The Greboes successfully parried that discriminatory system of justice by mobilizing their transatlantic experiences and arguing that Liberia was an extension of a “white man’s country” and should replicate its legal codes. This legal defense led to the establishment of the Grebo constabulary. Unfortunately, the problem did not abate with the new police force or the arrival of Russwurm, who found himself confronting “Freeman” at the same moment in which Simleh Ballah returned from his visit to the United States. Russwurm was angered when “Freeman” only addressed a white missionary, J. Leighton Wilson, with whom Russwurm was about to have more difficulties, and attributed “Freeman’s” lack of respect to Ballah’s American mission and a purported loss of whiteness on the part of Russwurm.²⁹⁰

²⁹⁰ James Hall to John H. B. Latrobe, 1 May 1836, MSCS. Richard Hall, 107-108, 136-150; Winston James, 5-25. Also see chapter two.

One insight to draw from this episode is an understanding of how the Americo-Liberians hoped that their society would function. The Grebo revolt was initiated when an African was brought before an American Justice of the Peace and summarily sentenced to a corporal and fiscal punishment without a means to challenge the ruling. While such a society remained the dream for most Americo-Liberians, the settlers lacked the dominating force to make such a vision of their “civilization” become the accepted and dominant norm in reality. In fact, the desire to secure such dominating force led Samuel McGill to advocate that the independent Maryland settlement requests its annexation by the larger Republic of Liberia. Maryland in Liberia declared its independence from the MSCS in a ceremony held in Baltimore on February 22, 1854. Like its other Liberian counterpart which declared independence in 1847, the secession of Maryland in Liberia from the MSCS met with the full support of the parent Society. Yet, as early as 1851, then-governor McGill was advocating merging with the government at Monrovia. His reasoning was straightforward.²⁹¹

The Colonists here should not be encouraged in their rejection of the idea of annexation to the Republic as a County for the following reasons. We require strength and numbers to control, and if necessary subdue our Native population. This will be the first work for Liberia to assist in, and well enough they know it. Should we undertake it alone, it would be likely to involve the destruction of more than half the improvements to the Colony, but with the force that the Liberians are able and willing when required to take the field we could easily subdue all around us if necessary. When our strength ~~became felt as~~ became known, we could easily interfere and prevent the wars existing around us constantly and which are so detrimental to the interests of our Colony.²⁹²

The projection of power was foremost in McGill’s mind and consolidating the force of all Americo-Liberians against native Africans. Indeed, McGill suggests that “subduing” Africans is a particular specialty of Americo-Liberians. The letter would prove eerily prophetic. After

²⁹¹ For an overview of Maryland in Liberia’s independence, time as a republic, and eventual annexation by Liberia, see Richard Hall, 370-431.

²⁹² Samuel F. McGill to John H. B. Latrobe, 6 January 1851, MSCS.

several years as an independent republic, Maryland in Liberia became embroiled in a war with their long-time neighbors, the Greboes, in December 1856. After initially destroying Gbenelu at last and securing the aid of Rocktown Africans in their struggle, the settlers became bogged-down in the military conflict, suffered setbacks, and eventually had to send for aid from Monrovia. The resulting military expedition from Liberia resulted in the annexation of Maryland in Liberia in 1857, much as McGill predicted. Although the Americo-Liberians proved triumphant in the end, the see-sawing conflict underscores the inability of the Liberian settlers to unilaterally project power at all times, everywhere, despite McGill's assurances. Instead, punch and counterpunch punctuate Liberian history. Africans burn Bassa Cove and have their town destroyed in turn; Americo-Liberians order an African flogged, the Africans break him out of jail.

And this Liberian violence was all the more complicated by the multifaceted groups involved: European traders, Americo-Liberian settlers, and numerous African ethnicities, each with their own agenda. The problems of Maryland in Liberia in 1838 amply demonstrate the complexity of these situations. Twenty years before the war that ended both Gbenelu and Maryland in Liberia, but after their very rocky start, "Freeman" and Russwurm had eventually built a working relationship before the ever-evolving landscape of violence brought them back into conflict that year. The immediate source of the problem was a prolonged drought combined with the arrival of two large expeditions of emigrants—one in January and another in July—that greatly taxed the food reserves of the colony. In late February, after the arrival of the first expedition, Russwurm decided to make direct contact with the interior African town of Denah, several miles up the nearby Cavalla River, in hopes of opening a direct land route to the town to allow for the importation of foodstuffs. "Freeman" accompanied Russwurm on this expedition. While Russwurm thought that "Freeman's" presence would increase the prestige of the mission,

the motives of “Freeman” are less well documented. Perhaps he desired to further cement the American settlement to his cause or he wanted to be present as the Americans interjected themselves into the coastal-interior trade that had traditionally been dominated by African go-betweens like himself. Or, perhaps more simplistically, he was also interested in opening up direct trade with the interior because his people were as hungry as the Americans. Regardless of “Freeman’s” motives, the Africans living along the river were not receptive to this intrusion in their riverine trade. Before their arrival in Denah, the Maryland expedition was fired upon from the shore, dumped from their canoes, and ignominiously sent back down the river to nurse their pride. Despite their respective outrages, both African and American leaders knew they were in no shape to launch a war.²⁹³ In April, colonial secretary John Revey dutifully transcribed a message from “Freeman” dispatched through his interpreter Ballah. Despite the intervening month to cool his temper, “Freeman” clearly still seethed, and informed the MSCS, “I want you please for send two schooners for fight them people & make them people no doo bad fash agin.” As late as July, Russwurm still operated under the nominal assumption that “Freeman” was an ally of the colony, and requested that the MSCS “send out a new suit of blue for King Freeman. His size is one of the largest.” Russwurm did not record the results of this gift, but it seems likely that “Freeman” found a suit of the appropriate color a poor substitute for actually becoming an African admiral.²⁹⁴

But even as the two leaders seemed to have developed some form of rapport, tensions worsened among the colony’s inhabitants. J. Leighton Wilson, the missionary go-between for “Freeman” when he first met Russwurm, reported in July in revealing language that the “natives are becoming exceedingly uneasy as [to] the amount of lands appropriated by the colonists &

²⁹³ Their subsequent inability to march an army upon the guilty party, the Barboes, led to the hiring of “Yellow Will” to kidnap a Barbo in order to bring them to the negotiating table to answer for their actions.

²⁹⁴ For a description of the Maryland expedition to Denah, see Richard Hall, 169-172; King Freeman to John H. B. Latrobe, 27 April 1838, MSCS; John B. Russwurm to John H. B. Latrobe, 7 July 1838, MSCS.

they are apprehensive that they will be crowded out of their reservations.” Once again, control of the territory and assumptions that the entire colonial territory was designated for the settlers aside from the “reservations” of the Africans resided at the forefront of the colony’s conflicts. Letters dated from the lean summer of 1838 increasingly contained complaints regarding the growing problem with thievery. For his part, Russwurm echoed the *Liberia Herald*’s summation of the Africans’ assault on Bassa Cove and placed much of the blame for the thefts on the settlers. “Our people also,” he wrote that summer, “are also much to blame, as many houses have not proper fastenings, though they know the natives will steal.” Just as pacifism failed to address inherent African malevolence at Bassa Cove, so too did lackadaisical security invite inherent African larceny.²⁹⁵

Unsurprisingly, the reports of the growing tensions in the colony were accompanied by increasing detail to the colonial militia. In April, an officer of the Latrobe Artillery—the company of men responsible for the cannon pointed at “King Freeman’s” town—requested that the MSCS order uniforms more suitable to the climate along with cartridge boxes and other military necessities. In July: “The muhtary [military] is moving. We have too uniform company and one mulitia [sic], we can call one hundred men to arms. Lard is wanted and powder for the run of their quarterly parads as you know that we have men under arms some time that they never handled a musket and the drill officers find it very necessary that such thing are much wanted.” Newly arrived schoolmaster Benjamin Alleyne reported in July 1838, six months after arriving in the colony, a litany of problems with the colony: its stockpile of provisions, its governor, the supplies provided settlers, and the lack of a prepared school house. About the only organization functioning well in the colony seemed to be its military structure, which Alleyne

²⁹⁵ J. Leighton Wilson to Ira Easter, 5 July 1838, MSCS. In terms of thefts, newly returned settler Alexander Hance commented upon the growing problem: “the natives can get troublesome in stealing the poultry of the Colonist and the like, thou trying we must expect it from them who do not know that jesus Christ is truly the son of the living god.” See Alexander Hance to Unknown, 5 July 1838, MSCS. John B. Russwurm to John H. B. Latrobe, 7 July 1838, MSCS.

admitted “has quite a military appearance and are improving in discipline.” At the same time, Russwurm was requesting one hundred cartridge boxes for the militia; the settler who carried his official correspondence to the United States was also entrusted to present to the Board of Governors a curiosity in the form of an African cartridge box. The underlying message seemed to be that despite the widespread availability of this African variant, the settlers would only withdraw ammunition from an American-style box.²⁹⁶ The colony may starve, but the military would look good doing it, and they would do it dressed as Americans.

Despite the fact that their definition of the power within whiteness was contested, the Americo-Liberians found such broadly conceived identities as “white,” “American,” and “civilized,” claims which would have been greatly challenged had they been made in the United States, as useful tools for enveloping a disparate settler society. The survival of Liberia necessitated presenting a united front against divided African nations, and unfortunately Liberians had multiple fissures that produced deep divides into their society. There is no better example of these fissures than Russwurm himself. Although in charge of the Maryland colony, Russwurm was Jamaica-born and raised in New England. Free-born northerners who emigrated often attributed the colony’s labor relations, poor educational opportunities, and lack of entrepreneurship to the majoritarian southern settlers. Indeed, the problematic “southern-ness” of Liberia was one of the few points that both William Nesbit and Samuel Williams, coincidentally both Pennsylvanians, agreed upon. In his scathing critique of Liberia, Nesbit scoffed at the condition of the “*Slave’s Slave*” and highlighted how Liberians replicated the living arrangements of southern slaveholders by housing natives in huts behind their main residences. In his response to Nesbit, Williams essentially agreed that an abundance of southerners was a

²⁹⁶ Anthony Wood to John H. B. Latrobe, 27 April 1838, MSCS; Alexander Hance to Unknown, 5 July 1838, MSCS; Benjamin Alleyene to John H. B. Latrobe, 10 July 1838, MSCS; John B. Russwurm to John H. B. Latrobe, 7 July 1838, MSCS.

problem. “The next objection that I find to Liberia, is the indolence or seeming indolence of many of the colonists....This is to be attributed more to the kind of people who have settled them than to any other cause. They are principally emancipated slaves, who do not appreciate freedom in its proper light, but think that when once free they are at liberty to be industrious or otherwise, and many choose to be lazy. Now, if, in my opinion, the Northerners could be induced to go to Liberia, we would soon find quite a different state of things.” The New Englander Russwurm was more cautious in his regional praises, if only because of his association with the colonization society from Maryland. Even before his appointment as governor, Russwurm rejoiced the arrival of an MSCS ship, noting that “The arrival of the Ann with emigrants for the settlement of Cape Palmas was with emigrants north of the District of Columbia; (for it cannot and ought not to be concealed that sectional feelings do prevail in our community) a subject of much rejoicing.” Nesbit and Williams wanted settlers of more northerly stock while Russwurm was contented if the colonists were simply from any area north of the capital or freeborn, but all three northerners agreed that the colony was filled with far too many southerners.²⁹⁷

Overlapping this regional divide among settlers was the question of whether individuals were freeborn or former slaves. And this complicated web of division was further subdivided by the presence of individuals of mixed origins like Russwurm and the constellation of racial ancestry represented among the Americo-Liberians. These questions of race and condition related to practical matters. Freeborn settlers—or at least those who had been free for several years before their emigration—could accrue greater resources for life in Africa than many of their newly emancipated comrades who were forced to rely on the colonization societies or their former masters. Positions within the colonial government, often the only assured means of securing a regular salary in the colony, and mercantile interests necessitated literacy, once again

²⁹⁷ Nesbit, 38-39; Williams, 16-17; John B. Russwurm to John H. B. Latrobe, 23 February, 1834, MSCS.

privileging freeborn settlers. The ranks of the freeborn settlers were likewise skewed to incorporate larger numbers of individuals of mixed ancestry. The white-run colonization societies in the United States favored mixed-race settlers who, in the words of Robert J. Breckinridge, as a “whole class of mulattoes is to be considered and treated as distinct from the blacks. They consider themselves so; the blacks consider them so, and all who have opportunity of comparing the two cannot doubt that the former are the more active, intelligent, and enterprising of the two.”²⁹⁸ For certain individuals of mixed ancestry, Liberia offered a perfect environment to obtain the power and influence denied them in the United States.

These relations of power meant that Liberia did not offer an escape from the same racialized tensions underscored by Breckinridge. Writing decades after his Liberian experiences, James Hall, who served as the ACS’s doctor in Monrovia before becoming Maryland in Liberia’s governor, explained how he came to learn of this fissure within Liberian society almost immediately. Shortly after arriving in the colony, the new colonial doctor was invited to a dinner hosted by the governor and attended by roughly twenty colonial officials and the colony’s most prominent citizens. After more than two hours of wining and dining, the banquet concluded in good American fashion with a number of toasts to “The Governor,” “The American Colonization Society,” “Liberia,” and so on deep into the night. All was well until one guest hoisted his glass and proclaimed, “‘The *Fair* of Liberia;’ which last created significant and not pleasant looks on the part of some very dark gentlemen present.” Luckily, the governor stepped in and quickly suggested that surely the toaster had meant “The *Fair Sex* of Liberia,” and the volatile situation defused. Hall added to the recollection for any confused readers that “*Fair* is a specific term with Liberians, signifying the shade of color; as ‘a little fair; *quite* fair; *very* fair; almost white, and so on.” Related to these issues surrounding the “shade of color” was the former legal status of the

²⁹⁸ Robert Breckinridge, “Hints on Colonization and Abolition,” 282-283.

immigrants. Many freeborn Liberians believed the ex-slaves to be unprepared for life on the frontier. One can hear the disappointment dripping from Monrovia's first governor of African descent, the mixed-race Joseph Jenkins Roberts who would go on to be the first president of the Republic of Liberia, when he commented to a companion after observing a vessel of Kentucky émigrés disembarking. "Do not think much of the Kentucky delegates.... They appear to be rather self-consequential, blustering and ignorant—perhaps 'field hands.'" ²⁹⁹ To complicate this already messy society further, this emphasis on the supposed unpreparedness of former slaves for life in Liberia was not only confined to free people of color. Some pro-colonization slaveholders decided to "train" their slaves prior to departure, thus providing certain ex-slaves with the same literary and educational skills as their freeborn compatriots. Samson Caesar, who arrived in Liberia in 1834, was one of these former slaves. Although previously enslaved and a Virginian, Cesar found no fault with the indictments of Nesbit, Williams, and Roberts regarding the quality of the emigrants.

I must Say that I am afraid that our Country never will improve as it ort [aught] unti the people in the United States keep their Slaves that they have raised as dum as horses at home and Send those here who will be A help to improve the Country as for Virginia as far as my knowledge extends I think She has Sent out the most Stupid Set of people in the place while they have them their the cow hide is hardly ever off of their backs and when they come here they feal So free that they walk about from morning till evening with out doing one Stroke of work by those means they become to Sufer [.] people in the United States ort to have more regard for Liberia than to Send Such people here." ³⁰⁰

As governor, Russwurm joined this chorus of grumbles regarding the recently freed.

After the arrival of the *Columbia* in July 1838, one the vessels expediting the colony's food crisis, Russwurm complained to his superiors that unmarried women constituted too large of a

²⁹⁹ James Hall, "My First Visit to Liberia [Concluded]," *The African Repository* 62, no. 1 (January 1886): 1-2. Also quoted in Winston James, 69-71; John Lewis to ACS, 19 June 1848, ACS, quote also in Tyler-McGraw, 152.

³⁰⁰ Samson Caesar to Henry F. Westfall, 2 June, 1834, *The Liberian Letters*, <http://etext.virginia.edu/subjects/liberia/samson.html>.

percentage of the expedition. Not only did these demographics fail to meet an idealized masculine agricultural norm, they were an especially disappointing expedition in their high numbers of former slaves. “An acquaintance with people just emancipated, knows that it is with the utmost difficulty, that males even can be driven to make the requisite exertions to maintain themselves—how much greater then the difficulty where you have to deal with females without protectors.”³⁰¹ Ill-prepared to support themselves, Russwurm mused, ex-slaves had to be “driven” to farm, a word choice that questions the liberty that accompanied the act of manumission.

Obviously, Russwurm likewise underscored the gendered dynamics of colonial Liberia. Founded on masculine agricultural and mechanical ideals and surrounded by “savages,” female settlers necessitated “protectors” in this line of thinking. Clearly, much of this rhetoric centered on fears that women could not provide for themselves economically or protect themselves from barbaric violence like that which befell Lucy Brant in this manly colonial environment. The high mortality rate of the colony exacerbated this masculine nightmare by producing large numbers of widows and fatherless families, the assumed foundational unit of this society. Such was the result for Rebecca Gibson, who wrote to the board of the MSCS on August 31, 1836, one year after her arrival in Maryland in Liberia, “that I am a lone widow in a strange land.” Gibson’s husband had died four months after arriving in the colony, and his widow, burdened with six children all under the age of twelve, could simply no longer survive. She requested “a little aid any thing will be gratefully accepted old clothes for my children or any thing which the charitable feeling may compel them to do.” Perhaps most tragically, Gibson had apparently left older children in bondage in Maryland. If the Maryland colonizationists could get one of her older sons to her in Africa, then she was certain that her lot would improve. It is a soul crushing letter, all the more

³⁰¹ John B. Russwurm to John H. B. Latrobe, 7 July 1838, MSCS.

so for its concluding note seemingly underlining the reason for the Gibson family's relocation: "Joseph goes to school (my eldest boy) he is fond of his book and will make a good scholar." For all of their supposed weakness in this colonial society, Liberia's widows often exhibit remarkable grit in their letters. Even as Sally Ann Gibson asked for help in 1844 upon the death of her husband, she affirmed, "I have no desire to com back to America."³⁰²

Even as their respective economic contributions flustered colonizationists, women's presence in colonial Liberia added sexual politics to colonial dynamics. As governor, Russwurm could disparage the arrival of single women, but the sickly colony needed women for their reproductive capabilities. Simply, the high death rate of the colony placed a greater emphasis on births within the colony. The racialized regime of colonial Liberia altered American racial structures, and subsequently fostered discourse among Euro-Americans in the United States that the colonial space encouraged an untoward familiarity between whites and blacks; sexual relations were of special concern. When the American Anti-Slavery Society publicly interviewed Thomas C. Brown, a disgruntled South Carolinian who found the colony wanting and returned to the United States after fourteen months in Liberia, some members of the audience coyly inquired about the number of white men present in the colony. Brown counted six white men connected with the colonial administration or missionary societies. The subsequent question—"Have there been any *mulatto children* born there?"—and Brown's unequivocal response—"There have certainly been mulatto children born there"—led to an immediate disruption as audience members howled "Shame! Shame!" from the balcony. The disruptive audience members, described in the published transcript as white men supportive of colonization, found the entire topic unseemly. Eventually quieted, the committee continued with the line of questioning, but Brown, obviously aware that at least a portion of the audience was hostile to even suggesting

³⁰² Rebecca Gibson to William McKenney, 31 August 1836, MSCS; Sally Ann Gipson to James Hall, 19 January 1844, MSCS.

white officials engaged in sexual relations with female colonists, immediately backed away from his earlier claims. When further pressed, Brown's "mulatto children" became "one mulatto child," and Brown refused to reveal or speculate on the identity of the father. At no point did anyone inquire whether the children were the result of shared love or forced will, but, of course, the great disparities in power between a colonial official who controlled purse strings and a Liberian widow render such questioning practically meaningless.³⁰³

Clearly, the male-dominated audience—the published transcript does not mention whether it was a mixed-race audience—was divided over the propriety of airing the colony's dirty laundry in terms of sex. Equally clear, given the leading questions regarding the number of white men in the colony, the assumption by the interrogators and the implication put forward by Brown was that these mixed-race offspring were the result of white colonial officials' sexual liaisons with African American or African women. Due to Liberia's high mortality rate, it is not difficult to imagine the advantages gained for women of African descent from engaging in a sexual relation with a colonial administrator. Of course, married men and women were also susceptible. It is possible that the child Brown referred to belonged to Joseph Blake. In 1835, Blake wrote to colonization officials in the States that his wife had been seduced by the white ACS agent, Joseph Mechlin. Blake balked at the results of this affair; not only had Mechlin "left here for me to maintain a mulatto child," but the "criminal intercourse" between the governor and married woman included monetary gifts, which "made her haughty, insolent and disobedient to me [and] careless about my affairs." Blake sought a restitution through the colonial officials by finding the father in the United States and securing restitution for the expenses involved in raising his child. Barring that, he requested a grant of land in order to build a shipyard, reestablishing his pecuniary resources as the family patriarch. Most intriguingly, Blake, in his

³⁰³ *Examination of Thomas C. Brown*, 12.

listing the possibilities for his response as a wronged male head of household, explained to the board that “Had I killed the man in the night or day it would have been a stigma casted upon the colony.” Clearly, Blake wanted to assert a claim to rightful violence on the white agent for disrupting and challenging his patriarchal place—indeed, one of the points of Liberia was to create black manhood through the colonizing mission—but that his concerns for the colony’s credibility prevented his actions. Violence against the white agent would hurt the image of the colony even as violence against black “savages” constituted a celebrated civilizing element.³⁰⁴

While the audience’s assumptions that mixed-race children resulted from white officials’ liaisons with black settlers reflected white masculine beliefs regarding the virtue of white womanhood and the licentiousness of black women, they also represented the reality of Liberian society in which white women were extremely uncommon and almost always the wives of missionaries. But a tantalizingly vague and undisclosed episode in Harper suggests the extent to which white and black could mingle in Liberia. Margaret McAllister was a single white woman about whom we know painfully little. She was apparently caught up in religious zeal and sought a missionary’s life in Africa. The Baltimore’s Ladies’ Society for Education in Africa subsequently hired her in 1835 to teach at their planned school in Maryland in Liberia and she was in Africa before the close of the year. Although not officially attached to the MSCS, the society’s agent, Hall, felt obliged to assist her in establishing her school. He initially attempted to have her board with the white missionary from South Carolina, J. Leighton Wilson, but Wilson

³⁰⁴ Joseph Blake to Ralph Gurley, 9 March 1835, ACS; Joseph Blake to Ralph Gurley, 13 May 1835, ACS. Joseph Blake’s account and the implications for African-American masculinity is also examined by Bruce Dorsey. Correctly noting that colonization’s masculine worldview is understudied by historians, Dorsey notes that while women’s roles in the abolitionist movement have received scholarly interest, the colonizationists—white and black—presented a differing masculine approach that emphasized politics and open forums. Imbedded within colonizationist discourse was an interpretation of feminine Africa ready for black masculine exploitation, an obvious element of colonial discourse in other times and places. African Americans opposed to the ACS’s message had to create their own gendered response to this colonizationist rhetoric, emphasizing black masculinity in the form of opposition to slavery and second-class class citizenship in the United States (manifested by Frederick Douglass) or as nation-builders capable of establishing their own state without white patronage (manifested by Martin Delany). See Dorsey, 136-164.

did not believe that he could accommodate another mouth at his mission station. Thus, Hall wrote to the Board of the MSCS that he had procured a room and a nurse for her, but made no mention of the specifics. McAllister was briefly mentioned in the Fourth Annual Report of the MSCS, penned January 15, 1836, roughly four months after her arrival in Harper. For the MSCS, McAllister, “a pious and benevolent lady of the M. E. [Methodist Episcopal] Church,” was indicative of the progress that education and Christianity specifically, and “civilization” more broadly, were enjoying in their little settlement. Right before publication of their report, the MSCS had received reports that McAllister was satisfied with the state of the colony, enjoyed good health, and was “comfortably accommodated in the house of one of the settlers.” McAllister did not reside with Hall, Wilson, or any of the few white missionaries, but rather a “settler,” a term reserved for the African-American immigrants to Liberia, and one whose sex remained unidentified. Perhaps this was simply the room that Hall had arranged for her. Regardless of her dwelling, like so many other settlers, she would be dead in less than a year.³⁰⁵

And it was because of her early death that there is any record that something may have been amiss with the young woman. There should have been two colonial officials in Harper with medical training in 1836: the outgoing agent, Hall, and his replacement, Oliver Holmes, who had a dental practice in the United States. Unfortunately for McAllister, she took ill at the exact moment that Holmes was incapacitated with the African fever and Hall was away making his plans to return to the States. Additionally, a vessel filled with new emigrants arrived at the exact moment that McAllister took ill. Thus, McAllister’s medical treatment fell into the hands of an overworked colonist, Joshua Stewart, who was William Polk’s neighbor on Duncan Road. In the States, Stewart had been a barber, tailor, and cooper in Baltimore, but he unfortunately possessed no medical training and only had the guidance of a feverish Holmes to assist him. Stewart

³⁰⁵ James Hall to John H. B. Latrobe, 25 August, 1835, MSCS; “Fourth Annual Report of the Maryland State Colonization Society,” 15 January, 1836, MSCS.

misjudged the dosage and McAllister received a fatal quantity of Mercury chloride. Her death at the hands of an unprepared colonist in a settlement supposedly staffed by two doctors greatly upset the missionary Wilson, a former slaveholder who was ill-disposed to see many settlers in a positive light.³⁰⁶ While Wilson dispatched one letter outlining the tragic death of McAllister to a society official, he wrote a private letter to John H. B. Latrobe, the MSCS president. In a paragraph set aside as “inter nos” (“Between Ourselves”), Wilson strongly suggested that something was scandalous about McAllister.

And let me say (inter nos) do not consent again for a white woman in similar circumstances ever to come out in one of your vessels. The influence of enlightened xtian [Christian] females is much needed here, but when they come out unprotected they must encounter difficulties & have their influence contravened in ways & by means which neither they nor their friends can anticipate. This however so far as it alludes to the deceased is a sacred inter nos.³⁰⁷

This is the extent of Wilson’s report about McAllister’s actions in Liberia. Although the language is veiled, it does lead to some suggestions about the nature of the scandal. In particular, the word “unprotected” has strong undertones of sexual predation, especially coming from a southern slave owner. Whatever the relationship she held with the African American colonists, it was shockingly unanticipated and violated her “influence.” This, combined with her peculiarly unspecified living arrangement with an undisclosed “settler,” raises the possibility that McAllister did more than just reside with an African American. Obviously, Wilson found something about McAllister’s presence in Liberia disconcerting enough to render a discreetly and vaguely worded letter as a “sacred” confidential report. Whatever the root of the scandal, the MSCS no longer accepted single white women as inhabitants in the colony, and the brief flash of the McAllister scandal faded from the record.

³⁰⁶ Richard Hall, 109, 127.

³⁰⁷ J. Leighton Wilson to John H. B. Latrobe, 25 June, 1836, MSCS.

These disputes between ex-slaves and freeborn, northerners and southerners, light-skinned and dark-skinned, female and male, not only reflected fractures within American society, but also had practical real-world ramifications in Liberia as certain individuals arrived in the colony with greater economic support, a better network of acquaintances in the United States, and the literacy and mixed-race heritage to ensure promotion within the government. Given the advantages bestowed on individuals of mixed ancestry in Africa, it is little wonder that Harriet Beecher Stowe had her “mulatto” character George Harris immigrate to Liberia at the conclusion of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Such preferential treatment apparently led a few colonizationists to simply use the racial shorthand “are they black or mulatto?” when asking about the social status of certain individuals in Liberia.³⁰⁸ The point is that colonial Liberia as the outpost of a semi-private society and thus lacking a national identity within itself, required a different identity to maintain societal cohesion in the face of so many disparate African nations surrounding their coastal settlements. Within European white settler societies, whiteness provided an adaptable identity with broad encompassing appeal, thus making it useful for colonial societies in which not every European may have been an “Anglo-Saxon or “British.” Whiteness was useful here at the boundaries of colonial society precisely because it was fluid, adaptable, and mobile.³⁰⁹ Similarly, the whiteness, Americanness, and “civilization” of the Americo-Liberians provided a unifying identity around which to rally that at least offered some means to level this highly stratified society. Despite the relative advantages of certain settlers, they could all march forward against non-white, non-American, and uncivilized Africans while enjoying the fruits of those identities that were largely denied to them by the advantaged whites in the United States.

³⁰⁸ Harriet B. Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin, or Life Among the Lowly* (New York: Penguin, 1981), 609-612; Cowan, 159-160.

³⁰⁹ Such is the argument presented by Warwick Anderson in one of the few other scholarly works attempting to examine whiteness outside of the boundaries of the West. Warwick Anderson, “Traveling White” in *Re-Orienting Whiteness*, 65-70.

And Russwurm encountered all of these fissures within his colonial outpost during the hungry and dry summer of 1838. Two sparks, one metaphorical and the other literal, set his settlement alight in late July. As he and “Freeman” attempted to maintain peaceful relations amidst the acrimonious thefts that month, a man from an interior town, Barrakah, walked along Maryland Avenue on the morning of the 24th in the accompaniment of a sheep. Intending to trade the animal along with other goods at Harper, the Barrawe tragically encountered Eben Parker in his yard along the road. A former slave in his forties and the head of a farming household consisting of six other mouths in addition to his own, Parker was in the position to know the quality of the animal and have many uses for it. He quickly purchased the sheep and the African continued on to Harper to conduct his trade. At some point later in the day, the Barrawe determined that Parker had cheated him and returned to the farm to demand the return of the sheep. Parker refused. The African walked into the yard to reclaim the animal; Parker walked into his house to grab his musket. Leaving his front door, Parker sighted the African as he left the farm and fired a round into the Barrawe’s shoulder, wounding though not killing him. The gun’s report sent Africans and Americans alike running, as everyone was especially tense during that long summer. The Africans joined in the Barrawe’s outrage at being shot; the settlers commiserated with an angry Parker.

At that moment, Russwurm, “Freeman,” and the Grebo leadership were engaged in negotiations at the Agency House, the seat of the colonial government, regarding the plague of burglaries. They were apparently unprepared for the arrival of a wounded man and his entourage. Russwurm dismissed the man after a brief interview, requesting that he return in the morning and “the palaver would be talked.” With nightfall rapidly approaching, Russwurm ordered a colonial magistrate to arrest Parker and bring him before the colonial judiciary to explain his actions. This order was not completed, probably because, as Russwurm theorized, “Parker had threatened to

shoot down any officer who should come on his premises for the purpose of arresting him.”

Relatives carried the Barrawe man to his home that night, and Russwurm was surprised to find both Parker free and the victim gone without justice. He reissued his arrest decree for Parker, this time with the new purpose of taking away his gun out of fear that he would shoot a civil officer of the colony.³¹⁰

The second spark struck that night before Parker could be arrested. A cooking fire in Gbenelu set a thatch roof ablaze, and the conflagration spread and devoured most of the buildings. Such episodes usually sparked looting, and both African and American leaders were uninterested in providing additional opportunities to thieves. The colonial militia was once again called out to prevent lawlessness. Thus, when the pickets on the eastern edge of the settlement were approached by fifty Barrawe men, it should have aroused suspicion during those anxious hours. But when the officer in charge of the guard questioned the Africans' presence, they responded that they had simply come to see the destruction of Gbenelu. This apparently appeased the officer and he allowed the men to pass. Evidently, the wounded Barrawe had eschewed colonial justice for vengeance with disastrous results for the Parker family. The Barrawes repeated the journey of their kinsman and approached the Parker farm from Maryland Avenue. Parker, evidently in the yard, managed a rushed cry of warning to his wife in the house before he was cut down. His wife was able to escape out of the cabin's back window; two other daughters joined their slain father in the yard. The Barrawes robbed the house before setting it on fire and fleeing into the countryside surrounding the small agricultural village.³¹¹

Charles Snetter, a freeborn man originally from Charleston, South Carolina, who had relocated to Monrovia in 1832 and moved down the coast to Maryland in Liberia in 1836, responded to the commotion with a group of militiamen under his command. Snetter possessed a

³¹⁰ Richard Hall, 181-185; John B. Russwurm to John H. B. Latrobe, 21 August 1838, MSCS.

³¹¹ Richard Hall, 184-187.

forceful character and had been commissioned an assistant agent by outgoing governor James Hall, before quarreling with Hall's briefly tenured replacement, Oliver Holmes, and then outright refusing to accept his demotion to storekeeper by incoming-governor Russwurm. He found employment with missionary Wilson while nursing his grudges against the colonial administration even as he retained his officer position within the colony's military structure; he was regarded, in fact, as one of the leading military minds among the settler ranks. The divide between Snetter and the administration deepened with the arrival of the brig *Baltimore* on July 4, 1837. A fourteen-year-old boy had stowed away onboard and was not discovered until the vessel was out to sea. Evidently, there was confusion over whether the young man of color was free or enslaved, but the fearful captain was determined to return the youth to America lest he be charged in the loss of property. The boy, however, stole a boat and slipped ashore. In his work on Liberia, David Kazanjian, building on Saidya Hartman's ideas regarding the relationship between past, present, and future in which slavery and freedom are not antipodal constructions but rather simultaneous experiences, raises "the question of what kind of ongoing relationship with U.S. slavery Liberian freedom requires." Kazanjian primarily focuses on the epistolary record from Liberian settlers and their imagined and remembered returns to American bondage, but the unnamed *Baltimore* stowaway brought the realities of American slavery onto Africa's shore when the captain and crew came ashore to reclaim the runaway.³¹²

The sailors found the lad, bound him, and returned him to the vessel; many settlers were understandably perturbed and frustrated at the unwillingness of their assistant agent, George McGill (Russwurm being absent in Monrovia), to stop the manhunt. Magistrate and former vice-agent Thomas Jackson joined with the colonial administration in finding the results an unfortunate legal necessity: "[T]he said boy has been delivered to the captain as we have no

³¹² Richard Hall, 101-104, 128, 144-146, 162-163; Charles Snetter to John H. B. Latrobe, 9 July 1837, MSCS; David Kazanjian, "The Speculative Freedom of Colonial Liberia," 869-875.

claim to him as grevous as it is we can but act in according with natural laws we trust in so doing we shall do justice to our selves and to our friends.” Snetter, and many other settlers, arrived at a different conclusion. Writing to the MSCS Board of Managers, Snetter argued that as the laws of the colony forbade slavery, then the boy was free after he “landed safe on this sand, which you have proclaimed to be of liberty.” The current situation made Liberia no better than the northern United States if fugitives could be chained and brought back to the States with a complicit administration. Despite Snetter’s angst and tearful tirades on the shore, to which he claimed the acting agent responded by “laughing at my weakness,” the stowaway was returned to the ship. Snetter concluded the account with the promise, “I will remain ~~until~~ no longer then freedom is maintained.” Snetter was a lightning rod of a colonist, emotional and rash with a martial talent, equally gifted at inciting other settlers and angering administration officials. And he and his soldiers were the earliest responders to the Parker farm.³¹³

Arriving at the scene of devastation, Snetter and his men spied a group of Grebo men and boys, at least one of whom carried a musket. Although they were Greboes returning from their outlying farms to see the destruction of their homes and not Barrawes, the settlers were in no mood to distinguish African ethnicities and seized upon the unsuspecting Africans. In a complete mirror image of white responses to supposed slave rebellions in the United States, a mob formed denouncing the innocent Greboes as the murderers; at that moment, any African would do to serve as the culprit. Snetter ordered the Greboes to march in front of his men with fixed bayonets. Apparently, the arrival of another band of militiamen proved too much for the fractured nerves of the Africans; they made a run for the thicket along the settlement’s edge. A hail of bullets followed in their wake, killing one and mortally wounding two. Initially, Russwurm was disposed to attribute the affair as an accident spurred by the anxiety-inducing

³¹³ Thomas Jackson to Unknown, 6 July 1837, MSCS; Charles Snetter to John H. B. Latrobe, 9 July 1837, MSCS.

setting. In the coming days, however, he sensed something far more sinister in Snetter's actions.³¹⁴

In the weeks following the shooting of the Cape Palmas Africans, the militia continued to maintain its nightly vigilance. Curiously, on those nights in which Snetter commanded the watch at Mount Tubman, the easternmost colonial stronghold, Greboes reported multiple thefts of their cattle. Rumors spread of the Tubman family and guests at Mount Tubman dining on steak in the midst of famine; more intriguingly, Snetter, who dined with them, supposedly only ate rice and eschewed the beef. There seems to have been some suggestion that Snetter's culinary decisions stemmed from his desire to distance himself from the incriminating meal. Russwurm questioned Snetter, who obviously denied the accusations. In the wake of the interrogations, Snetter supposedly gathered a group of settlers sympathetic to his vision of the colony and read the eighth chapter of the Book of Joshua, which describes the Israelites' capture of the Canaanite city of Ai and begins with God's promise: "See, I have given into thy hand the king of Ai, and his people, and his city, and his land." "Freeman" was irate at the loss of cattle his people were suffering as bullocks functioned as currency and trade goods for the Grebo economy and society.³¹⁵

By August, Russwurm had had enough of both Snetter and "Freeman." He became increasingly suspicious that the "accidental" shooting of the Cape Palmas Africans actually reflected a long-standing and very intentional campaign of violence. He called together the colony's administration into a court of inquiry to investigate Snetter's behavior, a nebulous body not entirely established within the legal framework of the colony. Maryland in Liberia could ill afford a war with the Africans living literally in the middle of its settlement, and Russwurm was more interested in projecting power into the interior, an expedition that would require aid from

³¹⁴ Richard Hall, 185-189; John B. Russwurm to John H. B. Latrobe, 1 November 1838, MSCS.

³¹⁵ Richard Hall, 186-188; Joshua 8: 1-2 (King James).

“Freeman.” Hence, the ten-man board of inquiry included both himself and those settlers either most loyal to Russwurm or most protective of Africans’ rights. They concluded that Snetter had ordered the execution of the fleeing Greboes, although the confusion of the moment ameliorated his guilt. They turned the matter over to Russwurm for adjudication. To maintain order, Russwurm needed Snetter gone, but the colonist remained popular with many of the settlers. Rather than punish the quarrelsome officer, Russwurm decided that removing him from the colony was the safest avenue. Despite this verdict, rampant rumors ran the length of Maryland Avenue that Russwurm planned to turn Snetter over to the Africans for execution, fueled, according to Russwurm, by Snetter and vice agent Anthony Wood. Provoked colonists flocked to Snetter’s cause and set their grievances in writing. The governor was also under fire from his African neighbors, “Freeman” in particular, who likewise provoked Russwurm by once again challenging the governor’s racial categorization. Writing on August 31, 1838, Russwurm fumed to the Board of Managers, “King Freeman having received his lesson from some quarter, has thrown it in my teeth that I am not a proper man for Governor—meaning that I am not a proper white man.” In light of this loss of whiteness and beset by settler and African alike, Russwurm tendered his resignation.³¹⁶

There are fascinating racial politics in this simple sentence attributed to “Freeman.” For starters, Russwurm suspects that “Freeman” “received his lesson from some other quarter,” but suggests no culprits. Through Russwurm’s eyes, “Freeman” equates whiteness with the ability to control the state. Russwurm had originally suspected that Freeman did not register Russwurm as the equivalent of Euro-Americans when he first arrived as colonial governor, but in the intervening years the two had established a working relationship without cause to question Russwurm’s race. Only at the moment in which his colony was on the verge of war with its

³¹⁶ Richard Hall, 187-190; John B. Russwurm to John H. B. Latrobe, 31 August 1838, MSCS; John B. Russwurm to John H. B. Latrobe, 1 November 1838, MSCS.

neighbors and his personal failure to protect Grebo property did “Freeman” challenge Russwurm’s whiteness. The board refused Russwurm’s proffered resignation and affirmed their trust in the man, and denied any interest in turning over the colony to a Euro-American officer. Intriguingly, the board presented an understanding of whiteness rooted in the American context even as they grappled with and pondered the African definitions of whiteness floating about the Liberian colonies. They assumed that “Freeman” and others were calling for a “white” governor as Americans understood the term, ignoring the African definitions of the word, of which they were intimately aware. For example, in 1837, just one year before the Snetter incident, Moses Sheppard’s letter to settler William Polk apparently so resonated with the white MSCS leadership that it was inscribed in the official MSCS letter book. In the far-ranging epistle, Sheppard confessed, “I am pleased with the meaning the native Africans give to the term ‘white man’ they make these words refer to intelligence rather than colour, the construction is a good one for knowledge is the same in all. minds [sic] as far as we know do not differ in complexion.” The colonizationists clearly had some notion of the ongoing racial constructions in their West African colony, but they only answered Russwurm’s query in the form of American notions of whiteness by refusing to turn the colony over to someone whom they would have defined as “white.” Convinced that they need only address their disgruntled agent in the form of American whiteness, they then curiously reinforced the Atlantic nature of their project by reassuring him that “on this side of the atlantic you are acquiring a reputation which grows with the character of the colony.” There is an implicit duality to Russwurm—and all Liberian settlers vicariously—here: with the expansion of power and prestige in the colonies came concomitant metaphorical power and prestige in the United States. The pathways to Liberia were not one-way streets and the colonial space resided in the minds of Americans as much as it existed on a map or on the

ground through force of arms. And to secure that power within the Atlantic world, all parties—African, settler, American—were willing to use force.³¹⁷

Russwurm's efforts to appease the Africans within his colony did not go unappreciated by the majority of the rank and file settlers, who almost immediately after the announcement of Snetter's banishment banded together to protest the governor's actions. In many regards, the freeborn Snetter, a Charlestonian from the deep South privileged with government patronage before Russwurm's arrival, was unrepresentative of Maryland in Liberia's settlers. But Russwurm's verdict struck a nerve with many beyond the pale of his administration and they nominated a committee of five men to voice their grievances. Betraying their enslaved past, several members could not sign their own names to the resulting document. But they found common cause with the elite Snetter in their opposition against Russwurm's pacific ways (at least pacific toward "Freeman" if not necessarily towards all Africans universally) and a shared commitment to masculine violence. They considered Russwurm's move against Snetter "the first move to give the lives of our wives and Children into the hands of the Savages around us who thirsts for our Blood." To sacrifice the man whom they considered the best military mind in the colony "To oblige this savage ["Freeman" and the Greboes] who surround us we are to be deprived of our Right Eye and then to lay down and die."³¹⁸ Surrounded and isolated amongst those whom they considered heathen, the fifty-six male signatories located manhood in their ability to protect their families against African violence. Clearly, the Parker family murder weighed heavily on their minds, and signatories like the formerly enslaved Maryland carpenter Ambrose Simpson and the freeborn North Carolinian Anthony Howard could join together in

³¹⁷ John H. B. Latrobe to John B. Russwurm, 17 July 1839, MSCS; Moses Sheppard to William Polk, 15 May 1838, MSCS.

³¹⁸ Richard Hall, 188-191;"Remonstrance of Citizens of Maryland in Liberia," 12 September 1838, MSCS.

their violent efforts to tame and check the savagery they believed threatened to swallow them whole.

Of course, the whole Atlantic world was in motion as suggested by the MSCS response to Russwurm's resignation. As Russwurm tackled African whiteness and his settlers asserted their right to march against savagery, the colonization officials based in the United States likewise contemplated the recent violence within its settlement. The MSCS's response to the Snetter affair highlights the Afrocentric variations within colonizationist thought. While many white colonizationists conflated African with African American, the MSCS recognized differences in the "civilization" of the two groups, but stubbornly refused to believe that race would divide the groups despite their awareness of African whiteness. In a response to a missionary desiring to know the official stance of the MSCS in regards to the Africans living within its colony, the MSCS reported, "our wish is to raise them [the Africans] to the standard of civilization and to amalgamate them with the colonists." They took comfort from the "conviction on the part of king freeman, that the laws of the Americans, as the natives call the colonists, were better than the native laws."³¹⁹ The choice of "amalgamation," with all of its negative American sexual connotations, is intriguing. The reference to the African use of "American" to denote the settlers likewise highlights colonizationists' difficulty in establishing African American origins. To concede that the settlers were inherently American rather than to quantify the term as an African lexicon would jeopardize a foundational argument for colonization, and yet they also separate African from African American by highlighting the need for the two bodies to "amalgamate." The Liberian settlers somehow simultaneously straddle both Africa and America without ever touching either fully, encapsulated in a watery Atlantic.

³¹⁹ John H. B. Latrobe to Launcelot Minor, 14 November 1839, MSCS.

Needless to say, the Snetter affair and the response of the settlers to Russwurm's actions jarred MSCS leaders, who were somehow surprised at "the disposition of the colonists to ill treat the natives," despite the fact the colonial Liberia from its earliest days had been the site of consistent and constant violence between settler and African. The MSCS discussed solutions to this problem, and, ironically, for a body of men surprised to find such brutality in their planned Arcadia, arrived at the conclusion "that our Executive must have power; and 'power' is here used to mean the power of armed men." In order to force peace upon the warring factions, the Marylanders proposed the creation of a "police guard," a military force answerable only to the governor as a counterbalance to the colonial militia. If the settlers and Africans would not "amalgamate" properly, then "armed men" would force them. Much as free people of color were singled out as "negative influences" upon the enslaved by many whites within the United States, so too did the MSCS leadership seem to suspect that freeborn elites like Snetter were leading their formerly enslaved comrades astray. The "police guard" was designed to put "it out of the power of evil designed men to create disturbances by imposing upon the ignorant." They attributed the settlers' petition regarding Snetter's sentence as a result of these designs rather than a competing affirmation of settlers' power and elevated place in the Atlantic world through their masculine colonizing spirit and willingness to protect women from savages. Knowing that the new executive's military might would be unpopular with the settlers, the MSCS recommended installing the police guard gradually, by first detailing a "night watchman" along Maryland Avenue to prevent African thefts at night—which would be popular with the settlers—and then gradually growing the force into the guard. Further reinforcing that they understood the temperament of their settlers, the MSCS also ordered Russwurm to keep the matter private. Needless to say, Russwurm was pleased with the idea and noted that the other

Diasporic colonies along the coast—Monrovia and Sierra Leone—had employed similar institutions.³²⁰

Russwurm never received his police guard, as the funding could never be sufficiently secured to operate two military apparatuses in the colony (the guard and the militia) and the settlers did not receive the affirmation of their masculine right to violently oppose savagery or keep Snetter in their military apparatus. In January 1839, Snetter sailed for Monrovia and ACS governance. The ACS was far more comfortable in using every means available to “tame” the surrounding savages and promptly placed Snetter in command of the rifle company formed in the wake of the Bassa Cove massacre.

He arrived in Monrovia at the same time that the Heddington mission station was being established by missionary George Brown in the African interior northeast of the colonial capital. This eastward expansion from the coast brought the colony in conflict with an African leader called “Gay Toombay,” who gathered a coalition of African ethnicities to launch an assault on the isolated mission post in 1840. This assault pitted a multiethnic force against an American missionary establishment defended by Brown and two Americo-Liberian craftsmen, Sion Harris and Bennet Demery, employed in constructing the mission, Harris’s wife, Martha, who was employed as a teacher, and two African students of the mission school. Additionally, the neighboring village upon which the Methodist station grafted itself likewise opposed “Gay Toombay’s” martial airs. At daybreak on March 7, this small band found themselves opposite a large force of Botswains, Mambo, Veys, and Deys numbering several hundred warriors, including a fierce leader named “Goterah.” Fortunately, what they lacked in numbers, they more than made up for in available weaponry, as the defenders possessed between twenty to thirty muskets which were constantly reloaded by Martha Harris. In the ensuing melee, “Zoda” and

³²⁰ John H. B. Latrobe to John B. Russwurm, 21 November 1839, MSCS; John B. Russwurm to John H. B. Latrobe, 15 January 1841, MSCS.

“Nicky,” the two African school boys, were wounded, but Harris succeeded in killing “Goterah,” an act that threw the attackers into confusion and retreat.³²¹

The subtle differences between Harris’s account of the defense of Heddington, the official report of the governor published in the *African Repository*, and the edited version of Harris’s letter also published in the *Repository* highlight the differing views of the colonial space and the violence it held.³²² In Harris’s original account, the survival of the mission hinged upon the early warning of the assault from the neighboring African village: “I had hardly got down before I heard a gun fore at a half town³²³ a mile off. I arose quickly & got to the window...at that moment I head [heard] a voic crying war! war! is come, which ~~appeared~~ proved to be a woman and man from the half town.” Governor Thomas Buchanan likewise considered the mission’s survival as the result of “the most signal interposition of Providence,” but rooted that divine signal as less the result of African warnings and more his own good sense to supply the mission with muskets. Harris’s account is, in fact, riddled with references to African allies engaged in the fighting beyond the mission’s gate. Having sent two mission students into the village to ascertain the state of affairs, Harris reported that “by the time the boys got back crying war several picked up muskets and ran, the Headman with them at this I cried, if they did bring back the guns, I wold [sic] shoot them, at this 4 only returned.” What the four returnees did during this time went unrecorded, but “one of the four natives that stoped in town came in shot, by name Baker, and said ‘Dady look, his bowels was out’ and he left his gun by me.” Clearly, “Baker” was engaged in the fighting elsewhere and it was with his loaded weapon, fortuitously

³²¹ Sion Harris to Samuel Wilkeson, 16 April 1840, ACS, also in Wiley, 220-223;

³²² George Brown also published an account of the assault the portrayed himself as one of the heroic defenders, but Harris grumbled in a private letter that Brown had shut himself into his second-story bedroom and did not participate in the fight except to discharge four muskets on Harris’s command: “I would have published this, but Mr. Brown who was shut up in his room some how published, and through out the whole action he knew nothing save the four guns he fired.” See Sion Harris to Samuel Wilkeson, 16 April 1840, ACS, also in Wiley, 223.

³²³ A “half town” refers to a settlement without an established headman or “king.” These were satellite villages that owed their allegiance to another town.

dropped by Harris's side at the exact moment that "Goterah" personally charged him, that killed the African leader. "Zoda" and "Nicky," presumably the two boys dispatched to the villages, fired from the upstairs window until both were shot. The two children were more engaged in the defense of the mission house than Brown according to Harris. Additionally, at the close of the battle "one of the two remaining country men" fired at a charging African in the mission yard.

In contrast to Harris's account, the governor's report largely removes these African allies in favor of an entirely-American defense force—Brown, the Harrises, and Demery. The only point at which it was necessary to concede an African presence, the apparently disemboweled "Baker" who had somehow arrived at the mission with a loaded musket for Harris, was minimized in favor of making Harris larger than life.

GORRORAH made a desperate rush upon them, at the head of his best warriors, toward one end of the house; he tore off some of paling with his own hands, leaped the fence and pushed his way within ten feet of the door, where HARRIS stood alone and *without his gun*, which being discharged, and the enemy too near to reload, he had thrown down for the purpose of seizing an axe, which he supposed stood behind him; as he threw his hand backwards to seize this weapon, only hoping to sell his life the more dearly, he struck a gun, which the moment before had been placed there by a wounded native of the town, and which, most providentially, had a heavy charge of slugs and balls.³²⁴

Buchanan summed up the African allies of the Liberians in two sentences: "A few of BLACK TOM'S people behaved well in the battle, but they contributed very little to the result. Two of them were wounded, one of whom died the same day." In this war against "savages," Buchanan was uninterested in African heroes. Conversely, the ACS was also uninterested in turning their settlers into savages. Like many letters received by the ACS and subsequently published by them, Harris's printed account received a heavy dose of editing. While these white editors only occasionally altered wording (usually to fix grammatical errors), they were particularly adept at omitting damning information. Harris's original account details the of

³²⁴ Thomas Buchanan, "Latest from Liberia," *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 16, no. 12 (June 1840): 178.

shooting Goterah: “I took deliberate aim at him...and brought him to the ground cut off his knee shot him in the lungs, and cut off his privates.” The reference suggestive of mutilating the African leader’s genitalia is omitted from the *Repository*’s extracts, and, indeed, can only be guessed at with modern eyes due to the unknown editor’s thick black line of ink striking through that final phrase. Conceiving of colonial Liberia as a civilizing space for both settler and African, the editors could rejoice in the murder of an unabashed “savage” described to readers as “the ferocious cannibal, GOTORAH, who had brought his pot for the purpose of cooking his breakfast of MR. BROWN,” but the agents of this civilization—the settlers like Harris—could not be presented in the same uncivilized light as defacing the body of a fallen enemy. Equally intriguing, the body of “Goterah” was removed some fifteen or twenty miles away from Heddington by the retreating army. Harris received this report from “fifteen of King Governor’s men followed them [“Toombay’s” retreating army] and found Goterah...They returned about sundown, and wanted a head-man to go and cut of his head, they being common men would not.” The arrival of fifteen “Americans” from Caldwell signaled the beginning of relief for Heddington, and luckily among the “Americans” was a recaptured Congo, “Zodaquee,” who was also coincidentally a headman. It was actually this victim of the illegal African slave trade, relocated to Liberia, who collected the head of “Goterah.” The governor’s report likewise did not expand upon these African contributions.

Buchanan and the ACS also did not feel a need to establish a feminine hero either, as the part taken by Martha Harris faded into the background of the raging battle between Harris and Demery, an “elegant marksman,” and hundreds of oncoming savages. This was the ultimate example of masculine colonization, and the ACS celebrated the remarkable account of manly settlers defending both women and school children while downplaying the contributions of those women and children. Harris himself seemed to enjoy the results of his labors, reporting that after

the battle “the natives came and licked my feet, said I had gree gree, and asked me for some. I told them I had none but what god gave me.” This is a remarkable image of colonialism; the Christian settler, armed only with God’s patronage, surrounded by groveling natives licking his feet in wonderment.

The ACS lacked the Maryland society’s ardent desires to maintain pacific settler-African relations. In light of the Heddington attack, Governor Buchanan reported on the relative confusion in determining the nature of the force opposed to the American settlements: “I found it quite impossible to gather any information of the enemy’s movements or his forces.” In this absence of information regarding the strength, size, and cohesion of the “Toombay’s” coalition, the ACS governor decided on a show of force and organized an expedition of three hundred men to attack “Toombay’s” town and remove the irksome African from his seat of power. Of those three hundred men, sixty were the ubiquitous Krumen performing their usual task: carrying the army’s baggage. Buchanan conceded that forty more soldiers were African allies, but he immediately belittled their contributions noting that they “proved, instead of being useful, the greatest burden.”

Marching through the forest toward “Toombay’s” town, Buchanan contrasted the wild and savage forest—the antithesis of the mapped and orderly agricultural settlements of the Americans—as the purview of the uncivilized African. Clearly, the image of the uncultivated forest as the den of savagery was an old trope echoing the settlement of “wild” North America by the early colonists and it had been employed from Liberia’s earliest days. Even before the establishment of its colony, the first annual report of the ACS drew these parallels when it inquired, “What brought our fathers voluntarily to these shores, then savage and forbidding, not less savage and forbidding perhaps than those of Africa itself? To render themselves more happy.” In his history of the first years of Monrovia, Jehudi Ashmun described an outpost

surrounded by a dense forest chocked with undergrowth “so as to be nearly impracticable by any but the feet of savages.” Ashmun described the African tactic of disappearing into the forest to reload their weapons before reemerging to fire a single blast before retiring into their sylvan refuge as a “mockery of ordinary warfare.”³²⁵

It was in this “mockery of ordinary warfare,” the hours of fighting in the jungle during the slow advance on the African town, that Charles Snetter fell mortally wounded while leading the rifle company, “but his men rushed gallantly forward and dislodged the savages so quick that the march of the line was scarcely checked.” Buchanan’s report spotlights the various high-ranking colonial officials who were conspicuous in the destruction of “Toombay’s” town. Always prefaced with their military rank: “General Roberts” (Joseph Jenkins Roberts, the future President of the Republic of Liberia) led the assault that captured the town; “Col. Wm. Lewis” served as the governor’s aide and displayed conspicuous gallantry; “Captain Charles Johnson, of the artillery” and “Lieut. Richardson, of the Rifle Corps” were seriously wounded. All of the wounded, including the unnamed rank and file, “fell in the front rank, with theirs faces to the foe, fighting bravely!” The savages were defeated, although “the blood of the murdered WILSON and PEALE [two colonists dispatched as messengers by Buchanan who were executed by “Toombay”] still cries for justice,” and the settlers had performed the deed with manly fortitude despite being burdened by what their governor would have his audience believe were the great weights of African allies. The report briefly deviated from martial affairs to discuss the economic exports of the colony before continuing on with a request for more weapons, blue cloth for officers’ uniforms, another type of material to distinguish the rifle corps, and “additional articles for a *Liberia uniform* for our volunteer companies.” The post-script of the report noted the need for a battle flag for the colonial military, preferably of silk. Buchanan noted that the need for a

³²⁵ *First Annual Report of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Color of the United States*, 18; Ashmun, 6-10.

military standard “may seem a trifle; but the lives of individuals and nations are made up of trifles, and we are all more influenced by small things than great ones.”³²⁶

Which may be an apt summation of colonial Liberia: a series of small things that added up to great ones. The military coat, a silk battle flag, the ability to write back to the United States about your manly stand against savagery, all of these elements were designed to elevate the settlers into the roles of masculine tammers of the African wilderness; much as the European descendants of white colonizationists believed their forefathers tamed the American wilderness. The possibilities for martial glory were one of the first lessons for male settlers who found relocation to Liberia an advantageous move. This was the lesson for Joshua Stewart, the colonist who administered the lethal dose to Margaret McAllister; literally, the first letter he wrote upon arriving in letter concluded with the signature “Joshua Stewart, First Sergeant of the Military[,] I have 45 men under my charge.” The poignancy of that conclusion is all the more fortified by the fact that the letter was written to his mother’s master with the request that the master pass on information of Stewart’s respective health. There is obvious pride in Stewart’s letter as he finalizes the text with his “respects to all the rest of your servants,” before reaffirming his newly-acquired rank and his own respective charges.³²⁷ Stewart understood the significance of his military rank and what claims it allowed him make on American audiences from literally his first moment in Liberia. He was not alone in drawing these conclusions after donning a Liberian uniform. And for at least one colonist, Buchanan’s martial glory after Heddington reminded him of the earliest days of the settlement when it first engaged in wars for its very existence. The Clerk of the Court, William W. Stewart (no apparent relation to Joshua), who arrived in Monrovia in February 1824 from his hometown of Petersburg, Virginia aboard the *Cyrus* praised

³²⁶ Thomas Buchanan, “Latest from Liberia,” *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 16, no. 12 (June 1840): 179-188.

³²⁷ Joshua Stewart to Doctor Macaulay, 10 [February?] 1834, MSP.

Buchanan's efforts at reinvigorating the Liberian military and placing the colony on a war footing even before the successful assault on "Toombay's" town.

Governor Buchanan a Gentlemen an lauded one, yes, for he puts me in mind of our General and Governor J. Ashmun that use to lead us to Battle and victory, has what must I say that I am a hobler on crutches and cannot assist him to put down every thing like vice and disorder in our neighboring settlements, the slave trade and many of the abominable vices. I mean amongst the African tribe....³²⁸

Jehudi Ashmun arrived in the infant colony of Liberia in 1822 at the head of an expedition of colonists and "recaptives." As Liberia had been designated as the official embarkation point for all recaptives regardless of point of origin, Ashmun nominally arrived in the colony as an agent for the United States government in charge of these recent victims of the illegal slave trade instead of the ACS's operation. Soon after arriving in Monrovia, however, he was placed in charge of the government's recaptives and colony. The colonial beachhead had been infamously established in December 1821 after several failed attempts to purchase territory and establish a colony at Sherbro Island when the ACS agent Eli Ayres enlisted the help of Lieutenant Robert F. Stockton of the *USS Alligator* to compel local African leaders, "King Peter" being the most prominent, to cede Cape Mesurado. Ayres gather the dispersed settlers of the earliest expeditions—the first ACS expedition had departed New York harbor in February 1820 aboard the *Elizabeth*—who had settled in Sierra Leone. After establishing the foundations of the settlement at Cape Mesurado, Ayres departed for the United States to personally report on the colony's many wants, leaving Elijah Johnson, a settler from New York, in charge of the colonial outpost.³²⁹

At its sixth annual meeting held February 20, 1823 in Washington, D.C., the ACS leadership held little fear of the disruption their infant colony might have had in African lives.

³²⁸ William W. Stewart to Ralph R. Gurley, 28 January 1840, ACS.

³²⁹ Ashmun, 6-16; "American Colonization Society." *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 1, no. 1 (March 1825): 3-5.

They were pleased that a town had been initiated on “a regular plan” and “works thrown up for defence against the Barbarian powers.” Despite the need for defenses against savages, the ACS remained unworried. “The natives are generally amicable,” the Board of Manager informed their membership, “and were it otherwise, little apprehension would be felt, since a concerted attack is altogether improbable, and each King can command but a small force, destitute alike of conduct and courage.”³³⁰ Of course, little did the board know that four months previously their infant colony had suffered a concerted attack from the neighboring Vai, Dei, and Mamban on November 11, 1822.

In his account of the earliest days of the colony, Ashmun claimed to present an accurate representation of the African war councils that preceded their attack on Monrovia. In one council, “Kings” “Peter” and “Bristol” opposed the assault because of the growing numbers of settlers—the colony at this moment numbered less than one hundred souls—and also because the colony was “not a settlement of foreigners and enemies, but of their countrymen and friends, as was proved by the identity of their colour.” The supposedly authentic African voice in Ashmun’s tale does not resonate with other Liberian African constructions of the settlers’ identity. Perhaps the ACS agent suffered from wishful thinking as such sentiments echoed the rhetoric of the colonizationists. Conversely, Ashmun frames these African voices as a minority opinion within the council of war. Continuing, he explained, “Kings George, Governor, and all the other headmen of the tribe, contended that ‘The Americans were strangers who had forgot their attachment to the land of their fathers; for if not, why had they not renounced their connexion with white men altogether, and placed themselves under the protection of the kings of the country?’” This perfectly reflected the opinions of most of the Liberians’ African neighbors; an association with the cultural practices and maintaining their governance through the United States meant that

³³⁰ *The Sixth Annual Report of the Society for Colonizing the Free People of Color of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Davis & Force, 1823), 13.

these newly arrived settlers were neither countrymen nor necessarily “black” as they understood the racial caste. They were, in fact, “strangers.” In his response to these African martial councils, Ashmun not only demonstrated an able understanding of the racial structures in his new home but also reinforced them. Utilizing a neutral African leader as medium, Ashmun sent word to the African confederacy arrayed against the colony: “if they proceeded to bring war upon the Americans...they would dearly learn what it was to fight white men.”³³¹

This was a fascinating message to send as “white” and “American” were not particularly easy identities for the African American settlers to claim in the United States. Indeed, one of the foundation principles of pro-colonization thought was the belief that people of African descent would never be accepted into the ranks of citizenry by the white majority. But beyond the borders of the United States, surrounded by “savages,” Ashmun—the only “white” man in the colony as he would have conceptualized it—evoked two foreign identities, one racial and the other national, that could only be claimed outside the boundaries of the United States. For his assuredly confused readers, Ashmun provides an explanatory footnote to clarify that “white” denoted “A phrase by which civilized people of all colours and nations are distinguished in the dialect of the coast.” Thus, with the wave a seemingly magic wand, the newly arrived free people of color instantly became “civilized people.” These were, in fact, the same people whom the Reverend Nathaniel Bouton described in his annual Fourth of July sermon in 1825 to his Concord, New Hampshire congregation as “the most ignorant, degraded and vicious class in the community...you may call them *free*; you may enact laws to make them free, but ‘you cannot bleach them into the enjoyment of freedom.’”³³² But, of course, Liberia could bleach its inhabitants.

³³¹ Ashmun, 23-25.

³³² Bouton, 15-16.

Further complicating Ashmun's declaration that the Africans would soon fight white men was the enrollment of thirteen "African youths" of indeterminate young age from among Ashmun's expedition of recaptives into the "lieutenant's corps" for military drilling. Not only did attacking Africans face "white" African Americans then, but also "white" African survivors of the illegal transatlantic slave trade. Did their relatively brief residence in the United States before "returning" to the civilizing space of Liberia place them on an accelerated trajectory akin to the African American settlers? Did mere loyalty to the colonial administration and residence in that space assure them a place among the ranks of "civilized peoples of all colours and nations" despite their African origins? Ashmun did not pause in his account of martial glory to ponder the implications of his own message.

Publishing his account in 1826, four years after the initial assault on the tiny toehold that had been renamed "Monrovia" in 1824, Ashmun also ascribed a curiously nationalistic divine grace to the colony's survival. Remembering the great odds he and the settlers faced, Ashmun ascribed divine intervention to their survival: "as the cause was emphatically that of God and their country, they might confidently expect his blessing and success to attend the faithful discharge of their duty."³³³ That the ordained Ashmun would see the workings of a Christian God as supporting their efforts to tame and convert savagery is unsurprising. But for what country did Ashmun emphatically assert the settlers served? Liberia was the colony of a private corporation (although certainly one heavily entwined with the United States government) that lacked a national identity within itself. In the correspondence of the African American settlers, very few adopt a Liberian identity during its colonial period, electing instead to lay claim to a national identity—American—which was only uncontested by their white audience because they had abandoned that nation. An independent Liberia was still more than twenty years away when

³³³ Ashmun, 26.

Ashmun published his claim. Such construction suggests that Ashmun was a colonizationist in the expansionist mold of Henry Clay who envisioned the tiny colony sprouting into a republican juggernaut in western Africa.

This was a manly endeavor for Ashmun and company, and the women kept getting in the way, of course. Although Ashmun repeatedly emphasized his prevailing illness that continually kept him bedridden during the colony's formative days, he always locates himself at the center of action during the attack. In his narrative, Ashmun singled out particular settlers for praise who exhibited courage in battle: Lott Cary rallying retreating settlers; Elijah Johnson, the acting agent before Ashmun's arrival, leading a force of soldiers around the flank of the enemy.³³⁴

Transgressions of military order, however, were left to anonymous settlers, such as the pickets who guarded the western approaches to the settlement who abandoned their post. Unfortunately, this retreat exposed several outlying dwellings to the African onslaught, and Ashmun chastised the settlers as although he claimed to have given a command to vacate those premises, "the measures necessary to secure the proper observance of this order were unhappily omitted; and the rashness of the misguided individuals who disobeyed it, met with a signal punishment." The epicenter of the African attack fell upon several "helpless women and children" who had either failed to heed the administrator's order or Ashmun had exaggerated the extent to which he had warned them to vacate the cabins.

³³⁴ It should be noted that Ashmun's account of the battle in which he is front and center was contested by several colonists there. David Bacon, a white doctor who served as colonial physician in Monrovia, recorded his surprise at the surprise with which certain settlers remembered Ashmun. He wrote: "I referred naturally to Mr. Ashmun as the great hero of those times,--taking him, of course, with all faith in his own testimony and that of his biographer, Mr. Gurley. But, to my astonishment, [Elijah] Johnson protested decidedly and indignantly against the common impressions of Ashmun's merits, derived from his own statements. The evidence of the survivors of those present at the first settlement, and sharing in the wars which grew out of it, Johnson assured me, would bear out in his assertions, that Ashmun's account of those events was unworthy of credit, particularly in regard to his own conduct, both in the preliminary negotiations and in the battles which followed. He said that Ashmun's weaknesses, and heedless confidence in the natives, were the original cause of the difficult and almost fatal struggle with them, and that at the most critical moment of the attack upon the colonists' little fortification, when the natives were rishing on to storm it, Ashmun, in a cowardly manner, shrunk from the defense of the barricade, and sought safety under cover, calling upon the rest to do likewise." See David Bacon, 120-121.

Yet, while male failures were anonymous and collective, women were singled out individually for their faults and placing their protective menfolk at risk of exposing their lives to protect the “helpless.” Ann Hawkins, an “imprudent” woman who slept the night in her cabin, received thirteen wounds although she survived the ordeal. Minty Draper attempted to flee with her two small children in her arms, but was wounded in the head from a cutlass, and lost both of her children in the melee. Imprudently sleeping in their homes when such was forbidden, these women required heroic male protection in the forms of Cary and Johnson less they be the victims of the neighboring savages, even if their danger resulted from unnamed and generalized masculine negligence.

But even Ashmun’s account contains hints that these women perhaps required less masculine protection than he suggested. Another named female transgressor, Mary Tines, boarded with another woman who was the mother of five children. When their cabin was surrounded by the swarming Africans, they each seized an axe and prevented entry into the dwelling for several minutes. Tines died in this defense of the homestead, but the other woman escaped. Although Ashmun was forced to figuratively salute the actions of these “heroines,” he clearly included the account to emphasize the character of the colony’s foes, whom he described as “savage enemies” and “irresolute barbarians” in his retelling of the women’s stand.³³⁵ The death of Lucy Brant in the woods surrounding Bassa Cove, the escape of Eben Parker’s wife from their cabin outside of Harper, the axe-wielding Mary Tines, Martha Harris loading muskets during the defense of the Heddington mission station, all deeply underscore that the violence of colonial Liberia was deeply entwined with the home given the women’s involvement in these actions.

³³⁵ Ashmun, 28-30.

The violence of colonial Liberia, however, was gendered as masculine to provide uplift and “civilization” to the male settlers: the “black race” interpreted through a gendered lens as the “black man.” Even as women formed the critical reproductive backbone of unhealthy colony and families served as the nucleus of the colonial project, African American men found elevation and “whiteness” through their opposition against and violent actions towards Africans. By violently taming African “savagery,” the settlers distinguished themselves from their uncivilized neighbors. The automatic “civilization” bestowed upon African American settlers in this space stemmed from this binary; if male settlers protected women from black barbarians, then they themselves could not likewise be barbaric. They would have to be something else. Or to rephrase Ashmun, the Africans would learn what it meant to fight white men.

Of course, in addition to the Mary Tines of the colony, there were other women willing to replicate this rhetoric of besieged womanhood in order to secure other goals. Colonial Liberia was filled with schisms within the settler community and survival could be impossible for non-elite women without access to trade goods, money, or labor. Formerly enslaved widows in particular often found themselves in difficult situations, although how they framed the threats to their livelihood differed from masculine accounts. The aforementioned letters of Sally Ann and Rebecca Gibson³³⁶ are indicative. When Sally Ann Gibson reported the death of her husband in 1844, she assured the MSCS that she had no desire to return to the United States and only required financial assistance for her and her children. Rebecca Gibson, however, was “a lone widow in a strange land” who confessed that the pressing needs to feed and clothe her children had led her to “many a time I wished I had never left America.” In 1837, one year after writing for assistance from America, Gibson married William Dulany. In a testament to the microbial

³³⁶ The relationship between Sally and Rebecca Gibson is not known. The Gibson family, a large clan originally from Talbot County, Maryland, relocated to the colony in 1835. The colony’s high death toll usually led to multiple marriages for individuals which subsequently make genealogical connections difficult to make. The tragic account of Rebecca Gibson turned Rebecca Dulany is indicative of the problems facing researchers.

realities of Liberia, Dulany was dead one year later. Thus, the newly minted Rebecca Dulany once again directed a letter across the Atlantic in July 1838 to inform her correspondents that another husband had predeceased her. This time she dispatched a boxful of shells in hopes that the MSCS leadership would send her money and goods in advance and repay themselves through the sale of exotic African conchs.³³⁷ The widows usually framed their requests in relation to the poverty of the colony and their inability to harness enough labor to their farmsteads to make them self-sufficient. An impoverished economy and poor soils were the principal enemies. Men, however, usually framed their discussion of widows in terms of the necessary protection for them from the dangerous colonial environment and exasperation of the continued presence of widows or women with small children aboard the colonization expeditions; colonial Liberia, within this view, was no place for a small family or female heads of households. Hence, Russwurm's exasperation with the *Columbia's* emigrants in 1838 not only stemmed from their enslaved past, but also the ratio of the sexes: "I am really sorry to see so few men among the *Columbia's* emigrants...how much greater then the difficulty where you have to deal with females without protectors." He also hoped that the Parker affair had taught the MSCS leadership a lesson in how they organized expeditions. With so much violence in the colony, Russwurm wrote to his supervisors, "I trust therefore that the fall expedition will be dispatched earlier than common; and that unusual care will be taken not to send out many women and children. We want able bodied men. We want two very light field pieces for immediate action—so light that 8 or 10 men may take them apart and carry them with ease."³³⁸ For Russwurm, it was not only disastrous for the colony to be filled with ex-slaves, but also women without male

³³⁷ Sally An Gipson [Sally Ann Gibson] to James Hall, 19 January 1844, MSCS; Richard Hall, 450; Rebecca Gibson to William McKenny, 31 August 1838, MSCS; Rebecca Delanie [Dulany], 9 July 1838, MSCS.

³³⁸ John B. Russwurm to John H. B. Latrobe, 7 July 1838, MSCS; John B. Russwurm to John H. B. Latrobe, 6 August 1838, MSCS.

guardians. Men in charge of heads of households—preferably freeborn ones—were most likely to benefit from the uplift provided by relocation to Liberia.

Of course, this idea of whitening violence was contested and constantly in flux. The small number of women of European descent in the colony, almost always the wives of missionaries, could upset the idea of protective masculinity. This was especially true of the unmarried Margaret McAllister, whose actions in Maryland in Liberia could not even be named, only alluded to, by missionary Wilson. In describing McAllister, Wilson utilized the standard trope, “unprotected,” employed in most descriptions of women in Liberia. But whereas most expressed this concern in terms of vengeful neighboring Africans, Wilson suggested that McAllister required protection from the Americo-Liberians. Of course, all Americo-Liberian women would have been considered practitioners of “white man’s fash” by Liberian Africans, regardless of the presence of Euro-American women like McAllister. Yet, in the funhouse mirror of colonial Liberia, whiteness constantly reflected and refracted, shrank and expanded. From the earliest days of the colony, Ashmun had led his “whites” in battle against black African savages, but that racial hierarchy could be challenged by the presence of an unmarried Euro-American woman in the colony.

This conceptualization of Americo-Liberian violence as a whitening agent does not rest solely in a historian’s analysis of the colonial space, but was empirically part of the impassioned debate over colonization throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. The attendees of the 1853 Colored National Convention believed they understood meanings of violence in Liberia, at that point a six-year-old independent republic. In a mainstay of the convention movement since its inception in the early 1830s, the delegates passed a motion denouncing the ACS and colonization (see chapter five). The 1853 “Report on Colonization,” however, was a much longer document than was usually produced for these occasions that recorded the entire history of

colonization in Africa beginning in the seventeenth century with the Dutch East India Company. When the report finally arrived in the nineteenth century and the creation of Liberia, it almost immediately turned to the issue of violence: “They tell of *reckless wars* upon the *natives* attended with both *rapine* and *bloodshed*, of legislation framed in a spirit of exclusiveness, not much less infamous than that of certain white slaveholding democracies.” For any especially daft readers who failed to grasp the parallels that the Committee on Colonization, chaired by J.W.C. Pennington, was trying to draw, they further explained:

The Liberians justify and connive all the encroachments of the white foreigners, even to the damage of their dignity. The whites from other lands have taken possession of every commercial river on the west coast, preparatory to an enforcement of their policy on Africa, for untold generations yet to rise. Have we heard one word of remonstrance from these native whippers? No.

The committee concluded that “the Liberians are in league with the worst enemies of Africa’s dearest interest”; that essentially the Liberians and Europeans were cut from the same cloth and in league together to claim Africa’s riches from her native inhabitants. A laundry list of violence, wars, duplicitous dealings with Africans, and excessive punishments for African leaders committed by these Liberian “native whippers,” another obvious allusion to white slave owners, provided the evidence to support their argument that the Liberians had gone over to the whites. To finally cement their claims, the committee quoted an 1827 address from the citizens of Monrovia to the free people of color in the United States: “Tell us,’ say the Liberians in their address to the free coloured people, ‘which is the white man, who, with a prudent regard for his own character, CAN association with one of you on terms of equality? Ask us which is the white man, who would decline such association with one of our number, whose intellectual and moral qualities are not an objection? We unhesitatingly answer both these questions by saying, the white man is not to be found.” While the Liberians viewed this prospective equality as a virtue of their state, the 1853 convention discounted their independence from whites, believing instead

that they remained marionettes with white hands pulling the strings, and denounced their aggression against Africans. Violence against African savagery, however, was one of the pillars by which the Liberians could claim equality with Anglo-Americans and Europeans, something they considered an unmitigated good.³³⁹

The 1853 report implicitly connected the violence waged in Liberia by the African American settlers to European colonial powers expanding into Africa and abusive slaveholders in the United States. Africa was an unappealing home for the committee who prophesized that the continent was “destined to be the theatre of bloody conflict, between her native sons, and intruding foreigners, black and white, for a century yet to come.” Ironically, the Liberian settlers likewise conceived of their African home as a violent home for masculine violence and martial glory. It was a space in which James Hall, after picking up two settlers in Monrovia to aid in the establishment of Maryland in Liberia, blissfully wrote back to the board of managers that “two of Ashmun’s veterans” had joined his expedition, assuring a core of seasoned settlers accustomed to the violent episodes concomitant with the establishment of another Liberian settlement.³⁴⁰ But whereas the delegates of the 1853 saw the Liberians as simply the surrogates of expansionist white dreams in Africa, the Americo-Liberians conceived of violence as one of the great

³³⁹ These assumptions that Liberia provided equal footing with whites worked themselves into the everyday thinking of many Liberian settlers. Take, for example, Jacob W. Prout’s recommended medical treatment. Prout functioned as a medical officer in Monrovia, nursing newly arrived settlers through the acclimating fever. In addition to settlers, Prout reported in 1836 that his ward contained a number of white European sailors. The death of two who refused to follow Prout’s recommendations regarding the consumption of food led him to conclude that “I am more in favour of my treatment of newly arrived emigrants or Europeans.” Prout assumed that both African American settlers and Europeans would need to undergo the same treatment and that the same results would follow, an assumption that his environmentally-oriented correspondents in the United States who consistently argued that Africa was the “natural” home of blacks and offered nothing but death for whites would have found disconcerting. Even more shocking, Prout conducted an autopsy on the European sailor to ensure the correctness of his diagnosis; he found “the stomach as empty as a bladder.” At the same historical moment in which African American corpses were disproportionately finding their way to dissecting tables in the United States, Prout was conducting post-mortem examinations of European whites in Liberia *and* reporting these findings to the ACS administration. See Jacob W. Prout to Unknown, 16 December, 1836, ACS.

³⁴⁰ James Hall to John H. B. Latrobe, 9 February 1834, MSCS.

equalizing tools by which they could finally claim equality with America's whites on the other side of the ocean.

Chapter 6

“It Became Apparent that Colonization had Two Sets of Friends.... The Explosion Came at Last”: Colonization Cacophony, Free Black Rejection, and Settler Agency

One spring morning in 1854 the members of the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society engaged in a lovers' quarrel. It was the eleventh day of May and the second of the meeting. The night before, the delegates had been regaled with speeches from America's leading lights of the abolitionist movement, including Frederick Douglass, before the convention concluded the evening with an address by the president of the Anti-Slavery Society of Canada. One hundred people crowded into New York's Hope Chapel the following day to begin the proceedings, which began with William Lloyd Garrison gaveling the meeting to order at 10 o'clock. Garrison stated that the purpose of the morning session revolved around two resolutions presented the day before: one proclaimed that "the grand vital issue to be made with the power is, the dissolution of the existing American Union," while the other was simply contented to call the South "in its pretended opposition to slavery, cowardly in its spirit, and spasmodic in its action." Robert Purvis signaled his desire to speak. The son of a free woman of color and a white English immigrant, Purvis was a member of Philadelphia's black elite. Educated at Amherst College and married to James Forten's daughter, Harriet, Purvis was a leading reformer who had joined with Garrison in establishing the American Anti-Slavery Society (AASS). He had served as President of the Pennsylvania branch of that institution, and his household functioned as an epicenter for Philadelphia's Underground Railroad, moral reform, and black intellectualism. There were very few people in the nation, let alone in that room, more qualified to speak to the matter at hand, and the great schism between him and Garrison—in 1868 Purvis would label

Garrison the “Benedict Arnold” or “Judas Iscariot” of the Anti-slavery cause—still lay in the future. The floor was quickly given to Purvis and the wheels fell off the convention.³⁴¹

Instead of the resolutions before the convention, Purvis desired to mention an address the night before given by William Furness in which the speaker had evidently said that “Mr. Purvis was wealthy enough to purchase connection with a white skin, but with credit to himself he saw fit not to do so.” Furness obviously believed that economic conditions undergirded whiteness; that, in short, it could be purchased under the right conditions by the right people. There are echoes of Moses Sheppard’s argument that liberty was the true definition of whiteness here, and the travels of the Liberian elite within the United States highlight one avenue by which “connection with a white skin” could be secured. Purvis, however, was not happy to be singled out in such a manner and wanted to know why such a claim had been presented in light of Purvis’s pride “in his blood—of the fact that he had twenty-five per cent of negro blood in his veins.” Instead of a particular color, Purvis claimed to desire only to be known as an “honest man.” A white attendee attempted to diffuse the situation by apologizing for Furness, but concluded with a promise that Furness held “no color prejudice,” missing the point that Purvis desired not to be known as a “black” man with racial options, but simply an “honest man.” Speaking next, Samuel J. May seemed to grasp Purvis’s point, but twisted the knife instead. While he hoped to no longer discuss the issue of color, “Mr. Furness meant to say that Mr. Purvis was light enough to pass for a white man, but chose to pass as a colored man”; an act for which Purvis should be commended. Thomas van Rensselaer, apparently in a desperate bid to right the convention’s ship, said that these responses to Furness’s address had soothed his uneasy conscience and hoped that the resolutions would now be taken up. Garrison rejected van

³⁴¹ “American Anti-Slavery Society. Second Day—Morning Session. Spirited Debate on the Color and Infidelity Questions—Lucretia Mott Against the Abolitionists,” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, May 19, 1854; *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, vol. 6, 59; Margaret Hope Bacon, *But One Race: The Life of Robert Purvis* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 158-159.

Rensselaer's olive branch and contended that it was impossible *not* to discuss color. Purvis disagreed and found no compliment in acknowledging the fact of his "blood." Garrison thought "that was all very well; but still one could say—'Well done, good and faithful servant'" That statement apparently did not have many admirers among the convention's African Americans, leaving Wendell Phillips to opine that it *was* time to cease discussing color. "Who are the slaves? They are Americans of the second generation. The grandchildren of Thomas Jefferson are in slavery in Virginia. The *Tribune* talks about African slavery, when it should say American slavery." Van Rensselaer countered that it would "difficult" for slavery's opponents to completely eschew color from their discussions, and, besides, he did not want to be "identified with the wicked white men of this society." Purvis curtly replied, "I don't think there's much danger of that."³⁴²

And so the convention muddled forward in discord and disagreement regarding the propriety of addressing "color." After a mid-afternoon break, Frederick Douglass judged the crowd returning for the afternoon session "very small." The issue turned from color to religious institutions and then on to the actual mechanics of the meeting as members complained that sidebar issues had hijacked the convention and sent it down a myriad of paths unrelated to the issues at hand. The day lurched to an end amidst confusion regarding whether one speaker could continue to respond to van Rensselaer's parting words that "the good of the slave was the only thing to be considered" and his hopes that future meetings adhered to that model. It was a lackluster display of organizational cohesion, although a typical one for the abolitionist movement, but it is telling that the issue of "color" sparked the initial derailment of the meeting. Could antislavery advocates discuss the issue without addressing color as Purvis, Phillips, and May desired? The response of van Rensselaer to this question suggests the widespread belief in

³⁴² "American Anti-Slavery Society. Second Day—Morning Session. Spirited Debate on the Color and Infidelity Questions—Lucretia Mott Against the Abolitionists," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, May 19, 1854.

normative whiteness during the mid-nineteenth century. To no longer “have” a color was the same as to be “identified with” whites. Frederick Douglass’s report of the meeting within his own paper underscores this conflation. Behind the name of every person of African descent speaking during the meeting, Douglass helpfully noted “(colored)” for his readership. Douglass did not offer the same annotation for Euro-American participants; the absence of color denoted a default to whiteness.

Nearly twenty years before this question of color disrupted the annual meeting of the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society in New York, Robert McDowall wrote from Monrovia with many of the same complaints as Purvis. The recipient of McDowall’s invective was Ralph R. Gurley, who over the course of fifty years’ involvement with the ACS beginning in 1822 would serve as travelling agent, secretary, corresponding secretary, vice president, and honorary life director. At that moment in August 1835 when McDowall put ink to paper, however, he was most upset at Gurley in his capacity as the editor of the *African Repository*. An Afro-Scottish physician who had graduated from the University of Edinburgh, McDowall had left for Liberia in June 1834 in the employ of the ACS as a colonial physician. The immediate source of trouble for McDowall was the *African Repository*’s republication of the eighteenth annual report of the ACS in February 1835 and the publication of a letter from McDowall to Elliott Cresson in the following March issue. The problem lay less in the republications of these respective documents than in the biographical information they provided about young McDowall. Apparently writing to Gurley after perusing the latest issues of the *Repository* from his Liberian office, the doctor informed Gurley, “I have to request that in all official documents, wherein it may be necessary to mention my name that the epithet ‘coloured gentleman’ shall not be coupled with it.” McDowall had apparently initially agreed that colonizationist propaganda could list his racial heritage as “it was held out to me that my means of doing good and

benefiting the cause would thereby be incalculably increased and much advantage to myself....In this 'honour' I have been cruelly mistaken." McDowall believed that the inclusion of "coloured gentleman" set a "limit" on his abilities that greatly impeded both his current practice and also his future prospects. "To be identified with the colonists here was never my intentions," he summed for Gurley, and "should I...continue to place myself in a predicament, which I now see must forever prevent me from reaping any of its [his profession] honors? and place me on a level with slaves?"³⁴³

For McDowall, to be labeled "colored" in the ACS publications placed him on the level of an enslaved person. Seemingly rejecting any possible coupling of "free" and "black," McDowall rejected the identity of "colored" as solely the possession of slaves; he, too, would have found much to agree with Sheppard's definition of whiteness as founded upon freedom. McDowall apparently hoped that, as was the case in Frederick Douglass's account of the anti-slavery convention, the absence of "color" would lead the readers to default to normalizing whiteness or minimally assume elevation above a "colored" population that could only be inhabited by slaves. If "colored" could only equate to slavery, then McDowall wanted nothing to do with that particular moniker. Like Samuel McGill who believed that "to be called a free colored man in the States" was synonymous with slavery and Andrew Hall who was unwilling to return to the United States "to be called a negro," McDowall sought elevation above the degraded blackness as perceived by Euro-Americans through the normalizing tools of whiteness. Ideally, he desired to be an educated professional without racial identity; minimally, he probably would have accepted the exoticized blackness that framed McGill's residence in New England, so long as he retained the aura of "civilization" and professionalism befitting his education. As with the Liberian settlers, this does not suggest that McDowall wanted to be "white," but rather

³⁴³ Robert McDowall to Ralph R. Gurley, 4 August 1835, ACS.

desired to inhabit a murkier undefined space between antipodal blackness and whiteness. This was uplift through simply *not* being “black.”

Of course, the great irony was that McDowall was writing to the mouthpiece of the ACS. This was, after all, the very same organization that in its first annual report transcribed the speeches of Charles F. Mercer and Robert G. Harper who described free people of color as “for the most part idle and useless, and too often vicious and mischievous”; “a wretched civilization...consisting of this degraded, idle, and vicious population”; and whose meeting places became “schools in which they are taught, by precept and example, idleness lying debauchery drunkenness and theft.”³⁴⁴ The colonizationists were the harbingers of unmitigated racial difference, to the point that they could not conceive of sharing a nation state with free people of color. Within the framework of Mercer and Harper, the coupling of “free” with “colored” could only create a vicious and idle class of people, as though the very words revolted from one another. How could McDowall expect the officers of an organization founded on unalterable racial divisions to acquiesce to his request for ambiguous racial identity when Purvis would fail to attain the same goal twenty years later within a multiracial abolitionist meeting?

Perhaps because Gurley was certainly no Mercer or Harper, and the ACS was an evolving, multifaceted organization. One of the internal tensions tugging the colonization movement in various directions was the ubiquitous question of whether free people of color were inherently degraded, vicious, and idle, and, assuming that they did indeed possess these characteristics, whether these traits were inherent or the result of the undue strain placed on them by white-authored laws. This nagging question was visible even in the ACS’s first report. Even as the report quoted Mercer and Harper at length, it likewise republished the letter of an Indiana supporter who claimed to have a large group of black Hoosiers ready to go to Africa. The author

³⁴⁴ *The First Annual Report of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Color of the United States*, 29, 15, 33.

reported them “in general industrious and moral. Some of them have landed property and are good farmers; and some can read and write. They are sensible of the existing degraded condition in which they are placed by our laws, respecting the right of suffrage, and other disabilities.”³⁴⁵ And so in 1836, the year following McDowall’s original letter, the *African Repository* published a letter from “R. McDowall” regarding the attack on the settlement at Bassa Cove without any racial annotation.³⁴⁶ The pattern repeated in 1837, and by 1838 when the *Repository* published another McDowall letter it opened with:

Dr. McDowall, the writer of the subjoined letter, went out to Liberia, about four years ago, as one of the Colonial Physicians, and has recently returned to the United States. The testimony is that of a candid and intelligent mind, given after fully opportunities of observation.³⁴⁷

Yet, even in May 1860, forty two years after the initial formation of the ACS, Purvis would still dismissively refer to the Republican Party platform as the “old spirit of African Colonization revived under a new name; it is the old snake with a new skin.”³⁴⁸

Despite momentary bursts of “neo-colonialist” scholarship aimed at rehabilitating the anti-slavery credentials of the ACS, which are becoming increasingly more common, the majority of scholars examining antebellum black activism have followed Purvis’s lead and categorized the colonization movement as a racist well-spring that the vast majority of African Americans vehemently opposed. Richard S. Newman credits the formation of a national colonization society as the driving force that sparked the impetus for previously localized African American abolitionists to foster broader national organizations of their own and seek white allies within larger multiracial reform organizations. While acknowledging that certain

³⁴⁵ *The First Annual Report of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Color of the United States*, 26.

³⁴⁶ “Annual Report,” *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 12, no. 1 (January 1836): 24; “Latest from Liberia,” *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 12, no. 2 (February 1836): 44.

³⁴⁷ “Testimony Concerning Liberia,” *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 14, no. 7 (July 1838): 201-206.

³⁴⁸ Robert Purvis, “The American Government and the Negro,” in *Life Every Voice: African American Oratory, 1787-1900*, eds. Philip S. Foner and Robert James Branham (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1998), 338.

members of the ACS, northern ministers Leonard Bacon and Ralph Gurley specifically, held “genuine antislavery views,” John Stauffer argues that once Gerrit Smith made himself into a “colored man,” he could no longer support the ACS. “Once Smith came to identify with blacks and to see in their oppression his own sufferings and struggles,” he then rejected colonization wholeheartedly, the implication being that colonization was for whites with no room for people of African descent.³⁴⁹ Leslie M. Alexander, building upon a framework established by Floyd Miller, probably makes the strongest claim by explicitly differentiating colonization from emigration along a racial binary. For Alexander, “emigration” denotes the movement of black-led organizations that were frustrated by the racial oppression of the United States and sought freedom beyond its borders. “Colonization,” on the other hand, “was an idea championed by White racists who did not want to interact with free Blacks on an equal basis and plotted to forcibly remove Blacks from the United States before they gained American citizenship and posed a real threat to Southern slavery.”³⁵⁰ Such a rigid binary fails to address intellectual cross-breeding between the movements, the very real conservative antislavery wing of the ACS, and

³⁴⁹ Richard S. Newman, *The Transformation of American Abolitionism: Fighting Slavery in the Early Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 96-104; John Stauffer, *The Black Hearts of Men: Radical Abolitionism and the Transformation of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 97-102.

³⁵⁰ Leslie Alexander, xix, 68-69. Alexander cites Floyd J. Miller’s seminal *The Search for a Black Nationality* as the foundation for her distinction, but Miller never makes such a deterministic boundary between “colonization” and “emigration.” Alexander specifically cites Miller’s first explanatory footnote as the basis of her own binary, but not only does the notation suggest a more blurry line between “colonization” and “emigration,” Miller discloses that he uses the both words without specific changes in denotation. “‘Colonization’ and ‘emigration’ are used interchangeably throughout this work, in conformity with common practices in black history. However, most students of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century black migratory activities use ‘colonization’ to refer to those movements which are *largely* [emphasis mine] white-inspired—such as the American Colonization Society’s efforts to found and maintain an African colony. There is a tendency to use ‘emigration’ to describe black-initiated movements, although ‘colonization’ has also been applied in these cases. While this usage has influenced me, I make no brief for any conceptual significance inherent in my terminology.” Rather than arguing that all colonization activities must be the work of racist whites, Miller actually paid serious attention to the minority of African Americans who were attracted to colonization rather than dismissing them. “Whatever the exact mixture of benevolence and racism which characterized the Colonization Society at this time, 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. Nevertheless, some blacks worked with or endorsed the Society. There were those who decided that, regardless of the motives of the Colonization Society’s members, planting an Afro-American colony in West Africa would free blacks from the degradation they experienced in the United States and present them with new social and economic opportunities.” See Floyd Miller, vii, 54.

essentially transforms those emigrants who decided to relocate as either unwitting dupes of white racists or activists intentionally trying to undermine black uplift. It would seem difficult to conceive of McGill, a masterful manipulator of white colonizationists able to utilize their networks to attain a goal never before achieved by an African American, as a mere dupe.

This is not to suggest a complete rehabilitation of the colonizationists. This was, after all, an organization whose Board of Managers reported in their second annual meeting in 1819: “If, as is most confidently believed, the colonization of the free people of colour, will render the slave who remains in America more obedient, more faithful, more honest, and, consequently, more useful to his master, is it proper to regard this happy consequence to both, as the sole object which the Society hope to attain?” That such a goal was not the primary mission of the ACS but rather could only be conceived as a happy offshoot of its program provided little comfort to its African American opponents. And the only thing that the pseudonymous supporter of colonization *Opimius* could agree with his anti-colonization opponent *Caius Grachus* about in their public debate which graced the pages of the *Richmond Enquirer* in 1826, was that free people of color were “degraded and debased from the very knowledge of their condition as slaves, dissolute and abandoned in their moral character, and with passions and feelings of the most lawless and brutal kind.”³⁵¹ For decades, most people of color would see the mechanisms of the Slave Power pulling the strings behind the ACS mechanisms in light of this sort of rhetoric from the society’s early years.

Yet, the ACS was not static, unified, or coherent as an organization. The trial of Reuben Crandall in 1835 for “seditious libel” and inciting the slaves of the District of Columbia to revolt is illustrative of the deep divisions within the organization. Crandall, a newly-arrived doctor in

³⁵¹ *The Second Annual Report of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Davis and Force, 1819), 9; Opimius [pseud.], “Opimius, No. 3” *Controversey between Caius Grachus and Opimius in Reference to the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour of the United States* (Georgetown, D.C.: James C. Dunn, 1827), 55.

the District who originally hailed from Connecticut, had opened a shop in Georgetown where he planned on giving lectures in botany. One of his only frequent visitors to the new shop witnessed Crandall unpacking from his relocation and noticed several copies of the *Anti-Slavery Reporter* among his possessions. The patron gave a warning about possessing such materials in the District and then borrowed one of the papers to quench his curiosity. Unfortunately, Crandall's arrival in D. C. with a trunkful of documents that included antislavery publications coincided with the American Anti-Slavery Society's direct mail campaign in which abolitionist tracts were mailed throughout the slaveholding states before Postmaster General Amos Kendall put a stop to the deliveries. In those tense months, Crandall's trunkful of personal papers became an abolitionist arsenal inciting the slaves to rebel. Someone swore they saw an abolitionist tract in Georgetown with Crandall's name on it—although a year later at Crandall's trial this same instigator could no longer remember the exact details—and Constables Robertson and Jeffers were dispatched with a warrant to search Crandall's residence. Problems arose when Jeffers, immediately after discovering Crandall's cache of abolitionist papers, triumphantly reported the discovery of "150 or 160" incendiary documents to a crowd gathered at a nearby apothecary shop. Of course, the mob was quick in forming. Denied lynching Crandall who was being held in the city jail protected by Marines brought from the Washington Navy Yard, the mob turned the following day on Beverly Snow, a proprietor of an oyster bar who was of mixed ancestry, whom the riotous crowd decided "had spoken in disrespectful terms of the wives and daughters of mechanics." The mob marched to Snow's house, which Snow had wisely vacated, and proceeded to smash his possessions and drink his alcohol; they resisted destroying the home only because Snow did not own the building. They then moved onward to seize James Hutton, another free man of color from the District, to drag before a magistrate for possession of abolitionist

newspapers, demolished several homes that were owned by African Americans, broke the glass of African American churches, and set fire to a reported “house of ill fame” about midnight.³⁵²

After the mob had blazed through the District’s African American community, they came to a stop before the Central Market House to listen to speeches and draw up the usual resolutions produced by such a mob while being watched by the local militia called out by General Walter Jones. The militia arrested a few rioters, the sated crowd eventually dispersed, and all that was left was the conviction of Crandall. This task fell to the United States Attorney for the District of Columbia: Francis Scott Key. Key drew up five counts of indictments against Crandall, charging him with “libel, of publishing malicious and wicked libels [“publishing” in the legal definition that incorporates distribution]. Fifteen weeks after Crandall’s arrest, Key stood in the Circuit Court of the District of Columbia, Chief Judge William Cranch presiding, staring at Crandall’s counsel, which consisted of two talented local attorneys, Richard S. Coxe and Joseph H. Bradley.³⁵³ In many ways, the courtroom scene would have felt familiar to the participants, constituting as it did a near quorum of past, current, and future managers of the ACS.³⁵⁴

Not that it would have been the most cordial of gatherings. Key, Cranch, and militia general Jones, along with Samuel H. Smith, the founder of the *National Intelligencer*, were ousted in 1833 as managers of the society in a coup orchestrated by its secretary, Ralph Gurley. Born in Connecticut and educated at Yale, Gurley had originally served as the society’s New England agent. In an effort to steer the society down an antislavery path with stronger support for black uplift, Gurley hoped to radically change the society during its 1833 annual meeting. While reading the numerous bland reports of the national organization, which were routinely approved

³⁵² Anonymous. *The Trial of Reuben Crandall, M.D.* (Washington, D.C., [1836]), 40-46; Neil S. Kramer, “The Trial of Reuben Crandall,” *Records of the Columbia Historical Society, Washington, D. C.* 50 (1980): 123-127; “Riots at Washington,” *Salem Gazette*, 18 August 1835, 2.

³⁵³ Bradley gained national notoriety thirty years later when he served as lead counsel for John Surratt in his trial for the assassination of Abraham Lincoln and assault on cabinet members.

³⁵⁴ Reuben Crandall, *The Trial of Reuben Crandall, M.D.* (New York: H. R. Pierce, 1836), 3-4; Kramer, 129-130.

by the delegates without question, Gurley included unnoticed a reorganization of the managers. Unwittingly, the convention agreed to the removal of these supporters of slavery—both Key and Jones were slave owners—and named them instead as vice presidents of the society, a more honorific position; they were replaced by a new anti-slavery slate of managers, including John H. B. Latrobe and Moses Sheppard.³⁵⁵ Not content with simply stacking the Board of Managers with slavery's foes, Gurley took the additional step of putting forward a new Constitution for the society effectively neutering the Board of Managers by establishing a new supervisory Board of Directors. The Board of Directors would dictate the policy of the organization, which the managers would then execute. The directors would consist of the president, vice president, and secretaries of auxiliary societies, guardians of colonization funds, and individuals who donated \$500 or more to the ACS. It was a system intentionally skewed to favor northern colonizationists, who organized more auxiliaries and donated more money. Over the course of five separate meetings held between January 20 and February 8, the delegates contentiously debated these changes to the society. Even the published minutes of the society, intentionally scrubbed of the deep divisions within the society, betray the confusion. Resolutions were submitted demanding a reconsideration of the Report of the Committee on the Election of Officers, the report by which Gurley had reorganized the Board of Managers; another proposal, subsequently voted down, authorized a committee to report on “whether there was any thing unfair, illegal, or dishonourable in the election of the officers of the Society.” Finally, apparently

³⁵⁵ In his brief notation of the 1833 annual meeting, Eric Burin claims that despite the objections of the deposed managers and their supporters the decision stood and the pro-slavery faction was replaced with northerners. Neither is entirely accurate. Key and Jones were back on the Board the following year, while Smith remained as a vice president. Cranch, whose reformist impulses had turned towards temperance, seems to have been little effected by his ouster from the leadership ranks. Additionally, the newly appointed managers were not all northerners. Although Latrobe and Sheppard had been born in Philadelphia, both had relocated to Baltimore at young ages. Reuben Post was a Vermonter and graduate of Middlebury College, but had gradually moved south, first to seminary at Princeton and then to his first pastorate in the District of Columbia. Hugh C. Smith lived in Alexandria, Virginia. Their clandestine selection for the board probably had less to do with the land of their nativity and more for their vision of colonization as a vehicle for gradual emancipation and African American uplift. See Burin, 23-24.

deciding that under the Constitution nothing could be done that year to remove the newly appointed managers, the convention voted on a proposal to “recommend” that the new managers voluntarily resign their seats. The divisive resolution barely passed, 63 to 57. With the expected return of the *status quo* forthcoming, the delegates decided it was “inexpedient” to alter the constitution and Gurley’s 1833 antislavery revolt failed for the moment.³⁵⁶ Unsurprisingly, in the immediate wake of the 1833 meeting, the Maryland State Colonization Society began the antislavery auxiliary revolt from the parent organization and initiated plans to establish its own independent colony and retain control over its own funds. Most abolitionists delighted in the schism of the society, noting that it undermined the oft-repeated refrain that colonization offered a path to emancipation. The front page of *The Liberator* crowed, “SIGNS OF THE TIMES!! *The great Babel tottering to its foundation!!!*”³⁵⁷

Now two years after this attempted purge of pro-slavery interests, Key found himself staring across the courtroom at Crandall’s defense council, Coxe and Bradley. Coxe had been elected to the Board of Managers during the tumultuous session in 1833; Bradley’s uncle Phineas had joined the board in 1834. Key’s case rested on the assumption that the jury would find the mere possession of abolitionist publications a heinous offense. He only offered evidence of a

³⁵⁶ *The Sixteenth Annual Report of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour of the United States* (Georgetown, D. C.: James Dunn, 1833). iii-xxii; Staudenraus, 78-79, 207-209. Moses Sheppard was unenthused about his predicament and disliked the idea of traveling from Baltimore to Washington for the meetings of the society’s managers. Given the call for his voluntary resignation and the setback the anti-slavery caucus had received, his hesitancy is understandable. As he pondered the “propriety” of his attendance, Latrobe prevailed upon him to at least attend the meeting in late February. But by March Sheppard was already planning to submit his resignation from the Board. See Moses Sheppard to John H. B. Latrobe, 20 February 1833, MSP; Moses Sheppard to Charles Howard and Charles G. Harper, 24 February 1833, MSP; Moses Sheppard to John H. B. Latrobe, 22 March 1833, MSP.

³⁵⁷ “Signs of the Times!!” *The Liberator*, 23 February 1833, p. 1; Of course, colonizationists were equally aware of the divisions exposed by the 1833 meeting. John H. B. Latrobe, writing to Cortland Van Rensselaer, in July 1833 explained to his correspondent the lesson of that contentious affair. “At that meeting it became apparent that Colonization had two sets of friends, who supported it from motives diametrically opposed to each other. The north looked to Colonization as the means of extirpating slavery. The south as the means 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. The Colonization Society had attempted to conciliate for years, between these parties, and so long as it would keep the question of principle from being publicly mooted, it was partially successful. But the explosion came at last.” See John H. B. Latrobe to Cortland Van Rensselaer, 10 July 1833, MSCS.

single “publication” of the material, Crandall’s loan of a solitary newspaper to his patron, and he never bothered to argue about the legal characterization of the pamphlets. Instead focusing on character witnesses who described Crandall as a vocal supporter of emancipation combined with a trunkful of incriminating documents, Key hoped to paint the doctor as an agent of abolition societies and let the jury equate this with sedition and libel. Bradley, however, opened the case with a bit of deception, reading from a speech of Key’s from the 1828 annual meeting of the ACS. The judges initially assumed that the rhetoric originated from one of Crandall’s “libels”; a mortified Key recognized that the defense was underscoring the antislavery side of colonization and drawing parallels between that organization and the abolitionists by utilizing Key’s own words. Key challenged the defense’s interpretation of his speech. Referring back to his address, Key argued, “The ‘great moral and political evil’ of which I speak, is supposed to be slavery—but is it not plainly the whole coloured race? But if I did say this of slavery, as I am quite willing to say it, here and on all fit occasions, do I not also in the same breath speak of emancipation as a far greater evil?” Key located the danger of freedom in inherent black debasement. Gurley, on the other hand, believed that what black despondency actually existed resulted from the actions of whites. In 1832, he listed the primary factors challenging African American “improvement” within the United States: “Of these causes...I would mention *the superiority of the whites* in education, wealth, influence and power, which renders it impossible for the people of color to engage, but with great disadvantage, in the occupations and arts of life.” The ACS’s deep divisions were revealed before the public, and the question hinged less on slavery than on the origins and reasons for African Americans’ position within society.³⁵⁸

³⁵⁸ Kramer, 133-139; Francis Scott Key, *A Part of a Speech Pronounced by Francis S. Key, Esq., on the Trial of Reuben Crandall, M. D.* (Washington, D. C., 1836), 9. Key’s speech was also published in the *African Repository*, see Francis Scott Key, “Mr. Key on the Colonization Society,” *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 12, no. 11 (1836): 339-351; Ralph R. Gurley, *Letter on the American Colonization Society* ([Washington?]: 1832), 2.

Needless to say, published comments like Key's would not have been exactly endearing to African American eyes. They do, however, underscore the problems with labeling the ACS as supporting or undermining slavery when members and officers serving at the same historical moment were in disagreement regarding the Society's relationship to slavery. Bruce Dain, for example, building upon David Brion Davis's work, has argued that colonization merits additional scholarly scrutiny since "certain sincere colonizationists became the first major American figures explicitly and unequivocally to see blacks as in effect fully equal and undegenerate, in Africa and as Negroes--that is, as distinct, different, and separate, but still equal, and connected to the West and Christianity." That certain "sincere" colonizationists existed is certainly true, but what makes Moses Sheppard, John H. B. Latrobe, or Ralph Gurley more "sincere" colonizationists than, say, Key? ³⁵⁹ And one cannot forget that as the various ideological wings of the ACS battled for organizational primacy, African American settlers within the colony were also spurring changes within the society as they increasingly demanded and gained greater prominence within colonial administration. Ironically, even as the colonization society "whitened" Africa through its emigration program, the society itself simultaneously "blackened" as African American settlers seized more power and control over their colonial affairs.

This determination to steer their own destiny had characterized the African American settlers since the maiden voyage of the ACS aboard the *Elizabeth* in 1820. The Society had not adequately outlined its vision for the relationship between the American-bound organization, its representatives in Africa, and the settlers. Confusion reigned supreme. Most settlers assumed that they would constitute any governmental body established in Africa, in obvious disagreement with society's agent, Samuel Crozer. Additionally, the ACS's initial foray into Africa was

³⁵⁹ Dain, 104-105.

largely supported through federal funds appropriated by the United States government following the enactment of the Slave Trade Act of 1819. Section 2 of the act authorized the President of the United States “to make such regulations and arrangements as he may deem expedient for the safe-keeping, support, and removal beyond the limits of the United States” the “recaptured” Africans, and President James Monroe determined the ACS’s proposed colony provided a removal point well “beyond the limits of the United States.” Thus, in addition to ACS agent Crozer, the *Elizabeth* sailed with government agents Samuel Bacon and John Bankson. Unfortunately, not only had the three white agents failed to establish the outlines of colonial governance with the settlers, but they did not even agree among themselves on how the colony would function.³⁶⁰ The government agents assumed that the settlers were essentially laborers contracted by the United States to build a station for recaptured Africans; the ACS agent thought he commanded an expedition of settlers who were also coincidentally prepared to fulfill certain obligations to establish the new colonial beachhead. Tellingly, the ACS had not clarified its claims to power by the time its second ship, the *Nautilus*, sailed into Sierra Leone one year after the first expedition. Writing to the ACS from the Fourah Bay settlement in that British colony on April 17, 1821, ACS assistant agent Christian Wiltberger found himself in a bind. He wrote, seemingly startled by his own ignorance, “I find I have come out here in much ignorance as to what is my duty as respects the Society’s affairs or the connexion there exists between the Government and Society, and Agents and how we stand related to the people as Society’s Agents and they to us.” The impetus for his concern was the claims of two leaders of the settlers, soon to be destined for prominent positions in colonial governance, Colin Teague and Lott Cary, who explained to the agents that they considered the colonists independent of the ACS. Remarkably, during its earliest years of existence, the ACS dispatched vessels, settlers, and agents to West

³⁶⁰ The confusion spawned by this awkward arrangement of government and society agents would usually be rectified in the future by naming the governor of the colony as both agent of the ACS and United States government.

Africa without ever identifying concrete delineations of power. After explaining the muddled affair in Sierra Leone, a befuddled Wiltberger could only ask for directions from home, as the only thing he could discern was that “the people do not consider themselves under the Society at all or it having any thing to do with them.”³⁶¹

This confusion was a recipe for disaster for those aboard the *Elizabeth* following their arrival in Sierra Leone in March 1820. On the voyage across the Atlantic, the white agents had attempted to assert their control by reading their abbreviated instructions from the colonial society, which primarily centered on the amount of land to be issued to colonists based upon familial guidelines. Based upon this responsibility, the agents asserted that they were the only ones authorized to negotiate with African leaders for the purchase of territory. A heated debate among the settlers was only moderated by the activism of Reverend Daniel Coker, the son of a white English indentured servant and an African slave who shared the same master, and who had been instrumental in the establishment of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Coker, an early adherent of the civilizing mission of Paul Cuffe, found himself serving as the middleman between the agents and settlers. Described by Floyd Miller as “a man who had lived much of his life in a netherland between white and black,” Coker had impressed the government and ACS agents who put him in charge of loading the *Elizabeth* and invited him to bunk in their cabin. Unfortunately, their planned destination, John Kizell’s settlement on Sherbro Island, a 30 mile long and 15 mile wide island separated from the mainland by the Sherbro River and Sherbro Strait, proved sickly and undeveloped. Kizell had to import fresh water the mainland and morale deteriorated further.³⁶²

³⁶¹ An Act in Addition to the Acts Prohibiting the Slave Trade, ch. 101, 3 *Stat.* 532-534; Floyd, 54-63; Christian Wiltberger Diary, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

³⁶² Floyd, 55-65.

Although a native of the area, Kizell had been sold into South Carolina slavery early in his life, served the British during the American Revolution, relocated to Canada, and returned to Sierra Leone in 1792 with other black Nova Scotians. In Paul Cuffe's early peregrinations to establish African contacts, he had organized the Friendly Society of Sierra Leone with the hope that the mercantile group would be able to break British trade monopolies and provide material assistance to future African American emigrants. Kizell was a member of the association and president of the group when he met with John Mills and Ebenezer Burgess, two agents of the ACS dispatched to Africa in 1818 to survey potential sites for the planned colony. The agents became enamored of Kizell; in reported extracts of Mills's diary posthumously published in the ACS's annual report, the agent gushed, "We may safely trust our friend K. No man's heart can be more ardent for the success of our object, and no man in Africa could probably be so useful to us under present circumstances." Little wonder that the *Elizabeth* turned for Sherbro Island once the governor of Sierra Leone offered little assistance to the American enterprise.³⁶³

Disease swept among the settlers and the death toll rose; Wiltberger eventually tallied the total as five men, eight women, and eight children. Concomitant with the rising mortality rate, tensions, already high after the voyage of the *Elizabeth*, rose even further. Although he arrived with the second expedition after the abandonment of Sherbro Island as a potential colony, Wiltberger was forced to deal with the problems laid in the first expedition's wake and he evidently found the trials of the *Elizabeth* intriguing and transcribed the diary of Elijah Johnson, the settler who would lead the young colony at Cape Mesurado before the arrival of Ashmun, into his own journal of his experiences from onboard the *Nautilus*. In so doing, Wiltberger created a combined rendering of the affairs of the first two expeditions into one journal. While

³⁶³ African Institution, *Barrow's Voyage to Cochinchina* (London: Ellerton and Henderson), 71-77; Samuel Mills, "Abstract of a Journal of the Late Rev. Samuel John Mills, Written While in Africa," in *The Second Annual Report of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Color in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Davis and Force, 1819), 24-31.

the means by which Johnson's account survived leads to serious questions regarding the accuracy of transcription and possible editing on the part of the transcriptionist, the text offers some intriguing details. Amidst the voyage, Johnson vis-à-vis Wiltberger notes that Coker had organized a Methodist congregation that would be not be subject to white Methodists nor Richard Allen's authority. Given Coker's history with Allen and the A.M.E. Church, this is not entirely out of character. In addition to mentioning Coker's defense of the white agents, including an argument presented by Coker that it was God's will that he bunked with the agents so that he could report on their activities to the settlers, Johnson's diary unveils a contentious voyage. John Fisher whipped his wife on deck; Richard Butler cut Francis Creecy (occasionally spelled "Cressy") with a knife; in turn, William Milton and Butler had a fight about cooking that terminated when Butler threw the pot overboard.

But beyond the scrapes and arguments commonplace to cramped living situations, there were darker conflicts at work. "Today Charles Francis's daughter had a fight and Mr. Bacon went down between decks and took the youngest and tied her and whipped her." What six-year-old Abigail Francis had to do with this altercation is unclear. It is equally unclear why Bacon administered corporal punishment on a settler's child. Was this part of the agent's campaign to reassert Euro-American dominance over the expedition? Was Bacon acting in his capacity as an Episcopal priest and former schoolteacher to correct a wayward child? Of course, performing this function would challenge the legitimacy of Coker's newly established ministry among the settlers.³⁶⁴

Once at Sherbro and its accompanying lean times, the ACS agent charged Creecy with stealing provisions. The agent intended for Coker to oversee the trial, but Creecy profusely objected to being tried by a "mulatto." Racial politics were afoot and while Creecy perhaps did

³⁶⁴ Elijah Johnson, "Extracts from Elijah Johnson Esq's Journal," trans. Christian Wiltberger, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

not believe he should be judged by the light-skinned Coker, it was probably Coker's close relationship with the agents that enraged Creecy rather than his phenotype. Even more problematic, the settlers again challenged the propriety of Euro-American agents before negotiations with Sherbro's African leaders could be established to purchase land. At a meeting held at Kizzell's church, Jonathan Adams proclaimed to Bacon, "Mr. K, the King, & head men, are waiting for our Agents, and they will not let a white man have the land, but the head man whom they give the land to must be a black man." Kizzel rose and exclaimed, "You misunderstood me," but Bacon was already convinced that Kizzel sought to water the seeds of discord sprouting vines among the settlers. Considering the Africans' previous and subsequent willingness to negotiate with Europeans and Euro-Americans and the constructed whiteness of the African American settlers, Kizzel was probably being truthful when he announced that Adams had misunderstood. New arrivals to the West African coast, the settlers and their agents operated with an understanding of racial difference forged in their early nineteenth-century American contexts. Transitioning from American racialized lines to murky, constrained, and fluid African notions of race inflected by cultural practice and performance would be an uneven task for these Americans in Africa.³⁶⁵

The abandonment of Sherbro, arrival of the *Nautilus*, and acquisition of territory on the mainland did not solve the embryonic colony's racial problems. Teague and Cary had already voiced their opposition to ACS governance aboard the *Nautilus* and landfall in Sierra Leone did not ease tensions between settlers and agents. By the fall of 1821, it seemed that the settlers would secure their independence through attrition alone. All three agents from the *Elizabeth* passed away in Africa. The *Nautilus*, which had sailed with two government representatives, Jonathan Winn and Ephraim Bacon, along with the ACS agent Joseph Andrus and his assistant,

³⁶⁵ Floyd, 62-63; Johnson, "Extracts from Elijah Johnson Esq's Journal."

Wiltberger, fared slightly better. In April 1821, Andrus and Bacon negotiated with “King Jack Ben” of Grand Bassa for the purchase of territory southeast of the future site of Monrovia. Bacon’s published diary of these negotiations note the same questions of land ownership broached by the misunderstanding between Adams and Kizzel. Believing that the Bassa leader would find commonality with “American blacks,” Andrus and Bacon informed the leader that they wanted “to get land for the black people in America, to come and sit down upon. . . . We told him that the people were very many, and required much territory; that a few white men only would come along, to assist and take care of them.” After delivering this early encapsulation of the white man’s burden, Andrus and Bacon set about the hard business of negotiation. After four days, a deal was struck and the agents distributed trade goods among the African participants. Bacon dutifully recorded “Jack Ben’s” response to one particular trade good given to his son, but was either the victim of the published account’s editor or did not dedicate any thought to the Africans’ response: “The king was much pleased at seeing his son with trowsers on; the people said, ‘He gentleman all one white man.’” That the Americans, agents and settlers, and Africans were thinking of “white” and “black” in very different terms during these early days of settlement is clear. Although successfully negotiated, Andrus and Bacon’s agreement called for annual tributes to the African leader, and the ACS managers refused to support such an arrangement. The negotiations fell apart, and within a matter of weeks the luck of the *Nautilus*’s agents soured. Andrus and Winn passed away within weeks of concluding their negotiations with “Jack Ben,” while Bacon returned to the United States in ill health.³⁶⁶

³⁶⁶ Ephraim Bacon, *Abstract of a Journal Kept by E. Bacon*, 4th ed. (Philadelphia: Clark & Raser, 1824), 18-22, 42-43.

The administration fell to Wiltberger, himself ill and ineffective, in Sierra Leone until the arrival of Eli Ayres, representing both government and society, in the autumn of 1821.³⁶⁷ In December, while Ayres was down the coast negotiating for the purchase of the colony, Wiltberger prepared the settlers for relocation by issuing supplies and clothing; it did not go well. Settlers Francis and Lucy Posey found themselves doubly angry with Wiltberger when he refused Lucy's request for supplies after she arrived late. Wiltberger recorded in his journal for December 12, 1821, "She made great to do about it." The next day, Francis knocked at Wiltberger's door. Answering, the agent supposed Posey's arrival stemmed from the previous disputes over supplies and immediately shut the door between himself and the settler. But Posey had actually arrived to receive a payment owed to him by Wiltberger. The agent refused to open the door for the settler, apparently upset at Posey for "abusing me in the most shameful manner." Wiltberger threatened to remove the Poseys from the list of those who would receive society support; Posey retorted, "Do it as quick as you please" and stormed off without payment. Wiltberger's journal soon was filled with accounts of altercations with settlers accompanied by signed statements from witnesses.³⁶⁸

By December 17, the settlers began holding formal meetings and established a society under the telling name "American African Union Society" with a leadership committee that included Cary, Teague, Johnson, and Coker in order to formally present settler grievances to the agents. Wiltberger was rescued from negotiating with the settlers by Ayres's return from negotiating with the Dey and Bassa leaders of Cape Mesurado. Nakedly showcasing American naval power in the form of Lieutenant Robert Stockton's warship, the negotiators were able to secure the embryo of Liberia for roughly \$300 worth of trade goods. Wiltberger recorded in his

³⁶⁷ It would be Ayres and Robert F. Stockton who would conduct the infamous negotiations to secure the land treaty for the territory along the Cape Mesurado. See Staudenraus, 59-65.

³⁶⁸ Gurley, *Life of Jehudi Ashmun*, 114-115; December 10-December 15, 1821, Wiltberger Diary.

diary, “They [Stockton and Ayres] had to make use of much planning and scheming to get the place and they state we are indebted to Captain Stockton.” After the return of Ayres, the American African Union Society attempted to interject their role in governance by issuing formal declarations to Ayres and Wiltberger of their intent to negotiate with the agents on behalf of several settlers, including the Poseys. Ayres flatly rejected the authority of group “to regulate the conduct of the people,” instead claiming the judicial authority over the people for himself. Between January and May 1822, the society shuttled those emigrants who were willing to leave the British colony for Perseverance Island, a small island in the Mesurado River lying between the cape and the mainland. The settlers were unhappy with their agents; the Africans were unhappy with the settlers.³⁶⁹

Finding themselves sick, isolated, and undersupplied, Ayres and Wiltberger abandoned the island to seek reinforcements, leaving Elijah Johnson in charge of the settlement. Finally under the leadership of someone they considered their own, the settlers crossed the river and established their beachhead on the cape. It was this site, which Johnson and Cary were rapidly preparing for war against neighboring Africans, to which Jehudi Ashmun arrived in 1822. Although Ashmun’s reputation would remain decidedly mixed among Liberian settlers for years after the end of his tenure as agent, there were at least several settlers who remembered Ashmun fondly for his assistance in defending Mesurado from early African assaults and expanding the settlement beyond its nascent boundaries. Yet, he too clashed with the settlers. After a brief return of Ayres as the Society’s agent in 1823, which was only notable for his further angering the settlers by assigning town lots without regard to plots already in possession, Ashmun returned to the seat of power and attempted to restrict rations for those settlers who did not

³⁶⁹ Wiltberger Diary; Floyd, 69-72; Ashmun, *History of the American Colony in Liberia*, 5-9.

consistently contribute two work days each week to public projects.³⁷⁰ The settlers found this a hard bargain and upon finding the agent unmovable in his conviction, simply raided the storehouse to forcibly secure their rations. Letters poured in from the colony charging the agent “with oppression, the neglect of obvious duties, the desertion of his post, and the seizure and abduction of the public property.” The colonial administration held only a tenuous position of power in Africa, and the managers of the ACS determined that only an armed warship with a special inspector, Gurley, commissioned to report on the state of affairs could rectify their strife-riddled colony. Gurley set about establishing regulations for aiding widows, orphans, the sick, and the despondent. He established a channel of communication by which settlers could directly communicate with the managers of the ACS. Most importantly, he reorganized the civil constitution of the colony to create a colonial advisory council consisting of settlers; previously, the constitution had only called for a board of the society’s (white) agents to “determine all questions relative to the government of the Settlement.” This 1824 reorganization laid the groundwork for a colonial administration consisting of settlers with an ACS-appointed agent atop the pyramid. Gurley deserves credit for seeing leadership potential in the rebellious settlers when many other Euro-American colonizationists refused to cede power to the settlers. Ashmun doubted the “qualifications of the settlers for any share in the concerns of government” and demanded the creation of a small military guard commanded directly by him. Back in the United States, the managers of ACS reported at their annual meeting that “in reference to the government of the Colony, the Managers cannot entirely concur in opinion with their Agent [Gurley].” Still, the Board admitted, Gurley’s actions reinvigorated the struggling colony and hopefully reaffirmed the settlers’ faith in the good intentions of the ACS. But Gurley only recognized what colonizationists in the vein of Francis Scott Key struggled to fathom: regardless

³⁷⁰ Following repeated settler protests, this provision would eventually be altered to the policy whereby settlers received rations and supplies by agreeing to cultivate and improve their respective allotments.

of the intentions of the ACS leaders in terms of slavery or black uplift, the settlers were going to use the rhetoric and ideology of the Society to elevate themselves and secure positions of power. The settlers were not going to be passive participants in the colonization movement.³⁷¹

What is striking about these early colonial growing pains is the racialized nature of the grievances. Wiltberger's diary laments that certain settlers were prejudicing others' minds against white agents; Creecy would not be judged by the "mulatto" Coker; some settlers believed that African leaders would not negotiate with any agent of European descent. Regardless of the veracity of these accounts of racial strife, there is a great deal of smoke hinting at significant racial tensions during the earliest expeditions, as Euro-American agents hindered settler efforts to control their own colonial destinies. Fascinatingly, these racial smoke clouds changed shape with later Euro-American governors. This is not to suggest that settler/agent tensions ended with the 1824 reorganization of the colony, but rather that subsequent Euro-American governors began to see whiteness (not "white" settlers, but African whiteness) where earlier agents had not. The subsequent disputes between agents and people did not suddenly lack a racialized dynamic, but rather that racialized content was recalibrated.

Nathaniel Brander, for example, stood opposed to the actions of Governor Pinney in 1834. Brander had been a member of the *Elizabeth* expedition and clashed repeatedly with the Euro-American agents who suspected Brander of engaging in polyamorous relationships on Sherbro Island. By 1834, he had risen to the rank of vice agent of the colony. Following the resignation of Pinney as governor in May 1835, it had been Brander in his capacity as acting agent who had initially guided the ACS's colony onto the warpath when "Joe Harris" attacked Bassa Cove in June. The Liberian climate had proven insalubrious to Pinney's health since his arrival there as a Presbyterian missionary in 1833. In September 1834, Pinney resigned his post

³⁷¹ Charles Henry Huberich, *The Political and Legislative History of Liberia* (New York: Central Book Co., 1947), 1:145; Gurley, *Life of Jehudi Ashmun*, 180-215; Floyd, 72-74; Staudenraus, 88-97.

due to ill health and, in an effort to retain white leadership of the colony, turned over the title to Ezekiel Skinner, a Euro-American doctor and the colonial physician. Eschewing racial terminology, Brander protested to Pinney that he could not “unconstitutionally impose it [the governorship] on one, not appointed by the Board of Managers nor elected by the suffrage of the people.” Brander admitted that his opposition created “a degree of unpleasantness,” but Pinney returned to duty as agent. When he formally resigned in May 1835, he did not attempt to usurp settler power again, and Brander took the reins of government until the managers formally named Skinner as their agent. By 1839, all that was left to argue about was the exact amount of time Brander had spent as acting agent in order to determine his compensation.³⁷²

Perhaps Brander and his compatriots had simply learned to frame their grievances in political rather than racial tropes, but the transformation from failed settler factions opposed to white agents to a settler vice agent successfully opposing the actions of a white governor is telling. A more compelling explanation is greater settler participation in colonial governance and decision-making and a greater embrace of their shifting racial position and access to the tools of whiteness that Africa offered. As George McGill learned to “toe point” with white naval officers and Abraham Blackford enjoyed the company of a Euro-American physician’s office, Americo-Liberian settlers eschewed the racial structures of their American origins in favor of their new place as creolized products of Atlantic mobility. These moving parts make the ACS a difficult organization to categorize. Colonizationists battled to decide whether the movement would support or hinder slavery; they further divided on whether black uplift should be an inherent part of the movement’s mission. And regardless of the Euro-Americans’ respective desires for colonization, many of the Liberian settlers proved remarkably adept at hijacking the ideology of colonization and manipulating their new racial identity to realize their own ideas of uplift.

³⁷² Nathaniel Brander to Ralph R. Gurley, 21 May 1839, ACS.

Undoubtedly, many rank and file members of the colonization societies did not agree with Moses Sheppard's admiration for African definitions of whiteness or believe in advancing African American uplift, but their membership contributions still helped McGill and Fletcher secure medical degrees. And for their own part, African American opponents to colonization recognized the complexity of the beast that for many of them served as the great white whale.

For historians, the tale of free black rejection of colonization is fairly static and standard fare: after initial dalliances with the schemes of Paul Cuffe on the part of a few black elites like James Forten, free people of color overwhelmingly rejected the white-led ACS. Instead of Cuffe's vehicle for black uplift, the ACS was perceived as propping up slavery while also serving as a fountainhead for white denunciations of black capacity for self-improvement. Preferring to fight for liberty and equality in the land of their birth, free blacks overwhelmingly rejected colonization during the 1820s and instead focused on the establishment of a national abolitionist community dedicated to immediate emancipation. As practically the only voices of opposition against colonization during that decade, African Americans were forced to create national networks to combat the national appeal of the ACS. Their efforts spawned the immediatist movement for white abolitionists during the 1830s—often former colonizationists shown the error of their ways like William Lloyd Garrison, James Birney, Gerrit Smith, Benjamin Lundy, and the Tappan Brothers—and fostered the creation of racially inclusive abolitionist societies.³⁷³ And to be fair, this standard account is not necessarily inaccurate. Free

³⁷³ With only slight addendums, this has largely been the standard narrative since at least Floyd Miller's *The Search for a Black National Identity*. Miller identified the failure of black emigration in Haiti as a leading source of discontentment for African American removal schemes in the 1820s. Miller also noted that the rise of immediate abolition and black convention movement of the 1830s provided "new avenues of protest" for free blacks. He notes, perhaps unfairly to later immigrants, that "no black of the stature of either Daniel Coker or John B. Russwurm left the United States for Africa" after the 1820s. Richard S. Newman built upon Floyd's foundation by arguing that the turn towards immediate abolitionism for white activists in the 1830s was a direct result of the African American anti-colonization movement and the creation of national unity. Leslie M. Alexander ascribes black's rejection of colonization and fears of forced expatriation with the widespread rejection of an African identity in favor of a national one. She, too, notes that the national convention movement was spawned from the need to nationally debate

African Americans *did* overwhelmingly reject colonization and organized nationally to combat the ACS.

The elite voices of the national convention movement ably support these scholarly conclusions. The national conventions, which began initially in 1830 with the sole purpose of debating the propriety of emigrating from the United States, evolved over the 1830s and 1840s to debate the best means to achieve black uplift. The published minutes of these twelve national conventions which met before the American Civil War provide ample material to explore elite black thinking in regards to colonization as it proved a nearly ubiquitous topic of conversation. Initially, the convention movement got off to a rocky start. The first gathering in 1830 proved to be a small affair numbering only a handful of delegates who were aware of its existence. Held in September, the idea for a national convention had only been suggested the April before; a formal announcement of the meeting only went out in August. Hezekiah Grice, a Baltimore delegate who had published the original proposal for the meeting in April, arrived in Philadelphia to discover only five other men in attendance. It was not an auspicious beginning, and the small group was apparently interrupted periodically by visitors challenging the authority of the group to speak on behalf of America's people of color. Despite the missteps, the group recommended emigration to Canada in preference to Liberia, and called for a future meeting in June 1831 to purchase land and create an organization to administer it. The next meeting was better attended and gradually evolved away from its emigrationist origins to include broader concerns for black uplift; soon the convention counted among its participants many of the nation's leading black

the merits of relocation to Africa, Haiti, Canada, or some other place. See Floyd, 82-90; Newman, 96-116; Alexander, 53-75.

intellectuals. In keeping with the tradition of the first meeting, however, a rejection of colonization became a staple of each annual convention regardless of its size or luminescence.³⁷⁴

In an early address produced by the 1831 convention, the delegates noted that “our forlorn and deplorable situation earnestly and loudly demand of us to devise and pursue all legal means for the speedy elevation of ourselves and brethren to the scale and standing of men.” In its emphasis on the “deplorable situation” of African Americans within the United States and masculine conflation of uplift with the “scale and standing of men,” the delegates’ address echoed the rhetoric of many colonizationists. Yet, the delegates rejected African colonization despite the “great debt which these United States may owe to injured Africa” because the people of African descent were precisely that: people of African *descent*. The delegates contended that they were American by custom and birth and could not “consent to take our lives in our hands, and be the bearers of the redress offered by that Society to that much afflicted country.” Further, a committee of inquiry established during the convention reported their belief that many of the “unconstitutional, unchristian, and unheard of sufferings” of African Americans stemmed from the rhetoric of the ACS. Finally, in a convention address authored by Belfast Burton, Junius C. Morel, and William Whipper, the writers suggested that the actions of the ACS inadvertently strengthened slavery rather than hindered the institution, argued that the delegates’ forefathers had likewise fought for American liberty and questioned the morality of a nation which would deny them, and finally requested that “if we must be sacrificed to their philanthropy, we would rather die at home.” The onus of their rejection of colonization lay in their cultural similarities with other Americans, the assumption that the ACS ran a deathtrap of a colony—a fair belief

³⁷⁴ “The First Colored Convention,” *The Anglo-African Magazine* 1, no. 10 (October 1859) in *Minutes of the Proceedings of the National Negro Conventions, 1830-1864*, ed. Howard Holman Bell (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969), i-vi.

given the alarmingly high mortality rates of Liberia—and the debt of the United States to the people of color who had fought to secure its own liberty.³⁷⁵

Later conventions would build upon these themes with increasing vigor. By 1834, the convention's president declared that although colonizationists “put on the garb of angels of light,” beneath that benevolent shell lay an inner darkness dedicated to “evil purposes.” Ironically, the attempted 1833 coup by Gurley and other like-minded colonizationists who conceived of colonization as geared towards black uplift probably damaged the reputation of the ACS more than they encouraged African Americans to give the society a hearing. Instead of seeing the ACS as a multifaceted organization with an internal power struggle, the convention goers saw only malevolence.

That society has spread itself over this whole land; it is artful, it suits itself to all places. It is one thing at the south, and another at the north; it blows hot and cold; it sends forth bitter and sweet; it sometimes represents us as the most corrupt, vicious, and abandoned of any class of men in the community. Then again we are kind, meek, and gentle. Here we are ignorance, idle, a nuisance, and a drawback on the resources of the country. But as abandoned as we are, in Africa we shall civilize and christianize all that heathen country.³⁷⁶

By the 1840s, the convention resolved that, theoretically, “it *may* be possible” that colonization had been founded by benevolent motives, but the actual accomplishments of the ACS had only “been fostered and sustained by the *murderous spirit of slavery* and prejudice.” Regardless of its founders' motivations, the actions of colonization sustained the institution of slavery for the convention's participants and, returning to the theme of nativity established in the first convention, they would challenge the activities of the group in favor of securing rights in the land of their birth. The 1853 convention summed this idea succinctly by declaring, “We are

³⁷⁵ *Constitution of the American Society of Free Persons of Colour....Also the Proceedings of the Convention, with their Address to the Free Persons of Colour in the United States* (Philadelphia: J. W. Allen, 1831), in *Minutes of the Proceedings of the National Negro Conventions, 1830-1864*, ed. Bell, 9-10, 5, 15.

³⁷⁶ *Minutes of the Fourth Annual Convention, for the Improvement of the Free People of Colour, in the United States* (New York: 1834), in *Minutes of the Proceedings of the National Negro Conventions, 1830-1864*, ed. Bell, 4-5.

Americans, and as Americans, we would speak to Americans.” Colonization had, in fact, played a significant role in the delegates’ thinking in terms of their place in American society. Initially, the conventions had been established with the explicit purpose of securing territory outside the United States, preferably in Canada, to provide a safe haven for African American expatriates following the exodus of over half the population of Cincinnati, Ohio’s free people of color. Following extensive mob violence in that city in 1829, between 1,100 and 2,000 of its free black denizens established a colony in Canada they named Wilberforce in honor of the British abolitionist. After only two large-scale meetings, however, the convention delegates found their balancing act of encouraging relocation while simultaneously rejecting Liberia as a possible site for that relocation problematic. By 1832, a committee charged with examining resolutions supportive of relocation declared that, based upon their examination of the ACS, they had determined “that any express plan to colonize our people beyond the limits of these United States, tends to weaken the situation of those who are left behind, without any peculiar advantage to those who emigrate.”³⁷⁷ From that point forward, delegates would largely focus on black uplift within the United States, along with annual denunciations of the ACS program. Repeatedly, the conventions undermined the logic of colonization, decried the movement as a scheme that reinforced slavery rather than hindered it, affirmed their American identity, and underlined their determination to secure their rights in the land of their birth; all of this scholars have accurately pinpointed as the basis of free black opposition to colonization.

³⁷⁷ *Minutes of the National Convention of Colored Citizens* (New York: Piercy and Reed, 1843), in *Minutes of the Proceedings of the National Negro Conventions, 1830-1864*, ed. Bell, 19-20; *Proceedings of the Colored National Convention* (Rochester, NY: Frederick Douglass, 1853), 8; *Minutes and Proceedings of the Second Annual Convention, for the Improvement of the Free People of Color of these United States* (Philadelphia: Martin and Boden, 1832), in *Minutes of the Proceedings of the National Negro Conventions, 1830-1864*, ed. Bell, 18. For the relocation of Cincinnati’s free people of color to Canada, see Nikki Taylor, “Reconsidering the ‘Forced’ Exodus of 1829: Free Black Emigration from Cincinnati, Ohio to Wilberforce, Canada,” *The Journal of African American History* 87 (Summer 2002): 283-302.

Yet, there was initial hesitancy on the part of these elite African Americans to specifically pinpoint individuals. If the *movement* as whole was soundly rejected along with its ideological underpinnings by these convention goers, then *individuals* within that movement were strangely absent from these denunciations. Given that colonization often functioned as a bridge to abolitionism for whites, these early formulaic denunciations are not surprising. The 1831 address, for example, qualified its rejection of colonization by noting that the convention did not doubt the “sincerity of many friends who are engaged in that cause.” Much as they offered increasingly astringent denunciations of colonization with each passing year, the conventions likewise increasingly dropped any suggestion that certain individuals conceived of the project as one of uplift, especially in light of the desertion of white abolitionists from the ACS during the 1830s. The published accounts of the convention delighted in these defections, noting that these former colonizationists “are now busily engaged in tearing down the MONUMENT they assisted in erecting.” Within just a few years, the conventions’ tone had changed from assuming that the society contained many friends to insisting that the constituent members had been duped by the insidious founders who kept their evil plans a closely guarded secret. Committees were formed to correspond with the figurehead vice-presidents of the ACS—positions created for men of national note without much regard for their actual opinions on colonization or dedication to the movement—to ascertain their opinion of the ACS and inform the officers of African Americans’ estimation of the society. In 1832, when Gurley spoke before the convention “with a view, as he said, of removing some erroneous impression in the minds of the people of color,” he was challenged by several convention delegates and William Lloyd Garrison. Needless to say, the convention widely disagreed with Gurley’s contention: “We have been told in this Convention Society, that there are causes which forbid our advancement in this

country, which no humanity, no legislation and no religion can control. Believe it not.”³⁷⁸ But even as the ubiquitous denunciations of the ACS and colonization filled the report of each convention with increasingly acerbic tones, their descriptions of the group transitioning from describing it as a misplaced idea attractive to reforming whites to denouncing it as a wolf in sheep’s clothing, there remained a curious omission from these elite back communiques: Liberia and Liberians. For all of the ink dedicated to decrying the white leadership of the ACS, the black convention leaders often found themselves tiptoeing around the actual colony and its settlers.

The 1833 report on colonization, for example, even as it crowed about former colonizationists turning on the Society, briefly conceded one point before continuing its denunciation of the ACS. “The only exception to the rule is,” the report noted, “those who are receiving an education, or preparing themselves for some profession, at the expense of the society.” As an organization dedicated to black uplift, the convention could denounce colonization, but had to make exceptions for those settlers who were acquiring educational uplift through the society. This was not an abstract problem. By the 1830s the settlers had wrested concessions from the ACS and established a place for themselves in the governance of the colony, others were securing training on behalf of the society to administer the bureaucracy of the colony, and still others were traveling the states stumping on behalf of the colonization societies and freeing family members from bondage. Indeed, the convention goes in 1832 who remained until the final session became intimately acquainted with the figure of the traveling Liberian settler as “Mr. J. C. Morel introduced Major Barbour of Liberia to the Convention.” What the delegates and Barbour discussed was not recorded in the minutes; this is especially

³⁷⁸ *Constitution of the American Society of Free Persons of Colour*, 10; *Minutes and Proceedings of the Third Annual Convention, for the Improvement of the Free People of Colour in these United States* (New York: 1833), 9, 27, 35; *Minutes and Proceedings of the Second Annual Convention*, in Bell, 9, 27, 35.

unfortunate given that Barbour arrived at the same convention that so resoundingly rejected Gurley's arguments on behalf of the ACS.³⁷⁹

Barbour would have presented an intriguing contrast to the convention, simultaneously encapsulating the hope and tragedy of Liberian settlement. Originally from Petersburg, Virginia, James C. Barbour had emigrated to Liberia as a young man with his mother and nine siblings in 1824.³⁸⁰ While the younger children enrolled in school in the colony, James and the older siblings found social, political, and economic success there. Eventually, James became a major of the colonial militia, was elected vice agent of the colony in 1835, and possessed a fine stone house on Broad Street in Monrovia. In the same year he was elected vice agent of the colony, the *African Repository* published Beverly R. Wilson's address to the free people of color in the United States. Wilson, visiting Norfolk, Virginia before his return to Liberia, held up Barbour, along with Anthony Williams and Joseph J. Roberts, as exemplars of the possibilities of Liberian relocation for creating paths parallel with those of elite whites in the United States. Liberia's "facilities held out for a comfortable living rarely equaled; industry and economy are sure to be rewarded and crowned with a generous competency, for proof of which I cite you to a Williams, to a Roberts, to a Barbour,--and to a number of others, who, a few years ago, possessed very limited means, but who now live all the affluence and style, which characterize the wealthy merchant and gentleman of Virginia."³⁸¹ In many regards, Barbour represented the potentiality of Liberia. Much of that lay in the future in 1832 for James, however, and even as James found his fortunes greatly elevated in the colony, the remainder of the large Barbour family struggled.

³⁷⁹ *Minutes and Proceedings of the Third Annual Convention*, in Bell, 26; *Minutes and Proceedings of the Second Annual Convention*, in Bell, 30

³⁸⁰ Marie Tyler-McGraw identifies him as James B. Barbour. See Tyler-McGraw, 145.

³⁸¹ "Latest from Liberia," *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 12, no. 1 (January 1836), 31; W. Hutton, "Mr. Hutton's Letter," *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 13, no. 5 (May 1837): 160-161; Beverly R. Wilson, "To the Free Coloured People of the United States," *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 11, no. 8 (August 1835): 245.

Agnes, James's mother and the matriarch of the clan, died of "decline" in 1828. William Barbour drowned in the same year; another sibling passed away two years later from a "deranged brain." During the same trip to the United States in which he visited the convention, Barbour also discussed the colony with a Virginia colonizationist who was dissatisfied with the results of the talk.³⁸² The decimation of the Barbour family would have reinforced most African Americans' beliefs that the colony was a deathtrap and found a receptive audience at the Philadelphia convention. Yet, Barbour himself was apparently not so disgruntled with his own opportunities in the colony as he returned to Liberia and enjoyed a distinguished political and military career there. And the recorded introduction of "Major Barbour" to the convention is equally intriguing. As noted in chapter five, Liberians embraced the martial airs that distinguished their civilized outpost from surrounding barbarian hordes. These positions of honor—official officer ranks in the colonial militia along with their uniforms—were jealously guarded by Liberian settlers. Did Barbour introduce himself to the convention as an officer of the Liberian military establishment or demand that he be recorded as such? If so, it suggests the extent to which martial glory was a critical element for Liberians' self-defined "civilizing" mission. Of course, the use of military rank instead of proper name by the convention proceedings may reflect the delegates' desire to highlight black achievement. Not until Martin Delany also received a commission as Major in 1865 would a man of African descent acquire a similar military officer rank in the United States military. Conversely, it would have been remarkably hypocritical of the convention to capitalize on the elevating possibilities of Liberian emigration while simultaneously denouncing colonization as a secret pro-slavery plot and calling for African Americans to soundly reject the ACS. It is also intriguing that in the year after Gurley's defense of colonization and Barbour's last-minute introduction to the convention, the convention delegates approved a report on

³⁸² Tyler-McGraw, 145.

colonization that made an exception for those settlers reaping educational benefits from the colony. Barbour embodied both the tragedy of Liberian emigration experienced by many settlers and also the possibilities that relocation provided. In that complexity lay problems for African American opponents of the ACS. Denouncing the colonization movement and its white supporters was a relatively straightforward affair, but what to do about the Barbours, the McGills, the Roberts, or the Fletchers who utilized Liberian emigration as a means to catapult themselves upward into white society? Regardless of the desires of colonization leaders or their opinions of people of African descent, the agency of this assuredly elite settler class could not be dismissed—and should not be discounted by historians. Focusing too heavily upon the Euro-American leadership of the ACS ignores the contributions of these individuals who forced the hand of the ACS to create a settler colonial bureaucracy and demanded access to educational and economic opportunities within the United States.

The figure of a successful Liberian settler was a significant threat for those determined to battle for rights within the United States. Not only did settler success undermine the narrative of the duped and impoverished settler, but the possibility that the colony could attract the brightest minds and create a “brain drain” from among the African American population worried advocates of black uplift. Frederick Douglass made this point in a letter to Harriet Beecher Stowe, written in 1853 during a period of expanded emigrationist plans, that was also presented to the national convention that year. Douglass was especially concerned that the most-educated of America’s free black population would increasingly look overseas for intellectual opportunities. “It would see that education and emigration go together with us; for as soon as a man rises amongst us, capable, by his genius and learning, to do us great service, just so soon finds that he can serve himself better by going elsewhere. In proof of this, I might instance the Russwurms—the Garnetts—the Wards—the Crummells and others.” Seeking better personal

opportunities abroad, in Liberia for Russwurm, Crummell, and (in the last weeks of his life) Garnet, in Great Britain, Canada, and Jamaica for Samuel Ward, these educated free men of color did a disservice to the broader African American community by robbing it of its best and brightest. Even heroes of the anti-colonization cause were not immune. Samuel Cornish, Russwurm's former editorial partner from *Freedom's Journal*, especially drove home this point when he came onboard as an editor for *The Colored American*. When Thomas C. Brown, a former Liberian settler who disappointedly returned to the United States, gave a public interview regarding the pitfalls of Liberian emigration, he became an instant celebrity among abolitionists. It was his answer to the question of "mulatto" children born in the colony that had drew jeers from the pro-colonization audience members. Brown, however, remained discontented with the United States and next tried relocating to Jamaica. *The Colored American* published a letter of Brown's extolling Jamaica's virtues, and editor Cornish reaffirmed his belief in Brown's "noble" spirit. He then continued, "we contend that we have among us those who are MORE NOBLE STILL. One thing Brother Brown lackest; he should not count his life dear unto himself, but *stay in our midst*... Here is the spot. On this rock should we build, and if needs be, die martyrs to principle. No colored man, possessing the talent and soul of Thomas C. Brown, should leave the country." Cornish followed this up six months later with a denunciation of what he called the philosophy of "taking care of no. 1." This "unholy principle" led free blacks in the South to become slaveholders, retarded the social and political advances of African Americans broadly, and deterred black monetary contributions to philanthropic societies. Russwurm, of course, was Cornish's first example of this principle, a veritable traitor to people of color. "It is this Rock upon which we have always split. 'Take care of No. ONE' carried Mr. Russwurm to Liberia: it

made Arnold sell his country, and it has plunged the South into all the guilt and shame of a cruel system of slavery.”³⁸³

Of course, these accusations against individuals emerged in the 1840s and 1850s with Russwurm being an especially favorite target. But in the earlier decades, elite African American opponents of colonization largely ignored the colony of Liberia in favor of denouncing the society’s white leadership. Indeed, during that time period the only other notation regarding Liberians from the convention minutes, aside from the 1832 arrival of Barbour and the 1833 exemption made for settlers receiving educational training from the colonization societies, was in 1834, in which a committee was formed to correspond with settlers “to use every means for ascertaining the true situation of our brethren there colonized, how many are desirous to return to this country, but are prevented for want of means.” Apparently the duties of this committee were underperformed, as the following year it was reestablished with the new addendum to also locate settlers “who may have considered themselves deluded by the American Colonization Society.” The adjustment in language—transitioning from an inspection of colonial society and settlers desirous of returning home to an inquisition of settlers believing themselves deceived by the Euro-American ACS leadership—reflects the conventions’ desires to keep the onus of their anti-colonization rhetoric centered on the ACS leadership instead of the settlers themselves.³⁸⁴

This intellectual separation of the colony and settlers from the society that spawned it is a common motif amongst the writings of black elites. William Whipper, a driving force in the early convention movement, eulogized William Wilberforce in 1833 by praising the British abolitionists’ opposition to colonization as the “*arch enemy* of liberty” and “Protean disciple of his Satanic majesty.” Yet, Wilberforce battled the colonization *movement* “notwithstanding he

³⁸³ *Proceedings of the Colored National Convention*, in Bell, 35; “Thomas C. Brown,” *New York The Colored American*, July 15, 1837; “Take Care of Number One!” *New York The Colored American*, January 27, 1838.

³⁸⁴ *Minutes of the Fourth Annual Convention*, in Bell, 12-17; *Minutes of the Fifth Annual Convention for the Improvement of the Free People of Colour in the United States*, in *Minutes of the Proceedings of the National Negro Conventions, 1830-1864*, ed. Howard Holman Bell (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969), 6.

loved the colony of Liberia, and the civilization of Africa.”³⁸⁵ Robert Purvis’s tongue was far sharper than Whipper’s when he included a denunciation of colonization in his own eulogy of a Philadelphia reformer:

What has your expatriating plan effected in the carrying out of its purposes, nefarious as farcical, viz. the removal to *their native country, of those who were born in America?* Nothing, nothing. Tired of detraction and abuse at home, you made allurements great, and temptation strong, to deceive and cheat the weary pilgrim of many sorrows. You were ready to dub us Governors, Majors, Colonels, Sheriffs, & c. & c. all to no avail. The approval of the people of color to your measures, could not be obtained; for, if that were done, Colonizationism, instead of being nearly extinct, would now be eloquent on many tongues; and missionary Liberia, Temperance Palmas, Spiritualizing Bassa Cove, Quaker Edina, and a host of Pennsylvanias, New Yorks, Marshalls, Marylands, and last though not least, Port or Fort Cresson, (in the language of him, whose name the latter place will immortalize,) would be “in most glorious and successful operation.” Oh! When I think of these men, and their Liberia, forgive me, when I say, if I hate not them, I do hate their diabolical schemes, with a refined, a perfect hatred....I would not wish to be understood, as having the most remote desire to denounce any part of God’s created world, yet Liberia, (if you please, in the abstract,) as she is held out as the only appropriate home for the colored people of this country...I cannot but anathematize.³⁸⁶

This quote contains many of the elements of free black opposition to colonization and suggests, along with Whipper’s eulogy of Wilberforce, the main thrusts of African American anti-colonization propaganda during the 1830s. Purvis mocks the spatial logic of colonization, denounces the appeal of high-ranking societal positions unavailable to African Americans within the United States, ridicules the reformist traditions that undergirded several of the Liberian settlements, underlines the violence, oppression, and warfare of the colony (“Port or Fort Cresson”), and concludes with broader denunciation of the entire enterprise. Yet, although seemingly said with a smirk, Purvis hates Liberia “in the abstract” instead of the material space.

³⁸⁵ William Whipper, *Eulogy on William Wilberforce, Esq.: Delivered at the Request of the People of Colour of the City of Philadelphia in the Second African Presbyterian Church, on the Sixth Day of December, 1833* (Philadelphia: William P. Gibbons), 28.

³⁸⁶ Robert Purvis, *A Tribute to the Memory of Thomas Shipley, the Philanthropist* (Philadelphia: Matthew and Gunn, 1836), 14-15.

Once again the brunt of the harangue is placed on the Euro-American colonizationists who “deceive and cheat” to bring settlers to their colony. Purvis makes this point literally clear by using the phrase, “Oh! When I think of these men, and *their* [emphasis mine] Liberia.” Liberia could only be denounced as an abstract surrogate for the colonization movement; what existed of it on *terra firma* must be portrayed as filled with former slaves relocated without choice and unfortunate free people of color duped there by deceivers who lacked the necessary capacity to return to the United States.

Of course, exceptions existed. One of the most scornful diatribes against the Americo-Liberian settlers graced the pages of *Freedom’s Journal* in 1828. Senior editor Samuel Cornish remained firm in his opposition to colonization throughout his life despite his son’s emigration to Liberia;³⁸⁷ junior editor Russwurm was still a year away from his public endorsement of colonization. Thus, the pages of the first African American owned and operated newspaper were still fertile grounds in which to oppose the colonization movement. An unsigned editorial appeared on the third page of the January 25 edition responding to the publication of a “Liberian Circular” printed in the pages of the *African Repository* the December before. That circular,

³⁸⁷ This relocation caused Cornish a bit of consternation in 1848 when his son took over as head teacher of school sponsored by the Ladies Association of Baltimore at Cape Palmas under the supervision of Russwurm. Cornish received word from his son that his wages were meager, thus leading the protective father to write to the MSCS to request assistance in dispatching trunks of clothing and goods to the settlement and increasing his son’s wages. In contradiction to his public persona of colonization’s stringent opponent, Cornish found himself awkwardly requesting aid from the society against which he had railed for nearly three decades. Russwurm changed from a Benedict Arnold looking out for “Number One” to “my old friend and brother.” The white agent of the MSCS, James Hall, to whom Cornish wrote was not a veiled supporter of slavery, but rather a “Dear brother” possessing a “high character and Christian principle.” While his son’s troubles financial problems would have certainly reinforced the image of an impoverished colony in Cornish’s mind, he also added that his son “speaks of the country and of the people in the highest terms.” Perhaps this was simply a line to ensure assistance from the colonizationists, but it strikes at the familial tensions that certainly arose within the Cornish household when his son elected to emigrate. Cornish also inadvertently highlighted one of the reasons that Liberian emigration appealed to certain free people of color in the slave states, and it unsurprisingly centered on mobility. Cornish needed such great assistance in dispatching goods to his son from Baltimore because he did not want to go to Baltimore personally. “I have never been so far South as your city,” he explained to Hall, “and I acknowledge from all that I have heard I am afraid [sic] to come. I never have had a free paper and have never intended to get one—otherwise I certainly should have come on to Baltimore to see Mrs. Russwurm when she was there. I am accustomed to travel every where I go without proscription and the idea [of] traveling under any other circumstance is a painful one.” No doubt, the McGills of Baltimore would have agreed. See Samuel Cornish to James Hall, 20 March 1848, MSCS; Samuel Cornish to James Hall, 27 March 1848, MSCS; Samuel Cornish to James Hall, 30 April 1848, MSCS.

penned by a community-appointed committee of settlers which included George McGill and Barbour, was an address to the people of color of the United States that attempted to dispel the “many misrepresentations...of a nature slanderous to *us*, and in their effects injurious to *them*.” Regardless of the lack of *direct* opposition against the settlers, the Liberians desired to contradict the overarching African American narrative. This is clear once they begin to list their corrections: “The first consideration which caused our *voluntary* [again, emphasis mine] removal to this country...is liberty.” After emphasizing that they did not arrive in Liberia as the dupes of whites, the settlers continued on to declare the West African coast healthy for those who survived the initial bout of fever, agriculturally fruitful, and economically viable. The response from *Freedom’s Journal* was swift and pointed. To their “friends of Liberia,” the author or authors of the unsigned editorial again affirmed their determination to remain in the United States and continue the fight against slavery. Liberty, they thought, was a great thing, “but we were not aware that its value was superior in Liberia.” From there, in a rare diversion from other elite critiques of colonization of the period, the editorial turned on both the ideology undergirding colonization and the colonists themselves, ridiculing their small numbers and evidence presented in the circular regarding how they perceived of their African liberty: “Having laws of their own, and judges chosen from among their learned and enlightened *hundreds* are subjects of the greatest self-gratification to our Liberian friends.” The colony must be a fairyland, they mused, for its seemingly magical abilities to transform America’s degraded into such learned and respected civil officers. Finally, the editorial provided a theory as to why Liberian settlers believed they had escaped the “debasement inferiority” of American racial castes. “Half civilized themselves, with learning enough to render them conceited; in the midst of beings still

more uncivilized; can we wonder that they meet with nothing to make them sensible of the least inferiority?”³⁸⁸

Such direct assaults on the civilization of the settlers themselves were relatively uncommon. It is telling that it was a communication from a committee of settlers directly aimed at dispelling the overarching African American narrative regarding Liberia that sparked such a direct and pointed criticism. So long as Liberian settlers were victims tricked into relocating to an unhealthy environment, they could be disregarded as critical agents in the movement while the Euro-American colonizationists received the brunt of the fervor. But once the settlers challenged this narrative and asserted their own actions in propagating colonization, African American opponents of colonization leveled their assaults against the literal colonial space and not just the abstract. Ironically, this became a necessity at the exact moment in which Liberia could most easily support arguments regarding African American intellectual capacity: when it became an independent republic.

Although several colonial governors had originated from the settler ranks, it was the Liberian Declaration of Independence, signed July 16, 1847, that delivered a critical blow to the argument that the settlers were deceived by the ACS. Without the direct control of the ACS managers in the States, it became difficult although not impossible to maintain the narrative of an abstract colonial space subservient to white demands. It is incredibly suggestive that of the twelve national conventions that met before the Civil War, the only one that did not include a single mention of Liberia or a denunciation of colonization in the published minutes was the 1847 meeting. And Liberia was likewise omitted from the reports of William Cooper Nell regarding the convention that graced the pages of Frederick Douglass’s *The North Star*. Nell concluded his account with the declaration “We shall not be transported,” but the statement

³⁸⁸ “Address of the Colonists to the Free People of Colour in the U. S.,” *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 3, no. 10 (December 1827): 300-307; “Liberian Circular,” *New York Freedom’s Journal*, January 25, 1828.

seems to arise from his own editorial voice rather than an official rendering of the meeting.³⁸⁹ Certainly, colonization and Liberia had to be topics of conversation amongst the delegates, but such references are absent from all official reports. Implicitly, the delegates needed to reevaluate this new development and plot a new course of attack.

One approach was simply to deny that the African republic was truly independent. The pages of *The North Star* informed its readers that the new government could not be regarded by people of African descent as “making much progress onward—not even a respectable semblance of progress, while its heads and chief men, continue to beg the notice of American Colonizationists and slaveholders.” Also noting the independence of Liberia, that “creature of Colonization,” in the pages of *The North Star*, Martin Delany applauded the political move of the infantile republic “provided she is determined to exist without a *master* and *overseer*.” Delany soon became disenchanted with the Liberian leadership’s continued close relations with colonizationists in the United States, and they bore the brunt of Delany’s disdain. After an official state visit to Europe by President Joseph J. Roberts to wrestle official recognition of Liberian independence, secure pecuniary aid, and receive military assistance to drive out slave traders in the newly-acquired territory of New Cesters, Roberts sat down to write Anson G. Phelps, a prominent New England colonizationist, regarding the fruits of his labors. The letter was published in the thirty-second annual report of the ACS as evidence of the respect and courtesy Roberts had received from European heads of state. Delany seems to have taken offense to Roberts’ tone as he closed the letter, “I have not time, dear sir, to write another letter; I beg, therefore, that you will inform the Rec. Messrs. McLain, Pinney and Tracy and Mr. Cresson of my doings in Europe....When I reach home, the Lord willing, I will send you and them a full account of my proceedings.” Instead of a private letter from a head of state to a friend, Delany

³⁸⁹ William C. Nell, “The Colored Convention,” *Rochester (NY) The North Star*, December 3, 1847.

interpreted the account as the official report of an underling. “Like the slave; ‘cap in hand, obedient to the commands of the dons who employ them,’ bidden on an errand of his master, President Roberts no sooner concludes the business of his mission...but he writes to A. G. Phelps...giving him an official report of his proceedings as the Minister of Liberia, an independent nation! If ever the curse of slavery were manifest in the character of man, it has fully exhibited itself in this man Roberts.” Delany expanded his metaphorical use of unfree labor systems by concluding that Roberts was simultaneously an American slave serving white masters and also a serf.³⁹⁰

In light of the racialized society evolving in Liberia, another intriguing response to Liberian independence aside from naming the government officials as the slaves of white masters was to argue that the Liberians had actually become the surrogates of whites themselves. As noted in Chapter five, the 1853 National Negro Convention adopted both strategies in a long report from its committee on colonization, chaired by James W. C. Pennington, which outlined the convention’s opposition to colonization through a history of the settling of Africa by European and American powers. Not only did the committee “demur” at the idea that Liberia was an independent nation freed from the reins of ACS leaders in the States, it was equally horrified at the violent means by which the Americo-Liberians had expanded their control into the African hinterland. The Liberians had joined with the Europeans in colonizing Africa for their own profits. The committee denounced such colonialism and decried Liberian involvement. “The Liberians justify and connive at all the encroachments of the white foreigners,” they announced, “Have we heard one word of remonstrance from these native whippers [the Liberians]? No....The truth is, the Liberians are in league with the worst enemies of Africa’s

³⁹⁰“Republic of Liberia,” *Rochester (NY) The North Star*, August 21, 1848; Martin Delany, “Editorial Correspondence,” *Rochester (NY) The North Star*, February 4, 1848; “Thirty-Second Annual Report of the American Colonization Society,” *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 25, no. 2 (February 1849): 43-45; Martin Delany, “Liberia,” *Rochester (NY) The North Star*, March 2, 1849.

dearest interest.”³⁹¹ Such evident conflation of Americo-Liberians with European whites is significant as it suggests other fields of exploration for African Americans’ overwhelming rejection of colonization. It is especially intriguing that in their long denunciation of colonization, the 1853 convention committee referenced the nearly two-decades-old 1827 Liberian circular, specifically the section regarding the ability of Americo-Liberians to “associate” with American whites “on terms of equality” established by their Liberian residence.³⁹²

The committee cast doubt on the African origins of this address due to its dismissal of those people of color who preferred American subjugation to Liberian liberty, believing instead that the circular’s wording originated with white editors in the United States. It was a remarkably strong declaration.

We solicit none of you to emigrate to this country; for we know not who among you prefers rational independence, and the honest respect of his fellow-men, to that mental sloth and careless poverty, which you already possess, and your children will inherit after you in America. But if your views and aspirations rise a degree higher—if your minds are not as servile as your present condition—we can decide the question at once; and with confidence say, that you will bless the day, and your children after you, when you determined to become citizens of Liberia.³⁹³

The phrasing could certainly have been altered through the editorializing of the *African Repository*. Conversely, as seen in previous chapters, statements by Liberian settlers washing their hands of intransigent African Americans who would not support the colony were not uncommon. Such ideas can even be found in the letters of settlers like Joshua Stewart, who writing nearly twenty years after his arrival in Liberia in 1834, admitted that he was initially daunted by problems with the colony. “But I have Braved thous dificulty &...now Sir, I am

³⁹¹ *Proceedings of the Colored National Convention*, in Bell, 55-56.

³⁹² *Proceedings of the Colored National Convention*, in Bell, 56-57; also in “Address of the Colonists to the Free People of Colour in the U. S.,” *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 3, no. 10 (December 1827): 301-302.

³⁹³ “Address of the Colonists to the Free People of Colour in the U. S.,” *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 3, no. 10 (December 1827): 301-302.

Ready to stand forth like a champion & defend the cause of my oppressed Brethren in Africa & etc. Where could the collard man in America feel what I injoy in Africa he would not stay their one day, but they have the Shadow, but not the substance.”³⁹⁴

And therein lies the rub. For the vast majority of African Americans, the socio-spatial argument of the colonizationists, the idea that the degraded of the States could be the awe of Africa, was ludicrous and laughable. More so, the colonial *space* of Liberia only seemed to offer death and continuation of the relations of power within the United States. Residence in Liberia could not equate to genuine liberty of the young republic’s officials still served at the beck and call of white colonizationists across the Atlantic. Those who willingly chose emigration to Liberia saw potential in this geographic argument to not make claims for black “civilization,” but to actually *perform* those actions: to chart their own maps, to receive education and conduct that profession, to wear the uniform of a high rank. Russwurm explicitly underscored the importance of performance when he publicly announced his change of heart regarding colonization to the readers of *Freedom’s Journal* in February 1829. “We ask every man of colour can any thing be more simple; here, is a land in which we cannot enjoy the privileges of citizen, for certain reasons known and felt daily; but there, is one where we may enjoy all the rights of freemen...in a word, where we may not only feel as men, but where we may also act as such.” As James Sidbury notes, Liberia offered a space in which African Americans could be more fully American, but this performance of “Americanness” shaped the racial hierarchy of Liberia.³⁹⁵

For the Africans of Liberia, settlers becoming “Americans” by moving beyond the boundaries of the United States was identified as acting in the “white man’s fash,” literally becoming white in Africa. Such was not the intent of the settlers when they relocated to Liberia; these were not ashamed blacks who wished they were white. Yet, in their determination to

³⁹⁴ Joshua H. Stewart to Moses Sheppard, 12 April 1852, MSP.

³⁹⁵ John B. Russwurm, “Liberia,” *New York Freedom’s Journal*, February 21, 1829; Sidbury, 201.

elevate themselves to the rank of citizen and full participation in the political, social, and economic spheres of a nation-state, the settlers found this toolkit of whiteness useful in their calls upon colonizationists and Euro-Americans to respect and support their elevated status in Africa. Beyond the settlers' dress, religion, urban planning, language, literacy (for some), and cultural practices defined by Africans as "white man's fash," their determination to control black bodies, self-conceptualization of an isolated outpost of civilization surrounded by black barbarity, and willingness to use violence to secure that labor and hold back the hordes created whiteness in the African space. That the Africans constructed the settlers as whites throws these constituent elements of whiteness into starker relief and underscores the effects of mobility upon whiteness and the broader construction of race in history.

The historical development of race in Liberia suggests the necessity of addressing whiteness as a "transnational force." What does it mean that the performative actions that denoted citizenship within the United States denoted whiteness in West Africa? And that, regardless of their explanations, these denizens of the nineteenth-century were intimately aware of this transformative whiteness? Even if few embraced this definition of whiteness based upon performance and action to the same degree as Moses Sheppard, those who read the incalculable number of reports regarding life in Liberia were aware that race as understood by most Americans was altered there.

Of course, that there were men like Sheppard within the colonizationist ranks was crucial for the settlers' ability to make demands upon Euro-Americans to support their African uplift. Even for those who did not fully embrace Sheppard's racial understanding that "freedom and independence make a white man, not colour," certain colonizationists conceived of the project as more directed towards black uplift than others.³⁹⁶ The settlers were certainly aware of the

³⁹⁶ Moses Sheppard to William Polk, 14 March 1836, MSP.

divisions within the colonization ranks and directed their requests and correspondence accordingly. It was not just simply their positions within the Societies that led to a preponderance of correspondence from Liberians to be directed to Sheppard, Gurley, Elliott Cresson, and Benjamin Coates; these were the colonizationists most committed to fulfilling the message of elevation after emigration and they conducted far more correspondence with Liberian settlers than, say, Henry Clay or Francis Scott Key. Such targeted correspondence reminds us to recognize the role that African American settlers had in shaping the colonization movement. In addition to debating the relative inherency of anti- or pro-slavery sentiment within the Euro-American membership of the ACS, we need also remember that it was McGill who first initiated contact to secure a medical degree, Hance who initially asked for assistance in freeing his family from bondage in Maryland, and Harris who first inquired about the state of affairs regarding African American travel in his native Tennessee. Repeatedly, Liberians called colonizationists in the United States to task to actually support their own spatially-based ideology, and they were savvy correspondents who knew where to direct their letters.

Which is why McGill and so many Liberian settlers disdained abolitionists' focus on the ACS leadership. It was more important to recognize that certain colonizationists would work towards African American uplift through their "once separate, equal" ideology and materially support *that* cause than to focus on the entire multifaceted movement as a whole which also included opponents of black equality. Despite the rhetoric, the Liberian settlers were certainly not the dupes of white colonizationists and were intimately aware of these divisions within the movement. Of course, they clearly favored those colonizationists who were committed to uplift and were critical of the continued presence of other members less enamored with black social mobility and notified their friends in the states that these members hurt Liberia. In 1840, Russwurm informed ACS agent Samuel Wilkeson, "Were all who call themselves

Colonizationists, actuated by a right spirit, how different would now be the face of things in Africa.—their earnest desire would have not only to transport the people of color across the Atlantic, but to have made their home, in their fatherland, an inviting asylum.” Samuel McGill made a similar distinction between colonizationists of “a right spirit”—such phrasing resonates with Bruce Dain’s twenty-first century descriptor “sincere colonizationists”—and the remainder of the movement in regards to Gurley whom he met in 1849 when Gurley toured the newly independent nation. Gurley, McGill thought, was “not only a friend to colonization, but a friend to my race.” Even more intriguing than McGill’s summation of Gurley’s commitment to the cause was his summation of a “Mr. Webb,” an African American from New York, who had come out to examine the infant republic. “He is one of those who has to abide the abuse of the both abolitionist and colonizationist. He desires the emancipation of his race in the states as much as any one can, and yet has no disposition to remain there to engage in the war of words by which it is to be effected. He is composed of the right material for our colonies at present.”³⁹⁷ It is fascinating that McGill transitions from Webb’s liminal position between the abolitionist and colonizationist camps to a declaration that Webb is the sort of material needed in Liberia. McGill’s sentence structure suggests that while Webb’s unwillingness to fight for abolition within the states leads to his denunciation from abolitionists, his dedication to ending slavery leads colonizationists to dismiss him. Again, there is clear recognition that not all colonizationists were cut from the same cloth as Gurley or Sheppard, but their presence in the organization and the ability of the Liberian settlers to hold all colonizationists accountable for their ideological elevation of the relocated African American was the critical lynchpin that fostered the support of men like Russwurm and McGill.

³⁹⁷ John B. Russwurm to Samuel Wilkeson, 4 January 1840, ACS; Samuel F. McGill to Moses Sheppard, 16 October 1849, MSP.

These Liberians, then, reveled in the gray world of exoticized foreignness that provided them with access to previously unimagined opportunities. For colonizationists of “a right spirit,” only through separation could uplift or equality be achieved. The colonizationists of New York City argued that Liberian emigration offered the *only* pathway to equality in a series of declarations in 1835: “That the Colonization in Africa of our free people of colour, tends to the immediate and essential improvement of their condition; that is in fact the only method by which they can be raised to political and social equality with the whites.” The *African Repository* likewise gleefully reprinted a letter from Henry Duncan, the Scottish minister and founder of the first commercial savings bank, to the *Dumfries and Galloway Courier* defending the colonization movement in the wake of the 1833 anti-colonization rally in London. For Duncan, rather than deepening the chasm between whites and blacks in the States, colonization, in fact, actually ameliorated racial tensions. Referring to the role of Liberia in providing opportunities for uplift, Duncan concluded, “Let but a small portion of them [people of African descent] become civilized, intelligent, and influential, and from that small portion of respectability will be diffused over the whole mass—increase that portion and you will increase the respectability, till it become a matter not of doubtful theory, but of strong demonstration, that the black man stands naturally on an equality with his white brother in mental powers as well as in moral feeling, and has therefore a right to demand an equality of privileges and of station.”³⁹⁸ Having followed the prescription of colonizationists and removed themselves as threats to a purely Euro-American body politic in the United States, Liberian settlers demanded recognition from those colonizationists. Delany did not pay any attention to the conclusion of Roberts’ letter to Phelps that so outraged him, but it suggests what Liberians found attractive about their potential in this Atlantic exchange. Roberts signed his letter:

³⁹⁸ “Report,” *Proceedings of the Colonization Society of the City of New York, at Their Third Annual Meeting*, 14; “The Protest,” *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 9, no. 10 (December 1833): 295.

I beg that you will remember me kindly to all your family. Say to Messrs. Dodge, Stokes, Altenburg, and your son Anson, that I can never forget their kindness to me during my stay in New York. I shall entertain a grateful remembrance of them as long as I live. I am also under lasting obligations to your dear daughters.³⁹⁹

This simple ending of a letter to a colleague strikes at the heart of this Liberian narrative and the need to frame colonization within an Atlantic world of mobility (at least in potentiality if not actuality). Too often, colonization and Liberian emigration has been interpreted as a one-directional terminus. As noted in the national conventions and accounts of Liberia published by opponents of colonization, a recurring fear among free people of color regarding colonization was the belief that once they arrived in Africa, colonial authorities would endeavor to prevent their return to the United States.⁴⁰⁰ Colonizationists were certainly aware of these commonly-held beliefs. For this reason, the managers of the MSCS were most distraught to observe a permit granted to Alexander Hance upon his return to the States to secure his family's freedom. As the Liberian colonies were especially cash-strapped, those few moneyed settlers in position to serve as creditors were fearful of their debtors leaving the country without settling their accounts. The government of Maryland in Liberia seems to have rectified this dilemma by having the assistant agent issue permits certifying those who wished to leave the colony as being free from debt, much to the chagrin of the managers. Recognizing that the "dread among many colored persons in Maryland is, that if they go to Africa they will not be permitted to return," the board ordered the practice stopped. They informed Russwurm, "Emigration from Africa to Am:[erica] should be on the same footing as emigration from America."⁴⁰¹ These colonizationists certainly understood the significance of this transatlantic exchange between colony and the United States.

³⁹⁹ "Thirty-Second Annual Report of the American Colonization Society," *African Repository and Colonial Journal*, 45.

⁴⁰⁰ The published transcript of a public questioning of returned settler Thomas C. Brown organized by the American Anti-Slavery Society, for example, almost immediately turned to this line of questioning: "How much more did they charge to bring you back than to carry you out?"; "Was there any opposition made to your coming away?" See *Examination of Mr. Thomas C. Brown*, 8-10.

⁴⁰¹ John H. B. Latrobe to John B. Russwurm, 24 October 1837, MSCS.

While the colony was certainly sickly and impoverished and, thus, presented obstacles to uninhibited Atlantic mobility, it also opened opportunities for previously unattainable relationships within the United States for those settlers best poised to demand and secure them.

It was those most able to take advantage of the exotic foreignness of civilized Liberian residence who secured these advantageous transatlantic relations. Their African whiteness and colonizationist rhetoric provided them with the resources to lay claim to the mantle of “civilization” while in the United States; the masculine work of creating civilization from barbaric blackness combined with the educational necessities of a governmental bureaucracy gave men greater opportunities for enjoying many of the performative elements of whiteness even as they often eschewed calling themselves “white” while in the United States. The settlers’ whiteness was a product of their African home, and they were aware of the constraints placed on bringing that racial identity back to the United States. Not that they necessarily wanted to do so. Again, it must be reaffirmed that these were not blacks who wanted to be white. However, they did find their African whiteness a useful and obvious tool to establish their elevated credentials, its utility framed by its jarring role-reversal for American audiences. For all of Samuel Wilkeson’s qualifying statements regarding the “degrees” of civilization on the African continent, he still found whiteness the most useful tool in describing Liberian society: “The Liberian is certainly a great man, and what is more, by the natives he is considered a white man.”⁴⁰²

Since such racial constructions within this “in-between” space provided the settlers with opportunities, it is unsurprising that so many of the greatest practitioners of this racial shape shifting—McGill, Russwurm, Roberts—were individuals of mixed ancestry usually categorized as “mulattoes.” With an existence already structured around racial liminality, these individuals

⁴⁰² Wilkeson, 45.

were further buttressed by the racialized assumptions of Euro-Americans who perceived them as elevated above the “purely black”; it is little wonder that the colonial administrations put into place by the colonization societies were heavily skewed to include settlers of mixed ancestry within their ranks. In a society in which government employment offered the steadiest means to a stable income, this became a self-fulfilling prophecy as these individuals used their government salaries to secure greater status. The relationship between “mulatto” and “black” developed as common query when discussing elite Americo-Liberians. When he visited the Republic of Liberia a few short years before the American Civil War, Alexander Cowan of Kentucky’s colonization auxiliary sat down with the Roberts family to discuss the planned construction of the new Liberia College for which Roberts would likewise serve as its first president. “I was much pleased with my social interview with the family. The husband and wife are bright mulattoes, especially the wife. I use the term with no disrespect. It is used to meet the often enquiry when speaking of persons in Liberia as to their standing, are they black or mulattoes?”⁴⁰³ Although many settlers found their African whiteness useful in certain situations regardless of their respective genealogies—Dempsey Fletcher, of “pure African” descent, being only the most obvious example—the mixed-ancestry elites of the colony were often the best poised and most skilled group able to cause that “colored” designation that so plagued Robert Purvis and Robert McDowall to evaporate. Purvis could not work within an organization, the ACS, which contained members who had done significant harm to the reputations of free people of color within the United States; McDowall saw avenues to accomplish his goals utilizing the personal connections of other members of that same organization.

⁴⁰³ Cowan, 160. Marie Tyler-McGraw likewise argues that “self-selected” mixed-race emigrants, usually freeborn, who chose to relocate to Liberia were motivated by different factors from other Liberian settlers. Their separation from the “white body politic” while obviously being connected to the “white body physical” offered this group hope for the place in the newly established American republic. These hopes, however, were gradually dashed in the early republic by legislation that curtailed their liberties and diminished their options. Tyler-McGraw argues that the majority of early emigrant families from Virginia were drawn from this class due to their frustration with the racialized progression of American jurisprudence and society. See Tyler-McGraw, 66-68.

To do that necessitated reveling in the murkiness and grays of the mobile Atlantic, and not everyone was willing to conceive of race as another exchangeable commodity. The 1855 national convention, the one following the great denunciation of colonization, Liberia, and the Americo-Liberians, underscored this unwillingness while ironically attempting to argue for a broader definition of who bore the brunt of white oppression within American society. Hoping to create a coalition in order to build institutions dedicated to mechanical sciences and business, the report of the Committee on Mechanical Branches during that convention affirmed, “As a people, we must understand that all that is not *white* is black, and all that is not *black* is white.” Even Martin Delany’s celebrated novel *Blake*, which was noted in the Introduction, was prone to think terms of black/white binaries.⁴⁰⁴

If Delany disliked the murkiness of the Atlantic and sought conclusive finality with a decisive “selection” of racialized identity, the Americo-Liberians were more interested in remaining in that ambiguous and ill-defined space. The most skilled practitioners were equally adept at utilizing their African whiteness and securing needed allies to secure their ends. Joseph Roberts was one these excellent practitioners. In 1844, governor Roberts toured the United States and spoke at the annual conventions of two state societies, Massachusetts and New York, which contained more members dedicated to African American uplift. The reports from these respective Societies regarding Roberts underscore the possibilities of Liberian emigration. The Massachusetts Society described Roberts: “This gentleman is a mulatto, with a highly intelligent countenance, and expressive eye, betokening him a man of talent. . . . He emigrated to Liberia from the vicinity of Petersburg, Va., when a boy, and received his education there, and may be considered of colony culture and growth.” Relocation had transformed one of the numerous

⁴⁰⁴ *Proceedings of the Colored National Convention, Held in Franklin Hall, Sixth Street, Below Arch, Philadelphia* (Salem, NJ: National Standard, 1856), *Minutes of the Proceedings of the National Negro Conventions, 1830-1864*, ed. Bell, 18.

Petersburg “mulatto” youths into an exotic example of “colony culture:” foreign, “civilized,” intelligent, and respectable. This performance was repeated in New York, whose colonizationists recorded, “Governor Roberts, a slightly colored gentleman of good appearance, being introduced, made some interesting statements, respecting an exploring tour he had recently made, in connexion with two or three white persons, and a number of colonists, into the interior.” Here, Roberts relates an account in which white individuals and black settlers jointly tour the savage African interior together in an exploring party. Again, the end result is to distinguish settler “civilization” in opposition to African savagery and to highlight the equal footing of “whites” and “blacks” in Liberia. Given this ideological framework, it is not surprising that the New York colonizationists determined that Roberts was only “slightly” colored. The descriptor perfectly encapsulates the result of these Liberian sojourns, whitening an individual into an indeterminate racial identity. If Roberts was not “white,” then he was only “slightly” not so. And these identities were forged in the constant transatlantic exchange between the United States and Liberia; these identities were predicated upon Roberts’s travels in the United States and his position of honor standing before the colonizationists as a testament of their colony’s capacity for improvement.⁴⁰⁵

In writing to an ACS official in Washington, D.C. in 1840, Russwurm warned the man that “your views cross the Atlantic,” underscoring the symbiotic relationship between Liberia and the United States. The building blocks of a western colony and young republic—the command of space, control of black bodies, the claims to possessing a besieged “civilization” surrounded by “barbarity,” the violence employed to uphold that “civilized” spot on the map, the neat renderings of the colonies on that map, the civil and military offices claimed by the settlers—all were ingredients in the African whiteness of the settlers, and parties on both sides of

⁴⁰⁵ “Massachusetts Colonization Society,” *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 20, no. 7 (July 1844): 213-214; “N. Y. State Colonization Society,” *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 20, no. 7 (July 1844): 215-216.

the Atlantic understood that racial alchemy occurred with each new expedition dispatched to Liberia. The question, then, hinged on how that African whiteness could cross the ocean and in what forms it could “return” to the United States. If the settlers understood the spatial confines of their whiteness in Africa, they also worked to secure the relationships necessary to occupy a liminal exotic and civilized blackness, not white but also not the blackness conceived in most whites’ minds in the antebellum United States. These were not men and women seeking to become whites, but having found themselves categorized as such by their African neighbors, many found these tools of whiteness useful in achieving their dreams in their returns to the United States. By laying claim to an exotic, but civilized, blackness ironically attained through African whiteness they secured previously unattainable educational attainments, freed family members from bondage, and traveled through with fewer hindrances and more options than other free people of color. A show of military might, an image of a tidy settlement surrounded by savage black bodies, the possession of a “plantation” complete with its “negro quarters,” an American colleague who notifies friends to treat a visitor “as a white man,” these were the little things of Liberia that combined to make great changes.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Ghana's tourism ministry found itself in the midst of a cultural predicament. Although many of the country's citizens remained poor with sparse or unreliable access to electricity or safe water, the West African nation 300 miles east of Liberia did enjoy a stable democratic government, economic growth, and broad support from abroad. Taking Israel as its model, the Ghanaian government hoped to instantiate itself as the African "homeland" for the global African Diaspora, encouraging people of African descent to vacation, retire, and invest in Ghana. The country laid the groundwork to begin offering special visas to the African Diaspora and relaxing citizenship requirements so that Diasporans could secure Ghanaian passports. Surviving sites of the Atlantic slave trade, Cape Coast Castle in particular, were placed at the forefront of these efforts to foster pan-African identity as spaces for healing, reconciliation, and memory. Unfortunately for the ministry's efforts, those Diasporans seeking a "return" to Ghana and Africa were often lumped together with visiting Europeans and white Americans and collectively called *oburoni* by Ghanaians. *Oburoni* may be translated as "someone born overseas," but it is most often translated as "white foreigner." Obviously, many Diasporans have been put off by this appellation as it emphasizes their foreignness from Africa at the same moment in which they are trying to establish an African identity; for Diasporans, it diminishes their claims to this African "home," a critical point made by the Ghanaian government to encourage their "return."⁴⁰⁶

Similarly to the Africans who encountered nineteenth-century African American settlers to Liberia, the Ghanaians do not necessarily use *oburoni* in derogatory manner, but rather as a

⁴⁰⁶ Lydia Polgreen "Ghana Wants Once-Enslaved Diaspora," *New York Times*, December 27, 2005; Katharina Schramm, *African Homecoming: Pan-African Ideology and Contested Heritage* (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2010), 142.

means of cultural differentiation. Much as nineteenth-century Liberian Africans used “white” and “countryman” to distinguish their cultural practices from those of the newcomers, so too do most Ghanaians assert the primacy of these practices over ancestry. Recognizing that race is a product of societies, these appellations are tools used by these West Africans to identify the cultural practices of the new arrivals from the Atlantic world and distinguish them from their own construction and self-identity of blackness. Hoping to increase the number of Diasporans “returning” to their Ghanaian “home,” the tourism ministry has introduced a new word for these Diasporans, *akwaaba anyemi*, to Ghanaians in hopes of changing the locals’ tongues. A neologism created from an amalgamation of the Twi and Ga languages, *akwaaba anyemi* awkwardly translates as “welcome, sibling”; few Ghanaians have used the new word to reference the visiting constituents of the Black Diaspora.⁴⁰⁷

It is not surprising that Ghana would lead the way in attempting to bring the African Diaspora “home.” Kwame Nkrumah, its first president after independence from Great Britain, had been a leading advocate of pan-Africanism. Nkrumah’s pan-Africanism was fueled by his American education at Lincoln University in Pennsylvania, one of the United States’ first historically black universities. Although the college adopted its name in 1866 following the presidency and assassination of Abraham Lincoln, it was actually established in 1853 as the Ashmun Institute, named in honor of Liberian governor Jehudi Ashmun. Founded by Presbyterians with an eye to producing African American missionaries, the Ashmun Institute was specifically organized to address “the wants of Liberia and the importance to its present and future welfare, of having suitably qualified men to fill its offices and posts of authority.” The academy’s first class of three students, two brothers, James and Thomas Amos, and one Liberian

⁴⁰⁷ Schramm, 142.

who had returned to the States for his education, Armistead Miller, were ordained as Presbyterian ministers in April 1859 and left for Liberia as missionaries one month later.⁴⁰⁸

The continued use of *oburoni* in the twenty-first century despite the government's best efforts, and the nineteenth-century origins of America's black university system in a college dedicated to sending educated officials to the Republic of Liberia, remind us to embrace the complexity of these mobile Atlantic societies. Settlers forced colonizationists to uphold bargains and make good on their rhetoric of black opportunity in Africa, and for certain colonizationists the fulfillment of those promises would have to begin and be continuously upheld in America. Liberia was not an end for many, but only a way station. The actions on one side of the ocean resonated on the other, often with unintended consequences. The Jeremiahs of unending racial conflict helped blaze a trail for previously unattainable African American educational advancements. John Brown Russwurm could write to his half-brother in 1834 that "color is nothing in Africa," and then fume in 1838 that the neighboring African leader did not conceive of him as a "proper man...meaning that I am not a proper white man." Black became white and then something else entirely. Benjamin Latrobe's son had an African houseguest with whom he toured Baltimore's Washington Monument. "Yellow Will" became William Hall. In the mind of a city planner, Emancipation Street could terminate in a well-designed fortification to protect civilization from the encircling barbarity that it was supposed to convert. When the founders of Ashmun Institute announced their plans for an institution of higher learning reserved solely for African American students, they explained the necessity of such a school in the United States. The arduous task of serving as missionaries and high officials in Africa necessitated advanced scholarly training, and as far as the trustees were concerned, that could only come from one source. "But they must be prepared for the work, they must be prepared in this country, they

⁴⁰⁸ "The Ashmun Institute" Broadside and "Ashmun Institute Trustee Record Book #1," both available via HBCU Library Alliance Digital Collection, <http://www.hbcudigitallibrary.auctr.edu>.

must be prepared by white men, and they must be prepared mainly at the expense of white men. These points we need not argue. If white men are to be their teachers, they must live here, and here are the means of support and proper oversight while they are engaged in this preparation.”⁴⁰⁹ Perhaps they did not grasp the irony that the exact same words could be said of Africans by the Liberian settlers in their African home.

⁴⁰⁹ “The Ashmun Institute ” Broadside.

Bibliography

Manuscript Collections

American Colonization Society Records. Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

The Diary, Correspondence, and Papers of Robert “King” Carter of Virginia, 1702-1732, Electronic Text Center, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, VA

Historically Black College or University Library Alliance Digital Collection

The Library Company, Philadelphia, PA

Major Collection, McLean County Museum of History, Bloomington, IL

Maryland State Colonization Society Papers, 1827-1871. Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore, MD

Moses Sheppard Papers. Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA

Records of the Dartmouth Medical School. Rauner Special Collections Library, Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH

Shelby Family Papers, University of Kentucky, Lexington, KY

Newspapers and Periodicals

African Repository and Colonial Journal (Washington, D.C.)

Baltimore Patriot & Mercantile Advertiser (MD)

The Colored American (New York, NY)

Connecticut Mirror (Hartford, CT)

Frederick Douglass' Paper (Rochester, NY)

Freedom's Journal (New York, NY)

The Liberator (Boston, MA)

Liberia Herald (Monrovia, Liberia)

Maryland Colonization Journal (Baltimore, MD)

New Bedford Mercury (New Bedford, MA)

New England Puritan (Boston, MA)

New York Times (New York, NY)

Norfolk Herald (Norfolk, VA)

The North Star (Rochester, NY)

Richmond Enquirer (Richmond, VA)

Salem Gazette (Salem, MA)

Trenton Federalist (Trenton, NJ)

True American (Lexington, KY)

Published Primary Sources

African Institution. *Barrow's Voyage to Cochinchina*. London: Ellerton and Henderson.

Allen, William G. *The American Prejudice Against Color*. London: W. and F. G. Cash, 1853.

Anonymous. *Claims of the African: or The History of the American Colonization Society*.
Boston: Massachusetts Sabbath School Union, 1832.

Anonymous. *The Trial of Reuben Crandall, M.D.* Washington, D.C., [1836].

Ashmun, Jehudi. *History of the American Colony in Liberia, from December 1821 to 1823*.
Washington, D.C.: Way & Gideon, 1826.

Bacon, David Francis. *Wanderings on the Seas and Shores of Africa*. Volume 1. New York:
Joseph H. Harrison, 1843.

Bacon, Ephraim. *Abstract of a Journal Kept by E. Bacon*. 4th ed. Philadelphia: Clark & Raser,
1824.

Bell, Howard Holman, ed. *Minutes of the Proceedings of the National Negro Conventions, 1830-
1864*. New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969.

Birney, James G. *Letter on Colonization: Addressed to the Rev. Thornton J. Mills,
Corresponding Secretary of the Kentucky Colonization Society*. New York: American
Anti-Slavery Society, 1838.

Bouton, Nathaniel. *Christian Patriotism: An Address Delivered at Concord, July the Fourth,
1825*. Concord, NH: Shepard & Bannister, 1825.

- Breckinridge, Robert J. *The Black Race: Some Reflections on its Position and Destiny, as Connected with Our American Disposition. A Discourse Delivered Before the Kentucky Colonization Society, at Frankfort, on the 6th Day of February, 1851*. Frankfort: A. G. Hodges, 1851.
- Breckinridge, Robert. "Hints on Colonization and Abolition; with reference to the black race." *The Biblical Repertory and Theological Review* 5, no. 3 (July 1833): 281-305.
- Bridge, Horatio. *Journal of an African Cruiser*. Edited by Nathaniel Hawthorne. New York and London: Wiley and Putnam, 1845.
- Cartwright, Samuel A. *Essays*. Vidalia, LA, 1843.
- Colonization Society of the City of New York. *Proceedings of the Colonization Society of the City of New York, at their Third Annual Meeting*. New York: William A. Mercein & Son, 1835.
- Conder, Josiah. *Wages or the Whip: An Essay on the Comparative Cost and Productiveness of Free and Slave Labour*. London: 1833.
- Constitution and Laws of Maryland in Liberia; with an Appendix of Precedents*. 2nd ed. Baltimore: John D. Toy, 1847.
- Constitution, Government and Digest of the Laws of Liberia, as Confirmed and Established by the Board of Managers of the American Colonization Society, May 23, 1825*. Washington, D.C.: Way & Gideon, 1825.
- Cowan, Alexander M. *Liberia as I Found It, in 1858*. Frankfort, KY: A. G. Hodges, 1858.
- Crandall, Reuben. *The Trial of Reuben Crandall, M.D.* New York: H. R. Pierce, 1836.
- Delany, Martin. *Blake or The Huts of America*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1970.
- Delany, Martin R. *Official Report of the Niger Valley Exploring Party*. New York: Thomas Hamilton, 1861.
- Discussion on American Slavery, Between George Thompson, Esq....and Rev. Robert J. Breckinridge...Holden in Rev. Dr. Wardlaw's Chapel, Glasgow, Scotland*. Boston: Isaac Knapp, 1836.
- Dunn, Durwood, ed. *An Abolitionist in the Appalachian South: Ezekial Birdseye on Slavery, Capitalism, and Separate Statehood in East Tennessee, 1841-1846*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997.
- The Eighth Annual Report of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour of the United States*. Washington, D.C.: J. C. Dunn, 1825.

- Episcopal Church, Foreign Committee. *An Historical Sketch of the African Mission of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the U.S.A.* New York: Foreign Committee, 1884.
- Examination of Mr. Thomas C. Brown, A Free Colored Citizen of S. Carolina as to the Actual State of Things in Liberia in the Years 1833 and 1834.* New York: S. W. Benedict and Co., Printers, 1834.
- Extracts from Letters Respecting the Capture of the Slave Ship "Pons," on the Coast of Africa, and the Landing of the Captured Slaves in Liberia on the 16th of the Twelfth Month, 1845.* 1845[?].
- The Fifteenth Annual Report of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Color of the United States.* Washington, D.C.: J. C. Dunn, 1832.
- The First Annual Report of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Color, of the United States.* Washington, D.C.: D. Rapine, 1818.
- First Report of the New-York Colonization Society.* New York: J. Seymour, 1823.
- Fitzhugh, George. *Sociology for the South, or, The Failure of Free Society.* Richmond, VA: A. Morris, 1854.
- The Fourteenth Annual Report of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Color of the United States.* Washington, D.C.: James C. Dunn, 1831.
- The Fourth Annual Report of the Kentucky Colonization Society, with an Address, by Rev. John C. Young.* Frankfort, KY: Albert G. Hodges, 1833.
- Gurley, Ralph R. *Letter on the American Colonization Society.* [Washington?]: 1832.
- Gurley, Ralph R. *Life of Jehudi Ashmun, Late Colonial Agent in Liberia. With an Appendix, Containing Extracts from his Journal and Other Writings; With a Brief Sketch of the Life of the Rev. Lott Cary.* Washington, D.C.: James C. Dunn: 1835.
- Holman, James. *Travels in Madeira, Sierra Leone, Teneriffe, St. Jago, Cape Coast, Fernando Po, Princes Island, etc. etc.* 2nd ed. London: George Routledge, 1840.
- Key, Francis Scott. *A Part of a Speech Pronounced by Francis S. Key, Esq., on the Trial of Reuben Crandall, M. D.* Washington, D. C., 1836.
- Latrobe, John H. B. *Maryland in Africa: A History of the Colony Planted by the Maryland State Colonization Society under the Auspices of the State of Maryland, U.S. at Cape Palmas on the South-West Coast of Africa, 1833-1853.* Baltimore: John Murphy & Co., 1885.
- Levine, Robert S., ed. *Martin R. Delany: A Documentary Reader.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003.

Liberian Letters. University of Virginia Electronic Text Center.
<http://www.library.virginia.edu/organization/etext>.

Merrill, Walter R, ed. *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison: I Will Be Heard!*. Vol. 6. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971.

Nesbit, William. *Four Months in Liberia, or African Colonization Exposed*. Pittsburgh: J. T. Shryock, 1855.

Opimius [pseud.]. "Opimius, No. 3." *Controversy between Caius Gracchus and Opimius in Reference to the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour of the United States*. Georgetown, D.C.: James C. Dunn, 1827.

The Proceedings of the Colonization Society of Kentucky with the Address of the Hon. Daniel Mayes, at the Annual Meeting, at Frankfort, December 1st, 1831. Frankfort: Commentator, n.d..

Proceedings of the Convention of the Friends of African Colonization, Held in the Capital at Washington, May 4, 1842. Washington, D.C. [?]: 1842 [?].

Proceedings of the National Emigration Convention of Colored People. Pittsburgh: A. A. Anderson, 1854.

Purvis, Robert. "The American Government and the Negro." In *Life Every Voice: African American Oratory, 1787-1900*. Edited by Philip S. Foner and Robert James Branham. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1998.

Purvis, Robert. *A Tribute to the Memory of Thomas Shipley, the Philanthropist*. Philadelphia: Matthew and Gunn, 1836.

The Second Annual Report of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour in the United States. Washington, D.C.: Davis and Force, 1819.

The Sixteenth Annual Report of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour of the United States. Georgetown, D. C.: James Dunn, 1833.

The Sixth Annual Report of the Society for Colonizing the Free People of Color of the United States. Washington, D.C.: Davis & Force, 1823.

Sleigh, William. *Abolitionism Exposed!: Proving the Principles of Abolitionism are injurious to the Slaves Themselves, Destructive to this Nation, and Contrary to the Express Commands of God*. Philadelphia: D. Schneck, 1838.

Speeches Delivered at the Anti-Colonization Meeting in Exeter Hall, London, July 13, 1833. Boston: Garrison and Knapp, 1833.

Stowe, Harriet B. *Uncle Tom's Cabin, or Life Among the Lowly*. Reprint, New York: Penguin, 1981.

Tenth Annual Report of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Color of the United States. Washington, D.C.: Way & Gideon, 1827.

Third Annual Report of the Managers of the Colonization Society of the State of Connecticut. New Haven: Baldwin and Treadway, 1830.

The Twelfth Annual Report of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour of the United States. Washington, D.C.: James C. Dunn, 1829.

Tyson, J. R. *A Discourse before the Young Men's Colonization Society of Pennsylvania.* Philadelphia, 1834.

Whipper, William. *Eulogy on William Wilberforce, Esq.: Delivered at the Request of the People of Colour of the City of Philadelphia in the Second African Presbyterian Church, on the Sixth Day of December, 1833.* Philadelphia: William P. Gibbons.

Wiley, Bell I., Editor. *Slaves No More: Letters from Liberia, 1833-1869.* Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1980.

Wikeson, Samuel. *A Concise History of the Commencement, Progress and Present Condition of the American Colonies in Liberia.* Washington, D.C.: The Madisionian, 1839.

Williams, Samuel. *Four Years in Liberia. A Sketch of the Life of the Rev. Samuel Williams. With Remarks on the Missions, Manners and Customs of the Natives of Western Africa. Together with an Answer to Nesbit's Book.* Philadelphia: King and Baird, 1857.

Public Record

Webster-Ashburton Treaty, The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy, www.avalon.yale.edu.

Public Documents Printed by Order of the Senate of the United States, Second Session of the Twenty-Eighth Congress. Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1845.

State Papers, Relating to Slaves in the Colonies; Slave Trade. Session: 5 February-23 July 1830. Vol. 33. Oxford: Bodleian Library, 1830.

Dissertations

Bennett, Charles Raymond. "All Things to All People: The American Colonization Society in Kentucky, 1829-1860." PhD diss. University of Kentucky, 1980.

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

Martin, Jane Jackson. "The Dual Legacy: Government Authority and Mission Influence among the Glebo of Eastern Liberia, 1834-1910." PhD diss., Boston University, 1968.

Secondary Sources

- Alexander, Leslie M. *African or American?: Black Identity and Political Activism in New York City, 1784-1861*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008.
- Allen, William E. "Liberia and the Atlantic World in the Nineteenth Century: Convergence and Effects." *History in Africa* 37 (2010): 7-49.
- Bacon, Margaret Hope. *But One Race: The Life of Robert Purvis*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007.
- Berlin, Ira. *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America*. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998.
- Boucher, Leigh, Jane Carey, and Katherine Ellinghaus, eds. *Re-Orienting Whiteness*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.
- Brancaccio, Peter. "'The Black Man's Paradise: Hawthorne's Editing of the *Journal of an African Cruiser*.'" *New England Quarterly* 53, no. 1 (March 1980): 23-41.
- Brooks, Jr. George E. *The Kru Mariner in the Nineteenth Century: An Historical Compendium*. Newark, DE: Liberian Studies Association, 1972.
- Burin, Eric. *Slavery and the Peculiar Solution: A History of the American Colonization Society*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005.
- Campbell, James T. *Middle Passages: African American Journeys to Africa, 1787-2005*. New York: Penguin Press, 2006.
- Campbell, Penelope. *Maryland in Africa: The Maryland State Colonization Society, 1831-1857*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971.
- Canney, Donald L. *Africa Squadron: The U.S. Navy and the Slave Trade, 1842-1861*. Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2006.
- Clegg III, Claude A. *The Price of Liberty: African Americans and the Making of Liberia*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004.
- Cresswell, Tim. *On the Move: Mobility in the Modern Western World*. New York: Routledge, 2006.
- Dain, Bruce. *A Hideous Monster of the Mind: American Race Theory in the Early Republic*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002.
- Dorsey, Bruce. *Reforming Men and Women: Gender in the Antebellum City*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002.

- DuBois, Laurent and Julius S. Scott, eds. *Origins of the Black Atlantic*. New York: Routledge, 2010.
- Farinelli, Franco. "Why America is Called America." In *Envisioning Landscapes, Making Worlds: Geography and the Humanities*. Edited by Stephen Daniels, et. al. New York: Routledge, 2011.
- Frost, Diane. "Ethnic Identity, Transience and Settlement: The Kru in Liverpool since the Late Nineteenth Century." *Immigrants & Minorities* 12, no. 3 (1993): 8-106.
- Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993.
- Gross, Ariela J. *What Blood Won't Tell: A History of Race on Trial in America*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008.
- Hall, Richard L. *On Afric's Shore: A History of Maryland in Liberia, 1834-1857*. Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, 2003.
- Handler, Jerome S. and JoAnn Jacoby. "Slave Names and Naming in Barbados, 1650-1830," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 53, no. 4 (October 1996): 685-728
- Henderson, Anita. "What's in a Slur?" *American Speech* 78, no. 1 (2003): 52-74.
- Herndon, Ruth Wallis and John E. Murray. Editors. *Children Bound to Labor: The Pauper Apprentice System in Early America*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009.
- Huberich, Charles Henry. *The Political and Legislative History of Liberia*. New York: Central Book Co., 1947.
- Huffman, Alan. *Mississippi in Africa: The Saga of the Slaves of Prospect Hill Plantation and Their Legacy in Liberia Today*. New York: Gotham Books, 2004.
- Ignatiev, Noel. *How the Irish Became White*. New York: Routledge, 1995.
- Inscoc, John. "Carolina Slave Names: An Index to Acculturation." *The Journal of Southern History* 49, no. 4 (November 1983): 527-554.
- Jacques, T. Carlos. "From Savages and Barbarians to Primitives: Africa, Social Typologies, and History in Eighteenth-Century French Philosophy." *History and Theory* 36, no. 2 (May 1997): 190-215
- James, Winston. *The Struggle of John Brown Russwurm: The Life and Writings of a Pan-Africanist Pioneer, 1799-1851*. New York: New York University Press, 2010.
- Kazanjian, David. *The Colonizing Trick: National Culture and Imperial Citizenship in Early America*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003

- Kazanjian, David. "The Speculative Freedom of Colonial Liberia." *American Quarterly* 63, no. 4 (2011): 863-893.
- Kolchin, Peter. "Whiteness Studies: The New History of Race in America." *Journal of American History* 89, no. 1 (2002): 154-173.
- Kramer, Neil S. "The Trial of Reuben Crandall," *Records of the Columbia Historical Society, Washington, D. C.* 50 (1980): 123-159.
- McDaniel, Antonio. *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot: The Mortality Cost of Colonizing Liberia in the Nineteenth Century*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.
- Melish, Joanne Pope. *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and "Race" in New England, 1780-1860*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998.
- Melish, Joanne Pope. "The Racial Vernacular: Contesting the Black/White Binary in Nineteenth-Century Rhode Island." In *Race, Nation, and Empire in American History*. Edited by James T. Campbell, Matthew Pratt Guterl, and Robert G. Lee. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007.
- Miller, Floyd J. *The Search for a Black Nationality: Black Emigration and Colonization, 1787-1863*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975.
- Moses, Wilson. *Afrotopia: The Roots of African American Popular History*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Moses, Wilson. ed. *Classical Black Nationalism: From the American Revolution to Marcus Garvey*. New York: New York University Press, 1996.
- Moses, Wilson. *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1820-1925*. 1978. Reprint, New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.
- Newman, Richard S. *The Transformation of American Abolitionism: Fighting Slavery in the Early Republic*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002.
- Nwankwo, Ifeoma Kiddoe. *Black Cosmopolitanism: Racial Consciousness and Transnational Identity in the Nineteenth-Century Americas*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005.
- Osborne, Myles. "A Note on the Liberian Archives." *History in Africa* 36 (2009): 461-463.
- Peacock, John. "Principles and Effects of Puritan Appropriation of Indian Land and Labor." *Ethnohistory* 31, no. 1 (Winter 1984): 39-44.
- Piper, Karen. *Cartographic Fictions: Maps, Race, and Identity*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002.

- Roediger, David. *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*. New York: Verso, 1991.
- Rockman, Seth. *Scraping By: Wage Labor, Slavery, and Survival in Early Baltimore*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008.
- Saxton, Alexander. *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic: Class Politics and Mass Culture in Nineteenth Century America*. New York: Verso, 1990.
- Schiller, Ben. "US Slavery's Diaspora: Black Atlantic History at the Crossroads of 'Race', Enslavement, and Colonisation." *Slavery & Abolition* 32, no. 2 (June 2011): 199-212.
- Schramm, Katharina. *African Homecoming: Pan-African Ideology and Contested Heritage*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2010.
- Shick, Tom W. *Behold the Promised Land: A History of Afro-American Settler Society in Nineteenth-Century Liberia*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980.
- Sidbury, James. *Becoming African in America: Race and Nation in the Early Black Atlantic*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Staudenraus, P. J. *The Colonization Movement, 1816-1865*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1961.
- Stauffer, John. *The Black Hearts of Men: Radical Abolitionism and the Transformation of Race*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002.
- Stauffer, John, ed. *The Works of James McCune Smith*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Taylor, Nikki. "Reconsidering the 'Forced' Exodus of 1829: Free Black Emigration from Cincinnati, Ohio to Wilberforce, Canada." *The Journal of African American History* 87 (Summer 2002): 283-302.
- Thornton, John. "Central African Names and African-American Naming Patterns." *The William and Mary Quarterly* 50, no. 4 (October 1993): 727-742
- Tomek, Beverly. *Colonization and Its Discontents: Emancipation, Emigration, and Antislavery in Antebellum Pennsylvania*. New York: New York University Press, 2010.
- Tyler-McGraw, Marie. *An African Republic: Black and White Virginians in the Making of Liberia*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007.
- White, Hayden. "The Forms of Wildness: Archaeology of an Idea." In *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978.
- Wong, Edlie L. *Neither Fugitive nor Free: Atlantic Slavery, Freedom Suits, and the Legal Culture of Travel*. New York: New York University Press, 2009.

Zezeza, Paul Tiyaube. "African Diasporas: Toward a Global History." *African Studies Review* 53, no. 1 (2010): 1-19.

Zezeza, Paul Tiyaube. "Rewriting the African Diaspora: Beyond the Black Atlantic" *African Affairs* 104, no. 414 (2005): 35-68.

Robert P. Murray

EDUCATION

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, VA
Master of Arts, History, 2008
Thesis: *Reform in the Land of Serf and Slave*
Adviser: Amy Nelson

Centre College, Danville, KY
Bachelor of Arts, History & Government Double Major, *Magna Cum Laude*, 2005

PROFESSIONAL POSITIONS HELD

Part-Time Instructor, University of Kentucky, Lexington, KY
August 2013-December 2013

Visiting Instructor, Centre College, Danville, KY
January 2012-May 2012

Teaching Assistant, University of Kentucky, Lexington, KY
August 2010-December 2011

Graduate Assistant, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA
August 2006-May 2008

HONORS AND FELLOWSHIPS

Graduate Editorial Assistantship, 2012-2013
Lance Banning Memorial Seminar Keynote Speaker, January 2012
Dorothy Leathers Fellowship, 2011, University of Kentucky
Certificate for Outstanding Teaching Award, 2011, University of Kentucky
Kentucky Opportunity Fellowship, 2008-2010
William Preston Society Thesis Award, 2008
Virginia Social Science Association Annual Conference, Best Graduate Paper Award, 2007
Phi Beta Kappa

PUBLICATIONS

“The End of Emancipation Street: ‘Civilization,’ Race, and Cartography in Colonial Liberia,” in *Reconsiderations and Redirections in the Study of African Colonization*. Beverly C. Tomek and Matthew Hetrick, eds. Forthcoming from the University Press of Florida.